

Defending the Faith in a Global Communion: A Tale of Tragedy and Hope

MARK D. THOMPSON

Abstract

The struggle to defend the faith in the global Anglican Communion is not merely a recent phenomenon. There has never been a “golden age” when the Reformed faith of the Elizabethan Settlement was unchallenged. The emergence of a global fellowship of national churches has highlighted the difficulties of discipline across national borders. Tragically, there has been repeated failure on the part of the Communion’s leadership to guard the faith once for all delivered to the saints, but there is hope in the courage and biblical faithfulness of a new generation of leaders from the Global South.

Keywords

Anglicanism, Lambeth Conference, discipline, jurisdiction, bishops, Global South, GAFCON, John Colenso, Canterbury

I. *From National Church to a Church with Global Interests*

The English Reformers of the sixteenth century would not have understood the concept of global Anglicanism. The Protestant Church of England was a national church established with a particular link to the government of the realm. After all, the King or Queen of England was the Supreme Head of the Church of

England (to which title was added the phrase “as far as the word of God allows”). Conversely, several of the bishops, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, were “lords spiritual,” with seats in the House of Lords (one of the houses of the English Parliament) and so themselves members of the government. Just as significant, deep in the DNA of the English Reformation Settlement was an aversion to international ecclesiastical structures. The pope in Rome could have no jurisdiction in the English commonwealth, according to the Act of Supremacy (1534). Furthermore, the Articles of Religion (1552/1571) explicitly recognized that there was no need for the practices in one place to be identical to those in another (Article 34). The English church was the *English* church, sharing fellowship with like-minded Christians in other lands (witness Thomas Cranmer’s attempts in the early 1550s to hold a pan-European Reformed conference, partly in response to the Council of Trent) but not institutionally linked or constrained by the practice in other lands. So, to speak of a global Anglican Communion would be not only strange but deeply suspicious in the minds of Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Matthew Parker, John Whitgift, and John Jewel.

Nevertheless, if the idea of transplanting the English church into foreign soil was inconceivable when the framework and character of English Protestantism were first devised, it emerged very soon afterward. The establishment of English colonies in other lands took place just decades later. The first permanent English colony in the Americas, Jamestown, Virginia, was established in 1607. By royal charter, the first English settlement in Canada was established at Cupers Cove, Newfoundland, in 1610, and the East India Company opened its first trading post (“factory”) in Surat in 1614. The first British settlement in Africa took place in 1661 on James Island in the Gambia River. A new wave of colonial activity began a little over a century later. The First Fleet, consisting of British soldiers and convicts, landed in Sydney Cove in 1788. The Dutch ceded the Cape Colony (South Africa) to Britain in 1814, and a mission station was set up in New Zealand in the same year. In 1841, following the Treaty of Nanjing, Hong Kong became a British colony.

Unsurprisingly, in each of these cases, the English settlers brought with them their own religious convictions and sought to practice their faith in the new setting in which they found themselves. Some sought distance from the Church of England, while others saw themselves as remaining its loyal members. For this latter group, the personal and institutional ties to the Church of England were strong. As their settlements grew into colonies, they built churches and began to put in place structures that mirrored English church life. Chaplains, clergy, and missionaries traveled to the colonies

from England, bringing with them the varied and at times conflicted character of the church at home. In 1632, Archbishop William Laud sent a proposal to the Privy Council “for the purpose of extending conformity to the national church to the English subjects beyond the sea,” and within a year, the Privy Council had pronounced that “in all things concerning their church government they should be under the jurisdiction of the Lord Bishop of London.”¹ In 1788, the Evangelical wing of the Church of England, with people like John Newton and William Wilberforce leading the charge, ensured that the chaplain sent with the First Fleet to New South Wales was an Evangelical, Richard Johnson. Just over sixty years later, in early 1851, alarm was expressed at a meeting in Adelaide, a young colony in the south of Australia, over an “attempt to introduce Tractarianism into this province.”² Despite the geographical distance, the theological and ecclesiastical tensions within the sending church emerged relatively quickly in its colonial outposts.

A major turning point in the history of these foreign English churches came with the appointment of colonial bishops. Without such bishops, ministry had to be authorized, and ordinations could only take place in England. The first requests for a remedy to that situation had been mooted in the early decades of the eighteenth century, and a concrete proposal was put before the British government by Archbishop Thomas Secker in 1763. It was rejected. Nine years later, the Virginia House of Burgesses considered the matter for themselves. George Washington wrote to the Rev. Jonathan Boucher in May 1772, “The expediency of an American episcopate was long, & warmly debated, and at length rejected.”³ Severing the cord might have unforeseen and unwanted consequences, and it was not only the authorities in England who were concerned about that. However, the American Revolution changed everything. No longer was it appropriate, let alone possible, to accept leadership in the American churches that was authorized or accountable to the authorities in England.⁴ In March 1783, a meeting of

¹ “London, Bishop of,” in *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, <https://www.episcopal-church.org/glossary/london-bishop-of/>.

² “Great Anti-Tractarian Meeting of the Laity of the Church of England,” in *The Launceston Examiner*, February 22, 1851, 128, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/36259676>.

³ George Washington to Jonathan Boucher, May 4, 1772, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-09-02-0027>.

⁴ A corollary of this is the changed status of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion within the American Episcopal Churches. Subscription to the Articles would not be required, and the Articles would only be recognized as part of the historical heritage of the Episcopal Church. This contrasted with an ordination requirement of subscription (often described as *ex animo* subscription) to the Articles elsewhere in Anglican churches. See the somewhat extraordinary entry on the Articles in the *Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, which insists that “the status and authority of the Articles has often been a subject of debate among Anglicans.” “Thirty-Nine

clergy in Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury as their bishop, though without a bishop to consecrate him, he had to travel to Britain. Unable to take the oath of allegiance to the king, he was consecrated by nonjuring Scottish bishops in Aberdeen.⁵

Eventually, bishops would be appointed in each of the colonies. In 1787, Charles Inglis was named the first bishop of the newly created Diocese of Nova Scotia. In 1814, Thomas Middleton became the first bishop of Calcutta, a diocese that, for a while, included all of Australia and parts of southern Africa. That particular situation changed when William Broughton was installed as Bishop of Australia in 1836, and five years later George Selwyn was consecrated as bishop for the new missionary diocese of New Zealand. In 1847, Robert Gray was consecrated as the first Bishop of Cape Town, and in 1853, on Gray's recommendation, John Colenso was consecrated Bishop of Natal. In 1849, George Smith was appointed the first Bishop of the Diocese of Victoria (Hong Kong). In 1864, Samuel Crowther became the first Bishop of Western Equatorial Africa, and in 1886, James Hannington was appointed to a parallel role in Eastern Equatorial Africa. Though most of these and the other early colonial bishops were English, Seabury was American (albeit for the first forty-seven years of his life, the American colonies were British), Inglis was Irish, and Crowther was Nigerian (though educated in London and Oxford).

