



Indaba as Obedience: A Post Lambeth 2008 Assessment 'If someone offends you, talk to him'¹

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ABSTRACT

The article seeks to reflect on the Lambeth Conference of 2008 and, in particular, the use of the indaba method of engagement, in the context of the Anglican Communion's fractured history and its need for inner reconciliation. It proposes that theological and pastoral work is required in the areas of conflict resolution and communication.

The following article was prepared before the TEC (The Episcopal Church) General Convention of 2009, and does not take account of its decisions.

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Designing Lambeth Indaba Style

The Design Group for the Lambeth Conference of 2008 clearly had a plan, some of which was explicit and some not. We do not know it all. But we do know that, by contrast with previous recent Conferences, the tagline was 'every bishop's voice must be heard' – as against – 'bishops should bring their dioceses with them'. The latter injunction was aimed both at broadening the vision of Lambeth so that everyone could try to learn something of one another's context of ministry, and perhaps to discourage bishops from having a happy and expensive junket by being held accountable to the folk they represented. It was good in its day.

Lambeth 2008 was different. As we all know, we had come – partly through deliberate actions by some, and partly perhaps by the kind of

1. Mt. 18.15.
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inertia which fails to tackle issues until they explode – to a place of deep conflict. This was characterized – not for the first time – by a sense that some loud voices in the Communion were aggressively and unjustly drowning out others. If we were to have any kind of meaningful encounter at Lambeth, the first move must be to tie off the mechanisms by which the few (the ones with the microphones, the money, the first-language use of English, the familiarity with white-western parliamentary procedures and the over-representation) would be toned down. Hence, it was early decided that there would be no formal resolutions and (perhaps, more importantly) no plenary process by which resolutions would be debated. For every voice to be heard, some voices had to be shut up.

In his opening address, the Archbishop of Canterbury made the point that while we were used to the resolutions model, it had not served us well; we had said good things but very often (citing an instance from the 1800s) we had never implemented them. So how could it be much worse if we tried something else?

Then we needed a mechanism for allowing everybody to speak. It was discovered that around the world, in many cultures, there are other ways of resolving disputes in communities, apart from the white-western ones – which were widely acknowledged to be defective both by those who know and use them, and by those who observe them from outside. In the far north of the Americas, for example, there was ‘the circle’ – a mechanism by which the villagers sit in a circle and bring their views and feelings to the attention of others to be heard and adjudicated by the common mind, for the common good.

It was decided, for whatever reason, to use the African model of *indaba*. Some criticized the choice, preferring another way; but that was in my view to miss the point. It was not a question of which alternative and perhaps traditional cultural model to explore; rather it was the principled decision to do something different at all, and to use a model from another culture and continent than those straitjackets into which the (north and) west have customarily forced us.

An *indaba* is a meeting or a talk-shop; it can also mean a story, a legal case or an item of business. The notions are congruent. In one of the other language groupings in Africa the same notion is conveyed by a word connoting a call or even a vocation; the meeting does not just happen randomly but is called together solemnly and intentionally by the leadership to address a communal concern. Once assembled, the *indaba* may hear a story, grapple with an item of business or try to resolve a dispute.

In common with many other such mechanisms in traditional societies, there are certain key dynamics of an indaba. One is that everyone present has the chance to say their piece; the presupposition is the dignity of every community member and the value of their insights. The weakest and youngest are heard with as great respect as the powerful and the experienced. I am struck by the fact that we are always saying how Benedictine Anglicanism is — and here in another context is a cardinal insight from the Rule of St Benedict who insisted that the youngest and newest monk in the community must be listened to, in chapter, with the same respect as the most senior. When it comes to human wisdom, what goes around, comes around!

Another facet is that the meeting takes full responsibility for its own business. It sets its own agenda, adopts its own procedures and undertakes to carry out its own decisions. This became an issue in Canterbury because there was an in-built tension in the process. Having taken the bold step to try trusting the bishops to talk well to each other, the Design Group undermined this approach by tying up the group agenda so tightly that the participants could hardly breathe. Some complained that the group exercises at the beginning were like colouring in the pictures at Sunday School to please the control freaks who wanted a tidy conference report. Several of the facilitators (known for some cranky reason as ‘animateurs’) simply abdicated and either did things their own way, or let the group set the agenda.

