

2 Authority, Conflict, and Communion

At the end of the decade, one question for Anglicans is whether their bonds of interdependence are strong enough to hold them together.

—*THE VIRGINIA REPORT (1997)*

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION IN anything like our modern understanding of it is a recent development in Anglican history. The term *Anglican Communion* was little used before the middle of the nineteenth century, and it began to be used as a consequence of the global spread of the Church of England.

The American War of Independence had meant that there could be no simple extension of the jurisdiction of the Church of England, at least in that part of the New World. In 1840 a bill passed the British Parliament allowing for clergy from the American and Scottish Churches to officiate, on occasions, in England. This effectively established communion with an American church already characterized by its own sense of identity and distinctives in governance, but aware also of its historic links to the Church in England and the See of Canterbury.

By the middle of the nineteenth century there was an emerging consensus that the colonial churches existed by voluntary compact and should be permitted to organize themselves. Bishop Selwyn in New Zealand was a strong advocate of this viewpoint and drew up a constitution for the

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Church in New Zealand based on that of the American Church. In Australia, Bishop Broughton insisted that his letters patent as Metropolitan implied the autonomy of his church.¹

By 1852 there seems to have been widespread agreement among the bishops in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa that the colonial churches needed freedom from English ecclesiastical legislation in order to hold their own synods. In the course of the 1850s many of the colonial churches moved by various means to establish synods. It was during this time that the term *Anglican Communion* seems first to have gained regular use. Provinces were emerging, with synodical government as well as an independent workable system of church discipline and measures for electing bishops.

Questions began to arise as to how this increasingly far-flung family could hold together with real coherence. There began to be calls for the creation of international structures and gatherings. A suggestion came from the United States for a Council of Bishops. A number of colonial bishops were pushing for a Pan-Anglican synod, and there were questions about the nature of the authority of the archbishop of Canterbury within the churches outside of the British Isles.²

With reservations in England about some of the emerging proposals, at the Convocation of Canterbury in May 1866, the Lower House expressed to the archbishop of Canterbury “an earnest desire that he would be pleased to issue an invitation to all bishops in communion with the Church of England to assemble at such a time and place . . . for the purpose of Christian sympathy and mutual counsel.”³

As in contemporary Anglican debates, fundamental questions were intensified by controversy. The first bishop of Natal, John Colenso, had become embroiled in a doctrinal controversy and was eventually deposed by Bishop Gray of Cape Town, for what were regarded as Colenso’s unorthodox opinions as well as his tolerant views on polygamy.

Eventually the archbishop of Canterbury called a meeting of bishops at Lambeth, for “united worship and common counsels.”⁴ It was not a council and it was not a synod. The first Lambeth Conference, held in 1867, was a deliberative, consultative gathering with the archbishop of Canterbury as

1. Jacob, *Anglican Church Worldwide*, 123–27.

2. *Ibid.*, 156–60.

3. Evans and Wright, *Anglican Tradition*, 328.

4. *Ibid.*, 330.

chair of the conference and a first among equals. The Colenso affair was an important matter that Archbishop Longley wanted to keep away from the main agenda because he believed it was too divisive.⁵

So worldwide Anglicanism began to take shape; it would not be an international church but a Communion of churches. It would not be governed by pope or patriarch; its weight of governance would be in its provinces. It would not have a magisterium, and to the extent that it had international instruments they would be voluntary and advisory.⁶

This commitment to dispersed authority within a Communion of autonomous provinces has been reaffirmed many times since within the life of the Communion.

LAMBETH AND DISPERSED AUTHORITY

The 1888 Lambeth Conference affirmed a statement that has often been referred to in discussions about Anglican identity and authority. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, as it came to be termed, was actually developed as a basis for “home reunion,” that is, possible reunification of the churches of the “English-speaking races.”⁷ The resolution adopted reads as follows:

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 ultimate standard of faith;
- (b) The Apostles’ Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith;

5. Jacob, *Anglican Church Worldwide*, 165–69. Some English bishops did not want the conference, fearing that it might interfere with Church-State relationships within England.

