

## Editorial: *Koinonia*

*Koinonia* is an important New Testament word. It suggests that people participate in the life of God and one another in a way that brings about communion, fellowship and sharing. The Greek word *koinonia* in the New Testament – Andrew Davison tells us in his excellent book *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*<sup>1</sup> – is intimately connected with the participation of the three persons of the Trinity in one another. For Davison ‘there is a “communion” between persons’,<sup>2</sup> in which humans are privileged to share. This is echoed in 1 Jn 1.3 where the writer talks of fellowship with other people and with the Father and with Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul uses *koinonia* or communion in relation to the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10.16–17) where there is a communion or participation of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist (v. 16) and where there is also a communion or fellowship with one another as the Eucharist is shared (v. 17). *Koinonia* is good news for Anglicans, impelling us to proclaim the presence of Christ who comes to reconcile the world to God. This suggests that *koinonia* or communion is the very nature of God,<sup>3</sup> where people participate in God and in one another. It is in the grace of this reconciling relationship that people live in unity and peace (2 Cor. 13.13). The fundamental sense of *koinonia* is the transformation brought about by sharing unity together or participating in the life of God and God’s Church as the body of Christ. The early Church portrayed this in the Acts of the Apostles where the first Christians ‘devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship [*koinonia*], to the breaking of bread and the prayers’ (Acts 2.42). It was this fellowship and the eucharistic community, shared together, that sustained the spiritual life of these early Christians. Their sharing was with God and with one another in imitation of the fellowship Jesus shared with his disciples and many others. *Koinonia* not only has a depth of spiritual meaning but also an outward expression of fellowship, worship and unity in the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1.5). It was the strength of this fellowship that allowed the emerging Christian Church to overcome barriers and to remain together in unity despite the strife that sometimes afflicted its life. Barriers of culture, race and class were less important and the more fundamental concept of *koinonia* trumped ‘purely physical and eternal tests of conduct’ (such as circumcision or food laws), which became ‘obsolete in the course of time’.<sup>4</sup>

In more recent times *koinonia* has been central to the life of the Anglican Communion. The Lambeth Conference of 1930 followed the theme of ‘fellowship’

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup>Davison, *Participation in God*, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Robert S. Heaney and William L. Sachs, *The Promise of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2019), p. 197.

<sup>4</sup>L.S. Thornton, *The Common Life of the Body of Christ* (London: Dacre, 1941), p. 10.

or 'bound together' or 'mutual loyalty' in a way that suggested *koinonia* was an important experiential dimension for Anglicanism. For Lambeth 1930 being Anglican was not about confessional statements or structural conformity but the sharing of a parentage (historical and liturgical) and the desire to be in communion.<sup>5</sup> This call to unity and fellowship was a realistic call since the bishops also spoke of 'this progressive diversity within the unity of the Anglican Churches',<sup>6</sup> which the bishops saw as central to the mission of the church. They also commented that:

We must now draw attention to the equally urgent necessity for unity *within* each Church. We appeal to all our brethren to remember that their right to a place in the Church of Christ lies in His call to each of them, in His love that embraces them, and His Spirit that dwells in them, far more than in the opinions which they profess or the methods which they pursue. It may even be necessary to the Church that men in it should hold and expound different opinions, in order that the Church as a whole should have the whole truth.<sup>7</sup>

These words coming to us from 1930 are very reminiscent of words spoken by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, at the recent Lambeth Conference of 2022. In his address to the bishops on the Call on Human Dignity, Welby said:

For the large majority of the Anglican Communion the traditional understanding of marriage is something that is understood, accepted and without question, not only by Bishops but their entire Church, and the societies in which they live. For them, to question this teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries would make the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For many churches to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

For a minority, we can say almost the same. They have not arrived lightly at their ideas that traditional teaching needs to change. They are not careless about scripture. They do not reject Christ. But they have come to a different view on sexuality after long prayer, deep study and reflection on understandings of human nature. For them, to question this different teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries is making the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For these churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

So let us not treat each other lightly or carelessly. We are deeply divided. That will not end soon. We are called by Christ himself both to truth and unity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The Bishops of the Anglican Communion, *The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with Resolutions and Reports* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and New York: Macmillan, 1930).

<sup>6</sup>The Bishops of the Anglican Communion, *Lambeth 1930*, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup>The Bishops of the Anglican Communion, *Lambeth 1930*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>Justin Welby's Opening Remarks on the bishops' discussion of the Call on Human Dignity, Lambeth 2022, 2 August 2022. Available at: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/bishops-lambeth-conference-discuss-lambeth-call-human-dignity> (accessed 28 September 2022).