Indaba as Open-Ended Process

Happily I was sitting in the same Indaba group as Bishop Trevor Mwamba of Botswana and when the question was asked about how our group might wish to do its work, we were able to consult and try to share the sense of how Africa would do it. We just encouraged the group to take responsibility for its own life, because that was the logical consequence of adopting the indaba model.

This was key because another dimension of the indaba process is its open-endedness. There is an old saying, ‘Europeans have watches; Africans have time’. Whites in Africa are notoriously impatient with the pace of life and conversation, often without asking other questions about the quality of what comes out of African conversations. Africans will ask what is the point of concluding synod by sundown if we have not finished working out the solutions to the problems before us? Why not stay a bit longer and solve things so that we can really move forward? This is not about idleness but about quality versus quantity.

In Southern Africa, we have tended (especially since the days of Desmond Tutu) to sit loose to the Westminster rules of synod to let people operate in the dialogical manner they are used to; and it yields results because no one feels they have been chopped off or sidelined. Consensus more readily emerges. Once that happens, the rest of the business tends to go much more quickly too, and we all get home before we expected! It is as if the emergence of consensus around one key issue creates a mood of consensus in the whole gathering, which then sidelines the adversarial nitpicking which bogs down so many western-style meetings where people are not happy that their voices have been adequately heard. In Africa, the tortoise often beats the hare.

Open-endedness creates real freedom. I once read a management manual that suggested that it was a mistake on serious agenda items, to request discussion and decision at the same meeting. Their point was that if decision is imminent, people will dig themselves into entrenched positions and defend them to the death; whereas, if they know that the decision will be taken next month after due reflection, they will engage more fully in open discussion and looking at every aspect of an issue. They know that they can talk, reflect and pray (or caucus and lobby) between meetings, and that creates space for managing an issue in a rounded way.

Indaba works like that. There is no gavel, no deadline, no time limit. The chair has to let the conversation run and the people talk. It may seem frustrating to the presidential controllers but it works because it takes people seriously. In theological terms, it places human dignity above administrative convenience. That not only blesses the people but also creates a better and longer-lasting positive atmosphere in the community – because it has affirmed that the community is being run on caring and respectful ‘human’ lines.

It is no coincidence that indaba is a feature of what is called an ubuntu culture. As is well known, the root meaning of ubuntu is ‘human’; umuntu means a person and the abstract noun ubuntu connotes a kind of combination of ‘humanity’, ‘humane-ness’ and ‘human-ness’. Hence the saying ‘umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu’ – a person is a person through other people.

Parallels with the values of the Gospel are clear; there is significant congruence between the African culture of human-ness and the recognition that all human beings are made in the image of God and, therefore, deserve dignity and recognition. The notion that I must greet every person I meet in the street because I need to acknowledge their humanity makes many meetings late; but weighing the human

benefit as a value added to society over against the demands of convenience is the very point.

Indaba therefore fits into a context where the value of the human being outweighs convenience, haste, and the pursuit of personal opinions and sectional agendas. What some see as ‘principled stands’ – and they may indeed be so – needs to be set not only against alternative opinions or equally principled stands, but against the need for others in the community to be treated humanly. That means that they will be listened to, respected, truly ‘heard’.

It was this which Lambeth 2008 set out to affirm and as far as it could, to achieve. For some the notion was too novel, too slow; it had to be hijacked by microphone opportunities and the intrusion of uninvited guests, determined to push their views into the ‘listening process’ by shouting without listening to anyone. They simply inhibited the process. How much of this was known to, or planned by the Design Group is not public knowledge. The tensions in their management of the process have been already noted. Maybe the bishops simply did as they were bid and took responsibility for the process.

Of course the *bona fides* of the process and its managers were – and continue to be – questioned. Is this just a fancy manipulation to dilute people’s convictions, delay disciplinary processes through or without the Covenant and allow pre-emptive action to become entrenched while we fiddle? That is a fair question but ironically, one that can only be addressed by open and patient communication. When trust is low – as in any dispute – it has to be rebuilt, not simply assumed as the basis for artillery fire from behind the distant bunkers of self-righteousness.

