Introduction

At the turn of the century the synod of the diocese of New Westminster in western Canada considered whether to approve liturgies for committed same-sex relationships. There were strong divisions within the diocese, but after a lengthy debate the synod voted in favour of the move on 22 June 2002. The bishop, Michael Ingham, was personally in favour of such a step, and as the diocesan bishop he had the responsibility of giving final authorisation for these liturgies. He delayed, perhaps in some degree wanting to be responsive to the furore which the proposed step had created in Canada and the rest of the Anglican Communion.

The issue was not new. Gender relations had been debated in Canada since 1976 and was on the agenda of the Lambeth Conference in 1988 and 1998. Indeed in 1998 it was the occasion of an unseemly row in which some bishops distinguished themselves in the public eye by the racist language they used to characterise their opponents. So the issue clearly had a lot of explosive potential.

Since 1998 the primates had decided to meet each year for consultation and fellowship. They had a meeting scheduled to be held in the diocese of Southern Brazil on 19–25 May 2003, at the Serrano Conference Centre in Gramado. It was to be the first such meeting for Rowan Williams as the new Archbishop of Canterbury. The pre-meeting press release stressed that it was to be a private meeting. The gathering was to take the form of a retreat, with Eucharist and Bible study being the framework of their being together.

As it turned out, some aspects of the meeting were anything but private. An official letter was released at the end of the gathering which described something of the topics which had been discussed. Not the least of these was human sexuality. With moderated understatement the primates declared:

> The question of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions is still a cause of potentially divisive controversy. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke for us all when he said that it is through liturgy that we express what we believe, and that there is no

theological consensus about same sex unions. Therefore, we as a body cannot support the authorization of such rites.[1]

That statement was made on 27 May 2003. During the Primates' Meeting Michael Ingham, in New Westminster, Canada, issued a rite for blessing committed same-sex unions and the first such blessing took place the day after the primates made their announcement. It was a globally public snub to the position of the primates and still ripples around the world amongst Anglicans. It reflects issues at the heart of the turn-of-the-century institutional crisis facing worldwide Anglicanism.

What kind of religious tradition can create such a public confrontation? Clearly one that includes questions about the relationships between centres of authority and the extent of jurisdiction. It is manifest that the primates have no jurisdiction over Michael Ingham. They did not claim it and he certainly did not concede it.

The primates did, however, intervene in the debate and as a group sought to exercise some authority. If that authority weighed with Michael Ingham, it was not enough to change his course of action. So again we are confronted with this question: what kind of religious tradition could lead to such a situation? The language of authority and jurisdiction occurs throughout the history of Anglicanism. It is precisely reflected in exchanges with the Pope when he spoke the language of jurisdiction to William I in the eleventh century. Authority and jurisdiction were implicit in the debates at the synod of Whitby in AD 664. Notoriously Henry VIII and the papacy engaged on issues of jurisdiction. If Henry and the Pope spoke the same jurisdictional language, that commonality of language was apparently absent from the exchange between Michael Ingham and the primates. Clearly the institutions of the Anglican Communion did not have, and do not appear to wish to have, any kind of Tudor/papal jurisdictional role.

So without jurisdictional authority how did such a religious tradition come to be a worldwide phenomenon and with such a character? How does such a religious tradition sustain itself? To what does this tradition testify? These are important questions and point to the odd history and character of the community of Anglicans worldwide. That story has been told on a number of occasions and with different lines of interpretation. Kevin Ward has written an excellent account of global Anglicanism by regions.[2] His book is different from earlier accounts in that it highlights the local

[1] Primates' letter from meeting of May 2003, available at: www.aco.org/acns/articles/34/50/acns3450.html (accessed 25 March 2007).
[2] K. D. Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

initiatives which led to the spread of Anglican Christianity around the world. In this respect his book represents a welcome change in historiographical approach, an approach which has been to some extent anticipated in postcolonial historiography generally.