6. The 1867 gathering at Lambeth received a report from a committee on synodical government recommending that wherever a Church was not by law established, there should be diocesan and provincial synods including both clergy and laity. The committee also recommended that bishops should be elected by dioceses, with both clergy and laypeople as electors. There was no recommendation for a “higher synod” because it was recognized that the established nature of the Church in England would make this a difficulty. A report was also received from a committee set up to consider a proposal for a “final court of appeal.” It recommended the establishment of such a court, but also that it be voluntary. See Jacob, *Anglican Church Worldwide*, 167–68.

7. Wright, *Quadrilateral at One Hundred*, 14–16.

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- (c) The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with un failing 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.⁸

While the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral might be regarded as in many ways an inadequate description of Anglican identity, or even as a basis for ecumenical discussion, it does illustrate something of the developing theology of dispersed authority within the emerging Communion, with Scripture as the ultimate standard, but with an understanding that the Church has received a range of instruments through which it is addressed by the authority of God.

A more substantial statement directly addressing the question of dispersed authority is to be found in a report to the Lambeth Conference of 1948.⁹ This report suggests that authority in the Church is to be understood as both “singular” and “plural.” It is singular because it derives from

8. Lambeth 1888, Resolution 11.

9. The report was called “The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion.” The report was prepared by sixty-four bishops convened by Archbishop Philip Carrington, of Quebec. The report includes these words:

Former Lambeth Conferences have wisely rejected proposals for a formal primacy of Canterbury, for an Appellate Tribunal, and for giving the Conference the status of a legislative synod. The Lambeth Conference remains advisory, and its continuation committee consultative.

These decisions led to a repudiation of centralized government, and a refusal of a legal basis of union.

The positive nature of the authority which binds the Anglican Communion together is therefore seen to be moral and spiritual, resting on the truth of the Gospel, and on charity which is patient and willing to defer to the common mind.

Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation, the authority of the eternal Father, the incarnate Son, and the life-giving Spirit. It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the saints, and the *consensus fidelium* which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through His faithful people in the Church. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralised authority, having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other; these elements together contributing by a process of mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggeration to the many sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to His Church.

(Included as an appendix in Sykes, *Authority in the Anglican Communion*).

a “single divine source” reflected within the “richness and historicity of the divine Revelation,” the authority of the Holy Trinity. However, while singular it is also “distributed” among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the saints, and the *consensus fidelium*, which is the continued experience of the Holy Spirit within the faithful.

It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralized authority, having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other; these elements together contributing by a process of mutual support, mutual checking, redressing of errors or exaggerations to the many sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to His Church.¹⁰

The report recognizes that authority of this kind is harder to understand, but suggests that it provides “suppleness and elasticity” and acts as a provision against the “temptations to tyranny and dangers of unchecked power.” The various elements through which authority works each act in organic relation. For Anglicans, the experience of authority is described in Scripture as the authoritative record and ultimate standard of faith; it is defined in the Creeds and through continuous theological study, mediated through the ministry of Word and Sacraments and is verified by the witness of the saints and *consensus fidelium*.

The Lambeth Conference of 1968 explored the theme of spiritual authority as “ordered liberty.” An addendum report of that conference describes the inheritance of faith along traditional Anglican lines of Scripture, reason and tradition.¹¹ It then speaks of “three strands.” The first is Scripture “proclaimed in the Catholic Creeds set in their context of baptismal confession, patristic reasoning, and conciliar decision.” The second is the Church’s witness to its own truth, particularly through its historic formularies. The third is the Church’s continuing witness to Christian truth through preaching, worship, and the writings of scholars and teachers “not least as exercised in historical and philosophical enquiry, as well as an acknowledgement of the claims of pastoral care.”¹²

The report recognizes the possible tensions between “new exploration” and historic formularies and acknowledges that “the Church and

10. Sykes, *Authority in the Anglican Communion*, 286.

11. *Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports*.

12. McAadoo, “Authority in the Church,” 76.

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Christian tradition cannot truly be themselves if they are static.”¹³ Briefly then, Lambeth 1968 explores and affirms the creative and contextual tensions within the working of ecclesial authority between order and freedom in the experience of corporate faith.

