

**SUPPORTING PAPERS FOR THE FAITH AND ORDER  
COMMISSION REPORT, *COMMUNION AND  
DISAGREEMENT***

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## ***Preface***

As noted in the Preface to the report on *Communion and Disagreement* from the Faith and Order Commission, members of the drafting group worked on a number of papers as part of the preparation for writing the report itself. In doing so, they had the idea of producing ‘dialogue papers’ that would be co-written. These papers would enable a more in-depth analysis of some of the areas covered in the report to be shared with its readers, as well as consideration of matters that the group had discussed but that did not feature prominently in it. They would also show the members of the group practising – in writing rather than face to face encounter – what it might mean to agree and disagree well together within the life of the Church on matters of theological significance.

The Faith and Order Commission supported this proposal. The five dialogue papers that are included in this document as supporting papers for *Communion and Disagreement* are therefore being made available for those who might like to follow up particular aspects of it or find out more about some of the background and related issues. Unlike the report, however, the content of these supporting papers has not been approved by the Commission and does not come with its authority. Their content therefore remains the responsibility of the individual authors, to whom I am grateful for their willingness to make their work publicly available in this way.

The Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth  
Bishop of Coventry  
Chair of the Faith and Order Commission

June 2016

# 1 *Communion, Disagreement and Conscience*

Loveday Alexander and Joshua Hordern

The second chapter of the FAOC report *Communion and Disagreement* discussed conscience alongside conflict, consultation and conciliarity with regard to how communion is sustained in the church in the face of serious disagreements. The goal of this supporting paper is to develop that section (§14–42) in order to illumine more fully the significance of conscience for thinking about difference and disagreement in the life of the church, taking Paul’s letters as a starting point. We note from the outset that the language of ‘conscience’ is not straightforward even where it does occur explicitly in Paul. Sometimes the relevant word (*syneidesis*) or operative concept may be better rendered as ‘consciousness’ or ‘self-consciousness’. Our approach is first to state what we agree about (§§1.1–1.14) and then to engage in conversation together concerning matters about which we at present disagree (§§1.15–1.40). A concluding note (§§1.41–1.43) states our hope of agreement in the future.

## Listening to Scripture

- 1.1 What happens when Christians cannot agree over the definition of what is sinful? This is the case in 1 Corinthians 8–10, where Paul discusses ‘food offered to idols’. The principle was clear: becoming a Christian meant turning away from ‘dumb idols’ to serve the one living and true God (1 Cor. 12.2). But in practice it was not always clear where ‘idolatry’ began. Meat bought in the market-place (1 Cor. 10.25) might have been slaughtered as part of a pagan religious ceremony: should a Christian eat such meat? Dinner-parties were often held in temple dining-rooms (1 Cor. 8.10): should a Christian accept such invitations?<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 1 Corinthians 8.4–6 outlines one approach which we may call the ‘strong’ position (though Paul does not use this term). There is only one God. Therefore ‘idols’ – i.e. pagan gods – do not exist. Therefore they cannot spoil perfectly good food created by God. Paul implicitly approves of this approach, making it the basis for allowing Christians to eat market-place meat (1 Cor. 10.25; cf. also Rom. 14.14; 1 Tim 4.3–5).

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<sup>1</sup> This concern is still a live issue for many non-western Christians. See Newton [1991]. Some regarded the issue as purely ‘cultural’ and took a ‘strong’ philosophical position that rendered the ban irrelevant to Christians: reading between the lines, this seems to be Paul’s own position (1 Cor. 8.4–6; 10.25–26).

- 1.3 But there is also a 'weaker' position (1 Cor. 8.11) which cannot escape the sense that pagan gods exist, and therefore that Christians cannot participate even in apparently harmless social activities without compromise (1 Cor. 8.7–10). To such a person, eating meat which might have come from a pagan sacrifice (or attending a social event in a temple) will always *feel* wrong, however strong the arguments made to the contrary, and this can only have the effect of de-sensitising the conscience (1 Cor. 8.10) so that it becomes less adequate to its role in discipleship and the life of the church. Just how feeling, moral reasoning and conscience relate to each other is then an important question.
- 1.4 Paul does not attempt to arbitrate between these two views by insisting on the right answer, knowing that the right answer is not the whole story (1 Cor. 8.2). His concern is not primarily which view is right but how to care for all members of the community: 'knowledge' which has a catastrophic effect on the faith of a fellow-Christian (1 Cor. 8.9–13) cannot 'build up' the church. Christian action, therefore, must not display an attitude to knowledge which puffs one part of the Body up while diminishing or destroying others but a love for the church. Knowledge known in the wisdom of love and carefully, even selectively, deployed, may build up the Body (1 Cor. 8.1–3).
- 1.5 The implications emerge in 1 Corinthians 10. Membership in Christ's Body brings the Christian into partnership with others who share in the same Bread and Cup (1 Cor. 10.17). Such partnership necessitates the interplay of responsibilities with freedoms (1 Cor. 10.23–24). The 'strong' position is perfectly correct in itself: meat from the market can be accepted as a gift from God (1 Cor. 10.25–26), and social invitations from unbelievers should not be subjected to unnecessary inquisition (1 Cor. 10.27). But if somebody else – the host, or a 'weaker' church member – raises the question of idolatry, the issue should be treated with all due seriousness. Responsibility to the other's spiritual needs takes precedence over our own spiritual liberty (1 Cor. 10.28–32).
- 1.6 Paul returns to the issue in Romans 14.1–15, this time writing to a church – or group of churches – that he had not founded. Clearly the early church contained a diversity of viewpoints on the matter. Here the 'strong' and 'weak' views encompass not only food laws (should Christians eat only vegetables, presumably as a way of avoiding idol-meats?) but also whether any particular time is to be considered sacred (should Christians esteem some days as better than others, or should they treat all days alike?).
- 1.7 We should not underestimate the seriousness of these issues: for Paul, they may impinge on the heart of the gospel of freedom in Christ. The plea in Colossians 2.16 'Let no-one pass judgment on you in questions of food or drink or with

regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath ... let no-one disqualify you' recalls the equally impassioned cry of Galatians 5.1: 'For freedom Christ has set us free: stand fast then, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.'

- 1.8 There are two steps in the argument in Galatians. On the one hand, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love' — which would seem to imply that the issues are *adiaphora* (cf. the *canon* of Gal. 6.15: comp. Rom. 14.17). But on the other hand, Paul insists that those who allow themselves to be browbeaten into justifying themselves by conformity to law are 'severed from Christ' (Gal. 5.4) and that 'this persuasion is not from him who calls you' (Gal. 5.8: cf. Col. 2.18–19). Paul's goal is to persuade the Galatians to embrace freedom in Christ.
- 1.9 In contrast to Paul's insistence in Galatians on turning away from their false persuasion, in Romans 14 *both* sides in a difference are enjoined to refrain from judgment: 'Let not those who eat despise those who abstain, and let not those who abstain pass judgment on those who eat: for God has welcomed them' (Rom. 14.3). The key to understanding both passages lies in the 'triangular' model of *diakonia* set out in Romans 14.4: 'Who are you to pass judgment on another's servant? It is before their own master that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the master is able to make them stand' (cf. Rom. 14.10–12).<sup>2</sup> As long as the eating of food or keeping of a day is undertaken 'in honour of the Lord' and with the intention of giving thanks to God, it will be accepted as authentic service by the Lord (Rom. 14.6): the essential is 'Let everyone be fully convinced in their own mind' (Rom. 14.5), albeit on a matter which Paul has explicitly indicated that he thinks is indifferent in itself (Rom. 14.14).
- 1.10 But the demands of membership in the Body go beyond refraining from judgment. 'Walking in love' (Rom. 14.15) means deciding 'never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother or sister' (Rom. 14.13): 'If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be spoken of as evil'. How? Because what you (correctly) perceive as 'clean' may yet be a stumbling-block to another Christian who has doubts, 'because they do not act from faith' (Rom. 14.23). Thus there is an obligation on the 'strong' to 'bear with the failings of the weak', to please (and work for the edification of) our neighbour rather than ourselves (Rom. 15.1–2). This is what it means to 'pursue what makes for peace and for mutual

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<sup>2</sup> This 'triangular' view also underlies Paul's argument about himself and Apollos in 1 Corinthians 3–4: cf. esp. 3.5; 4.1–5. For the 'triangular' shape of this argument, compare the FAOC report on Senior Church Leadership §§52–68: Alexander and Higton [2016, 25–27].



upbuilding' (Rom. 14.19): that is, (following the example of Christ) 'to live in harmony with one another' to the praise of God (Rom. 15.5–6).

### Conscience: Points of Agreement

- 1.11 Romans 14 raises, in acute fashion, the question of conscience (*syneidesis*) — though the word occurs only in 1 Corinthians 8–10.<sup>3</sup> There are three points regarding conscience on which we happily agree.
- 1.12 First, most importantly, we agree that conscience, though always individual, has corporate or ecclesial significance. We are called to 'be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind' (Philippians 2.2). The *koinonia*, the fellowship of sharing in Christ, is characterised both by common passion for Christ and, as an inevitable consequence of sin, by passionate disagreement about the nature of Christ's gospel and its implications. Christians' consciences will be affected in some way by this passionate interchange. In the exegesis above, the weaker member's sensitive conscience (Rom. 14.15) is in danger of being wounded by the actions of the stronger. The 'conscience' is not simply an individual affair – though it *is* individual (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 10.29); it has profound corporate significance. For an endangered conscience for one member brings danger to the whole Body. The danger might involve either a wounded or a seared conscience, the former tending to despair, the latter to a kind of indifference or brazenness. What is striking is that Paul does not attempt to impose his view, rooted in sound doctrine, on those whose conscience is 'weak'. As regards the things upon which difference of opinion is permissible, even if one opinion rests on a mistake (i.e. that it is wrong to eat meat sacrificed to 'idols'), Paul does not recommend nor does he engage in moral or doctrinal persuasion of the mistaken weaker brother who is in danger of being troubled. Instead his advice avoids endangering the individual by wounding their conscience. Because he values the peaceful conscience of weaker members so highly, Paul does not call the churches to argue the 'weak' into the 'strong' position.
- 1.13 Second, we agree that it is entirely proper to consider the subjective experience of conscience. What makes the passages from Paul so interesting is that the problem which Paul recognises is an *existential, subjective* one: we are created to be *subjects*; our experiences of the world and of dangers to our self-understanding are matters of creaturely and ecclesial *existence*. This self-understanding involves recognising ourselves truthfully among the goods of God's world and learning to act towards those goods rightly.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 8.7, 10, 12; 10.25, 27, 28, 29.

- 1.14 Third, we agree that the wounding or paining of the conscience is a very serious matter requiring careful pastoral attention. Shared passion can lead to deep wounding. Those whose conscience becomes marred in some way which is incompatible with the freedom of Christ suffer catastrophic effects. Those who have pastoral care for the church are therefore called to bear tenderly the consciences of many in their own hearts.

We turn now to consider in discussion points on which we do not yet agree.

### **Conscience and Persuasion in Paul** – Joshua Hordern

- 1.15 What is the proper relationship between ‘conscience’ and ‘persuasion’ for Christians? Any link between them must bear in mind Paul’s decision not to persuade the weak in Corinth to accept the implicitly approved doctrine of the strong. But it must also take into account Paul’s much firmer attitude to other matters such as the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church, embodied in the table fellowship dispute (e.g. Acts 10–15, Galatians 1–2 esp. 2.11–14). Paul’s pastoral approach on that matter is rebuke and open conflict aimed at doctrinal and moral persuasion and reconciliation. Paul tells the troubled Galatians that the ‘persuasion’ they had come to accept was not from the God who called them (Galatians 5.8). He vigorously opposes those who lead the Galatians away from the liberty found in Christ.
- 1.16 Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8–10 focus on disagreements based on beliefs about food which, though mistaken, were of real significance for those who held them. However, that Paul did not press his disagreement with the ‘weak’, having a care for their conscience, in no way suggests a more general toleration of deep disagreement in the church. Instead Paul’s wisdom in selecting *which* matters to press should focus Christian minds today on discerning the issues on which disagreement must not permanently characterise the church. Such issues have to be resolved if the church’s members are to share a common life. Christians should not rest with such disagreement even in order to avoid paining other Christians’ consciences. Instead, resolution to such matters should be sought through doctrinal and moral discussion and persuasion in order that all may come to the persuasion of the gospel. The Christian conscience is threatened by the kind of (bad) disagreement which ought not to characterise the church (i.e. a disagreement about matters on which one ought to endeavour resolution). Such bad disagreement will cauterise or ‘sear’ the conscience.

### *Consciences wounded and seared*

- 1.17 As noted, *suneidesis* (normally 'conscience') can often be better translated 'consciousness' or 'self-consciousness'. A person's self-consciousness can be 'wounded' by being grieved or offended, or feeling guilty after doing something that one was never quite convinced about. Wounding may lead a person to destruction (1 Cor. 8.11), which seems to mean a downward spiral into despair as the 'weak brother', slipping into what he believes to be sin, fears that he has passed out of the freedom of God's grace and back into the slavery of idolatry.
- 1.18 Another route to destruction is that the conscience becomes 'seared' by being wrongly self-confident that one's actions and teaching are in keeping with what is good, right and true (1 Timothy 4.1-4). If the 'weak' concludes from observing the 'strong' eat, not that the demons 'are nothing', but that they may be worshipped as valid manifestations of the dark side of God, then his or her eating, however cheerful and untroubled, will not have the innocence of the 'strong'. The conscience will have become seared and indifferent, entrenched in false belief.
- 1.19 Disagreement is especially bad when it involves or engenders such seared indifference. For such a consciousness fails to 'have a (bad) conscience' about sin. This corruption of conscience diminishes the possibility that the gospel's persuasive power will resolve disagreements. It brings about impenitent slumber not lively repentance.

### *Liberty of conscience*

- 1.20 The phrase 'liberty of conscience' is prone to abuse here. For 'liberty' might be taken to mean the freedom not to be troubled in one's conscience by the moral and doctrinal persuasion of the gospel proclaimed and lived by other Christians. In this 'freedom', an appeal to 'conscience' becomes the defiantly raised hand which signals 'speak no further, you will not persuade me'. This diminishes hope of reconciliation in shared belief and practice, leaving no longer liberty but slavery. Instead, 'liberty of conscience' must first and last mean the freedom won for the conscience from condemnation by the salvation achieved through him who loved us and gave himself for us (Galatians 2.20).
- 1.21 Christians are called to bear tenderly the consciences of other Christians in their own hearts, including those with whom they disagree. The danger of seared indifference to others' consciences is real. But if bad disagreement leads to such indifference, a church's good disagreement must aim at a shared judgment about its common life. That judgment is that, if we all together share a particular

belief and practice, it will not undermine anyone's experience of liberty of conscience, the consciousness that he or she has been reckoned innocent by the justifying judgment of God in Christ.

- 1.22 If such shared judgment is not possible, the results are very serious. Even on matters implicitly reckoned indifferent, Paul warns that the mistaken 'weak' Christian is at risk of being destroyed by the actions of the 'strong' if led into what appears sinful to the weak. The risk of such 'destruction' means that care for Christians' consciences must be central to how the church disagrees.

### *Guilt in the conscience*

- 1.23 Historically, belief in the prospective or directive function of conscience emerged in the Church Fathers although it was in scholastic authors that this notion became systematic.<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, by contrast, understood the retrospective notion basic to Paul's thought: that conscience is a judgment on the whole person, seen in light of sin, Christ and the gospel. In this way, he grasped how the guilty conscience could be destructive if an individual perceives themselves to have so believed and acted as to become separated from God's mercy. The conscience's judgment condemns but, when associated again with the mercy and grace of God, recognises freedom from condemnation.
- 1.24 For this reason, the conscience is properly called 'subjective'. Affections (or 'emotions') are central to the Christian's subjective experience of gospel freedom – the movement from condemnation and fear to absolution and joy. The conscience's affections, whether joyful or fearful, are important for a person's self-consciousness. A self-understanding continually shaped by guilt and fear is not experiencing the freedom of the gospel of Christ in whom there is no condemnation and no enduring subjective experience of guilt.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It is not clear what a 'vocation to follow conscience' (Church of England [2014, 18]) might mean in terms of Paul's thought or whether this is a helpful usage for the church at all. As to whether 'conscience' is to be construed as a judgment which directs prospectively or a judgment which examines retrospectively, there is ample support for the former in the long and rather messy tradition of the church but little or no support from Pauline usage. In short, if the idea of 'a vocation to follow conscience' is that 'conscience' has a directive role, then it is one quite foreign to the New Testament, especially to Pauline thought. Cf. Pierce [1955, 109] – Paul 'is definite that conscience only comes into play after at least the initiation of a wrong act; when it does not come into play, it may mean that the act committed is not wrong, but equally it may mean that the reactions are defective – either handicapped by wrong information, wrong environment or wrong habit, or made sluggish by sin, repeated and un-repented'. For a brief summary of the tradition, see O'Donovan [2005, 303–308].

<sup>5</sup> For this claim in more detail, see Hordern [2013, chapter 2]; see also Hordern [2014].

## *Pastoral care*

- 1.25 But temporary experiences of guilt and pained consciences do have a role in the church's life. In pastoral care, we should make every effort to avoid bringing about false and unnecessary guilt – the guilt of the unconvinced weaker brother who eats while perceiving idols to be gods (though they are in fact no gods at all). However, if one is emboldened to think that a fellow Christian's conscience has become seared and resistant to the Spirit's convicting work, one approaches very difficult territory to be entered only in continuous prayer. The responsible way to pray, pastor, teach and act that a fellow Christian might become aware of sin and repent is to hope in the convicting and redemptive work of the Spirit whereby sin can be first illumined then swiftly forgiven and guilt first heightened then speedily assuaged.
- 1.26 Again pastorally, the church must grasp how some believers' liberty of conscience in Christ is threatened by the beliefs and practices of other members. Understanding the type of disagreement which different parties believe is taking place is crucial, as explained in the main report. If some Christians perceive that certain beliefs and practices will incur guilt and even, through a progressive searing of the conscience, place at risk their communion with Christ, this is very serious. Those with pastoral responsibility must prayerfully discern the tender (or not so tender) state of others' consciences. For those indifferent or cauterised, one may, through prayer, action and teaching, cooperate in hope with the Spirit's work in heightening pain in the conscience; for those slipping into despair, the relieving of the conscience by the gospel is needed.

