

Read the full text of the Archbishop's presidential address:

The Primates' Meeting held in Canterbury between 11th and 15th January 2016 occasioned much comment and even more misrepresentation. It has been spun more than Donald Trump, and you would be well advised to set your spin meters to "detect" as I am hoping both to say something about what happened, at least from my point of view... and more importantly, why and what it says to us. I have no doubt most people will disagree with one or the other aspect, or all of them.

The spin included such elements as saying that the Primates had had their phones removed, and that they were being treated as children. Even some seasoned journalists believed this and printed it as fact.

It became quite a joke among us, with people waving their phones at me from time to time to indicate that my powers were limited. Neither were they treated as children. Secretary General, sit up and keep your hands still. [Laughter]

My original aim, after wide consultation with Primates, had been to attend a series of regional meetings of Primates over the course of 2016 and 2017, before having a full Primates' Meeting in 2018, as a run-up to the Lambeth Conference which was aimed for 2020.

However, following the General Convention of The Episcopal Church (TEC) in June 2015, and the decision of the General Convention to alter their definition of marriage so as to be gender neutral, I spent last August and early September ringing all of the Primates in order to take their advice on the next steps. It became clear that a Primates' Meeting was required sooner rather than later.

It was also evident that were it to be convened in the normal way, there would be very significant absences, as was the case at Dublin in 2011. Archbishop Foley Beach of the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA), who has a close relationship with many of the Primates who form the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) and the Global South, was therefore invited. Given the tensions that exist in North America, it speaks much of the graciousness of the Archbishop Fred Hiltz of Canada and the then presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori and her successor Michael Curry, as well as Archbishop Foley Beach, that despite being deeply unhappy, they were still willing to come to the meeting - and we should be duly grateful to all of them.

As you know, it was described as a Primates' Gathering and Meeting, as the Meeting proper could only include those provinces which are recognised as institutionally part of the Anglican Communion (as distinct from churches which have an Anglican tradition and identity). To be part of the institution of the Anglican Communion, a Province must be in communion with the See of Canterbury. That was upheld as it had been

understood previously at the Lambeth Conference of 1930, and was often repeated, most recently in the Eames Report 3.32. And also a Province has to be on the schedule of Provinces held by the ACC and supported by two thirds of the Primates in one way or another. There is no clear process or precedent for a new Province to join, except as an agreed spin-off from a previous Province.

The meeting was set for Canterbury because that would recall to people the way in which Canterbury, and especially its cathedral, represent the centre of the Anglican Communion. That the Meeting achieved what it did is a great tribute to the extraordinary work done by the Dean and Chapter, and indeed all the staff at Canterbury Cathedral, whose gift of Benedictine hospitality, of calm organisation, and whose ability to create a sense of security and safety in the midst of much disagreement, are absolutely unparalleled. We owe them a great deal.

It may help to give you a sense of what the meeting was like by describing the final Eucharist in the Crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, the oldest part of the building.

We sat in a semi-circle around the altar, laid for the Eucharist. On one side of it, and a little in front, was the Crozier of St Gregory, Pope Gregory the Great, who had sent Augustine in 597 for the re-evangelisation of these Islands, at least according to the Roman tradition. The Crozier is very beautiful, with inspiration which I suspect is drawn from the apocalypse, of a carved ivory lamb rising above attack by a dragon. I was present when it arrived on the Friday before the meeting began, and watched as those unpacking it were moved to tears by its beauty and historic significance. Its loan for the week, from the Prior of San Gregorio, with the blessing and active support of the British ambassador to the Holy See, and of the Italian authorities, and much support from the Vatican itself, was a symbol of ecumenical unity that was most remarkable.

On the other side of the altar, and just in front of it, were the Augustine Gospels, loaned for the day by Corpus Christi College Cambridge, and brought down, setting off at 3am, simply for the service. That again was a gift that we gratefully received. They are authenticated as dating from the 6th Century and are beautifully illuminated. Again, they provided forceful symbolism of our call to continue in the tradition started so long ago.

Before the altar, during the Ministry of the Word, sat Jean Vanier, who had spoken to us on the Thursday evening after Evensong, and addressed us during the Eucharist, on John Chapter 13, the washing of the feet. He led us both in meditating on that passage, and then in washing each other's feet, so that all Primates washed each other's feet.

It seemed to me as I sat there that much of what we are about, as the Anglican Communion, as God's people, was symbolised in the way—

everything was laid out:

* The Ministry of the Sacrament recalled to us that through the sacrament we reaffirm our catholicity - our essential unity with all Christians everywhere and in every time.

