

Maintaining the Bonds of Affection and the Discovering of Objects of Love: An East Asian Response to the Windsor Report 2004

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The Primates' Standing Committee asks whether the description of the life of the Communion in Sections A and B of the Report we can recognize as consistent with our understanding of the Communion. My answer, in brief, is no. Let me be clear from the start. I long for churches in the Communion to move closer together than go their separate ways. To do this, we must shift from the paradigm of trying to maintain "Bonds of Affection" towards a more open and provisional vision of discovering the "Objects of Love" in our common journey¹.

A Question of Social Identity

Section B of the Report deals with the issue of identity. The Report reminds us, alongside the spiritual bond we share as children of God in Christ, of the "shared and inherited identity which is the particular history of the churches to which we belong"² It goes on in the next paragraph to trace the history of "the Anglican Communion", recalling our roots in "the ancient churches of the British Isles." Then the Report proceeds to deal with how the institutional churches can and should work together in the common task of discernment. Indeed, back in Section A, the Lambeth Commission cites the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood as a case in point of how mutual discernment and decision making operate in the Communion.³ The central problem today in the Communion, so the Report announces at the end of the prognosis, is that "we have not always fully articulated how authority work within Anglicanism."⁴ And I do not think it is unfair to add that by "authority", the Commission has in mind *institutional* authority. For the Report goes on in Sections C and D to offer institutional responses in maintaining the bonds in the Communion; viz. setting up of a Council of Advice to Canterbury, and the creating of the post of "Anglican Communion Officer" for each member Church.

The question of social identity is of especial interest to East Asia. The history of the church is a matter of huge interest and debate, not simply within Christian circles, but more importantly in political realms. The spread of Christianity has been implicated with the history of imperialistic aggressions.⁵ Hence Christians in East Asia cannot avoid

¹ The phrase of course is taken from Professor Oliver O'Donovan's recent book *Common Objects of Love. Moral reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

² Paragraph 45.

³ Paragraphs 14-21

⁴ Paragraph 42.

⁵ As recent as in 2003, the Church in China heralded the publication of Luo Gaunzong's *Don't Forget: the Past is Guide for the Future. A Historical Account of how Imperialists made use of Christianity to invade China* (*qian shi buwang, houshi zhishi. Diguo zhuyi liyong jidujiao qinlue zhongguo shishi shuping*) (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2003).

reflecting, for apologetic interest, on the issue of self-identity and the histories of their local churches: “Why am I who I am”?

Hence, I find the Report puzzling. For the account it gives of “how we become what we are” is so remote from my understanding of it.

The following points require clarification:

1. The Report does not seem to pay attention to the history of the terms “Anglican”, “Anglicanism”, and “Anglican Communion”. They are used interchangeably throughout the Report. “Anglican” was used in the Middle Ages, with the reference to the churches in Canterbury and York as *ecclesia anglicana*. “Anglicanism” emerged in the nineteenth century, likely in the context of the fresh debate prompted by the Oxford Movement on the nature of the Church of England.⁶ The phrase “Anglican Communion” was first used in the 1867 Lambeth Conference. It referred to “the Churches of our *colonial* empire and the missionary Churches beyond them in the closest union with the *Mother-Church (italics mine)*”.⁷

2. Is not the account of the decision-making in the ordination of women to the priesthood revisionist in character? The first sentence of Paragraph 13 reads: “The background to the story was a period of debate and disagreement of Florence Li-Tim-Oi in 1944”. It moves quickly in the second sentence to say “The story gathered pace in 1968 . . .”. To fill in the details:

- a. Lambeth 1948 rejected the proposed Canon from the General Synod of the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui to allow for an experimental period of twenty years a deaconess might be ordained to the priesthood, citing the reason that the matter has been considered *in England* by the Archbishops’ Commission on the Ministry of Women in 1935.⁸
- b. Revd Florence Li voluntarily resigned, as a matter of personal sacrifice, from the priestly order.
- c. The issue was overtaken by political events in China in 1949, and the consequential changes in Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui.
- d. Up to the 1950s, names of Chinese clergy associated with South China were still entered into the Church Missionary Society Native Clergy Register (List III). We find for the entry of “Lei, Florence Tim-Oi” the following: “b. May 5, 1907 at Hong Kong. Later as headmaster of the Un Long Government School, New Territories, Hong Kong. (retired since 1938).” Then written in large

⁶ In the British Library on-line catalogue, the first four books entitled “Anglicanism” appear in the mid-nineteenth century: *The Development of Anglicanism the Hope of the Church of England*. A letter to Lord John Russell, M.P. By a Churchman ... Second edition. (pp. 16. James Ridgway: London, 1846.); Gresley, W. *Four letters on the Rev. J. Spencer Northcote's pamphlet, entitled "the four-fold difficulty of Anglicanism" /* ([S.l.] : Batty, 1846.); Northcote, James Spencer. *The Fourfold Difficulty of Anglicanism: or the Church of England tested by the Nicene Creed*. In a series of letters. (London, 1846.); *Protestantism essentially a Persecuting Religion*. By another convert from Anglicanism. (pp. 93. Browne: York, [1853.]