Welby's words suggest that there may be different views and the wish to expound them but that we are called nonetheless to a vocation of truth and unity. Like the bishops of 1930 he is being realistic in the situation faced by the Anglican Communion on human dignity, including sexuality, but Welby is clear: we are called by Christ to not only truth but unity. Welby's words, nonetheless, may not address the issues raised by some Anglicans, such as those who are part of the Global Anglican Futures Network (Gafcon) who willingly affirm the need for unity and truth, but appeal at the same time to the witness of Scripture alone, arguing that the so-called 'plain reading of Scripture' is the root operating principle of their position.

Calls to truth and unity as *koinonia* are not new in the Anglican Communion. *The Windsor Report* of 2004 distinguished carefully between the presenting issues (that is, the ordination of Gene Robinson as a bishop in the Episcopal Church, the use of services of blessing and marriage for same-sex couples in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada and importantly but sometimes forgotten, the decision by some Anglican Primates in Africa to provide episcopal oversight for churches outside their own province) and what the Report called 'the fundamental issue'. *The Windsor Report* itself defined the fundamental issue as not questions relating to sexuality but the question of how the churches of the Communion can discern together how to be faithful disciples of Christ, especially when the decision of one church or one province challenge the standard or teaching across the Communion. Unity was also seen as a fundamental principle as was the idea of fellowship or *koinonia*. Unity was seen as one of the ways in which Anglicans as part of the Christian church bear witness to the love of God revealed in peoples' lives through Jesus Christ. Unity, therefore, was not seen as an optional extra which could be dispensed with, but as fundamental to the witness of the Christian life. Remaining together in the shared bonds of *koinonia* was seen as essential to the very nature of communion.<sup>9</sup>

*The Windsor Report* also referred to Paul's use of the word *koinonia* to emphasize the importance of unity. It says in part:

These themes are worked out dramatically in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In writing to the very troubled faith community there, he begins his pastoral and restorative ministry (following on from his apostolic and evangelistic ministry, already exercised) by reminding them of the true gift of God that is their identity in Christ. He writes to them in the grace and peace that is 'from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (1.3). The Corinthians, he maintains, are a people who have been 'sanctified in Christ Jesus' and are 'called to be saints' (1.2). In Christ they are 'enriched in every way in speech and knowledge of every kind' and 'are not lacking any spiritual gift as [they] await the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1.5-7). Paul reminds them that a faithful God has 'called them into the fellowship [*koinonia*, 'communion'] of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (1.9). Whatever problems there are in the community – and Corinth had more than its fair share, from personality cults and social divisions to immorality and unbelief – Paul begins by addressing

<sup>9</sup>See Section B Fundamental Principles, in Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004), pp. 24-41.

them as those who are, despite some outward appearances, already set apart by and for the love of God. This does not hold him back from administering severe discipline in the case of scandalous behaviour (ch. 5); but this too, as 2 Corinthians 2 indicates, is held within the larger context of pastoral and reconciling intent. At the climax of this letter, after dealing with all these problems, we find Paul's longest exposition of what it means to live as the Body of Christ, united in diversity (ch. 12), with that unity characterised not by a mechanistic or formal structure but by that all-demanding and all-fulfilling virtue which the early Christians called *agape*, love (ch. 13).<sup>10</sup>

The methodology of *The Windsor Report*, in focusing on fundamental or first principles, was not novel in Anglican thinking. Richard Hooker, as long ago as the sixteenth century, had advocated a first principles approach in his famous book *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker moves in the *Laws* from what he calls 'general meditations' in Book I where he uses 'law' as the organiser to 'particular decisions',<sup>11</sup> addressing in Book V, for example, matters of controversy such as the attack of the Puritans on the public ceremonies and specifically the sacraments of the Church of England. Book I addresses the more fundamental principles first as matters of epistemology and lays out the foundations for future arguments. Hooker, like *The Windsor Report*, does not begin or prioritize the specific or particular issues, but rather looks to first principles. Books II–IV of the *Laws* contains responses to the Puritan attack on the Church of England and are based on a first principles approach, arguing for right thinking and the avoidance of epistemological errors based on specifics rather than first principles. It is Hooker's claim that divine law, ultimately revealed in Christ, is the means through which God works in the world. This same strategy was employed in *The Windsor Report* so that the currency of the argument did not descend into questions of who is right or wrong in relation to particular issues, but rather focused on the more primary issues of fellowship, truth and unity. For *The Windsor Report* there was a priority given to *koinonia* as a first principle and as the basis of unity and truth.