At least in part prompted by tensions about the ordination of women, the Lambeth Conferences of 1978 and 1988 addressed more directly the actual working of authority at a Communion level. Among significant developments in the reports and resolutions of these conferences there is a greater clarity about, and distinction between, authority itself and what McAdoo calls the “instrumentalities” of authority.¹⁴

The report of Lambeth 1978 affirms the authority of Scripture and tradition functioning within the Church to maintain it in truth. However, it also speaks of the guardianship of the episcopate in synod as instrumental to the working of authority in each church.¹⁵ The text of Resolution 11 is significant: “The Conference advises member Churches not to take action regarding issues which are of concern to the whole Anglican Communion without consultation with a Lambeth Conference or with the episcopate through the Primates’ Committee, and requests the Primates to initiate a study of the nature of authority within the Anglican Communion.”

This resolution is noteworthy, not just because it called for further study on the nature of authority in the Communion, but because of the role it assigns to the gathering of the primates alongside the Lambeth Conference in considering matters of concern to the whole Communion. As McAdoo points out, at the 1978 Lambeth Conference the primates acting together are given heightened recognition as “instrumentalities” of authority.¹⁶

THE GRINDROD REPORT: A RESPONSE TO GROWING TENSIONS

The Grindrod Report was commissioned in the context of growing Anglican Communion tension during the 1980s about the ordination of women. In 1985, The Episcopal Church of the United States had signalled its desire not to withhold consent to the election of a bishop who was a woman and had referred the matter to the newly created Meeting of Primates. The primates

13. *Ibid.*, 77.

14. *Ibid.*, 73–75.

15. *Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1978*, 77.

16. McAdoo, “Authority in the Church,” 74.

established a working group led by Archbishop John Grindrod of Brisbane to prepare a report for discussion at the 1988 Lambeth Conference.

In 1974 eleven women had been ordained to the priesthood within The Episcopal Church of the United States. The “Philadelphia Eleven” were ordained by bishops who had retired or resigned and the ordination was denounced as irregular. Four more women were ordained soon after, despite the controversy. In 1976 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution to change the church’s canon law to allow the ordination of women for all three orders of deacon, priest, and bishop.

The ordination of women to the priesthood was authorized by the Anglican Church in Canada in 1975 and an ordination followed in 1976. Women were ordained to the priesthood in New Zealand in 1977. At that time a number of other provinces of the Anglican Communion were moving towards authorizing the ordination of women.

In places like Australia change came more slowly, but the stresses were felt acutely. The General Synod of 1977, after receiving a report from the Doctrine Commission, endorsed the view that “the theological objections which have been raised do not constitute a barrier to the ordination of women to the priesthood, and the consecration of women to the episcopate, in this Church.”¹⁷ It would not be until 1992 that women would be ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Australia, and then only after a difficult and divisive debate.¹⁸

The Grindrod Report, as it came to be known, begins with a reflection on the 1978 Lambeth Conference, noting that the resolutions of the conference had given freedom to the provinces of the Anglican Communion to

17. Anglican Church of Australia, *Thirteenth General Synod 2004*.

18. In the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia in 1985 a canon to provide for the ordination of women to the priesthood failed by two votes in the house of clergy. That General Synod did pass a canon to allow for the ordination of women to the diaconate. The debate about women in the priesthood continued through the 1980s in Australia, with the strength of feeling on both sides of this debate growing. For many of those in favor of the ordination of women the only way forward seemed to be through local diocesan legislation. Women were ordained for the first time in Perth in 1992 and later that year the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia passed the “Law of the Church of England Clarification Canon.” This canon did not address directly the question as to whether there was or was not a legal obstacle to the ordination of women to the priesthood, rather, it clarified the law to ensure that there was not. Under the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia the legislation only applies in those dioceses in which it was adopted.