⁷ Resolution 8.

⁸ Resolution 113 to 116.

letters diagonally across the page, perhaps with sudden realization that such "clergy" is a woman (!), are the words "Clergy form received June 1947 reveal that the above 'clergyman' was the Deaconess who was ordained priest in 1944 by Bishop Hall. She later resigned her priesthood. *Name removed from List June 1944.(italic mine)*"⁹

The above illustrates how personal perceptions and decisions, and often circumstances beyond human control, that influence the course of history and our human decisions. The commission, however, with an air of Eusebian confidence, trumpets the triumph of institutional processes, as if the heart and soul of the Communion beat and breathe on consensus reached in commissions and committee meetings!¹⁰

3. This comes to my third concern whether the Commission pays adequate regard to the role of missionary societies in the emergence of the Communion as we experience it today. How did missionary societies influence the course of the Communion? What are the lessons to be learnt? This is all the more remarkable because from the early nineteenth century, missionary societies and the church institutions wrestled with the issues of jurisdiction, authority, cultural perceptions, and the nature of the Communion.¹¹ Decisions were made then in the formative days of the "worldwide" Communion, long before the "instruments of unity" came into place. Yet strangely the Commission does not seem to see it fit to reflect on these early debates, *whose decisions governed the shape of the Communion today.*

By ignoring the cultural and personal dimensions above, the Report lends itself to an understanding of the Communion that is institutional in character, and thus the solutions it offers only meet the institutional needs of the Communion. I cannot see how the creating of Anglican Communion Officers and Council of Advice can further the cause of the Communion. Are not bishops and Primates supposed to fulfill those duties? True, such remedies can well serve to maintain the ideological bonds of affection, if those bonds were meant to cement a revisionist history of the Communion.

The crucial issue is not simply that of authority. Our nineteenth century forebears wrestled with that in their days, perhaps with the same or more intensity. What is at stake is something more fundamental: that we have for the first time in history the emerging of a worldwide church. The Report does not examine the radical changes in the dynamics within the Communion since the mid-twentieth century, when the geographic extent of the British Empire and Commonwealth, which hitherto overlapped with that of Communion, has undergone drastic political changes. Bishop John Taylor, formerly General Secretary of the Church missionary Society puts it this way:

⁹ In my research on Church Missionary Society Archives, I have yet to find another person removed from the Society Register, even if relations were severed on suspicious moral grounds!

¹⁰ Paragraphs 14-21.

¹¹ To illustrate from the mid-nineteenth century: the issue of overlap in jurisdiction in Shanghai between Bishop George Smith of Victoria, and Bishop William Boone of the American Episcopal Church; the controversy over the dismissal of William Humphrey by the Church Missionary Society, and the protest by the Bishop of Madras and referral to Canterbury; the status of mission stations in China and relation to the Diocese of Victoria.

The division that matters most for the church today and tomorrow is not that between Catholic and Evangelical, or political right and left, but whether in any matter the form or the content is of prior importance. . . . The structure of the church's government is confused with her catholicity; her uniformity becomes the measure of her faithfulness. . . . The question posed by this great divide will be the dominating issue for Christianity in the twentieth-first century precisely because the shift of its centre of gravity from north to south will entail a greater departure than has ever been made hitherto away from the Graeco-Roman concepts of orthodoxy and uniformity, and a greater level of confidence in provisionality and diversity.¹²

The Commission fails in their analysis of the “deeper symptoms”¹³ to pay closer attention to this major shift. Instead, it goes on to dissect the issues using the theological apparatus that (no doubt) had served well in the heydays of (western) Christendom, while oblivious to the birth pangs of the new age.

The Report does not give recognition to the deep-felt resentment from younger churches that Anglo-American members of the Communion continue to impose agenda and make decisions without reference to the wider Communion? Where is the moral authority of Canterbury when the chief shepherd of the church cannot seem to arrest the perceived moral and spiritual decline in his country? If the Communion were Roman (and the Commission takes pride to say that we are not!), at least the choice of Popes were not confined to Italians. If we were Orthodox, at least we have Moscow (with its tradition of suffering) alongside Constantinople.

