

A Brief Response to Gregory Cameron's Hellins Lecture on Anglicans and the Future of the Communion

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Gregory Cameron's recent lecture¹ is a most sensitive treatment on the Anglican Communion today. His position as the Deputy Secretary-General of the Communion and as the Archbishop of Canterbury's confidant makes his proposal all the more significant. It marks a strikingly departure and positive way forward towards resolving the present crisis.

My present aim is to highlight the main features in his proposal, and to underline points of convergence between Cameron's proposal and those the global South. Cameron from the outset offered a sober historiography of the Communion, in marked contrast with the confident note the Windsor Report took towards ecclesiastical and institutional authorities. He reminded his audience from the outset the Communion itself "is something of an accidental creation". "The Anglican Church as a universal entity has never existed. . . . Anglicanism is far more wedded to the legitimacy of its national and regional expressions than its international expression." What holds churches in the Communion together is not formal authorities. The ties are rather sustained by the bonds of affection – "the very real personal and continuing bonds of study, friendship, identity, and mutual discipleship".

At the end of his lecture, Cameron made a case for the Communion against "the levels of anger, political subterfuge and almost histrionic rhetoric" that are pulling the Communion apart. Cameron suggested the Communion's ill cannot be solved by "externalising the issues and demonising those parts of the communion, liberal or conservative, with which we find ourselves most in disagreement". Further, "the true bonds which hold the Communion together [are] not bonds of constitution and canon law, but bonds of affection. . . . the heart of our lie is not history or heritage or even ecclesiastical politics, but the reality of lived and shared discipleship." The Communion's future lies, so Cameron suggested, not in power realignment, whether "North or South or East or West, but to the reality in each heart of the living experience of Christ. . . . to the Cross wherein God's love is revealed to the world".

These are extraordinary words if we note what Cameron left out in his reading of the Communion.

(1) Nowhere in the lecture did he refer to the Windsor Report and to conciliar authorities. No reference was made to the instruments of unity or to Canterbury as the focus of unity. Missing was also the quadrant-demarcation of churches and power blocs in Communion's "Cold War" (to borrow Cameron's allusion to NATO). His approach in mapping the Communion future is strikingly different from that undertaken by Fulcrum and ACI, which by and large offer a structural and conciliar solution to the present Communion crisis.

¹ Gregory Cameron, "The Hellins Lecture: Here, there and everywhere: to where does the Compass Rose point? Anglicans and the Future of the Communion," http://timescolumns.typepad.com/gledhill/files/hellins_postdelivery.doc.

(2) The above is underlined by the astonishing way Cameron reinterpreted and defended the Anglican Covenant. The idea of Covenant was first proposed in the Windsor Report under the heading “Canon Law and Covenant” (Windsor Report, 113-120). The sequence and relation between the two are important: “Canon Law” first, then “Covenant”. The Windsor Report has in mind that the Covenant would be a “Communion law” that

“would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion. The Covenant could deal with: 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). (Windsor Report, 118)”

In sharp contrast, Cameron (intentionally?) dismissed the juridical and administrative languages, and suggested that the Covenant should be understood in the context of the following question:

- What exactly is the character of Anglicanism?
- What are the boundary stones by which the Communion lives and by which Anglicanism finds its coherence?
- When and how is it appropriate to establish new boundaries?
- How far can we adapt or move the old boundary markers?
- What are the boundary markers anyway, and how do we recognise them?

But these five questions are *catechetical* questions! One only has to replace the word “Anglicanism” with “Christianity” and “Communion” with “Christian community” to see this. They are fundamental questions new converts ask as they renounce their “pagan” past, and turn to the Christian Way. Catechists and missionaries for the past two thousand years have been reflecting on and responding to these questions as they make disciples of all nations.

(3) Further still, Cameron mentioned neither the Anglican Way (in the present form as TEAC proposes) nor the Lambeth Quadrilaterals. Rather, he recognised that churches of the southern continents have asserted their identity in a faith “which is uncompromising in its commitment to the supreme authority of the scriptures as God’s Word written, which is content to see the Thirty-Nine Articles as the benchmark of contemporary Anglican life”. Such faith, so Cameron describes, enables the churches contend “for the salvation of souls in the face of a lively Pentecostalism and a militant Islam”.

To be sure, Cameron might not have intended such radical departure from his peers as I have highlighted. But his treatment on the Communion’s future does provide a fresh and creative way forward for the whole Communion. Fundamentally, he is asking us all to see the presenting issues in the context of worldwide shifts in present-day Christianity. The Roman Catholics have been alerted to such shifts – as Cameron pointed out, so should we. Indeed the Anglican Communion grew amid the blunders, accidents, and mishaps on the one hand, and out of personal holiness, mission zeal and martyrdom on the other. Yet, how should we see God’s hand in all these (“not

history or heritage or even ecclesiastical politics”) and conduct ourselves as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church?

Four questions in response to Cameron come to the fore:

1. What form would the Anglican Covenant assume if it makes better sense in the context of the catechetical traditions (and disciple-making)? The Global South draft of the Covenant – that had informed the Nassau draft, situated Anglican beliefs in the context of ordinal/baptismal/liturgical vows, (hence also the wordings from the Preface to the Declaration of Assent). Saint Andrew’s draft unfortunately replaced this with the Lambeth Quadrilaterals, and offered an elaborate (and unenforceable) appendix on disciplinary measure.
2. In what ways can the bonds of affection and instruments of unity nurture a catechetical tradition in the Communion; that is, to encourage and promote a reflective and faithful transmission of the faith once delivered to the saints?
3. Is the office of Canterbury understandable apart from his collegiality with fellow Primates, and what implication this carries for the selection and nurturing of the Canterbury vocation?
4. In what ways can the Communion redress the concern of cultural/intellectual/financial superiority of the trans-Atlantic alliance and of the new-rich in the globalised world? How can we encourage concrete face-to-face conversation and partnership in the Communion?

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