Lambeth 2008 Indaba: A Personal View

And the process of Lambeth 2008? This is how it was for just one of those bishops. After 1998, the Church of England was told in no uncertain terms (through the feedback forms to the conference organizers) that it was unfriendly and inhospitable, preoccupied with its own business more than occupied with the business which would have characterized many other churches of the Communion in the same position – that of delightedly welcoming guests. To their credit they heard and changed; the pre-conference hospitality programme was superbly done in many places and was greatly appreciated. It also allowed some pre-conference ‘connections’ between groups from far places as they began to relate to each other and to the local church. There was space for some from places, which had been castigating

each other for years, to begin relating as human beings. Some took the opportunity to start putting 'the real stuff' on the table, and this bore fruit in the conference context the next week.

The 'retreat start' of Lambeth 2008 was a stroke of genius (why didn't this occur to the church quite naturally every decade since the 1860s?). The cathedral that had been positively unhelpful in 1998 set out to do what cathedrals ought to do and under Dean Robert Willis's lead, truly facilitated the spiritual dimension of Lambeth 2008. Those who walked to the cathedral from the campus could not avoid the resemblance between the twin bikini tops of the campus worship centre – the 'Big Top' – and the twin towers of the great cathedral: one old, one new, one lasting, one just a tent, the sign of a people on the move. It turned out that the notion 'retreat' differs across the Communion; for some a chance to be quiet with God, for others the chance to chat volubly with little regard for the quietness others seek. That was part of the learning.

Much has been made of the side benefits of the long meal queues; indeed the logistics were awful, and the snags should have been anticipated especially by an events company being paid serious money to know what they were about. But the willing will find a way; the whole hassle really did become a space for engagement and connection. Better still when lunch was possible in the open, and relaxed conversation could happen on the grass.

But what of the planned engagement? Early eucharists a carefully staged encounter with other provinces; breakfast; Bible study in groups – a reassuring process familiar to many and practised last time. Ours began with an inspired question from the leader – 'how many of us have had to deal with death threats in the course of our ministries?' – It was all of us, and it startled us into a common bond; one American, two Brits, two from Philippines, one from Central America, the Bishop in Jerusalem and myself from Southern Africa, enriched by three ecumenical participants. We struck oil on day three – after we read the interview with the woman of Samaria in John 4, the Bishop in Jerusalem said 'that's in my diocese – let me tell you about it'.

Then the clever structuring came in: each five Bible study groups were clustered into an indaba group of 40 to engage with each other on all the issues over the next two weeks. That group was unchanged through the conference and it operated with one ground rule: discussion from the group could be quoted but not attributed to the individual who said it, in order to free people to speak their minds and hearts. So that 'every bishop's voice could be heard', there was

every effort at simultaneous translation. As confidence grew, real engagement began, naturally more in some groups than others.

'We are trying to rebuild the country we love after a terrible war, but thanks to you, we are dismissed by our critics as "the gay church" – and we cannot care for our people' – so said a seasoned African leader across the room to an American. Where do you get that level of openness and still keep talking?

What shook me was the tension between The Episcopal Church (hereinafter TEC) and the Church of England: 'when we approved Gene Robinson we at least acted in the open – but we think you in England do it all the time and don't admit it – in our book you are dishonest'.

I have been in the US and in parts of TEC, but I had not understood the extent to which TEC's mindset is still the product of the American War of Independence. Of course I knew about Samuel Seabury, but I had reckoned without the quite strong anti-British undertow in the Americans' perception of the Church of England as part of King George's colonial tyranny. This was associated with an assertiveness that attracts and expresses a loyalty to General Convention not unlike that which American citizens give to the US Constitution. It helped to answer an old question of mine about why the 'Stars and Stripes' stands in the sanctuary of TEC churches – in a way that seemed to me (as a subject at that time of apartheid in South Africa) as a dubious concession to Nero. The assertive autonomy of the church is welded to the assertive independence of the nation.