Again, how can the Commission be so confident in referring to Canon 8 of the Council of Nicea (325 AD) to be relevant to the present discussion of episcopal jurisdiction? Parallel and conflicting jurisdiction had always been part of the life of the early church. The experience of martyrdom and different understanding of holiness had led Christians to follow different bishops in the same localities.¹⁴ Is there any recognition that Christianity and the Nicean doctrine were used as ideological tools by an enterprising Roman Emperor for political ends, and that the Nicean understanding of jurisdiction was related to Roman administrative structure? In life, the church has always been divided and in tension, and sadly will remain to be so until the Lord comes. The sooner we discard an idealist view of the history of the church, the better it is for the Communion.

For the Communion to grow and possess its rightful heritage, it must move on and be reborn.

Discovering Common Objects of Love

The lasting contribution of missionaries from the Anglican and Episcopal missionaries in East Asia does not lie in the educational and medical institutions they left behind, but in the new name they bestowed to the local churches and to the Communion, a name that was borne out of years of wrestling in the mission fields in China.

¹² “The Future of Christianity” in John McManners (ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary of Christianity*. (Oxford, University Press, 1992), pp. 660-662.

¹³ Paragraphs 31-42.

¹⁴ See for example Professor W. H. C. Frend's study on the Donatist Church.

I have refrained so far from predicating the Communion with the word “Anglican”, for I have always been brought up with the understanding that I am a member of “Sheng Kung Hui”(in pinyin *Sheng Gong Hui*), which literally means “Holy Catholic Assembly”. For convenience, “*Sheng Gong Hui*” has often been translated as “Anglican”. Thus, we refer to the Church of England as “Yingguo Sheng Gong Hui”, ECUSA as “Meiguo Sheng Gong Hui”, and “Anglican Communion” as “Sheng Gong Hui Tuanqi”, and so on.

Why did the missionaries adopt such term? They could have decided otherwise. The Methodists, Presbyterians, and missionaries from other traditions retained the name of their churches in Chinese. For some time, Church Missionary Society continued to refer to the churches they established in Hong Kong and China as “An Li Gan” churches.¹⁵ And yet, at the end they abandoned the Chinese rendering of “Anglican” and settled with “Holy Catholic Church” (Sheng Gong Hui).

It is worth tracing the history of the birth of the term “Sheng Gong Hui”.

The story began with the preparation of catechisms by the early missionaries. How should the word “Church” be translated, the early missionaries asked. William Milne in Malacca experimented with the term “Sheng Jiao Gong Hui” (Holy Religion Catholic Assembly).¹⁶ Such term was then adopted in the Apostles’ Creed. For example, in the 1855 Prayer Book in the time of Bishop George Smith, we find the term “Sheng Hui Da Gong” for “Holy Catholic Church”. John Burdon (of CMS, later Bishop of Victoria) and Samuel Schereschewsky (of the American Episcopal Church, later Bishop in Shanghai) collaborated on Bible and Prayer Book translation in Beijing in the later half of the nineteenth century. They settled for the term “Sheng Gong Hui” for the translation of “Holy Catholic Church” in the Creed.¹⁷

In 1877, Archdeacon Arthur Evans Moule wrote an exposition on the Thirty-Nine Articles entitled *Sheng Gong Hui Dagang (Outlines of the Holy Catholic Church Outlines)* 1877. Frederick R Graves in Wuchang in 1888 published a translation of Joseph Bingham’s *Origines Ecclesiasticae: the Antiquities of the Ancient Church*. He entitled the translation *Sheng Gong Hui Gu Gui (Ancient Rules of the Holy Catholic Church)*. Yan Yungjing, the most learned Chinese priest ordained by the American Episcopal Church in China, in 1898 published a history of the Church of England under the title *Ying Pu Gong Jiao Hui Shi (History of the Universal Catholic Church in England)*.

¹⁵ Such term was used well into the 1910s for Chinese churches established by the Church Missionary Society.

¹⁶ See his catechism *Shang di sheng jiao gong hui men*. Malacca, 1825.

¹⁷ See example the 1877 edition of the Prayer Book published in St Paul College, Hong Kong. See also Schereschewsky, *The Bible, Prayer Book, and Terms in our China Missions. Addressed to the House of Bishops*. (Geneva, New York: Humphrey Printer, 1888)

It is important to note that the Oxford Movement at that time began to assert its influence in China.¹⁸ Questions on self-identity of the English Church (vis-à-vis the liberals and puritans) that Newman wrestled with found new relevance in China. Similar questions were put in a new cast. Who are we vis-à-vis fellow Chinese of ancient civilization, became an important issue. The answer is clear: we belong to a religion of ancient history as well: we belong to Sheng Gong Hui (the Holy Catholic Church)!

