

Taking the Anglican Communion Seriously



by Terry Buckle and Archie Pell



Anglican Agenda Series ♦ J.I. Packer, editor

Taking the Anglican Communion Seriously

by
Terry Buckle
and
Archie Pell

published by



**Anglican Network
in Canada**

Preface To The Series

The Anglican Agenda series of publications aims to open up current questions that call for thought, discussion, prayer and decision among members of the Anglican Church of Canada at this time. The series is sponsored by the Essentials movement, which seeks all-round renewal of life and strength in the Anglican Church, and its writers are Anglican Church personnel speaking out of their loyalty to the Church and their acute sense of its present needs. It is hoped that the series will spark deep personal reflection and group discussion within and between parishes, so that we all may be better prepared for the difficult and demanding era into which, as it seems, our Church is now entering.

J.I.PACKER
Editor

The Most Rev. Terry Buckle is Bishop of the Yukon and Metropolitan Archbishop of the Province of British Columbia.

The Rev. Dr. Archie Pell is a Sessional Lecturer in the Anglican Studies Programme at Regent College.

The Rev. Dr. J.I.Packer is Board of Governors Professor of Theology at Regent College and Assistant Minister at St. John's Church, Shaughnessy, Vancouver.

Taking the Anglican Communion Seriously

Published by
Anglican Network in Canada
Box 1013,
Burlington, ON, Canada, L7R 4L8
Web: www.anglicannetwork.ca
Email: info@anglicannetwork.ca

ISBN: 0-9781653-1-4

Copyright © 2006 by Terry Buckle and Archie Pell.

No part of this publication may be copied, photocopied, reproduced, translated or reduced to any electronic medium or machine-readable form, in whole or in part, without specific permission of the copyright owner.

Printed in Canada.

Taking the Anglican Communion Seriously

Terry Buckle and Archie Pell

It seems true to say that the average Anglican today is much more aware of the Anglican Communion than Anglicans have been at any other time in history. Largely this is due to controversy over the issues around homosexuality, particularly in the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A.. Modern technology has created an information-sharing boom never experienced in society before. News today travels very quickly from person to person, church body to church body, country to country and allows immediate negative or positive reaction to the information that is shared.

The Anglican Communion has been, in these recent years, stretched to the limit by the actions and reactions of many of its members and of its leadership. It has often been front and centre in secular media and church media reporting. This has brought confusion, dissension, separation, and pain to many Anglicans. And it has created for all a stark awareness of the fact that what one part of the Anglican Communion says or does can adversely affect another part of the Anglican Communion. With this awareness we are brought to the realization that we cannot act in disregard for other parts of the Communion, even if we do stress our autonomy as a Province within that Communion, without jeopardizing something of deep significance to us all as Christians.

What is it then that we value in our relationship together as the worldwide Anglican Communion? At deepest level, the authors believe, it is a spiritual value, not just an institutional and organizational value, namely the value of Anglican good will. We believe that this connects strongly with the teaching of Holy Scripture in regard to what it means today to be the Church in the world:

“And God placed all things under his [Jesus’] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1: 22-23).

The identity of Anglican Christians as part of the church in the world today is largely indicated, for good or for ill, by the way we see each other and relate to each other in obedience to our Lord within the Anglican Communion. Our identity as a church implies a personal and corporate relationship with Christ as Lord “who is head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” We as a church are a communion, and as such we are called to be representatives, to each other and to the world, of our Lord Jesus Christ, “who is head over everything for the church.” The church belongs to God and exists for his purpose, and the kingdom and glory of Jesus are central to that purpose. All Anglicans need to care deeply about this.

This raises another question for us and for our church: “How then are we to faithfully follow our Lord Jesus Christ together in the Anglican Communion as his church today?” It is our conviction that there is no more faithful way to follow Christ than to follow the directives of Holy Scripture. Since we fail so often to do this as we should, an attitude of repentance is required of all of us. To heed the instruction given by the Apostle Paul to the Ephesian Church will lead us into being a Communion worthy of God’s call:

“As a prisoner for the Lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”
(Ephesians 4:1-6)

Our world has become small. We bump into each other as never before. It is in this context that we are called “to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Therefore as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in this present time, we as a Communion need to prayerfully find a way to demonstrate in our everyday life and in

our relationships with one another, the truth of who and what we are as the world-wide Anglican Communion in Christ.

Let us consider then how the Anglican Communion historically came into being and how it has attempted to answer that most important question, “How then are we to faithfully follow our Lord Jesus Christ together in the Anglican Communion as his church today?”

