



The American Anglican Council

THE REV. CANON J. PHILIP ASHEY
Chief Executive Officer

Anglican Identity? Canterbury's loss, not ours

"We just need to be very, very clear about this. There is no Anglican Pope. Decisions are made collectively and collegially and I am absolutely committed to not pre-empting what the primates choose to do."

The Most Rev. Justin Welby, The Archbishop of Canterbury (Anglican Communion News Service, Oct 6, 2014)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, friends of the Anglican realignment,

The Archbishop of Canterbury has been in the news lately. On the eve of the celebration of the growth of the Anglican Church in North America (488 new churches planted, increased membership and Average Sunday Attendance, poised to exceed the declining membership of the Anglican Church of Canada—if it hasn't already, etc.) and the Investiture of its second Archbishop, the Most Rev. Dr. Foley Beach, the Archbishop of Canterbury had this to say (<http://www.gazette.ireland.anglican.org/audio/>) about the Anglican Church in North America:

"The ACNA is a separate church. It is not part of the Anglican Communion... ACNA is clearly an ecumenical partner. It is part of the Church of Christ in the world."

When asked whether the ACNA can be a part of the Anglican Communion, or is that something for the future, ++Welby replied, "[that is] clearly something for the future."

The "future" arrived less than 24 hours later when the Anglican Diocese of North West Australia, meeting in Synod, recognized the ACNA as a full member of the Anglican Communion:

"That this synod:

- welcomes the impending investiture of the Most Reverend Dr Foley Beach, the Archbishop of The Anglican Church in North America;
- recognizes the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) as a member church of the Anglican Communion, in full communion with Diocese of North West Australia; rejoices that the orthodox faith is proclaimed in word and deed through ACNA and its member churches;
- continues with ACNA to pray for and call for repentance from those churches which have turned to a different gospel;
- calls upon faithful Anglicans around the world to join us in joyful praise to God for the renewal and rebirth evident in ACNA and the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans."

Actually, the "future" arrived in June 2008, when at the first GAFCON gathering of over 1000 Archbishops, bishops, clergy and lay leaders from the majority of the Anglican Communion, the GAFCON Primates called for the formation of a new "Anglican Province" in North America. The future continued to unfold in April 2009 at a conference for leaders of the continuing GAFCON movement. There in London, the Primates who represent the majority of practicing Anglicans around the world recognized the Anglican Church in North America 'as genuinely Anglican' and called on all Anglican Provinces to 'affirm full communion with the ACNA'.

The movement gathered increasing momentum in Nairobi just a year ago, when the second GAFCON gathering reaffirmed the ACNA as a “full partner province, with its Archbishop having a seat on the Primates Council” and its Holy Orders recognized without exception. In that Nairobi Communique, the delegates of this global Anglican Council also reaffirmed the authority of the GAFCON Primates Council to “recognize and authenticate faithful Anglicans.”

Once upon a time that recognition and authentication occurred through the meetings of the Primates, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops, churches of the Anglican Communion and resolutions of the Anglican Consultative Council “with the Primates assenting.”

But, the Archbishop of Canterbury never makes that decision alone.

Tomorrow in Atlanta, Georgia, eight Primates and other bishops representing the majority of practicing Anglicans worldwide will gather around the new Archbishop of the ACNA to lay hands on him and recognize him as a fellow Primate, and reaffirm the ACNA as a full member of the Communion of Anglican Churches. Canterbury’s absence from that future—without even an official representative—will be noted.

The Rev. Dr Mark Thompson of Sydney, Australia has written an excellent analysis of Canterbury’s statements in the light of Anglican polity and history. I encourage you to read his [analysis below](#). In it, Dr Thompson pinpoints a major concern with Archbishop Welby’s interview. The Archbishop of Canterbury is assuming powers that rightfully belong to the Primates:

“ACNA could be, and perhaps already is [according to ++Welby], an ecumenical partner with the Anglican Communion but it cannot be considered a member of the Anglican Communion because (and this last bit is the implication of what he said rather than his own words) it is not in communion with Canterbury, it has not been recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself.

“This is a gigantic slap in the face to the Primates who represent the vast bulk of practicing Anglicans around the world and who, meeting in London in April 2009, recognized the Anglican Church in North America ‘as genuinely Anglican’...” (Emphasis added)

That “slap in the face” stings worse when those who have already recognized the ACNA read more of what the Archbishop Canterbury had to say:

“Virtually everywhere I’ve gone, the analysis is that the definition of being part of the Anglican Communion is being in communion with Canterbury. And I haven’t prompted that. I was quite surprised to hear that.” – Archbishop of Canterbury, Church of Ireland Gazette (<http://www.gazette.ireland.anglican.org/audio/>)

It has always been the role of the Primates to decide who is in the Communion of Anglican Churches-- working together in their Primates’ meetings, through their Provinces¹, at the decennial Lambeth Conference of Bishops,

¹ For example, the recognition of the Uniting Churches of South India, North India, Pakistan and Bangladesh beginning in 1947 was a forty year process which included resolutions by Lambeth Conference of Bishops 1948 affirming the measure of unity locally achieved by the uniting churches despite questions about the regularity of their Anglican orders; and resolutions by the Lambeth Conference 1968 recommending that “Churches and provinces of the Anglican Communion re-examine their relation to the Church of South India with a view to entering into full communion with that Church”. ACC-1 (Kenya, 1971) took note in Resolution 3 that seven Anglican Churches had already requested full communion with the Church of South India, eleven other Anglican Churches indicated their intent to work toward full communion, and urged all other Churches of the Communion to review their relationship with the CSI with a view towards entering into full Communion. (By contrast, it has taken less than five years for seven Churches in the Anglican Communion—the GAFCON Churches—to recognize the ACNA as full members of the Anglican Communion.) The 1978

and by prior assent to resolutions of the Anglican Consultative Council². This authority is recognized in Section 7.2 of the Constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council (revised 2010), which provides that the “Member Churches of the [Anglican Consultative] Council shall be those bodies listed in the Schedule... ***with the assent of two-thirds of the Primates of the Anglican Communion.***” (Emphasis added).