* The pastoral staff spoke to us of the conquest of Evil, of the call for unity, of the shepherding of the people of God, in simplicity and in holiness.

* The Gospels, the Word of the Scriptures, unfold to us the life of Jesus our Saviour, Word and Sacrament held together.

* And Jean Vanier himself, a living symbol of what true simplicity and discipleship means for the life of the Church today.

We washed each other's feet and each prayed a blessing on the one who had washed our feet, before washing the feet of other Primates; a great contrast to what is often portrayed as the conflicts within the Communion. Many of us were moved to tears.

I start there, because it sets before us the reality of the Anglican Communion. It is the very work of God inspired by the Spirit, full of fallible human beings who must confess their sins and who require the comforts of the Word and the hope of the Sacraments and the example of the Saints and the shepherding of those called by God, however weak they may be, into leadership, if we are to be to the world the symbols of unity, which are our calling and purpose, and which will enable us to proclaim more confidently the Good News of Jesus Christ. We here in this Synod are but one very small part of it, both in time and space, and we are called to the covenant of unity, of catholicity, with past present and future. As one part, albeit a small one, we are of infinite value, and are held by the grace of God for infinite good.

We were conscious as we met in that week that literally millions, possibly tens of millions, of people were praying for us, and I have never known a week in which I have been so aware of prayer, or of pressure.

One of the moments in which we voted - and you don't vote often at these meetings, according to those who've been to several of them - was on the question, when all seemed lost, as to whether we would walk together or separately. And it did seem lost. The vote to walk together, after a warning - repeated twice - that to undertake to do so meant to take a personal responsibility for it happening properly, was unanimous. It was done by open voting of raised hands, and was total. However, the divisions were profound, and remain so. We should not have any illusions of the fragility of the process, or of the outcome.

A working group then sought a way of turning that vote to walk together into action and decision. I did not expect them to reach an agreement, certainly until shortly before the ACC meeting in Lusaka in April. But thanks to their own dedication and commitment, and to the support of facilitators and mediators, they managed to reach an agreement which was put to the Meeting the next day and adopted by an overwhelming majority.

The vote was immediately spun outside the Meeting, having been leaked on the Thursday (the day before it ended) as a severe sanction on TEC. You will not find the word ‘sanction’ or ‘punishment’ or anything like it at any point in the Communique, or the Addendum which refers to the decision taken. The word used is ‘consequence’.

Provinces of the Anglican Communion have been recognised since its beginning at the first Lambeth Conference of 1867, and as emphasised in 1920 and 1930, in 1978, 1988 and 1998, in the Virginia Report, the Eames Report and the Windsor Continuation Group, and in numerous other places, as a collection of *autonomous* and *interdependent* churches. The autonomy means that no meeting of the Communion has any authority to give instructions to individual provinces.

No province is legally bound by the Communion; there is no synodical group within the Communion. The interdependence recognises what I spoke of when describing the final Eucharist: that we belong to one another through the action of God, as called to be one in Scripture, as having lived as one traditionally, and as reflecting reasonably the life of the Trinity by our unity in diversity.

Where a Province decides to take action that has a profound effect on other Provinces, either because it is outside of the received doctrine of the Communion or through its day-to-day impact (in this case both), then there will be consequences. That seems obvious; actions have results.

The decision by the Primates, for TEC in this case (it could be for other Provinces on other matters in the future) would be that since they were in disagreement with the Communion on a significant issue, they should not represent the Communion ecumenically, or in its principle elected standing committees. Nor should they vote on matters of doctrine or polity. This decision binds the Primates as a group, but not any Province or other Instrument of Communion. It is a powerful and morally forceful guideline, to use language from the Windsor Continuation Group in 2008. The Presiding Bishop [of The Episcopal Church, Michael Curry] described the Primates’ decision as a fair outcome.

The underlying issue is about reception. Both before, but especially since, Lambeth 1920, reception has meant the informal process by which, over time, developments are accepted or rejected in a way that leads to consensus. Thus, issues in 1920 around contraception, in Lambeth 1930

and 1948 around divorce, were at the time seen as threatening the unity of the Communion as seriously as issues of human sexuality now.

Reception goes both ways. There has been a consensus against lay presidency, despite significant pressure in the past, but the reception process rejected it. It is not a legal process, but a discernment of the Spirit based in relationship.

The importance of this is very great indeed. The Anglican Communion finds its decisions through spiritual discernment in relationship, not through canons and procedures. Those operate at Provincial level. All developments must show signs of the presence of the Spirit, not only locally but across the Communion. Primates' Meetings, Lambeth Conferences and ACCs are not a question of winning and losing, but of discerning.