Throughout this period—in fact, throughout its life right up to the present—the church that sent out chaplains, missionaries, and eventually missionary bishops to these far-flung places lived with theological controversy. Indeed, there was no “golden age” in which Reformed theology was without challenge in the Church of England, though that is undoubtedly the theology expressed in its foundational documents. The challenge would be intense at times, involving exclusion, imprisonment, and worse, and yet throughout the centuries following the Reformation, we can find numerous examples of the grace of God and the courageous determination of his people to bear witness to the truth. The Puritans were opposed by the Laudians, the Calvinists by the Arminians, the confessional Anglicans by the Socinian rationalists, the Evangelicals by the Latitudinarians, and the

Articles, or Articles of Religion,” *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*, The Episcopal Church, 2021, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/thirty-nine-articles-or-articles-of-religion/>.

⁵ Nonjurors were, first, those who refused to take the oath of allegiance to William III and Mary II following the deposition of James II in 1688, and, second, those in the Scottish Episcopal Church who refused to swear allegiance to George I (the Hanoverian heir of Queen Anne who ascended the throne in 1714) and who remained nonjurors until the death of Charles Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) in 1788.

Evangelicals by the Tractarians.⁶ A careful reading of the history makes very clear, once again, that there has always been a need to defend the faith within the Church of England. The Reformed theology of the Articles, the Ordinal, and the Book of Common Prayer was never without challenge, and there were many times when it seemed that its opponents held the upper hand.⁷

The same would be true in the churches that sprang up under the auspices of the Church of England all the way around the world. Some of the early chaplains were sympathetic to the concerns of the Puritans, and some were from the High Church group. Archbishop Laud sought to impose conformity in the early seventeenth century precisely because there were different views of church and competing theological perspectives circulating in the American colonies from the beginning. The later struggle between rationalism and the liberal theology that grew out of it on the one hand and orthodox Anglicanism, including the Evangelical revival associated with John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Charles Simeon on the other, played itself out, most obviously in America and in Australia.⁸ So too the opposition of Evangelicalism and Tractarianism.⁹ Yet three of these elements (orthodox Anglicanism, liberal theology, and High Churchmanship) came together in the struggle in South Africa, which was a major catalyst for the first international gathering of Anglican bishops, the Lambeth Conference of 1867.

II. *The Colenso Affair*

As we have seen, Robert Gray was consecrated as Bishop of Cape Town in 1847.¹⁰ Gray was a High Churchman who held traditional views on the veracity and authority of Scripture, on the need for faith, and the reality of divine judgment. Quickly recognizing the scale of the task and the demands of ministry in the vast area he served, Gray lobbied the British government to subdivide his diocese, and in 1853 a bishop was appointed for a new diocese in Graham's Town and another for a new diocese of Natal. Gray's original royal letters patent, under which he acted as a bishop, were then

⁶ John Dowden, *Outlines of the History of the Theological Literature of the Church of England from the Reformation to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (London: SPCK, 1897).

⁷ Robert C. Doyle, "No Golden Age," *The Briefing* 22 (April 1989): 1–6.

⁸ Diana H. Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁹ Tom Frame, *Anglicans in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 47–71.

¹⁰ Jonathan A. Draper, ed., *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration*, JSOTSup 386 (London: T&T Clark, 2003).

replaced with new letters patent that referred to him as “the Metropolitan Bishop.”¹¹ The second of the new appointments (to Natal) was John William Colenso, at first glance a High Churchman like Gray but, as soon would become clear, with very different theological commitments.

Colenso had, years before, been introduced to the theology of Frederick D. Maurice, and he would later dedicate a volume of sermons to him.¹² Maurice’s influence showed itself in the way Colenso came to embrace a type of universalism that rejected the doctrine of hell and argued that a subjective response to Christ’s objective saving work (conversion, faith, repentance, and obedience) is unnecessary, since righteousness is a gift God “gives to all, the evil and the good, the just and the unjust alike, that we may be regarded as children before Him.”¹³ He had also taken on board the critical biblical scholarship that had begun to be introduced in Britain from the Continent. This led him to raise questions about the historicity and truthfulness of parts of the Old Testament, particularly the early chapters of Genesis.¹⁴

In response to his writing on these subjects, in February 1863 the Upper House of Convocation (in England) voted to “inhibit” Colenso and urged him to examine his conscience and resign.¹⁵ Three months later, on May 12, nine articles of accusation supporting a charge against Colenso of false teaching were laid before Bishop Gray by Dean Henry A. Douglas of Cape Town, Archdeacon Nathaniel J. Merriman of Graham’s Town, and Archdeacon Hopkins Badnall of George Town. Gray summoned Colenso

¹¹ Peter Hinchcliff, “Colonial Church Establishment in the Aftermath of the Colenso Controversy,” in *Religious Change in Europe, 1650–1914: Essays for John McManners*, ed. Nigel Aston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 347.

¹² John W. Colenso, *Village Sermons* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1854). Jonathan A. Draper, “Colenso’s Commentary on Romans: An Exegetical Assessment,” in *The Eye of the Storm*, ed. Draper, 306.

¹³ John W. Colenso, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Newly Translated and Explained from a Missionary Point of View* (New York: Appleton, 1863), 51; Draper, “Colenso’s Commentary on Romans,” 109, 118.

¹⁴ John W. Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (London: Longmans, Green, 1862); *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Essays and Reviews*, a collection of essays which included Charles Goodwin’s critique of “the Mosaic cosmogeny,” had been published just three years before. Charles W. Goodwin, “On the Mosaic Cosmogeny,” in *Essays and Reviews*, ed. H. B. Wilson (London: Parker & Son, 1860), 207–53.

¹⁵ “Inhibit” means “to restrain or prevent” and refers to the suspension of a clergyman from performing any religious act or spiritual duty in a specific jurisdiction. Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814–1883* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983), 131. The Colenso dispute became a *cause célèbre* over the next few months in the Anglican world. See *Public Opinion* III.79 (Saturday, March 28, 1863), in *Public Opinion: A Comprehensive Summary of the Press Throughout the World on All Important Current Topics*, vol. 3: *January–June 1863* (London: Cole, 1863), 337–39.

to appear before a metropolitan court on a charge of heresy six days later, but Colenso refused to attend and instead appealed to the Crown against Gray's right to hold such a trial (the Crown passed the matter on to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council).¹⁶ Colenso was tried in absentia in Cape Town during November and December 1863. He was found guilty of false teaching, and in April 1864 Gray declared the see vacant. The Privy Council heard Colenso's appeal later that year and concluded that Gray's letters patent as Metropolitan of Southern Africa did not confer on him "any jurisdiction, or coercive legal authority" over other bishops. As a result, his attempt to try Colenso for heresy must fail.¹⁷ Undeterred by this judgment, Gray then excommunicated Colenso on January 5, 1866, and set about appointing a more orthodox bishop for Natal.¹⁸ In the end the Colenso affair resulted in rival ecclesiastical jurisdictions in South Africa.