These dynamics eventually led the churches in China, Japan, and Korea to adopt similar designation for their churches: *Sei Ko Kei* in Japan (1887), *Sung Kong Hoe* in Korea (1889); and *Sheng Kung Hui* in China (1912).¹⁹

It is remarkable that except for the Episcopal Church of the United States of America, only North East Asian members of our Communion refer themselves with a name other than “Anglican”. Churches established by Chinese diasporas in South-East Asia, North America and Britain also call themselves “Sheng Gong Hui”.²⁰

I believe that similar stories can be recovered from the mission histories across the Communion. These are stories of how local Christians began to possess their own identity, and reflect on their spiritual heritage. What becomes important was the rediscovery (as the English Church did in the time the Reformation) that they belong to the primitive Church, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Communion of Jesus Christ. The question put before the Communion is this: do we continue to regard younger churches with paternalistic attitude, and perhaps with disdain of their (lack of) theological subtlety; do we simply consider younger churches as political allies and foes, that with balancing power in the selection of membership in committees here and there we can maintain the bonds of the Communion as before; or are we able to embrace the mission histories outside of Britain and North America in our revered reception processes, that we are able to rediscover common objects of love that we can pursue together in the Communion?

For us in East Asia, we wish to share with members of the Communion the vision that through the birth of our churches, God has taught us that we belong to the Holy Catholic Church of God. It is a task and gift: a possession and object of our continuing discipleship. There are lessons to be learnt and shared. China, for example, is thinking

¹⁸ Bishop W. J. Boone was accused of introducing ritualism in Shanghai. See F. McKeige, *Correspondences in connection with the protest against consecration of Rev. W. J. Boone as missionary bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America in China; also letters referring to the wretched management of the mission.* (Shanghai, 1885)

¹⁹ From the mid nineteenth century, missionary activities in China, Korea and Japan overlapped. Refer to Mark Napier Trollope, *The Church in Corea* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1915); J Liggins and C. M. Williams, *Japan. Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church.* Occasional Missionary Paper, No. 20, March 1859 (New York: Bible house, 1859). The term “Sheng Gong Hui” was adopted in China in 1909 when delegates from across China voted on the Preamble of the Constitution of Chinese Church. The use of the term was deliberate. Missionaries at the time reflected on the significance of the term. See *Spirit of Missions*, July 1912.

²⁰ Hence, for example, the Province in Hong Kong adopted the name *Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui*; the Diocese of Singapore’s Chinese name is *Sheng Gong Hui Xinjiapo Jiaogu*.

through new understanding of episcopacy.²¹ Suffering and martyrdom in the face of pagan political authorities became rare in Mediterranean Christianity from the middle of the fourth century. Many Christians in this part of the world are called to take up this form of discipleship. Perhaps for the first time since the fourth century, Graeco-Roman culture and Latin based languages no longer dominate the course of Christianity. Both the Russian and Chinese Christians show us new ways of being the church in very different political contexts. The continuing self reference as “Anglican” perhaps makes sense to those brought up in the West. It now can carry negative nuances where Christianity is implicated with histories of foreign aggression.

The Recommendations in the Report give a superficial response to the issues at hand. It may perhaps respond to those involved in the hierarchical structures, but leaves the lives of the rest of the seven million members of the Holy Catholic Communion untouched. For us all to belong as one Communion, we need to be inspired by a higher vision than what *ecclesia anglicana*, bound together once with the promise of the Land of Hope and Glory of the British Empire, can offer.

We are at the verge of a new age, called to bring about the birth of the Holy Catholic Church in our midst.

I end with three questions:

1. Are there ways that the Communion together can collaborate on promoting, sharing and reinforcing theological traditions in different languages within the Communion?
2. Are there new ways forward for us to reckon personal initiatives, mission societies and religious orders in a Communion now structured and governed by episcopal boundaries? Can our form of Christianity accommodate the Eldads and Medads²², and another John Wesley with the world as his parish?
3. What lessons can we learn from the Orthodox in their experience of Communion and in how orthodoxy be safeguarded? During our journey as a Communion, can we identify other “patriarchates” other than Canterbury?

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²¹ I refer to the consecration of Shen Yifan and SunYanli in Shanghai in 1988. Bishops in China possess spiritual and moral, and not jurisdictional authority. See Archbishop Robert Runcie’s *Letter to Bishop K. H. Ting*, April 11, 1988. See also Bishop Ting’s Sermon at the Consecration on 26 June 1988; “Taking a New Way” in *Love Never Ends. Papers by K. H. Ting* (Nanjing: Amity Press, 2000), pp. 305-310.

²² Numbers 11:26