

Dr. William H. Harrison
“Custom and the National Church: The Reason Why”

Abstract

At the heart of the discussion about the direction of the Anglican Communion today is the debate over how close the relationships ought to be. Instruments of unity, such as Primates’ meetings and the Lambeth Conference, are taking on an appearance of centralized authority which represents a significant shift in the Communion’s self-understanding. Little has been said about the benefits of an autonomous national church model, though the model still dominates the thinking of many in the Communion. Richard Hooker found another wise way to structure a church. According to Hooker, only “things necessary to salvation” must be held in common; other questions are most appropriately dealt with by individual churches within their own national boundaries. Each church is best able to decide how to incarnate the gospel in its own time and place. In our complex era of increasing globalization, Hooker’s argument still holds true.

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Custom and the National Church: The Reason Why

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“Faith Seeking Understanding” Conference — Huron College, January, 2007

Through successive concatenations of historical circumstances and for excellent reasons, Anglicanism has chosen to adopt the model of autonomous national churches,¹ composed of monepiscopal dioceses, as the heart of its polity. A movement has grown up within the Worldwide Anglican Communion, seeking to undermine this model and move to a more centralized, internationally-ordered, arrangement. A variety of options have been presented; perhaps the leading example is the Archbishop of Canterbury’s suggestion of a two-tier communion. “Constituent members,” who might or might not

¹The language of “nation” is becoming ambiguous. That is notably the case in Canada, where this paper was written and delivered; here, the word “nation” is undergoing a shift in meaning, so that it refers to a group which shares something defining (such as language), but remains a part of a larger country. Throughout this paper, “nation” and “national” will refer to the traditional nation-state, with the sovereignty, autonomy and boundaries ordinarily associated with that form of organization.

form the whole of a national church, would enter into a covenant to agree on certain things, while “members in association” would be loosely affiliated to the Communion.² The purpose of Archbishop Rowan Williams’s idea is to enable greater harmony among and within Anglican churches, by creating a system of mutual responsibility and discipline. With women bishops and some movement toward acceptance of same-sex unions, the North American churches (and other churches under the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Church of the USA) would undoubtedly find themselves in the associate category. The Australian church’s consideration of lay sacramental leadership might have a similar effect.³ The significance of the Nigerian church’s support for strongly anti-gay legislation would need weighing,⁴ and so might the exceedingly pentecostal and charismatic leanings of the Ugandan and other East African churches.⁵ If constituent membership is to have any meaning, then the question of “outs” and “ins” is likely to be thorny and divisive. Those who have the privilege of objecting to another church’s behaviour carry some responsibility to do so, facing us with the prospect of endless dispute. This hardly seems to be a hopeful future for the Anglican Communion.

² <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/releases/060627%20Archbishop%20-%20challenge%20and%20hope.htm>

³ The Anglican Church of Australia passed a motion at its 2004 General Synod, requesting “the Standing Committee of General Synod to consider the implications of a diocese of this church professing to authorise and implement lay and diaconal administration/presidency, with particular reference to relationships within the Anglican Communion and in an Ecumenical context.”

<http://www.anglican.org.au/docs/GSMins%20Day%207-8Oct.pdf>

⁴ http://www.anglican-nig.org/communique_ibadan2006.htm

Section 7.2 of the legislation (entitled: “Act to Make Provisions for the Prohibition of Relationship Between Persons of the Same Sex, Celebration of Marriage by Them, and for Other Matters Connected Therewith”) reads: “Publicity, procession and public show of same-sex amorous relationship through the electronic or print media physically, directly, indirectly or otherwise are prohibited in Nigeria.”

<http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/archives/001582.html>

⁵ The charismatic movement in Africa, with special attention to East Africa, and its significance for Anglicanism are discussed in: Griphus Gakuru, “An Anglican’s view of the Bible in an East African context,” in *Anglicanism: A Global Communion*, edited by Andrew Wingate *et al*, (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), 58-62; Amos Kasibante, “Beyond revival: a proposal for mission in the Church of Uganda into the third millennium,” in Wingate *et al*, 363-368; and Allan Anderson, “African Anglicans and/or Pentecostals: Why so many African Anglicans become Pentecostals or combine their Anglicanism with Pentecostalism,” in Wingate *et al*, 34-40.