The Colenso affair focused attention on another question: How might theological and ecclesiastical issues be resolved in a global fellowship that does not have an international superstructure and has in fact studiously avoided all thought of one? In reality there was a great deal of legal uncertainty surrounding the authority and jurisdiction of the English church in territory beyond the British Isles. Significantly, concerning the judgment delivered in the trial, Colenso had petitioned the Crown, not the Archbishop of Canterbury, concerning the authority vested in bishops by their letters patent. The point would be made quite emphatically in 1874, when the British Parliament passed the Colonial Clergy Act, which allowed the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, when they consecrated bishops "for the purpose of exercising episcopal functions elsewhere than in England," to dispense with "the oath of due obedience to the Archbishop."¹⁹ The corollary of this was that English archbishops had no authority to discipline an errant bishop in another province.

¹⁶ For a record of the trial see *Trial of the Bishop of Natal for Erroneous Teaching before the Metropolitan Bishop of Cape Town, and the Bishops of Graham's Town and the Orange Free State as Assessors* (Cape Town: Cape Argus, 1863); for an account of the intricacies that is unapologetically supportive of Colenso, see Jonathan A. Draper, "The Trial of Bishop John William Colenso," in *The Eye of the Storm*, ed. Draper, 306–25; see also Hinchcliff, "Colonial Church," 348.

¹⁷ Charles Todd, *Observations on the Judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the Case of Bishop Colenso v The Bishop of Capetown* (London: Rivingtons, 1865), 44.

¹⁸ Guy, *Heretic*, 156.

¹⁹ "Colonial Clergy Act 1874, section 12," [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/vict/37-38/77/section/12/enacted), <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/vict/37-38/77/section/12/enacted>.

III. *Lambeth Conferences*

This extraordinary series of events became the catalyst for the first Lambeth Conference, which was called in response to requests from the bishops in Canada to debate the issues and resolve the legal question of international jurisdiction. Yet from the very start there was a determination in England that any gathering of all the Anglican bishops from around the world should have a very limited remit. When Archbishop Charles Longley brought the proposal to the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury in February 1867, he insisted,

It should be distinctly understood that at this meeting no declaration of faith shall be made, and no decision come to, which shall affect generally the interests of the Church, but that we shall meet together for brotherly counsel and encouragement.

“I should refuse to convene any assembly,” he continued, “which pretended to enact any canons, or affected to make any decisions binding on the Church.”²⁰ Undertakings were given that the Colenso case would not be discussed at the conference, the invitations were quickly issued, and eventually 76 out of 144 Anglican bishops attended, 24 of whom were “colonial bishops.”²¹ Colenso was not invited.

Nevertheless, the first Lambeth Conference was undoubtedly dominated by the Colenso affair. It was the specific subject of a prolonged debate on the third day of the conference, September 26, when a resolution of condemnation, proposed by the Presiding Bishop of the American Church (!), was ruled out of order by the Archbishop of Canterbury.²² In the end, what would become a recurring Anglican strategy for dealing with dissent was adopted by Resolution 6: appoint a committee and ask for a report (to be submitted to the Archbishop and then distributed for comment).²³ Guidance was given for “obtaining a new bishop” in Natal, should that be necessary, in Resolution 7. Resolution 8 insisted that the closest union of “the Churches of our colonial empire and the missionary Churches beyond them” and “the Mother-Church” requires “that they receive and maintain without

²⁰ Chronicle of Convocation, February 15, 1867, 807, cited in Randall T. Davidson, *The Lambeth Conferences of 1867, 1878, 1888* (London: SPCK, 1896), 10–11.

²¹ Davidson, *Lambeth Conferences*, 20.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

²³ “Resolution 6,” Lambeth Conference, 1867, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1867/resolution-6.aspx>.

alteration the standards of faith and doctrine as now in use in that Church.”²⁴ The Archbishop was true to his word. There would be no attempt to exercise discipline. Resolutions were to be expressions of the mind of the Conference but were not to be treated as decisions binding upon anyone. When Report No. VIII, which referenced the Colseno deposition, was submitted to those bishops who remained in England on December 10, it was simply received and printed.²⁵

The jurisdiction of the Lambeth Conference and the nature of its decisions were live issues in 1867 and have remained so to this day. The discussions exposed significant weaknesses when it came to church discipline. Whatever mechanisms may be put in place in each province, there is no mechanism for a more global exercise of discipline. The only power the Archbishop of Canterbury has beyond his own province is persuasive and what resides in his right to issue invitations to the Lambeth Conference.

Five years after the first Lambeth Conference, the Canadian bishops once again petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury to convene a conference of all the world’s Anglican bishops. This second conference (1878) would receive and discuss the reports of the various committees set up by the first conference. The recommendations of these reports were to be incorporated into an encyclical letter, but there would be no resolutions. Recommendation 8 spoke of the discipline of clergy and the setting up of provincial tribunals of appeal. It also insisted, “Your Committee are not prepared to recommend that there should be any one central tribunal of appeal from such provincial tribunals.”²⁶ Recommendation 9 spoke of “the very grave question of the trial of a bishop,” suggesting how this might be organized and how a proper process of appeal might be conducted by five metropolitan bishops and the Archbishop of Canterbury.²⁷ The suggestion went nowhere. Recommendations were merely recommendations and could not be enforced.

The pattern continued. Fourteen Lambeth Conferences have been convened, including the first in 1867.²⁸ The nineteenth-century conferences were largely dominated by the question of how the various provinces might

²⁴ “Resolution 8,” Lambeth Conference, 1867, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1867/resolution-8.aspx>.

²⁵ Davidson, *Lambeth Conferences*, 19.

²⁶ “Recommendation 8,” Lambeth Conference, 1878, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127719/1878.pdf>.

²⁷ “Recommendation 9,” Lambeth Conference, 1878, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1878/recommendation-9-union-among-the-churches-of-the-anglican-communion-encyclical-letter-27-11.aspx>.