## *The responsibility to teach*

- 1.27 To these pastoral ends, the church has the difficult responsibility to teach doctrine, including moral doctrine. This responsibility to teach what it is good, right and true precisely illumines what one ought to 'have a (bad) conscience' about. Paul understood that there was no need to have a bad conscience about food sacrificed to idols. But he offers no similar reassurance concerning that which is clearly sinful, explicitly highlighting sexual sins as being of a different order from matters regarding food (1 Corinthians 6.18–20). Good pastor-teachers will know that having a bad conscience must never be the end of the road. Such conscience ought to be relieved through the promise of God's forgiveness, restoring people to the freedom of the gospel and the joy of repentance.
- 1.28 Accordingly, Christians ought to hope, pray, speak and practise that siblings in Christ may come, by the Spirit, to 'have a conscience' about their belief-and-

practice on matters they do not judge are *adiaphora*. This is the corollary of avoiding causing pain in the conscience for siblings in Christ over matters they do believe are *adiaphora*. The conscience is *for* something – *for* awakening to a sense that, were one to believe and practise in this way, one would be in danger of renouncing faith in Christ and taking a road to destruction, paved with despair, indifference or even both.

### *Conclusion*

- 1.29 In summary, what may be learned from the conscience passages in Romans and 1 Corinthians is not so much a model for dealing with the kind of disagreements about sexual ethics which are particularly pressing at the moment. Few, if any, would willingly see themselves as the ‘weak’ in these debates, labouring under some misapprehension of the truth. Few would see these debates as ones which do not require resolution in the present life of the church. Rather, these passages press Christians to recognise the seriousness of the conscience’s ministry within us and therefore the need for tenderness in the continually prayerful, Spirit-dependent process of moral and doctrinal persuasion, whether in personal pastoral care, in the discussions within and between provinces of the Anglican Communion or in ecumenical conversation.
- 1.30 For when Paul says, ‘this persuasion is not from him who calls you’ (Gal. 5.8), we understand that it is possible to be persuaded one way or another. The gospel’s persuasion brings total relief to the conscience through justification by faith in Christ. Faith has a content which may be denied. If it seems to the believer that they are denying it by acknowledging gods in addition to Christ, then this is – for that believer – a denial of faith. Inasmuch as a clear conscience depends on faith, it is a catastrophe for the conscience. Those who claimed to be Christians but seem to that believer to deny Christ by going to the temples or eating the idol food threaten that believer’s faith, tempting him or her back to the dark paths of sin. It is the church’s calling to avert such disasters.
- 1.31 But it is also the church’s calling to avoid a failure to feel guilt where repentance is needed, on account of a failure to relate oneself properly to that which is good, right and true. Sensitivity to the former kind of disaster must not, for Christ’s sake, perversely induce a searing of the conscience among teachers of the church so that they lack the Spirit’s boldness in persuading the faithful of the truth of the gospel and guiding the church in Christ’s way of salvation.

## Further Reflections – Loveday Alexander

- 1.32 This is enormously helpful, and I am grateful to Joshua for this clear and lucid analysis of the role of conscience. What this brings out is what is referred to in the FAOC report as the moral and spiritual qualities required to deal with disagreement in the life of the church – a particular kind of attentiveness that needs to be sustained, and indeed is actually rather difficult to sustain, in order to disagree in communion with one another in Christ. I think you bring out very well the delicacy of the pastoral task and the moral and spiritual qualities required of all concerned.
- 1.33 Of course no amount of exegesis will resolve our problem as to which issues are *adiaphora* today. That has to be argued on other grounds (which are not the subject of this paper). But I would strongly resist the underlying implication that the ethics of food are intrinsically ‘of a different order from’ the ethics of sexuality (§1.27). For Paul and his correspondents, the idol-foods issue is fundamentally about *idolatry*, and touches on profound issues of Christian identity in a pagan world. There are real spiritual issues at stake here — as Paul admits in 1 Corinthians 10. This makes it all the more remarkable that Romans 14 allows that *both* sides in the debate may be acting with integrity and as an act of Christian obedience, and as such should treat each other with respect.
- 1.34 And it is worth remarking that the dispute in Galatians 2 (which Paul regarded so seriously that he ‘rebuked Peter to his face’) was also about *food* issues: the issue of table-fellowship between Jewish and Gentile members of the church in Antioch. And the reason Paul seems to have reacted so strongly on this occasion was precisely because food goes to the heart of Christian fellowship: the real danger was the breaking of Christian fellowship. In other words, an ethical dispute which leads to the breaking of Christian table-fellowship cannot be tolerated within the Body of Christ, not because it doesn’t matter but because unity in Christ matters *more*. Paul eventually extends this principle to all the great issues that divided Paul’s world: race, gender, slavery (Gal. 3.28), it is not only the Jew-Gentile division that is transcended ‘in Christ’.
- 1.35 I agree that Paul’s treatment of sexual ethics does not allow much room for ‘good disagreement’, though he does allow some space for disagreement (or human judgment) on sexual issues — cf. the treatment of divorce in 1 Corinthians 7. But this is precisely the problem for those Christians whose ethical ‘conscience’ (or ‘consciousness’) will not allow them to accept uncritically the first-century cultural assumptions that underlie Paul’s construction of sexuality. This is one example — though not the only one — of a situation where Christian ethical thinking is informed not only by Scripture but

by a wider repertoire of moral reasoning, extrapolating from Christian principles rather than citing explicit biblical regulations (Aquinas' 'just war' theory might provide another example). The discussion on Hooker (in supporting paper 3, pp. 29–45) is relevant here.

- 1.36 Thus Joshua's point about the seriousness of conscience's ministry is entirely apposite to the question. However, we must be aware that the argument from 'conscience' can be used by both sides. For some, conscience may inhere in scrupulous adherence to biblical precepts, and it is this kind of conscience (what Paul calls the 'weak' conscience) that can easily be damaged by the arguments of the 'strong' which appear to sit light to scriptural precepts. I suspect this is how Paul uses the term in 1 Corinthians. But for others, conscience may equally come into play where scriptural precepts conflict with deeply-held moral norms which are themselves derived from and congruent with fundamental principles of Christian behaviour. Here again the teaching of Romans 14 (that *both* sides in such a dispute can claim with integrity to be honouring the same master) is highly pertinent to the question of how we deal with difference and disagreement within the Body of Christ.
- 1.37 What Paul sets out in Romans 14 is not a programme of moral re-education for the errant brother or sister (as we agreed above in §12), but mutual acceptance of the 'in-Christ-ness' of the brother or sister with whom we do *not* agree. In other words, he can envisage a communion (*koinonia*) in Christ in which the shared foundational awareness that we are both 'in Christ' transcends differences in belief and practice. The crucial thing is to hold on to the fact that the brother or sister with whom I disagree (and with whom I may be engaging in robust debate on the point at issue) also shares 'the consciousness that he or she has been reckoned innocent by the justifying judgment of God in Christ' — and that I have no more right to cast doubt on this fundamental awareness (or to seek to undermine it) than he or she has to cast doubt on or undermine mine.
- 1.38 This is not to envisage a fellowship without *any* form of shared belief and practice. Irenaeus' 'canonic principle' (supporting paper 2, pp. 19–28) is relevant here. The canon allows for diversity within boundaries; it is neither a recipe for infinite and unregulated diversity, nor for a monolithic unity. Irenaeus recognises the need for the 'rule of faith,' the *regula fidei*, to guide the church in the interpretation of Scripture: the 'overarching story' (itself derived from Scripture) by which the Scriptures need to be read and interpreted.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.39 This refusal to over-define has been the traditional practice of the Church of England. Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that there are two equal and opposite

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<sup>6</sup> Young [1997, 18–21].



dangers in attempting to define the faith: defining *too little*, and defining *too much*.<sup>7</sup> The former displays an ‘exaggerated and distorted commitment to individual liberty at the expense of communal integrity’.<sup>8</sup> The latter, however, is equally dangerous: such groups ‘tend to confuse the accidental with the essential. They tend to make some single element of belief or of morals the litmus test of membership and indeed of true Christianity’.<sup>9</sup>

- 1.40 We can see this mirrored in the controversies of the Reformation. The Church of England was under constant pressure from the Puritans to offer a fuller definition of its faith along the lines of the Westminster Confession. But (as Bishop Pearson argued successfully in his 1660 pamphlet *No Necessity of Reformation of the Publick Doctrine of the Church of England*), there is wisdom in the restraint of the Thirty-Nine Articles. And in retaining the Creeds (not the Articles) as its standard of Christian faith, the Church of England recognised the importance of the ‘reticence’ of the Creeds, in refusing to define any more than is absolutely necessary: what Johnson calls ‘the blessed simplicity of profession’.

## Conclusion

- 1.41 C.S. Lewis’ Uncle Screwtape writes: ‘We have quite removed from men’s minds what that pestilent fellow Paul used to teach about food and other unessentials—namely, that the human without scruples should always give in to the human with scruples. You would think they could not fail to see the application. You would expect to find the “low” churchman genuflecting and crossing himself lest the weak conscience of his “high” brother should be moved to irreverence, and the “high” one refraining from these exercises lest he should betray his “low” brother into idolatry. And so it would have been but for our ceaseless labour. Without that the variety of usage within the Church of England might have become a positive hotbed of charity and humility’.<sup>10</sup>
- 1.42 It is appropriate to conclude by emphasising the eschatological dimension of knowledge (1 Cor. 13.8–13). Neither of us is advocating that we should rest content with disagreement. St Paul is content to say ‘now I know in part’, in the assurance that ‘then I shall know even as I am fully known’. In other words, ‘good disagreement’ must not mean a state of perpetual ambiguity. We should hope and work for resolution to disagreements. There is such a thing as truth, and there is Someone who knows it — and will reveal it at the right time, whether now or in the age to come. But Paul reminds us (1 Cor. 8.1–3) that we

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<sup>7</sup> Johnson [2003, 297–98].

<sup>8</sup> Johnson [2003, 300].

<sup>9</sup> Johnson [2003, 298].

<sup>10</sup> Lewis [1943, Letter XVI].

need to be wary of claims to 'knowledge' (gnosis) that do not build up in love — and that we may not know all the answers, this side of eternity. Paul has plenty to say on judgment, especially premature judgment — as do the Gospels (cf. the parables of the wheat and the tares [Matt. 13.24–30, 36–43] and the fishing-net [Matt. 13.47–50]).

- 1.43 Paul's teaching in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8–10 offers much to ponder for the church today as we seek to deal with our deep and serious disagreements, not only on sexuality but on other issues too. It is our hope and prayer that we may be able to learn from Paul within the pain of disagreement to share the Christian hope that all our partial knowledge will eventually be fully illumined by the light of eternity, and in the meantime to hold on to the love — to the *being loved* — that holds us together in Christ – not that we loved God, but that he loved us (1 John 4.10).

## ***2 Irenaeus and the date of Easter***

*Loveday Alexander and Morwenna Ludlow*

As noted in the first chapter of the FAOC report, Irenaeus of Lyons, active in the second half of the second-century, ‘provides rich resources for reflection on the church’s response to disagreement’ (§51). This supporting paper aims to open those up further with a more detailed analysis of his enduring contribution. Writing to the Bishop of Rome on the fierce controversy that had emerged over the correct day to finish the preparatory fast and celebrate the festival of Easter, Irenaeus made the memorable statement that ‘the disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith’. His defence of the inclusion of four different Gospels within the canon of Scripture is also significant as early testimony to what is described in the main report as the ‘pluriformity’ of the apostolic church. Irenaeus’ determination to refute what he saw as false doctrine and prevent it being taught in the church might seem to be in tension with this positive attitude towards ecclesial diversity, but we identify the principle of communion and what we call the canonic principle as in fact consistently underpinning his approach of diversity within specific limits. The relationship between these two principles highlights the role of the ‘rule of faith’ within Irenaeus’ theology in connecting hermeneutics with ecclesiology and the two principles with one another.

### **Irenaeus and the Unity of the Church – Loveday Alexander<sup>1</sup>**

2.1 The FAOC report raises a number of issues for ecclesiology, not least the question whether a church that includes dialogue, debate, and divergent viewpoints trying to work out a common unity, is a proper church. What does the unity of the church mean in a situation where segments of the church hold seriously divergent opinions on matters of Christian faith and practice — and hold them not frivolously but with deep theological conviction? This is not a new debate: I am reminded of a fascinating letter written by Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in southern France, to Victor, Bishop of Rome, around 190 AD. There is a controversy raging in the church — a controversy so severe that the Bishop of Rome has threatened to excommunicate the entire province of Asia (modern Turkey), with all its bishops and clergy. The reason is the ‘Quartodeciman controversy’, one of the many controversies that engulfed the church in the early centuries over the date of Easter. The point is actually quite simple: the

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<sup>1</sup> This section of the paper was originally published as part of a much longer paper on the ecclesiology of Acts: Alexander [2008]. For further reflections on unity and diversity in Acts, see Alexander [2012].

churches of Asia celebrated Easter on the 14th of the month Nisan, whatever day of the week it fell on — just as western Christians do with Christmas. But all the rest of the Christian world celebrated it on the Sunday after the 14th, on the grounds that you couldn't celebrate Easter on any day except Sunday (which is what we do with Easter). The churches around the world held a Synod and debated the matter, and agreed that the western practice (Sunday) was right. But when the bishops of Asia went back and told their congregations that they would have to change their age-old practice, there was revolt: we can't, everyone said, this is the way we've always done it, and our tradition goes right back to the apostle John. Why should we change it? This meant that half the Christian world was fasting for Good Friday while the other half was celebrating Easter, and this didn't seem right. Certainly not to Bishop Victor, who took it upon himself to decree that the churches of Asia must fall in line with the majority ruling or be excommunicated — that is, excluded from communion with other Christians around the world. The worldwide Christian communion would be broken.

- 2.2 And that's where Irenaeus comes in. He himself agrees with Victor on the Sunday principle — but he totally disagrees about the meaning of Christian unity.<sup>2</sup> It would be completely wrong, Irenaeus insists, 'to excommunicate whole churches of God for following a tradition of ancient custom' (HE 5.24.11). It isn't just a matter of the date, Irenaeus explains: there are divergent ways of celebrating the Paschal fast, and these too go back to 'the days of our predecessors who, it would appear, disregarding strictness, maintained a practice which is simple and yet allows for personal preference, establishing it for the future, and none the less all these lived in peace with one another and **the disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith**' (HE 5.24.13). Those are remarkable words, I think: Irenaeus implies that it is perfectly possible for the church to embrace quite profound disagreement (the Greek word is *diaphonia*, different voices) while maintaining an underlying unity (*homonoia*) in the essentials of the faith. Sure, there are practical problems about sharing the same time-space continuum: but none of those are sufficient to justify breaking the communion that binds Christians together. More, the disagreement actually **confirms, establishes** (*sunistesin*) the unity — because after all, maintaining communion with the people who agree with us is not where the challenge is. Real unity, real communion in Christ, Irenaeus implies, is the kind we are able to maintain with people we disagree with (isn't there something in the Sermon on the Mount about that?).

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<sup>2</sup> He also incidentally disagrees with Victor about the primacy of the Roman church — as does Eusebius, who relates this story in his *History of the Church* (HE) 5.23–24.

2.3 In fact, Irenaeus goes on to tell Victor, none of the previous Bishops of Rome had attempted to impose uniformity on the church in this matter, '**and no-one was ever rejected for this reason, but the presbyters before you who did not observe it [the fast] sent the Eucharist to those from other dioceses who did**' [HE 5.24.15]. Polycarp, one of the Asian bishops, had actually travelled to Rome to explain the Asian practice to the then Bishop Anicetus,

*and though they disagreed a little about some other things as well, they immediately made peace, having no wish for strife between them **on this [fundamental] matter**.<sup>3</sup> For neither was Anicetus able to persuade Polycarp not to observe it [sc. the Quartodeciman fast], inasmuch as he had always done so in company with John the disciple of our Lord and the other apostles with whom he had associated; nor did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, for he said that he ought to keep the custom of those who were presbyters before him. And — [here's the rub] — **under these circumstances they communicated [shared communion: ekoinonesan] with each other**, and in the church Anicetus yielded the celebration of the Eucharist to Polycarp, obviously out of respect, and they parted from each other in peace, for **the peace of the whole church was kept both by those who observed and by those who did not**.<sup>4</sup>*

A remarkable passage, I think you'll agree, and one that implies a very different model of unity from Victor's centralised, authoritarian model. The unity of the church, on this model, is not a uniformity imposed from above. Nor is it simply an edict of toleration, a kind of 'lowest common denominator' that seeks to find a mediating position between opposing viewpoints. It presupposes a relationship of mutual respect, but it is more than that: it is a communion in the faith that prioritises keeping the peace and maintaining communion between Christians even when they disagree quite profoundly.

2.4 Eusebius, who tells us this story in his 'History of the Church', clearly approves of Irenaeus' intervention.<sup>5</sup> And it is not without significance, I think, that this same Irenaeus is the one who so colourfully and dramatically stated the theological necessity for diversity within the canon of Scripture, insisting that the number of Gospels (four) has the same kind of natural and spiritual inevitability as the four winds of the four corners of the earth — or the four mystical beasts of Ezekiel and the book of Revelation. In so doing, of course, he was firmly excluding the Gospels he considered heretical, the 'Gnostic' Gospels and other apocryphal Jesus stories which did not cohere sufficiently with the

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<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus says *peri tou kephalaiou toutou*, i.e. on this key point — which I take to be the maintenance of communion, not the fast.

<sup>4</sup> HE 5.24.16–17.

<sup>5</sup> 'And Irenaeus, who deserved his name, making an *eirenicon* in this way, gave exhortations of this kind for the peace of the church and served as its ambassador, for in letters he discussed the various views on the issue which had been raised, not only with Victor but also with many other rulers of churches', HE 5.24.18.

*regula fidei* or ‘rule of faith’ — that is, the basic outline of Jesus’ earthly and heavenly existence set out in what we now call the Apostles’ Creed — to qualify as ‘Christian’. Diversity has boundaries; it is not an open-ended ticket.

- 2.5 But diversity is not monolithic, either. We often forget that by the same token, Irenaeus is *including* not one but four canonical versions of the Jesus story, firmly resisting two viable and tempting alternatives that were increasingly popular in the second century: Tatian’s *Diatessaron* or Harmony of the Gospels, which attempted to harmonise the four Gospel accounts into a single story; or Marcion’s equally persuasive attempt to reduce the Gospel to a Pauline simplicity by cutting out everything except Luke and dropping quite a lot of that. In other words, Irenaeus is asserting — or reminding us — that the apostolic witness to Christ is diverse, not uniform: it includes four distinctive apostolic testimonies to the one Lord, one story told in four distinctive narrative voices. This diversity is not limitless — some voices are excluded — but it is irreducible: John’s voice cannot be reduced to Matthew’s, or Luke’s to Mark.
- 2.6 So Irenaeus gives us two principles which I believe are fundamental to understanding the nature of unity in the Body of Christ. The first, emerging from his letter to the Bishop of Rome, is the principle of a **communion** — a sharing, a *koinonia* (expressed classically in the sharing of the Eucharist) which doesn’t merely tolerate but transcends disagreement. And the second, linked with it but with wider implications, is the **canonic principle** whereby Scripture itself encompasses and celebrates the diversity of the apostolic witness to the one Lord. This canonic principle, of a unity that transcends an irreducible diversity, is, I believe, potentially of enormous significance for understanding what unity means in the church of the apostles. A number of scholars have picked it up in recent years: Jimmy Dunn, in his powerful and now-classic study of *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* argues that the same principle underlies the whole New Testament canon.<sup>6</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson (a prophetic voice from the Roman Catholic Church) develops this theologically, looking at the ‘untidy’ way we’ve always done theology as an on-going conversation with the diversity of voices within Scripture: ‘Rather than regard diversity as a problem for biblical authority or theology’, he says, ‘I find it a great gift from God to the church ... [and] an open invitation to theology as communal discernment of the will of God’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dunn [2006].

