

Abstract

“MICHAEL RAMSEY, AUTHORITY, AND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION”

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This thesis examines the challenges posed by the understanding and use of authority within the existing structures of the Anglican Communion. Ramsey’s work highlights the special role of the episcopacy within the church. Ramsey argues that not only is the episcopacy a necessity, but also that those exercising the office are to use it in such a way as to support the constant process of the building up of the Body of Christ. Ramsey’s thinking on the issue forms a large part of the foundation of the theologizing around the proper use of authority which has taken place in the last twenty years. Two of the principal documents produced in the context of these debates, *The Virginia Report* and the Ridley-Cambridge Draft of the Anglican Communion Covenant, raise questions around the necessity of centralized governance structures which have the purpose of resolving doctrinal disputes. These documents also raise questions as to whether ascribing authority to a centralized structure is an undesirable innovation within Anglican ecclesiology.

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**Michael Ramsey, Authority, and the Anglican Communion**

by

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## Introduction

The challenge posed by the definition and use of authority within the Christian community is as old as the Church itself. Arguments over its use date back at least as far as the New Testament texts themselves. One of the Greek words for authority, ἐξουσία, appears over forty times throughout those texts. Its presence suggests that authority is a major concern, not only of Jesus himself, but of very many early Christian communities as well. The most literal definitions of ἐξουσία are “from a substance,” or “from a being,” though the word itself, especially as used during the Classical period, nearly always means “one with power.” Regardless, what these all connote is that authority is something held by a person or persons. It stems directly from a source located within the self, whether said “within” exists as an individual’s own being, or stems from the community of which one is a member, or originates from a divine source.

All of these definitions would seem to apply within ecclesiastical contexts, where the Church’s authority derives directly from God. Its foundation is “rooted in the saving work of the Father in the incarnate Son, Jesus, and the missioning of the Holy Spirit by the Father to bring that work to completion.”<sup>1</sup> Authority as exercised within the Church can also be defined as “the subjective or objective superiority of certain persons by which they are entitled to make demands on others.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is a “both/and” proposition: the Church has authority because of its being caught up in the relationships among the constituent members of the Trinity. At the same time, the Church entrusts certain persons, after a period of discernment and testing, to exercise leadership and

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Flynn, “Authority in Anglicanism,” *Consensus* 12, no. 1–2 (1986): 36.

<sup>2</sup> Flynn, 17.

oversight. Both functions require those persons called to exercise leadership to make demands of others. Approaching the exercise of authority in this way carries with it the danger of assuming that the role of an authority holder is primarily that of “bossing people around.” While that may be the case in practice, that assumption is fundamentally incorrect in principle. Jesus himself never engaged in such a practice. Rather, when pushed on the issue, Jesus reminded his disciples that the path to greatness did not involve their lording authority over one another like the Gentiles’ tyrant-rulers did. He asserted that he had instead come not to be served, but to serve others, as ultimately demonstrated by the Crucifixion. If the Church’s authority is rooted in his life, death, and resurrection, then it should follow that those who are called to exercise authority within the Church are to do likewise.

The practice of so-called servant leadership was well established in early Christian communities as the ideal of *diakonia*. Broadly defined, *diakonia* is service of the sort expected of someone who waits on his or her social superiors at table (e.g., a slave serving food and wine to the guests at a dinner party or symposium). In antiquity, it was “the function of the Church in respect of its own members, an expression of Christian love within the brotherhood, directed either towards individuals or towards the corporate institution itself.”<sup>3</sup> This ideal of mutual and humble service remains a favorite way of describing the Church’s workers and their work to this day. Thus, to speak of

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<sup>3</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, “Diakonia in the Early Church,” in *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966), 52.

“Christian ministry” encompasses all four orders (bishops, presbyters, deacons, and laity) within the tradition of service set forth by Jesus himself.<sup>4</sup>

Within the gospels, the verb used for “serve,” διακονεῖν, describes Jesus’ service to humanity; service provided to Jesus and the disciples; and more specialized forms of service, such as that performed on behalf of the needy.<sup>5</sup> Mark 10:43-45 develops the ideal most fully. There, Jesus reminds the disciples that the use of authority in a secular sense is not equivalent to Jesus’ conception of loving service. Rather, his suffering and death add a sacrificial quality, such that it raises the servant to the level of being “the greatest.”<sup>6</sup> What sets ecclesiastical authority apart from political types of authority is that it requires the bearer, whether a community or an individual, to use authority in the interest of the poor and marginalized members of society.<sup>7</sup> As Jesus himself suggested, it does not involve the exercise of political power in such a way as to coerce a member of the community to do the leadership’s bidding, regardless of the potential for injury. It does require an ongoing commitment to relationships among all members of the community, as well as keeping at the forefront the question of how a given action may serve the well-being of those on whose behalf it is undertaken.

The fullest Biblical example of the practice of *diakonia* as it relates to the exercise of authority (ἐξουσία) in the Church is found within 1 and 2 Corinthians. There, Paul

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<sup>4</sup> John Knox, “The Ministry in the Primitive Church,” in *The Ministry in Historical Perspective*, ed. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1956), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence R. Hennessey, S.T., “Diakonia and Diakonoι in the Pre-Nicene Church,” in *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, ed. Robert T. Meyer, Thomas P. Halton, and Joseph P. Williman (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> John L. McKenzie, *Authority in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 21.

discusses it as it pertains to himself, and his ability to preach, teach, and organize. His own service in this case is the work of a messenger called by God to proclaim the Gospel; to delegate community functions such as gathering for worship and distributing resources to the poor; and to respond to problems.<sup>8</sup> At no time does Paul suggest that his service to the Church at Corinth entails anything else. Despite his occasional appearance of an arrogant attitude, at no time does he suggest that his task is to wield power in such a way that his mission becomes one of self-glorification, rather than serving the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The theme of keeping the gospel at the forefront of the growing Church's organizational agenda is also found in other sources from the first and second centuries. The leadership functions of the community became increasingly associated with the church's mission work as it expanded, culminating in the development of the offices of bishop (ἐπίσκοπος, "overseer") and deacon (διάκονος, "server"). Very often, the bishops themselves were public officials whose chief functions were initially to oversee the ministry within their jurisdiction, and whose office would later be expanded to include defending against teachings contrary to what had been received directly from the apostles themselves. Deacons, first appointed in Acts 6, were given the specific responsibility for the church's social ministries so as to free up the apostles to devote themselves more fully to "prayer and to serving the word" (Acts 6:4, NRSV).<sup>9</sup> It is notable that *diakonia* forms the backbone of the offices themselves, as well as the desired qualities of the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Joel C Elowsky, "The Ministry in the Early Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, no. 3–4 (July 2012): 298.

people holding them. Unfortunately, *diakonia* is a quality which seemed all but to disappear with the increasing professionalization of the clergy during the fifth century.<sup>10</sup>

Patristic sources expand slightly on the Biblical definition, as well as paint a picture of a Church which was struggling to define its identity in light of the generational shift which took place in the mid- to late first century. *1 Clement*, written in 95/6 A.D., holds that bishops and presbyters (the terms for each were used interchangeably at that point) possessed “the same authority that the apostles had” to preach, to teach, and to administer the sacraments, and that such authority is of God.<sup>11</sup> The letter itself notes that,

The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ. Both, therefore, came of the will of God in good order. Having therefore received their orders. . . they went forth with the firm assurance that the Holy Spirit gives, preaching the good news.<sup>12</sup>

G. W. H. Lampe argues that, in practical terms, the embodiment of *diakonia* on the part of the ordained originated from “the intimate and constant relationship between the cult and practical service.”<sup>13</sup> Such service was to be “both directed toward Christ, in the persons of His needy brethren, as its object and performed by Christ acting through

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>12</sup> *1 Clement* 42.1-4, *The Apostolic Fathers in English, Third Edition*, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 61.

<sup>13</sup> Lampe, “Diakonia in the Early Church,” 49.

His servants.”<sup>14</sup> The purpose of such service was “the alleviation of distress. . . to be servant to God in and through ministry to the world of His creation.”<sup>15</sup> These points all suggest that there is a very close relationship between the exercise of authority on the part of the ordained, and service to others in Christ’s name. This relationship seemed to be subsumed with the increasing professionalization of the clergy beginning in the fifth century. The end result was that the church served the structure, instead of the structure serving the church.<sup>16</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis, “authority” refers to that which is exercised within the ecclesiastical structures of the Anglican Communion as currently constituted. It is the God-given privilege of serving others in a way such as to build up the Body of Christ. Despite differences in polity among the individual Provinces of the Communion, such authority is commonly embodied in the office of the episcopacy. Despite the political power the office has accrued over time, its ultimate end remains the service of the people. There is a subtle difference between political power and authority *per se*. As will be argued later in this paper, authority, when exercised in the way Jesus himself demonstrated, is marked by deep concern for the wider community and by its enabling the community to embrace fully its calling as Christ-followers. Political power, on the other hand, demands obedience without necessarily insisting that its holder keeps the needs of those on lower levels of a hierarchical system at the forefront. Archbishop Ramsey in particular held that such a use of power and/or authority only serves to crush

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>16</sup> Elowsky, “Ministry in the Early Church,” 310.

those on whose behalf it is exerted, regardless of whether the intent of the people exercising it is to preserve some sort of unity or otherwise.

To assume that an authority-holder is ordained does take somewhat of a clericalist approach to the question. It tends to emphasize the role of the bishop within the context of the wider Church above all others. However, it should be noted that the only body on a global level which includes laity in its membership is the Anglican Consultative Council, where the other two assemblies, the Lambeth Conference and the Primates' Meeting, are comprised entirely of bishops. It should also be noted that the participation of laypeople in church governance also varies from province to province. For example, while the polity of The Episcopal Church has taken their participation for granted since the Colonial period, the Church of England did not begin the process of formally including laypeople within the General Synod until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Regardless of how individual Provinces choose to govern themselves, one of the major questions which has plagued the Communion for the better part of the past fifty years has been how to live into the tension between “universal” or global and local authority. That is, how is it possible to achieve, and maintain, balance between the two when one locality's discernment of God's will leads it to engage in practices which are considered innovations and thus not well-received by other local churches? Historically speaking, the answer has been along the lines of, “register one's disapproval publicly, but avoid interfering in another bishop's diocese or province.” However, that shifted enormously in the aftermath of the consecration of Gene Robinson as the Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003. Many strong disagreements resulted from this event, which several other Provinces perceived as a unilateral action. In return, bishops in those provinces took

“corrective” action by offering oversight to any U.S. Episcopal churches which desired it, in violation of both historic norms and the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury not to do so. For their part, the bishops who protested the Episcopal Church’s actions argued that they violated the plain meaning of Scripture, most especially its prohibitions against homosexual behavior. The communiqué issued at the end of the Primates’ Meeting in 2005 at Dromantine notes that “Many primates have been deeply alarmed that the standard of Christian teaching on matters of human sexuality expressed in the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10, which should command respect as the position overwhelmingly adopted by the bishops of the Anglican Communion, has been seriously undermined by the recent developments in North America.”<sup>17</sup> In light of this statement, the heart of the issue was, and continues to be, who has the authority to interpret Scripture; whether resolutions adopted by the Lambeth Conference carry any binding authority beyond expressing the collective minds of their writers; and whether unity is truly possible among a federation of national churches which do not appear to agree on a single hermeneutic. Specific to Anglicanism, it also raises the issue of whether it is appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury, or any other body, to impose a single ethic on the entire Communion. Centralization of authority in this way is an idea which sits in some tension with the historical reluctance to create a curial, monarchical, and centralized authority along the lines of the Roman system.

The documents produced in the wake of the crisis, including *The Virginia Report*, *The Windsor Report*, and the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant are all attempts

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<sup>17</sup> “The Primates’ Meeting Communiqué, February 2005 (Dromantine).” [http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/blog/comments/the\\_anglican\\_communion\\_primates\\_meeting\\_communique\\_february\\_2005\\_dromantine](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/blog/comments/the_anglican_communion_primates_meeting_communique_february_2005_dromantine) [accessed March 19, 2019].

to come to a consensus about the issue. All of them describe the status quo, as well as present possibilities for practical solutions to the challenges inherent with respecting differences among the many local contexts where Anglicans live and worship together, and what those mean in practice. At the same time, all of them move toward suggesting that perhaps establishing a centralized structure might prove to be a useful tool in resolving future disputes of this nature.

An important forerunner to all of these documents is the work of Michael Ramsey, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961 until his retirement in 1974. His thinking in the area of ecclesiology represents a synthesis of the High Church and Evangelical wings operative within the Church of England (i.e., a high view of the Church combined with deep grounding in Scripture). His was one of the key voices in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to pull together what the writers of *The Virginia Report* appeared to take for granted in those documents' understanding the necessity for and role of the episcopacy. It is a "marker" which distinguishes Anglicanism from Roman Catholicism and other Protestant denominations in that while it is necessary to Anglicans' sense of identity. As Richard Hooker argues in *The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, there was a deliberate choice to retain it because it is neither offensive to Scripture, nor an innovation. Further, it is a locus of authority which is, under the best of circumstances, exercised by the community as a whole.

Ramsey's work is also foundational for understanding the concepts of dispersed authority and subsidiarity. He does not use those exact terms to describe how authority moves within the Church. However, his apparent distaste for centralized forms of church governance such as the papacy makes clear that authority which is concentrated in a

single office risks becoming an end unto itself. Ramsey is keenly aware of the danger of leaders' forgetting the communal aspects of authority and religion in general, and thus turning it into "glory unto me."<sup>18</sup> His warning flies in the face of those who do not see humble service as the marker of an office-holder; it takes aim directly at the idea that, to paraphrase the Gospel of Mark, "leaders lord it over them like tyrants." This practice does not fit with Ramsey's idea of the Church as a living sign of the Gospel. It is the exact opposite of Jesus' example of servant leadership. It is also incompatible with the example of apostolic leadership found in the Book of Acts.

Chapter 1 of this thesis focuses on the issue of authority as Ramsey presents it. It begins with some of Ramsey's source material in Scripture and the early Church, and explores his understanding of authority as it properly functions within the Christian community. Many of his arguments highlight the necessity of the episcopacy, as well as seek to recapture the historic, servant leadership role of those called to take up the office of bishop.

Chapter 2 discusses the understanding of authority within the Anglican Communion from 1948 to the present day. Its focus is on three of the major touchstones used to qualify that understanding: the 1948 Lambeth Conference report, *The Virginia Report* (1997), and the Ridley-Cambridge draft of the Anglican Communion Covenant (2010). These documents represent a progression of thought, from maintaining the status quo of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, and ending with the Covenant's abortive attempt to transform the collegial relationships among the Instruments of Unity into an authority-wielding, bishop-heavy structure.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 48. Originally published by Longmans, Green, and Co. in 1936.