The Anglican Communion in History

It was at the suggestion of the Canadian Synod, and with the support and invitation of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Thomas Longley, that a world conference of bishops was called to meet with the Archbishop at Lambeth Palace in the year 1867. There was a reluctance to meet on the part of some bishops who were fearful that the conference would seek to become a council with power to legislate for the church. However, as Archbishop Longley stated then, it would be a body that would pass only advisory resolutions; that remains true today. The Lambeth Conference has met every tenth year, more or less, since 1878 as a visible expression of the whole Anglican Communion. Even today, among some there is concern, even fear, about the establishment in any form of a central legislative authority in the Anglican Communion.

In the year 1867 seventy-six bishops met together at Lambeth Palace with Archbishop Longley. More than 130 years later, in 1998, it was deeply impressive for Archbishop Terry to witness the largest Lambeth Conference ever, with seven hundred and fifty bishops meeting to worship and to pray, to talk and to study the Bible together. Daily worship in the traditions of the different Anglican Provinces from around the world and the united prayer and praise of representatives from so many nations was an awesome experience. Daily Bible study in small groups of bishops from varying countries generated a very strong sense of following one Lord together. The study of Holy Scripture thus drew the bishops together, challenging them and shaping them with a growing awareness of their oneness in Christ.

In a similar way, periodic Anglican Congresses have provided the vision and the opportunity for Anglican delegates from around the world to gather at a central location and prayerfully to focus on the life and mission of the church. There was such a Congress in

1963 in Toronto. As a young Church Army Captain, Archbishop Terry had the happy experience of sharing in some of that conference. A life-changing memory of it stays with him: “We had gathered in a large room for prayer; in the midst of our praying two Ugandan Priests walked into the room. They bore the presence of our Lord (unbeknown to them, I am sure, but clearly obvious to most of those present). Their presence among us was an inspiration moving each one to pursue a life of fullest commitment to Christ. It was a gift to us. This vision-giving experience was enabled by the gathering together of the worldwide Anglican Family.”

The forming of the Anglican Consultative Council came about as a result of a resolution of the 1968 Lambeth Conference that affirmed the need for more frequent and more representative contact among the Churches of the Anglican Communion than was possible through the conference of bishops. After the general synods and conventions of the member Churches of the Anglican Communion had accepted the constitution of the Council, it came into being in 1969 and first met in 1971. This Council meets every two or three years. It includes bishops, clergy, and lay members, one of each group being appointed by each of the 38 provinces of the Communion.

Archbishop Donald Coggan, the 101st Archbishop of Canterbury, established the Primates’ Meeting in 1978, and these gatherings have occurred regularly ever since. The purpose of the Primates’ Meeting is to provide opportunity for “leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation.” In the recent crises within Anglicanism, the Primates’ Meetings have been important, since they have provided a voice whereby the wider Anglican world can propose the means for the resolution of particular local differences.

These three structures, the Lambeth Conferences, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates’ Meeting, exist for the purpose of enabling the worldwide Anglican Communion to be true to the call of God, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as a significant part of the world church today. For most Anglicans, the Anglican Communion itself is one such structure.

However, there are some complexities behind the term “Anglican Communion” that require careful consideration. At its simplest, the term “Anglican Communion” refers to all those churches — diocesan, national, and regional — that are in com-

munion with the Archbishop of Canterbury and that recognize the leadership of whoever holds that office. But in these days of dispute and uncertainty, that simple definition is beginning to fray at the edges as we discover that not everyone agrees with what it means to be “in communion” or how to define “Anglican.”

Let us begin with the word “communion.” Most Anglicans associate that word with the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; it can mean the service itself and/or the act of receiving the bread and the wine. To be “in communion” indicates that a person or a group feels able to gather around the Lord’s Table with some other person or group to receive the consecrated elements together. There is a spiritual union among them, and sharing the sacrament with each other is a tangible way to express that union. In the New Testament the spiritual union among Christians is based on the close personal union between each believer and the risen Christ. Because each is united to Christ by faith and all are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, through him they are united to each other. The image of a wheel may be helpful here; the spokes of the wheel (Christians) are united and held together by their attachment to the central hub (Christ) so that they form a whole wheel (the church).