There is, however, a better answer and it is one that Anglicans already possess, as their birthright. On the strength of both historical development and theological reasoning, the autonomous national church model has proven to be far better suited to the needs of Anglicanism worldwide than any alternative so far presented. It is our best option, if we wish to maintain relationships of respect and support and sustain our own identities.⁶

Even as Anglicans claim roots in the ancient church, we recognize that the 16th-century English church represents a kind of starting point for us. The 16th century was a formative time for modern Anglicanism, in which some basic characteristics of our identity were both made evident to the world and elucidated as formal principles of our life. During this period, the English church became a national church, rather than a somewhat self-aware part of the transnational Western church, and it did so for a variety of reasons.

Initially, of course, there was Henry VIII. The story of Henry and his wives is an awkward portion of our history and, while non-Anglicans are prone to over-emphasize it, our inclination is always to try to bury it. Henry's battle to produce a male heir (driven by fears of 15th-century-style chaos), while satisfying his theological convictions and dealing with European and papal politics, is not edifying. His needs met the reformist convictions of an influential group of Lutherans, including Thomas Cranmer, who were happy to support Henry's bid for an annulment of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. This support, of course, came in large part because the end — an autonomous national church — suited both sets of goals.

⁶ *The Windsor Report* makes an effort to maintain some emphasis on national autonomy. Nonetheless, the *Report* places autonomy in the context of a theory of mutual responsibility. Subsequent conversation has tended to focus upon the latter theory, proposing various means of centralization and discipline, causing the autonomous, national church model to lose the central place which it has traditionally held in Anglican ecclesiology. . The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report, 2004*, (London: The Anglican Consultative Council, 2004), § 72-86.

Of course, not all the English supported the national church, resulting in a brief (1553-58) return to Papal authority under Mary Tudor. Moreover, those who became Church of England had quite dramatically different views about what that meant. There are a variety of ways in which one can trace the theological history of the English Church in the 16th century. One relatively simple method is to examine the history of Articles of Religion, from the Lutheran-influenced, but still rather traditional, “Ten Articles” of 1536; through Henry’s largely-medieval “Six Articles” of 1539; to the determinedly Protestant “Forty-two Articles” of 1553 and their successors, the “Thirty-eight Articles” of 1563 and “Thirty-nine Articles” of 1571. The “Lambeth Articles” of 1595, accepted by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York — but never by the Queen — demonstrate the sway which Calvinist ideas had over a remarkable number of English churchmen by the end of the 16th century.⁷

Another means of following the development of the English church is to study the battles over church order, especially those which occur after the accession of Queen Elizabeth and the return from the Continent of many who fled under the rule of Mary Tudor. A significant number of English Protestant leaders had become more radical during their Continental exile, while Elizabeth had no intention of moving faster than the common people would bear or in any direction which might undermine her own authority. The consequence was a vigorous and ongoing battle over theology, liturgy, church order, vestments and more-or-less anything else which could be tossed into the pot. The Church of England was deeply split, perhaps more than our church is today.

For Elizabeth and her supporters, Article XXXIV (of the Thirty-Nine Articles) was among the most important. This article justified Elizabeth’s efforts to confront all of this messy history and ecclesiastical confusion, making sense of it in a way suited to her country, in her day.

⁷ The history of these articles may be traced through: Gerald Bray (ed.), *Documents of the English Reformation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever through his private judgement, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the conscience of the weak brethren.

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.⁸

This article, broadly interpreted, combined with Elizabeth's assumption of the Royal Supremacy, supported passage of the legislation called "The Elizabethan Settlement." Thus began the experiment which constitutes the first, self-defined, "national" church.

Richard Hooker is the first theologian in the Anglican tradition to have reflected deeply upon what being a national church might mean. In the spirit of Article XXXIV, he recognizes that customs are tremendously powerful things and wise leaders do not dispose of them unnecessarily. Moreover, he regards the customs of a people as the context in which the gospel is both preached and lived; customs prepare people to know God's salvation and sustain them in God's life.⁹ While customs are inextricably local, the existence of the nation-state gives custom a national focus. As parochial as any village might be, ultimately its behaviour will be directed and, to a significant degree, defined by the national leadership.