As the Anglican Communion seeks to focus on these first principle issues it has been greatly helped by Paul Avis's book *The Vocation of Anglicanism*.<sup>12</sup> Here Avis argues for a peaceable vocation for Anglicanism that rejects the suggestion that there is a 'new gospel' among some Anglicans. Avis instead argues that in order to be peaceable, the Anglican Communion must have the character of Christ as seen in the Gospels. For Avis this means that 'the ultimate theological significance of the character of Christ is that it is revelatory, mirroring, revealing and making present the eternal character of God as that is disclosed in scriptural revelation'.<sup>13</sup> When this character, he argues, is imprinted on the church's theology and pervades the church then the church presents a more attractive and desirable version of Christianity to the world. For Avis this same character of a peaceable vocation must

<sup>10</sup>*The Windsor Report*, Section A, Paragraph 4, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: A Critical Edition with Modern Spelling* (3 vols.; ed. A.S. McGrade; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), I, 1.2, pp. 43–44.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Avis, *The Vocation of Anglicanism* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

<sup>13</sup>Avis, *The Vocation of Anglicanism*, pp. 94–95.

pervade our intra-Anglican relations. Anglicans have a vocation to be peaceable, courteous, emphatic and kind. In this sense there is a need for a community of civilized disagreement or one where there is tradition constituted rationality, where there is difference and where people are respected and heard and not objectified or demonized. Avis's words echo what Justin Welby has argued at the recent Lambeth Conference. This character recognizes that there is strife in the churches, such as there was in Corinth and that some are accused of embracing 'another gospel' (Gal. 1.6-7) and yet these people are still churches. Avis makes the argument that it is only when people refuse to confess Jesus Christ (1 Jn 4.2-4) that there is cause for breaking unity and *koinonia*.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that there are some issues, some first principles, like *koinonia*, that are more universal and fundamental to the life of the Anglican Communion than specific behaviours, for example sexual behaviours, which some may see as scandalous. These fundamental issues, like *koinonia*, are not human in origin, but of God. *Koinonia* is a creation of the Holy Spirit and not our creation. It cannot be laid aside on a whim or on human reasoning and particular interpretations of the Scriptures. *Koinonia* connects us intimately to God, to one another, to the gospel and the sacraments and it is in the context of *koinonia* that we find unity and truth. Without *koinonia* truth and unity cannot be found. *Koinonia* is nothing less than God's greatest gift to people in this life which looks forward to the perfection of the life of heaven.

As the Anglican Communion moves forward following Lambeth 2022 there is a need to focus again on first principles rather than particular issues and confessional statements. There is a need for the Anglican Communion to embrace what Avis calls a 'peaceable vocation' where truth and unity are central to the gospel of Christ and where *koinonia* is seen as the gracious gift of God, to be preserved at all costs. These matters are much discussed in recent times. In the *Journal of Anglican Studies*, an article written by Bishop Keith Joseph (the Bishop of the Diocese of North Queensland, Australia) was published in the May 2022 edition reflecting on these issues.<sup>15</sup> In this article Bishop Keith argued that since 2008 the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) had emerged as a powerful force within the Anglican Communion. He also argued that GAFCON's *Jerusalem Declaration* (a confessional statement) had become a standard of Anglican orthodoxy for some to the exclusion of other Anglicans who also see themselves as orthodox but unable to affirm the *Jerusalem Declaration*. It is Bishop Keith's contention that GAFCON leads to schismatic ends with the fracturing of unity and *koinonia*.

In this edition of the *Journal of Anglican Studies*, I have invited the Chair of Gafcon Australia, Bishop Richard Condie (the Bishop of the Diocese of Tasmania, Australia) to respond to Bishop Keith's article. Bishop Richard acknowledges Bishop Keith's article as far-ranging in its analysis and its treatment of GAFCON's shortcomings throughout the world. Bishop Richard in his Response has focused on specific issues as they impact Australia, where both Bishop Richard and Bishop Keith are based. Bishop Richard acknowledges the importance of unity in the Anglican Communion and how various actions, including those in

<sup>14</sup>Avis, *The Vocation of Anglicanism*, p. 64.

<sup>15</sup>Keith Joseph, 'The Challenge of Gafcon to the Unity of the Anglican Communion', *The Journal of Anglican Studies* 20.1 (2022), pp. 3-21.

the Episcopal Church have impacted on that unity. He contends that it is ‘the erosion of the plain reading of Scripture with respect to questions of human sexuality’ that is the root of any threat to unity. Unity, he argues, can only be preserved if it ‘is in line with the teaching of the apostles and the prophets and Christ Jesus himself and in accord with what he calls ‘the plain reading of Scripture’. He also refers to the recent Appellate Tribunal decision in Australia, that is, that the blessing of same-sex union was consistent with the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia. He also refers to the formation of the Diocese of Southern Cross, established outside the Anglican Church of Australia for clergy and parishes who cannot accept the ministry of their own diocesan bishop.

Bishop Keith’s article and Bishop Richard’s response are offered to readers of the *Journal of Anglican Studies* as part of the current dialogue in the Anglican Communion. The journal exists to serve the study of Anglicanism by promoting and facilitating serious study of all aspects of Anglicanism. In so doing, it hopes to engage all perspectives and to increase academic and sensible debate on Anglicanism. I thank both Bishop Keith and Bishop Richard for their considered opinions and hope that they will help others to understand something of the current issues we face as Anglicans and the varying opinions of those involved.

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