But that simple New Testament understanding has been disrupted. As differences arose among Christians — whether on central matters such as the divinity of Christ, or on lesser matters such as the appropriate age for baptism — particular groups began to discriminate about whom they were “in communion” with. From the first, adherents of the apostolic faith would not share the sacrament with those deemed heretics, such as the Gnostics. At no stage would churches that held to conciliar orthodoxy on the Trinity and the Incarnation join in communion with any who denied it. At the Reformation the Lutherans, the Reformed and the Anglicans would not gather at the Lord’s Table with Anabaptists whom they saw as erratic revolutionaries splitting off, like the Donatists of Augustine’s day, from the body of Christ on earth. Meantime, the Roman Catholic church declined to welcome to Mass any Christians who did not accept the authority of the Pope, and this continues today. Anglicans are of course included in that exclusion. Later, as Christianity spread to Africa, the Americas, and Asia during the age of exploration and colo-

nialism, Anglicans outside England would see themselves as “not in communion” with their Presbyterian or Baptist neighbours, for example, but fully “in communion” with Canterbury and those dioceses and congregations that also looked to Canterbury for leadership and support.

However, with the spread of Anglicanism around the world, it became necessary to define “Anglican” as more than being in communion with the See of Canterbury. The 1789 Preface of the first *American Book of Common Prayer* makes no reference to Canterbury, but gives a doctrinal definition of the form the newly independent church would take: “This church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship; or further than local circumstances require.” What this meant became clear in 1801 when the General Convention of the American church accepted as doctrine the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, changing only Article 37, “on civil magistrates,” to exclude royalist references.

In Canada a century later, the first General Synod defined what it meant to be Anglican in the *Solemn Declaration* of 1893 (found near the front of *The Book of Common Prayer, 1962*, on page *viii*). Here “Anglican” means “in full communion with the Church of England throughout the world” with a declared intention “to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Writ, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same in ‘The Book of Common Prayer’ ...and in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion.” In short, then, to our Canadian Anglican forbears, being Anglican involved three things: (1) connection to the Church of England worldwide, (2) submission to the authority of Scripture, and (3) faithfulness to the form of Christianity mediated through the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles.

Anglicans throughout the world have, for the most part, defined their Anglicanism as the Canadian church did, specifically by connection to Canterbury and/or England and by doctrine found in the Book of Common Prayer and the Articles of Religion. Yet in an official publication of the Anglican Communion Office in 1991, *The Anglican Communion, a Guide*, the emphasis was on the structural connections centred on the Archbishop of Canterbury, the so-

called “Instruments of Unity” that were brought to everyone’s attention by the *Windsor Report* in 2004. Those “instruments” are:

FIRST the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, supported by a staff employed for Anglican Communion work.

SECOND the Lambeth Conference of all Anglican diocesan bishops worldwide, summoned by the personal invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

THIRD the Primates’ Meeting, called together every two or three years by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

FOURTH the Anglican Consultative Council, made up of one layperson, one priest and one bishop from every Province of the Anglican Communion, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as *ex officio* president.

This view of the Anglican Communion reflects the view of some that “Anglican” is defined by relationships and structures. Each country and province is established by local decisions and legislation. Each province is free to set up its own standards for doctrine, liturgy, and discipline. All that binds these provinces into a worldwide communion is mutual affection plus a common ethos symbolized by the Archbishop of Canterbury and reflected in the non-legislative nature of the Instruments of Unity.

Over the years some have attempted to widen this structural approach to defining Anglicanism by appealing to the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 which speaks of four marks of the church:

FIRST, recognition of the Holy Scriptures as containing everything necessary for salvation.

SECOND, acceptance of the Apostles Creed as the baptismal symbol and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

THIRD, recognition of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as instituted by Christ.

FOURTH, acceptance of the historic episcopate, locally adapted, for the administration of the church’s life.

The difficulty with using this formula to define Anglicanism is

that it was never intended to be used in this way. It was the bishops' attempt to establish a basic minimum for the negotiating of church union with other denominations throughout the world: no less, and no more.

The Anglican Communion in Crisis

The growth of Anglican churches in Africa and Asia has changed the complexion of the Anglican Communion in many ways. At present the average Anglican is not to be found in the traditional Anglican strongholds of Britain, North America, and Australia, where only a small minority of the world's practising Anglicans now live. The average Anglican is 30 years old, black, and lives in Africa. To such a person, defining Anglicanism by structures and relationships looking back to England does not have the resonance of ethnicity and culture that white Anglo-Saxons still feel, if only unconsciously. Global South Anglicans are looking for more, and their search has been given added impetus by the current crisis in "Old West" Anglicanism. So, through its bishops and primates, the church in the Global South has begun to ask that shared faith and common doctrine be given greater importance in determining membership in the Anglican Communion. One example of this was the 2005 decision by the Nigerian church to no longer define "Anglican" by reference to a relationship with the See of Canterbury or the Church of England, but simply by the doctrine expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion.

