

Standing Committee – Report 2006

APPENDIX B

ANGLICAN CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

ACC 13 – a Report to the Standing Committee

This report describes and evaluates business at ACC 13 in Nottingham in June. Principal points raised include:

- Continuing challenges and strains in the Communion as reception of the Windsor Report continues;
- the addition of the Anglican primates to membership of the ACC;
- Ecumenical developments, particularly in the context of the final work of ARCIC II;
- the Israel/Palestine situation;
- the distinctive contributions to the Council of Archbishop Rowan Williams and Canon Kenneth Kearon.

A lot of water has passed under the Anglican bridge since January 1998 when I had the privilege of being elected by the Standing Committee to be the Church of Ireland's clerical member of the ACC. On that occasion, in his gracious words of good wishes, the Archbishop of Armagh – himself a former member of the Council – commented that I would 'enjoy every minute of it'. He was 100% correct in relation to my first two ACC experiences (Dundee 1999 and Hong Kong 2002) but 'enjoy' might not, I fear, be quite the word to apply to my final session of the ACC, which took place in Nottingham from 19 to 28 June last.

As everybody knows, ACC 13 took place against the backdrop of what tends to be referred to these days, sublimely tactfully, as 'recent developments' in the Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada – the consecration of an active homosexual as a bishop in the former and the authorisation of the blessing of same-sex unions in one diocese of the latter. Of course 'recent developments' are about far more than homosexuality in the context of Christian discipleship, important as that issue is. They are also about power, about the nature and location of authority in the Anglican Communion, about the way in which we interpret Holy Scripture in very different cultural and pastoral settings.

At the Primates' meeting in Dromantine early this year, apparently after considerable debate and heart-searching, the North American provinces were requested voluntarily to withdraw their members from ACC 13 in order to provide space for them to reflect on the questions posed to them by the Communion as a whole in the Windsor Report. Some, not least in the provinces concerned, saw this as unjustified intervention by the Primates in the affairs of the ACC. In the event, the two provinces decided to withdraw their six members in the sense that they would not participate in debate or vote. It was also decided, however, that they would send those members to the Council as observers. Furthermore, it was agreed that – as the Primates had requested – the two provinces would send high-level delegations, including both their primates, to Nottingham to make presentations concerning the theological, historical and pastoral background to the actions on which they had embarked.

Standing Committee – Report 2006

All of this, it has to be said, made for a very fraught atmosphere at the beginning of the Council. The presence of the ‘observers’ was resented by many and it seemed likely that a motion might be tabled seeking their withdrawal. The observers (all of them delightful people placed in a virtually impossible position) stayed at the expense of their provinces elsewhere in Nottingham, and they were not included in the Bible study groups with which each day’s proceedings commenced. However, human nature is such that daily informal encounter within a relatively small assembly tends to produce a gradual thaw, and it was significant that the observers were invited (theoretically as the guests of the host diocese of Southwell) to the dinner at Nottingham Castle at the end of the Council meeting. At that stage no-one seemed to want them to absent themselves.

There was predictable and substantial media interest in the two presentations requested by the Primates’ meeting and it was good that a full attendance of Council members appeared to be present to listen to the cases presented. We were treated to considerable theological reflection, compelling pastoral testimony and detailed explanation of how the canonical procedures in each province had led to the present impasse. If I were to single out one presenter who impressed me deeply, it was ECUSA’s Bishop of Louisiana, Bishop Jenkins. He had not given his assent to the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson, he was a passionate advocate of the unique place of Holy Matrimony as the proper context for sexual intimacy and he had wrestled with his conscience as to whether to be part of the ECUSA delegation at all. Despite the fact, however, that it might have been easier for him to walk away from ECUSA into some kind of continuing church, he had determined to stay within his Church, to accept – albeit painfully – the integrity of other people and to make sure that people of his school of thought continued to be heard within the decision making bodies of the Church he so obviously loved. I believe Bishop Jenkins’ eloquent explanation of his position hugely affected the atmosphere of the Council in subsequent days, and many members found themselves mirrored both in his moral theology and in his commitment to unity.