²⁸ Lambeth Conferences were held in 1867, 1878, 1888, 1897, 1908, 1920, 1930, 1948, 1958, 1968, 1978, 1988, 1998, 2008, and 2022.

relate to each other and especially the Church of England. They had been, after all, convened by successive Archbishops of Canterbury and held in England. So issues such as synodical authority, the best modes of unity, relationships with other Christian communions (out of which discussion came the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral), the value and regularity of Lambeth Conferences, provincial organization, and the setting up of a central “consultative body” dominated those early agendas.²⁹

The resolutions coming out of the Conferences held in the first half of the twentieth century were quite conservative and resistant to both the chill winds of skepticism and secularism blowing in the wider community and the doctrinal and ethical revisionism promoted by some in leadership in the churches. One study suggests that in America, “by 1900, there were very few people left in the Protestant Episcopal Church to carry on the Evangelical Episcopal vision,” so it is hardly surprising that later in the century, the North American provinces would find themselves out of step with those provinces in which Evangelical or traditional Anglo-Catholic convictions remained strong. Even at the 1908 conference, there was an awareness that orthodox biblical doctrine was being challenged:

The Conference, in view of tendencies widely shown in the writings of the present day, hereby places on record its conviction that the historical facts stated in the Creeds are an essential part of the faith of the Church.³⁰

Negotiating the diversity within the churches of the Communion became increasingly difficult. Resolution 2 of 1930 spoke of an “urgent need in the face of many erroneous conceptions for a fresh presentation of the Christian doctrine of God.”³¹ Yet, while recommending that “the marriage of one

²⁹ Resolution 11 of 1888 reads, “That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God’s blessing made towards home reunion: (a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as ‘containing all things necessary to salvation’, and as being the rule and standard of faith; (b) The Apostles’ Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith; (c) The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him; (d) The historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church.” <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1888/resolution-11.aspx>.

³⁰ “Resolution 2,” Lambeth Conference, 1908, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1908/resolution-2.aspx>.

³¹ “Resolution 2: The Christian Doctrine of God,” Lambeth Conference, 1930, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127734/1930.pdf>.

whose former partner is still living should not be celebrated according to the rites of the Church,” this recommendation was introduced with the concessive clause “while passing no judgment on the practice of regional or national Churches within our Communion.”³²

A greater political and social conscience became evident in the conferences after the Second World War. The 1948 Conference insisted, “We believe that Christians generally are called to take their part in the life of the world, and through the power of God’s grace to transform it.”³³ In line with this, that conference produced forty-three resolutions titled “The Church in the Modern World,” which included statements about the church and war, human rights, the Christian attitude toward the state, education (including a call for universities to retain the study of theology, Resolution 49), and the Christian way of life. However, even in 1948 fault lines were beginning to appear: A proposal was put before the conference, at the request of the General Synod of the Church in China, seeking a twenty-year experiment with the ordination of women to the priesthood under certain circumstances in light of the “emergency” ordination of Florence Li Tim-Oi in Shaoquing during the war (1944). Resolution 113 made clear that “such an experiment would be against the tradition and order and would gravely affect the internal and external relations of the Anglican Communion.”³⁴ Presiding over the conference that made that resolution was the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who for many years had made known both privately and publicly that he supported the ordination of women.³⁵

The ordination of women was raised again at the 1968 Conference, where the ordination of women to the diaconate was endorsed (Resolution 32), but arguments for ordination to the priesthood were considered inconclusive (Resolution 34). Encouragement was given to national churches to give careful study of the question and to report back to the Anglican Consultative

³² “Resolution 11: The Life and Witness of the Christian Community, Marriage,” Lambeth Conference, 1930, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/resolution-11-the-life-and-witness-of-the-christian-community-marriage.aspx>.

³³ “Resolution 40,” Lambeth Conference, 1948, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1948/resolution-40-the-church-and-the-modern-world-the-christian-way-of-life.aspx>.

³⁴ “Resolution 113: Proposed Chinese Canon,” Lambeth Conference, 1948, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1948/resolution-113-proposed-chinese-canon.aspx>.

³⁵ “If we could find any shadow of theological ground for the non-ordination of women I should be immensely comforted, but such arguments as I have heard on that line seem quite desperately futile.” William Temple, Letter to G. L. Prestige, July 19, 1944, quoted in David M. Paton, *R. O.: The Life and Times of Bishop Ronald Hall of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Diocese of Hong Kong and Macao and the Hong Kong Diocesan Association, 1925), 132.

Council (Resolution 35). The ground was shifting on this issue, and it would be revisited in 1978, when each member church was encouraged to ordain women as deacons (Resolution 20), the ordination of women to the presbyterate by some provinces was acknowledged, and the right of each member church to make its own decision on the matter was recognized (Resolution 21). On the matter of women bishops, the conference recommended consultation and “overwhelming support in any member church” before proceeding. By 1988, all that could be done was to urge each province to “respect the decision of other provinces in the ordination or consecration of women to the episcopate” (Resolution 1).³⁶ This has largely been the case, although deep disagreement remains in certain provinces, and the mutual recognition of orders (which enables those ordained in one place to exercise ordained functions in another place) has been disrupted.

The 1968 Lambeth Conference made another move that, while not as visible as the ordination of women, was arguably much more significant. Accepting a report of the Archbishops’ Commission on Christian Doctrine, the Conference sought to further its recommendation:

The Conference ...

(a) suggests that each Church of our Communion consider whether the Articles need be bound up with its Prayer Book;

suggests to the Churches of the Communion that assent to the Thirty-nine Articles be no longer required of ordinands;

suggests that, when subscription is required to the Articles or other elements in the Anglican tradition, it should be required, and given, only in the context of a statement which gives the full range of our inheritance of faith and sets the Articles in their historical context.³⁷

This move away from subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles and the encouragement to contextualize the Articles where subscription was retained are highly significant. Without actually pronouncing on any of the doctrine affirmed in the Articles, this resolution opened wider the window to doubt and theological innovation. Since the late nineteenth century there had been a steady stream of bishops in the Church of England who in one way or another had challenged doctrines contained in the Thirty-Nine Articles.

³⁶ Women were first ordained to the presbyterate in Hong Kong in 1971, the USA in 1974, Canada in 1976, New Zealand in 1977, Kenya and Uganda in 1983, Australia in 1992, and England in 1994. Women were consecrated as bishops in the USA in 1989, Canada in 1984, Australia in 2008, England in 2014, and Kenya in 2021.

³⁷ “Resolution 43: The Ministry, The Thirty-Nine Articles,” Lambeth Conference, 1968, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1968/resolution-43-the-ministry-the-thirty-nine-articles.aspx>.

