



Book Review

Paul Avis and Benjamin M. Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose* (London: Bloomsbury T. and T. Clark, 2017), pp. 437. ISBN 978-0567662316. RRP \$114.00 or £71.00.
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What is the Lambeth Conference? Is it the Anglican Communion's supreme parliament in which laws are passed to resolve (or not resolve) the great issues of the day, or is it a bishops' social in Kent in which long summer days are spent talking, eating and sleeping? To help dispel both of these myths Paul Avis and Benjamin M. Guyer have assembled an impressive collection of essays on various aspects of the conference by a range of academic specialists. With meetings of the conference being so infrequent (in 2020 it will be 12 years since the previous one) the number of those present who will remember previous conferences will be small. This means corporate memory is limited, with potential for participants to be tripped up, so the publication of a volume like this is very timely.

The chapters range from ecclesiology, starting with a nuanced essay by Stephen Pickard on the place of the conference and other instruments of communion within Anglican doctrine of the church as a whole, through to history, beginning with an engaging overview of the different conferences and the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, from Paul Avis, who prefers to speak of one Lambeth Conference that has met on different occasions rather than of many conferences, showing connectivity and continuity over the last 150 years.

Guyer provides an in-depth discussion of the way the first conference inherently challenged the supremacy of the monarch over the Church of England (because it suggested Anglicanism was greater than its mother church and its 'Supreme Governor'), which was the reason why a number of Northern English bishops, including the Archbishop of York, stayed away. Self-absenting bishops seems to be a recurrent feature of the conference.

There is a sympathetic portrait from Mark Chapman of William Reed Huntington, the author of what became the Chicago-Lambeth quadrilateral, a general formula which has taken on a defining role within Anglican ecclesiology at the same time as the Articles of Religion (from Tudor times) have declined in influence. Jeremy Morris places the conference within a wider context of changing patterns of episcopal leadership, especially within the Church of England, with conciliar forms of leadership gradually replacing authoritarian forms.

Charlotte Methuen's article on the making of the 1920 'Appeal to All Christian People' is especially important and revealing, not only because the 2020 conference will commemorate its centenary and hopefully renew Anglican commitment to Christian unity in mission (on which more below), but because it shows the creative

role that the bishops in sub-groups within the conference can have, especially if there is a sense of purpose and urgency surrounding the issues they are discussing. It shows how the timetable of the conference always needs to allow some space and flexibility for the Spirit to blow where it wills and to form the minds and hearts of the assembled bishops in its own ways.

There are informative articles reviewing developments on sex and marriage, and the Covenant, from Andrew Goddard and Gregory Cameron respectively. But for this reader another group of articles stood out in the way they revised widespread perceptions of the nature of the conference itself (and answer the opening question above). It has often seemed as if the conference was convened to respond to division within the wider communion, as a kind of fire-fighting exercise to keep Anglicanism on the road. It is undeniable that the first conference was called in response to sharp disagreement over the rise of biblical criticism and the stance of Bishop Colenso of Natal, but Ephraim Radner shows that the wider setting of the conference was much more positive, being the century-long missionary movement of Christian growth and expansion across the globe. The 1867 gathering, and many of the subsequent gatherings, were called to support this, not least through the 1920 Appeal and later on the 1988 commitment to a decade of evangelism. Indeed Radner shows how the concept of the Anglican Communion itself 'was primarily missionary in its origins and meaning':

the actual phrase 'Anglican Communion' emerged from a very specific missionary context: the Jubilee Anniversary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), which had been a leader, despite all its foibles, in the Anglican spread of the Gospel. There is a communion of Anglican churches, observers noted, precisely as it is the embodied expression of the missionary thrust of Anglicans to plant the Gospel in all places. (p. 133)

Radner shows, then, that it is to the primarily *missionary* invigoration of Anglicanism in the nineteenth century that we owe the creation of the notion of an Anglican Communion. Mission lies at the heart of its developing life.

This key insight is illustrated in other essays, such as Cathy Ross's, who quotes Archbishop Longley's letter of invitation to the first conference in which he invited his brother bishops 'to consider together many practical questions, the settlement of which would tend to the advancement of the kingdom of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, and to the maintenance of greater union in our missionary work and to increased intercommunion among ourselves' (p. 298). The Lambeth Conference might more appropriately be called the Lambeth Mission Conference.

All of this is important because it begins to answer a pressing challenge highlighted by Norman Doe and Richard Deadman in their review of the relationship between resolutions of the conference and the laws of member churches. They show that there is now a need to move away from a corporate institutional model of the Communion, in which the Lambeth Conference is seen as a kind of governing body, to one which reflects the reality of member churches being independent and in which the historic formularies, especially the Articles of Religion, no longer have a defining role. Doe and Deadman call for 'a paradigm shift' in our perception of how the instruments in general and the Conference in particular relate to those laws.

But to this reviewer it seems clear that the book is already pointing to what that new paradigm should be, which, paradoxically, is the one that was there at the beginning, as revealed by Radner, Ross and others: that of the Communion as a mission movement of churches serving the coming kingdom of Christ. It is this paradigm that needs recovering, one which places the emphasis on member churches positively opting *in* to the great work of God's mission in partnership with other Anglican churches across the globe.

Happily it seems that the initial design of the next conference is in accord with this, with its designated theme of 'God's Church for God's World' and with a strap line that emphasizes participants journeying together in a purposeful way, namely 'listening, walking and witnessing together'. In another of the essays Alyson Barnett-Cowan describes the different methodologies of the 1998 and 2008 conferences and the differing impacts that these had on the feel and outcomes of the meetings. It is already clear that Lambeth 2020 will be different from both of these, with study and reflection on 1 Peter setting some of the agenda. Unlike 2008 it will also attempt to formulate and pass a number of resolutions reflecting the mind of the conference but will also try to avoid the fractious polarization of the 1998 conference. But what is especially needed, if Lambeth 2020 is to make an impact in its own distinctive way, is for the original mission paradigm again to meld and mould the hearts and minds of participants and sending dioceses, and for the inspiring vision of the 1920 'Appeal' to be honoured and renewed, to create an outward looking, dynamic and diaconal temper. To use the increasingly popular and widely employed Marks of Mission to help organize the content of the conference would be one way of doing this.

The book touches on many other topics through a range of engaging essays that it is not possible to mention here. However, there is a serious omission, which is the absence of any voices from the global South. Anglicanism now has more adherents in the global South than global North and their differing perspectives on the conference need to be reflected in a volume like this. But if the original mission paradigm is again allowed to set the tone and content of the conference and if these voices are allowed to come to the fore during the conference there is every possibility that Lambeth 2020 will win its own distinctive and influential place in the unfolding story of Anglicanism.

*The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Spencer
Director for Theological Education in the Anglican Communion*