The mirror image of that is the perception in England, and in much of the post-colonial world, that the Episcopal Church is far too indistinct from the US government and American expansionism in the world. The irony is that TEC perceived itself, under then-President George Bush, as prophetic. Others thought it pathetic – both in its failure to critique its own regime (I write as a South African consecrated to episcopacy by Tutu) and in its perceived habit of trying to control and manipulate the Communion. It should not be forgotten that Lambeth 1:10 of 1998 was as much a third-world reaction to American dominance (in numbers, wealth and pushiness) at Lambeth 1978 and 1988, as it was about sexuality.

That clash of perceptions emerged most sharply at Lambeth 2008 when the Sudanese issued a statement criticizing the Americans. It came just as the TEC bishops were seriously and sincerely considering a statement to the conference in which they would have expressed regret over recent words and actions in an attempt to 'free up' relations and dialogue in the conference. They didn't, partly because they

rightly perceived that anything they said would be 'mauled'; partly because the indaba dynamic was meant to let people talk person-to-person rather than in communiqués; and partly because they were stung into a defensive posture by Sudan. Interpretations of that moment were interesting, ranging from Americans saying in a pained and puzzled way, 'but we thought they were our friends', to others saying (equally puzzled), 'did the Americans think they had bought the Sudanese?' Such is the need for understanding.

Another fruit of the American church's declaration of independence is that it has engaged in significant church-planting to the south and west of itself, in Central America and the Pacific. This is largely unknown elsewhere in the Communion (to English eyes it is out of sight behind the Atlantic and the Rocky Mountains). This is naturally the cause of some pride among Episcopalians as an exercise in evangelism, charitable care (often substantial and costly, involving US parish budgets, 'missions' and volunteers) and the pursuit of justice in undemocratic climes. However, it creates a role and a self-understanding for the Presiding Bishop, which is trans-national and threatening. It appears to compete with Canterbury. In a funny way, in resonating with other kinds of US expansionism, it serves to justify cross-border raids by other primates into North America.

This is not of course 'all about the Americans'; forgive me if I give that impression (I am getting to the British in a moment). One of my most painful moments in the conflicted past few years was that of being accused by a very close TEC friend of 'kneejerk anti-Americanism'. I guess we all carry some wounds from these days and that is one of mine. It is strange how perceptions work; I see myself as an americanophile since the age of 18. Here I simply try to observe what I see.

One thing I saw was that as soon as Lambeth ran some plenary hearings on the Covenant process, the microphone was hijacked by long queues of voluble North Americans. The more sensitive were appalled at themselves; the less fluent in English were more cautious and were elbowed out until the chairing process woke up. When these larger hearings shifted to the conference report and our drafting panel had to run them, we had to start by saying that we would call speakers on a basis of representivity rather than 'first come first served' — to the anger of some and the ironic laughter of many who had been watching the dynamics. If indaba is to bear fruit as a means of serious dialogue, it must be managed so that the powerless have the power of utterance — and that means controlling the voice of the powerful. The contrast between the groups and the plenaries made that obvious to all.

Actually that bad experience seemed to highlight the nature of the indaba notion and strengthen the resolution of the groups to make it work for everyone. The reporting process tried to reinforce that. Each group had its animateur and its independent scribe (one of the youth volunteers who served the event); no report was sent in until the animateur had scrutinized the work of the scribe. Then each group nominated three to the Design Group to be appointed to the drafting team and one was chosen on the basis of geographical spread (when the Tanzanian from our group could not serve and I was sent, despite the presence of another southern African, the resistance was initially palpable – I assume, because of the principle).

From then on, each report had to be confirmed by the animateur, the scribe and the rapporteur as expressing the mind of the group, and the rapporteurs in the drafting group were solemnly bound (and often reminded) that they were to allow into the report only things that they were confident the whole group could affirm. Further, there had to be consensus among the 16 drafters. Obviously that is easier said than done, but as an exercise in resisting the familiar conference hazard of the power of the drafting committee, it was impressive. The document, Lambeth Indaba,³ is the fruit.

