

After Lambeth

Twenty-one years before the foundation of the Diocese of Wakefield, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Longley called the first Lambeth Conference. Its aim was to get people talking and to bring bishops together so that they in turn connected together the emerging 'Anglican Communion'. In the past one hundred and fifty years things have changed enormously. First of all there was no Anglican Communion formerly in those days. Now there are thirty eight provinces and it is the most widely scattered communion in the world apart from Roman Catholicism; one hundred and thirty countries were represented this time. The second contrast stands alongside this: in 1867 some seventy bishops gathered for the conference in comparison with this year's seven hundred. Then they were literally able to meet in Lambeth Palace. This time, even the University of Kent at Canterbury has at times found it difficult to cope with the numbers. There are ten times the original number - so seven hundred bishops and five hundred spouses. Such numbers produce logistical problems of considerable proportions. There was no single venue, even within the University of Kent, that could take such numbers and so a circus big top was erected with three vast screens and an altar at the front. This is where we worshipped daily for the Eucharist and evening prayer. Morning prayer, midday prayer and night prayer happened at a smaller venue simply called 'The Prayer Place'.

What was the Conference like? Well, for the bishops, the first three days were in retreat. It was a unique experience. Canterbury Cathedral and its precincts were closed to all apart from us and the Archbishop gave five talks setting the mood in the context of prayer for the rest of the Conference. Canterbury Cathedral is itself remarkable. Its soaring perpendicular nave acted as the chapel where we heard the addresses. Making one's way out (rather like a pilgrim) through the crossing, past the martyrdom, where Thomas à Becket was murdered, one reaches the quire – large enough itself to take all seven hundred bishops as it did on the Sunday morning opening service. In the crypt there were various tables set out with aids to prayer and the entire precincts were there for us to walk around and collect our packed lunches. The retreat was a good way to start and it certainly did set the tone.

The opening service is one of those occasions that one will never forget if one has been part of it. It probably took the best part of half an hour for the seven hundred bishops plus ecumenical guests to make their way in, double file, through the nave up into the presbytery and into the quire. One bishop ironically noted not only was this the first time five hundred women have stood for me as I have come into the Church it was certainly the first time my wife has ever stood for me to enter a building! The Eucharist itself

was splendid with an excellent sermon by Duleep de Chichera from Sri Lanka. He began ‘I bring you greetings from the people of Sri Lanka where five of the great religions of the world meet – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and then he allowed an enormous gap while each of us struggled to think of what the fifth might be. Finally, he filled in the gap and said... cricket! It was a memorable start. The entry of the gospel was extraordinary and wonderful. Melanesian brothers and sisters in grass skirts playing pipes and drums brought in with them a small boat into which was placed the Book of the Gospel and an African deacon followed sprinkling holy water on the boat from a Melanesian holy water sprinkler. They made their way to the nave for the gospel and on the way back the Melanesians danced for us. All of these images reminded us of the worldwide nature of our communion.

What was a typical day like? Well, of course, it depends on who you ask. The spouses had a completely separate programme with a daily bible study (using the same material as the bishops) and then on each day they gathered in plenaries to be addressed by people on a variety of different subjects. It too was an excellent conference. The bishops themselves went firstly to a bible study each morning and then into an Indaba group. Indaba is a Zulu word which refers to a mode of conversation which happens within the tribal heartlands of Southern Africa. Here the villagers meet together in these groups to try and reach consensus and to see how the community should be led from day to day. This was the pattern set for us. Indaba groups brought together five of the smaller bible study groups giving us a total of forty people. My bible study group included amongst its eight bishops, two Kenyans, two from England (including me), the Bishop of Swaziland, two American bishops, one male and one female, and one third of the primate of New Zealand. (In New Zealand there are three people acting together as primate: from New Zealand [Pakeha], from Polynesia and from the Maori communities). The bible study material was outstanding. I hope very much it may be made available more generally for use in the Church. It was prepared by a group of people under the chairmanship of a young South African Professor of New Testament Studies.

Each day the Indaba groups discussed a different issue and so asked in what ways the bishop is called to lead. They were all styled as ‘The Bishop and ...’ Several of the days used key themes for me, picking up earlier aspects of my ministry and focusing on key issues within our diocese. These included: The bishop and the environment; the bishop and other faith communities; the bishop and ecumenism; the bishop and the Bible; the bishop and human sexuality.

In each group there was an animateur who explained the process and kept the thing on track. There was a rapporteur who brought together out of our notes and conversations something that could be passed back to the reflections group at the heart of the Conference. Finally, there was also a listener that is a member of the group who was part of the wider conference reflection process and who helped this group to produce a report for the whole conference. The group sessions varied and indeed some groups apparently sat fairly lightly to the agenda they had been set. Our group worked together well and some days produced excellent material and other days perhaps rather less focused reflections.