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proceed to ordain women to the priesthood without feeling that this action would lead to a break in communion.¹⁹

A significant contribution of *The Grindrod Report* was to adapt an important concept from ecumenical discussions, that of “reception.” The notion of reception had its origins in Roman Catholic ecclesiology, referring primarily to the processes of acceptance by the faithful of the teachings or decisions of the magisterium and had been taken up in ecumenical dialogue to be applied to the “mutual assimilation of ecumenical dialogues.”²⁰

The contribution of *The Grindrod Report* to the use of this idea is to be found in its reference to “an *open* process of reception.” Avis notes that what is suggested by “open reception” is a process of “dialogue, mutuality and provisionality.”²¹

Also significant in *Grindrod* is the way it links together the concepts of “autonomy,” “interdependence” and communion (*koinonia*). The “delicate balance” of autonomy and interdependence, the report suggests, is to be understood in relation to the “very nature of communion,” which implies a unity in faith that is itself expressed in, and maintained by, the ministry of the Church.²²

The Grindrod Report was received by the Lambeth Conference of 1988 (Resolution 1.1), which resolved that “each Province respect the decision and attitudes of other Provinces in the ordination or consecration of women to the episcopate, without such respect necessarily indicating acceptance of the principles involved, maintaining the highest possible degree of communion with the provinces which differ.”

Paul Avis suggests that Lambeth 1988 put the question of *koinonia* “near the top of the agenda for Anglicans,” reflecting the increased relevance of this term in ecumenical dialogues.

The archbishop of Canterbury reminded the gathered bishops that they represented “not an empire, nor a federation, nor a jurisdiction, nor yet the whole Church, but a communion, a fellowship based on our gathering at the Lord’s Table.” One of the section reports, “Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns,” takes up the theme:

The Anglican Communion consists of a family of Churches which say of themselves that they are in communion with each other. At

19. Grindrod, *Report of the Working Party*, para. 2.

20. Avis, *Seeking the Truth of Change in the Church*, 23.

21. *Ibid.*, 25.

22. Grindrod, *Report of the Working Party*, para. 87.

a time when there is debate and disagreement in the family, it is essential to set all consideration of what it might mean to be Anglican in the wider context of the familiar and ancient (indeed biblical) word “communion.” The fundamental theological question about the identity of Anglicanism is what it means for a Christian to be in communion.²³

The “Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns” report of the conference maintains that the primary purpose of authority in the Church is to enable every member to live out his or her relationship with Christ. Ultimately, the source of all authority is Christ, but Christ is known through Holy Scripture, which has sovereign authority as “the medium through which God by the Spirit communicates his word in the Church.” However, because Scripture must be translated, read, and understood, its meaning is apprehended in the light of tradition and reason, speaking through “the voices of living human persons.”²⁴

The ordained ministries are the “primary agents” of the nurturing authority of Christ, interpreting Scripture and speaking out of the tradition and mind of the Church. There are also those whom God raises up as “prophets and sages” as part of the “economy of authority.” Finally there is the essential authority of the body of believers, exercising discernment in ongoing reception.

Where there is disagreement or conflict, then the Communion’s structures of consultation and decision become important. These “embodiments and agents of unity” include the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, and the Anglican Consultative Council, but also the more recent Primates’ Meeting.

These four institutions . . . are the ways by which the autonomous Provinces of the Anglican Communion express their unity and communion and live out their interdependence today. They may not, either individually or together, take decisions on behalf of the whole Communion. They *do* provide means of consultation, places in which to search for a common mind, and they provide the means of expressing the mind of the Communion. They serve to develop and sustain Anglican cohesion and unity.²⁵

23. Anglican Consultative Council, *Truth Shall Make You Free*, 105.

24. *Ibid.*, 99–111.

25. *Ibid.*, 111.

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It is significant to note at this point not just the emergence of the four Instruments of Communion in the form that is generally characteristic of Anglicanism today, but that this structure of Communion “instruments” is given substantial consideration within a section of the 1988 report focusing on authority.

EAMES AND VIRGINIA: A DEVELOPING EMPHASIS ON AUTHORITY THROUGH STRUCTURE

The 1988 Lambeth Conference (Resolution 1.3) also asked the archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a commission “to provide for an examination of the relationships between Provinces of the Anglican Communion and ensure that the process of reception includes continuing consultation with other Churches as well.”