As noted, the process and its proposed continuance around the Communion are in dispute. In the week this was drafted, there appeared the following comments from Charles Raven in Anglican Spread which appeared on our e-mails, deploring events at the ACC (Anglican Consultative Council) in Jamaica and lamenting the general breakdown of trust in the Communion: 'The only positive proposal to come out of the ACC meeting was to extend the discredited "indaba" process used at Lambeth 2008 throughout the Communion...but in the absence of an effective covenant to provide a common confessional framework, indaba becomes a tool of manipulation'.⁴

Reflections Personal and Theological

This leads me to two pastoral observations and I hope, to theological reflection in two areas that are related to each other and to the pastoral

3. *Lambeth Indaba Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008: Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity*, is available from the Lambeth Conference web site at <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/2008/>

4. Anglican SPREAD. Accessed on May 9, 2009 at <http://www.anglicanspread.org/?p=196>

dimensions. In today's world, one of the growth industries is in conflict resolution. We are so aware that in everything from industry to international affairs we are in conflict, and we have spawned a huge and necessary business of expertise and consultancy in trying to manage it. What happens when we view the Anglican Communion from that perspective? I am no expert but I offer these thoughts.

Let me be personal. When I was a young Evangelical, I thought the whole problem was the Oxford Movement; since John Keble's 1833 assize sermon on National Apostacy, they had launched a new understanding of Anglicanism which refreshed the faith of some but aggravated others, causing doctrinal disagreement, disciplinary action, litigation, mutual acrimony and confusion. Then they had exported all this to the colonial world in a kind of turf war between catholic and evangelical Anglicans (leaving the theological liberals, who were not motivated by notions of mission, sitting at home trying to control the Church of England).

Then I had a revelation. I had gone on retreat a few years ago in a little fishing village near Cape Town, with a spiritual director visiting daily. As it happened, the kaolin hills behind the village were on fire; the firefighters and the water helicopters were working the whole week to try to douse the fire in the fynbos. I was reading Diarmaid MacCulloch's magisterial life of Cranmer;⁵ so after a week of silence and contemplation, and about 600 pages of the story, I came on Sunday afternoon to read the drama of Cranmer's death. It seemed too cosy to sit with tea beside the coffee table, so I took the book onto the sand dunes and read the account of the immolation of Cranmer in the open air, to the accompaniment of crackling flames in the hills beyond, with smoke and soot flying in the breeze. Something of the horror of that day communicated itself deeply.

It was then that I realized how wounded the spirit of our church is, not from the nineteenth but at latest the sixteenth century. We thought it was acceptable to torture, burn and eliminate our opponents in the name of the Gospel; we took part in the venomous spirit of those who could do such things; and we took on the fear that others could really and truly want to do such things to us. Of course we may no longer do so with flames but we would do it in common rooms with our tongues (remember the Epistle of James and its strictures about those kinds of forest fires!); we would do it acidly in courts of law, despite the

5. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

strictures of Paul; we would speak violently and dismissively of other Anglicans; and we would see church politics as a means to eliminate others – or for them to eliminate us – from participation in the church of our birth. The twentieth century truly saw some parties in Anglicanism trying to eliminate others from their patrimony.

Of course it was all very polite, academic and rational. But the words behind the scenes of Anglican conversation belied the neutral words on the page; the same is true up to Virginia and Windsor. We can't understand why no one takes our words at face value or debates them coolly; that is because the passions in the community operate at a different, more visceral, more fearful, more violent level than the words we think are vehicles of our meaning. But they are not.

Look at the reality. In middle-sized towns all over England, there is a parish church (sort of 'central' in every sense), a 'high' church at one end of town and a 'low' one at the other. The high and the low do not really think the others are Christians; they barely know each other and certainly do not like or respect each other. They do not talk each other's language⁶ or support each other's bazaars. If the priest of one is lonely, depressed or substance-dependent, he can look in vain for care from his counterpart; still less an invitation to Christmas lunch when peace and goodwill to all men are said to prevail in the town.

The international turf war continues. I have said before (in an address in Oxford, no distance from where the ashes of Cranmer fell to the ground) that the Community of the Resurrection in South Africa, great as it was, mendaciously told their people that theirs was the only authentic version of the Anglican faith. The South American Missionary Society told people the same thing in Argentina. But there was no congruence between the two realities, which they claimed to be the only genuine article.