In the aftermath of the formal presentations, other provinces were invited to make comments on where they stood in relation to the whole matter of sexuality. I took the opportunity, in effect, to place upon the record of the Council the Church of Ireland bishops’ pastoral letter of 2003 concerning the issue. This document generated considerable favourable comment, coming as it does from a Church which has wrestled for such a long time with painful and potentially divisive issues of identity and loyalty. There was particular interest in the manner in which the bishops set out four different perspectives on same-sex relationships, all of which might reasonably and with integrity be argued to be essentially consonant with Scripture. In many ways, Ireland seemed to be providing an Anglican microcosm in these demanding times of how to live together with diversity, to be truly attentive to one another and to keep things in proper perspective.

Following the ECUSA and Anglican Church of Canada presentations, a motion was submitted, signed almost entirely it must be said by members of the Africa region, endorsing Lambeth 1.10, the Primates’ Dromantine statement and, in effect, the continued marginalisation of the two North American provinces until the next Lambeth Conference. The original text of the motion also sought exclusion of those churches from such things, it seemed, as international ecumenical commissions and the Anglican

Standing Committee – Report 2006

Networks. Had this form of the resolution been passed, it would have left the capacity of the Communion to function properly in a very doubtful position indeed. In the event, however, the motion was amended (largely thanks to the intervention of the Archbishop of Canterbury) to state what in fact everyone already knew, namely that withdrawal from the ACC simply and specifically implied withdrawal also from its Standing Committee and from the Inter-Anglican Finance and Administration Committee. Even this amended motion, no more really than an affirmation of the post-Dromantine *status quo* by the ACC itself, passed – after a secret ballot - by 30 votes to 28 with four abstentions. This was a result which astonished many in its closeness. It was, on that hot afternoon, a painful moment of division and at least some African members deliberately absented themselves from the hall during the voting altogether. The fact that the ACC came so close to NOT rapping Canadian and American knuckles further shows how delicate the balance of opinion currently is within global Anglicanism. However, the closeness of the vote is perhaps an inspired and providential challenge to Anglicans to live with each other and with the integrity of one another – neither ‘side’ (and I hate to use the term) is in a position to go on some sort of moral stampede. After the close vote, the atmosphere at the Council seemed to change remarkably: people know that had the North American ‘observer members’ used their votes (as constitutionally they could have done) the outcome would certainly have been different. The influence at this point of off-site pressure groups, lobbyists and ‘advisers’ seemed to diminish palpably. As the meeting proceeded, there was no difficulty about a motion lauding the essentially pro-Palestinian Independence investment policy of ECUSA or in passing a resolution on the final day thanking the two North American provinces for their presentations and requesting their observers to convey those thanks home.

That said, no one could predict at all just now how events will unfold as ACC members report back and provinces digest the decisions of this particular Instrument of Unity and Communion which in a neo-synodical way has displayed that an imperative to live with significant moral diversity may *itself* be somehow the consensus fidelium. Much of course will depend on the successful operation of the listening process encouraged by Lambeth Resolution 1.10 of 1998¹, a process which an ACC Resolution has now established and commended on a basis not unlike that already in operation in the Church of Ireland. The Secretary General is now charged with the responsibility of collating the studies and statements which are the fruit of experiences of listening in each province, and making such material available for study across the Communion. Progress on encouraging this work of mutual attentiveness and indeed education is to be reported to each of the instruments of communion as soon as possible.

After these predictably but necessarily lengthy ruminations on all that goes with matters of sexuality, perhaps I had better deal with other matters that preoccupied the Council with a succession of bullet points.

¹ Lest anyone forget, Lambeth Resolution 1.10 of 1998 made a commitment ‘to listen to the experience of homosexual persons’ (clause c) and also requested the establishment of ‘a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us’ (clause f)