Chapter 3 places Ramsey's work into conversation primarily with *The Virginia Report* and the Anglican Covenant. These later texts share a number of similarities with Ramsey about the relational and communal aspects of authority, particularly regarding the bishop's role as a symbol of the Church's unity and her or his role within the local diocese. They diverge primarily in the application of the authority of the office itself. That is, they ignore the concept of *diakonia* or humble service at the heart of the Christian community, particularly as it applies to its ordained leaders, in favor of an approach which both centralizes authority and defines it in terms of bishops themselves.

## Chapter 1: Archbishop Ramsey on The Practice of Authority

Lord Arthur Michael Ramsey was arguably one of the most prominent figures in the Church of England in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The son of a Congregationalist minister and the grandson of an Anglican priest, he was born in Cambridge in 1904. Educated at Repton School, Cambridge University, and Cuddesdon Theological College, Ramsey's talents as a writer and orator became evident quickly through his participation in debating societies in the 1920s. Following his ordination to the diaconate in 1928, he was assigned to serve as curate in St. Nicholas' Parish, Liverpool. From there, he went to Lincoln as a teacher, where he wrote perhaps his best-known book, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, in 1936. He eventually returned to Cambridge as a Fellow of Magdalene College. Shortly thereafter, in the spring of 1952, he was appointed to the See of Durham. Eventually, he would be translated to York as its archbishop, and finally became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1961. Following his retirement, Ramsey remained active as a scholar, teacher, and retreat leader as long as his health allowed. He died on April 23, 1988, and is buried at Canterbury.<sup>19</sup>

During his years as Archbishop of Canterbury, Ramsey was well-known for his particular brand of political activism, which centered around the practice of reconciliation. One of the most famous examples of this was his visit to the Vatican to meet with Pope Paul VI. Ramsey was, at first, not particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of visiting Rome, nor did he, "like it if anyone suggested that Christendom might one day be reunited under the chairmanship of the Pope."<sup>20</sup> Despite his misgivings,

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<sup>19</sup> For these details see Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

Ramsey went anyway, in March of 1966, and at the close of a service both prelates attended, Paul VI gifted Ramsey his own episcopal ring as what was widely perceived as a sign of “the official recognition of the Church of England as a rightful Church with its rightful ministers.”<sup>21</sup> Such action was unprecedented, yet at the same time remained, for Ramsey, a powerful example of the type of servant leadership required for the ongoing task of building and rebuilding Christ’s church.

As a scholar, Ramsey was a prolific writer throughout his career. He could very often be found with pen and paper in-hand. Such was the case at the 1968 Lambeth Conference, where he spent a great deal of time in the moderator’s chair scribbling notes during the speeches he found especially boring.<sup>22</sup> He published a total of sixteen books during his lifetime, many of which were devoted to pressing theological issues of his day. Most germane to this study are *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, a defense of catholic order within the Church, which was first published in 1936; *The Future of the Christian Church*, which was written in 1971 with Cardinal Suenens and stemmed from the beginning of the ARCIC dialogues; and *The Christian Priest Today*, first published in 1972, which is a collection of talks given to new ordinands in the Church of England. The common thread throughout these three works is authority, especially within the context of the Church itself. Ramsey’s approach to the issue is typically Anglican in how it appeals to both Scripture and documents from the Early Church to prove that current praxis does not constitute an unacceptable innovation. His assertions are largely descriptive, rather

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 275.

than prescriptive; i.e., they name how authority is used and flows within the Church's structures, rather than what the Church must do in order to achieve a particular ideal.

As for the issue of authority itself, Ramsey deals mainly with its exercise within the bounds of the Church proper. He applies it most clearly to episcopal authority, with special attention paid to the principles that authority is both communal and relational, and any exercise of it on the part of the episcopate must adhere to those principles. That is, genuine authority stems from the *ecclesia* as a whole. Its foundation lies within the divine life of the Trinity, and as such derives directly from God's own authority. It is relational in that it is never exercised outside of the common connection in Christ formed among all members of the Church by virtue of their baptisms, and the relationships which ordained and lay leaders enjoy with one another and with God. The sole purpose of authority is to build up the Church, not to tear it down. The ultimate goal of such construction is to have the truth of the Gospel and thus God's own glory made plainly visible to the world by means of existing ecclesial structures. Ramsey makes this assertion most clearly in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, where he writes "[The] Church has borne witness to the coming of the end and to the transitoriness of the things of earth. Its history bears witness to Him, and He has borne witness to its history."<sup>23</sup>

To better understand Ramsey's approach, it is necessary to first examine his key sources. Within the Bible, he draws on Paul's Letters to the Corinthians to describe the purpose for, and proper use of, authority by the leaders of the Church at Corinth. Ramsey also draws heavily on the writing of Ignatius of Antioch, whose letters are among the earliest documents to provide, in detail, descriptions of how bishops functioned within

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<sup>23</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 191.

the Early Church. Both of these sources lay the foundations for determining what is truly important for the historical functioning of leaders within the Church. They are also appropriate supports for Ramsey's arguments in this arena, especially in regards to his emphasis on service to the community, and the proper ordering of relationships among bishops, the people whom they serve, and God.

In establishing the essence of authority as communal, relational, and marked by service, Ramsey first turns to 1 and 2 Corinthians. The idea that Paul, and those who share his status as apostles, are not anything other than servants appears in 1 Corinthians 3:9-11. There, Paul claims, "We are God's servants. . . for no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid: that foundation is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). The point here is that collaboration is required. Paul does not, and cannot, engage in the work he has gone to Corinth to do without assistance. He recognizes clearly that his role is simply to put the foundation into place there, and then to enable others to build the walls. The authority he has to do so is Christ; as Paul himself more or less argues earlier in chapter 3, it is not a matter of which one of the apostles, Paul or Apollos, the people at Corinth claim as their patron, or as their source of authority to build up their churches as they see fit. ("For when one says, 'I belong to Paul,' and another, 'I belong to Apollos'. . . For we are God's servants (*διάκονοι*), working together; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:4-9). Ultimately, it all belongs to God, through Christ. Therefore the type of service the building up of the Church requires is a matter of ensuring that God can provide what the community needs in order to grow and flourish, rather than seeking out political power or accolades of its own accord. For his part, Ramsey asserts that thinking in any other way constitutes the sin of self-consciousness,

one which blocks the necessity of learning to be “humble and dependent and to die to self” -- i.e., the very qualities which are required to exercise the authority of *diakonia* within the Church itself, as well as in the context of the wider world.<sup>24</sup>

This ideal appears again in 1 Corinthians 9. In defending himself against charges that he is yet another self-centered, false prophet, Paul asks bluntly, “Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same?” (1 Corinthians 9:8) The answer to these rhetorical questions is, of course, “no” to the first, and “yes” to the second. Paul’s authority comes directly from God, as he has already asserted. The proclamation of the Gospel, and arguably the responsibility to ensure that the communities established as a result of that proclamation continue to function according to its principles, is an obligation, one which he cannot ignore if he is to fulfill his mission to the people in Corinth. He makes this clear in verses 16-17: “If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.” Paul’s authority to proclaim the Gospel is a function of his call from God, not of any human desire to be rewarded with either materials, power, or prestige. He cannot do it without the people to whom the Epistle is addressed: “If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 9:2). Nor do they seem to have the capacity to function as a community in healthy and appropriate ways without his guidance. It is only together that they are able to exercise properly the authority of humble service for the building up of

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<sup>24</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 44.

the Church -- an ideal to which Ramsey himself would later return in the context of responding to the challenge papal authority poses to all of Christendom.

For his part, Paul makes a case for authority's having the sole purpose of building up the Church in three different places within 2 Corinthians. 10:8 contains the most clear statement to that effect: "Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building up and not for tearing you down." The deliberate use of "our authority" (ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν) emphasizes that authority belongs to the community as a whole, and not just to Paul himself. In 11:7, he notes that he "[humbled] himself so that you might be exalted." His sole purpose is to build up the community. His work stands in direct contrast to those who would tear it down. In this context, those would-be destroyers are outsiders who had attempted to establish themselves as equal to Paul himself, and in the process managed to convince some of the Corinthians that Paul's Gospel was the wrong one.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of *diakonia* plays directly into the kind of humility Paul seems to be talking about in this case, particularly as it requires a leader to lower his or her status within the community's pecking order for the sole purpose of raising up another. As he makes clear here, and elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence, modeling *diakonia*, with the telos of strengthening the Corinthian Church as a whole, is his entire purpose. The closing of 2 Corinthians restates this purpose yet again: "So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority (ἐξουσία) that the Lord has given me for building up and not tearing down" (13:10). With this statement, Paul reminds his audience that authentic authority -- i.e.,

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<sup>25</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, vol. 32A, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), 52–53.

that which comes from God and has humble service as a chief characteristic -- does not equal the sort of destructive force which Paul believes is sowing division among the people of Corinth. In doing so, Paul also reminds them that his purpose is that of a divinely-inspired builder. His only desire to that end is to utilize the authority he has for the good of the community as a whole. It also demonstrates that he is keenly aware of the potential for the abuse and/or misuse of that authority. Such awareness is essential in any leader, regardless of the context in which the leader exercises authority.

Paul's somewhat brief excursus on the subject of authority in these two Epistles highlights several overarching principles governing the use of authority in the Early Church. These principles, at least in theory, still apply to church polity in the modern day. Key to Ramsey's thinking on the subject are the ideals that: a) the Church "should be faithful to the gospel and the apostolic tradition;" b) all spiritual gifts and leadership functions are to be dedicated to service; and c) those chose and/or called to exercise oversight are to do so "in a collegial and faithful manner."<sup>26</sup>

Ramsey echoes Paul's sentiments in *The Future of the Christian Church* by noting that, "authority is rooted in humility, and the practical service of Christians of one another and of all is a paramount duty."<sup>27</sup> Ramsey also situates this authority directly within the life and ministry of Jesus himself. The examples Ramsey uses to support this point are drawn from Luke 22:24-27 and John 13. Both passages illustrate clearly that the foundation of Jesus' own authority is the mere fact that he is among the disciples as one who serves.

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<sup>26</sup> David M. Scholer, "Patterns of Authority in the Early Church," *Servant Leadership* 1 (1993): 42-60.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Ramsey and Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *The Future of the Christian Church* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1970), 49.

The Luke text contains Jesus' response to an argument over which disciple is the greatest. The argument itself occurs in the context of the Last Supper, between Jesus' telling the disciples that one of them will betray him and his prediction of Peter's denial. Luke is the only one of the Synoptics to place that argument in the context of betrayal itself, highlighting the disciples' utter lack of understanding about the events which are about to take place. Luke draws a sharp distinction between leaders who "lord it over" (κυριεύουσιν) their charges and the "true" leaders who serve as Jesus himself did (διακονῶν). The same verb, διακονῶν, appears in verses 26-28 a total of three times, and always at the end of a sentence. The position of emphasis is meant to highlight the importance of service over all other actions, not just in what Jesus himself does, but also in what those who follow him are to embody. Effectively, Jesus reverses the relationship between serving and being served. That is, human relationships are to be marked by serving one another at table as an act of willing sacrifice, and not, as the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:9-14 suggests, to gain personal merit before God.<sup>28</sup>

Ramsey draws a second example from John 13. Ramsey discusses the actions Jesus takes in this chapter at some length in *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, as they depict a Jesus who takes the embodiment of servitude one step further. He lowers himself to the level of a servant by washing the disciples' feet in the midst of the Last Supper. This is not a task normally undertaken by the host at such a meal as this. By his actions, Jesus demonstrates the subversion of the traditional role ascribed to those who have authority within a patriarchal and highly regimented society. This makes no sense at all to Peter until Jesus tells him, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me"

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<sup>28</sup> Hennessey, "Diakonia and Diakonoi in the Pre-Nicene Church," 64-65.

(John 13:8). The surface statement of the requirement for “belonging” to Jesus aside, the rebuke contains two pieces of information directly related to the use of authority. One, the act of washing the feet shows others how something is to be done, rather than providing a directive lacking in clarity or context to an underling, and simply expecting said directive to be carried out. Two, it requires a great deal of humility. In Jesus’ case, he lowers himself to the disciples’ level, and even lower, in the full knowledge of what God has entrusted to him, and that his actions will ultimately glorify God.

In explaining the implications of Jesus’ actions for church leaders, and for all Christians, Ramsey writes:

[T]he feet-washing, so far from being a veiling or abandoning of glory, is a manifestation to the disciples of the nature of the glory of the eternal God. . . It is the humility of the Son of God who knew that ‘his hour had not yet come’; and his action foreshadows the humility of the Passion: for the Passion as the supreme act of humility will be no less the supreme means of cleansing humanity. The feet-washing therefore prefigures it, both in humility and in cleansing: it is an act of truth and grace. For from the sovereignty of Christ there flows the sovereignty of the Church that represents him; but this sovereignty is grounded in the Lord’s humility.<sup>29</sup>

This act is not only a sign of God’s glory which is about to be manifest in the Resurrection, but also contains three important points about Jesus’ own exercise of

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<sup>29</sup> Douglas Dales, John Habgood, Geoffrey Rowell, and Rowan Williams, *Glory Descending: Michael Ramsey and His Writings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 74.

authority. First, while Jesus possesses authority because of who he is, he chooses to use it in acts of humble service. Within the context of John 13-17, which contain the entire Farewell Discourse, the action of washing his disciples' feet, in addition to his lecture, are meant to be taken together as Jesus' final lesson to the disciples. It provides them a model for going about that work in his absence, just as it does for anyone else who seeks to exercise authority in his name. Second, "humility and cleansing" are the key actions in which Jesus engages as demonstrations of truth and grace. The unstated expectation is that such behavior is normative for those who confess their faith in Christ. From this stems Ramsey's assertion that the Church shows the meaning of the Gospel when it, and those within it, go and do likewise. Third, the foot-washing provides a template for describing authentic forms of authority. It applies the concept of *diakonia* as would later be understood by Paul and those who followed in his apostolic leadership role. Authentic authority, exercised within the bounds of the Church, then, is manifest as something which is "humble, unselfconscious, and unpatronizing. It will meet the needs of humanity more deeply, since God has first been allowed to meet your every need."<sup>30</sup>

In other words: authority, when wielded properly, is not about the office one occupies, *per se*, but rather about how said office is exercised within the context of the Church. Ramsey's lived experience as a bishop bears this idea out. While he did recognize the gravitas of his office, Ramsey did not consider its material trappings, the material signs of the grace bestowed on its holder, as anything to be used to "lord it over" those whom he served. Ramsey's biographer, Owen Chadwick, notes that he "was a magnificent figure in ritual clothes. On his massive head a mitre did not appear comic,

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<sup>30</sup> Dales, et al., *Glory Descending*, 46.

and in gaiters and apron he looked every inch a bishop, with nothing fancy-dress about him.”<sup>31</sup> Ramsey arguably thought it was a protection against “wrongful ceremony” to interpret the wearing of vestments in any other way than doing what was appropriate for a given occasion. He himself is quoted as having said that “people who don’t understand . . . generally get pompous when they dress up.”<sup>32</sup> An essential part of his not being pompous can be found in his deliberateness about spending time with “his” people. At Durham, he made a habit of participating in the lives of parish churches. Not only did he conduct confirmation services and institute new vicars, but also stayed over after these services to “chat up the people with a mixture of silence and belly-bumping laughter.”<sup>33</sup> Ramsey also visited with the sick and the dying periodically, often sitting at the bedside with them in silence. One of his great delights was sharing in seminarians’ personal and academic lives. Chadwick writes that Ramsey “talked with them in his study or took them for walks in the park. He would talk not only of their vocation to the ministry but of the books which they were reading and the circumstances of their family. . . He found the ordinations, three times a year, to be his happiest moments.”<sup>34</sup> For those seminarians, Ramsey clearly used his authority to help build them up, and in the process, to help ensure that the next generation of English clergy understood clearly the responsibilities which would be laid upon them.

