

Anglican Churches, especially in England, the USA and the wider communion. It is a masterly condensing of history, which offers an excellent overview of a complex subject. Although Wells raises some of the conflicts (as over homosexuality, p. 99), he does not major on division but instead tries to explain some of the differences between the churches. He concludes on an optimistic note by emphasizing the growth and signs of healing in the African churches which seem to reveal the power of God at work among them. In contrast, he sees part of the crisis of the Western churches to rest in their difficulty in expressing 'what salvation means today'. Trying to express this meaning through mutual encounter and dialogue, he concludes, 'is where the Churches of the Anglican Communion need each other. As they always have done' (p. 117). All in all, this is a book which will explain a broad, intelligent and unpartisan Anglicanism to a general audience, and for that it is to be highly commended.

Mark Chapman
Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford

Paul Valliere, *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-making in the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 289. ISBN 978-1-107-01574-6 (hbk).
doi: 10.1017/S1740355312000216

Paul Valliere, an American professor and a member of the Episcopal Church, speaks to the angst that Anglicans are experiencing at the present time with regard to their Communion. He believes that the right way to tackle the crisis in the Anglican Communion is for Anglicans throughout the world to come together in council to address their issues and to take decisions. Valliere has written a wise and distinguished book that deserves to be pondered by all concerned for the unity and integrity of the Church and of Anglicanism in particular. It is marked by a clear and robust style, elegantly and often epigrammatically phrased. His case is thoroughly researched (he has facility in several languages, including German and Russian), incisively argued and often pungently put. I am sure that he is right that a recovery of conciliar values and practices can help us now. He writes as an historian, more than as a theologian or ecclesiologist, but always with authority.

The book starts by diagnosing the challenge that faces us. He notes that there has been a decline of ecclesiastical jurisprudence in the Episcopal Church (this is not true of the Church of England) which leaves it ill-equipped to cope with its present difficulties. What he identifies as the Anglican disinclination to attempt to resolve conflicts by coordinated means is another factor. Anglicanism has become polarized into progressives, who do not hesitate to sacrifice unity for an ideology of sexual inclusivism, and fundamentalists, who appeal to a literalistic interpretation of the Bible and to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion which cannot serve our purpose. Both camps reject the idea of a comprehensive church. 'Flight from fellowship is pervasive in Christendom today' (p. 3). Valliere writes as a catholic Anglican and he is not someone who is hung up about sexuality. To be catholic is to be both conciliar and comprehensive (pp. 17-18). Catholicism prioritizes fellowship, communion

and communication: 'Fellowship does not require unanimity, uniformity or even harmony, but it does require connectedness' (p. 30). Unity was the first principle of ecclesiology in the ancient church and that unity was created and expressed by councils.

For Valliere conciliarism – what I would call conciliarity – is of the essence of the Church. Conciliarism is the Church's practice of coming together in representative ways to resolve problems of disagreement and disunity. Conciliarism builds up the unity of the Church. 'Councils are one of the signature institutions of the Christian tradition' (p. 9). The New Testament canon is the first and greatest achievement of conciliarism: 'The most important conciliar datum in the New Testament is the New Testament itself ... it is the church's only permanent council' (p. 42). Conciliarism has been practised throughout Church history, beginning with the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. The conciliarism of the early centuries promoted consensus (no narrow majorities; the consent of all was the special charisma of these councils), moderation (rigorism and exclusivism were defeated) and theological scholarship (methods were often rough, but arguments were theological). But the theory behind conciliarism did not emerge until the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, in response to the fragmentation of the papacy – a papacy that was meant to guarantee unity. Valliere rather trivializes the massive ecclesiological trauma of the Great Schism of the West in 1378 that split Christendom, describing it merely as an embarrassment (p. 140). The principle of constitutionalism – that the scope, limits and distribution of authority are understood – was the greatest achievement of the conciliar movement. 'Catholic concordance', taken from the title of Nicholas of Cusa's great work of conciliar theory, becomes a mantra for the author's discussion of Anglican issues. The twentieth century saw a renaissance of conciliarism, or at least of conciliar values: the Russian Local Synod, just before the Revolution; the World Council of Churches; above all, the Second Vatican Council; and now the Orthodox are gradually gearing up for a Council. The dialogue and cooperation that the ecumenical movement promotes are conciliar values, even if they do not add up to full-blown conciliarism. But even dialogue requires a sturdy institutional framework (which is inimical to the present culture).