Under the chairmanship of Archbishop Robin Eames, the Commission quickly became known throughout the Anglican Communion as the Eames Commission. In 1994, the three official reports of the commission were published in one volume, *The Eames Commission: The Official Reports*.²⁶

After a brief introduction, each chapter of the First Report includes the word *koinonia*.²⁷ The emphasis on *koinonia* in *Eames* reflects a developing emphasis on this theme in ecclesiology generally over the past half century. While the language of *koinonia* goes back as far as that occasion popularly described as the Church’s birth date, the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42), it is not a term that has been prominent in ecclesiology until relatively recently. Vatican II brought the theme of *koinonia* to the fore in late twentieth-century Roman Catholic ecclesiology, but for Christian Churches more generally it has been the changing nature of the ecumenical movement that has brought the word into greater prominence.

In the last thirty years, ecumenical discussion of every kind has proliferated. During that time—broadly speaking since the Second Vatican Council (1962–65)—the theology of *koinonia/communio* (to set the Greek and Latin terms side by side) has all but swept the board. Here is a way of presenting the Christian faith that takes in a fundamental concern with God as trinity (*koinonia* in God),

26. Anglican Consultative Council, *Eames Commission*.

27. Following the introduction, the chapters of the First Report are headed as follows: “Koinonia and the Mystery of God,” “Koinonia and the Anglican Communion,” “Koinonia and Women in the Episcopate,” “Koinonia and Pastoral Guidelines.”

with human beings as made for *koinonia*, with ecclesiology and the doctrine of salvation (*koinonia* with God and with other human beings), and ethics (living in and for *koinonia*).²⁸

While the renewed emphasis on *koinonia* has been very much a product of the modern dialogue *between* churches, this wider usage has increasingly been adapted by Anglicans dealing with relationships *within* the Communion, against a background of emerging tensions on a range of issues.

Eames links *koinonia* within the churches with the relational being of the Holy Trinity. In a section called “Koinonia and the Anglican Communion,” the spiritual reality of *koinonia* is described as “sharing in the life of God the Holy Trinity.” “The basis of the Christian Church is that spiritual reality of *koinonia* which is a sharing in the life of God the Holy Trinity. In the Anglican Communion, this mystery manifests itself in visible elements of the Church’s life many of which Anglicans already share with other ecclesial bodies.”²⁹

Those “visible elements” of the Church’s life that may be said to manifest the life-in-communion of the Trinity include the common confession of apostolic faith in conformity with Scripture, the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist and a “single interchangeable ministry which is apostolic both in terms of fidelity to apostolic teaching and in terms of apostolic succession.”

For *Eames* this spiritual reality of *koinonia* is expressed in mutual prayer, mutual responsibility and care, a sharing of resources and goods and a commitment to mission. The life of the Communion is held together in the creative tension of “provincial autonomy and interdependence” lived out and sustained through the Communion structures of the Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council and Meeting of Primates. Synodical debate is valued as an “important instrument” in the discernment of God’s will.³⁰ However, there is a call to conduct debate with respect and courtesy:

The Commission offers this Report in the hope that the spirit of “respect” and “courtesy” voiced by the Lambeth Conference in connection with differences over women in the episcopate may continue to influence this debate in the Anglican Communion. When differences of principle and practice result in tension,

28. Sagovsky, *Ecumenism, Christian Origins and the Practice of Communion*, 18.

29. Anglican Consultative Council, *Eames Commission*, 83.

30. *Ibid.*, 83–84.