Ramsey’s term as Archbishop of Canterbury also demonstrated his commitment to servant leadership in a much wider context. As he had done at Durham, Ramsey made

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<sup>31</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

a point of being present in places where there was a potential for conflict. This was most evident in his visits to Northern Ireland in 1973 and 1974. These visits took place in the midst of deep and violent conflict between the Protestant and Catholic factions there. Despite vehement opposition to his presence from both sides, he persisted in his efforts to assist in reconciling these two warring factions. He used his authority as a member of the House of Lords to call for moderation from all sides “but with a sense of responsibility which the British ought to feel and some of them did not.”<sup>35</sup>

Ramsey did not make decisions unilaterally while he was at Canterbury, particularly when it came to bishop selections which would affect the entire Church of England. Ramsey never failed to write to the Prime Minister concerning his choices, nor to consult with local Vacancy-in-See committees about the qualities those groups desired in a new bishop. This had the effect of putting diocesan needs ahead of political or intellectual considerations. Arguably, it also produced a bench of bishops which was better able to exercise its ministry of servanthood within both local dioceses and the Church of England as a whole. Finally, in the run-up to the 1968 Lambeth Conference, he took great care not to let his own personal views affect the discussions and related reports. As chair of the conference, he only intervened in debates seventeen times, and then only to defuse tension or frustration.<sup>36</sup> Once again, this represented a use of the authority vested in the office of the Archbishop for the sole purpose of building up the Church. In this case, it fostered collegial relationships among the bishops attending the Conference and helped smooth the path to consensus on some of the Conference’s major

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 275.

issues. All three of these examples show an Archbishop who practiced what he preached, particularly in using the authority of his office to build up, not tear down, the community of the faithful.

Ramsey's writing on the subject of authority demonstrates that he was keenly aware of the danger of ordained leaders' forgetting the communal aspects of authority and religion in general. To do so risks turning the exercise of the offices of bishop, priest, and deacon into "glory unto me," rather than the service to others required by ordination vows.<sup>37</sup> Like Paul, he warns that:

There is the peril of a self-consciousness that dwells upon 'our privileges' rather than upon the glory of God in Christ; of a partisanship that exaggerates particular experiences or aspects of truth; of an intellectualism that misses the meaning of the redemptive act; and (the most subtle because the most devout error) of a 'spirituality' that rejoices in conscious union with Christ here and now and ignores the importance, for belief and conduct, of the historical coming of Jesus in the flesh and the historical society that links them to that coming.<sup>38</sup>

As was the case in Corinth, such self-interest dilutes the gospel message, as well as the meaning of "the redemptive act," i.e., Jesus' death and resurrection. It also serves as a warning to those who exercise ministries within the community that the ultimate end

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<sup>37</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

of their authority is the glory of God, and not the accrual of political types of power for their own use.

Ramsey's warning about this tendency to put self above community flies in the face of those who do not see humble service as the marker of an office-holder. It takes aim directly at the idea that, to paraphrase Mark 10:42 "leaders lord it over them like tyrants." The practice of those in authority behaving as if they are kings does not fit with Ramsey's ideal of the Church's authority being grounded in Christ's humility. When Church leaders begin to act in this way, their behavior fails to show the type of humility Christ displayed on the cross, i.e., one which is kenotic and which has the sole purpose of building up the Body of Christ. To use authority in any other way hearkens back to Paul's own assertion that it causes division, and in doing so, it turns the Church away from its primary task of showing forth God's glory in the world.

Ramsey's discussion of episcopal forms of authority, as properly exercised within the context of the Church, builds on ideas first set forth by Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius was among the earliest extant sources to articulate clearly the principle that bishops, by dint of their having inherited their offices directly from God, are a symbol of the unity of the Church itself. Ignatius discusses this ideal in terms of the relationships between the bishop and God, and the bishop and the Church. One of Ignatius' recurring themes is that the bishop is a point of unity for the whole Church. The relationship between a bishop and his or her flock is a sign of the unity between Jesus Christ and the whole Church, and of the unity between Jesus Christ and God the Father. Per the Letter to the Ephesians, the relationship between bishop and people is what allows the whole Church to be "harmonious in unanimity, and taking your pitch from God you may sing in unison with

one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, in order that he may both hear you and, on the basis of what you do well, acknowledge that you are members of his Son.”<sup>39</sup> Ignatius also maintains that bishops are an absolute necessity, particularly in light of his context, where they functioned as protectors of a persecuted community. Their authority is “obtained. . . not by [their] own efforts or through people or out of vanity but in the love of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>40</sup>

Building on Ignatius’ argument, Ramsey traces the development and the necessity of the episcopal office back to the earliest days of the Church. It was initially a response to the “peril of a self-consciousness” among the faithful which led to the sins of partisanship; an intellectualism which discounts the reality of the Cross; a type of spirituality which ignores the historic significance of the Incarnation; and, perhaps most damning of all, the development of a religion which promotes an ethic of “glory unto me” instead of the glory of God.<sup>41</sup> This principle holds with Paul’s argument against partisanship in 1 Corinthians as discussed above. That is, the exercise of authority within the Church has but one telos, which is to glorify God. Any use of authority which does not meet that condition is incorrect. It does not stem from the authority of the gospel itself, and has as hallmarks the kind of partisanship which both Ramsey and Paul condemn, as well as a failure to do the justice of lifting up the marginalized.

Ramsey further cites Irenaeus of Lyons, a second-century critic of the Gnostic heresy, in citing a two-fold emphasis on Scripture and the Apostolic Succession as the

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<sup>39</sup> *To the Ephesians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers in English, Third Edition*, ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 97.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 48.

building blocks of the Church's overall structure.<sup>42</sup> That it has evolved organically around these two things is not an accident; "the Gospel has created them, and in the Gospel their meaning is to be found."<sup>43</sup> The authority vested in the episcopacy does not function apart from the overall structure of the Church (which Ramsey, following the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, defines most broadly in terms of Scripture, Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and bishops). These elements are inseparable from one another, and serve to point Christians away from the subjective and toward the truth of both the Incarnation and the Church which evolved from it. Ramsey notes that "it would seem highly arbitrary to select one out of these to call it essential, while rejecting or ignoring the other."<sup>44</sup> This suggests the authority vested in the episcopacy is part of a finely balanced system. The privileging of any one part of it carries the danger of losing sight of the others. The only way to avoid this imbalance is through an awareness of the interdependent relationships among the Creeds, Scripture, episcopacy, and the life of the Church as a whole. In an almost circular fashion, each of these things leads to the other.<sup>45</sup> Like any finely tuned mechanical system, the failure of one part to work harmoniously with all of the others wreaks havoc on the entire system. As Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 3, this is exactly the sort of chaos which results in different groups claiming to belong to Paul or to Apollos, and in the process failing to behave in a way which reflects their status of being one in Christ.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 54.

For bishops in particular, this imbalance also includes the danger of assuming the type of monarchical authority which requires others to serve them, instead of bishops' serving the people with whose care they have been charged. This reversal of the examples of servant leadership in Scripture, beginning with that of Jesus himself, represents as much of a disruption to the life of the Church as preaching "glory unto me." This is especially true when it results in the isolation of bishops from the rest of the Church: "And the Episcopate will be perverted unless it knows itself as nothing in isolation and significant only as an organ of the one Body, which, by the healthy relation of all its parts, sets forth the Gospel."<sup>46</sup> As is also the case for Ignatius, the authority vested in the episcopal office itself comes from the community. The office-holder only has as much power in a political sense as the community is willing to grant it. This suggests that a "bottom-up" approach to its exercise would prove to be most beneficial. If nothing else, such an approach has the result of enabling everyone to embrace fully the use of their gifts on behalf of the community, and thus maximizing the capacity for building on the foundation that is the "reconciling act" of the Crucifixion. In *The Christian Priest Today*, Ramsey writes that such authority, when vested in the person of a bishop, is representative of the whole body's response to Christ "because the Church is apostolic and catholic the priests and the lay people in turn require the bishop to *display*, to *enable*, and to involve the Church in acts representing its. . . character."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today*, New Revised Edition (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 96.

One of the challenges to Ramsey's argument in favor of the episcopacy is that of the Roman Catholic Church's claims concerning the authority of the Pope. Ramsey addresses these directly by appealing to the historic development of the office itself. He recognizes that the authority of the Papacy is legitimate, though only on the condition that it "expresses the general mind of the Church in doctrine, and which focuses the organic unity of all the bishops and of the whole Church."<sup>48</sup> What Ramsey finds problematic about the way the authority vested in the office of the Pope is understood and exercised claims to be "a source of truth over and above the general mind of the Church" and in its having become something which "depresses the due working of the other functions of the one Body."<sup>49</sup> Not only has the Papacy forgotten its commission to serve God's people, and thus failed Ramsey's test of being a "true development," its claim to primacy may also represent a distortion of what is known about the historical development of structures within the Early Church. However, Ramsey notes further that it "seems possible that in the reunited church of the future there may be a place for a *primus inter pares* as an organ of unity and authority. . . For a primacy should depend up on and express the organic authority of the Body; and the discovery of its precise functions will come. . . by the recovery elsewhere of the Body's organic life."<sup>50</sup>

The consequence of this type of organic authority is that individuals who are called to occupy bishops' thrones have the task of "ruling and integrating. . . [and] controlling local churches on behalf of the general Church" and nothing more.<sup>51</sup> This

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<sup>48</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Dales, et al., *Glory Descending*, 107.

<sup>51</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 63.

reinforces the arguments made by Paul, Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Ramsey alike that there are limits to what even a monarchical type of authority can do within the boundaries of the Church's structure. Simply put, it cannot function appropriately outside of the boundaries of the community as a whole. This point is especially important to remember in light of the historical development of the episcopate. As the Church grew through the Middle Ages and the ratio of congregants to clergy increased rapidly, bishops became somewhat removed from the day-to-day lives of the people living within their dioceses. They thus came to enjoy the material privileges and the trappings of political power which were ascribed to their office.

In practical terms, it also meant their responsibilities to interpret doctrine and Scripture were done largely apart from the lived realities of the people, who in turn are affected by the often chaotic consequences of those decisions. At Corinth, unilateral decisions by the leadership in the absence of Paul's guidance resulted in disruptions to the community's worship life, as well as caused them to forget the truth of the Gospel on which the Church is founded. In the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century Anglicanism, that chaos has taken on the form of some bishops' pushing the boundaries of their own authority against that of the wider church (e.g., the blatant and very public refusal of the Bishop of Albany in late 2018 to comply with General Convention's requirement to make provision for marriage equality). The chaos experienced as a result is no different from that found in ancient Corinth. Likewise, it only serves to reinforce the ideal that interdependence among all the various structures which make up the Church is an absolute requirement for avoiding the pitfall of "glory unto me," as well as the resulting blindness to the truth of the gospel.

The ideas Ramsey advances about the place and proper practice of authority within the Church are not new. Like his Elizabethan-era predecessors, he relies heavily on ancient sources to make his point that so-called servant leadership is the standard to which Church leaders must aspire. Ramsey also follows Richard Hooker, John Jewel, and the Tractarians to some extent in arguing for the necessity of bishops. His unique perspective on the matter involves recovering the ancient mode of “bishop-as-servant.” Where Hooker and Jewel, for their part, are more interested in defending the retention of “popish structures” such as the three-fold order of ordained ministry in the face of Puritan resistance, Ramsey fully embraces them as signs of the Church’s catholic and apostolic nature. However, his warnings about the dangers inherent with the misuse of authority still pose challenges for the Anglican Communion as a whole, especially with respect to the question of the role of authority as embodied in those who exercise episcopal oversight.

## Chapter 2: Questions of Authority in the Anglican Communion, 1948-present

If Ramsey's work represents the theoretical side of authority as an issue, then the questions surrounding its application within the wider context of the Anglican Communion represent the practical challenges. Since the Communion's inception in the early 1850s, the issue of authority has presented a conundrum. This is especially true for bishops. They are symbols of the Church's unity, yet at the same time, it has often been unclear whether they can exercise jurisdiction outside of the geographic boundaries of their dioceses. In the ongoing struggle to address this conundrum, the Communion has moved to adopt more formal structures to help regulate the common life of its loose confederation of national churches.

The points in history which are most often held up as definitive in this regard are reflected most clearly in four specific documents: The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888; a report titled "The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion" produced by the 1948 Lambeth Conference; *The Virginia Report*, which was published in 1997 and included in the Lambeth 1998 conference proceedings; and the Ridley-Cambridge Draft of the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant, finalized in 2010. All four of these documents share a desire to define the proper loci of authority, while at the same time preserving provincial autonomy to the highest degree possible.

The hopes, and the reality, expressed and reaffirmed within these documents often do not so far as to provide prescriptive solutions to the challenges of maintaining relationships across geographic, cultural, and theological divides. It can be argued that this lack of prescriptive solutions enable one group to impose uniformity, and thus its own particular hermeneutics and theological will, on another, and in a way which honors

the distinctiveness of each local context where such unity is desired. The critics of both the Lambeth 1948 “Meaning and Unity” document and *The Virginia Report* maintain that the deliberate vagueness with which they define structural sources of authority is not always helpful. This is particularly true where critics feel that a stronger, more centralized form of authority, such as that already vested in the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, would be preferable as a solution to the anxiety over the changes occurring within the family system of former British colonies. However, it remains to be decided if such a solution is either appropriate, warranted, or even particularly Anglican in its self-understanding. At best, establishing a curial form of government at the highest levels of the Communion would require individual Provinces to sacrifice something of their unique witness in their local contexts in order to maintain some sort of uniformity of belief and worship across the Communion as a whole. Such a move is not congruent with the long-held preference for preserving local autonomy to the highest degree possible.

The exercise of episcopal authority, locally adapted, has been an issue with in the Anglican Communion since its birth in the middle of the nineteenth century. The extent of a bishop’s authority beyond the physical boundaries of a diocese first came to a head in the case of John Colenso, whose attempts to adapt the Bible to local culture to evangelize students more effectively in South Africa were viewed as heretical. Bishop John Gray of Cape Town successfully prosecuted Colenso within the bounds of the newly-formed synodical structure of the church in South Africa.<sup>52</sup> Then Colenso successfully challenged his conviction on the grounds that only the Crown had

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<sup>52</sup> Kevin Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139.

jurisdiction over those whom it had appointed to a specific see.<sup>53</sup> In his case, since he was an appointee of the Queen, and not of Bishop Gray, Colenso was not required to obey Gray's pastoral directives. Colenso's ability to adapt to the local culture arguably made him a more effective missionary. Despite how it ran counter to the overriding colonialist impulses of his day, Colenso's work provides an excellent example of using the authority vested in the episcopal office to build faithful community, while at the same time honoring the gifts of its individual members.