Custom, for Hooker, is not a mere random accumulation of stuff that we do. Instead, every custom, every habitual action, is the product of a reasoned decision concerning the way to act in a particular set of circumstances. Customs are often good

⁸ Anglican Church of Canada, *The Book of Common Prayer*, (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1962), 711-712. Developments in wording may be traced in: Bray, 304-05.

⁹The nature of custom and its impact on ecclesiology is discussed in: William H. Harrison, "Prudential Method in Ecclesiology: Authority in Richard Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*," (Ph.D. thesis, Boston College, 2000); and William H. Harrison, "Prudence and Custom: Revisiting Hooker on Authority," *Anglican Theological Review* 84.4 (Fall, 2002), 897-913.

things, arising from a sincere effort to understand the world and find the best possible course of action in it. Insofar as this is the case, customs are founded on right reason. This foundation is the ground of Hooker's respect for custom.

Note that when describing the root of custom in reason, I did not suggest that any particular custom represents the "best" way to act, necessarily. We are both limited and sinful. Sin gives rise to evil customs, which ought to be transformed or uprooted. Transformation is possible; customs created with evil intention may be redeemed so that they serve the good. Grace is at work here. Moreover, we must take care to avoid falling into the grasp of utopian visions which cannot be realized in practice. Uprooting a way of life, in order to introduce an innovation, may have the consequence of introducing unintended (and worse) evils.

Customs are continually tested by the people who participate in them. Hooker is a firm believer in the value of "experience," but he does not use this word (as we tend to) as a reference to some private revelation received by an autonomous individual, which may then serve as the criterion for testing whole systems of meaning. Hooker is altogether suspicious of such revelations. Instead, for Hooker, experience is the communal activity of employing a custom over time; a wise custom will endure, for it will be found to serve its purpose consistently. As long as circumstances remain substantially similar, the custom will continue to work. To depart from the path worn by experience is unwise, unless solid justification for change exists.

Change is appropriate when circumstances are so modified that the existing custom no longer serves the intended purpose. The meaning of any given custom may be subverted, even inverted, by change in historical circumstances. Alternatively, change may become necessary when a custom is discovered to have unhelpful consequences or implications. The world changes; meanings change; actions must change. Nonetheless, care must be taken when making changes, because the world is complex and we cannot know all ends.

This understanding of the nature and importance of custom is the heart of Hooker's case for the autonomous national church. The 16th century saw the beginnings of the modern discovery of history as a real force in human life, including ecclesiastical life. Prior to Luther, the church was generally understood as having existed unchanged in its essential characteristics; the slogan was based on the position taken in the 5th century by Vincent of Lérins — "We believe that which has been believed always, everywhere and by all." Certainly, there are indications that the notion that change had occurred was starting to break through earlier, as with the Franciscan-Dominican argument over whether Christ lived in poverty and the implications of this possibility for the church, and with the appearance of Lollardy and its call for a Bible-based renewal of the church. Nonetheless, Luther's was the first movement which successfully reached a large portion of the European population with the idea that the church of his day was not what it had been at the beginning. Luther's answer was a thorough reformation of the church on what he understood to be Biblical principles. Calvin carried this process further, with a formal design for ecclesiastical polity.

Hooker faced a group of reform-minded activists within the English church, who understood Calvin's Reformed polity to be essentially Scriptural in character. These Protestants upheld the banner of cleansing change, while simultaneously retrieving the ancient and medieval notion of one God-given and unchangeable order for the church, to be followed by everyone, everywhere. Any church which did not follow the Genevan model of polity, at least in its general outline, was regarded as insufficiently reformed and, therefore, defective. This was the powerful ecclesiological doctrine which drove the Puritan opposition to the Elizabethan Settlement.

Against this, Hooker points to a rather startling and much more complete understanding of history and its significance for the church. Hooker recognizes that the church's form is, in part, prescribed by its historical context, which is defined by inherited customs. For Hooker, the Gospel is fixed in its content, though we — aware of

the development of doctrine — would disagree. To Hooker’s mind, the Bible provides the clear evidence necessary for the church to deduce the necessary doctrines: “touching pointes of doctrine, as for example the unitie of God, the trinitie of persons, salvation by Christ, the resurrection of the body, life everlasting, the judgment to come, and such like, they have been since the first hower that there was a Church in the world, and til the last they must be believed.”¹⁰ However, the Gospel must be both lived and presented in different times and places. Different sets of circumstances call for different strategies. One cannot assume that the appropriate way to be church in Geneva will be similarly appropriate in Canterbury. Instead, the best way for the church to act in a particular place will be identified by the church in that place exercising its own intelligence. The church will seek to understand the Gospel, while examining the customs inherited by the ecclesiastical body, other relevant customs in that place, and current circumstances.