Charles Gore, successively Bishop of Worcester (1902–1905), Birmingham (1905–11), and Oxford (1911–32), had in 1889 edited and contributed to *Lux Mundi*, a collection of essays by Anglo-Catholic theologians that embraced critical biblical scholarship and a form of kenoticism in their attempts “to put the Catholic faith into its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems.”³⁸ Herbert Hensley Henson, Bishop of Hereford (1918–20), then Durham (1920–39), and famous for dismissing the Evangelicals who opposed the revision of the Prayer Book in 1928 as “the Protestant underworld” and “an army of illiterates generalled by octogenarians,” defended the right of clergy to express doubts about the virgin birth and the resurrection.³⁹ John Rawlinson, Bishop of Derby (1936–59), argued on the basis of academic freedom for greater openness to critical biblical scholarship and more flexible views on church order.⁴⁰ He was also willing to endorse a certain “wise agnosticism” when it came to the physical resurrection of Jesus.⁴¹ In the years immediately prior to the 1968 Conference, John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich (1959–69) and then Dean of Chapel at Trinity College, Cambridge (1969–83), had published his *Jesus and His Coming* (1957), in which he doubted the second coming of Christ. He then published *Honest to God* (1963), in which he sought to recast Christian orthodoxy in modern terms and called on Christians to abandon the notion of God “above” or “out there” and to see that “assertions about God are in the last analysis assertions about Love.”⁴² The trend would continue into the late twentieth century and today. In 1984, the newly appointed Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, publicly voiced his doubts about the virgin birth and the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus.⁴³

However, the most notorious case of departure by an Anglican bishop from the doctrine enshrined in the formularies was that of John Shelby

³⁸ Charles Gore, Preface to *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, ed. Charles Gore (London: John Murray, 1889), vii.

³⁹ Herbert Hensley Henson, “Prayer-Book Revision,” *The Times*, March 30, 1927, 11; John S. Peart-Binns, *Herbert Hensley Henson: A Biography* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2013), 68, 151. Opposition to the revision of the Prayer Book centered on its reintroduction of sacerdotal practices (e.g., the wearing of eucharistic vestments and the reservation of the sacrament) that had been deliberately excluded at the time of the Reformation. This move to revise the Prayer Book was defeated in the House of Commons.

⁴⁰ Graham Wilcox, “John Rawlinson and Anglican Liberal Catholicism in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 18.2 (2020): 201–14.

⁴¹ A. E. John Rawlinson, *Dogma, Fact and Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 111.

⁴² John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 126, 105.

⁴³ David Jenkins on “Credo,” London Weekend Television, April 29, 1984; “Poles Apart,” BBC Radio 4, October 28, 1984.

Spong, Bishop of Newark (1979–2000). He managed to outrage traditional Anglo-Catholics, Evangelicals, and even other liberals. A series of controversial pronouncements suggested that the Genesis account of origins is “pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense,” the apostle Paul was a homosexual, and the virgin birth, the miracles, and the physical resurrection of Jesus are no longer believable. In 1998, he announced that “theism, as a way of defining God, is dead.”⁴⁴ Spong’s writing was provocative, at points vitriolic, and almost always on the far edge of liberal theology. Yet he did more than write. On December 16, 1989, he ordained an openly gay priest (Robert Williams), which led the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops to censure him (by a very close vote of 80–76). That same year he published *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* and continued with regular television interviews and international speaking tours.⁴⁵

IV. Lambeth 1998

Spong was popular because his controversial views on sexuality in particular aligned with wider cultural movements in the United States and elsewhere. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, questions around human sexuality became more insistent in parts of the Anglican Communion in line with a larger profile pursued by gay activists in the wider community.⁴⁶ In 1973, the Archbishop of York, Donald Coggan, acknowledged that many Anglican clergymen were homosexuals and called for them to be treated “with great sympathy and understanding.”⁴⁷ The first openly gay person (Ellen Barrett) was ordained as a priest in New York in 1977. The next year, Resolution 10 of the 1978 Lambeth Conference included a clause on homosexuality:

⁴⁴ John Shelby Spong, *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 453; *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 26–27, 117, 215; *Jesus for the Non-Religious: Recovering the Divine at the Heart of the Human* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2007), 76–85; *Resurrection: Myth or Reality? A Bishop’s Search for the Origins of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).

⁴⁵ John S. Spong, *Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990).

⁴⁶ An agenda for such activism, one that seems astonishingly prophetic in retrospect, was provided in Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

⁴⁷ “A Quiet Man Succeeds to Canterbury’s Ancient Seat,” *People*, December 2, 1974, quoting a BBC Radio broadcast.

While we reaffirm heterosexuality as the scriptural norm, we recognise the need for deep and dispassionate study of the question of homosexuality, which would take seriously both the teaching of Scripture and the results of scientific and medical research.⁴⁸

Ten years later, Resolution 64 of Lambeth 1988 repeated the call for such study.⁴⁹ Various reports were indeed produced in the next decade, including the English House of Bishops' *Issues in Human Sexuality*, which concluded, with regard to candidates for ordination, that "ordinarily it should be left to the candidates' own consciences to act responsibly in this matter."⁵⁰ In August 1994, Bishop Spong and seventy other bishops presented a statement to the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) House of Bishops that included the declaration that "homosexuality and heterosexuality are morally neutral."⁵¹ Later that week the General Convention amended its canons to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (Resolution 1994-D007), opening the way for the official endorsement of the ordination of practicing gay men and women. It was evident to all that this subject would be a major item on the agenda for the 1998 Lambeth Conference.

Meanwhile, other pressures were also building, though there was less confidence that these would be addressed at the Lambeth Conference, given a general reluctance to discuss doctrinal deviation on the part of individual bishops in the Communion. In 1995, the then Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, defended his cathedral's invitation to a practicing Muslim to preach the university sermon on the BBC's "Thought for the Day." He quoted Jesus's words "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt 5:9) and then went on to deduce that since this Muslim was working for peace in his own country, he not only came under the blessing of Jesus but shared the title Son of God with him. When challenged about the uniqueness of Jesus on the basis of John 14:6, he responded, "To suggest that Jesus actually said those words is to deny 150 years of scholarship in the

⁴⁸ "Resolution 10: Human Relationships and Sexuality," Lambeth Conference, 1978, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1978/resolution-10-human-relationships-and-sexuality.aspx>.

⁴⁹ "Resolution 64: Human Rights for Those of Homosexual Orientation," Lambeth Conference, 1988, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1988/resolution-64-human-rights-for-those-of-homosexual-orientation.aspx>.

⁵⁰ Church of England House of Bishops, *Issues in Human Sexuality* 5.22, Church House Publishing, December 1991, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/issues%20in%20human%20sexuality.pdf>.

⁵¹ "An Affirmation in Koinonia," Appendix C, 1994, The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 2017, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/publications/1994_GC_Journal.pdf.

Gospel of John.”⁵² Two years later (September 1997), Michael Ingham, Bishop of New Westminster in Canada, was interviewed by the *Ottawa Citizen*. In that interview he insisted, “It’s time for Christians to drop the idea that Christ is the one sure way to salvation.”⁵³

What was becoming clearer to orthodox Anglicans around the world was that a general and unchecked movement toward doctrinal and moral revisionism was not confined to issues of human sexuality, though those issues were the presenting edge of that movement. A failure to be disciplined by Scripture in their pronouncements and in their practice had led to denials of fundamental Christian doctrine (e.g., the doctrines of God, the divinity of Christ, substitutionary and propitiatory atonement, the bodily resurrection, the call to faith and repentance, and the reality of judgment) by those who, at their ordination and consecration, had promised to uphold, guard, and proclaim those same doctrines. What was happening in the area of human sexuality was part of a larger pattern that demanded a more whole-sale call to repentance and recommitment to the authority of Scripture and the theology expressed in the Reformation formularies. Yet questions surrounding homosexuality also required direct address because this was the point at which the gospel of the forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ was most directly under attack. This is what was recognized by the Global South in 2005:

The unscriptural innovations of North American and some western provinces on issues of human sexuality undermine the basic message of redemption and the power of the Cross to transform lives. These departures are a symptom of a deeper problem, which is the diminution of the authority of Holy Scripture.⁵⁴

In quiet parallel to this tragedy, one of the most dramatic changes in the history of Anglicanism took place in the decades straddling the turn of the

⁵² Richard Harries to Mark Thompson, personal correspondence of June 4, 1995.