<sup>7</sup> Johnson [2003, 33 and 45].

## A Response – Morwenna Ludlow

- 2.7 Loveday Alexander's paper suggests that there are two alternative models of church unity evident in the account of the dispute about the date of Easter: Bishop Victor of Rome's 'centralised, authoritarian model' and Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons' model of 'a communion in the faith that prioritises keeping the peace and maintaining communion between Christians even when they disagree quite profoundly' (§2.3). In that particular controversy, the latter 'principle of a communion' (§2.6) won out over Victor's attempt at uniformity imposed from above or from the centre.
- 2.8 The strong implication of Loveday's paper is that Irenaeus' model was not just the one that happened to succeed on that particular occasion, but that it is simply the better expression of church unity **because** it is founded on some fundamental theological principles. The first of these is an understanding of communion as a relationship in the faith even between those who disagree profoundly about particular expressions of that faith; an understanding which resonates with the love commandment as expressed in Matt. 5.23–4, Matt. 5.43–48. Communion, therefore, is to be reduced neither to agreement in all respects nor to assent to a lowest common denominator. The second principle is 'the canonic principle whereby Scripture itself encompasses and celebrates the diversity of the apostolic witness to the one Lord' (§2.6). Together, these principles ground a notion of the unity of the church which incorporates diversity. This diversity, in Loveday's terms, has boundaries, but is not monolithic (§§2.4–5). It is the relationship between these two principles and their ecclesiological implications that I would like to examine briefly in my following remarks.
- 2.9 With regard to their relationship, I take it that the canonic principle **gives more shape** to the notion of communion – and in particular articulates more clearly the notion of diversity-in-unity. To put this another way, and harking back to the love commandment again, the notion of communion as understood through the canonic principle is a reminder not of the universal call to love our neighbour, but of the more specific work of building up our relationships with those we call our sisters and brothers in Christ.
- 2.10 But, someone might argue, surely the life of Irenaeus illustrates the limits of this principle? What seems like a church of diversity-within-limits to one person might seem to another to be exclusive and authoritarian. This point might be raised particularly with regard to Irenaeus' relationship with the various Gnostic and associated groups which he excludes from communion. Precisely this accusation was a feature of much late twentieth-century scholarship on

Irenaeus, accompanied by an increasingly sympathetic reading of Gnosticism: on what grounds could Irenaeus rightly exclude those who sincerely professed faith in Jesus Christ? It is important to understand that this was not a merely scholarly debate: underlying many of the critiques of the early church were concerns about the perceived **current** exclusiveness of twentieth-century Christianity. For example, some feminist scholars associated contemporary Christian attitudes to women's authority with Irenaeus' (and others') exclusion of Gnostic groups who, they argued, had more tolerance of women's leadership.

- 2.11 In more recent years, however, Irenaeus' stance has been defended. Again, this is no mere academic debate: some of the protagonists are theological educators in both universities and ministerial training institutions and are involved in inter-denominational dialogue. These are persons, therefore, for whom questions about the limits of disagreement and the notion of communion have real purchase.
- 2.12 John Behr, for example, mounts a strong but careful defence of Irenaeus as the defender of a catholic church which 'preached toleration and was open to diversity'.<sup>8</sup> On the question of boundaries of communion, he argues that, far from being the liberals portrayed by some scholars, the Gnostics denounced by Irenaeus **separated themselves off from the church by their own choices**. This suggests a model, not of the church refusing communion to those with whom it cannot agree, but rather recognising a point at which others knowingly reject the communion which holds between others. (Irenaeus' 'heretics' make a 'choice', *haeresis*, to separate from the church.)
- 2.13 Secondly, the Gnostics' determinist theology divided humanity into three groups and allotted each a specific destiny as to their salvation (sure salvation, certain exclusion, the possibility of salvation). This was far less tolerant than the catholic church which offered the gospel of salvation to whoever would receive it.<sup>9</sup> This is important ecclesologically, because it means that members of the catholic church were bound, not just (for example) by a sense of duty to practise mutual respect, but, more profoundly, **by a shared recognition that they all**

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<sup>8</sup> Behr [2013, 2]. John Behr is Dean of St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and Distinguished Lecturer in Patristics at Fordham University.

<sup>9</sup> Behr [2013, 2]. Mark Edwards also connects the intellectual breadth of the catholic church with a theological generosity: orthodox Christianity was characterised not only by its willingness to argue against challenges from e.g. the Gnostics, but also by its ability to take on board some of their ideas; this is compared to its generosity in welcoming any who wish to receive the gospel and welcoming back those who had once denied their faith: Edwards [2009, 9].



**needed saving and that God's salvation through Christ was open to all.**<sup>10</sup>

Put bluntly, the church is founded on God's self-giving love, not on any human qualities. This may be the theological grounding for a contrast Loveday seems to be drawing in her paper: Irenaeus' humility compared to Victor's self-asserted authority.<sup>11</sup>

- 2.14 In sum, Behr's interpretation of the concept of communion suggests not an authoritarian exclusion of others by Irenaeus and other representatives of the catholic church, but rather the self-exclusion of those who were unwilling to accept (amongst other things) the wideness of God's mercy.
- 2.15 With regard to the canonic principle, Loveday notes that Irenaeus' acceptance of a four-fold Gospel canon is related to the importance of **the rule of faith** in his theology. The four Gospels cohere with this rule of faith; the texts he rejects deny it. This would seem to make the rule of faith more fundamental, theologically speaking. However, I would argue that this is not the case: rather, the four-fold Gospel and the rule of faith (or rule of truth as he sometimes calls it) are mutually-confirming. In fact, the rule of faith in Irenaeus is fairly minimal and very loosely expressed (there is no single form of words). In a typical example, he declares:

*But we hold fast the rule of truth, that there is one almighty God who founded everything through his Word and arranged it and made everything out of the non-existent... He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. There is no other God above him... He [is] the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we shall show...*<sup>12</sup>

- 2.16 In Irenaeus' theology I don't think that one can get much further than this (not as far, perhaps, as the fuller list of ideas in the Apostles' Creed). But this is why the relationship between the canon of faith and the canon of Scripture is crucial: the rule of faith is derived from the Scriptures and the Scriptures fill it out. On the other hand, the veracity of individual books of the Bible is warranted by their coherence with this rule of faith and other rival texts are ruled out. (Irenaeus argues that the Scriptures 'can be clearly, unambiguously, and understood by all' to teach that 'one only God, to the exclusion of all others, formed all things by his Word' – the idea that there is one God, Father of Jesus Christ being the basis of his version of the rule of faith: AH 2:27:2).

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<sup>10</sup> Irenaeus appears not to have thought that all people *would* be saved, but he clearly argues that salvation is *offered* to all. This is connected in his thought to the doctrine of the incarnation, according to which the Word of God takes on a new relationship with all humankind (thus challenging Gnostic exclusivism).

<sup>11</sup> I am personalising the positions, because this is how they are presented by Loveday, following Eusebius: they could equally apply to *parties* in a church, rather than individuals.

<sup>12</sup> AH 1.22.1.

- 2.17 What is the significance of this for notions of diversity in the church? One can view this relationship between Scripture and tradition as a paradox or as an example of a positive dialectic. Our understanding of Scripture (and its use to judge on matters of church unity) needs to be modified by our understanding of the rule of faith/tradition – and *vice versa*. Furthermore, this willing openness to allow Scripture and the rule of faith to speak to each other needs to be taken up by each generation of the church. Theologically these ideas are reminders that neither Scripture nor rule of faith are in themselves the revelation of God *per se* but are witnesses to God’s self-revelation in Christ which is reducible to no precise human verbal formulation (hence Ignatius’ famous declaration ‘**Jesus Christ** is my archives’ *Philadelphians* 8.2). Origen of Alexandria expressed a similar thought with regard to the four-fold Gospel: ‘Jesus too is many things, according to the conceptions of Him, of which it is quite likely that the Evangelists took up different notions, while yet they were in agreement with each other in the different things they wrote’ (*Commentary on John* X:4). But Origen too excluded rival ‘Gnostic’ Gospels on grounds of their incoherence with the rule of faith.
- 2.18 It is because of this kind of relationship between Scripture and rule of faith/tradition that John Behr concludes that Irenaeus’ church was ‘a communal body of interpretation and ecclesiastical practice’.<sup>13</sup> We should not see the catholic church as fighting to defend an identity in the sense of ‘static and bounded reified identities needing to be preserved or retrieved’. Rather, ‘it would be better to adapt one of the key themes of Irenaeus’ theology, that of a symphony, comprised of different voices throughout time, each lending themselves to the melody being played, with different timbres and tonalities, inflections and themes, and each in turn being shaped by the symphony. Speaking theologically, moreover, this symphony is not therefore constructed by any individual voice or all the voices together but is governed by its own rhythm and rules, so that, to use Irenaeus’ words **it is God who ‘harmonises the human race to the symphony of salvation’** [*Against Heresies* 4.14.2].<sup>14</sup>
- 2.19 As I have noted, this is not the only way of reading the story of the catholic church in Irenaeus’ day. Others, both those wanting to defend and critique the church of their day, have interpreted it as following a path much closer to Victor’s. However, for those who might want to critique Loveday’s reading on the grounds that it gives too much weight to diversity (§2.3), John Behr has a warning.<sup>15</sup> The supposedly monolithic version of truth that some scholars find

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<sup>13</sup> Behr [2013, 10].

<sup>14</sup> This analogy resonates with David Bentley Hart’s theology (Bentley Hart [2003]), in which he employs a musical polyphony as an analogy for Trinitarian beauty – eschewing the social Trinitarian model.

<sup>15</sup> Behr [2013, 4].

in Irenaeus perhaps bears not the imprint of second-century Christianity but rather the marks of later generations of the church. First, it carries the traces of Christian narratives of the fourth century, which read earlier Christian history in a narrow and self-justifying way to confirm that their own, theological position was a true continuation of the original deposit. Secondly, it betrays the presence of a certain kind of modern historical method, whose criteria for truth associated truth with early evidence, purity, uniformity and unanimity. Are these really integral to Irenaeus' vision of unity in quite the way that has been imagined, or have they been read into his theology?

- 2.20 To these warnings I add my own word of caution. No one who reads *Against Heresies* can fail to be aware of Irenaeus' use of rhetoric. It is precisely this, I would argue, that has led to the argument that Irenaeus is a powerful and authoritarian (male) representative of the church, who is intolerant of all diversity and eager to impose a single blueprint on the church. More sophisticated accounts have burrowed beneath some of the rhetoric, or have exposed the way in which the rhetoric was, in their view, put to the service of a more diverse church.
- 2.21 I am not suggesting that one needs an extensive technical analysis of Irenaeus' rhetoric in order to use his theology as a model of diversity and unity in the church. I am suggesting, however, that his use of rhetoric – sharp, funny, sometimes brutal – might be a prompt to think not only about models for the church, but also to consider the **way** in which those models are expressed. In particular, I am thinking of the use of particular models and analogies, of authoritative sources, and of labels for oneself and those with whom one disagrees. Irenaeus stands not just as an example of an irenic understanding of communion but also as an example of the way in which rhetoric can distort a more irenic theology to the extent that it has been fundamentally misunderstood by some very intelligent people. While Behr seems to want to put most of the blame on the methods of modern historiography, I would tentatively want to lay some of the responsibility at the feet of Irenaeus himself. His powers of expression may have been effective at the time in his own cultural context, but they have not translated well.

### **Further Reflections** – Loveday Alexander

- 2.22 Like all good exegesis, Morwenna's comment helps me understand better what I was trying to say. Her last point is particularly pertinent, I think: a reminder that it is possible to be 'right but repulsive' in the way we conduct our debates.

- 2.23 What I meant by the ‘canonic principle’ is that the canon of Scripture is *both* inclusive *and* exclusive: it has boundaries, it isn’t completely open-ended, it doesn’t mean ‘anything goes’: but it does embrace an irreducible diversity. Scripture itself (as I went on to argue in the longer article of which this was the introduction) embraces the same kind of diversity-within-limits. The four-fold Gospel canon is a concrete testimony to precisely this diversity: even the eyewitness generation was not able to (and saw no need to) reduce the apostolic witness to Christ to a single narrative.
- 2.24 I find very helpful the way Morwenna has teased out the relationship between this understanding of Scripture and the *regula fidei* (which is also ‘canonic’: *canon* in Greek means a yardstick or carpenter’s rule, Latin *regula*). What she says is an important and salutary reminder that neither Scripture nor rule of faith are in themselves the revelation of God per se but are witnesses to God’s self-revelation in Christ which is reducible to no precise human verbal formulation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the *regula fidei*, see Young [1997, 18–21].

### **3 Richard Hooker on Scripture, Tradition and Reason: Responding to Disagreement**

*Christopher Cocksworth and Julie Gittoes*

The work of Richard Hooker is regarded as one of the classic sources of Anglican theology; his legacy has been received, debated, claimed and contested by many different interpreters. His multi-volume work entitled *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* sets out his central convictions about law and revelation, as well as proposing a relationship between Scripture, tradition and reason. To turn to him in the face of disagreements in our own day is to find a source of challenge and encouragement. He does not solve our problems for us, but out of the crucible of sixteenth-century controversy he poses central questions, in the light of which we might learn to live with greater assurance as Christ's Body.

In this paper, we describe Hooker's context, concerns and mode of engagement, which open up the possibility of seeking wisdom in conversation with opponents and allies. We then seek to engage with and interpret Hooker, first by examining in more detail the way in which he configured a nuanced relationship between Scripture, reason and tradition. Secondly, we discuss the distinction he makes between things necessary for salvation and things accessory and the issues raised by applying this to ethical questions. In the final section, we draw the work of Daniel W. Hardy into dialogue with Hooker in order to shape our own improvisation. This invites us to consider how we reason with Scripture; how we grow in and recognise holiness; and how worship shapes our church life and witness.

In writing this paper, we have found ourselves speaking largely with one voice. Expecting to disagree over our understanding and assessment of Hooker, through conversation and our own study we came to a common mind in most areas. Indeed, although we allow ourselves to write more individually on Hardy, we share a common belief not only in the significant similarities between Hardy and Hooker, but also in the still untapped potential of Hardy's theology to serve the unity of the church, and its pursuit of the truth of God's ways.

- 3.1 Richard Hooker (1554–1600) lived at a time when the English Church's identity was the subject of fierce debate. He was born just after the accession of Mary I, when the Church had returned to Rome, but barely five years later Elizabeth I had come to the throne, and the Prayer Book had returned to the Church, with the newly ratified Thirty-Nine Articles soon to follow.
- 3.2 The scope of Hooker's learning is striking: civil and ecclesiastical law; biblical and classical texts; patristic, scholastic and reformed theology, including Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin. He opposed those within the English Church who wanted scriptural rule and precedent to be the sole regulator of church and

society alike – a movement that we now call Puritanism but which, in Hooker’s time, was a vibrant and influential force in the varied theological landscape of the one English Church. Instead, Hooker saw God’s guidance as given not only in the Bible but also in the universal tradition of the Church, and in a universe founded on laws, discernible by human reason, which direct us to God. While what was necessary to salvation had to be established from Scripture, there was much else on which the Bible was silent, which meant that other methods had to be used.

- 3.3 Hooker died in 1600, having defended doctrinal orthodoxy alongside a pragmatic approach to church life. His worldview might seem alien to us as we grapple with the debates of our own generation both within and outside the church. In particular, Hooker’s emphasis on conformity to the authority of the church on even minor ceremonies at one point in history looks excessive from a different vantage point. The challenge of describing, interpreting and improvising on Hooker is found as much in allowing some of the difference to ‘shock’ us as it is in discovering easily transferable categories. While many have sought to interpret Hooker in a wide range of contexts, few – if any – would seek to adopt his methods or priorities in their entirety. Nonetheless, there is a real sense in which, in Paul Avis’ words, Hooker ‘did a new thing’ and ‘enlarged the envelope of official English theology. He reinstated the beauty of holiness’.<sup>1</sup>

### **Describing Hooker**

- 3.4 Richard Hooker is often regarded as the innovator who paved the way for what would later be called a distinctive ‘Anglican’ identity; a priest and scholar forged by the tensions and debates of his own generation. Even though historians continue to debate his influence, a good case can be made for the way the breadth of his thought, the theological principles he honed and the measured means by which he argued them, offer us an ethos for engaging with those with whom we disagree. He also gave to us a way of helping the church discern its mind through a carefully configured appeal to the role of Scripture, the use of reason, and the value of tradition.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.5 The extraordinary variety of interpreters – and the way they have found it possible to use Hooker for their own, often conflicting, theological purposes –

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<sup>1</sup> Avis [2014, 93].

<sup>2</sup> Avis alerts us to the ‘urban myth’ that Hooker accorded equal weight to Scripture, tradition and reason: ‘reason and tradition minister to our understanding of the revelation of God’s truth in Scripture; they can never supplant it’, Avis [2014, 105].

proves that there is no static Hookerite legacy or school of thought to which we can turn.<sup>3</sup> It shows, rather, that Hooker's legacy is dynamic. His reasoning, so focused as it was on the controversies of his own day, is generative of further thought in other contexts. That is why we have sought, consciously, to improvise with Hooker in our final section as we bring him into dialogue with another theologian, some of whose insights were themselves, we suggest, generated by Hooker and the ways of thinking about the church that he set in motion. First, though, we make our own attempt to describe and interpret particular aspects of Hooker's thought.

### 3.6 Hooker's work is rooted in doctrine:

*divine law is inscribed in the scriptures and is interpreted by human reason under the guidance of the wisdom of the past. That wisdom is embedded in practices that have stood the test of time by effectively enabling the participations in the life of God the Holy Trinity.*<sup>4</sup>

Hooker sought a 'path between authority and liberty', characteristics that he saw pushed to extremes in Roman and Puritan thought.<sup>5</sup> Toleration of a measure of diversity – or 'compatible variety' – is made possible in relation to divine law and the abundant 'purpose of God in creation and redemption' and 'variety is ultimately the unimaginable diversity of ways in which the beauty of the face of God in Jesus Christ is made visible'.<sup>6</sup> He resisted Puritan and Roman Catholic arguments alike, but for the most part he did so while seeking the sharing of 'our mutual understanding' (1.3.5) rather than outright condemnation of either group.