The usefulness of Scripture is not in making prescriptions for all actions, for all of history, available to the church. The task of Scripture is to enable the church, reading the text with its own intelligence and in light of its history, to know “laws of duties supernaturall,”¹¹ — Hooker’s language for the way of salvation. Even when the Bible provides a specific law which might pertain to the current situation, the church cannot simply assume that the biblical law applies and automatically follow it. Circumstances change and so must the church.

Of course, this argument might be used to justify the infinite divisibility of the church. After all, I have found only one person in the world with whom I more-or-less completely agree: myself. However, Hooker points out that we do not live as monadic individuals. Instead, people have always come together in larger groupings so that life may be sustained and enriched.

¹⁰ Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, Vols. I-III. general ed. W. Speed Hill, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977-81), III, x, 7; I, 244.

¹¹ Hooker, *Lawes*, I, xiv, 1; I, 124.

As a matter of fact, we have created nation-states, in which power is given to duly constituted authorities to provide leadership and create laws which apply to people on the sovereign territory of those nation-states. These laws are rooted in the wisdom and customs of the people who make up the nation. Moreover, these laws become the customs and the grounds for new customs of those people. The authorities within a particular nation are best able to understand the national situation and make laws accordingly. If some powers are best exercised at a more local level, then national churches are best equipped to ensure that appropriate structures are in place. Consequently, a church is best organized on a national basis.

Although Hooker identifies a great many issues on which churches from different nations have no right to call one another to account, he never specifies whether any right of international discipline ought to be upheld. The logical deduction from his argument, however, is that if any such right exists, then it is limited to matters which are of the “foundation” of Christian belief: “Christ crucified for the salvation of the world” and the supporting propositions reached by the four great ecumenical councils of the early church — Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon.¹² On these matters, all Christians have an evident duty to correct one another, with some formal disciplinary measure, if necessary. On other matters (*adiaphora*, or “things indifferent”), all should learn from each other. Indeed, churches should instruct one another — Hooker was familiar with the

¹² 16. But if the name foundation do note the principall thing which is beleevd then is that the foundation of our faith which Ste Paule hath unto Tymothee. *God manefested in the flesh justefied in the spirit* etcetera. Thatt of Nathaniel: *thou arte the sonne of the lyving god. Thou art the king of Israell*: that of the inhabitants of Samaria *this is Christe the saviour of the world*. He that directly denieth this doth utterly raise the very foundation of our faith.

Richard Hooker, *A Learned Discourse of Justification, Works, and how the Foundation of Faith is Overthrown*, in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, Vol. V, general ed. W. Speed Hill, text ed. Laetitia Yeandle, commentary Egil Grislis, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 123.

25. Nowe because the foundation is an affirmatyve proposition they all overthrowe it who denye it; they directly overthrowe it who denye it directly; and they overthrowe it by consequente or indirectly which hold any one assertion whatsoever whereupon the directe deniall thereof maie be necessarily concluded. Hooker, *Justification*, 135.

On the priority of the four councils: *Lawes*, V, lii – liii; II, 211-220.

larger theological and ecclesiastical world of his day. Moreover, he does not believe that “indifferent” implies insignificance, but only that these are not matters concerning salvation (what we might call “core doctrine”); Hooker is aware of how important such matters can be and insists that right and wrong, good and evil are at issue in such questions.¹³ However, he provides no justification for interference with another national church over such *adiaphora*.

Historically, Hooker’s theory faced its first great challenge with the growth of the Church of England overseas. Hooker wrote during the “Age of Exploration,” rather than the days of empire. In the first instance, his great insight about the value of local custom and national churches was lost; from this loss, monumental tragedy has ensued.