⁵³ *Ottawa Citizen*, September 26, 1997. Ingham developed his ideas in Michael Ingham, *Mansions of the Spirit: The Gospel in a Multifaith World* (Toronto: Anglican Book Center, 1997).

⁵⁴ “The Third Anglican South to South Encounter,” Anglican Communion News Service, October 5, 2005, <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2005/10/the-third-anglican-global-south-to-south-encounter.aspx>. The sentiment was repeated by Joseph Galgalo in 2019: “Broadly speaking, the Global South’s contention with the present-day Anglican establishment can be summarized as follows. The South sees the West as guilty of betraying the foundations of Anglican faith. It accuses the West of becoming increasingly liberal and in the process relegating to the periphery all traditionally accepted markers of Christianity including the authority of Scripture, without which Christianity stands radically redefined.” Joseph Galgalo, “The Kikuyu Conference and Global South Anglicanism: For What Does the Anglican Communion Stand?,” in *Costly Communion: Ecumenical Initiative and Sacramental Strife in the Anglican Communion*, ed. Mark D. Chapman and Jeremy Bonner (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 291.

millennium. The center of gravity in terms of positive missional energy and regular church attendance shifted dramatically from the United Kingdom and North America to the provinces in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁵⁵ By 2008 around 75%–80% of attending Anglicans lived south of the Equator. A decade earlier, representatives of those churches had begun to meet, to encourage each other in mission, and to sound their alarm at what was happening in the churches that had first sent missionaries to evangelize them. The first Anglican Encounter in the South took place in February 1994 in Limuru outside of Nairobi, Kenya, and a second was held in February 1997 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The second Encounter produced the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality, endorsed unanimously by the eighty bishops attending and including these as its fifth and sixth clauses:

5. The Scripture bears witness to God's will regarding human sexuality, which is to be expressed only within the life-long union of a man and a woman in (holy) matrimony.

6. The Holy Scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is sin. We are convinced that this includes homosexual practices, between men or women, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage.⁵⁶

This reassertion of the authority of Scripture and its application in the area of human sexuality did not go unchallenged. Just over a year later, and less than two months before the Lambeth Conference was scheduled to meet, the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada voted to authorize same-sex unions. On this occasion the diocesan bishop withheld his consent, but a strong signal was being sent: “This is where we are heading.”

The thirteenth Lambeth Conference met at the University of Kent in July 1998. It passed resolutions on issues as diverse as human rights, nuclear weapons, the theological foundations of mission, religious freedom, urbanization, and discipleship. However, all attention was focused on Resolution I.10 on human sexuality. The resolution affirmed the teaching of Scripture on marriage but called for pastoral care and listening to those with a “homosexual orientation,” assuring them that “all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of

⁵⁵ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 2.

⁵⁶ The text of the Kuala Lumpur statement is available at <https://acl.asn.au/old/news/KL-Statement.html>.

Christ.” Then, critically, it stated (thanks to an amendment proposed by Archbishop Donald Mtetemela of Tanzania) that the Church,

d. while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, [this Conference] calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;

e. cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.

The resolution concluded with an acknowledgement of the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement.⁵⁷ The voting on the Resolution surprised many: 526 for, 70 against, and 40 abstentions. Against the expectations of some, the vast majority of the conference voted to uphold the Bible’s teaching on marriage and to oppose same-sex blessings and the ordination of those “in same sex unions.” Yet it was only an expression of the mind of the Conference. The Resolution had no binding authority, and despite the rather naïve expectations of some, it neither settled the matter nor proved to be a turning point in moving the Communion as a whole toward a more orthodox position on this subject (let alone the more fundamental issue of biblical authority).

V. *The Reaction to Lambeth 1998*

A violent reaction to the resolution began almost immediately. Philip Jenkins writes, “Western reactions to the [Lambeth] sexuality statement can best be described as incomprehension mingled with sputtering rage.”⁵⁸ In September, 182 bishops (including the future Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams) published “A Pastoral Statement to Lesbian and Gay Anglicans from Some Member Bishops of the Lambeth Conference,” which, among other things, pledged they would “continue to reflect, pray, and work for your full inclusion in the life of the Church.”⁵⁹ Some of them held press conferences in which they decried the resolution and spoke of the

⁵⁷ “Section I.10: Human Sexuality,” Lambeth Conference, 1998, <https://www.anglican-communication.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1998/section-i-called-to-full-humanity/section-i10-human-sexuality.aspx>.

⁵⁸ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 203.

⁵⁹ “A Pastoral Statement to Lesbian and Gay Anglicans from Some Member-Bishops of the Lambeth Conference,” Whosoever, September 1, 1998, <https://whosoever.org/a-pastoral-statement-to-lesbian-and-gay-anglicans-from-some-member-bishops-of-the-lambeth-conference/>.

homophobia represented by the Conference; others wrote open letters to the gay and lesbian members of their churches. In February 1999, the Bishop of Kingston, Peter Selby, spoke of the Conference as having the atmosphere of a Nuremberg rally.⁶⁰ Feelings ran high. The meeting of the ECUSA General Convention in 2000 reported that “the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved.”⁶¹

Lambeth 1998 had also passed a resolution (Resolution III.6) that called upon the Primates of the Anglican Communion to consider “intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces.”⁶² In light of that resolution, a group of conservative Episcopalian leaders, distressed by the direction in which the Episcopal Church seemed to be heading pre- and post-Lambeth, presented a request for alternative episcopal oversight to a group of primates meeting in Kampala in November 1999. It was an extraordinary move arising from extraordinary circumstances. These Anglicans no longer had confidence that they would receive appropriate pastoral care and leadership from the bishops of the Episcopal Church. Nine of the primates wrote to those who participated in this meeting, promising to “take all the measures consistent with our obedience to Christ, submission to the authority of Scripture and according to our ordination vows.”⁶³ On January 29, 2000, Archbishop Moses Tay of South East Asia and Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini of Rwanda, two of the nine signatories, led in the consecration of Charles Murphy and John Rodgers as missionary bishops to serve disaffected Anglicans in America. It was now clear that the churches representing the vast majority of Anglicans worldwide were not prepared to follow the revisionist agenda still being promoted by many in the West. As expected, there was outrage from the Presiding Bishop of the ECUSA, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, and even the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, Dr. Peter Moore, of Trinity School for Ministry in Pennsylvania, wrote that

⁶⁰ Reported, among other places, in Pat Ashworth, “7500: Waterloo for One Liberal Step Too Far,” *Church Times*, December 6, 2006, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2006/8-december/news/uk/7500waterloo-for-one-liberal-step-too-far>.