The Bishop Colenso incident effectively raised questions of whether a bishop in one province can properly charge a bishop of another province with heresy, as well as whether England had any "bearing on overseas churches" which were beginning to develop their own internal governance structures.<sup>54</sup> This emerged as a discrete challenge as former British colonies gained independence through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the process of the formation of the Church of South India (CSI), which began in 1929, gave rise to questions about who could properly ordain bishops to oversee the Episcopal parishes within the CSI itself. Anglo-Catholics within England, including T.S. Eliot, argued that moving toward a more locally defined episcopacy constituted a threat to the church's catholicity, despite the outcome of such a move ultimately enabling the CSI to "overcome the historic divisions which have plagued English Christianity since the seventeenth century."<sup>55</sup> The issue of using governance structures in service of maintaining catholicity continues to be an issue in the context of the current conflict

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>54</sup> Perry Butler, "From the Early Eighteenth Century to the Present Day," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, Revised Edition, eds. John E. Booty, Jonathan Knight, and Stephen Sykes (London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 41–42.

<sup>55</sup> Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism*, 235–36.

around human sexuality. The question at the heart of the matter is, if the Archbishop of Canterbury cannot, even after consultation with fellow heads of national churches, move to exclude a Province on account of its actions, who can, or even should, possess the power to do so?

Resistance to ascribing synodical or curial authority to any gathering of Anglican bishops has existed since the 1850s. Bishop G.K.A. Bell, following the second Lambeth Conference in 1878, described such episcopal gatherings as “a special opportunity for knitting the various provinces and dioceses of the Anglican Church together in mutual counsel.”<sup>56</sup> Subsequently, the Lambeth Conference continues to exist solely as a deliberative body, convened at the direct invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. While the various reports and resolutions produced by attendees are granted privileged status, and as such are often received as definitive statements of praxis and theology, the Lambeth Conference itself has no constitutional or canonical authority. It is meant to serve as a forum for bishops to consult with one another and to develop collegial relationships, and nothing more. It has, however, enhanced the Archbishop’s primacy within the Communion, but without according that office the same type of political power as exercised by the Pope.<sup>57</sup>

The desire for collegiality among bishops, with the Archbishop of Canterbury serving as convener, has been normative ever since, although the desire for enhanced archepiscopal authority from some corners of the Communion has been a threat to that collegiality since at least 2003. The lack of a centralized curia has become one of the

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<sup>56</sup> Butler, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

hallmarks of Anglicanism, especially when compared to other hierarchically-structured denominations. The authority afforded to the Archbishop of Canterbury within the Communion is merely a function historically ascribed to his office. As in the case of Bishop Colenso, whether the Archbishop can properly exercise that authority outside of England is still an open question, and even within the Church of England his authority is limited. In the context of the current crisis, both Rowan Williams and Justin Welby have declined to intervene in the internal affairs of any of the provinces which have, to date, sanctioned the ordination of LGBTQ clergy and the blessing of same-sex marriages. Likewise, they have also declined to “discipline” the several provinces which attempted to intervene on their own by establishing Anglican churches outside of existing provincial structures. For Williams and Welby, at least, the question seems to be settled. The Archbishop can advise and counsel, but cannot take actions which would effectively disrupt the life of the local church.

The practice of one bishop’s not interfering within another’s jurisdiction is an ancient one. Within Anglicanism, it is enshrined in the 1888 Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. One of the Quadrilateral’s hallmarks is the affirmation of both diversity and provincial autonomy. These have held up as overarching principles for the organization of the Communion to this day. The four basic elements which are the “inherent parts of this sacred deposit [of the Christian faith]” emphasize the primacy of Scripture as the revealed Word of God; the Creeds as a sufficient statement of faith; the sacraments of baptism and eucharist; and “the Historic Episcopate, locally adapted.”<sup>58</sup> As an ecclesiology, it is almost deceptively simple; it says very little about the unique

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<sup>58</sup> “The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.” *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 8771

nuances found within the polity of those local churches, but instead emphasizes the things which are unitive on a global level.

Of these four elements, the episcopacy and its human guardians have caused the most discussion about the use of authority. Butler notes the “precise implications of this last element, which was deliberately used to embrace the differing interpretations of episcopacy within Anglicanism, have consumed much Anglican theological energy.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, many of the best known, and most discussed, issues occupying mainstream news coverage about the Anglican Communion since the turn of the twenty-first century have centered on episcopal authority, to say nothing of the hundreds of online resources which have served to foster conversation on a previously unknown scale. At least as far back as the 1948 Lambeth Conference, and arguably the discussions which resulted in the Quadrilateral itself, the central question has been one of defining an Anglican ecclesiology, in terms of how the authority derived from Christ himself flows among and between what is essentially a confederation of national churches.

While the 1948 Lambeth Conference was initially intended as an opportunity for Anglican bishops to offer a word of hope to a war-torn world, it is much better known for its attempt to define Anglican ecclesiology more clearly. The conference itself took place against the backdrop of an incredible amount of upheaval in the world order: two world wars; rapidly changing understandings of science and technology; the Cold War; advances in Biblical scholarship; and the beginnings of liturgical reforms in most major denominations (some of which failed in England proper, most notably the rejection of a proposed Book of Common Prayer by Parliament in 1928); and the breakup of the British

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<sup>59</sup> Butler, 42–43.

Empire are but a few of the events which vastly changed the context in which the Church ministers. In the midst of this, the 1948 conference sought to define both a sort of status quo for the Communion, as well as shape its identity going forward. The results of those conversations appear in the reports on the Anglican Communion included in the conference proceedings. The “Meaning and Unity” report, while it is not authoritative beyond the group of bishops who produced it, has been interpreted as a definitive statement on the shape of authority within the Communion. It was accepted as such by the Primates’ Meeting in 1981, and both Archbishops Robert Runcie and George Carey cited it at subsequent Lambeth Conferences.<sup>60</sup> The report’s process of acceptance, then, was more or less organic, leading to the assumption that the report itself was intended as more than a description of what its authors originally perceived about the state of the Communion in 1948.

The report itself makes two claims about the nature of authority and its origins: one, that the source of the Church’s authority is God; and two, that the authority exercised within the context of the Church is not concentrated in a single entity. The report states:

Authority. . . is single in that is derived from a single Divine source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation, the authority of the eternal Father, the incarnate Son, and the life-giving Spirit. It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph Britton, “‘Dispersed Authority’: An Historical and Theological Critique of the 1948 Lambeth Conference Report,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 42, no. 3 (1999): 311–31.

witness of saints, and the *consensus fidelium*. . . It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralized authority.<sup>61</sup>

Rooting authority firmly in the life of the Trinity represents a departure from modern political thinking about “lordship.” That is, God’s power does not originate from a place of strength, despite God’s status as an omnipotent Being.<sup>62</sup> “God’s power” is instead demonstrated through the Incarnation, and its culmination in Christ’s humbling himself to the point of death on the cross. As discussed in the previous chapter, such authority does not constitute power to “lord it over” another, but rather power to *serve* another. Within the bounds of Anglican ecclesiology, it is best demonstrated in the deliberateness required to maintain relationships across large geographical and theological distances (which, in this era, has been greatly aided by the growing ease of international travel and the wide availability of the Internet as a communications tool).

One example of an effort to remain in relationship in spite of deep divisions is the approach taken by Bishop Shannon Johnston of Virginia, and the Rev. Tory Baucum, rector of Truro Church in Fairfax. Both were involved in a bitter legal dispute following votes by Truro and ten other congregations to leave the Episcopal Church following the election of the Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson, the first openly gay bishop within the Communion. Despite opposition from advisers on both sides, Johnston and Baucum struck up a friendship and continued to meet over a period of several years. Their

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<sup>61</sup> Appendix: “The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion,” in *Authority in the Anglican Communion: Essays Presented to Bishop John Howe*, ed. Stephen W. Sykes (Toronto, Canada: Anglican Book Centre, 1987), 284–85.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen W. Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995), 142.

friendship gained the attention of Archbishop Welby, who wrote, “The close friendship [the Rev. Baucum] has forged with Bishop Shannon Johnston, despite their immensely different views, sets a pattern of reconciliation based on integrity and transparency. . . . Such patterns of life are essential to the future of the Communion.”<sup>63</sup> While Baucum and his congregation are not a part of the Communion proper, his and Bishop Johnston’s commitment to remaining in relationship demonstrates how episcopal authority can be applied in a spirit of humility and service, and in a way which minimizes the imbalance of power inherent in hierarchical systems.

The concept of dispersed authority as expressed in the “Meaning and Unity” report is almost deliberately vague. It is an essential piece of Anglican ecclesiological understanding, and, like any description of authority within a concrete system, has both advantages and drawbacks when it is put into practice. Dispersed authority does not rely on a single, centralized office and office-holder. Rather, it is a shared endeavor, with authority distributed equally across the different aspects of the organizational structure. It is also inherently relational, as it requires all of the constituent parts to remain in relationship with one another in order to maintain the health and balance of the entire system. It is inexact, and as such functions more as an ethos which shapes the life of the Church rather than a set of doctrinal statements which confines that life.<sup>64</sup> The clear advantage of such a model is that it allows both for provincial autonomy and “the collegiality of bishops” to serve as determining factors in the face of controversial

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Paulsen, “Two Ministers Forge Friendship Across Church Divide,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/19/us/two-ministers-forge-friendship-across-a-church-divide.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Ephraim Radner, “The Scriptural Community: Authority in Anglicanism,” in Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of the Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 90–112.

decisions. It also recognizes that the exercise of authority, especially in cases where there is the potential for an issue in one local context to affect another local context negatively, requires the hard work of remaining in relationship.

The major example of this concept in action is found in the response to the ordination of women to the priesthood. As the text in section 4.16 of *The Virginia Report* describes, the 1968 Lambeth Conference requested each province to study the matter after the needs of the mission within the Church in Hong Kong warranted the practice. The Anglican Consultative Council, meeting several years later, resolved that “the Bishop of Hong Kong, acting with the approval of his Synod, and any bishop of the Anglican Communion acting with the approval of his Province, that, if he decides to ordain women to the priesthood, his action will be acceptable to this Council; and that this Council will. . . continue in communion with these dioceses.”<sup>65</sup>

The main disadvantage, as suggested by both Philip Turner and Ephraim Radner, is that lacking a centralized authority which provides a definitive grounding in, and interpretation of, Scripture causes a great deal more chaos within the Church and even errors in its discernment of God’s will. Turner notes, correctly, that the “Anglican Way” depends on both the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the maintenance of collegial relationships among those who hold episcopal office. Such collegiality has been endangered by the innovations of ordaining women and “non-abstaining homosexual persons” as priests and bishops, and the blessing of same-sex marriages in the United

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<sup>65</sup> “The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission,” 4.16. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/150889/report-1.pdf> [accessed January 17, 2019].

States, Canada, and elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> His assertion that the breakdown in collegial relationships among bishops has compromised the polity of the Communion as a whole is far-fetched. Disagreements have, historically, featured quite prominently in the histories of both the Church of England and The Episcopal Church, for example, the arguments between the Godly and the “no bishop, no king” parties in the seventeenth century which led to the English Civil War, and the debates between Northern and Southern bishops in the U.S. over a potential schism in the run-up to the American Civil War.

In both cases, there was a great deal of damage done to the Church in the short term. However, they did not result in a permanent dissolution of the so-called “bonds of affection” among bishops on either side. Rather, both the Church of England and the Episcopal Church emerged from those periods of turmoil into a position of strength. It was not due only to the political power required to produce the solutions in both cases, but also as a result of the bishops’ having exercised the privileges of service to the wider Church which are an essential component of their office. Turner also seems to forget that dispersed authority requires that all four “corners,” i.e., Scripture, Creeds, sacraments, and the episcopacy, are necessary to ensure the smooth functioning of the Communion as a whole. The presence of both the Holy Spirit and human fallibility within that framework raises the distinct possibility that the Church can and will err on issues of doctrine. The diversity of theological opinions resulting from the lack of a centralized person or group to impose uniformity on the whole can be a disadvantage in its propensity to cause anxiety and conflict, but at the same time it also demands more work

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<sup>66</sup> Philip Turner, “The Virginia Report: How Firm a Foundation?,” in *The Fate of the Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006), 168.

to stay in relationship despite differences resulting from local practices and cultural norms.

Section IV of *The Virginia Report (TVR)*, titled, “Levels of Communion – Subsidiarity and Interdependence,” introduces the concept of subsidiarity into the discussion of authority. It also affirms the relationally-based checks and balances first described in detail by the 1948 “Meaning and Unity” report. First introduced in the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1896, subsidiarity is understood within the context of *TVR* as investing in local and face-to-face means of exercising authority. Its initial development within Roman Catholic circles was intended to decentralize the hierarchy, pushing a greater degree of control to national conferences of bishops within their own localities.<sup>67</sup> In principle, subsidiarity means that “a central authority should... [perform] only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a local level.”<sup>68</sup> As applied within the Anglican Communion, subsidiarity means that individual provinces and dioceses are freed to make decisions as they discern best for their local contexts, subject to consent from other provinces on things which are not considered *adiaphora*.<sup>69</sup> The example of subsidiarity provided within the text of *TVR* is that of a bishop’s sharing authority with a parish priest to engage in the tasks of, “worship, witness, and service” within the immediate boundaries of the parish, subject to the oversight and support provided by the bishop.<sup>70</sup> This differs from a “top-down” approach in that the life of the

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<sup>67</sup> J. Neil Alexander, “Patterns of Ecclesiology: Does the Anglican Covenant Fit?” Unpublished paper presented to the House of Bishops, Kanuga, North Carolina, March 2011, 9.

<sup>68</sup> *The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission*. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/150889/report-1.pdf> [accessed September 20, 2018], 25.

<sup>69</sup> Alexander, “Patterns of Ecclesiology,” 9.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

local community is largely self-determined. It is governed more by the maintenance of relationship with the larger body of the diocese, rather than by an agenda imposed from a different level of hierarchy.

One practical consequence of the collegial relationships required to maintain a structure based on this concept is maintenance of the historical reluctance of bishops to intervene in another's diocese. *TVR*, in affirming applicability of the concept at a provincial level, cites Resolution 1 of Lambeth 1988: "Each province should respect the decision and attitudes of other provinces. . . without such respect necessarily indicating acceptance of the principles involved, maintaining the highest degree of communion with the provinces that differ."<sup>71</sup> This does not, as Philip Turner suggests, represent an attempt at establishing a curia or "[presuppose] a political structure of sub- and super-ordination that is foreign to the Anglican tradition of Episcopal collegiality."<sup>72</sup> What it does is recapitulate the descriptive position already articulated in earlier documents, namely, that authority within the context of the highest levels of the Communion is exercised primarily by means of collegial relationships among bishops.