3.7 The *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* emerged from that crucible of intense deliberation, debate and disagreement. The presenting issue in the controversy with those who, for brevity's sake, we will call the Puritans, was their opposition to the Elizabethan Settlement, a dissent worked out in *Admonitions to Parliament*, as well as in various writings, especially those of Thomas Cartwright, and sermons, notably those of William Travers.

3.8 London's Temple Church became the fulcrum of disputation. Travers' sermons were delivered with considerable oratorical skill. Hooker responded with his own quieter and somewhat painstaking style of preaching. A particular point at issue was whether those without true knowledge of the doctrine of justification by faith alone could ever be saved. Travers was clear that they could not be.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. MacCulloch [2002].

<sup>4</sup> Avis [2014, 100].

<sup>5</sup> Avis [2014, 122].

<sup>6</sup> Williams [2005].

Hooker disagreed, believing that even those with a defective doctrine could still trust in God's mercy, such as those in the Roman Church before, and even after the Reformation.<sup>7</sup>

- 3.9 Hooker was an able debater and an effective polemicist. Nevertheless, he was concerned that dissension and controversy distracted ministers from their primary calling, corroded the life of the church and undermined Christian witness. His treatise therefore aimed to create space to address controversy and to call the church back to be a sign of the blessing of peace. In addition, Hooker was concerned about the pastoral implications of disagreement and of unnecessary changes to church practice. This helps to explain the high value he placed on conformity to the decisions and practices of the church. He argued that individuals within the church each following their own private judgment or the church frequently changing its practice would trouble Christian consciences. He also maintained that the command to justify every action by explicit biblical precedent would leave people with an uncertain conscience whenever such support was lacking, leading to a lack of peace for the individual Christian soul.
- 3.10 Part of our heritage, underpinned by Hooker's theology, is the refusal to become a confessional church based on narrowly defined doctrinal boundaries and strict parameters of practice. Hooker judged that the unity of the English Church would be better served by resisting the unnecessarily restrictive interpretation of permissible belief and practice being proposed by the Puritans and, in their own way, by Roman Catholics. Hooker believed that the increasingly serious divisions within English Christianity were corrosive and wasteful. He urged Christians on all sides to enter into 'such consultation as may tend to the best reestablishment of the whole Church of Jesus Christ' (4.14.6) and to allow the Church of England to be a truly national Church embracing all people in one society bound together in church and state.<sup>8</sup>
- 3.11 In our own time, with its very different ecclesiastical landscape and political settlement, Hooker nevertheless encourages us to be patient, taking time to work out a reasoned response in the midst of disagreement and pressure.<sup>9</sup> Engaging courteously with those with whom we disagree, vigorously pursuing a

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<sup>7</sup> When Travers' views were judged to have become excessively disciplinarian, or Puritan, Archbishop Whitgift forbade him from preaching. Writing at length about the nature and government of the Church in the *Laws* was Hooker's response to those who complained about Travers' ban. He set out to show that the Puritan case against the polity and many of the practices of the Church displayed a flawed understanding of the ways of God, an improper use of Scripture, and an unhelpful and unnecessary dismissal of the wisdom of the Church.

<sup>8</sup> See Maltby [2011].

<sup>9</sup> Tom Greggs explores the dialectic of patience and impatience in the theology of Daniel Hardy, in Greggs [2010].



better understanding of God's word together preserves human dignity in relationships and is itself an act of witness in a world in need of reconciliation. A dedication to serious scholarship and a commitment to mutual respect provides the tools to disagree in a Christian manner. They enable us to cultivate wisdom through conversation – not just with opponents or allies in our own generation, but also with those in the past.

- 3.12 Hooker invites us to deploy a rich and generous understanding of human wisdom, found within and beyond Scripture through the use of God given reason.<sup>10</sup> His motivation was rooted in concern for the church's witness, conscious as he was of how much time and energy are consumed by disagreement, and how the fruit of learning is directed away from witness to internal disputes.<sup>11</sup>

### **Interpreting Hooker**

- 3.13 We turn now to consider what we might learn from Hooker's method to help us improve the quality of our debates and disagreement within the life of the church. How can Hooker help us witness to the gospel's blessing of peace rather than perpetuate unhappy controversies?
- 3.14 Hooker retained a 'big picture' of God's creative and salvific activity.<sup>12</sup> We might glimpse that reality in the present but it is only brought to fruition in the fullness of time. Hooker stressed first and foremost the things necessary for salvation – the path of peace that the church is called to walk in. He also acknowledged that there would be disagreement around matters 'accessory' regarding order and ceremonies. It is debatable whether the clear distinctions with which Hooker worked in the area of liturgy, ceremony and polity can be easily applied to some of the ethical issues facing the church today, and so we will return to that theme a little later. However, his commitment to discerning

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<sup>10</sup> In a presentation by Rowan Williams during a visit to the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue (Christ Church Oxford, 11 September 2010) he said that: 'for Hooker part of the essential and distinctive role of human beings is indeed to exercise *reason* – not as an abstract capacity to argue, but reason as sensitivity to divine wisdom'.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel W. Hardy reflects on what distracts and limits the church – including becoming focused on our own 'inner meaning' rather than persisting in our task in the world in Hardy et al. [2010, 106].

<sup>12</sup> Rowan Williams draws us into this vision of salvation in his consideration of law and revelation 'The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Revisited': Christian salvation comes from incorporation into the life of Christ the eternal Son, who has shared his life with us through the incarnation; it is not a matter of adherence to a form of words, even inspired and inerrant words. The Bible is true but not a substitute for the living Truth which is Christ's person', Williams [2005].

truth and faithful practice, and the method he used to attempt it, are of perennial value. It is to this that we now turn.

- 3.15 The principle of *sola scriptura* was at the heart of Reformation thought. Both Hooker and his Puritan opponents drew on a wide range of biblical texts to support their views. However, Hooker differed from the Puritans on how Scripture was used, and how it related to the use of reason and the tradition of the church. Those of more Puritan views saw Scripture as a comprehensive set of commands and propositions to be applied to all of life: doctrine, practice, church structure and civil law alike. If something was not explicitly laid down in Scripture then it should not be done. They were suspicious of the tradition of the church beyond the earliest period, and were even less trusting of reason in matters of faith.
- 3.16 Rather than engaging with Puritan arguments using their own assumptions about method, Hooker put forward a different view. He spoke about ‘collecting the sense of scripture’ in terms of its proper Christological and soteriological function, and argued that applying it without reference to this function was to misinterpret it. Hooker did not reduce tradition to an ideal past era; rather the constant practice of the church was a valuable source of consensus: ‘it is the living tradition of the church, embedded in its practices of reading, studying and preaching Scripture, that first directs us to the sacred writings.’<sup>13</sup>
- 3.17 It is worth looking a little more closely at how Hooker configured the relationship between Scripture, reason and tradition. Perhaps the clearest example is found in Book 5 of the *Laws*.

*Be it in matter of the one kind or of the other [either doctrine or issues of church order], what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next where-unto is whatsoever any man necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgments whatsoever.*<sup>14</sup>

Here we can see in Hooker a clear order: what Scripture *plainly* delivers, what reason *necessarily* forces us to conclude, and what the church teaches. What Hooker means by Scripture, tradition and reason, then, is not just any reference to any one of these three in a given argument. Appeal to Scripture must be to its plain meaning. This gives Scripture primacy in all areas it is meant to cover, but resists attempts to make it do more than is intended. While reason is an

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<sup>13</sup> Avis [2014, 109–112].

<sup>14</sup> *Laws* 5.8.2.

important tool, only what is *necessarily* concluded by reason can be binding on all. The authority given to the church reflects the fact that it upholds what Christians have always believed and practised.<sup>15</sup>

3.18 Behind this dense account of the relative place of Scripture, reason and tradition lies Hooker's fundamental understanding of the way God relates to the world. It is here that we can see the part that reason plays in Hooker's theology, and the way it relates to Scripture.

3.19 God's ordering of the world, for Hooker, is an expression of God's self-consistency:

*The being of God is a kind of law to his working: for that perfection which God is, giveth perfection to that he doeth.*<sup>16</sup>

Creation, therefore, is ordered by the eternal law of God by which God's actions cohere with God's identity.<sup>17</sup> As Williams puts it:

*God wills to exercise the 'abundance' of his glory – to create as many reflections as possible of his own being ... Law, then, is bound up with the compatible variety of things in the universe ... The 'laws' of nature tells us how all material beings exist together. The laws of society propose how beings with free choice can exist together. The law that regulates the Church tells us how human beings may live in the society of God and the angels.*<sup>18</sup>

3.20 Participating in God's law – God's way of ordering life that is consistent with God's own life – each sphere of creation rises to its true stature and so brings glory to God, the creator of all. Intrinsic to each sphere is the orientation of its law to the serving of the 'other's good' and the preference for 'the good of the whole before ... their own particular' (1.3.5). For Hooker, this is an example of the way God's own self-ordering is embodied in the ordering of created life.

3.21 God is as much involved in the law of reason as in the divine law. Nevertheless, there are limits to the law of reason, which reason itself discerns. It desires a deeper participation in the life of God than the material or intellectual can provide, as full in 'beauties, riches, honours, sciences, virtues and perfections' as it is. It cannot rest satisfied with that which is in its grasp. It knows that there is

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Avis explores the nuanced relationship between Scripture, tradition and reason in Avis [2014].

<sup>16</sup> *Laws* 1.2.2.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Chapman considers Hooker's ordering of law in Chapman [2012].

<sup>18</sup> Williams [2005].

more 'which exceedeth the reason of sense, yea somewhat above the category of reason, somewhat divine and heavenly' (1.11.4).

- 3.22 The primary function of Scripture is to show us this supernatural law and so 'make us wise unto salvation' and form us into the sanctified community of the saved, of participants in the divine life. Scripture relates to the whole of human life, and thereby informs human reason by which human living is ordered. But it does not dictate every area of human life. For much of that, reason – a God given reason, of course – is necessary.
- 3.23 However, none of this is to imply that reason and Scripture only operate in their respective spheres. Reason is an 'effectual instrument' (*Preface*.3.2) of the Spirit that God gives us *to use* Scripture. Hooker says that reason is like the sling in the hand of David.<sup>19</sup> We can see it at work in the way Jesus makes use of the Old Testament and where Paul constructs his careful argumentation. We see it in the way the Church Fathers do apologetics in their own societies.<sup>20</sup>
- 3.24 We are called to do likewise as we give, in obedience to Scripture, an answer to the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3.15). We rely on it for 'collecting' the truth of Scripture and 'comprehending in such sort that by reason we may conclude all things which are necessary' (I.14.2). Just as reason is necessarily applied to Scripture in order for us to discern its truth, so is reason itself 'perfected through Scripture' (1.14.5) as it finds itself lifted beyond the natural into the supernatural. This shaping and honing of reason through the divine law plays back into ordinary living, as a Christian approach to areas of life that do not pertain directly to the way of salvation, and so are not determined by Scripture, is nevertheless shaped by the determining principles of Scripture (2.2.1).
- 3.25 Hooker's assessment of Scripture, reason and tradition, is rooted in his understanding of the character of God. The primacy given to Scripture affirms God's self-revelation through it. The high view of reason affirms God's creation of the world according to certain laws, and the reverence for antiquity against frequent changes reflects the fact that God is a God of order and peace.
- 3.26 Perhaps the most hopeful and challenging area of Hooker's *Laws* in relation to how we handle disagreement within the life of the church is the distinction he makes between things necessary for salvation and things accessory. This distinction played a crucial role in relation to Hooker's thought on worship, ceremonies and matters of polity.

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<sup>19</sup> *Laws* 3.8.10.

<sup>20</sup> *Laws* 3.8.16–17.

- 3.27 While making use of his distinction, though, we should note two things. First, Hooker made this distinction not so much to promote ‘good disagreement’ but to limit the circumstances under which individuals could refuse to conform to church authority on the grounds of conscience (i.e. in matters necessary to salvation). Second, the distinction is not straightforwardly applicable to other areas of disagreement.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to questions of ethics, for example, distinctions between matters necessary (where differences of practice concern the surety of salvation) and matters accessory (where difference, though serious, may be mutually tolerated) are easier to maintain on some issues than on others. The relationship of ethics to the process of sanctification adds further complexity to the way in which distinctions are made between matters pertaining to salvation and those which are incidental to it.
- 3.28 Despite these caveats, Hooker’s approach remains hopeful for a church facing serious disagreement in any area, because it sets apart matters of doctrine (the nature of God) and those things necessary for salvation (our justification and sanctification). Those things lay out the way of faith that the church is called to walk in. In contrast, things ‘accessory’ may be regarded as matters which, if altered, do not change that path. As Chapman puts it, ‘the underlying path was the route to salvation even if paving differed’.<sup>22</sup> Hooker’s view that the church can ‘establish that for an order at one time, which at another time it may abolish, *and in both do well*’,<sup>23</sup> is important for disagreement. Judgments on some topics are provisional, and debate or change in this area should not be greeted with unease, provided there is a good reason for it. It is possible to shift one’s understanding on what relates to the heart of the gospel and the life that issues from it. The weight that Christians, including Anglicans, gave until relatively recently to liturgical practice is a good example of that.
- 3.29 The ages in which Scripture was written and the character of the tradition formed do not represent perfect eras to be recreated exactly. Rather, they give us tools that have to be used according to their purpose. Hooker saw the Puritan movement’s attempt to regulate all things by Scripture as reflecting a desire for prescription and certainty in every area of church life and human activity that is not available to us. Disagreement can arise when we try to find certainty in areas where it is not possible. His overall concept of authority ‘reflects his vision

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<sup>21</sup> For example, during the debates in the Church of England over the ordination of women, some regarded such matters very much as second-order issues. Judging that they did not touch the heart of the gospel, they were prepared to support or oppose the ordination of women as priests or bishops on more pragmatic grounds according to the particular pressures and needs of the time. Others, whether ‘for’ or ‘against’, regarded the inclusion of women in priestly or episcopal orders as a matter that involved the substance of the faith.

<sup>22</sup> Chapman [2012, 118].

<sup>23</sup> *Laws* 5.8.2.

of the Church, which is... incarnational, corporate, organic, sacramental and dynamic'.<sup>24</sup>

### **Improvising on Hooker**

- 3.30 By drawing on Hooker's approach as a source of encouragement and inspiration, we move to points of challenge and further thought. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, we will do so by bringing Daniel Hardy into conversation with Richard Hooker and with ourselves. Like Hooker, Hardy thought, preached and wrote on church polity in the midst of painful struggles over theology and practice. In the face of constant threats of division within the Anglican Communion, he proposed profound ways of understanding the theological task of the church and sharing in its life, ways that were always hopeful for the future while not minimising the challenges of the present.
- 3.31 Hardy's writings include *Finding the Church*, which is a collection of essays that draws on the wisdom of the theological tradition, and specifically explores the nature of the church as constituted by its worship and its mission.<sup>25</sup> *Wording a Radiance* proposes an understanding of the church shaped by a concern to witness to God as the light that attracts – in us and through others.<sup>26</sup> Behind these rich ecclesiological texts lies Hardy's *God's Ways in the World*, a collection of essays that mirrors the scope of volumes 1–4 of Hooker's *Laws*.<sup>27</sup> Hardy, in a similar vein to Hooker, offered a distinctively Anglican vision of God's relation with the world and the life of the church, engaging deeply, spiritually, prophetically with reasoning, Scripture, worship, witness and the pursuit of holiness.<sup>28</sup> We now explore these themes in more detail, with Christopher focusing on reasoning and Scripture, and Julie looking at holiness, worship and witness.

### **Reasoning with Scripture Together – Christopher Cocksworth**

- 3.32 Dan Hardy's theological project was much concerned with the order of reality. His interest in order was not unlike Hooker's interest in law. Hooker and Hardy believed in a God whose life could be discerned throughout the created world and who maintained a loving, life-giving, interaction with everything that exists. Hardy speaks of the *dynamic relationality* that constitutes the very being of God,

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<sup>24</sup> Avis [2014, 129].

<sup>25</sup> Hardy [2001].

<sup>26</sup> Hardy et al. [2010].

<sup>27</sup> Hardy [1996].

<sup>28</sup> Recent work on, or inspired by, Dan Hardy, includes: Pickard [2012]; Gittoes [2012]; Gittoes [2015]; Cocksworth [2015].

and by which God has constituted the reality of the world. God, in the dynamic life of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, gives life to world, sustaining it through the on-going presence and activity of the Son and the Spirit, and ordering its life so that (again in a way reminiscent of Hooker) human beings are inextricably bound together, and all life is interconnected in a global, indeed, cosmic, environment of interdependence.

- 3.33 Sin, as we shall see, is withdrawal from relationality, the fracturing of humanity. At its heart is self-attraction which distracts us from God and from each other, disorienting us from God and towards ourselves. Redemption is the healing of our fragmentation and the restoration of our relationality. Hardy describes this as 'attraction': being drawn beyond ourselves towards God, other human beings and the rest of the natural order.
- 3.34 Hardy, inspired by the work of the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, explored the notion of *sociality*. Sociality, for Hardy, as it was for Bonhoeffer, is essentially the constitution of human beings as social creatures who need each other not only to exist but to thrive in their fullest identity. Furthermore, he coined the term *sociopoiesis*, by which he meant the formation of human society, and the making and shaping of our true identity as people who live and move and have our being with each other and with God. The function of the church, for Hardy, is to be so formed as a community in God that we not only show what human living is called to be but also become the means by which God lifts the whole of humanity into its fullest form, the fullness of the stature of Christ.
- 3.35 The concept of attraction is key to Hardy's understanding of God, human life and the church. He developed it with the help of the philosophical notion of *abduction*, especially in the form it takes in the writings of the nineteenth-century Anglican poet and philosopher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>29</sup> Hardy defined abduction as the process by which we are drawn into a fuller apprehension of ourselves and a deeper experience of the reality of life through the attraction of the other, primarily through the attraction of God, who is the Attractor. God, being with us and for us, calls us, moves us, entrances us and enthrals us, abducting us freely, gratefully, joyfully to a fuller reality of life in which we find ourselves in being with and for God, and those with whom God has made us to live.
- 3.36 Hardy's ideas of attraction and abduction, sociality and sociopoiesis gave his theology a panoramic scope. Theology is to do with everything that is, the whole of life because the whole of life is bound in dynamic relationality, held in that connectedness by Christ in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1.17).