How is it possible that the Archbishop of Canterbury overlooked the polity of the Anglican Communion, its Instruments, and its documented history in granting membership to Churches? How do we square his declaration on Monday “*There is no Anglican Pope. Decisions are made collectively and collegially,*” with his unilateral declaration the previous Friday that ACNA is not part of the Anglican Communion because he (Canterbury) has not recognized us?

Dr Thompson goes on to assert:

“We must deny categorically and in the strongest possible terms that communion with the See of Canterbury is the determining factor when it comes to Anglican identity. It is not and never can be. A church, diocese or national body does not have to be in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury in order to be a legitimate member of the Anglican Communion, especially if a majority of other Anglicans around the world recognize it as part of our fellowship.

“Anglican identity is fundamentally a matter of certain theological commitments, anchored ultimately in the authority of Scripture as God’s word written (Article 20), together with an agreement to operate with a common pattern of church government (the threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons). The Anglican Church has always been confessional in nature, as witnessed by the history of subscription to the Articles, which began in the time of Cranmer and continues around the world today.”

And there is the rub. It will always be easier for an Archbishop of Canterbury to seek the lowest common denominator in disputes of the kind that have been tearing the Anglican Communion apart for the last 30 years. It will always be easier to resolve disputes on the basis of institutional inclusiveness, “bonds of affection” (whatever that may be) and a common commitment to “indaba” that will lead to “good disagreement.” It is difficult to mediate disputes over doctrine, discipline and a common commitment to biblical patterns of discipleship.

But isn’t that exactly what we expect Archbishops and bishops to do for the sake of the Church?

Lambeth Conference of Bishops took up the recommendation of ACC-1 and resolved to call the Archbishop of Canterbury to convene a meeting of the bishops of the Anglican Communion and the bishops of CSI and the other uniting churches of N India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to review how the latter could participate in the ACC and the Lambeth Conferences. By 1984 the Churches of South India, N India and Pakistan were participating in the ACC, and in 1990 the Church of Bangladesh participated in the ACC—all before full membership in the Anglican Communion. The 1988 Lambeth Conference of Bishops invited the United Churches into full membership within the Anglican Communion, through full participation in the Lambeth Conference of Bishops and the Primates Meetings.

² See, e.g., Resolutions of ACC-9 (Cape Town Southern Africa, 1993) Resolution 47: New Provinces of Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire, and Resolution 48: New Province of Korea, “Resolved that this Joint meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion and the Anglican Consultative Council...requests the Primates to add them to the list of member Churches”; Resolutions of ACC-10 (Panama, 1996) Resolutions 1 and 2: Welcome to New Provinces: Province of Mexico, Province of Southeast Asia, “Resolved that the Primates having assented, this ACC-10 meeting in Panama welcomes...”; Resolutions of ACC-11 (Dundee Scotland, 1999) Resolutions 1 and 2: Welcome to New Provinces: Anglican Church of the Central America Region and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, “Resolved that the Primates having assented, this ACC-11 meeting in Dundee, Scotland welcomes...”; Resolutions of ACC-12 (Hong Kong, 2002) Resolution 38: Tanzania, “This Anglican Consultative Council, noting with pleasure the growth of the Church in Tanzania, resolves, subject to the assent of the Primates, that the Church of Tanzania should be transferred from Category (c) to Category (b) of the Schedule of the Constitution.”(Emphasis added).

We are going to have a grand celebration tomorrow here in Atlanta! We will celebrate our commitment to the historic Anglican way of following Jesus Christ³. We will celebrate the election and investiture of a new Archbishop. We will come from all over the United States and Canada to reaffirm our commitment to reach North America with the transforming love of Jesus Christ. We will be surrounded by archbishops, bishops, clergy and lay leaders from all over the Anglican Communion who are here to reaffirm our Anglican identity and our status as full members of the Communion of Anglican Churches. How sad that the Archbishop of Canterbury cannot offer his blessing as a fellow Anglican. How sad that he cannot find the time even to pray with our ACNA bishops.

But in the end, it's Canterbury's loss—not ours. We are inheriting the future of a reformed and reforming Anglican Communion. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 3:13-14)

And so dear friends... *We press on!!*

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip" with a small cross or plus sign at the end.

The Rev. Canon J. Philip Ashey,
Chief Executive Officer,
American Anglican Council

³ See “the seven elements as characteristic of the Anglican Way, and essential for membership [in the ACNA] in [The Constitution of The Anglican Church in North America](#), Article I, p. 1. Those seven elements include the canonical books of the Bible as the final authority and unchangeable standard for Christian faith and life, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the dominical sacraments, the godly Historic Episcopate, the three Catholic creeds, the first four Councils of the undivided Church, the Book of Common Prayer 1662 and the Ordinal, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion 1571.