*TVR* explicitly affirms the "checks and balances" noted in previous documents, especially the "Meaning and Unity" report received by Lambeth 1948. It notes that the relationships among the four basic elements of the Communion's structure are marked by "mutuality of encouragement and correction." That is, it operates on the assumption that the collegial nature of the relationships among these structural elements, especially the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Turner, "The Virginia Report: How Firm a Foundation?," 195.

bishops charged to uphold them, will be sufficient to foster communication and consultation, as well as to allow for discernment of God's will, particularly where such discernment is determined to correct a previous error. Subsidiarity is a feature of Anglican polity, to the point where "canonically binding decisions can only be made at the level of a Province or in some Provinces at the level of a diocese" (*TVR*, 4.11). In other words, the so-called Instruments of Communion lack the authority to impose their will unilaterally on an individual diocese or province. Decisions which affect local communities are to be left to those communities, such as the interpretation of the rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer or changes to disciplinary canons. They are not subject to being imposed by higher levels, insofar as they are consistent with established practice and understanding, and have gone through a process of reception by the people whom they most affect.

*TVR* also affirms several of the ecclesiological concepts which Ramsey championed. The report commends the ideals of the Church as a visible sign of catholic doctrine; the lack of autonomy on the part of individuals and local congregations and their bishops; and the visibility of the gospel in the sacraments, Creeds, Episcopacy, and Scripture. Paragraph 4.24 in particular reaffirms that the basis for, and source of, the Church's own authority is that of God. "Our trinitarian theology provides the basis of such an ecclesiology... in no sense is this ecclesiology untried or flimsy." Authority is, then, primarily relational. As such it must mimic the perichoretic relationship among the members of the Trinity. It is not inflexible; rather, it is the very reliance upon relationships (vs. a top-down, dictatorial scheme) which allows for a great deal of flexibility in solving problems through "a mutuality of encouragement and correction."

*TVR* has not lacked criticism, especially with respect to the absence of clarity around the issue of Scriptural interpretation, and its apparent attempt to establish a centralized form of authority where none had previously existed. Philip Turner in particular takes issue with both of these things, in what he reads as an attempt to create a curia of sorts, without a firm enough justification in Scripture. Turner takes issue with the application of reason, literary criticism, and other hermeneutic approaches favored in academic circles to interpret Scripture. He argues that “the problematic character of these . . . sources of Christian knowledge is best viewed as a . . . famine of hearing the Word of God that is an aspect of divine judgment upon his people.”<sup>73</sup> Turner further suggests that the use of reason as a tool for discernment may in fact be at odds with the Church’s traditional role in the interpretation of the Biblical text.<sup>74</sup> Turner rightly names the challenge which the use of reason presents as being at odds with “the mind present in Scripture and the tradition(s) of the church (which are also necessary for the interpretation of the gospel message).”<sup>75</sup> However, he fails to recognize that “the world” does affect how individuals, dioceses, and provinces interpret Scripture.

Turner’s insistence that tradition, i.e., “what the church has always practiced, is a necessity for interpreting the gospel smacks of the Tractarians’ “reading back” the very concept of tradition into Hooker (who, by contrast, uses Scripture as a check on traditions, including the episcopacy itself). Such an approach eclipses the possibility inherent in the use of historical-critical approaches to the Biblical texts. While such an

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<sup>73</sup> Turner, “The Virginia Report: How Firm a Foundation?,” 183.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

approach does not discount “the way we have always understood and done it,” it also opens up greater possibilities for the Church to use its authority in the name of inclusion, as well as to invite its members into deeper relationships with one another. Anglicanism has traditionally displayed a gift for living with some degree of tension between its different affinity groups. Given that history, the current challenges should, at least on paper, pose no more of a threat to the Church’s unity than the disputes which arose out of events such as the adoption of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the Oxford Movement.

Turner does pick up on *TVR*’s move to give the Primates’ Meeting and the Archbishop of Canterbury greater jurisdiction and moral authority in addressing conflicts within the Communion, and its arguments in favor of some sort of increased oversight. Citing the work of Ian Douglas, he notes that reinforcement of structures designed to foster collegial relationships may well mark “the first step toward a western Anglican curia that will struggle to maintain the same sort of control. . . which they enjoyed in the colonial period.”<sup>76</sup> Turner goes on to note that the 1998 Lambeth Conference questioned whether a lack of legislative authority would prove to be sufficient to hold the Communion together in the face of conflict. He also poses the question of what political order might be necessary, “if the truth of the gospel message and the peace of the church are to be maintained.”<sup>77</sup> He reaffirms Ian Douglas’s concerns about the creation of a curia, and in doing so, makes clear that he places the ability to impose a political solution

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

to preserve at least the appearance of unity above the more difficult, and essential, task of remaining in relationship.

Turner does concede that *TVR*'s suggestions are not without merit, as they allow time and space for "the truth to be spoken in love and for evil to be exposed."<sup>78</sup> He seems to define evil as locally-based traditions which intensify the divisions at the highest levels of the Communion.<sup>79</sup> Turner and his co-author Ephraim Radner apply this definition especially to the discord within the Communion which has come as a by-product of "ECUSA's actions in respect to the ordination of women and the blessing of gay unions."<sup>80</sup> They also apply the term "evil" to the inevitable tension around the question of authority produced by what Radner calls "the forces of autonomous pluralism. . . embodied in a vast expansion of ecclesial Christian life."<sup>81</sup> He does seem to be arguing in favor of provincial autonomy. However, such autonomy can only be allowed as far as "traditional" readings of Scripture will allow. This is problematic for two reasons. First, the idea that Scripture has anything other than a "plain meaning," which is easily discerned by any reader, harkens back to Anglicanism's beginnings. Second, Radner, like Turner, fails to recognize how factors like local cultures, the history of evangelism within those cultures, and socio-economic status of Christian communities influence the reading of Scripture.

The fourth, and latest to date, document which attempts to describe authority within the Anglican Communion is the so-called Anglican Covenant. The most recent

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 181–83.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>81</sup> Radner, "The Scriptural Community: Authority in Anglicanism," 112.

draft, finalized in 2010, was the product of a Turner-like desire to assuage the anxiety caused by the consecration of Gene Robinson some seven years prior. As a binding statement it is more or less “dead,” as the synods of a number of Provinces, including The Episcopal Church, the Church of England, and the Anglican Church of Canada, have roundly rejected it through their internal synodical processes. However, it still has some significance in terms of setting forth a possible solution for conflict resolution on a global level. Its descriptions of the structures which currently form the backbone of the Communion are notable, as well as how it proposes to utilize those structures in the service of resolving theological disputes between Provinces. Authority, especially that reserved solely to bishops and to the larger groups of which they are the majority of constituent members, plays a vital role in the Church envisioned within the Covenant. This is particularly evident in Section 3, which focuses on the role of the episcopacy as an “Instrument of Communion.” The section raises the very serious issue of whether the Covenant seeks to concentrate power in a centralized way within the episcopacy itself (and at the expense of the other three orders of ministry). There is also some question of whether it effectively disconnects the authority of the Primates (i.e., heads of national churches) from both their local Houses of Bishops and from the Communion as a whole.

What Section 3 of the proposed Anglican Covenant presents is essentially ecclesiological in nature. It attempts to draw some common parameters around what is recognizable as the Church, and how we as God’s people are called to be a part of it by virtue of our baptisms. Section 3.1 defines the “what,” where Section 3.2 defines the “how.” Both sections evoke significant questions in terms of the actual descriptions of a polity or governance structure. Both sections also leave much room for debate about how

to implement their recommendations for further action once those structures are established. On the surface, Section 3 appears to be a good beginning for laying out how Anglicanism defines itself as far as its manifesting the outward and visible signs of a Church which embodies the Gospel. However, it does seem to be lacking something in its definition of what creates community at the most basic level, i.e., that of relationships among the laity in the various Provinces, even as it seeks to define and refine the formal structures by which the national churches within the Communion can continue to enjoy relationships with one another.

This section of the proposed Covenant defines the unity of the Church in terms of sacrament and structure. The first half of it broadly outlines the outward and visible signs of this unity as Anglicans have received and implemented them. Participation in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are defined broadly as what incorporates people into the Body of Christ and the shared life of the church. However, simply being called into this participation is not enough, at least as far as the attempt to define the unique parameters around which churches in the Anglican tradition can be “in communion with autonomy and accountability.”<sup>82</sup> The so-called Instruments of Unity are the means by which this common life is to be ordered, though they are not intended to create a centralized authority structure. There is a clear emphasis on the work and life of bishops as visible signs of that unity. This centrality of the episcopate, in its representative function both at the local level and within the context of the Instruments themselves, raises several questions. One, how does this understanding fit within the Anglican

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<sup>82</sup> *The Anglican Communion Covenant* ([http://www.anglicancommunion.org/omission/covenant/docs/ridley\\_cambridge\\_draft\\_090402.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/omission/covenant/docs/ridley_cambridge_draft_090402.pdf)), 5 [accessed January 17, 2019].

tradition? Two, does it represent a significant departure from the understanding of the authority inherent in the office of bishop which has emerged in the past 150 years? Three, how does the understanding of the orders of ministry as expressed here fit with the understanding outlined in the Baptismal Covenant and the catechism of the Book of Common Prayer currently in use in the United States? Lastly, and perhaps the most difficult to answer, is this emphasis on the episcopate merely intended as a sign of the Church's unity, or is it, as a number of people in the U.S. and elsewhere have argued, intended as a sort of power grab which all but ignores the voice and lived faith of laypeople?

The office of the bishop has historically served as a focus of unity for the Church. Within Anglicanism, the episcopate emerged as such on a global level as part of the development of relationships among the various national Churches which make up the Anglican Communion as we recognize it today. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral affirms its role as one of the four points of unity; notably, it appears last in the list, understood as something which is “locally adapted in the methods and needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.”<sup>83</sup> This description recognizes the diversity of the local contexts involved, without being specific about defining the role of a bishop beyond that of a *sine qua non* for the restoration of unity along the lines of what was known in the early Church. It was not until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that the role began to be more clearly defined in terms of its connections to both its local context and the historic Church of which it is a representative part. Archbishop

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<sup>83</sup> “The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886, 1888.” *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 877.

Ramsey is very careful to make this argument, couching it in terms of the bishop's role as "the link with the historic events and the organ of the one Body"<sup>84</sup> and as an authority that can, in the mold of St. Peter, exert a primacy that focuses on the apostolic authority as a whole.<sup>85</sup>

The power that the Primates' Meeting wields *per se*, however, is not so clearly defined. This raises the question of whether it is simply a collegial group, or whether it is able to assert its authority over all of the member churches in the Communion. While it was originally intended as a forum for "leisurely thought, prayer, and deep consultation" when it was first convened by Archbishop Coggan in 1978,<sup>86</sup> the Meeting has in recent years asserted greater authority when dealing with controversies which affect all of the churches in the Communion. For example, the Eames Commission which authored the *Windsor Report* was the result of a direct recommendation by the group which met in October of 2003. Similarly, the communiqué issued following 2005 Primates' meeting at Dromantine was as much prescriptive as descriptive. It contains a number of specific recommendations, including requests to both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada to cease and desist in matters concerning the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian persons to the episcopate, as well as an invitation to both churches to explain themselves to the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council.

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<sup>84</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 52.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>86</sup> "Primates' Meetings." <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/primates/> [accessed February 14, 2019].

It is questionable whether the Primates understood themselves in this instance as functioning as extensions of their own Houses of Bishops, or as a group which is able to assert power over others on the sole basis of the teaching function of the offices occupied by its members. That said, it is not uncommon within the whole of the Christian tradition for bishops to act in this way. A prime example is the authority the Pope or Roman Curia assumes when they choose to speak on behalf of the whole Church on a particular doctrinal issue. It is simply assumed that as teachers of the faith, what they deliver as “teaching” in a given situation is a definitive interpretation and not open for discussion or further discernment.

Wielding power in this way is, at best, inconsistent with the notion of dispersed authority which has been the accepted norm within the Communion for the last several decades. As the 1948 Lambeth Conference report described it, dispersed authority is necessarily one which contains a system of mutual checks and balances which “[contributes to] a process of mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggerations in the many-sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to his Church.”<sup>87</sup> Concentrating authority within the episcopacy to such an extent that voices of the bishops come to dominate the Communion is problematic at best. It precludes the participation of deacons, priests, and most especially laypeople in those conversations at the international level. As such there would be little to check or balance the power wielded by these groups of bishops, in essence giving them the very kind of unquestioned and unchecked authority which the Reformation specifically sought to

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<sup>87</sup> “The Anglican Communion 4: The Later Lambeth Conferences.”  
<http://revpatrickcomerford.blogspot.com/2009/02/anglican-communion-4-later-lambeth.html> [accessed February 14, 2019].

undo, and which the Anglican tradition has consistently resisted putting into use as a means of resolving conflicts at the international level.

In principle, however, the Instruments of Unity outlined in Section 3.1 fit within the understanding of dispersed authority and the structure of the episcopacy as Ramsey defines it. Authority itself does not rest in any one individual Instrument, with specific responsibilities allotted according to the current understanding of how each functions. The Covenant does recognize that the bishops who attend the Primates' Meeting and the Lambeth Conference receive their authority from their own Houses of Bishops and synods. The sense of connectivity to one's local context and to the wider Communion is preserved in this way, as is a sense of collegiality within each group. The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) includes laypeople in its membership, as does its Standing Committee. This ensures there is at least some representation of the lay majority from each province, as well as provides somewhat of a check on the authority of the bishops-only groups. Limits are placed on the authority extended to Archbishop of Canterbury as well, with the officeholder functioning in this context as "a focus and means of unity" in his calling meetings and serving as the presiding officer of the ACC.<sup>88</sup> Finally, the Covenant allows for any Province to initiate a process of discernment and consultation on issues which directly affect member Churches, hence not limiting that role to any specific individual or group.

Is this a significant departure from what has developed as an Anglican understanding of authority within the hierarchical structures of the Communion? No, insofar as these structures, and the particular charisms of those who are called to serve

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<sup>88</sup> *The Anglican Covenant*, 6.

within them, are currently understood. However, the appearance of extending authority to bishops beyond the jurisdictions they have been elected or appointed to serve is problematic at best. This effectively gives them authority on a global level to an extent which they have not previously enjoyed. While some of that did develop out of the formation of the Instruments of Unity themselves in the 1960s and 1970s, it is arguable whether the Instruments were ever intended to have the kind of coercive power which they appear to have claimed for themselves.