For me, apart from the final Eucharist, the most remarkable aspect of the Primates' Meeting was the energy that was released when we acted together. For the first time, I experienced the beauty of the Communion when, on issues affecting us very widely - often issues of life and death - there was a sharing and an outpouring of mutual support.

For example, we shared together around issues of the environment, something we discussed here last July in terms of its future impact. If you are in Polynesia, as the Archbishop of York so vividly demonstrated to us, it is a matter of life and death. To quote the Archbishop of Polynesia at the meeting, "We are drowning!"

We discussed the interaction with Islam in various places around the world, and shared how we could support each other, and what are the essentials of dialogue - both for those countries which are in a non-Islamic majority and for those who are in a minority.

We spoke of evangelism, and I hope that this Synod will take due note both now and in the discussion we will have tomorrow, of the extraordinarily powerful declaration made unanimously by the Primates in the Communique. I might add that the Christocentric and passionately evangelistic approach of the new Presiding Bishop of TEC had a great impact on many.

We agreed a Lambeth Conference for 2020. We must pray that the conference of 2020 itself recovers some of the radicality, even revolutionary spirit that was shown in 1920, in its call to all Christian people to repent of their divisions - a call that was at the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement. 2020 must enable not just Anglicanism but the whole Church to find fresh ways forward that represent more clearly to the world the hope that is in Jesus Christ.

During all these discussions, those who are theologically in very different places in the Communion demonstrated their profound support for one another; and there was a great sense of collective effort, of common vision, of love for one another and for the service of the world. It is a vision which encompasses rich and poor, north and south, breaking down barriers in the cause of Christ and the kingdom of God. It is lived out not mainly in the great meetings but in Diocesan links and partnerships, in prayer, in celebration, in grieving.

We rightly talk of scripture, of tradition and reason; but in the tension in which we live in a Global Church, there is another trio - of freedom, order and human flourishing - set out by Tim Jenkins in an article in 2002. As a Communion (and as churches) where authority is found in discernment, and expressed in relationship, this trio is of huge importance. It anchors us in the breaking down of barriers, in facing each other, in the beauty of human interaction in love.

Disaster has come whenever one element has overcome the others to an excessive degree. A hunger for power, masquerading as order, has very often overcome freedom, and neglected human flourishing. Order is essential, but it exists to assure foot washing and love, not domination. Certainly after the Reformation, and the religious wars that dominated Europe for the following 100 years or more, it was a sense of perverted order that led to the appalling cruelty which is almost without parallel in Europe until the 20th Century. The Church, confronted by modernity, sought power through order rather than human flourishing or freedom: it was out of these tensions that Anglicanism emerged, and from 1867 and the first Lambeth Conference developed a relational model of authority.

The Church in its order is meant to encourage the freedom in Christ that is promised, and human flourishing that is the vision of the kingdom of God. When the balance is wrong, and even more so when we feel threatened, like a ship with a dysfunctional crew heading for the rocks, different groups all strive to grab the wheel so that, as they see it, they may demonstrate that they and only they know the way to avoid disaster.

The reality is that none of them do know fully, and disaster is only avoided by unity which relishes and celebrates the diversity of freedom and flourishing within broad limits of order.

That is what many of the discussions in the Communion are about. What are the limits of diversity? Who is in control? British colonial history makes the laying down of edicts by white, middle-class Christians from the Global North, citizens of the former colonial power in many places, a process that is rightly deeply resented.

Yet freedom cannot be found without order, and order and freedom are necessary for human flourishing.

If we bring to our Church, and to the world around, the certainty that Jesus came to set us free, and to open the way for true human flourishing in service to each other and to Him; if our expectation in that only in foot washing, even of our enemies, is the Truth demonstrated adequately, then in beauty of relationship the grace of God will prevail, as that grace did during the Primates' Meeting

Life will not be perfect, or even anything remotely approaching it. That kind of over-realised eschatology is a nonsense. There are no quick fixes, magic wands or perfect spells. There is no church order that ensures perfection, nor one in which human sin does not add to the problems of the whole.

Yet there is a way forward that reveals the unity that we are given, and that celebrates the strength that we can bring each other; that enables us to love those who oppose us, and that focuses on human flourishing and on the setting free those who are bound by rules which Jesus could never have imagined, nor Paul (let's put that old idiocy to rest), and which have emerged out of a desire for power rather than the expectation of the kingdom of God. There is, in short, a way forward in which we look like the people of Christ.

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