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<sup>29</sup> A careful study of Hardy's understanding of abduction can be found in Srikantha [2015].

Accordingly, Hardy's ecclesiology was wide and deep. Although deeply fond of and endlessly fascinated by the Church of England, Hardy thought instinctively in terms of the whole Anglican Communion, and more broadly still, of the whole church of God.

- 3.37 Hardy's key concepts of abduction and sociality shaped his whole approach to questions of understanding and the pursuit of truth – the reasoning by which we understand the way things are and the nature of reality itself. He was critical of purely 'deductive reasoning', a way of defining what is true from certain universal premises. At the same time he distrusted purely 'inductive reasoning', a way of determining what is true from our observation of what appears to be the case. He described the former as 'cognitive foundationalism' and the latter as 'relativism'. Both systems of understanding, he thought, were closed in on themselves. In Hardy's mind both were unstable because it is possible for premises to be wrong and for conclusions drawn from observations to be flawed. Both are, of course, necessary to human reasoning but Hardy proposed that 'abductive reasoning' offers a mode of reasoning that is more dynamic and more secure than one that relies on only deductive or inductive reasoning, or on a combination of the two.
- 3.38 There is much here about which philosophers will argue. What is most interesting for our purposes is the way Hardy's notions of abductive reasoning allowed him to see human rationality itself in dynamic, relational terms. Rationality, for Hardy, has the capacity to be expanded by its relativity to God. As we are drawn more deeply into the life of God's love, more fully receiving that work of the divine Logos and Spirit by which the world is created and redeemed, our reasoning is formed into a spiritual reason as our rationality is transformed into a 'divinely infused rationality'<sup>30</sup> (an understanding of reason that Hardy claimed he had learned from Hooker).
- 3.39 Just as Hardy was critical of ways of reasoning that are based solely on inviolable premises that lead to (apparent) certainty or on interpretations of observations that lead to judgments of probability, he was also wary of approaches to Scripture that mirror the deductive or inductive ways of self-limiting human reasoning. He proposed approaching Scripture in ways that are fully oriented towards God, the people of God and the activity of God moving the world forward to its fulfilment in the kingdom of God. Through Scripture, read always with others (as Hooker also proposed), we are reoriented to God and God's purposes, redirected from the self towards God and others. The 'and others' gave Hardy a strong sense of the living tradition of the church. We read Scripture in the context of the church, in the braiding or weaving of life with

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<sup>30</sup> Hardy et al. [2010, 17].



others, which (as Hardy pointed out) is the meaning of the Latin verb *contexere* from which our word for context is derived.

- 3.40 That is why the liturgical reading of Scripture is its true setting. Scripture addresses us as God's word, and it addresses us together as the church. We read, mark, learn and inwardly digest Scripture not as individuals or as separate groups in self-enclosed situations but as people who belong to each other in a global community that stretches through history. We read Scripture as people who bear Christ to each other for in Christ, through the energy of the Spirit, God uses each of us, our communities and our churches, as means by which God abducts the people of God into the fullness of life as purposed by God, a life that finds its fulfilment in the kingdom of God.
- 3.41 In a paper prepared for a meeting of the Anglican Primates in 2001, Dan Hardy listed the multiple complexities and serious questions facing the Communion, and then wrote, 'All of these – as well as our use of Bible, tradition and reason – are given new meaning by placing them in the context of our mediation of Christ to each other'.<sup>31</sup> He would say the same today, no doubt.

### **Holiness: Worship and Witness** – Julie Gittoes

- 3.42 Hooker's use of Scripture, reason and tradition, alongside his understanding of law and the place of worship within ecclesial life, are focused on the fulfilment of human potential. We might call this a vocation to holiness. By drawing on a wide range of tools, Scripture and reason alike, for discerning the will of God, it becomes possible to speak of the pursuit of holiness in all areas of life. The holiness of God demands interaction between history and culture, church and politics. It is the holiness of God that shapes our freedom and ethical responsibilities. For Hooker, the threefold way is the key to discerning and recognising that holiness in human lives.
- 3.43 What might that involve? Perhaps it is to begin with the character of God; to discover afresh the gift and grace of attending to such holiness; to live out of this reality in worship, relationship and witness. In the face of disagreement we risk seeking to contain 'holiness' in moral codes. Yet it is precisely in the face of such challenges that we are invited to consider how our participation in Christ through the Spirit transforms us. Individually by virtue of our baptism, we are called by name into the Body of Christ. Our corporate identity is rooted in holiness – indeed Paul calls his brothers and sisters 'saints' because they are holy, they belong to God, they (and we) are dedicated to God.

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<sup>31</sup> Hardy [2001,150].

- 3.44 The paradox is unavoidable: the people and places called holy are seldom free from tension and dispute. We are, as Archbishop Justin Welby put it in his presidential address to General Synod in February 2014, learning to live as an ‘untidy church’. How do we flourish amidst deeply held differences? How to we love those with whom we disagree? Untidiness of this order demands, to coin the phrase used by the Archbishop, ‘holy grace’.
- 3.45 To be holy is not an act of will (the metaphorical crossing of fingers and hoping for the best in a crisis). Nor is it a faultless life, judged according to a set of rules. Rather it is the capacity to reflect something of God’s character – faithfulness, mercy, generosity – precisely in the midst of untidiness, imperfection and chaos. The church, writes Rowan Williams,

*is holy... not because it is a gathering of the good and well-behaved, but because it speaks of the triumph of grace in the coming together of strangers and sinners, who, miraculously, trust one another enough to join in common repentance and common praise... Humanly speaking, holiness is always like this: God’s endurance in the middle of our refusal of him, his capacity to meet every refusal with the gift of himself.<sup>32</sup>*

- 3.46 Dan Hardy has drawn attention to the dynamic, Spirit-led approach to the pursuit of holiness. In *Finding the Church* Hardy states that ‘holiness, sociality and worship are – or should be – extremely rich and powerful notions and practices, and therefore capable of orientating vast ranges of life in the world’.<sup>33</sup> Christopher has talked about the place of reasoning with Scripture. Hardy regarded Scripture and the Eucharist as measures of the church’s life. Perhaps this is another constructive way of improvising on Hooker.
- 3.47 Scripture reveals a vision of the Kingdom, rather than a set of rules. It is the

*showing of the end of the journey... the most intimate relation with God, with all humans and all creation. It is Scripture... that discloses the Kingdom and the fullness of God’s purposes. Scripture as a whole measures the Church, but the all defining measure... is the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>34</sup>*

Hooker used the concept of ‘participation’, which broadens and deepens his understanding of the doctrine of sanctification. His sacramental theology is rooted in this: baptism is understood as the sacrament of justification and the Eucharist as the sacrament of sanctification. Rather than focus on the question of ‘how’ the bread and wine take on their sacramental significance, he focused instead on ‘why’. That is the question of salvation: sacraments are not ‘bare

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<sup>32</sup> Williams [1994, 136].

<sup>33</sup> Hardy [1996, 8].

<sup>34</sup> Hardy et al. [2010, 65].

resemblances or memorials of things absent, neither [for] naked signs... but... for means effectual whereby God when we take the sacraments delivereth into our hands that grace available unto eternal life'.<sup>35</sup>

- 3.48 Hardy regards the Eucharist as one of the measures of the life of the church; human freedom is reshaped *within* the refining cross of Christ; the Eucharist, and all that it enacted within it, enables us to speak of a 'holy trust'. It is a refining fire; a place where the cruciform holiness of God's love transfigures us. Living this out in the life of the church, for the sake of the world, is difficult and demanding. It demands a patient impatience and a deep attentiveness to God, as well as God's world.
- 3.49 Worship is not cut off from the world in all its complexity. Rather, it is where layers of human meaning and social life come together; where they are transfigured before God and the vision of God's Kingdom. God's story and ours is 'enacted': the Eucharist 'enacts the intrinsic connection of all these [that is social, political and economic actions] to the inner dynamic of God's holiness, which depends not on the efficacy of the dramatic action but on the efficacy of God's holiness in it'.<sup>36</sup> God's self-giving holiness forms us: it shapes our freedom and our ethical responsibilities.
- 3.50 Worship draws us into the crucible of divine holiness. Our hope is that we do this 'in Christ'. God's love is cruciform and in broken bread and outpoured wine, we enact and extend holiness. Healing – like a refining fire – comes about through the cross of Christ. The fragmentation is 'burnt away' because,

*the holiness of God – the fire in God by which full holiness is generated and sustained in its relation to all else – eventually refines even that which opposes it, thereby healing the fragmentations introduced by those who resist it.*<sup>37</sup>

- 3.51 Indeed 'facing the holiness of God, and performing it within human social life, is the special provenance of worship'.<sup>38</sup> Hardy alerts us to the dangers of treating worship as 'routine' or the error of regarding it as a human attempt to 'ascend' to God. Rather, in worship, we are placed in a situation where we are moved forward by God's holiness towards the good, because of God's 'formative, freeing and energizing attraction'.<sup>39</sup> Worship takes place within the context of human

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<sup>35</sup> Hooker, *Laws* 5.57.5.

<sup>36</sup> Hardy [1996, 21].

<sup>37</sup> Hardy [1996, 17].

<sup>38</sup> Hardy [1996, 19].

<sup>39</sup> Hardy [1996, 20].

resistance and fragmentation; we are proved, refined and lifted up by it; it is a real anticipation of the kingdom of God.

3.52 Perhaps this might be seen as an outworking of Hooker's legacy. This way of holiness might challenge the church to think about how we are formed by worship as it enacts a holy trust, but also to consider the way a dense moral vision is cultivated. For the sake of the kingdom of God, the pursuit of holiness draws us into an expansive network of relationships within the world and a concern for the flourishing of society – an individual and collective fulfilment of the potential of human life.

3.53 Hooker's deep awareness of the unity of God also led to a strong concern for the unity of the people of God:

*God hath created nothing simply for itself, but each thing in all things, and of every thing each part in other have such interest, that in the whole world nothing is found whereunto any thing created can say, 'I need thee not'.<sup>40</sup>*

3.54 The unity of the church is grounded in fellowship with Christ – which finds its focus for Hooker in the nature of the Eucharist. This fellowship is what draws men and women to fulfil the highest potential of human life. For Hardy, in the Eucharist, all aspects of social meaning in the world are gathered together into an event in which the full truth of God is made explicit: we are confronted with divine intensity.<sup>41</sup>

3.55 In a different mode of theological engagement, Hardy sought to face the reality of division and crisis with the same scholarly endeavour and rootedness in God as Hooker. His work is full of the possibility of healing – he used the medical term 'granulation' to describe the slow, often painful, process of deep healing. Rather than getting stuck with what seem like intransigent problems and differences, we need to refocus on the glory and light of God and of the kingdom: 'it is not a matter of our working out every detail of how to move on; we need to leave room for the Spirit to work'.<sup>42</sup> Confronting the holiness of God in worship

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<sup>40</sup> Hooker, *Sermon on the Nature of Pride*.

<sup>41</sup> Intensity in Hardy's thought is described in relation to extensity: both are movements of God's love towards the world. To speak of extensity is to name the way in which we, as human beings, get caught up in things; it refers to our spread-out-ness in the world. It is part of our created nature that we are sent forth. However, there is a risk inherent within the gift of creaturely freedom is that in being drawn outward, we are in danger of losing the sense of God's presence with us (the dynamics of capitalism, for example add to that fragmentation). Intensity is God's self-movement of love towards the world – in creation, redemption, the perfection of human life in the world. Intensity calls forth a response; it makes possible human social life in all its fullness; it enables a movement of love between people. See also Gittoes [2013, 103–104].

<sup>42</sup> Hardy et al. [2010].

creates space; and gives us the assurance to take risks, with patience and generosity.

- 3.56 Worship is a place where we turn from 'self-attraction to divine attraction and thus attraction to others'.<sup>43</sup> There we are measured by Scripture and the Eucharist. Worship is a place of healing and forgiveness as well as praise and abundance: it acts as a crucible, as we come before God's holiness. Our participation in the life of God is a means of grace; it restores our vision of God's Kingdom. Our encounter with God in worship is at the heart of our ecclesial life. The healing we seek is not 'simple or immediate or predictable ... not a matter of mere choice, or will, or rational discipline'; it is in worship,

*when a pilgrim's openness to the Spirit is met by the Spirit and 'other' replaces 'self' as the object of attraction. This is still not the end of the drama – but only the beginning of the possibility of healing: an opening for attraction to meet attraction and, with the balm of the Spirit, for a wounded Church to walk with Jesus.*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hardy et al. [2010, 107].

<sup>44</sup> Hardy et al. [2010, 107].

## **4 Dialogue around Difference: Symbolic, Symptomatic and Systemic**

*Mark Chapman and Tim Dakin*

The FAOC report argued that differences arise naturally within the life of the church from its participation in God's mission across different societies and cultures, and also that where such differences lead to significant disagreement there is a proper place for political discourse and process in addressing that. Both these points are taken up and explored in more depth in this supporting paper. Mark Chapman uses the Vestiarian Controversy of the later sixteenth century to illustrate the way that 'condensational symbols' can function in ecclesial disagreement and to highlight their negative effect on the potential for political discourse to be a vehicle for disagreeing well. Tim Dakin locates contemporary debates around gender and sexuality within the broader context of disagreements in mission, while also proposing that they have some distinctive features that need careful consideration. We both discuss the theology of communion and how we should understand the relation between unity and difference in the light of fundamental doctrinal themes around Trinity, creation, incarnation and salvation.

### **Introduction**

4.1 The following is a dialogue about conflict and difference and how important it is in the history of the church and Christian mission. The two voices in this discussion agree about the importance of disagreement and about the symbolic force of particular issues, but have divergent views about whether some conflicts are not merely symbolic but are symptomatic of a fundamental systematic theological disagreement about what it is to be human. We have attempted to explore and illustrate differences and disagreements in a variety of contexts both historical and global in a way that we hope will help to resource some the Church of England's current conversations about sexuality. What we offer in our different ways is a discussion that draws on the contrasting languages of politics and theology, but which also points to how fundamental disagreements might emerge.

### **On Vesting Correctly – Mark Chapman**

4.2 I begin with what might seem a trivial dispute. In July 2014 the Church of England's General Synod discussed a possible change in the frequently flouted canon that requires clergy to vest in particular ways when taking certain types of services. While the debate revealed that some of the passions which had

accompanied discussions of clerical dress in the past had evaporated, it also enabled reflection on the past when things were very different. The so-called Vestiarian Controversy of the 1560s clearly shows that ecclesiastical dress was once a matter of supreme importance.<sup>1</sup> The point at issue was simple (and it has been repeated in different guises at various points since that time): what to wear in church functioned as symbolic of a whole range of identities which related to the role of the Reformation and the wholesale clearing away of the clutter of the medieval church. For some, late medieval choir dress was the very mark of the beast in much the same way that the Book of Common Prayer was a 'popish dunghill'.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, questions of church order and ecclesiastical practice were perceived as questions about idolatry, which pointed to far deeper theological and doctrinal tensions. Discussions about what was a first or second order matter were never simple.

- 4.3 In my view, such controversies are symptomatic of the vast bulk of ecclesiastical conflicts: things are seldom what they seem. Sometimes it is difficult to grasp the venom with which people promoted or resisted certain practices: this is particularly true of the ritualist controversies where different campaigning groups shaped Victorian perceptions of the identity of the Church of England. The Oxford Movement's *Library of the Fathers* was pitted against their opponents' *Parker Society* edition of the works of the Reformers in much the same way as later the mass vestments and credence tables defended by the English Church Union were attacked by the Church Association. Taking a longer and broader view, it is clear that from the beginnings of the history of the church there was always disagreement and frequently conflict. Indeed, it is probably true to say that a proper understanding of the church includes a recognition that conflict has been part of the history of mission since the first mission to the Gentiles. Paul and Peter were sufficiently at odds with each other, with Paul opposing Peter and even Barnabas for 'hypocrisy' and for not acting in line with the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:11–21). Different views on circumcision were fundamental to Christian identity and symbolic of far deeper differences. Such conflicts have characterised Christian mission ever since.

### **Conflicts in Mission – Tim Dakin**

- 4.4 In his recent history of the Church of England's mission up to the First World War, Steven S. Maughan has shown how domestic conflicts were transferred to the mission field.<sup>3</sup> These were made still more complex by their association with imperialism but also by the dialogue with local cultures which were perceived

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapman [2011, 77–85].

<sup>2</sup> John Field in *An Admonition to Parliament* (1573) in Frere and Douglas [1907, 1-39, here 8].

<sup>3</sup> Maughan [2014].

as more or less sophisticated.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the crucial missionary activity of translating the Scriptures helped undermine the force of colonialism empowering local Christians to develop their own theological and mission vision.<sup>5</sup> In the Church Missionary Society this developed into the idea of the self-governing, self-extending and self-supporting but inter-related local church. Arising from this policy of self-determination, the vision for the Christian contribution to nation building in a post-colonial era also became an important part of many Anglican Churches' wider mission.

- 4.5 An example of a dispute in which the issue at stake is embedded in wider socio-cultural dynamics was the 'female circumcision' dispute in Kenya in which the Anglican Church was deeply involved from the 1920s. This resulted in a cultural clash, and in conflict amongst Christians and also between Christians and the colonial authorities.<sup>6</sup> Here there is both an incipient theology of the body (including the question of sexuality) as well as cultural and ecclesial elements. Furthermore, this is still a current issue (as is the matter of polygamy). The question of whether female genital mutilation should be challenged, modified, or accepted, raises the deeper hermeneutical questions about cultural and social presuppositions that are not only symbolic of disagreement, but also symptomatic of deep systemic differences.
- 4.6 From a more wide-ranging perspective, David Hesselgrave, in his *Paradigms in Conflict*,<sup>7</sup> identified ten mission questions over which there have been and continue to be significant disagreements through the history of the church and especially from the Reformation: from doctrinal disputes over the nature of grace, relations with other religions, different views about eschatology, to the relation between church and kingdom of God. While some of these issues of conflict might not seem to pose particularly significant questions for Anglicans, they offer a snapshot of some of the most bitter disagreements in Christian mission, some of which are played out at a symbolic level where seemingly minor issues take on a meaning apparently out of all proportion.
- 4.7 Although he writes from an American evangelical position, Hesselgrave shares much in his analysis with major modern Roman Catholic thinkers such as Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder who in their book *Constants in Context*<sup>8</sup> identify six major doctrinal elements which have been shaped around at least three great traditions with different ways of understanding Law, Truth and

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Carey [2011].

<sup>5</sup> See Sanneh [2009]. On the intentionality of missionaries see Porter [2004].

<sup>6</sup> For the historical background on the female circumcision dispute see Strayer [1978, chapter 8].

<sup>7</sup> Hesselgrave [2005].