The Lambeth Conference and Primates' Meeting are the prime examples of this process of laying claim to power. As outlined above, the Primates' work has taken on an increasingly authoritarian tone in recent years. Despite the protests from a number of corners that their statements do not have any authority greater than that of a pastoral letter (and an equal number of statements stating that they do have such authority), those statements have been widely accepted as normative for the entire Communion. Lambeth Conference reports and resolutions have also been given a similar status. For example, Resolution I.10 from the 1998 Lambeth Conference has been taken as a definitive teaching of the Communion as a whole on matters of human sexuality despite reports about the lack of consensus among the bishops on its passage. The same is true of the acceptance of the principle of dispersed authority. It stems from a report the bishops received at the 1948 Lambeth Conference, without giving it much further consideration.<sup>89</sup> Simply legislating normative teaching, instead of making a recommendation and allowing for a process of reception seems inconsistent with how Anglicans have typically operated when trying to discern whether a controversial development might be accepted

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<sup>89</sup> Britton, "'Dispersed Authority': An Historical and Theological Critique of the 1948 Lambeth Conference Report," 233.

by the *consensus fidelium* as authentic to the Christian faith.<sup>90</sup> While it is understandable that speed is everything in this era of nearly instant communications, it is not wise to make hasty decisions that affect the shared life of the Communion. There seems to be more of a chance of getting it wrong, to the detriment of many. It also runs the risk of leaving a significant number of people out of the process of discussion and discernment whose voices should be heard.

Despite its apparent drawbacks, the bishop-heavy structure of the Instruments of Unity is not outside of the boundaries of the understanding which The Episcopal Church (TEC) holds with respect to the episcopacy's particular vocation. In practice as well as in description, both the Covenant and TEC recognize the centrality of the role to the life and mission of the Church. Both point out that bishops are the guardians and teachers of the faith, and serve as "a visible sign of unity, representing the universal Church to the local, and the local Church to the universal."<sup>91</sup> Bishops thus become the focal points for the life and work of the Church. At the local level, they are directly responsible for ensuring the continued sacramental life of the Church through their responsibility as chief priest and pastor, as well as their specific task of ordaining priests and deacons to assist them. They also do much administratively through the setting of policy, making appointments to various committees and commissions, and providing specific direction for their dioceses as a whole. Such direction serves to sharpen the focus of both lay and ordained ministers as they go about God's work in the world. While there is canonical provision for dioceses to function in the absence of a bishop, this kind of work simply cannot go as smoothly

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<sup>90</sup> "Discernment in Communion and Reception." *The Windsor Report*, Section B, Paragraph 68. [http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/section\\_b/p7.cfm](http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/section_b/p7.cfm) [accessed February 14, 2019].

<sup>91</sup> *The Anglican Covenant*, 7.

without the kind of authority embodied in the office. Such episcopal oversight both symbolically and practically provides the Church with the motivation and the direction required to effectively live out its mission.<sup>92</sup>

Returning to the idea of dispersed authority, Section 3.2 does recognize the right of each Province to govern itself as best fits its local circumstances. This fits within the present practice and understanding of the autonomy afforded each Province of the Communion in structuring its polity and establishing procedures for dealing with its own internal affairs. The end result of this autonomy, however, is particularly evident in the conflicts which arose after TEC chose to ordain women and non-celibate homosexuals to the episcopate. Individual Provinces do not always give the appearance of respecting the diversity of theological opinion and practice which exists across the Communion. The Covenant recognizes this as well, delivering a stern reminder that the actions taken by one member can and do affect all in some way.

This principle hearkens back to the earliest days of the Church, when it was first articulated by Paul in his attempt to resolve the conflict plaguing the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians, he deals with this conflict by extending the metaphor of the interconnected nature of the parts of the human body to the Church itself. He reminds the people there that they are all members of the Body of Christ by virtue of their baptisms, and as such all are connected to one another just as the parts of a human body are connected. He further reminds them that, “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). With respect to the present conflict, this applies to those on both sides of the issue. It is not only imperative for those making so-called controversial decisions

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<sup>92</sup> “The Episcopate.” *The Windsor Report*, Section B, Paragraph 63.  
[http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/section\\_b/p6.cfm](http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/section_b/p6.cfm) [Accessed February 15, 2019].

to bear in mind the impact those decisions may have on people in other parts of the world, but it is also necessary for those staunchly opposed to bear in mind the consequences of saying, “I have no need of you.”

Ideally, the proposed structures and recommendations for addressing conflict would prevent this sort of breakdown in the relationships among the various national churches in the Anglican Communion. The role of those structures in dealing with controversial theological matters, as outlined here, is primarily that of enabling the constituent Churches to work together to test those matters in a way “consistent with the Scriptures, the common standards of faith, and the canon laws of our churches.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, they provide the mechanism for the process of reception outlined in *The Windsor Report*. As described in that document, this process in and of itself is consistent with the particularly Anglican ethos of examining innovations through the tripartite lens of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. Such a lens cannot rely solely on the explanations of “We’ve never done this” or “The Bible doesn’t permit this” as a means of stifling the growth and testing of a new thing. Rather, it should serve to promote conversation and further discernment. Such conversation is precisely the goal the Covenant appears to have in mind, despite its stated goal of codifying a method for addressing controversy.

However, the procedures outlined by this section of the Covenant are simply that: an ideal. Actual implementation of them is made far more difficult by the expense involved with international travel, and compounded by the modern ease of communication. The constant influx of information leaves little time to be still, much less to gather others together face-to-face for prayer and discussion of these matters. Sadly, it

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

is far easier to go on the attack instead, particularly when it can be done from the relative anonymity of one's computer. As things appear to stand now, the process of reception of innovative things such as the ordination of women and gay people to the episcopate is stalled because some individuals at the highest levels of the Anglican hierarchy appear to be refusing to listen to one another honestly. That failure to listen is a two-fold sin, that of the pride in not admitting the possibility of being wrong, and of the hand saying to the foot, "I have no need of you." It also represents a failure to seek and to serve Christ in others, and to obey the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. All of these require repentance, on every side of the issue, as well as a willingness to understand the local contexts which by necessity inform individuals' theological understanding.

Does Section 3 of the proposed Anglican Covenant fit within the traditional understanding of Anglicanism, as it currently exists? In some respects it does, and in others it presents a challenge to current understanding. On the positive side, it provides a consistent and comprehensive description of the Instruments of Unity and of the unique role afforded to bishops within them. That understanding is generally consistent with the understanding of the episcopate as expressed by Scripture and by more recent Anglican theologians. However, the emphasis on bishops as the majority of office holders within the context of the Instruments of Unity is problematic. It is not entirely consistent with TEC's understanding of ministry, as its polity places far greater value on the representation of laypeople in all levels of church governance. With their role essentially limited to serving on the ACC, it could well become very difficult for the voices of the laity to be incorporated into decision-making processes at that level.

On the definitively negative side is the thorny issue of authority and how its use could potentially cause a great deal of damage to the relationships within Communion as it currently exists. The proposed Covenant appears to extend the authority exercised by bishops, particularly that of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates, to a level beyond any they have been understood to have previously. Arguably this is an innovation within Anglicanism. As such it ought to be subject to the same process of reception required of other innovations. The relatively short period of time involved with the drafting process for this most recent version, as well as the pressure which seems to have been placed on the Provinces to adopt it quickly, do not, in my opinion, allow sufficient opportunity for the vast majority of Anglicans worldwide to discern whether it is in fact the direction in which God is calling the Anglican Communion at this time in its history. There are some inherent dangers in such a truncated process. Error is one of those dangers, though in any case time will be the ultimate judge of whether the Church has in fact misunderstood God's call in the present conflict. The other danger lies in the potential for ignoring the relationships between individual parishes and dioceses which form the most basic level of communion and instead accept the state of so-called "impaired communion" which currently exists at the highest levels of the Church's hierarchy. If these bishops, who are specifically called to embody the unity of the Church, cannot share the same Eucharistic table, it is difficult to understand how they could possibly begin to expect the people whom they serve to do so.

### Chapter 3: Ramsey, *The Virginia Report* and the Anglican Covenant

The work of Archbishop Ramsey, *The Virginia Report*, and the proposed Anglican Covenant represent distinct points on a continuum of thought in defining an “Anglican Ecclesiology.” As the earliest of the three, Ramsey’s work serves to affirm the understanding first codified within the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. The Church is built upon the four “corners” of Scripture, Sacraments, Creeds and “the historic Episcopate, locally adapted.” Ramsey pushes this bare-bones structure out a bit in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* by describing the nature of the relationships among them, as well as advancing arguments in favor of the bishops’ special role in maintaining them. Nowhere in Ramsey’s work is there any notion that these four “corners” comprise any sort of formal governance structures at the level of the Anglican Communion itself.

However, by the time of *TVR*’s publication in 1997, formal structures had been created, in the form of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), the Primates’ Meeting, and the Lambeth Conference all assuming a legislative role, with the assumption that the resolutions they pass are binding on the entire Communion. The goal of these groups was to foster the type of collegial relationships among the various national churches, and their leaders, required to continue the process of interpreting Christian faith in light of a rapidly changing world. *TVR* begins the shift from a descriptive mode to a prescriptive one, in which the formal structures originally intended solely to enhance relationships are assigned authority to solve problems outright, and in a way which would crush the levels of hierarchy beneath it in the name of unity. The proposed Anglican Covenant completes this move. In doing so, it represents an innovation in Anglican ecclesiological thought. Never before has there been any notion that the Archbishop of Canterbury, or any other

assemblage of bishops exercising synodical jurisdiction, possesses the authority necessary to impose consequences on a province or provinces which either cannot or will not subscribe to a specific theological position.

As part of a continuum, Ramsey, *TVR*, and the Covenant share a considerable amount of DNA. The first commonality among them is the underlying assumption that bishops are a *sine qua non* of the Church. They are the embodied signs of its unity amid its divisions, and as such, possess special responsibility to model *diakonia* in their relationships with one another and within their dioceses. All three also assume that the exercise of episcopal authority occurs in multiple contexts, all of which are eucharistic communities whose identity is grounded in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Ramsey notes, and both *TVR* and the Covenant reaffirm, that “the Bishop does not have a greatness of his own, he is the organ of the one Body who represents to the Christians their dependence within the Body, and to the local Church independence within the historic family, whose worship is one act.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, a bishop’s role is primarily representative, nor can a bishop function properly apart from the Church as a whole.

While Ramsey approaches the gift and challenge of the historic episcopate’s role in a way which is best described as a synthesis of High Church and Evangelical thinking on the subject, both *TVR* and the Covenant consistently fall into the High Church camp. The views they express of the Church’s place in the world and the high value the writers of these documents place on ordained leaders. They both echo sentiments expressed in the seventeenth century about the position enjoyed by the established Church in England. They also place a high value on the existence of the institution itself, as seen through,

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<sup>94</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 69.

“the catholic and apostolic faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation, the historic formularies of the Church of England, forged in the context of the European Reformation and acknowledged and appropriated in various ways in the Anglican Communion.”<sup>95</sup> This statement not only acknowledges the Church’s traditional reliance on Scripture and the Creeds, but also reinforces the historic roots of all currently existing Anglican provinces. It also pays lip service to the local adaptations to English doctrine, discipline, and worship required for the Church’s flourishing in each local context where it is found. In doing so, it subtly suggests that relationship and the maintenance of diversity are essential characteristics of the Church. Nowhere is its place “in the world” mentioned, nor are the specifics of what constitutes “traditional doctrine, discipline, and worship.” This is congruent with Ramsey’s own thinking on the issue. Like other High Church thinkers of his day, he believed strongly that the Church was not primarily a political entity. Rather, its purpose is “to preach Christ and his death and much which is unintelligible to the world.”<sup>96</sup>

There are some important differences among these three examples as well. Ramsey maintains that the Gospel is evident in the Church’s structures, and that the source of the authority contained therein is the community as a whole, which in turn ultimately derives its authority directly from God. Ramsey does not use the terms “subsidiarity” or “dispersed authority,” as those would come into use within Anglican

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<sup>95</sup> *The Anglican Covenant*, 1.1.2.

[https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/99905/The\\_Anglican\\_Covenant.pdf](https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/99905/The_Anglican_Covenant.pdf) [accessed February 7, 2019].

<sup>96</sup> Gordon Wakefield, “Michael Ramsey and Ecumenical Theology,” in *Michael Ramsey as Theologian*, eds. Robin Gill and Lorna Kendall (Boston, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1995), 76.

circles well after *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* was first published, though it is not implausible to argue that he moves in that direction. He draws a distinction between episcopal authority as vested within the bounds of the community, and the type of papal primacy which “depresses the due working of the other functions of the one Body.”<sup>97</sup> The former is shared among all holders of apostolic office, whose task is mainly one of integrating all the different parts of the community; the latter is far more removed from the community itself, and as such risks being transformed into something which, as Ramsey notes above, displays characteristics of disabling the work of the Body and in the process crosses the line into a mode of “glory unto me.”

Both *TVR* and the Covenant lean away from “organic authority,” i.e., authority which grows up from the community at-large, toward a form of authority more closely resembling that of a curia. *TVR* does so in its naming of the dynamic “mutuality of encouragement and correction” which is the hallmark of a faith community which is committed to a process of continual teaching and learning (*TVR*, 4.2). The Covenant takes this one step further in proposing to establish the Standing Committee of the Communion as the proper forum for arbitration of disputes between Provinces, complete with the power to recommend “relational consequences” for those who persist in promoting practices which are not consistent with the mind of the Communion as a whole.<sup>98</sup>

This explicit threat of punishment for provinces which choose to “walk apart” from the majority -- whatever position said majority might hold on a given issue --

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<sup>97</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> *The Anglican Covenant*, 4.2.2-5, 7.

effectively positions a bishop-heavy, centralized structure as an enforcer. While it is congruent with episcopal ordination vows to uphold and defend the faith, it lacks precedent beyond the synodical structures of individual Provinces. The need to have produced a document like the Covenant, and to a lesser extent, *TVR*, demonstrates a high degree of tension between the reliance on relationships to disperse authority throughout the Communion (and thus maintaining serious gray areas where the status quo is concerned), and a need for certainty in the face of a changing world. This tension raises very serious questions for the life of the Communion: are individual provinces willing to live with their anxiety about whether “we have got it right,” and thus maintain the relationships required to blunt that anxiety? Or will they, like the ancient Israelites, give in to their anxiety and demand that Samuel anoint a king, one who is almost guaranteed to use his power for his own good and to the detriment of the Body as a whole?