About one-third of the book is devoted to Anglicanism. From the Reformation and Richard Hooker onwards, Valliere suggests, Anglicans have talked loudly about conciliarism, but they have been slow or reluctant to put it into practice – to the extent that the author accuses Anglicans of 'synodphobia'. The Lambeth Conference is 'a monument to Anglican ambivalence about conciliarism' (p. 186) because it has steadfastly refused to turn itself into a council or synod and to issue binding decrees (supposing that it could, one might add). In Valliere's view the Lambeth Conference is 'non-conciliar': it contains no clergy or laity, only bishops (though advisers are present) and issues no decrees. But at least it does not call itself a council. The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), on the other hand, does so call itself, but because it has no binding authority it is a contradiction in terms – it is no council. Both the Lambeth Conference (2008) and the ACC (2009) abdicated their responsibility in declining to promote the Anglican Covenant. The Windsor Report also missed an opportunity to foster Anglican conciliarism, hardly

mentioning the concept. The Anglican Covenant is a 'surrogate' for a council, but a move in the right direction nevertheless. What Anglicanism today needs is to take decisions; it needs laws (p. 16). The author is cautious about the claim that I make (in *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition*, T&T Clark, 2006) that 'Anglicanism aspires to be an expression of conciliar catholicism' and he rejects my interpretation of the Lambeth Conference as a form of 'non-hierarchical and non-coercive conciliarity'. For him a council is not a council unless it can actually decide matters for the Church. A council that does not have juridical powers is not fully a council.

The author is distressed by the recent actions of his own church, where 'thoughtless revisionism fueled by local and provincial enthusiasms of dubious standing in the Gospel' has torn the fabric of unity in that church and in the Anglican Communion (p. 47). In the case of some recent consecrations of bishops, the Episcopal Church has belied its name by not understanding the significance of the episcopal office: 'Episcopacy is by definition a concretization of ecclesial fellowship' (p. 224). What is called for now is a Reunion Council of the separated Anglican churches of America (p. 228) and beyond that, a council of the Anglican Communion.

The author accuses some Anglicans, especially in the Church of England, of being idealistic and not practical about conciliarism, but he himself is a case in point. First, in conciliar theory, a council presupposes eucharistic communion between the participants; a council is a eucharistic event. Necessarily that condition does not pertain between the Churches of the Anglican Communion and those who have separated from them. Secondly, the calling of a Pan-Anglican Council would presumably need the agreement of all the Anglican member Churches and its proposals certainly would need to be adopted through their own synodical structures. If they cannot rise to the challenge of the Covenant, are they likely to accept a more stringent regime?

I am greatly heartened by the author's affirmation of the conciliar tradition. But, we need to ask, what is possible under the present conditions? Valliere seems to recognize these constraints when he says that what a Pan-Anglican Council could do is 'to speak a catholic and evangelical word to the church of its day' and then leave the outcome in God's hands. So where are juridical decrees now? His drive towards Anglican conciliarism suddenly flops at the end. But he is right: we struggle in the Anglican Communion and in the Church Catholic to take what steps we can in a conciliar spirit and in pursuit of conciliar values. For me the Covenant is one such step. In the spirit of the Covenant I applaud the author's stance that conciliarism is 'an instrument of the catholic centre' (p. 244) and that we should reclaim 'the charisma of the centre' (p. 244). This may be what the *via media* means for us today.

Paul Avis
University of Exeter, UK