It is against this background that the current crisis in the Anglican Communion has to be seen, for it has led many Anglicans to re-examine the Anglican Communion as it now exists. The presenting issue is the Christian response to physical same-sex activity. The Canadian diocese of New Westminster has authorized the blessing of same-sex unions and provided an approved rite for use in parishes that decide to offer such blessings. The Episcopal Church (USA) has consecrated as Bishop of New Hampshire a divorced man openly living in a same-sex relationship. Through their synods, bishops, and primates, the majority of Anglicans in the world have expressed dismay that these actions were taken against the spirit and wording of the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference in 1998 and the Primates' Meeting in 2002. Many provinces and dioceses have declared

a state of “impaired communion” or “broken communion” between themselves and the two jurisdictions that had chosen to act contrary to the will of the Communion expressed through two of the “instruments of union.” This crisis has brought to the fore issues about the nature of the church and of communion that need to be openly acknowledged and dealt with for the Anglican Communion to continue.

The obvious difficulty is how to decide whether this issue is “communion-breaking.” A key tenet of Anglican ecclesial life has been local autonomy. Article 34 (of the Thirty-Nine Articles) states that “every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.” In practice this has been acted upon by Anglicans in various parts of the world to revise forms and means of worship so that they connect with the local culture. For example, a pipe organ may be appropriate in England, but drums are a more suitable aid to worship in Africa. Local autonomy has allowed Anglican churches around the world to organize their own structures and priorities in order to carry out the mission of the church in their own political, ethnic, and cultural contexts. Certainly there are Anglicans who would defend these controversial actions in Canada and the USA on the basis of this principle of local autonomy.

But another key Anglican tenet is the authority of Scripture. Article 20 states that “the church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, authority in Controversies of Faith; And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written.” Historically, Anglican declarations and pronouncements have regularly restated this doctrinal principle — for example, in the *Solemn Declaration* of 1893 and the Lambeth Quadrilateral noted earlier. Many public statements by Anglicans that criticized the actions in New Westminster and New Hampshire emphasized that these actions were unacceptable because they were contrary to Bible teaching, and more particularly to the gospel of new life in Christ that the Bible sets forth. On the other hand, some have defended the same actions on the grounds that there are different legitimate ways to read and understand Scripture. Debate on this continues, though sometimes in a way that brings to mind Sydney Smith’s comment on two women stand-

ing in their doorways and yelling contradictions at each other across the street: “They will never agree; they argue from different premises.” But we cannot go into that now.

Richard Baxter, reflecting St. Augustine, wrote, “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” The difficulty in Anglicanism at the moment lies in identifying the essentials in relation to which the limits of “communion” can be defined. This difficulty arises, in the view of many, because the “instruments of unity” are only expressions of affection, not a means of reaching definitions of essentials and then holding members of the Communion accountable for upholding those essentials. Defenders of the Diocese of New Westminster have responded to criticism that the diocese violated the resolution of the 1998 Lambeth Conference by claiming that Lambeth resolutions are advisory, not legislative; provinces and dioceses are free to differ with them.

Meeting for two weeks in the summer of 1963 in Toronto, the Anglican Congress that Archbishop Terry attended as a young Church Army Captain took as its theme “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ.” The thousands of laity, priests, and bishops from every part of the Anglican Communion (although for economic reasons most were from the Anglo-Saxon part of the world) adopted a Congress Statement that called for a rebirth of the Anglican Communion in a mission-focused form. Among the priorities identified by the Congress were two that speak to the current situation: “we must continue and extend the whole process of inter-Anglican consultation” and “each church must radically study the form of its own obedience to mission and the need it has to share in the single life and witness of our church everywhere.” The Congress recognized that this meant “deep and deliberate involvement in one another’s affairs and life.” In other words, it was a strong recommendation that the Anglican Communion move toward some form of mutual accountability.