One of the highlights of the conference was the 'London Day'. We left Canterbury at seven in the morning by coach and were dropped off near Whitehall so we walked from near the cenotaph passed Downing Street, the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and then eventually along Millbank over Lambeth Bridge into Lambeth Palace grounds. It was a marvellous witness. I imagine that some newspapers will have come up with the headline '*Purple Protest*'. We were marching to try and encourage world leaders to take proper note of the Millennium Development Goals and to work for their implementation. Once we got within the grounds of the Palace we were addressed by the Prime Minister who was passionate about the MDGs. The Archbishop of Canterbury also addressed us as indeed did Helen Wangusa, The Anglican Representative or Observer at the United Nations. The Prime Minister noted it was probably the most powerful single witness from religious leaders ever experienced in the great city of London. Thereafter we were given lunch in the largest marquee I have ever seen and then taken by coach once again to Buckingham Palace where the Queen held a garden party for some two thousand people connected with the conference. Happily it was a blazingly hot sunny day which helped to make it such a memorable excursion.

Perhaps the other thing to note immediately is the daily worship. We began at 7.15 with a Eucharist led by different provinces within the Communion. This meant different music, different languages and different rites. All of us were equipped with headphones and there were translations from some seven different languages. English was predominant but even those who had English as their first language were made to work for their living on occasions by turning on the headphones. Music was a good mixture of traditional and modern and gathered material from across the world. Indeed the Canterbury Press produced for the Conference *Lambeth Praise* and gathered together those hymns not known or found easily in our standard hymnbooks. Geoff Weaver, formerly of the Royal School of Church Music, was a brilliant musical director throughout and the quartet who were with

him sang music from both the traditional cathedral repertoire and from across the world during communion. Evening worship was equally enriching and varied.

One other quite different day was the day in which spouses and bishops were all gathered together. On this occasion we spent more than three hours together in the big top talking about the abuse of power and particularly the abuse of women by men. Again our South African professor led us in a bible study from 2 Samuel telling the story of Amnon and the rape of Tamar. Some salutary lessons were learnt during that morning. It was not comfortable both because of the subject matter and also because the temperature was near twenty-five degrees and we were all jammed together on tip up seats in this vast big top.

The other outstanding facet of the conference were the four plenaries addressed by experts in their own spheres. All of us enjoyed all four but the final one to which I shall come in a moment was the most striking. The first plenary was a brilliant example of presentation by the American evangelist Brian McClaren – not everyone thought there was much content here but there was no doubt about the impact of the presentation itself. The second presentation was by Cardinal Diaz, Prefect for the Propaganda Fidei Department at the Vatican, that is the Department for the evangelisation of peoples. His talk was fairly dry but in the questions he came to life with some very sharp human examples. The third address was from Dr Chris Rapley the Director of the Science Museum and it was one of the most measured and worthwhile presentations on global warming and the environment that I have heard. Finally there came the outstanding address by Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks. The Chief Rabbi talked about covenant and it had much to say to us as we were looking at the model of covenant ourselves within the Communion. He talked about a covenant of fate and a covenant of faith. A covenant of fate is one that is produced by being in a particularly critical situation and working together whatever one's differences may be; the covenant of faith is one rooted in a particular religious tradition. The three covenants he mentioned from the Old Testament were those of God with Noah, with Abraham and with Moses. It was a profoundly moving lecture, which felt almost like evangelism in itself. There are two questions from the end of his talk, which I remember most vividly. He was asked whether he had anything to say to Anglicans. He said he felt that in a way it was not his place to do so but perhaps he did have one excuse. He was, after all, educated at St Mary's Church of England Primary School and then had his secondary education at Christ's College in Finchley. In other words he was fully immersed in Anglicanism from an early age. He said that he had been eternally grateful for this but was much more grateful still for the witness of Anglicans worldwide. He said there is

no doubt that certainly within the western world Anglicanism has been the most tolerant and embracing of all religions and certainly of all versions of Christianity. He said do not give up on each other now. The world needs you more desperately than ever and you are the only people who can offer precisely what it is that you have given in the past. Finally he was asked whether he could say anything on Jesus. He said how could he a Jew talk about Jesus but he would make one reflection. He noted that on the Day of Atonement, the greatest of all the Jewish festivals, there is one particular phrase that is used. He said he had never really seen it translated into English properly but if her were to try and attempt such a translation it would go something like this: 'Forgive those other people for they do not know what they are doing.' This, he said, is what Jesus had contributed particularly. It is where Judaism had stopped and he had carried on to the next development. It was a powerful moment.