The mere fact that what travelled was “The Church of England” is the key to understanding the problem of the colonial church. Altogether too often, the rallying cry was “Monarch and Prayer Book,” while British economic interests often carried the missionary church. As Max Warren points out, “Christianity, Commerce and Imperialism” met in the missionary movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, and “there is a closer relationship between [sic] the three than is commonly appreciated.”¹⁴ This is certainly the case in the eastern half of Canada, where Anglicanism arrived with fisherfolk and soldiers, then stayed with the Loyalists. Our earliest bishops, Charles Inglis, Jacob Mountain and John Strachan, are at least as famous for tying together loyalty to the Crown with Anglicanism as they are for their ecclesiastical

¹³ *The Windsor Report* is correct to note the significance of many issues which fall into the category of *adiaphora*, recognizing that much which Hooker includes in that area is of tremendous importance to Christian life and witness. Hooker would agree with this position, insisting only that judgements about such matters are best performed within national churches and at the level of government which they regard as most suitable. However, the definitions of the term “*adiaphora*” in *The Windsor Report* (“things which do not make a difference,” section 87) might seem to take away from the level of seriousness which Hooker intends, partly by appearing to suggest that such matters can routinely be left to individual consciences, though with consideration for the consciences of other Christians. As Hooker sees it, there are indeed some such matters which can be left to the individual, but that is not the implication of the category; *adiaphora* include many issues about which both ecclesiastical and civil polities must make decisions. Lambeth Commission, § 87-96.

¹⁴ Max Warren, *The Missionary Movement from Britain in Modern History*, (London: SCM, 1965), 18.

accomplishments.¹⁵ In the West, the military and royal connection was, perhaps, less evident. There, however, the church travelled with the fur trade, with logging and with mining — commercial interests. Wherever the gospel went, it brought European ways.

This is not the whole story. In the 18th century, Thomas Wood translated the *BCP* into Miqmaq,¹⁶ and John Stuart worked closely with Tyendinaga (Joseph Brant) to translate parts of the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)* into Iroquois for the Mohawk people (originally in northern New York state and later in Upper Canada).¹⁷ In the early 19th century, John West trained Henry Budd, a First Nations man who became a catechist, then deacon and whose name survives with a First Nations school for ministry in The Pas, Manitoba.¹⁸ Nonetheless, these activities which strengthened the indigenous church also maintained British culture. Even if the language used is Iroquois, the book itself is still the 1662 *BCP*, with all of the implied cultural lading.

Within Anglicanism, three things saved the insight: 1) the American Revolution; 2) the Oxford Movement and a new theory of episcopacy; and 3) a worldwide shift in missiological theory, to thoroughgoing inculturation.

From the perspective of Anglicanism and with the benefit of hindsight, the American Revolution was a beneficial development. The post-Revolution United States was decidedly independent, republican and anti-British. A national system, intended to serve American needs, had been established; here was a set of customs which could not be over-ruled by English authority and, indeed, any suggestion of English intervention would likely have been fatal to the newly-formed Protestant Episcopal Church in America. The first bishop, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated by Scottish Episcopal

¹⁵ The only overall history of the Anglican Church of Canada is: Philip Carrington, *The Anglican Church in Canada*, (Toronto: Collins, 1963). The focus of this history tends to be on the ecclesiastical structure, so that it gives a good account of the work of these three men.

¹⁶ Cynthia Shattuck, "Indigenous Canadian Translations," in *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, edited by Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 378.

¹⁷ Carrington, 41.

¹⁸ Carrington, 71-107, *passim*.

bishops, avoiding the complications surrounding Royal “Letters Patent” and extra-territorial episcopacy. One might argue that the Anglican Communion came into existence at this point in history, with the birth of a second autonomous, national church.

The Oxford Movement is usually understood as having begun with John Keble’s “National Apostasy Sermon,” preached July 14, 1833. The sermon was a response to Parliament’s intention of suppressing a number of Church of Ireland bishoprics, but its focus is on the decline of active commitment to Christianity in England.¹⁹ One way in which the Oxford Movement sought to link these themes — opposition to treatment of the church as a department of government and the call to spiritual renewal — was by presenting a theory of episcopacy which represented a definite shift in Anglican ecclesiology. Appealing to antiquity as a decisive authority, the major thinkers of the Movement insisted that

the authority of the church does not rest upon the authority of the State; that the Church possesses a divine authority whatever the State may do, even if the State should be represented by an indifferent or a persecuting government; that the authority of the bishop or the vicar rests not upon his national or his social position, but upon his apostolic commission.²⁰

This notion of episcopacy disentangles it from magistracy, while maintaining a sense of the church’s role in national life. This grants the church an independence lacking in prior Anglican ecclesiology, paving the way for Anglicanism to remain viable in an age when most of its members do not live in established churches and institutional authority must have another source.