Standing Committee – Report 2006

- One was aware anew of the extraordinary scope of the Anglican Communion's involvement in major ecumenical dialogues and conversations. Of particular interest was the presentation concerning the final ARCIC II Agreed Statement on Mary. I dare to think I threw at least a kitten among the ARCIC pigeons by asking why, if Scripture could be stretched sufficiently to render Immaculate Conception somehow consonant with it, the Commission had taken little heed of the apparently plain word of Scripture in the matter of the (non!) perpetual virginity of Mary. The answer I received was that as Cranmer and Latimer had apparently accepted perpetual virginity, ARCIC had not found it necessary to address the matter! It is hoped that a new ARCIC (III) to be established by 2007 will deal largely with matters of ecclesiology.
- It is the hope of the Archbishop of Canterbury that Lambeth 2008 will be somewhat more concerned with providing serious and appropriate in-service theological and missiological training for bishops than with the production of resolutions.
- In order to increase, not least in the present climate, the coherence of the Instruments of Unity/Communion, it has finally been accepted that all the Anglican Primates will on a phased basis be incorporated into the ACC as a sort of house of bishops within it. The chief casualty of this will be the participation of episcopal members who are not Primates and it likely that the Council will in future vote by orders.
- The Church of Ireland was particularly and suitably prominent at this ACC – Canon Kenneth Kearon was attending his first Council as Secretary-General of the Communion, the Bishop of Clogher presided over a masterly presentation of the work of the Inter-Faith Concerns network and the host bishop, George Cassidy of Southwell, is of course a son of the Church of Ireland. In addition to all that, and following the work of the Lambeth Commission, Archbishop Eames was truly an invisible but ever-appreciated influence on the atmosphere of the meeting.
- Largely thanks to the provision of proper office facilities for the Communion in London, and the number of international ecumenical and theological commissions at present at work, the inter-Anglican budget is not in a very buoyant state, and is hugely dependent on contributions particularly from ECUSA (with all that that implies...). Putting it bluntly, each province's contributions will probably rise by a significantly higher level than inflation over the next few years, not least on account of the challenge of funding a Lambeth Conference which will nevertheless be shorter and more modest than many would have desired. For the moment, at least, the vision of a larger Anglican 'gathering' in some kind of association with Lambeth has been put on ice.
- In the light of an amended resolution concerning Palestine presented originally by the Peace and Justice Network and passed after quite a heated debate in the Council, the Church of Ireland may feel obliged to ask itself whether its adopted ethical investment strategies, at various levels and *inter alia*, 'support the infrastructure of a future Palestinian State'. This resolution was not quite as sweeping in its

Standing Committee – Report 2006

implications as that originally drafted² and many members of the Council – myself included – had been intensively lobbied (and also entertained) by their local rabbis who had offered us weighty reflections concerning Israel’s position on how any policy of divestment at this time would weaken the prospects of Middle East peace.

I could go on and on about this my final ACC – a milestone of a meeting, more theologically meaty and indeed physically demanding than any I had attended before, and interested persons must await what will be a very lengthy published Report. If I did not enjoy quite every minute of it, it was an utter privilege to be part of it, to have met so many wonderful people from around the globe as well as to have functioned within what is actually a strikingly small, intimate but I think effective Europe Region. For all of this I shall be eternally grateful to the Church of Ireland. It has been a pleasure to share the Nottingham experience with someone held in such respect and affection by others in the Council as Kate Turner and she goes forward to ACC 14 which may well take her to New Zealand, home territory of the Council chair John Paterson, Bishop of Auckland.

The final accolade must, however, lie with Rowan Williams, who brought to the whole Council wisdom, scholarship and frankly holiness – not least through the manner in which he personally led the morning Bible studies on Acts. His apparently unassuming interventions made the utterances of the Council much more balanced and judicious than they would otherwise have been and his genuine capacity for friendship permeated everything. The ovation he received as the meeting concluded was moving and without precedent in my experience of the Council and I am glad to have it as my final memory of a remarkable ten days. In so far as being an Anglican depends so much at the end of the day on communion with Canterbury, people of all shades of opinion really do want to stay with Rowan. The manner in which the Archbishop builds in the coming years on that quite extraordinary, yet still essentially non-judicial, authority of affection will be crucial in helping us, in spite of everything, to discern how to continue to experience *Living Communion* – the very theme that ACC 13 set for itself.

Michael Burrows
July 2005

² The final agreed text (resolution 36 of ACC 13) perhaps needs to be quoted more fully here since it has been the subject of intense discussion and ‘spin’ since the meeting of the council. The key phrases in clause (b) commend ‘the resolve of ECUSA to take appropriate action where it finds that its corporate investments support the occupation of Palestinian lands or violence against innocent Israelis and

- i. commends such a process to other Provinces having such investments, to be considered in line with their adopted ethical investment strategies
- ii. encourages investment strategies that support the infrastructure of a future Palestinian state’