Both Ramsey and *TVR* begin with the basic principle that everything about the exercise of authority within the Church, from the relationships at the heart of the Eucharistic community to the service demanded of those called to exercise oversight within that community, is rooted in the Gospel itself. In *The Future of the Christian Church*, Ramsey suggests that “we need to set the matter in the context of our faith in God. . . we believe in the Church. . . only and always in terms of our belief in the God who judges and raises up.”<sup>99</sup>

Ramsey approaches the issue from a High Church perspective. The authority held within the Church cannot be exercised apart from God, because it is God who is the origin of that authority. Within the wider world, authority is a function of the Church’s

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<sup>99</sup> Ramsey, *The Future of the Christian Church*, 37-38.

commission to serve. Ramsey cautions that such service is not a matter of providing for wants and needs, but rather of Christ's having come, "not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:42-44). The exercise of such authority is a paramount duty of all Christians. It is particularly so for bishops, whose unique role affords them a far greater opportunity to ensure that such service is normative at all levels of the community. Ramsey reinforces this ideal through his reading of the Jesus' washing the disciples' feet described in John 13, as discussed in Chapter 1 above. Jesus' actions not only provide a model for humble service, but are also, "a manifestation. . . of the nature of the glory of the eternal God."<sup>100</sup> Again, there is the unstated expectation that demonstrations of service should properly follow this model, for it is in the humbling of oneself that others will come to know Christ more deeply. Finally, Ramsey also maintains that authority is a development of the Gospel itself, which "expresses the Gospel and can only be belittled by the Gospel."<sup>101</sup>

*TVR* pushes these themes out by applying them directly to the structures of the Church. It contains a number of statements describing the nature and location of authority as grounded firmly within the Godhead. Paragraph 1:11 states that "the unity of the Anglican Communion derives from the unity given in the triune God, whose inner personal and relational nature is communion." This is reinforced by the clear statement in Paragraph 2.9 that, "The eternal, mutual self-giving and receiving love of the three persons of the Trinity is the source and ground of our communion," and in Paragraph 5.3: "The structures of the Church. . . are ordered as well as in the way they interrelated and function they are to reflect and embody the fundamental reality of the Church's

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<sup>100</sup> Dales, et al., *Glory Descending*, 74.

<sup>101</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 49.

communion in the life and love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Finally, Paragraph 2.21 echoes Ramsey in situating “ministry” itself within Jesus’s own, specifically “his self-offering on the cross for the reconciliation of God and humanity and the healing of the whole human family.”

All of these statements, when taken together, suggest that the shared life of any ecclesial body is meant to echo the perichoresis of the Trinity, subject to the boundaries imposed by human frailty. They also highlight the use of authority as a relational and communal endeavor, one which has as its telos the building up of the Body to go into the world and preach the gospel. They also demonstrate a high view of ecclesiology because they give primacy to the divine economy; state the ideal without recognizing how “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”; and lack any suggestion of the Church’s having chosen to organize itself this way. A representative of the High Church party, Mary Astell argued along these same lines around the turn of the eighteenth century in a letter titled “The Religion of a Church of England Woman”: “the same Catholick Tradition. . . does likewise deliver us [a] Form of Government. . . which is establish’d in the Churches among whom I inhabit.”<sup>102</sup>

The second point of agreement between Ramsey and *TVR* is the assertion that authority is not exercised in isolation. As has been pointed out already, authority is rooted in the community as a whole, not merely with those individuals called to exercise oversight. Following Ignatius of Antioch, Ramsey writes:

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<sup>102</sup>Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion, as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church*, 45. [https://books.google.com/books?id=4FtiAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&ad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=4FtiAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&ad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) [accessed February 9, 2019].

“Do nothing without the Bishop!” Is this the remark of an institutionalist who has lost the simplicity and spirituality of the early Gospel? . . . For the bishop does not have a greatness of its own, he is the organ of the one Body who represents to the Christians their dependence within the Body, and to the local Church its dependence within the historic family, whose worship is one act. . . Thus the same truth lies behind the Lord’s commission to the Twelve, the episode of Peter and John laying hands on the Samaritans, the dealings of Paul the Apostle with the Corinthians, and the Episcopate that prevailed from the second century.<sup>103</sup>

Ramsey goes on to note that all four orders of ministry (bishops, presbyters, deacons, and laity) share in Christ’s own priesthood, while at the same time each represents a different facet of the truth. The episcopate in particular operates “in close connection with the whole Body of Christ. . . To sever this connection is to corrupt the meaning of the Episcopacy.”<sup>104</sup>

*TVR* recapitulates this idea in three statements: “episcopate is exercised personally, collegially, and communally” in Paragraph 3.51; “No local embodiment of the Church is simply autonomous. . . the apostolicity of a particular church is measured by its consonance with the living elements of apostolic succession and unity: baptism and eucharist, the Nicene and Apostles’ creeds, the ordered ministry, and the canon of Scripture” in Paragraph 4.27; and “A ministry of oversight (*episcopate*) of interdependence, accountability and discernment is essential at all levels of the Church’s

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<sup>103</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 69.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

mission and ministry, and for the sake of the Church's wellbeing, must be exercised at every level in a way that is personal, collegial and communal. A bishop's authority is never isolated from the community; both the community of the Church and the community and unity of all humankind" in Paragraph 5.5.<sup>105</sup> The statement of 4.27 concerning the concept of apostolic succession is particularly close to Ramsey's thought. He too argues that the succession is a sign of the "Church's full and continuous life of grace."<sup>106</sup>

That Ramsey and *TVR* are so closely aligned with respect to the function of the episcopacy indicates three things. First, the notion of what a bishop is, and how the office functions, is consistent over the history of the Church, at least in principle, even as the office has been adapted to best fit the needs of local contexts. Secondly, both reiterate that no ministry can take place in a vacuum. That is, it grows organically out of the life of the community itself. Its efficacy does not depend on the individual office-holder, but is a function of the community as a whole. Third, the episcopal office is a sign, both of the Church's unity, and of the indwelling of God's grace within the whole Body.

As the most recent document to deal with the use of authority within the Church, the Anglican Covenant shares several underlying assumptions with both Ramsey's work and *TVR*. Its approach relies largely on descriptions of what already exists within the formal structures of the Communion. What it shares most closely with its predecessors is its assumption that authority is inherently relational; its grounding within the divine economy; and the necessity of "the historic Episcopate, locally adapted." All three of

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<sup>105</sup> *The Virginia Report*, 23, 28, and 29.

<sup>106</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 71.

these items together create a snapshot of authority as it has been traditionally understood and applied on a global level since the Communion's inception. It maintains the ideal of collegiality as a guiding principle, recognizing, at some level, the necessity of maintaining relationships to preserve the unique character of the Christian community.

An undercurrent throughout the text of the Covenant is collegiality, specifically the expectation that “each Instrument [will] consult with, respond to and support each other,” “seek a shared mind about matters of common concern,” and “in situations of conflict. . . participate in mediated conversations.”<sup>107</sup> These statements push into the practical realm the ideal Ramsey expresses of the Episcopacy's primary function as one of service as an “organ of the one Body who represents to the Christians their dependence with in the Body, and to the local Church its dependence within the historic family.”<sup>108</sup> Such consultation not only requires a recognition of the fact that one does not operate in a vacuum, but also that taking counsel with one's fellow bishops is an act of service on behalf of the community as a whole. To request assistance in that way requires a degree of humility not unlike that which the Apostles themselves displayed in addressing concerns of their day. It is also a marker of how the “calling and gift of communion entails responsibilities for our common life before God.”<sup>109</sup>

Both the Covenant and Ramsey ground the Church's authority, and by extension that of the episcopacy itself, firmly within the life of the Trinity. The Covenant's introduction begins by stating unequivocally that “communion has been revealed to us by

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<sup>107</sup> *The Anglican Communion Covenant*, 3.1.4, 3.2.4, and 3.2.6.

<sup>108</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 69.

<sup>109</sup> *The Anglican Communion Covenant*, “Introduction to the Covenant Text,” paragraph 3.

the Son as being the very divine life of God the Trinity. . . this life of the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, shapes and displays itself through the very existence and ordering of the Church.”<sup>110</sup> It goes on to establish that the Church itself is part of the New Covenant in Christ’s blood, and that “the forms of this life in the Church, caught up in the mystery of divine communion, reveal to the hostile and divisive power of the world ‘the manifold wisdom of God.’”<sup>111</sup> These statements recapitulate Ramsey’s position on the foundations of ecclesial authority and the structures by which that authority is dispersed. In addition to his assertion that those ecclesial structures are manifestations of the Gospel itself, he holds that “before and behind the historical events there is the unity of the one God. This unity overcomes men and apprehends them through the Cross.”<sup>112</sup> Taken together with the Covenant’s statements as outlined above, this demonstrates a long-standing and typically Anglican attentiveness to historical developments which continue to affect relationships among Christian communities, as well as the Anglican practice of returning to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as both a source and as a means of establishing a clear identity in the midst of some sort of change.

The Covenant’s numerous descriptions of the status quo of the “historic Episcopate, locally adapted” primarily apply to how bishops exercise their authority within the boundaries of the Church itself. The Covenant reaffirms their central role as “guardians and teachers of the faith,” as well as the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral’s assertion that bishops are one of the four “essential” components of the Church’s polity.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., paragraph 1.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., paragraph 3.

<sup>112</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 42.

The remainder of the descriptions in Section 3 of “the instruments of the Anglican Communion” is quite bishop-heavy. It emphasizes that the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, and the Primates’ Meeting are the primary vehicles by which consultation and dispute resolution take place on the international level. This emphasis further suggests that, without necessarily stating outright, there can be no Church as currently understood without the presence of bishops. This dovetails with Ramsey’s statements to the effect that “bishops are the organs of the Church’s unity and continuity,” and that “the Episcopate is of the *esse* of the universal Church.”<sup>113</sup> For Ramsey, the episcopacy is a symbol which “proclaims that there is one family of God before and behind them all, and that all die daily in the Body of Him who died and rose.”<sup>114</sup> The descriptions and consolidations described in the Covenant do not overtly recognize this; they are, at some level, merely “institutional facts” which do not necessarily have any further significance.

This is where the divergence between Ramsey’s work and the Covenant begins. It is most prominent in the Covenant’s failure to distinguish between authority and political types of power. Stephen Ross White, in *Authority and Anglicanism*, draws a sharp distinction between the two:

[T]he concept of authority involves having the ‘right’ (whether moral or statutory) to do or say something or to request others to comply with a directive . . . The essence of power is that of having the de facto ability to make something

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 48 and 72.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 73.

happen regardless of the rights and wrongs which may be involved. . . The characteristic nuances of each are seen to be substantially different.”<sup>115</sup>

White goes on to suggest that the church has, over time, lost the power it once had to make and enforce decisions which affect the life of the various societies around it.<sup>116</sup> It is out of this loss (specifically, that of more conservative elements within the Communion to dictate the social mores around human sexuality, and the Biblical hermeneutic required to enforce those mores uniformly within the context of the local cultures in which the Church is located) that the Covenant comes. It teeters on the knife edge between describing the exercise of authority (as Ramsey does) and attempting to gather political power in the name of promoting “unity” (against which Ramsey cautions strongly).

Ramsey’s definition does not admit exercising that kind of power, a notion which is far removed from many contemporary understandings of power today. The authority inherent in the office of a bishop is rather different from other types of political power situated within secular systems. Its nature is not such that the individual(s) holding it can act unilaterally and/or with impunity. As something which in and of itself serves to preach the Gospel, the episcopacy simply cannot function in any sort of comprehensible way apart from its local context, or that of the Church as a whole. The Covenant asserts this in principle in the statement in Section 3.1.4 about the nature of the Primates’ Meeting, in which the individual archbishops only have the authority which they bring with them in their function as the senior bishops of their Provinces “and are in

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<sup>115</sup> Stephen Ross White, *Authority and Anglicanism* (London, England: SCM Press, Ltd., 1996), 101.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

conversation with their own Houses of Bishops and located within their own synodical structures.”<sup>117</sup> *The Windsor Report* takes this a step further, noting that a bishop’s authority is not merely a function of a particular polity, but is rather rooted in a ministry of prayer and in the Word of God.<sup>118</sup>

Section 4.2.7 of the Covenant provides an example of “authority which crushes.” It reserves the power to impose “relational consequences” on individual Provinces which take actions the wider Communion considers “incompatible with the Covenant.” It is not specific as to the form of said relational consequences, or what is incompatible with the Covenant, despite the implied threat it contains to the autonomy of local churches and their ability to discern and act in ways which they believe best fit their specific contexts. The proposed Covenant is clear is on the need for a process by which controversial issues may best be studied and received, and in a way which will not result in the so-called “tears in the fabric of the Communion” which have been characteristic of the current crisis. It values unity and process over hasty reactions of any kind, and seems to assert that abiding by the principles which it puts forth is enough to ensure the continued existence of the Anglican Communion as currently constituted.

Perhaps more troubling is the underlying assumption that the Covenant itself is authoritative because its writers have all agreed on the processes it outlines. The writers also appear to expect that any Province which ratifies the document will assume it is authoritative because it was produced by institutional structures elsewhere in the hierarchy, and not because it plainly shows the Gospel. Ramsey himself, in the process of

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<sup>117</sup> *Anglican Covenant*, 6.

<sup>118</sup> “Scripture and Interpretation.” *The Windsor Report*, Section B, Paragraph 58. [http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/section\\_b/p5.cfm](http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/section_b/p5.cfm).

demonstrating how ecclesial structures reflect the Gospel, asks, “Is it spurious ‘institutionalism’ that obscures the simple and primitive Gospel?”<sup>119</sup> He intends it as a rhetorical question, though in the case of the Covenant, the answer is a resounding no. The Covenant moves to formalize relationships at the international level which are not necessary except as a response to the desire to maintain homeostasis within the Anglican family system. That this document is a product of conflict over precisely the question of authority cannot be overstated. It proposes an institutional solution, instead of the hard work of remaining in relationship, with the goal of refocusing the emotional processes which provoke anxiety over the prospect of change. A solution such as ascribing political power to the so-called Instruments of Unity in ways which has not been previously done not only ignores the necessity of collegial relationships, but also appears to disregard the principles of dispersed authority and “bishop-as-servant.”

In *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Ramsey writes that the tests of a “true development” in the history of the Church are “whether it bears witness to the Gospel, whether it expresses the general consciousness of the Christians, and whether it serves the organic unity of the Body in all its parts.”<sup>120</sup> The Covenant fails to meet these standards in several respects. Its rejection by at least half the Provinces in the Communion shows that it does not “express a general consciousness of the Christians.” Despite its claims to serve the “organic unity” of the Communion, its attempts to codify the Instruments of Communion as discrete structures provides a mechanism for privileging one group over another, and/or creating more chaos in the process. Section 4’s attempt to create a body

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<sup>119</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 49.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

which has the sole purpose of enforcing “relational consequences” undermines collegiality, as well as the long-held practice of noninterference in the internal affairs of another national Church. The danger here is similar to what Ramsey cautions with respect to papal primacy, despite the requirements for consultation prior to such a step’s being taken. Concentrating authority at the level of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates’ Meeting, the Lambeth Conference, and the ACC risks that it will crush the levels below it, instead of more fully enabling their work. It is not *diakonia* in any sense of the word. Rather, it crosses the line into the territory of “glory unto me.” When used in this way, authority becomes inherently beholden to maintaining its own self-interests, whether those interests are shared with the entire community or not.

*The Virginia Report* and Anglican Covenant diverge from Ramsey on two major points. While they do share the view that the episcopacy itself is a sign of the Church’s unity, the Covenant in particular attempts to enlarge the jurisdiction of bishops in a way which is inconsistent with the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral’s description of the episcopacy as “locally adapted in the methods and needs of the nations and peoples called by God into the unity of His Church.” Ramsey is very careful to note that the bishop’s role, and the authority of the office, find their roots in the authority of Jesus himself. Such authority in turn is a function of *diakonia*, which in no way attempts to aggrandize power as the Covenant appears to describe it.