Perhaps the most powerful force reviving the Hookerian insight about the value of custom and the national church, however, is the contemporary missiological emphasis upon thoroughgoing inculturation of Christianity. Where concern for national churches once meant that the *BCP* and some English hymns were translated into local tongues, for use in the English style, the focus has shifted to the composition of liturgies and hymns in

¹⁹ The sermon can be found at: <http://anglicanhistory.org/keble/keble1.html>

²⁰ Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1990), 3.

the vernacular and in styles particularly suited to the local context. The Church of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) has developed its own indigenous liturgy and ecclesiastical architecture.²¹ The Tanzanian church has created a new liturgy in Kiswahili.²² The Melanesian Brotherhood sings Melanesian hymns of praise, while dancing and employing native symbols and instruments, in its liturgies.²³ The result cannot be merely a variation in appearances; this level of change in verbal and visual symbolism implies a real and significant variation in belief. Ian T. Douglas links this growth of true inculturation with the commitment to the national church demonstrated in the Thirty-Nine Articles, and announces that “As Anglican worship looks and sounds less and less ‘English’, an increasingly post-colonial, multivocal, and polycentric Anglican Communion will emerge.”²⁴

The genie is out of the bottle and cannot be forced back. Anglican churches are going to look different from one another in the future; inculturation is a reality and there is no virtue in seeking to make us all look and think the same.²⁵ We cannot reasonably expect uniformity; instead, we can only ask that people retain a commitment to the most basic beliefs of Christianity, as expressed in the early church’s conciliar decisions and reconceived as accurately and helpfully as possible in different historical contexts.

Still, challenges have continued within worldwide Anglicanism. The first great example, and one remarkable in its parallels to the present situation, is the Colenso affair. In the 1850’s and 1860’s, Bishop Colenso of Natal came to the world’s notice as a

²¹ Jayasiri Peiris, “The Church in Sri Lanka and relations with other faiths,” in Wingate *et al*, 338-339.

²² Esther Mombo, “Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa,” in Hefling and Shattuck, 280.

²³ Richard A. Carter, “Where God still walks in the garden: Religious orders and the development of the Anglican Church in the South Pacific,” in Wingate *et al*, 50.

²⁴ Ian T. Douglas, “Inculturation and Anglican Worship,” in Hefling and Shattuck, 271-276; quotation from page 276.

²⁵ *The Windsor Report* notes the impact of inculturation. The emphasis upon “truth and love” as establishing parameters for diversity, while enabling us to live together, is helpful. In the spirit of Hooker, however, one must note the complexity of charity. A national church may be forced to act uncharitably toward the wider Anglican Communion, in order to act charitably toward the people whom it must serve in its historical context. This points to the strength of the autonomous, national church model. Lambeth Commission, § 85-86.

proponent of Black rights and new approaches to reading the Bible. In addition, he questioned the permanence of after-life punishment. These views brought him into conflict with many in the church. Colenso's Metropolitan, Bishop Gray of Cape Town, claimed juridical authority in the case, but dispute arose in England and the Privy Council ultimately ruled that no colonial bishop had authority because all of the royal letters granting episcopal standing were invalid. The Privy Council also ruled that Bishop Colenso should retain his see. The legal details are not of interest to us. Instead, our focus is upon the Canadian church and its reaction.

The Synod of the Province of Canada, meeting in Montreal in 1865, indicated its discomfort both with the doctrines ostensibly taught by Bishop Colenso and the Privy Council's reaction. At the urging of Bishop Travers Lewis of the Diocese of Ontario, the Synod passed a motion calling on the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Thomas Longley, to host a "National Synod of the Bishops of the Anglican Church at home and abroad, who... may meet together, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost take such counsel and adopt such measures, as may be best fitted to provide for the present distress, in such Synod presided over by your Grace."²⁶ The vision of Anglicanism in this action

²⁶ The ADDRESS from the Provincial Synod of the United Church of England and Ireland in Canada, assembled at Montreal in September, 1865.