⁶¹ “Resolution 2000-D039,” ECUSA General Convention, 2000, https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2000-D039.

⁶² “Section III.6: Instruments of the Anglican Communion,” Lambeth Conference, 1998, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1998/section-iii-called-to-be-faithful-in-a-plural-world/section-iii6-instruments-of-the-anglican-communion.aspx>.

⁶³ “A Letter to the Participants and Invited Observers Attending the Group of Primates Meeting Held in Kampala from 16th to 18th November 1999,” Anglican Church League, Sydney, <https://acl.asn.au/old/news/KampalaStatement.html>.

“these two bishops are being sent from younger missionary churches to re-evangelise a listless and doctrinally uncertain church in the West.”⁶⁴

The next scheduled meeting of all the Primates of the Anglican Communion was held in Oporto, Portugal, in March 2000. It noted that

clear and public repudiation of those sections of the [Lambeth] Resolution related to the public blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of declared non-celibate homosexuals, and the declared intention of some dioceses to proceed with such actions, have come to threaten the unity of the communion in a profound way.

However, the primates also

noted with deep concern the recent consecrations in Singapore intended to provide extended episcopal oversight for Anglicans in the USA. ... Such action taken without appropriate consultation poses serious questions for the life of the Communion.⁶⁵

A series of Primates’ Meetings followed, beginning with those in Kanuga, North Carolina, in March 2001 and Canterbury in April 2002. Each issued calls for caution and warned of the danger of unilateral action on either side of the dispute. The Anglican Communion was facing a crisis that extended beyond the issues of human sexuality to the nature of the Communion itself and its willingness and capacity to exercise doctrinal and ecclesiastical discipline.

VI. *A Line Crossed: 2002/3 and Its Aftermath*

In 2002, the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada authorized its bishop to produce a service for the blessing of same-sex unions. Noted Anglican theologian Dr. J. I. Packer was one of several members of the synod who walked out when the vote was passed. He explained why he felt compelled to do so in *Christianity Today*: “This decision, taken in its context, falsifies the gospel of Christ, abandons the authority of Scripture, jeopardizes the salvation of fellow human beings, and betrays the church in its God-appointed

⁶⁴ “ACO: Report on Singapore Consecrations,” Anglican Communion News Service, February 24, 2000, <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2000/02/aco-report-on-singapore-consecrations.aspx>. Six years later these bishops would be joined by Martyn Minns, consecrated within the Church of Nigeria for ministry to orthodox Anglicans in America. “Election of Bishops,” The Church of Nigeria: Anglican Communion, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20070430045246/http://www.anglican-nig.org/bshpelects_jun2006.htm.

⁶⁵ “Primates Meeting Communique,” Primates Meeting Oporto, Portugal, March 2000, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/288306/primates-meeting-communique-2000.pdf>.

role as the bastion and bulwark of divine truth.”⁶⁶ At this point the Diocese of New Westminster was acting in advance of the Canadian province, which would not endorse same-sex blessings until 2016. When the Anglican Consultative Council met in Hong Kong in October 2002, it would call on dioceses and individual bishops “not to undertake unliteral actions or adopt policies which would strain our communion with one another without reference to their provincial authorities” (Resolution 34).⁶⁷

On June 7, 2003, a man in an open same-sex relationship was elected Bishop of New Hampshire. In August the 74th General Convention of the ECUSA confirmed the election. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, immediately convened an emergency meeting of the world’s Anglican primates at Lambeth. That meeting spelled out the consequences of going ahead with these intentions:

If his consecration proceeds, we recognise that we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the Communion itself will be put into jeopardy. In this case, the ministry of this one bishop will not be recognised by most of the Anglican world, and many provinces are likely to consider themselves out of Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA). This will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level, and may lead to further division on this and further issues as provinces have to decide in consequence whether they can remain in communion with provinces that choose not to break communion with the Episcopal Church (USA).⁶⁸

Gene Robinson was consecrated on November 2, 2003, before more than 4,000 people at the ice rink at the University of New Hampshire.⁶⁹

The determination to proceed in the face of widespread, repeated, and insistent calls not to do so was shocking to many. How could fellowship be maintained in the face of such defiance and betrayal? Following the Lambeth meeting of the primates a commission was set up to investigate the way forward. A year later it produced *The Windsor Report*, which examined what it saw as dangerous behavior by those on both sides of the crisis.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ James I. Packer, “Why I Walked: Sometimes Loving a Denomination Requires You to Fight,” *Christianity Today* 47 (January 21, 2003): 47.

⁶⁷ “ACC12 Affirms Archbishop of Canterbury’s Resolution,” Anglican Communion News Service, October 1, 2002, <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2002/10/acc12-affirms-archbishop-of-canterburys-resolution.aspx>.

⁶⁸ “A Statement by the Primates of the Anglican Communion Meeting in Lambeth Palace,” Anglican Communion News Service, October 16, 2003, <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2003/10/a-statement-by-the-primates-of-the-anglican-communion-meeting-in-lambeth-palace.aspx>.

⁶⁹ Stephen Bates, “Gay Consecration Splits Church,” *The Guardian*, November 3, 2003, <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2003/nov/03/gayrights.religion>.

⁷⁰ The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report*, The Anglican Communion Office, London, UK, 2004, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68225/windsor2004full.pdf>.

It treated both the unilateral actions of ECUSA and the Canadian Church contrary to the resolutions of the “instruments of unity” on the one hand and the interventionist provision of episcopal oversight for those who could not agree with such action on the other as threats to the Anglican Communion that needed to be addressed.⁷¹ There was no acknowledgment that the two actions—the consecration of an openly noncelibate homosexual man as a bishop and the crossing of ecclesiastical boundaries to provide episcopal care for those who opposed the consecration—were of an entirely different moral character. This, as much as anything else, doomed the report to a lukewarm reception at best. Its proposal, that the churches of the Communion enter into a voluntary covenant with each other, would purportedly create a legal accountability to one another, but in reality it gave extraordinary power and authority to the “instruments of unity”—which, while they appeared to be four separate instruments, very easily resolved into one: that is, the Archbishop of Canterbury convenes the Lambeth Conference, presides over the Primates’ Meeting, and has enormous influence within the Anglican Consultative Council; he would also, the report suggested, “decide all questions of interpretation of this Covenant.” *The Windsor Report* focused on the institutional questions, not the theological ones, but by proposing an international structure of accountability it ran up against the long history of avoiding just such structures.⁷²

In this context questions arose about whether those who brought about this crisis (those who had approved rites for same-sex blessings and those who participated in the consecration of Robinson) should continue to participate in the various boards, bodies, and conferences of the Communion. When the primates met in Dromantine, Ireland, in February 2005, they requested that “the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada voluntarily withdraw their members from the Anglican Consultative Council for the period leading up to the next Lambeth Conference.”⁷³ There was no such voluntary withdrawal. The Third Anglican South to South Encounter took place in Egypt in October 2005. It insisted that

⁷¹ The Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission’s *Virginia Report* from 1997 had identified four “instruments of unity” in the Anglican Communion: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council. *The Virginia Report*, The Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council, 1997, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/150889/report-1.pdf>.