The principle of subsidiarity, the principle that decision-making is best made at the lowest level possible (i.e., parish or diocese), is also at risk. Subsidiarity requires a “bottom-up” approach, while *TVR* and the Covenant try to invert it. Instead of leaving decisions to the lowest appropriate level, they attempt to remove such decisions to the

highest possible levels. In effect, these two documents attempt to create the very type of curia which the Reformers sought to avoid. This inversion effectively ignores Ramsey's warning about the potential of a centralized authority to crush the levels beneath it. It is an innovation within the Anglican understanding of the episcopacy, as such a centralized structure has not historically played a large part in the life of the Communion as a whole, though both the polity of individual provinces and may understand it in that way. As Neil Alexander argues, it shifts the ideal of bishops exercising their ministries in their local contexts to a "much stronger sense of universality and centralization" which is defined and embodied almost exclusively by bishops themselves.<sup>121</sup> It is questionable whether such a centralized arrangement, with power concentrated in the hands of a few who may or may not "belong" strictly to their local contexts, fits Ramsey's ideal of *diakonia* which embodies the Gospel.

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<sup>121</sup> Alexander, "Patterns of Ecclesiology: Does the Anglican Covenant Fit?," 8-9.

## Conclusion

In an ideal Church, the exercise of authority within the confines of its governance structures would be as St. Paul envisioned it: an exercise of humble proclamation of the Gospel, where “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each” (1 Corinthians 3:7-8). Paul suggests not only do all work together for the benefit of the whole body, but also that the ultimate source of authority to plant and to water is God. In an ideal community, such as the one Ramsey and his Tractarian forerunners describe, such would be the case. However, their ability to see beyond the ideal is somewhat limited by the hopefulness of their pre-war era. For them, the experience of people on the margins (i.e., those on the receiving end of episcopal authority) do not seem to factor into their theologizing about the Church and those called to serve in ordained ministry. Their work, as eloquent as it is, does not always convey to the reader what the role of bishops has been, and continues to be, in terms of their exercising the authority entrusted to them.<sup>122</sup>

Anglican ecclesiological thinking since *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* was first published in 1936 has shifted away from the “pie-in-the-sky” description of the relationships within the Communion. It has instead moved in the direction of thinking of the Church in terms of centralized, power-bearing structures and away from the authority embodied in waiting on one another’s tables. It is that, and not the exercise of power -- often to the detriment of groups traditionally excluded from doing so on their own behalf -- which is the type of authority about which Ramsey writes. Such authority is

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<sup>122</sup> Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 2003), 98.

community-based, relational, and rooted solely in the life of the Triune God who inspired the writers of the Bible and endowed humans with the gifts necessary to discern God's truth.<sup>123</sup> Jared C. Cramer observes:

There is a tendency in humanity, and especially in the church, to lose focus on God as the ultimate authority and begin to hold up one of God's methods of revelation as key... Throughout his writings, when dealing with questions of authority and truth, Ramsey suggests a healthy amount of humility, recognizing the fallible nature of all created things. Instead, he seeks to draw the church's focus upon the One who is uncreated, always at work to bring creation into the fullness of divine truth. By locating primary authority there, the church is then freed to engage critically with the various tools of theological authority.<sup>124</sup>

The humility required to recognize "the fallible nature of all created things" extends to recognizing that the Church is not an ideal institution. Article XXI of The Thirty-Nine Articles, as ratified in England in 1662, states that "General Councils. . . may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God."<sup>125</sup> This statement acknowledges that the Church, as a human institution, is subject to human limitations. As such, it does not always "get things right," including how those called to exercise oversight may do so in ways inconsistent with the guiding principles established in

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<sup>123</sup> Jared C. Cramer, *Safeguarded by Glory: Michael Ramsey's Ecclesiology and the Struggles of Contemporary Anglicanism* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 37.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> "Articles of Religion." *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 872.

Scripture and the Early Church. Fallibility also requires recognition that the use of reason to interpret Scripture and establish praxis will result in precisely the type of diversity among local expressions of the Church which both the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and *TVR* commend. Maintaining that diversity within the context of the Anglican family does not require precise conformity to a single set of doctrines as it does in the Roman Catholic tradition.

As in any family system, the health of the relationships within that system depends on the individual members' ability to self-differentiate. In the case of the Communion, differentiation has historically been in the form of "the historic episcopate, locally adapted" to suit the needs of a particular national church, while at the same time maintaining collegial relationships with the other members of the Communion. Authority is properly used by all four orders of ministry to hold these relationships together, not to force lower levels of a hierarchy to do the will of the upper levels. Enforcement of doctrinal purity in this way runs counter to Ramsey's assertion that authority is meant to build up the church for the purpose of showing the Gospel. This stands in direct opposition to claims made by both *TVR* and the proposed Covenant. Both of those documents attempt to move in the direction of consolidating the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury to resolve disputes among member churches. Such a move would effectively grant these international bodies the power to crush the lower levels of the hierarchy. Over the long term, the conflicts created at the local level by such a demand to conform, especially in cases where the demand runs counter to the discernment of God's will in a specific context, would only to discourage the kind of diversity which has proven to be one of Anglicanism's core strengths.

Dispersed authority, with its requisite “mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggerations”<sup>126</sup> provides a better framework for maintaining relationships in the face of conflict than coercion. It requires a deliberate effort on the part of all provinces to remain in relationship with one another, and to provide time and space for shared discernment and dialogue. Such a process also requires accepting our own human fallibility at least to the extent of admitting that one may be wrong. Dispersed authority does not require that one party in a dispute must be correct at the expense of another, if for no other reason that, at its core, it is committed to a process designed to maintain the highest level of relationship possible in the midst of disagreement.

Maintaining partnerships across the Communion is a challenge under ideal circumstances. It becomes a far larger challenge when those who exercise authority use it to maintain a status quo which would effectively fail to honor the gospel mandate of inviting all, including tax collectors, lepers, and sinners to the table. In this case, maintaining the status quo represents “the attempt to defend some historical locus of infallibility -- whether it be a Council, a Pope, or a Scripture -- [which] inevitably ends up in difficulties.”<sup>127</sup>

“Difficulties” are precisely what the Communion has experienced, especially in the past twenty years. It is the result of certain parties’ quest to prove themselves “correct” about the dual issues of Biblical interpretation and the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals among the ranks of the ordained. Such a quest serves only to maintain

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<sup>126</sup> “The Anglican Communion 4: The Later Lambeth Conferences.”  
<http://revpatrickcomerford.blogspot.com/2009/02/anglican-communion-4-later-lambeth.html>.

<sup>127</sup> Cyril Charles Richardson, “By What Authority?: A Study of Religious Authority in Anglicanism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 24, no. 3 (July 1942): 245–55.

homeostasis within the Anglican family system, one which traditionally privileges predominantly white, cisgendered, and male voices above all others. The process of grappling with the issue itself, as well as with the collateral damage of impaired relationships throughout the Communion, has resulted in obscuring the very foundations of those relationships. This is demonstrated through the proposed Anglican Covenant's prescriptions for "relational consequences," and its apparent conflation of authority and political power in Section 4.

To exercise authority in this way may also represent a conflation of ecclesiology and polity. Ecclesiology itself is best understood as "a living theology because it is the reasoned persuasion of a living body working out its life." On the other hand, polity is a system of government arising out of a group's self-understanding.<sup>128</sup> The shift toward a centralized and bishop-heavy structure at the level of the Communion thus represents an overall change in Anglicans' self-conception. It moves away from the familial understanding enjoyed throughout the history of the Communion, and toward one which, on the surface, appears to be driven more by a desire to impose some sort of conformity which has not previously existed. Any effort to do so represents an attempt to assuage the great anxiety over the place of the Church in an increasingly diverse and skeptical religious landscape. Despite the ongoing disputes over the proper interpretation of Scripture and the place of traditionally marginalized groups within the governance structures of individual provinces, Anglican ecclesiology has proven to be "thin and exceptionally tough, proved in vast numbers of stresses" (*TVR*, 4.24). As such, it continues to reflect the lived experience of the Communion as one which has

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<sup>128</sup> Alexander, "Patterns of Anglican Ecclesiology," 10.

relationships at its core, instead of dictator-bishops who can simply impose their will on those with whom they disagree.

*TVR* and the proposed Anglican Covenant both represent attempts to codify the working out of the Communion's life, while at the same time attempting to impose solutions to the current challenges unilaterally on all member provinces. This type of problem solving, as outlined in Section 4.2 of the Covenant, is antithetical to *TVR*'s statement that "Anglican theologians, such as Richard Hooker, have spoken of the need for consent, without which the mere exercise of authority can amount to tyranny. But there is no one way of establishing what constitutes consent. Where there is disparity and diversity of traditions there is need for great care with communication" (*TVR*, 4.21). Despite the assertion that "mutual commitment does not represent submission to any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction," the Covenant's proposed process for solving disputes assumes precisely that.<sup>129</sup> However, the document itself is not binding on member churches without their having to alter their constitutions and canons to assent to the Covenant. The Covenant further allows the Standing Committee to request members "defer a controversial action" in consideration of other member churches. It also allows the Standing Committee, in consultation with the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting to impose consequences for a province's refusal to submit to the will of the majority.<sup>130</sup> Such a process implies the presence of the consent called for in *TVR*. However, it fails to delineate what constitutes such consent, and thus opens itself up to becoming the exercise of tyranny so loathed by Hooker and his contemporaries. In its

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<sup>129</sup> *The Anglican Communion Covenant*, 4.1.3, 4.2.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.2.5, ff.

attempt to mute what is arguably a dual process of discernment and reception within individual provinces, it also fails to honor *TVR*'s statement that "[t]he contemporary churches of the Anglican Communion also need locally embodied ecclesiologies. . . full, rich, and relevant embodiments of God's saving presence within a locality" (*TVR*, 4.26). Such richness, and the opportunity for the church to show forth authentically the light of the gospel, are made much less possible under the threat of the imposition of "relational consequences" by an extra-provincial body. It is precisely the same challenge presented by the Colenso heresy trial in the 1860s, and is one which clearly has yet to be resolved in a manner which preserves the communal, relational, and dispersed patterns of authority critical to Anglican self-understanding.

As theological categories, both ecclesiology and polity are "non-hierarchical and organic." They do interact with each other, and together provide a fuller picture about the nature and distribution of authority across the family system of a church. Within Anglicanism, both ecclesiology and polity afford primary authority to bishops, who then delegate it to presbyters and deacons.. Within the Episcopal Church itself, the exercise of authority, by necessity, traditionally includes the lay order as well. Their role in calling clergy to parishes (subject to episcopal approval), and in shaping the lives of the parishes and dioceses where their gifts for ministry are appreciated cannot be understated. Further, bishops also cannot be elected without their participation, either in their capacity as delegates to electing conventions or as members of diocesan Standing Committees which must consent to all elections.

In the article "Authority: The Challenge to Anglicanism," Arthur Vogel writes, "The nature of authority in a community arises out of that community's self-

understanding. If persons in a society relate only externally to one another as separated individuals, authority will be exercised externally also.”<sup>131</sup> This tension between communal self-understanding and the human tendency to relate to one another as separated individuals is precisely what is at stake in the debate over the proper use of authority within the Church. Since authority is, by its nature, both communal and relational, finding the balance between meeting individuals’ needs and serving the entire community is challenging at best. It requires a measure of putting aside self-interest, the self-seeking of “glory unto me,” and the conviction that one must be correct in favor of humble service to the community as a whole. Such humility is the only answer to the “nervous fretting [which] can bedevil the church’s life.”<sup>132</sup> As Ramsey reminded a group of new ordinands, some level of anxiety will always be present:

Sometimes [the Church] frets by its old-fashionedness, its inability to reform itself, its shirking of challenging issues. And sometimes it frets in the opposite way: by a seeming loss of historic values, by a playing down of the supernatural, by a concern to be “with it”. If we are ourselves conceited, we fret about what others in the Church are doing or not doing in a “we and they” superiority; if we are humble, we include ourselves within the criticism.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Arthur A Vogel, “Authority: The Challenge to Anglicanism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 72, no. 1 (1990): 10.

<sup>132</sup> Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today*, 83.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

What are the implications of maintaining Ramsey's thesis that authority itself is rooted in the Christian community, and that, at its most authentic, authority is found in service of others? First, "authority" is not what twenty-first century American thinking would have it be. That is, it is not what allows some to have sway or charge over others; rather, it is what allows Christians to serve others in the same kenotic way which Jesus himself modeled. That principle should, in an ideal situation, change how leaders understand and live into their role. That said, the trappings of office, including power and prestige, often serve to distract office holders from their mandate to use their authority to build others up. This is particularly true in hierarchical systems, where the concentration of power in a papacy or a curia-like body runs the very real risk of becoming a self-perpetuating "means to its own end." In such systems, this self-perpetuation is demonstrated in several ways, beginning with the distancing of authority holders from the very people they are called to serve. Misuse of authority can, and often does, go unchallenged, particularly in cases involving some form of abuse, and those in power place the needs of the institution above the needs of victims (for example, the long-standing crisis fomented by the cover-up of clerical child abuse within the Roman Catholic Church).

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this challenge is how hierarchically-based systems tend to privilege those who exercise authority over against those who lack high office. The inherent danger such systems present is in their desire to enshrine this power imbalance within the hierarchy itself, and very often to the detriment of the community as a whole. Instead of the humble service modeled by Christ, they become models of, in

Ramsey's words "a self-consciousness that dwells up on 'our privileges' rather than the glory of God in Christ."<sup>134</sup>

Ramsey's writing also calls for a re-evaluation of how authority is used within the structures of the Church. The dispersed nature of authority within the Anglican Communion requires existing structures to enable decision-making by the widest constituency possible. In effect, authority must be shared equally among lay and ordained people wherever possible. At the level of the Communion, this is most clearly seen in the Anglican Consultative Council, which was established with Ramsey's support while he was Archbishop of Canterbury, and its inclusion of laypeople among its membership. (Notably, the ACC is the only legislative body at that level which includes presbyters, deacons, and laypeople, in addition to bishops.)

Within the Episcopal Church's polity, shared governance has been the case since the Colonial period, when a lack of clergy meant that laypeople took on much of the day-to-day work of parish governance. The compromise of Bishops Seabury and White to allow active participation of the laity as members of the House of Deputies continues to ensure that their voices will be honored and heard to a similar degree as those of the members of the House of Bishops. At the diocesan level the election and consecration of any bishop cannot proceed without the express consent of the lay order. Such consent, which allows bishops to function with relative autonomy within the boundaries of their respective dioceses. It implies that the bishop's primary responsibility is one of humble service, which, under ideal circumstances, raises up the whole community of the Church to glorify God in this age and in the age to come.

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<sup>134</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 48.