If disciples of those two bodies went to London to study, made friends, and went looking for Anglicanism in Langham Place or Margaret Street on a Sunday morning, they would both be puzzled and confused – not to mention disagreeing with each other.

This is not to argue for doctrinal indifferentism or wishy-washy compromise. It is to say that those who have been driven by a spirit of mission have not always been equally gripped by the call to unity or the dominical demand for reconciliation. Anglicans in England have worked together across the party boundaries, indeed, and bishops from all the camps have been able to come together when they have

6. Even 'our Lord' and 'the Lord' are not congruent.

been appointed out of the ministerial ghettos to which many have been confined throughout their parish ministries. But there has not been an extensive, deliberate, nationwide, grassroots attempt to recognize the extent of the ecclesiastical fractures which have for years characterized the social history of England. Even the ecumeniacs have been more eloquent in cross-denominational contexts than in addressing the rifts within the major denomination in the country. Most sadly, we have not recognized — at least not at the deep level of heart and conscience — that it was an issue. An issue with huge consequences, and one which mattered to God.

It is that fractured mosaic of English Christianity, which has been exported worldwide. The gut-level antagonisms that arise when Anglicans communicate were all there in England years ago. The American Revolution, far from working transformation, added another layer of passion (more nationalistic than religious) to the mix; but they didn't invent it. Maybe all unconscious, they have carried and perpetuated it, in ways which maybe did not matter too much as long as we were not involved in mutual responsibility across the Communion.

But we have been so involved, in all sorts of ways implicitly and since the Toronto Congress of 1963 explicitly, in our Communion.⁷ The stresses in the fabric have been showing up ever more clearly but again, as in England, have been tolerated or politely ignored rather than being taken as evidence of a major need for conflict resolution. We have simply internationalized our theological ghettos. Pastorally, we have to recognize the huge extent of the distress all that has caused to Anglican/Episcopal worshippers across the world. And we have to put conflict resolution on the agenda openly and explicitly.

Practitioners of conflict resolution must have some fascinating comments to make about our crisis. They would not anticipate that it could be overcome in a short time. But they would probably reckon that the first step is to recognize the dimensions of the crisis; it has taken us since Lambeth 1998 to start doing that, trying to describe and account for the harsh words, the politicking in synods and conventions, and the theological and other fractures which are suddenly yawning from the geological depths of our history.

If we are serious, that process of description has to continue. The scholars are already climbing onto the wagon with analyses, backgrounds

7. The Anglican Congress of 1963 adopted the principle of 'Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ' and this was endorsed in Resolution 67 of Lambeth 1968.

and explanations; we need to take their studies on board. We need to stay with the present processes of mutual explanation, of which Lambeth 2008 was a key part. It was, among other things, a place where people simply explained what it is like where they live; cause of a string of 'aha moments' among the previously uncomprehending.

Those who condemn the rollout of indaba processes as time-wasting tactics or manipulatory mechanisms need to tell us how else it will be possible for us simply to start understanding the context of each other's ministries. Clearly the managers of those processes will need to build trust by steady integrity in the way they go about. If it is not yet too late, that process will quietly and incrementally help us to understand, even if in the process we painfully find that we understand about our own divisions and our failures in love and discipleship.

Beyond description will come communication – step two in all conflict management. While we are filled with anger and indignation, we will have to let that be expressed from the heart – which may be a painful and alarming stage in the process. But it is often the necessary prelude to talking as if we have heard each other. In Africa, the phrase 'I hear you' generally means 'I hear you but...'; that is to say, it is a commonplace in our business that we acknowledge the force of another's position and concerns before setting out our own. That little phrase might usefully find a place in wider discourse as a conversational ball-bearing, facilitating negotiation.

Clearly those who are furthest apart will shout most loudly across the chasm. That is why I think it is an open question whether we would have done better to have the GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) bishops at Lambeth or not; at one level we all needed to hear each other. But sometimes in peace negotiations, one has to build communication between groups incrementally, starting with those who will not derail the process by the force of their positions. Maybe it was better to start with a constituency of those who, while differing, could make some progress and then broaden the discussion with a wider group (as happened at the February 2008 Primates' Meeting).