This book is not a history of worldwide Anglicanism. It is an introduction to world Anglicanism and seeks to set out a way of understanding world Anglicanism as it confronts the twenty-first century. In order to understand this Christian community we need to have some understanding of the foundations upon which the community faith is based and some sense of the dynamics that shape that faith. In order to do justice to the current dynamics and its heritage of institutions and activities I will be treating Anglicanism as a tradition. By this I do not mean a set of fixed habits from the past, but rather the more dynamic sense of being a conversation over time amongst a community of people held together by sets of practices and beliefs. Anglicanism is thus seen as having a story which provides a framework within which Anglicans understand and experience their practices and beliefs.

That story needs to be characterised so that the practices and beliefs of Anglicans can be seen in their appropriate perspective. There are some prominent markers in this tradition, pre-eminently a theological habit of focusing on the incarnation. This focus gives a quite particular construal for a notion of catholicity: it begins with the local expression of a universal faith in which the local is part of a larger whole. That local needs a larger community to save itself from being inadequate in its faith and practice.

This orientation explains why Anglicans have always thought that the complete ecclesial unit is a province with an archbishop. This practice provided two things: a manageable reach for effective catholicity and a reasonable framework for ecclesiastical order for ordination and discipline of all ministerial orders – deacons, priests and bishops. Anglicans regard this as the model of the early church and therefore as having an important pedigree. Archbishops are not an order, but hold a part-time temporary job and are subject to discipline as bishops. This system of provinces is the reason why the Anglican Communion has historically described itself as a fellowship of churches and not as a church. In this respect it is similar to the world federation of Lutheran churches, and in some contrast to Roman Catholicism which begins its ecclesiology with the magisterium and the pope as the Vicar of Christ. It thinks of itself not as a fellowship of churches but certainly as a universal church. We shall see that each model has its problems.

The idea of a supra-provincial structure is not necessarily impossible for Anglicans, but the tradition lacks resources to provide a clear rationale for it.

For this reason I describe the moves since 1988 as an ecclesiological experiment. The story of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrine Commission (IATDC) reports is a tale of attempts to find resources from the tradition to provide shape for the experiment. A number of options have been canvassed along the way: regional conferences and structures, international congresses of all the churches, and an international study centre for theological education and research with appropriate resources on Anglican identity. This is to name just a few options that have been considered or tried but have now been discarded for the time being.

The current line of experiment follows the suggestions of the *Windsor Report* and moves in the direction of a covenant which would provide more manifest authoritative power than the present arrangements to restrain deviations from some central norm. This line of experimental development has come in the context of very significant conflict over the institutional actions in the areas of gender relationships. It is interesting to observe that the currently discarded experiments have tended in the direction of persuasive authority and the currently pursued experiment moves in the direction of jurisdictional development. So the experiment is really quite innovative, if not revolutionary.

This book focuses on the global experiment that Anglicans are engaged in. This means that activities at the world level occupy a large part of this account. The records of the Lambeth Conference are therefore very important sources, not because they report decisions that apply in the regions – they do not, and do not profess to do so – but because they are taken as reasonable evidence of what is going on in the world community. Throughout the book I have tried to refer to the Anglicans that live around the world and their local institutions as part of world Anglicanism. The term 'global' has for some the connotation of western domination.[3] The current struggle among Anglicans around the world, and the post-1988 institutional experiments, seem to many to be a form of globalism.[4]

There is a distinction between the institutions of the current experiment and the well-established regional and local institutions. The latter form the framework for the life and faith of Anglicans everywhere. They are where the practices which sustain the tradition of faith operate and where the faith is lived out and expressed in the lives of individuals and communities. There are literally thousands of such institutions and organisations, just as there are

[3] L. O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 22.
[4] See J. R. Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism: And the Reinvention of the World* (London: Atlantic, 2005).

hundreds of worldwide networks and institutional relationships which keep these dispersed Anglicans in touch with each other. A mere fraction of these connections are visible in the institutions of the Anglican Communion. When we look at the Anglican Communion and its organisational arrangements we need to remember this wider network of living connections between Anglicans around the world. Yet it is the organisational arrangements of the Anglican Communion which are the subject of the current ecclesiological experiment in Anglicanism, and they must therefore occupy a good deal of our attention in this book.