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debate and pain, such a spirit will create a profound unity and communion beyond that which the world knows. If those who find the exclusion of women from the priesthood and episcopate contrary to an understanding of God's justice and meaning of the Incarnation, and those who find their inclusion an unacceptable development of the apostolic ministry can come together to share each other's burdens and sufferings, then the Anglican Communion will have learned something of the meaning of communion with the God who suffers.³¹

So *Eames* suggests that, although *koinonia* may suffer some restriction as a result of the action of some provinces to ordain women, Anglicans should not suggest that such restrictions result in their being "out of communion" with one another. To do this would do less than justice to the "concept of communion as we now understand and experience it." It is in this context that *The Eames Reports* develop the idea of "open reception" introduced in *The Grindrod Report*, also referring to it as a "continuing and dynamic process of reception"—a space of listening and discernment in which "the highest possible degree of communion" should be maintained in spite of differences.³²

The Eames Reports emphasize the role of synod in this discernment process, but offer the qualification that the process of reception should not be seen as complete just because a synod has reached a decision, since reception is not just about weight of numbers, but also continuance in the life of the Church. In that context, there is a place for sensitive and clearly expressed dissent in forming the mind of the Church.³³

The work of the Eames Commission was paralleled by that of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC), addressing resolution 18 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference, which called for "further exploration of the meaning and nature of communion with particular reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, the unity and order of the Church, and the unity and community of humanity." The Commission's report was published in 1997 and came to be known as *The Virginia Report*.³⁴

The Virginia Report is particularly significant, not just because it continues to develop an emphasis on authority working through Communion

31. *Ibid.*, 13.

32. *Ibid.*, 24–32.

33. *Ibid.*, 83–85.

34. *The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission*. This Commission was also chaired by Robin Eames.

structures, but because it questioned whether these structures in their existing forms were sufficient to hold the Anglican Communion together. The report also develops further the relational and Trinitarian theology of communion that began to emerge in *The Eames Reports*. God's relational being is apprehended as the Trinity, which is the "source and ground of our communion," and the Church is "lifted through the Holy Spirit into the life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."³⁵

The love with which the Father loves Jesus is the love with which Jesus loves us. On the night before he died Jesus prayed (John 17) that all who follow him should be drawn into that love and unity which existed between the Father and the Son. Thus our unity with one another is grounded in the life of love, unity and communion of the Godhead. The eternal, mutual self-giving and receiving love of the three persons of the Trinity is the source and ground of our communion, of our fellowship with God and with one another.³⁶

However, because the communion of the Church is a participation in the communion of the Trinity, it is eschatological and therefore always incomplete and so the mind of God must be constantly discerned afresh. In this context, Anglicans are held together by their characteristic use of Scripture, tradition, and reason. They are also held together by an "interdependence of charisms," including the "charism of ordered ministry."³⁷ Although provinces are formally autonomous, in practice autonomy has never been the sole criterion for understanding the relations of provinces with each other: "There has generally been an implicit understanding of belonging together and interdependence. The life of the Communion is held together in the creative tension of Provincial autonomy and interdependence."³⁸

Among the interdependent charisms in the life of the Church, "the continuation of a ministry of oversight (episcopate) at the Reformation exercised by bishops, by bishops in college and by bishops in council 'helps to hold Anglicans together' in a community of discernment and reflection."³⁹ Interdependent relationship or *koinonia* is also supported within the Anglican Communion by a "web of structures," in particular, the office of the

35. Ibid., paras. 2.9–11.

36. Ibid., para. 2.9.

37. Ibid., paras. 3.11–16.

38. Ibid., para. 3.28.

39. Ibid., para. 3.21.

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archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and a regular Meeting of Primates.

As the report itself acknowledges, much of *The Virginia Report* focuses on this “web of structures,” seeking ways for them to be clarified and strengthened. Chapters 4 to 6 of this report are largely concerned with this theme. The ideas of “subsidiarity” and “interdependence” (chapter 4) are developed with reference to Anglican Communion decision-making. Principles for developing structures are examined in chapter 5 and provide the context for a discussion about reception. Chapter 6 looks to the future development of the “world-wide Instruments of Communion,” examining ways they might be clarified in their relationships with each other and strengthened in their working.

Considering Anglicanism’s “Worldwide Instruments of Communion,” *The Virginia Report* seeks to clarify their workings and interrelatedness.⁴⁰ While no specific recommendations are put forward, a number of questions are asked, including the following:

- Does the Primate of the Anglican Communion need to be the occupant of the See of Canterbury?
- What is the nature of the authority of the [Lambeth] Conference?
- Should Primates be expected to make authoritative statements, or should the Primates’ Meeting be encouraged to exercise a primarily pastoral role, both for their own numbers, but also for the Communion?