The genius of Jesus' apparently simple words in Mt. 18.15 – 'if someone offends you, talk to him' – is that it inverses our normal practice. Imagine a circle of chairs occupied by people; what we normally do, if the person to our left insults us, is to turn away (in hurt or anger or self-justification) and share what has happened with the person on our right. True to pattern, they will turn from us and repeat the story to their right. The process will continue with the addition of incremental misunderstanding and anger around the circle; by the

time it reaches the ears of the offender, from the body on their left, it is unrecognizable as the issue that started the process. And it is very unlikely to be truer or less destructive of relationship; most likely it has become the forest fire of which the letter of James speaks.

We would all recognize that pattern from family, parish or the UN. Jesus bids us desist from the pattern of fire-laying, and to extinguish the blaze as close to home, and as close to the outbreak of the conflagration, as we can. It is one of the most simple, useful, pragmatic teachings of Jesus, yet one we struggle to follow because of its interpersonal difficulty. It calls for humility, transparency, grace and love of which we are not readily capable; indeed the test of its authenticity is precisely that it challenges us so simply to be what we should, but often cannot.

Pastorally then I propose that we have plenty of caring work to do locally, wherever 'local' is for us; and that we could do worse than explicitly to name the processes of conflict resolution as our need at many levels. Then we might more readily find mental categories into which to put our thinking, and be open to mechanisms that we might formerly not have thought of as part-solutions. And we have to reassess the priority of open, clear and charitable communication. The Communion is in deep trouble because we have bypassed that simple but difficult process for so long; I propose, for five centuries or so. No wonder it has become a mess.

Because our antagonisms find their taproot there, we have to propose to the Church of England that it takes the lead in this process of recognition, repentance, communication and reconciliation. Try exporting that for a change. We need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and it needs to start with the Church of England!

Then across the world we need to sit and contemplate the story of how we came to whatever our part is, in the complex history of our dispute; maybe we were foolish to abandon the plan for an Anglican gathering. Perhaps then we could discern how to act responsibly towards healing. This is not at all to downplay the content of the issues. It is to try to strip off some of the accumulated sense of aggression around the issues, so that we may address the issues themselves in a different manner.

How is this theological? First, it asks us to revisit our ecclesiology. Over the past 60 years, we have talked at great length about the Pauline image of the church as the body of Christ, as the basis of appeals for unity in diversity and the proper liberation of the gifts of the people of God. The image helps us because it has been the common cause among many differing churchmanships around the

Communion – the parish eucharist movement, the charismatics and so forth. It has been expounded in parishes, renewal circles and dioceses.

However, those of us who were nurtured in the Church of England never followed the logic of seeing the Church of England itself as such a body, or (with more ecumenical sensitivity) as a reflection of that One Body. We lived with the divisions as if they did not matter and did not require attention. As noted, we have pursued ecumenical engagements across the board without digesting the truth that unity begins at home.

That unholy (literally) disregard for the call of God was then cheerfully exported to provinces across the globe, which became passionate about all kinds of missional agendas, but not about ecclesial healing and transformation. We have said (from Edinburgh 1910 onwards) that unity is the precondition of mission, but have not believed it. No wonder such mental habits have now been played out at the Communion level; failure to nurture the body of Christ has become a deeply ingrained habit – and abusing it has too often been substituted.

It is indeed good that we have had the Virginia Report, the Windsor Report, the debates about the Covenant and so much more. This is ecclesiological work of a high order and much needed. The problem is, first, that it has come so late and is under pressure of a crisis; secondly and much more seriously that there is little sign that we intend to be any different, even if we ratiocinate differently.

Hence, the second theological issue is to enable a theology of reconciliation to emerge, not only in the evangelistic context or the political one, but also in terms of the ongoing need for churches to address their own inner fractures. That needs within it a theology of communication, respectful dialogue and the power of the spoken word resting on Jas. 3 and Mt. 18.

The true ecclesial task facing Anglicans at this time is that of accepting each other as Christ accepted us, listening to each other, respecting each other and working to form all of us into a loving and functional body. I submit that for our church at this time, that is the shape of Indaba obedience.