It is completely impossible in a single book to describe the vast extent of the activities in this world community. Being selective about which topics to include has been inevitable and it is also certain that readers will know of examples which could or should have been used. A book like this is an open invitation to upset almost everyone because I have left out what they know is important. My only hope is that what I have written will be of interest, and help the reader to have some idea of what this thing called world Anglicanism is, and something of what the current experiment is about.

PART I

Foundations

CHAPTER 1

The nature of the story as a tradition

The fact that a community has had such a long history raises some important questions about how best to tell its story. This book is not a history of Anglicanism. Rather it is an introduction to a particular tradition of Christianity. In order to enter into the nature of contemporary world Anglicanism we need an interpretative standpoint from which to make some sense of what we see today. There are a number of different frameworks that could be used: Marxist class struggle, a study of social power and manipulation, conflict between nationalist sentiments, the impact of modernity and the fragmenting effects of postmodernism or postcolonialism, to name just a few. This book is written from a theological standpoint. It sees Anglicanism as part of the response to the presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and of the struggle to give expression to that presence in the life circumstances of the Christian community and the believer. The contemporary encounter with Jesus Christ is not just a process of leaping from the present to the first century. We make that encounter within the framework of a living tradition of faith and life.

Within Christianity there are a number of discrete traditions of faith, and Anglicanism is one of them. What Anglicans bring to the contemporary encounter is thus a complex mix of practices and beliefs that have developed over many generations. These provide the framework for understanding contemporary world Anglicanism.

The Anglican tradition is a continuing response to God in particular circumstances and is a dynamic force. The foundations of world Anglicanism are thus not easily set out in simple descriptive terms. Rather they are best captured in narrative form: not as a simple story of what Anglicans have done through the centuries but as a narrative of the continuity within the tradition in its various manifestations.

The construction of such a narrative faces very significant hurdles in the case of Anglicanism. Precisely how tradition is conceived affects the nature of the narrative and needs to be identified clearly. The horizon for the

narrative is itself a contentious matter amongst Anglicans and other Christians, not least Roman Catholics. Did it begin with the reformation of Henry VIII or does its pedigree date from an earlier time, even from Jesus of Nazareth himself? And what might it mean to say that it began at a certain point anyway?

The idea of a Christian nation, which has influenced the understanding of Anglicans for a thousand years, has little currency in the modern world, yet it is a crucial part of the Anglican story. To enter into what it meant for Anglicans to live in a self-consciously Christian nation over a long period of time requires a significant imaginative endeavour for inhabitants of the twenty-first century. These are issues to which we must turn first, before offering a narrative within which to locate our understanding of world Anglicanism.

THE NATURE OF A TRADITION

The terminology of tradition is found in the earliest documents of Christianity. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the following terms, 'I handed over to you as of first importance what I in turn had received' (1 Cor. 15.3). This is an activity construed along a temporal line with a view to sustaining some kind of continuity in the community within which these matters are being handed on. That dynamic notion of tradition persisted in earliest Christianity. With the passing of generations the content of what was being handed on came to be identified as tradition. That process made it possible for a conflict to emerge between the expressions of this tradition at different times and in different places and what was perceived as the original meaning. We can see this concern clearly in Irenaeus (*c.* 130 – *c.* 200), who argued for what we would regard as a historical use of the early Christian texts in combination with an appeal to the public tradition of gospel-preaching in the church in Rome. During the second century a collection of texts from the earliest period inevitably came into existence as a benchmark. This collection in due course became a rule or canon, and was accepted in early Christianity as authoritative testimony to the original message of the faith: the texts were apostolic. There was always a dynamic between past tradition and present experience of the God testified to in the tradition. As Christians developed institutions of greater complexity that dynamic increasingly shared the cultural assumptions and problems of each generation.