<sup>8</sup> Bevans and Schroeder [2004].



History and which focus on Christology and the church, culture and anthropology, and soteriology and eschatology. What Bevans and Schroeder help us to see is that even when mission issues emerge over which there is deep disagreement and which are connected to fundamental aspects of theology, we may still be able to discern family resemblances, even if we cannot say we are in full communion: the issues are elemental and systemic, relating to theological culture as a whole. That may be a more honest way to engage with difference, diversity and deep disagreement: there are genuine differences, some of which are symbolic of deeper disagreement, and some of which are symptomatic of deep divergence at a systemic level. An example of this, I would claim, is the theology of the body. The theology of the body includes the symbolic and sacramental significance of the body at a fundamental level (of which I shall say more later). At this point I simply note that as Pope John Paul II said, 'The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into visible the reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it'.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Condensational Symbols – Mark Chapman**

4.8 Our discussion so far reveals that throughout the history of the church certain issues have functioned as what the political scientist Murray Edelman has called 'condensational symbols'. In our own day the slogans of politicians (such as 'gun control', 'family values', 'freedom of choice' in the USA, or in Britain 'tackling unemployment' or 'reducing the deficit') can take on a whole range of associations and become code words for identity politics. In a similar way, particular theological or ethical positions on a whole range of issues take on far broader symbolic meaning than the presenting problem. In the Vestiarian Controversy, what one wore in church became a code for whether or not the Church of England should have continued on its journey of reform. In the twentieth and twenty-first century the presenting issues have been different but have often been as divisive: for instance, there were times not so long ago when some Anglo-Catholic parish churches in England had notices saying that they were not in communion with the Church of South India after it had lost what they regarded as a 'valid' ministry.<sup>10</sup> A whole range of identity questions are involved in such apparently small and insignificant gestures which obviously signify far deeper issues.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in West [2009, 5]. Pope John Paul II [2007] explored the fundamental significance of the sign of the body and the sacrament of marriage. See also Christopher West's extensive commentary on John Paul II (West [2007]), especially the sections on sign and sacrament in Part II.

<sup>10</sup> See Billings [2013, 103].

- 4.9 In all this, what is frequently underplayed is the *political* nature of ecclesiastical discourse. This is surprising since in the Church of England controversies have been conducted through the mode of politics, either in Parliament (which was the sole governing institution of the Church from 1717 until the 1860s and the revival of Convocation) or, more recently, in the quasi-parliamentary institution of the General Synod. As we have both already suggested, any cursory glance at the history of mission reveals that conflict and disagreement are at the heart of much theological discourse, particularly in the theological tradition of the Church of England, which for the most part has focused on the polemics and apologetics of ecclesiastical practice. In general, in most of the Anglican tradition both historically and in the present day, theology has not been done by ‘professional’ theologians working in universities, but by church leaders and educators who have specific problems to address or who encounter a lack of obedience to what the church has laid down (which was the norm in Elizabethan England).
- 4.10 Consequently, the mode of theological discourse for the bulk of the Anglican tradition (and obviously for much other theology) is that of polemics, with its rhetorical strategies and emphasis on the powers of persuasion. This makes it profoundly political. Cartwright and Whitgift, Travers and Hooker in the sixteenth century, and later Laud and Fisher in the seventeenth are all good examples of political theology: indeed the starting point for Whitgift and Hooker is the series of *Admonitions* presented to Parliament (in which the questions of vestments and the Prayer Book were major presenting issues).
- 4.11 Of course more recently symbolic markers of cultural identity have focused on other issues, especially since the Lambeth Conference of 1998 with its Resolution 1.10, which has taken on a symbolic prominence which its framers could hardly have expected. As Chris Brittain and Andrew McKinnon have written:

*The position one takes on ordaining gay and lesbian bishops and blessing same-sex partnerships has become a symbolic marker around which differing (and competing) interests within the Communion are constructing strategic partnerships, and possibly even forging a new common identity: ‘Orthodox Anglicans’. This conflict cannot simply be reduced to the effects of a so-called culture war between liberals and conservatives, terms which do not fit well in a number of the local socio-political cultures discussed here, since these basic poles stem from a U.S. context.<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Brittain and McKinnon [2011, 351–73, and 352–3].

- 4.12 This presenting issue, I would suggest, is little different in kind from earlier controversies, even if it is being played out on a larger global stage. Like earlier disputes, it is framed in terms of identity – ‘orthodoxy’ here is associated with a particular set of symbols – and at the same time the way the debates have been conducted is in terms of the manipulation of language and discourse, much of which involves different models of biblical interpretation or different understandings of natural law. In turn there are sometimes symbolic acts such as refusing to share communion or to meet with certain people in certain places who have acted in ways which appear to contravene the symbolic code.<sup>12</sup>
- 4.13 What seems important is that there is a particular sensitivity to language as well as to the contexts – both ecclesiastical and political – in which these conflicts emerge. Indeed, I would suggest, the greater the degree of understanding of the nuances of difference and disagreement, the greater the chance that the conflicting parties might begin to understand one another. Even though this may not lead to resolution it will at least help people to recognise the nature of their differences both at a surface and a deeper level. From my perspective, therefore, understanding the symbolic politics of difference becomes crucial in efforts to live with diversity.

### **Symbolic and Symptomatic and Systemic – Tim Dakin**

- 4.14 A fundamental issue that emerges from an analysis of such conflicts is whether all such conflicts are *merely* symbolic or whether some are more symptomatic and systemic.<sup>13</sup> For me, the question of sexuality is not only symbolic of a wider set of differences, but has a distinct quality in a way that such issues as vestments in church never have. There is something here that is elemental and affects our whole theological culture: it is symptomatic and systemic in its significance. There is therefore a distinction between the present disagreement about sexuality and the historic disputes about vestments.<sup>14</sup> Although there is

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<sup>12</sup> The recent Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa meeting on 9–10 March 2015 in South Africa was marked by the absence of some primates of substantial churches – Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Rwanda. They berated the chairman of CAPA, Archbishop Bernard Ntahoruti of Burundi, for attending a meeting in 2014 (along with the Archbishops of Central Africa and West Africa, and Tanzania) with bishops of The Episcopal Church of the USA.

<sup>13</sup> As classic texts like David Kelsey’s *The Fabric of Paul Tillich’s Theology* (Kelsey [1967]) make clear, symbols can carry ontological significance beyond their social and cultural use. I’m conscious this is a complex area. My views are informed by thinkers who advocate critical realism, e.g. philosophers, social philosophers and theologians like Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier and Andrew Wright.

<sup>14</sup> It is clear that in whatever way the debate is interpreted, the fact that the Church of England’s teaching on marriage is expressed in its Canons (B30), will ensure that those who see this as a fundamental doctrinal matter and those who see this from another perspective will not only have to discuss what they think about the issues but will also have to explore at what level they

no space to rehearse the arguments in detail, I would suggest that the distinction emerges because a distinctive theology of the body is essential to the faith: our creation as bodily beings, the incarnation of God in Jesus and the resurrection of the body, are central to Christian revelation and to our understanding of God, the world and humanity. It is therefore not surprising that our disagreements about sexuality and its significance are so visceral at all levels: fundamentally, symbolically, socially and personally, which was true even from the time of Paul.<sup>15</sup> How we understand the body has always been central to Christian mission and in its engagement with diverse cultures. Conflicts have been part of this engagement, some of which illustrate the significance of the body in the life of a culture.

- 4.15 Some have sought to relativize a particular debate as just another example of ‘symbolic politics’ rather than a fundamental disagreement which may be symptomatic of an elemental difference that is systemically significant. Here is one of the key places where we disagree with one another about the significance of the issue at stake in the discussions about sexuality: while I readily admit that it is symbolic, I would suggest that sexuality is also symptomatic of a deeper question relating to elemental matters that affect our whole system of theology. Our vision of the meaning and goal of creation must include an account of bodily existence, giving a trajectory to our interpretation of the image of God in human relations, the human reproduction of life and its extension into the flourishing of human life. For me, heterosexual marriage has a great symbolic significance in our cultures because of its *fundamental* importance in expressing the meaning of our creation and our destiny.<sup>16</sup>
- 4.16 While some might suggest that there are many views on gender, sexuality and marriage, some of which could help us address our current disagreements, it would be wrong to turn simply to the social and human sciences as a way of getting outside a particular perspective, e.g. the traditional biblical perspective. All human sciences and historiography carry their own founding narrative, not least sociology, which has a distinctly secular foundation. There is no neutral starting point outside of the Christian faith or other perspectives. This means

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are having the discussion or disagreement. [It should be noted that the matter of clergy vestments is also included in the Canons (B8)!] The FAOC paper proposes three levels of communion: the ‘apostolic’, ‘ecclesial’ and ‘theologically significant’. For me the sexuality debate focuses on the connection between the apostolic and ecclesial.

<sup>15</sup> See Donaldson [1997]; N.T. Wright explores Paul’s theology of God’s reconciling mission: ‘Paul invented something which with hindsight can be called “Christian theology” because only by giving themselves to this task – learning to think Christianly about God, about God’s people, and God’s future – can the church be sustained and energised in unity and holiness’ (Wright [2015c, 10]. See also Wright [2015b, 29–36].

<sup>16</sup> For an exploration of the symbolic significance of gender difference in marriage in the Biblical account in relation to cultural difference see Wright [2015a, 63–83; but especially, 70].

that there is a Christian theological responsibility for cultural hermeneutics. As Alan Thomson's *Culture in a Post-Secular Context*<sup>17</sup> illustrates, there is much theological work for Western Christianity to do on culture rather than leave interpretation up to social scientists or philosophers.

4.17 For me, the question of the body is so embedded in the Christian perspective and in the practice of the faith, that the remaking of sexual identity and sexual relations amounts to a form of constructivism (in which knowledge and reality are actively created by social relationships and interactions). Such constructivism leads to a revision and conflict with the perspective based on the revelation of God in the flesh of our created bodily existence, supremely in Jesus, the historical risen Lord. Here one of the deepest questions emerges in the sexuality debate: the continuation or obliteration of bodily-based gender. I would say that in Jesus the eschatological significance of gender is affirmed and therefore the pattern of relations based on such differences is interpreted as fundamental.<sup>18</sup> Whilst not denying the significance of the body, others might argue for a perspective centred on the dynamics of desire in relations of difference and otherness.<sup>19</sup> Further commentators would offer a broader analysis using a simple typology: the t-world, the i-world, and the r-world; where t, i and r stand for traditional, individualistic and relational.<sup>20</sup> The disagreements about sexuality may therefore be seen as a dispute between the t-world and the i-world, and the resolution would be a move to the r-world (which still might take many different forms and emphasise diverse and distinctive virtues). In some ways this seems to be where the Anglican debate is now moving, as we discuss the importance of our founding Christian narrative, and its virtues and values as the basis for a **vision for relationships** in families, churches and wider society. Can we – should we – develop a vision for mission that truly acknowledges pluralism, is inclusive in its approach to values, and is based on a distinctive – exclusive – total perspective (what social philosophers call a comprehensive doctrine)?<sup>21</sup>

4.18 A key challenge for the Church of England will be whether we have the time and capacity to address these matters with the depth and quality of debate that is needed. We are working at many levels in this discussion: we are not only discussing sexuality *per se* but are re-evaluating our bodily life through the

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<sup>17</sup> Thomson [2014].

<sup>18</sup> Felker Jones [2007, chapter 5].

<sup>19</sup> See Coakley [2013, chapters 6 and 7]. See also Hill [2015] for a review of how asymmetrical difference develops in Paul's theology.

<sup>20</sup> Kuenhne [2009].

<sup>21</sup> Missiologists have been reflecting on this for a while, especially those like Newbigin. See Hunsberger [1998]. The debate about liberalism and religion has also moved in this direction, see Ahdar and Leigh [2013].

revelation of God's relationship with us expressed in the historical action of God supremely in the person of Jesus and faithfully recorded and explained in the Scriptures by eyewitnesses and inspired authors. This kind of exploration presents a challenge to our synodical governance.

### **Living with Conflict** – Mark Chapman

4.19 Our governance structures are themselves complex and make any discussion of such contested issues highly problematic. Through the twentieth century and especially with the establishment of the Church Assembly in 1919, the Church of England has embraced a system of church government characterised by conflict, horse-trading, and compromises but also occasional hostility between the various party factions. What has emerged in its practice of government is a system established not on the fact that people agree but on the fact of passionately-held disagreement; the Church Assembly and later the General Synod quickly became places where people who disagreed with one another came together to try to make decisions or to make compromises so that they could live with disagreement. Synods were necessary not because of any rather ambitious idea of comprehensiveness, but because of the *disunity* of the church and the need to find a political method of handling conflict. Any theology of synodical government will be a political theology:<sup>22</sup> it will be about compromises and making decisions which are unlikely to be perfect. General Synod – and much the same is true of the other tiers of synodical government down to the Parochial Church Council – is a body which consists of people with very different ideas of what constitutes truth but who have been forced into an institutionalised mechanism for making decisions.

4.20 What is crucial is the study of conflict and power in the church, which Ephraim Radner has recently called 'eristology', or the analysis of Christian divisions in their relation to political power. Whilst conflict might not seem to be positive or desirable, Radner suggests that we must go beyond simply recognising the reality of Christian conflict; instead we should introduce the study of eristology into our understanding of the church:

*I would suggest, in fact, that a more proper framework in which to lodge a discussion of Christian division today would be something like 'eristology' – from the Greek word associated with the goddess of discord. Eristology, then, is the study of hostility in its disordered forms and forces.<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Chapman [2013, 15-31].

<sup>23</sup> Radner [2012, 4ff.].

Radner recognises that an ecclesiology that includes conflict must rest on a doctrine of God that also includes an eristology.

- 4.21 It is consequently crucial to try to grasp something of the nature of political rhetoric and the symbolic discourses it contains: instead of skating over conflict we understand these as at the heart of a Christian discourse that pays proper attention to disagreement. A detailed analysis of the cultural symbolics of politics needs to become the key mode for addressing theological controversy both in the past and in the present. This requires a proper and full discussion of the messiness of the political rhetoric behind (ostensibly) theological language:<sup>24</sup> ‘there is no pure theological discourse’.<sup>25</sup> Christians should not be embarrassed about conflict or politics. Here, a warning from George Orwell in 1946 seems particularly relevant: ‘In our age there is no such thing as “keeping out of politics”. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia’.<sup>26</sup> Ecclesiastical controversy and dispute, then, are very much part of the dirty business of politics.
- 4.22 Through church history there have been frequent slogans and catchphrases about practices and ideas – ‘popish dunghill’ is, after all, a good soundbite. While such slogans often have little impact on the daily lives of most people, they nevertheless instil a sense of identity and security which does not ultimately rely on rational and analytical argument. Personal identity is consequently constructed through the encounters that people have with one another and the ways in which they construct their opponents’ views: words like ‘traditional’ or ‘orthodox’ take on meanings quite detached from anything theological or creedal and can easily be associated with the construction of ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’.<sup>27</sup> As Brittain and McKinnon put it in relation to the current issues surrounding human sexuality, ‘the construction of effective condensational symbols has been an important component of organising opponents of the “liberal agenda”’.<sup>28</sup> Or, as Edelman puts it, ‘people involved in politics are symbols to other observers; they stand for ideologies, values, or moral stances and they become role models, benchmarks, or symbols of threat and evil’.<sup>29</sup> This means that political language exists in part to create rhetorical mechanisms for demonising opponents and robbing them of personality as well as promoting group solidarity.

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapman [2001].

<sup>25</sup> Ward [2000,14–15].

<sup>26</sup> ‘Politics and the English Language’, in Orwell and Angus [1968, I:127-40, 137].

<sup>27</sup> See Schmitt [1996, 27].

<sup>28</sup> Brittain and McKinnon [2011, 357].

<sup>29</sup> Edelman [1988, 2]; see also Kniss [1997].

- 4.23 In all this there is a degree of the fetishisation of the symbolic: ‘The political entities that are most influential upon public consciousness and action ... are fetishes: creations of observers that then dominate and mystify their creators’.<sup>30</sup> Gathering around markers and creating badges or symbols which reinforce group solidarity become key factors in identity-formation, and at the same time make reasoned discussion difficult if not impossible. There is no neutral space: instead everything is marked out by clear boundaries, and strategies are created to ensure that nobody transgresses the boundaries. According to Edelman, there is constant re-enforcement and reiteration: ‘people in the same social situations use similar language to cope with the problems they face; and that kind of predictability is characteristic of a great deal of political language. Most of it is banal, precisely because it reassures speaker and audience that whatever they think will serve their interests is justifiable’. There are wide areas for manipulation and interpretation in the use of language, and in the networks of persuasion. ‘While most political language has little to do with how well people live, it has a great deal to do with the legitimation of regimes and the acquiescence of publics in actions they had no part in initiating’. This seems to resonate with the ways in which language can be used in theological controversy: on many matters that will have no direct effect at all on the voter (or the church member), there will nevertheless be a use of language where people feel that are ‘involved in fateful or significant events’.<sup>31</sup>
- 4.24 What I am suggesting is that any attempt to analyse and provide a way forward through conflict in the church requires a framing of the issues as widely as possible. In particular, there is the need to embrace and understand the messy language of politics and to grasp the potency of ‘condensational symbols’.<sup>32</sup> There is a powerful rhetoric at work in the identity politics of the Anglican Communion and the Church of England that needs to be addressed in detail. The more we are able to analyse and deepen our understanding of condensational symbols, the more we will be able to grasp the underlying fundamental differences and move towards some costly peace (which might be established by redrawing boundaries through a peace treaty rather than a reconciliation of opponents). Identities will be challenged when people are open to the nuances of language and rhetoric, which might perhaps begin with deep facilitated listening. Ultimately this will be about opening ourselves up to the ‘other’, both the transcendental ‘other’, who always remains distinct from any contextualisation and closure, but also to the ‘other’ whose perception of the Good News and its implications remains different from ours. As Graham Ward puts it (somewhat provocatively):

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<sup>30</sup> Edelman [1988, 11].

<sup>31</sup> Edelman [1985, 10-19, 14].

<sup>32</sup> On the use of ‘condensational symbols’ in American politics, see Kelley [2001, 230].



*The institutional churches are necessary, but they are not ends in themselves; they are constantly transgressed by ... an erotic community ... The body of Christ desiring its consummation opens itself to what is outside the institutional Church; offers itself to perform in fields of activity far from chancels and cloisters.*<sup>33</sup>

- 4.25 The practice of Christian listening as a means for addressing conflicts is not about reaching uniformity, still less is it about exclusion; it is about trying to express something of the otherness of God as this is recognised in the communities which exist to proclaim the gospel of his Son, which in turn requires a listening to the 'other' within that very community. Such communities exist in an inter-relationality and interdependence of those who give themselves over to Christ. Of course, there may be splits after listening and there may well be messiness and blurred edges (or in more prosaic language, 'impaired communion') but there is unlikely to be complete separation: agreeing to disagree may be a profoundly liberating step and it may well be a way of resisting violence and promoting an ontology of peace.