The Virginia Report speaks of relationships within the Communion in terms of “subsidiarity, accountability and interdependence.” In language similar to that used in *The Eames Reports*, the term *subsidiarity* is used with the meaning that “a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing those functions which cannot be performed at a more immediate or local level.” The notion of subsidiarity is linked to that of reception, so that in matters affecting the whole Communion, a process of discernment and testing needs to occur “within the life of interdependence of the Provinces” before a decision is taken, with this being followed by a process of reception.⁴¹

The final reflections of *The Virginia Report* underscore the importance of “structures” and “instruments” for the maintenance of communion: “A

40. Ibid., paras. 6.6–36.

41. Ibid., paras. 4.8, 5.22–24.

deeper understanding of the instruments of communion at a world-level, their relationships to one another and to other levels of the church's life should lead to a more coherent and inclusive functioning of oversight in the service of the *koinonia* of the Church."⁴²

LAMBETH 1998: DIFFERENT ISSUES, SIMILAR STRESSES

The 1998 Lambeth Conference marked something of a shift in the issues that would put most pressure on the unity of the Anglican Communion. The question of the ordination of women, particularly to the episcopate, would continue to be contentious within some provinces, but the issue most to the fore was that of human sexuality and in particular the place of gay and lesbian people within the life of the Church.

In some provinces, pressure had been building for the Church to look favorably on the ordination of practicing homosexuals in long-term committed and stable relationships and in North America a number of bishops were ordaining openly gay and lesbian clergy. Equally there were moves towards formalizing provisions for the blessing of the relationships of same-sex couples. The matter had been debated within the 1997 Episcopalian Convention in Philadelphia and had also been brought to the Synod of the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada.

The Kuala Lumpur Statement was produced in 1997 as a response to these and similar developments.⁴³ It emerged from a gathering of delegates from Anglican Provinces in the developing world and it reaffirmed what it referred to as “the clear and unambiguous teaching of the Holy Scriptures about human sexuality,” as well as expressing concern about “recent developments relating to Church discipline and moral teaching in some provinces of the North—specifically, the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions.”

The Lambeth '98 study document “Called to Full Humanity” recognized that, of all the themes to be considered at the Lambeth Conference 1998, the topic of human sexuality would be one of the most sensitive and deeply divisive. It acknowledges that there were deep divisions within the different cultures of the Communion on a variety of issues related to human

42. *Ibid.*, para. 6.35.

43. “The Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality,” paras. 3–7. This report is included as an Appendix (1) in *Faithfulness in Fellowship* (Doctrine Panel of the Anglican Church of Australia).

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sexuality: divorce, cohabitation, and polygamy, as well as homosexuality. However, the divisions in regard to homosexuality were clear: “In many places, homosexual behaviour is identified simply with paedophilia and promiscuity, whereas in other places there are now many examples of faithful homosexual relationships in society at large and within the Church.”⁴⁴ The strength of these divisions in Anglicanism on this subject may have been somewhat disguised by the voting at Lambeth. It was a passionate debate, with some of the African bishops calling for those who supported the ordination of homosexuals to repent or leave the Communion. Feelings ran high and there were public confrontations between participants. A draft resolution was amended towards a more conservative outcome.

Resolution 1.10, as it was passed, upheld faithfulness in marriage “between a man and a woman in lifelong union” and affirmed abstinence as right for those not called to marriage (1.10.b). While rejecting “homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture” (1.10.d) and therefore being unable to “advise the legitimising or blessing of same-sex unions” (1.10.e), the resolution also expressed a commitment to listening to the experience of homosexual people and asked that the primates establish a process to monitor continuing work in the Communion on human sexuality, and to “share statements and resources” (1.10.f).