In modern western culture tradition has become a highly contentious idea. The internal impulses of romanticism and the rigorous new 'discovery mentality' of modernity have meant that in the west tradition has been

under constant attack for nearly two hundred years. It has come to be seen as the past and to be a burden and an inhibition. The spirit of this is captured very nicely in Rousseau's 1762 book on education and upbringing, *Émile*. In the first sentence of Book I Rousseau declares: 'God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.' And so he appeals to mothers: 'Tender anxious mother, I appeal to you. You can remove this young tree from the highway and shield it from the crushing force of social convention.'[1] In this highly influential work Rousseau developed a sharp contrast between humanity and nature on the one hand and society and its institutions on the other. So he says to mothers: 'Forced to combat either nature or society, you must make your choice between the man and the citizen, you cannot train both.'[2] Thus on this account civilised man is a slave and freedom is gained only by learning from nature: 'take the opposite course to that prescribed by custom and you will almost always do right'.

The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a significant renewal of interest in these issues. Modernity appeared under severe threat and philosophers and social theorists were grappling with the challenges for humanity of a century of hot and cold wars and the apparent evaporation of confidence in the values of the western heritage. The struggle was finely represented in Alasdair MacIntyre's 1981 book, *After Virtue*. He rejected the Marxism of his earlier days and also contemporary liberal individualism.

MacIntyre claimed that the most pressing problem was that moral arguments were essentially interminable, in the sense that they cannot reach conclusions. The crucial test case for him was that of 'emotivism', in which any evaluative utterance has 'no point or use but the expressing of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings or attitudes of others'.[3] His argument challenged this disposition. He argued for a re-construction of our understanding of the western philosophical tradition and called for a return to a form of the predecessor model of Aristotelianism.[4]

The MacIntyre project has fallen like a bombshell into the contemporary debate about the nature of moral discourse, and how communities exist in historical particularity and at the same time have continuity through

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1969), p. 5.
[2] Ibid., p. 7.
[3] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 24.
[4] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

history. According to MacIntyre that continuity is sustained by the practices of the community within the framework of a notion of tradition. MacIntyre has placed the serious analysis of moral practices and their modes of thinking squarely on the table. These aspects of his work are of direct importance in trying to understand the nature of the Anglican community in its various manifestations.

MacIntyre has not been the only person concerned about these matters. In the same year (1981) that MacIntyre published *After Virtue*, Edward Shils published his T. S. Eliot Lectures of 1974 entitled simply *Tradition*.[5] Like MacIntyre, Shils began with the disrepute into which tradition had fallen under the influence of the Enlightenment. He argued that tradition is what is handed down. He has a more developed sense of institution than MacIntyre and claims that in relation to practices and institutions what is handed down are 'the patterns or images of action which they imply or present and the beliefs requiring, recommending, regulating, permitting or prohibiting the re-enactment of those patterns'.[6] Tradition implies some continuity and identity with the predecessor handlers of the tradition and thus carries within it some tacit knowledge of the life and meaning of those in the tradition. In this sense Shils argues that tradition is the cohering force in a society.

Having begun his book with the disrepute in which tradition is held, Shils ends it with an evangelistic assertion of its value and importance:

> I wish to stress that traditions should be considered as constituents of the worthwhile life. A mistake of great historical significance has been made in modern times in the construction of a doctrine which treated traditions as the detritus of the forward movement of society. It was a distortion of the truth to assert this and to think that mankind could live without tradition and simply in the light of immediately perceived interest or immediately experienced impulse or immediately excogitated reason and the latest stage of scientific knowledge or some combination of them.[7]

Shils' concept of tradition is cast in more static content terms than the more open-ended notion we find in MacIntyre. Even though the precise configuration of the character and role of tradition found in Shils and MacIntyre is not exactly the same, they were both attacking the same issue and seeking to assert that communities exist within a narrative of particulars, and that the continuity of that narrative is shaped and sustained by a tradition of practices.

[5] E. Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981). [6] Ibid., p. 12. [7] Ibid., p. 330.