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As the conference proceeded it became clear that generally the indaba groups were well received and that many of the Bible study groups were outstanding. The Archbishop of Canterbury gave two further presidential addresses one just after half way through the conference and then a final address at the concluding plenary on Sunday 3rd August. In these two addresses he tried to pull together some of the thinking on covenant ways in which the Communion might move forward. There was a very strong feeling amongst many people from across the world in the last stages of the conference that the Archbishop had made a very significant mark on the conference and that his stature, both in his office as the Archbishop of Canterbury and in his personal handling of that office, was very greatly strengthened throughout our time together. His ability, with both integrity and humility, to hold some of the criticisms that he had received from across the Communion was quite remarkable. At the same time the clarity of thought that he gave to possible futures further reinforced his position. In all this he came across as a gift to the communion – 'an instrument of grace' helping us in the spirit of a covenant to respond to that grace and see how we might move things forward. That in itself was a spur to all bishops present to go back to their own dioceses (and to some extent provinces) to see how they too might be instruments of grace prompting a similar generous response from their people.

What might this all mean? If people were expecting us to come away from the Lambeth Conference with the problems of the Anglican Communion solved then they would have been naïve in the extreme. Such deep-seated problems will take months and even years to heal fully. Secondly, the Lambeth Conference was never set up as a decision making body with

juridical powers. Nevertheless there did seem to be emerging some fairly clear direction signs. There was undoubtedly a majority feeling that a communion-wide covenant must be the way forward. The covenant sets out our common faith alongside a summary of the ordering and traditions of Anglicanism and also presents a procedure for reconciliation should a dispute arise between provinces. There was less agreement that the covenant should have appended to it an appendix which is almost as long as the covenant and highly legal in nature. The appendix aims to give 'teeth' to the covenant by setting out a juridical framework for the reconciliation procedure. Alongside this there was a fair degree of agreement that some sort of Pastoral Forum ought to be set up with the Archbishop as its president but then with a group of people from across the Communion helping to heal wounds but also to note possible divisions before they arise fully or indeed deepen. The Pastoral Forum would be there to move things forward and act as a moderating influence for the future.

But what of those at the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem before Lambeth and the refuseniks? How do we move things on when at least two hundred bishops were not present? First of all we need to remember that those bishops who did not come represented generally very focused areas of discontent. No bishops came from Nigeria or the Diocese of Sydney, nor indeed from most of the Southern Cone or Uganda (two only). Those African bishops mentioned make up the majority of those missing. Other provinces showed significant gaps, so for example, only one third of the bishops came from Kenya but this in itself was a positive sign remembering that the Primate of that province had discouraged any of his bishops from going. It was interesting to note from our own Bible Study Group that the province of Kenya has never been asked through its House of Bishops to look at the Windsor Report or indeed at any of the other intra-communion reports and agreements that have been produced in the past five years. Almost certainly that means that no ecumenical agreements or reports have been reviewed! The Archbishop of Canterbury is about to call a meeting of the Primates towards the end of this year and it will be part of his desire to encourage people from those other provinces to attend. It remains to be seen how they will respond.

I venture a final reflection of my own. Building upon the extraordinary experience of the Archbishop acting as an instrument of grace, I thought of nothing other than of us being called to go back to our own dioceses to act in a similar manner. Perhaps the most powerful practical way in which the See of Rome acts as a focus for unity for the Roman Catholic Communion worldwide is through the *ad limina* visit to the Pope every five years. This is an exemplary way of the bishops keeping in touch with the Holy See and giving them also an opportunity to engage with other dicasteries at the

Vatican. So another idea might be to institute a similar process in the Anglican Communion. Ten years between Lambeth Conferences is a long time. Would it not be possible for the Archbishop of Canterbury to visit all provinces (at present there are thirty eight) in a systematic way during that ten years? Sometimes this could be built onto an anniversary or some other particular celebration. Nevertheless the key issue would be to make sure that every province received a visit. During those visits the House of Bishops would gather together and perhaps indeed the General Synod of that Province. There would be ample opportunities for serious conversation especially in areas where misunderstandings might arise. The graciousness of the Archbishop going out to the provinces rather than calling people in on the *ad limina* manner exhibited within the Roman Catholic Church would undermine those feelings that some provinces have of the Archbishop and the Church of England still representing a former colonial power. Nevertheless it would be the Archbishop as the first and in some ways most significant ‘instrument of communion’ helping to strengthen the bonds of unity throughout the communion. Foundations for this have been amply laid at the 2008 Lambeth Conference and I would hope we might be able to build upon that.

Further news and reporting can be found at:
<http://www.lambethconference.org/index.cfm>