The resolution was carried emphatically, 526 votes for and 70 against. Despite this large majority, however, strong expressions of dissent were registered from some sections of the Communion. These expressions of dissent included an apology to gay and lesbian Christians signed by 146 bishops.⁴⁵

The *Eames Commission Reports* and *The Virginia Report* were considered by the 1998 Lambeth Conference and are reflected in resolutions. While the conference resolutions recognize that the Church is held in *koinonia* “by our liturgical tradition and common patterns of worship, by prayer and the communion of the saints, the witness of the heroes and heroines of our history, the sharing of the stories of our faith, and by our interdependence through exchanges of friendship between our dioceses and by service to others in the name of Christ,” there is considerable emphasis on the formal Instruments of Communion.⁴⁶

44. Anglican Consultative Council, *Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, para. 57.b.

45. Bates, *Church at War*, 139.

46. Anglican Consultative Council, *Lambeth Report 1998*, III.8.

The resolutions affirm the role of the archbishop of Canterbury “as a personal sign of our unity and communion” and the role of the decennial Lambeth Conference and other gatherings as collegial and communal signs of unity. In addition to this, however, they call for “enhanced responsibility” for the Primates’ Meeting, including a possible role of intervention “in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution” and urge a “clearer integration” of the roles of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, as well as recommending that the bishops representing each province in the Anglican Consultative Council should be the primates of that province.⁴⁷ The Primates are asked to initiate and monitor a study in each province as to “whether effective communion, at all levels, does not require appropriate instruments, with due safeguards, not only for legislation, but also for oversight.”⁴⁸

A FOCUS ON CENTRAL STRUCTURES

Several trends in Anglican ecclesiology emerge during the period between the Lambeth conferences of 1968 to 1998. The theme of *koinonia* comes to the fore, as it does in ecclesiology more generally. Linked to this, there is a shift towards a Trinitarian approach to ecclesiology, emphasizing relationships and mutuality.

There is also a clearer articulation of authority in Anglicanism in two respects; firstly in the primary sense as the “inheritance of faith” at work in the Church, but also in a secondary or instrumental sense of the working of that authority through the Communion’s instrumentalities for consultation and interdependence.⁴⁹

These two aspects of authority that we have identified as emerging with greater clarity over this time seem to correspond to a distinction made by Stephen White between what he termed the authority *of* the Church and authority *within* the Church.⁵⁰ By authority *within* the Church, White meant “its own systems of government, its officers and so on” (the working of authority through ecclesial instrumentalities). When he speaks of the authority *of* the Church this refers to “its doctrines, its worship, its practices” preached and taught in God’s name and as “potentially applicable to

47. *Ibid.*, III.4.

48. *Ibid.*, III.8h.

49. McAdoo, “Authority in the Church,” 75.

50. White, *Authority and Anglicanism*, 12–13.

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all people.” The reference here is to authority in its more primary sense as the inheritance of faith.

A related tendency is an increased emphasis on those secondary authorities or ecclesial instrumentalities in maintaining unity in the Communion. The 1978 Lambeth Conference was marked by the primates receiving heightened recognition as “instrumentalities of authority.” Lambeth 1988 stressed the role of the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, and the Anglican Consultative Council, but also the more recently formed Primates’ Meeting as “embodiments and agents of unity” that served to develop and sustain Anglican cohesion and unity.⁵¹ *The Virginia Report* is particularly significant because of its emphasis on the Communion’s “web of structures” and its questioning whether those structures were sufficient to hold the Communion together. The 1998 Lambeth Conference took up this question when it asked whether “oversight” might not be necessary at all levels of the Communion, with an enhanced role being postulated for the primates, including the possibility of intervention in provinces.

Tracing a series of major reports and the considerations of the Lambeth conferences from 1968 to 1998 has shown us how tensions over major issues produced something of a reassessment of the Anglican Communion’s commitment to a model of dispersed authority. An increasingly structuralist approach to the working of authority began to emerge, with growing pressure towards enhanced authority at the center. By way of something of an ecclesiological dissonance, this centralizing tendency was set against an emerging emphasis on the relationality and mutuality of the Holy Trinity as the basis for communion.

These trends would be evident as the tensions in Anglicanism continued beyond the turn of the century.

51. Anglican Consultative Council, *Truth Shall Make You Free*, 111.