For years after the Toronto Congress, changes appeared to be slow and low-key — for example, some African clergy did mission and pastoral work in England, while more from Britain and North America were active in mission and evangelism work in Africa. But the mindset of most Anglo-Saxon Anglicans still remained in an “older versus younger” or “giving versus receiving” or “rich versus

poor” mode. Global South bishops began to challenge this way of thinking at the 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences; and the Global South primates have done so very strongly since Lambeth 1998. They want the Global North provinces to recognize that the equal status of provinces within the Anglican Communion requires that we give priority to mutual accountability over provincial and diocesan autonomy. In other words, they want “mutual responsibility and interdependence” to be enshrined in the membership expectations and inter-provincial actions of all the “instruments of unity” of the Anglican Communion.

However, in April 2006 the bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada passed a motion disassociating themselves from the actions of the Nigerian Church in its support of the Nigerian government’s legislation banning homosexual activity. What was done in one place thus produced a protesting reaction in another place within the Communion. Earlier Nigeria had reacted against Canada, the actions of the Diocese of New Westminster, and the General Synod’s recognition of the “sanctity” of same-sex relationships. Now Canada has reacted against actions by the Nigerian church.

In the *Windsor Report* the members of the Lambeth Commission recognized the potential for conflict in the Communion. Their response (paragraph 105) was that “we have concluded that there needs to be a clearer understanding of the expectations placed on provinces in responding to the decisions of these Instruments,” and this means that (paragraph 106) “further work is necessary on the relationship between those Instruments of Unity.” The Report recommends that an “Anglican Covenant” be developed, covering (paragraph 118) “the acknowledgement of common identity; the relationships of communion; the commitments of communion; the exercise of autonomy in communion; and the management of communion affairs (including disputes).” Whether such a Covenant can become a reality remains to be seen. To be effective, it will have to provide for a process of determining what matters are essential to the maintenance of communion, and also for a process of accountability that can operate in a timely and decisive manner and that will be respected by Churches that value their autonomy. It appears that this proposal may be the only way to prevent the disintegration of the Anglican Communion.

Taking the Anglican Communion Seriously

To most Anglicans the Anglican Communion is more of an idea than a reality in their lives; our local congregations and perhaps our dioceses provide the usual limits for our thinking about the church. Yet each and every Anglican has a stake in the Anglican Communion. It unites us to Christians who share the same heritage of beliefs, same worship patterns, same history, and same ways of expressing our faith. The Anglican Communion is our window on the world, making us aware of the struggles and joys experienced by fellow Christians in almost every part of our planet. Therefore, to play our part in the world church, the church catholic, we need to take our Communion and its future seriously. That may naturally lead us to four kinds of action.

First, we can broaden our prayer horizons to embrace Anglican life and work throughout the whole world. In every issue of such publications as *The Anglican Journal* and *The Anglican Planet* there are articles on Anglicans and Anglican churches in many different countries. The Anglican Communion website <http://www.anglican-communication.org> provides up-to-date Anglican news from around the world. These Anglican resources give us concrete things for which to pray. And from time to time the public media have articles on events in places where Anglicans live and minister; these too can inform our prayers.

Second, we can read in order to learn more about what “Anglican” means. Books such as the classic *Anglicanism* by Bishop Stephen Neill or the more recent *Is The Church Of England Biblical?* by Bishop Colin Buchanan can help us understand the roots, nature, and growth of Anglicanism. After reading such books, we might find it helpful to discuss with Anglican friends the ideas and questions such books bring to mind.

Third, we can make up our own mind on what we hold to be important about Anglicanism and the Anglican Communion. What do we mean when we use the word “Anglican”? Should membership in the Communion entail responsibility and accountability to fellow Anglicans worldwide? If so, what form should it take? What are the boundaries to our Anglican identity? We each need to make our personal, thoughtful, prayerful decisions on such questions.

Fourth, we can make our views on the Anglican Communion

known. We can tell fellow members of our own congregations what we think. We can tell our parish clergy and leaders, our parish lay delegates to synod, our bishop(s), our archbishop, and our primate what is important to us about and within the Anglican Communion. We can engage all these people in reflection and debate on key issues. If we don't speak up, they will be unable to take account of our views and incorporate them in their own work on behalf of the church.

We all should pray with the apostle Paul, *“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”* (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Questions For Study And Discussion

1. What enrichment does being part of the Anglican Communion bring us?
2. What obligations does being part of the Anglican Communion involve for us?
3. How do you think mutual accountability should be worked out in the worldwide Anglican fellowship?
4. What are the essentials of Anglican unity?
5. How do you understand the purposes of the “instruments of Anglican unity”? How adequate do you think they are for their purposes? Are further “instruments of Anglican unity” needed?
6. What can laypeople do to further healthy forms of Anglican unity?