#### **Communion, Otherness and Difference – Tim Dakin**

- 4.26 This language of opening up to the 'other', however, can easily slide into a form of pluralism that lacks the most fundamental difference, that between God and the world. This might require us to challenge the language of communion – God as communion; church as communion – which has become such a commonplace in ecumenical discourse. Radner believes that the analogy of communion lacks precision and slides into given ideas of communion, failing to address questions of discipline, excommunication and self-identity. As with all human language applied to God, the use of the term *communion* theologically has carried with it the dangers of shaping our conceptions of God in a way that comes to mirror our own social assumptions or hopes: God ends up looking like a multi-ethnic society, a congress, a church council, a congregation, and so on. What we require for our understanding of 'communion' which is a human and social construct, is that its meaning is informed by *God's* reality, not the other way round.<sup>34</sup> We should therefore also be aware that the use of the phrase 'good disagreement' is itself a rhetorical move, implying the possibility of a communion that affirms disagreement as a good element in the kind of relationships that include fundamental differences. Does 'disagreeing well' put the emphasis somewhere else? I think it might, and may allow for a greater honesty without the sense that the process is also the programme: for it is the priority of God's truth that stands at the heart of our relationships. It's not just about managing *our* disagreements,

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<sup>33</sup> Ward [2000, 180].

<sup>34</sup> Radner [2012, 8].

rather our asymmetrical relationship with God means that there is *a priority to seek the mind of Christ*, acknowledging the priority of God's action.<sup>35</sup>

- 4.27 God's oneness, according to Radner, should shape our understanding of oneness and consequently of communion. Most significantly, oneness and therefore communion cannot be understood without the deeper understanding of God's asymmetrical relationship with creation: 'difference is the stuff, the ground, of created life itself; yet that means that created life demands difference, demands a kind of invention out of nothing for God of something that is not God'.<sup>36</sup> Such a relationship between God and creation includes and addresses the possibility and reality of conflict: 'God's oneness is such that it begins in creation and is fulfilled in the cross and resurrection'.<sup>37</sup> The very reality of creation is itself a 'death' to God: the asymmetrical nature of the difference demands of God a self-outpouring which includes the willingness to be related to a creation that rejects God, and is hostile to the creator; and therefore a willingness to be in a relation in which conflict becomes inevitable.
- 4.28 The significance of Radner's perspective becomes clear if we understand God's Trinitarian relationship with the world – in creating, reconciling and redeeming – as the *missio Dei* fully revealed in Christ. This is the mission in which we are called to participate and which is the fundamental basis for our Christian identity, as individuals, as the church and as a social movement across cultures. Christians are called into an asymmetrical correspondence of relational difference: we are an analogy of the *missio Dei*.<sup>38</sup> The mission of God consequently defines the oneness of God. Christian mission is therefore the site for the outworking of conflict based on God's 'oneness' as revealed in Jesus who holds the asymmetrical difference between God and us in a unity that allows all kinds of relationships of difference to flourish.
- 4.29 One disarmingly simple way of exploring this idea is to suggest that there are two deep alternatives here: a difference-in-unity model or unity-in-difference a model. The unity-in-difference model offers a way of interpreting the world through the unity found in the person of Jesus as both divine and human, showing how the revelation of this unity – that includes asymmetrical difference – can engage with a diversity within the context of pluralism: new difference can be included but there can be no denial of difference, including the denial of the

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Bowald [2006, ch.6]. A conversation which recognises disagreement about Scripture but seeks a hermeneutical virtue is explored by Rogers [2015]. However, if our disagreements are fundamental then we are in the area of inter-faith hermeneutics, e.g. Barnes [1989].

<sup>36</sup> Radner [2012, 12].

<sup>37</sup> Radner [2012, 13].

<sup>38</sup> See Thacker [2007, 46-54] on the four levels of perichoretic knowing, particularly the asymmetrical knowledge of God. See also Ward [2005, chapter 5].

great asymmetrical difference between divinity and humanity. In contrast, the difference-in-unity model takes the pluralism of perspectives as a given and seeks to find a unity in the notion of a shared understanding of religion as seen in the example of Jesus' own religious consciousness, which is fundamental to humanity. To me, the unity-in-difference model looks more like the canonical theism of Christianity and the difference-in-unity model looks more like the Enlightenment search for a common humanity.

- 4.30 Dalferth correlates these two models with the overarching hermeneutics of Barth and Schleiermacher respectively.<sup>39</sup> Both these approaches attempt to engage with revelation and reason and with the internal and external perspectives on faith. I have implied that the unity-in-difference model is more coherent with the logic of Christian mission revealed in Christ (expressing the relational unity-in-difference of Trinitarian mission). This perspective is particularly important for inter-faith dialogue, where some would argue that it is the fundamental logic of a hermeneutic of unity-in-difference – which a traditional view of gender difference upholds – that enables there to be a positive approach to pluralism and to a public space that allows for genuine difference between faiths.
- 4.31 Conflicts in the church and conflicts between Christian mission and wider culture will continue, but the trajectory of the fundamental hermeneutic for how difference is handled is vitally important. In the unity-in-difference model, unity is established in the givenness of God's revelation and worked out in the differences and limitations of that revelation through on-going communication, exploring what has been shown. In the difference-in-unity model, unity is a projection of human hope across human differences which risks the ultimate denial of true and fundamental difference in a common humanity. In the unity-in-difference model difference is truly maintained – as in the difference between the genders, in difference-in-unity, difference may ultimately be denied, including the loss of gender difference.
- 4.32 With unity-in-difference it is possible to plot a pathway of peace; in difference-in-unity that peace is in question because it looks as if unity will have to be imposed through the application of a comprehensive doctrine of universal non-difference. Here we may note Radner's discussion of the dynamics of disagreement in his paper 'Talking about Things we will Never Agree About'. He explores two possibilities, consensus around open-ended disagreement or entrenched disagreement, the latter leading to three options, depending on the ability to voice concerns and the dynamics of loyalty: coercive marginalisation, principled exit, and active disobedience. He thinks interventions by the state to

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<sup>39</sup> See Dalferth [1988, chapters 9–11].

provide same-sex marriage legislation will make entrenched disagreement a more likely outcome.<sup>40</sup>

- 4.33 Summarising his thesis, Radner claims: ‘consensual unity is built up out of and describes a broad range of ways of engaging division, not so much of eliminating it’.<sup>41</sup> Put starkly, what seems to be at stake is an ontology of peace or of violence. I am here implying that a unity-in-difference model has a trajectory of peace. My conviction is that the unity-in-difference model expresses an eschatology of costly peace. In turn, this may also allow us to engage with the deepest question of our humanity and, for Christians, our understanding of divinity: the eschatology of God’s own mission in the world and in his church, bringing us back to God’s costly unity expressed in the unilateral asymmetry of his self-giving in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Common Good – Tim Dakin**

- 4.34 One example of how we might articulate this ontology of peace is to reflect on the importance of the common good within a multicultural context.<sup>42</sup> The common good implies not only that there might be some shared aims, but also that there might already be some shared concerns, for example, the importance of the environment for sustaining the well-being of all. So one way of moving forward, even in the midst of a separation, might be to look at what we share rather than what we do not agree about. This may help to build mutual respect, to acknowledge our differences and to encourage the search for cooperation. Such a process would help the church to move beyond some of the strategies that are equivalent to those used by governments in responding to immigration and multiculturalism: guest-status, forced integration, or parallel development. Such an approach, when there are deep disagreements that may never be resolved, takes the conversation partners away from their own concerns and

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<sup>40</sup> Radner [2010]. Reflecting on the possibility of building consensus based on genuine open-mindedness, Radner suggests that this is unlikely to happen where states have intervened to establish same-sex marriage legislation: ‘This intervention has rendered impossible a balanced ecclesial debate and possible consensus, in the sense of minds coming together (and therefore changing). Because of enacted civil legislation permitting and protecting these same-sex relationships, gay unions/marriages and families (via surrogate conception and gestation or adoption) are now legitimised and upheld by the state, rooted in social ties, and *therefore* ensconced within the membership of many church bodies.’

<sup>41</sup> Radner [2012, 485].

<sup>42</sup> For an eschatological vision of the common good grounded in an ontology of peace see Brueggemann [2010] and Michael Gorman’s summary of his own work: Gorman [2015]. Of course, this approach does not solve the question of how unity relates to holiness. Such a question will not go away (as Paul acknowledged in 1 Corinthians 11.19) but remains part of what it means for God’s name to be hallowed in the expectation that one day every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus (see Goroncy [2013]).

invites them to look at wider issues and how their conversations can be a witness to others, contributing to the wider intercultural debate about the common good of all. So even if there cannot be full agreement about what is common and what is good, the exercise of considering these things may, in itself, help to contribute to the good of all. This is to recognise the need for a foundational narrative that provides the basis for virtues, values and vision, encouraging Christians to embody in their common witness a hermeneutic of unity-in-difference. Such a narrative is known by *faith* in the one God and held in *hope* that all things will one day be united by him in Christ by whom and through whom all things were created in the Spirit of God's *love*.

## Conclusion

- 4.35 Through the course of this paper, our discussions have ranged across conflicts and disagreements in mission and through history and how these frequently symbolically express a whole range of competing identities and visions about what the church should be. We are in agreement about the force and power of such symbols and the importance of paying proper attention to the politics of persuasion in analysing disagreement. Nevertheless we differ over what Tim understands as the homogenising force of 'difference-in-unity' which, he has suggested, can stifle the fundamental unity-in-difference at the heart of the gospel revealed in Jesus and expressed in the Christian life. Mark has suggested that an increasingly nuanced analysis of condensational symbols and the process of political persuasion in church governance can help us identify the otherness of the other in order to continue to move towards that fundamental unity expressed in the life of God himself. It is not clear to him that difference is so clearly distinguished in the two models of unity Tim outlines. While we might disagree, however, both of us would nevertheless express that disagreement – disagreeing well – in our commitment to one another in love and in our commitment to discern together what we understand as the Good News of Jesus Christ as we try to embody a vision for relationships in our often conflicted Church and Communion.

## ***5 The Limits of Diversity***

*Jonathan Goodall and Jeremy Worthen*

The relationship between unity and diversity in the life of the church, a central theme in the Faith and Order Commission's report, has been the subject of intensive study over recent decades. In the first main section of this paper, Jeremy argues that within the ecumenical movement there has been a consistent concern to affirm three propositions here: first, diversity is a proper and normal part of the life of the church; second, diversity and unity belong together in the life of the church and are not fundamentally in tension with one another there; and third, diversity can sometimes undermine the unity of the church and may need to be rejected by the church. The issue for ecumenical theology has been how to articulate all three claims in a coherent and consistent way. Jonathan then turns to the distinctive ways in which Anglicanism has sought to define the limits of diversity. After considering earlier history, he outlines how the Instruments of Communion have come under particular pressures in the twenty-first century and discusses some of the key documents that have sought to address the limits of diversity for the Communion in that context. Finally, we suggest that there may be a danger in this context of merging two distinct if related questions under the general heading of 'the limits of diversity', and benefits in distinguishing them clearly.

### **Introduction**

- 5.1 In recent decades, the question of the limits of diversity has been a growing focus first for theology about relations between churches and communions, and then for theology about relations within the Anglican Communion. Thinking about unity and diversity within the Church of England needs to be mindful of both these areas of work, and indeed the FAOC report is informed by them both at various points. The two main sections of this paper outline each of them in turn in greater depth than was possible in the report itself, before offering some brief comments on the value of 'the limits of diversity' as a way of framing difficult issues in the life of the contemporary church.

### **Legitimate Diversity and its Limits in Ecumenical Theology – Jeremy Worthen**

- 5.2 The recent convergence document from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, includes a

section on 'Communion in Unity and Diversity' (§§28–30).<sup>1</sup> The section begins by asserting that 'Legitimate diversity in the life of communion is a gift from the Lord' (§28), but later emphasises that 'There are limits to legitimate diversity; when it goes beyond acceptable limits it can be destructive of the gift of unity' (§30). These brief paragraphs sum up half a century or so of sustained reflection on the relationship between unity and diversity within the ecumenical movement.

- 5.3 Theologians within the ecumenical movement have generally wanted to hold together three propositions. First, diversity is a proper and normal part of the life of the church. Second, diversity and unity belong together in the life of the church and are not fundamentally in tension with one another there. Third, diversity can sometimes undermine the unity of the church and may need to be rejected by the church. Qualifying diversity in the first two propositions as 'legitimate' is one way to avoid the apparent contradiction between the second and third. How do we tell the difference, however, between the diversity that is proper to the life of the church and is not in tension with its unity (second proposition), and the diversity that is in fact inimical to its unity and has no place within it (third proposition)?
- 5.4 The first of the three propositions, that diversity is a proper and normal part of the life of the church has now become something of a theological cliché. It came to prominence in the 1960s in response to a number of different factors. One was the globalisation of Christianity and the desire to overcome the shadow of colonialism in the way that relations between different parts of the global church are conceived, not least by rejecting the idea that there is a geographical and cultural 'centre' for Christianity to which some churches are nearer than others. That intersected with a more general affirmation of human culture in its diversity as itself a wonderful gift of the bountiful creator. 'Legitimate diversity' could therefore be claimed by Vatican II as integral to the church's mission to the whole of humanity with all its cultural variations.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, its use could also be extended to become a way of accepting the enduring differences of the Orthodox churches and making it clear that the Roman Catholic Church is not seeking their submission or absorption.<sup>3</sup>
- 5.5 The first proposition, then, becomes important as a way of affirming what the FAOC report refers to as the 'pluriformity' of the one church of Jesus Christ. The second proposition develops and clarifies this fundamental point: diversity and unity belong together in the life of the church and are not fundamentally in

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<sup>1</sup> WCC [2013].

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II [1965a §92].

<sup>3</sup> Vatican II [1964, §§16-17].

tension with one another there. If one simply affirms both unity and diversity as goods without explaining the relationship between them, the impression could be given that somehow the church has to find some kind of compromise or balance between them, as if more of one means less of the other. In fact, theologians have wanted to argue, diversity is only the opposite of uniformity, not of the unity that properly belongs to the church.<sup>4</sup>

5.6 *Church as Communion*, a key text from ARCIC II, reflects extensively on the relationship between unity and diversity within the church, linking it to a number of theological motifs. One is mission: 'If the Church is to remain faithfully rooted and grounded in the living truth and is to confess it with relevance, then it will need to develop new expressions of the faith. Diversity of cultures may often elicit a diversity in the expression of the one gospel; within the same community distinct perceptions and practices arise'.<sup>5</sup> A church that is evangelising diverse cultures will grow in diversity while remaining one church with one gospel. Another is eschatology: the document claims that 'God will be truly glorified when all peoples with their rich diversity will be fully united in one communion of love'.<sup>6</sup>

5.7 *Church as Communion* also articulates the relationship between unity and diversity from a rather different perspective, that of salvation as 're-creation': 'In the mystery of his will God intends the church to be the re-creation in Christ Jesus of all the richness of human diversity that sin turns into division and strife (cf. Eph. 1.9–10). Insofar as this re-creation is authentically demonstrated in its life, the church is a sign of hope to a divided world that longs for peace and harmony. It is the grace and gospel of God that brings together this human diversity without stifling or destroying it; the church's catholicity expresses the depth of the wisdom of the Creator'.<sup>7</sup> Here it is not primarily a matter of the church embracing, reflecting or accepting existing cultural diversity for the sake of mission. Rather, the church is itself the place where 'the richness of human diversity that sin turns into division and strife' can be recovered. Indeed, the final sentence hints that the grace that heals us from sin and its effects means that the church has a unique role in enabling human diversity to flourish without negative and destructive effects. The church should be a sacrament of the restoration-transformation in Christ of creation's divinely given diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance Vatican II [1965a §16]; Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches [1993, II.B.23–24]; Second Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) [1998, §27]; International Commission for Anglican – Orthodox Theological Dialogue [2006, III.31].

<sup>5</sup> ARCIC II [1991, §29].

<sup>6</sup> ARCIC II [1991, §23].

<sup>7</sup> ARCIC II [1991, §35].



- 5.8 The idea of the church having a vocation to nurture diversity as a positive task that coheres fully with its vocation to unity recurs in the section of *The Church* that was commented on at the outset; the main text ends by asserting that Christians ‘are called ... to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation in such a way that they can contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole’.<sup>8</sup> Yet while *Church as Communion* in the passage quoted above focuses on human diversity as both a gift of creation and also always at risk from the effects of sin, *The Church* asks us to foster ecclesial diversity as something already established and without any indication that it may be in various ways corroded by sin and ignorance. Now, one might want to argue that ‘legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation’ are as it were ecclesial translations of human cultural diversity, but if so then will they not be subject to the same dynamics of sin and grace as all human cultural diversity, or can it be assumed that they have been wholly sanctified and are therefore to be accepted without discrimination?
- 5.9 That the final, italicised (and unnumbered) paragraph in the section in *The Church* on ‘Communion in Unity and Diversity’ is headed ‘Legitimate and divisive diversity’ would appear to imply that ecclesial diversity is indeed susceptible to distortion from sin and therefore requires an on-going task of ecclesial discernment. The paragraph ends with the request: ‘We invite the churches to consider: what makes common discernment possible?’ It is a good question, and it takes us back to where we began: what is the difference between the diversity that is proper to the life of the church and is not in tension with its unity, and the diversity that is in fact inimical to its unity and has no place within it?
- 5.10 One possible point of departure might be a rather earlier document from the WCC, the statement on ‘The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church’, from the Uppsala Assembly in 1968.<sup>9</sup> This text affirms the intrinsic relationship between diversity and catholicity already in the New Testament, and then says:

*Behind the variety of apostolic activities we discern a double movement: the Church is always ‘being called out of the world and being sent into the world’ (Lund 1952). This double movement is basic to a dynamic catholicity... The constitutive centre of this double movement is corporate worship in which Christ himself is the one who both calls and sends.*

This would seem to be a promising way to hold together the pre-existing human, cultural diversity with which the church in mission engages and the diversity of

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<sup>8</sup> WCC [2013, §30].

<sup>9</sup> Text reprinted in Link [1985, 118–19].

ecclesial traditions which the church in mission in turn produces, as related but not simply identical, with corporate worship as the place where they meet. The statement then relates this analysis directly to the issue of the difference between positive and negative instances of diversity. 'Here we also discern a basis for evaluating the Spirit's gift. A diversity which frustrates the calling and the sending is demonic; the diversities which encourage and enhance the double movement, and therefore advance catholicity, are of different kinds', which the document then briefly lists – including charismatic gifts, 'diverse ways of proclaiming the gospel and setting forth its mysteries' and 'different patterns of organisation'.