To his Grace CHARLES THOMAS, Archbishop of Canterbury, D.D., Primate of all England, and Metropolitan:

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR GRACE,

We, the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Province of Canada, in triennial Synod assembled, desire to represent to your Grace, that in consequence of the recent decisions of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the well-known case respecting the Essays and Reviews, and also in the case of the Bishop of Natal and the Bishop of Cape-Town, the minds of many members of the Church have been unsettled or painfully alarmed, and that doctrines hitherto believed to be Scriptural, and undoubtedly held by the members of the Church of England and Ireland, have been adjudicated upon by the Privy Council in such a way as to lead thousands of our brethren to conclude that, according to this decision, it is quite compatible with membership in the Church of England to discredit the historical facts of Holy Scripture, and to disbelieve the eternity of future punishment; moreover, we would express to your Grace the intense alarm felt by many in Canada lest the tendency of the revival of the active powers of Convocation should leave us governed by Canons different from those in force in England and Ireland, and thus cause us to drift into the status of an independent branch of the Catholic Church, a result which we would at this time most solemnly deplore.

is clearly unitary. “The Anglican Church” is understood to be one church, capable of meeting in one synod. Moreover, the intention of that synod is legislative, rather than advisory. The Canadian synod desired a meeting of bishops of the whole Anglican Communion, to undertake a programme of action on behalf of the whole Communion.

However, no such synod was held. Longley wrote to the South African church, indicating that they were free to elect their own bishops and settle their own crisis.²⁷ At the request of Convocation, he called the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, with the language of “conference” (rather than “synod”) proving to be decisive.²⁸ The Lambeth Conference website emphasizes the voluntary and conversational nature of this first meeting:

It was made clear at the outset that the conference would have no authority of itself as it was not competent to make declarations or lay down definitions on points of doctrine. It did not take any effective action regarding the issues raised by Bishop Colenso but it explored many aspects of possible inter-Anglican cooperation.²⁹

At the second Lambeth Conference, a committee report stated explicitly that: “the duly-certified action of every national or particular Church, and of each ecclesiastical Province

In order, therefore, to comfort the souls of the faithful, and reassure the minds of wavering members of the Church, and to obviate, so far as may be, the suspicion whereby so many are scandalized, that the Church is a creation of Parliament, we humbly entreat your Grace, since the assembling of a general council of the whole Catholic Church is at present impracticable, to convene a National Synod of the Bishops of the [18/19] Anglican Church at home and abroad, who, attended by one or more of their Presbyters or Laymen, learned in Ecclesiastical law, as their advisers, may meet together, and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost take such counsel and adopt such measures, as may be best fitted to provide for the present distress, in such Synod presided over by your Grace.

F. MONTREAL, METROPOLITAN,
President.

JAS. BEAVEN, D.D., Prolocutor.

Francis Fulford, “A Pan-Anglican Synod. A Sermon Preached at the General Ordination held by the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Oxford, in the Cathedral Church of Christ in Oxford, on Sunday, Dec. 23, 1866.

http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/fulford/synod_sermon1866.html

²⁷ Evans and Wright, 323-325.

²⁸ Evans and Wright, 328-330.

²⁹ <http://www.lambethconference.org/resources/info/index.cfm>

(or Diocese not included in a Province), in the exercise of its own discipline, should be respected by all the other Churches, and by their individual members.”³⁰

With the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, accepted at the third Lambeth Conference (1888), we have a precise statement of what we would expect of other denominations wishing to unite with Anglicans. This goes further than Hooker’s stated church foundation, notably with the emphasis upon episcopal governance. Logically, however, if this is our only Communion-wide expectation of others who wish to join with us, then we cannot reasonably establish a stricter standard than this for full membership in the Communion.

The vision of independence maintained by the Lambeth Conference reflects a sounder vision of church than the centralized model best epitomized by Roman Catholicism or, indeed, a tightly-bound communion built around mutual discipline. The autonomous, national church is much better suited to today’s world. Harking back to the 19th century, with an attempt at international discipline over matters which have traditionally been left for national churches to decide, is not helpful. Returning to the 16th century, with a call for international standardization of polity, is even less so. Let us remain with the autonomous national church model and permit national churches to perform their duty of relating Christ to culture and culture to Christ as best suits them.

³⁰ “Committee Report, Lambeth Conference, 1878,” in G. R. Evans and J. Robert Wright, (eds.), *The Anglican Tradition: A Handbook of Sources*, (London: SPCK, 1991), 341.