⁷² There were many written responses to *The Windsor Report*, including Peter G. Bolt, Mark D. Thompson, and Robert Tong, eds., *The Faith Once for All Delivered: An Australian Evangelical Response to the Windsor Report* (Sydney: Australian Church Record, 2005).

⁷³ “The Anglican Communion Primates’ Meeting, February 2005 Communique,” Anglican Communion, February 2005, https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68387/communique_-_english.pdf.

“unscriptural and unilateral decisions, especially on moral issues, tear the fabric of our Communion and require appropriate discipline at every level to maintain our unity.”⁷⁴ No discipline was forthcoming. When the primates met again in Dar es Salaam in February 2007, they set a deadline of September 2007 for the ECUSA House of Bishops to make “an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorise any Rite of Blessing for same sex unions ... and ... confirm that a candidate for episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consent.”⁷⁵ No such covenant was made.

As tension mounted, the fourteenth Lambeth Conference drew closer. Several bishops made it clear that they would have difficulty accepting the Archbishop of Canterbury’s invitation if such an invitation was also extended to Robinson and those who consecrated him or by the Bishop of New Westminster and others who had defied the Communion by proceeding with their revisionist agenda. However, when the invitations were issued in May 2007, while Robinson was not invited, those who participated in his consecration were. Furthermore, no invitation was extended to Martyn Minns, the missionary bishop consecrated by the Nigerians in 2006.

In this context, a group of primates (from Nigeria, West Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda) met in Nairobi to discuss how they might respond. Other key leaders met with them, including the Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen. They determined to convene a much larger meeting

... to plan for a future in which Anglican Christians world-wide will increasingly be pressured to depart from the biblical norms of behaviour and belief ... to draw together to strengthen each other over the issue of biblical authority and interpretation and gospel mission.⁷⁶

The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) met in Jerusalem in June 2008, and many of the bishops who attended it refused to attend the Lambeth Conference several weeks later. Its key achievements were the Jerusalem Declaration—a statement of faith that put the current struggle in a gospel and missional context—and the announcement of a new Anglican province, the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). In keeping

⁷⁴ “The Third Anglican Global South to South Encounter,” Anglican Communion News Service, October 31, 2005 (Clause 33), <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2005/10/the-third-anglican-global-south-to-south-encounter>.

⁷⁵ “The Communique of the Primates’ Meeting in Dar es Salaam, 19th February 2007,” Anglican Communion, February 2007, https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68393/communique2007_english.pdf.

⁷⁶ “Global Anglican Future Conference—Archbishop Peter Jensen,” *Anglican Church League*, December 27, 2007, <https://acl.asn.au/2007/12/>.

with the conviction that the fundamental issue in the contemporary disputes is the authority of Scripture, the second clause of the Jerusalem Declaration reads,

2. We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Between 2008 and 2022 those pursuing the revisionist agenda continued without restraint, encouraged by changes in the civil law in many places. The number of provinces supporting same-sex blessings and the ordination of noncelibate gay men and women increased. The Lambeth Conference in 2008 made no fresh decisions on the topic. During the next Lambeth Conference, delayed until 2022, in a letter sent to the bishops attending, Archbishop Justin Welby made this somewhat ambiguous statement: "I write therefore to affirm that the validity of the resolution passed at the Lambeth Conference 1998, 1.10, is not in doubt and the whole resolution is still in existence." Those who received the letter debated what he actually meant. In a speech delivered to the Conference he apparently attempted to straddle the fence: "For many churches to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence For these [other] churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence."⁷⁸ However, he had insisted earlier, "I will not punish churches that conduct gay marriages."⁷⁹ In October 2022, it was announced that the newly appointed Dean of Canterbury, David Monteith, "shares his life in a Civil Partnership with David Hamilton."⁸⁰

On the other hand, those who saw this agenda as simply the latest instances of a long-standing departure from the authority of Scripture continued to meet and set a gospel agenda for the renewal of the Communion. The Global South met in Singapore in 2010, Cairo in 2016, Cairo in 2019, and

⁷⁷ "Jerusalem Declaration," GAFCON, 2018, <https://www.gafcon.org/jerusalem-2018/key-documents/jerusalem-declaration>.

⁷⁸ "Lambeth Conference Anglican Church Global South Bishops," *Christianity Today*, August 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/august/lambeth-conference-anglican-church-global-south-bishops.html>.

⁷⁹ "No Penalty for Churches Rebelling over Gay Marriage," *Times*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/no-penalty-for-churches-rebelling-over-gay-marriage-g0mll8rc9>.

⁸⁰ "New Dean of Canterbury Announced," Association of English Cathedrals, October 11, 2022, <https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/new-dean-of-canterbury-announced/>.

online in 2021. GAFCON reconvened in Nairobi in 2013 and Jerusalem in 2018, and it is planned for Kigali, Rwanda, in 2023. New parallel provinces and dioceses, acknowledged and supported by GAFCON, have emerged: the Church of Confessing Anglicans Aotearoa New Zealand, the Anglican Network in Europe (described as a protoprovince), and the Diocese of the Southern Cross (Australia).

When, in the sixteenth century, the English Reformers produced the Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, the Ordinal, and two books of homilies, they did so in the sure knowledge that the faith they sought to pass on to a new generation by these means would always be under attack. That was, after all, what Jesus and the apostles had promised, and their words had proven true throughout the history of the church to that time. They knew it would continue to be the case in England. Reformed theology had no “golden age” in the Church of England. Things would not change when episcopal churches were established in British colonies across the globe. The focal point of the challenge might be different at different points in time, but as has been said many times, the underlying question remains whether the churches of the Anglican communion are willing to live in joyful and faithful obedience to the word of God. The tragedy of this tale is that in the West many of those who have been set apart as guardians of the faith have proved unable or unwilling to do so, almost always while pretending this is not the case. The hope lies in the work of God in the leaders from the South, who have been willing to make a stand, and bear the cost, because they recognize that we all will have to give an account of the stewardship that has been entrusted to us.