- 5.11 The presentation here remains highly compressed – no more than an outline sketch. Yet it makes a number of interesting moves. The first is quite simply to insist that the evaluation of diversity proceed in the light of the church's calling here on earth. That suggests that 'common discernment' between churches, such as *The Church* asks for, needs to rest on a shared understanding of that calling. The second is to invoke the Ignatian tradition of the discernment of spirits, which recognises the activity of evil as well as grace, knows that it is easy to mistake one for the other and accepts that time is needed for the task, including time to revisit what may initially have appeared clear enough. The third is a reminder that the evaluation specific to this case is the evaluation of the diversity as such, rather than of its various constituent elements – this or that form of liturgy, this or that theological formulation, this or that ethical position.
- 5.12 To bring these three points together, in order to navigate the potential tension between the three propositions about unity and diversity noted as key for ecumenical theology over the past half-century at paragraph 3 above, we need to have some way to tell 'positive' from 'negative' diversity. The specific kind of judgment needed here is not so much the doctrinal or moral judgment required to assess a particular belief or practice, but rather a careful act of spiritual discernment that asks: does the existence of the diversity that has developed in *this* specific aspect of the church's life, compromising these various concrete forms, serve the purposes of the church as called and sent by Christ? In many cases this will be an important question, but it will not be the only or the most important one in all cases of serious disagreement in church life. Human life as well as church life involves us constantly in asking: is this belief true, and is this course of action good? Framing the approach to such questions in terms of the ecclesiological thinking developed by the ecumenical movement about the limits of diversity is not always going to be productive.

## Anglican Comprehensiveness and the Limits of Diversity – Jonathan Goodall

- 5.13 When a reformed local church rapidly emerged in England from centralised late medieval Catholicism it did so, not only under the auspices of political authority, but as a participant of a kind of conciliarism in a new mode. Newly isolated from the Latin tradition, the Church of England nonetheless needed to shape a future faithful to the authority of Christ, even as its independence was subject to the outworking of state policy and polity. Initially in relation (synchronically) to the practice of ‘the best of [continental] reformed churches’, then increasingly in dialogue (diachronically) with the patristic theological consensus, there was a growing sense that the local church ‘had to determine its *own* doctrine, not the prince; and the church had to be defined as the ensemble of Christian communities that were prepared to accept the critical pressure of Scripture upon the existing arrangements of ecclesiastical polity’.<sup>10</sup>
- 5.14 By beginning in this way I want both to recall the complexities of the early consolidation of the reformed Church of England (the tradition donated in due course to wider ‘Anglicanism’) and also to indicate that from that outset the question of the ‘limits of legitimate diversity’ was, as it is now, a phase or a dimension of a much larger process of engagement with authority in the church, ultimately the authority of Christ and the promised Holy Spirit leading into all truth. The limits of local or contextual diversity, like the claims of universal and fundamental unity, are integral to a process of obedient listening, argumentation, discernment, repentance, mutual decision-making, conciliar agreement, authoritative declaration, ecclesial reception and transmission through successive generations.
- 5.15 In the course of the often repressive and violent experiences of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it became clear that the theological commitments of the reformed Church of England were never purely a matter of the strictly local judgment of a national church. Final appeal may have been strictly reserved to the rule of local law; but discernment and worship drew on the established sources and methods of wider and more ancient Christian orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup> Thus theologically, as well as in social terms of more concern to the civil authorities, an ethos of ‘comprehensiveness’ developed in Anglican identity, method and practice: a dialectical tension between the Church’s catholicity and hierarchical continuities and its evangelical and prophetic vocation, principally expressed liturgically and canonically rather than magisterially. Over the

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<sup>10</sup> Williams [2009, section I].

<sup>11</sup> Williams [2009, section II]: ‘this interest in the early Church was ... a serious effort to articulate and display the ‘grammar’ of a universal Christian language as it was reflected inseparably in theological speculation and liturgical worship prior to those major schisms which had destroyed the visible unity of Christendom.’

centuries this 'reformed catholic' charism, renewed by various revival movements, came to be viewed as a characteristic of Anglicans. This was the Anglican 'genius', the Anglican gift to the wider Christian mind. It made Anglican tradition and practice recognisable to Christians of diverse confessions, promoting contact and dialogue before the ecumenical movement formally began, and giving a singularly positive and promising role to Anglican engagement once formal ecumenical dialogues were underway.

- 5.16 But the transfer of ecclesiastical autonomy from the 'mother church' to newly viable local churches around the world meant also the transfer to them of the quandary of historic Anglicanism, a quandary that was embedded in its comprehensiveness: namely, the consequences of the *rejection* of a central executive and teaching office across the church catholic, together with an *acceptance* of obedience and accountability to the apostolic tradition of the catholic church. Localism would increasingly be in tension with universalism, diversity in tension with unity, if in addition to the primary instruments (of unity)—Scripture, the Creeds, the Sacraments as provided in the Book of Common Prayer, and the historic three-fold order— secondary instruments (of governance) were not found which could resolve disputes and promote full and visible communion between Anglicans.
- 5.17 The given instrument was the See of St Augustine. Where the archbishopric did not have jurisdiction it had a primacy of honour and respect as the focus—or as the Anglican Communion Covenant came to describe it, the 'focus and means'—of unity among the bishops and thus among the local churches, who are in full communion with him. From the late 1860s this episcopal collegiality has been expressed in an episcopal conference, convened and presided over by the archbishop, thus providing Communion-wide opportunities for counsel and mutual encouragement and teaching. It is not constituted as an episcopal synod (which is not to say it should not be); but nor is it organised along the lines of the autonomous local churches. Its teaching and moral authority is the authority of the gathered episcopate of Anglican local churches exercising the universal features of episcopal ministry: guarding the faith and unity of the church, and equipping those churches in their care for the work of ministry and mission.
- 5.18 By contrast the two more recently established instruments of communion—the ACC and the Primates Meeting (which have more frequent opportunities to meet than the episcopate as a whole)—*are* reflective of a certain localism, having been constituted on the basis of provincial identities. It was the Primates Meeting which the 1998 Lambeth Conference specifically requested to 'include among its responsibilities ... intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces, and giving of

guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity in submission to the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture and in loyalty to our Anglican tradition and formularies'.<sup>12</sup>

- 5.19 From the 1960s on, the prominence of a theology of communion in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council gave added momentum and coherence to dialogue among a wide range of ecumenical partners; and among Anglicans it encouraged an intensification of the vocation to communion and the acceleration of the development of instruments which honoured the legacy of a non-centralised ecclesial body that nonetheless believed itself accountable to the norms of Christian judgment in Scripture, tradition and reason.<sup>13</sup> But it was also clear that major disagreements in doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters were emerging among Anglicans that would test very severely that intensification of relationships and shared obedience, and potentially derail the ecumenical achievement thus far.
- 5.20 In the opening address of the 1988 Lambeth Conference, Archbishop Robert Runcie put the challenge this way:

*Let me put it in starkly simple terms: do we really want unity within the Anglican Communion? Is our worldwide family of Christians worth bonding together? Or is our paramount concern the preservation or promotion of that particular expression of Anglicanism which has developed within the culture of our own province? ... I believe the choice between independence and interdependence, already set before us as a Communion in embryo twenty-five years ago, is quite simply the choice between unity or gradual fragmentation.*

- 5.21 The result was the commissioning of the Virginia Report, which came for discussion ten years later at the 1998 Lambeth conference. In the framework of a Trinitarian ecclesiology (much influenced by ecumenical debate, especially the 1993 ARCIC statement *Church as Communion* discussed in the previous section and from 1989 the Anglican-Orthodox focus on ecclesiology), it contained the most sustained treatment to date of the growing issue of the limits of legitimate diversity ('if the Gospel imperative of unity and communion is to be maintained'), as well as recommendations as to how the existing organs of unity would need to be strengthened. The conference requested the Primates to oversee a decade of study on the report including whether 'effective communion, at all levels', does not require appropriate instruments including a

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<sup>12</sup> Lambeth [1998, Resolution III.6 (b)].

<sup>13</sup> See especially the Anglican Consultative Council Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission [1986].

universal ministry. But at that same controversial conference, and throughout the same decade, decisive divisions began to open up.

- 5.22 As the chief ecumenical guest in 1998, Cardinal Cassidy preached a homily<sup>14</sup> (which his successor Cardinal Kasper was to recall at the 2008 conference): ‘The commitment to unity is relativised’ Cassidy warned,

*if diversity and differences that cannot be reconciled with the Gospel are at the same time being embraced and exalted. It is put in question when pluralism in the Church comes to be regarded as a kind of ‘postmodern’ beatitude... The Virginia Report is surely right to argue that, ‘At all times the theological praxis of the local church must be consistent with the truth of the gospel which belongs to the universal Church’; and that the universal Church sometimes has ‘to say with firmness that a particular local practice or theory is incompatible with Christian faith.*

- 5.23 Under the pressure of increasing localism in the Communion (driven by legal autonomy and missional contextualisation), of scrutiny by ecumenical partners, and of the incapacities of the instruments of communion to safeguard the unity they were intended to express, the heritage of Anglican comprehensiveness was showing its serious ambiguities and weaknesses. Serious study of the Virginia Report was overtaken by the well-known decisions and events that unfolded from 2003 in North America, and a new process fitting more precisely the needs of the time—the Windsor Process—was pursued, involving all the instruments of communion even as they experienced their own inadequacies to answer ‘urgent (and potentially divisive and destructive) questions concerning the received tradition, the *consensus fidelium*, and the limits of the diversity that can be sustained within the life of the Communion’.<sup>15</sup> Some provinces of the Communion were already unable to recognise one another, and declared it; others maintained participation but with the assertion of autonomy.

- 5.24 The story of the on-going crisis of the last decade is painfully familiar. In the course of that process, the Windsor Continuation Group once again addressed directly the question of the limits of diversity:

*Churches are enabled to live in communion because they recognise one another as truly an expression of the One Church of Jesus Christ. If mutual recognition of faithful discipleship, the preaching of the Word of God or the ordered administration of the Sacraments is threatened, then the entire foundation of the Communion is undermined. This is why although Anglicans remain committed to a generous accommodation of diversity,*

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<sup>14</sup> Cassidy [1998].

<sup>15</sup> Lambeth Commission on Communion [2004, §5].

*there must ultimately be some limit to the extent of the diversity which can be embraced. This limit is the point where the fellowship of Churches can no longer recognise in one of its members the faithfulness to Christ which flows from communion with the Father, in the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. If the recognition of one another as Churches is to be sustained, it implies a level of mutual accountability in the handling of the life of each Church.<sup>16</sup>*

- 5.25 Where does all of this leave the historic notion of Anglican comprehensiveness referred to at the start of this section? Cardinal Kasper offered an analysis of the underlying ecclesiological challenge in 2006.<sup>17</sup> He considers Catholic and Protestant ecclesial *principles*, where the Catholic ‘principle’ is concerned for the structural unity of the church, the inner unity of its intrinsic being, and the Protestant ‘principle’ focuses on the church as a dynamic, Spirit-given reality, and its constant need for renewal. He reflects on Anglicanism within this context, seeing the ‘Anglican principle of comprehensiveness’ as the endeavour to achieve a harmonious balance between Catholic and Protestant principles, but which is now set in a worldwide ecumenical situation so radically changed ‘as to run virtually counter to the ecumenical movement towards unity’. With both principles intensifying and pulling away from one another, Kasper said,

*It is understandable that the Anglican Communion, which hopes somehow to hold the two together, suffers particularly under the consequent polarisation. To me the only possible solution seems to be to turn back once more to the fundamentals of ecumenical theology.*

Just where that might take the Anglican Communion at the present moment, however, is far from clear.

### **Further Reflections – Jeremy Worthen**

- 5.26 I tried to argue at the end of my earlier section that the ecumenical question about the limits of diversity needed itself to be limited and not allowed to become a way of framing every disagreement in the life of the church. In the light of Bishop Jonathan’s presentation of how ‘the limits of diversity’ has functioned as a key phrase in recent thinking about the Anglican Communion, I am minded to ask: is it the best frame for understanding current issues there and formulating a response to them?

- 5.27 Another way to make the same underlying point might be to distinguish two perfectly good ecclesiological questions about the limits of diversity. The first –

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<sup>16</sup> Windsor Continuation Group [2009, §52].

<sup>17</sup> Kasper [2008, 78-88].

which has been the classic question for the ecumenical movement – would be: is it a good and proper thing that diversity in respect of some particular area of practice and expression is expressed and affirmed as *gift* within our relationship of communion? The second, on the other hand, would be: is this a theological disagreement in which contradictory responses – including practical responses – can be borne as *challenge and task* within our relationship of communion? They are both important questions for churches to grapple with, and indeed they may often be intertwined, but they are by no means the *same* question.

- 5.28 To take the example of the ordination of women, very few Anglicans, I should think, would want to answer ‘yes’ to the first question were it to be asked about this subject: most Anglicans think that difference on this point is not God-given diversity that calls for affirmation, but rather hope and pray that unanimity on this point will one day prevail. On the other hand, all Anglicans with a strong sense of belonging to the Anglican Communion are bound to answer ‘yes’ to the second question on the same subject: we are maintaining ecclesial communion between churches that not only believe different things about this but are acting decisively on those beliefs in terms of ordaining – or not ordaining – women to the diaconate, priesthood and episcopate. We consider this to be a disagreement that can be borne within our relationship of communion. We can continue to walk together while we work this one out.
- 5.29 Lumping both questions together under the heading ‘the limits of diversity’ may not therefore be helpful, as the FAOC report implies. Where there are serious theological disagreements about belief and practice in the life of the church, the substantive issues need to be addressed and the right context for doing that in terms of structures of authority identified. In some cases, one outcome of that may be a framing of the issue in terms of the first type of question about the limits of diversity – but only in some cases. *Crucially, recognising that an affirmative answer cannot be given in terms of the first question does not mean that a negative answer also has to be given to the second.*
- 5.30 Muddling the two together may therefore not only create for some a misleading impression that pluralism has come ‘to be regarded as a kind of “postmodern” beatitude’ (para. 22 above), as if contradictory theological positions were no more than expressions of cultural context that must be embraced as complementary facets of the church’s wonderful diversity. It also raises the stakes of disagreement in a deeply unhelpful and indeed dangerous way, as if not being able to affirm each other’s theological positions as part of the church’s proper and God-given diversity inevitably means that we cannot continue in communion with one another. The effect in both cases is to leave no real space for good disagreement in the life of the church, and it is precisely that space that



the FAOC report seeks to explore as critical for the unity of the church today, and in particular for the Church of England.

### Further Reflections – Jonathan Goodall

- 5.31 Critical indeed: but are your two distinct questions not also *cumulative*? The *dynamic* character of the ‘challenge and task’ which is key to the second (key, that is, to the ‘goodness’ of any disagreement) surely *prepares* what we might call a ‘community of *mutual loyalty*’—whether that ‘community’ is a particular ecclesial body (like the Church of England), or a communion of such bodies (like the Anglican Communion), or ‘separated’ communions that have *declared* their certain if incomplete communion and are unequivocally *committed* to a common vision of unity (like the Communion and its ecumenical partners)—for a more clearly recognisable answer to the first: i.e., whether a particular disagreement represents on the one hand a *bearable* anomaly given *momentum towards* greater visible unity, or on the other an emergent divergence and lessening of mutual recognisability. Thus, to continue your example, the Church of England recently acknowledged as a matter of *principle*, that its own ‘clear decision’ on ministry and gender is ‘set *within a broader process* of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God’. (Notice those three ‘communities’ of *loyalty* again.) The question is now how it continues to submit its decision to the authoritative mind of the universal church, recognising that our divergences and separations are themselves a condition not to say an obstacle to that common mind. As Ephraim Radner observed in our consultations, ‘Parties to church disputes more often than not *do not* recognise their common bonds, *do not* use their disagreements to grow into fuller agreements’. So I want to offer three final observations about diversity and its limits from an ecumenical point of view which may be helpful.
- 5.32 First: the *authority* to which all Christians are submitted is *the Divine purpose* ‘to gather up all things in Christ – all things earthly and heavenly’; the church is the unique *inheritor* and *participant* (‘sign, instrument and foretaste’), the sacrament, of that divine purpose of the ‘reconciliation of all things’, ‘set forth in Christ’ (Eph. 1.5–12). This link between the *inherited purpose* of the Christian *oecumene* (the Church Catholic) and the *unity of all things* created and re-created in Christ must be the frame for, and felt pressure on, all our disagreements. Properly understood, the goal of the ecumenical movement is not primarily unity between separated churches, but the manifestation — like Christ *in time* — of the kingdom of the Triune God, which requires the visible unity of the church.

- 5.33 A second observation flows from this: the God whose purpose is manifest in unity is a God whose being does not approve a 'legitimate' diversity, but rather *requires* difference, otherness. Father, Son, Holy Spirit: perfectly one and perfectly other, difference as well as unity (the difference between whom is that each is not the other), the criterion as well as the guarantor of all created otherness and variety. There can be for the Triune God no dynamic of *divergence*, or *convergence*, but a perfect *perichoresis* between those who are one, a *communicatio idiomatum*. *Difference-in-unity* is as fundamental to the life of the church as it is to God himself.
- 5.34 But this reveals an important semantic point: a third observation. Diversity is the most-used word in this discussion to mean variety, but it is not actually a very helpful term when considering disagreement, derived as it is from a verb meaning 'moving apart', turning aside, the exact opposite of convergence. As I've already stressed, from an ecumenical perspective, the unity of the church *requires* rather than merely accommodates difference as well as unity. No two recipients of the gospel and the apostolic witness—individuals or cultures—receive it and respond in *exactly* the same way. However, we are assured that gospel (with divine authority) *transforms* alike all its recipients, making those previously *unrecognisable* to each other *recognisable*, 'one'. Diversity in the church must be understood therefore in the sense of *recognisable and interdependent difference* rather than the *consequence of divergence*.
- 5.35 This clarification also tempers our use of phrases such as 'legitimate diversity', or 'reconciled diversity'. 'Legitimate diversity' refers to variety in teaching or practice which neither prevents nor diminishes mutual recognition and reception. But it needs its parallel, 'legitimate unity'. The Triune life and purpose of God no more endorses any kind of unity than it does any kind of diversity. Similarly, 'reconciled diversity' must mean (if it's justified at all) a diversity that is no longer *divergent* or contradictory; but a mutually recognisable difference, a difference springing from creation and re-creation rather than the fall, that expresses both the reality of ecclesial diversity and the obedience of apostolic fidelity.

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