



# *The Doctrine Commission* *Of the Anglican Church of Australia*

## Advice to the Standing Committee of General Synod

### **Parts of Sections 4-6 in the 2001 report *For the Sake of the Gospel* that could guide ongoing dialogue toward a preliminary Covenant of Association with The Uniting Church in Australia**

Scott Cowdell & Andrew McGowan, Presbyters

In resolution 78/07, the 14<sup>th</sup> General Synod asked the Doctrine Commission to elaborate further on the 2001 Report *For the Sake of the Gospel: Mutual Recognition of Ordained Ministries in the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia*, by specifying which aspects of parts 4-6 'may be used to guide ongoing dialogue in the quest to develop a preliminary Covenant of Association with the Uniting Church in Australia'. This task was delegated to Drs McGowan and Cowdell in the first instance.

The request is timely as the Joint Working Group, first appointed in 1998, is eager to move this project along. Its report, abovementioned, has been submitted to IASCER, the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations, which reported back in December 2007, basing its comments in part on an initial November 2007 paper by Dr Paul Avis. The key issues mentioned there have also occurred to us, with some other considerations that in part reflect local knowledge.

In 2001 the Doctrine Commission reported on *For the Sake of the Gospel* in the person of its then Chairman, Archbishop Carnley, the full commission being engaged on other tasks at that time. Dr Carnley's reflections were focussed on the ministerial priesthood, arguing that it represents a 'different order of the gifts of the spirit', following ARCIC in disagreement with BEM, and in particular taking issue with the book *Transforming Priesthood* by Anglican writer Robin Greenwood. Dr Carnley's point was that ministerial priesthood is not simply a focus of the Church's wider priestly ministry but is itself a distinctive action of Christ. While ministerial priesthood is a major issue that the Joint Working Group must address, and for that reason Dr Carnley's paper is no doubt of real value, nevertheless a fuller response engaging the substance of the joint report had been hoped for by some on the Joint Working Group.

This document before you is not required to provide that fuller response, but in addition to what has been received from IASCER and Dr Avis, as well as Dr Carnley, we hope that these brief comments may be a helpful contribution. There is also the Standing Committee-authorized document *Steps to Unity: An Outline Process for Ecumenical Convergence from an Anglican Perspective* that must form the basis of dialogue from our perspective, and that document also stands in the background of the present task.

---

The following observations refer to sections 4-6 of *For the Sake of the Gospel*.

**a. General Considerations reflecting intra-Anglican Differences**

4.5 Some Anglicans will wish to understand the phrase ‘saving action in word and sacraments’, as ‘saving action set forth in word and sacraments’.

4.8. The statement on worship may not state sufficiently clearly that the two traditions share a specific common heritage and commitment, not simply to ‘worship’ as such but to the tradition of common prayer and to the celebration of the biblical sacraments.

4.9. Many Anglicans would want to add specific mention of bringing people to Christ under the definition of mission.

4.11. Issues of ministerial order and Eucharistic presidency remain in this section. There is lack of clarity about ‘authentic celebration of...the eucharist’ (cf 5.9), reflecting concerns also expressed by Dr Avis and the IASCER report, both of which feel that such lack of clarity contributes to undue optimism in the level of agreement claimed. There is a body of Anglicans with a higher view of Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic action and the ministerial priesthood (which is its guardian and celebrant), with similar problems for this dialogue anticipated as faced the communion at the inception of the Church of South India, and in England’s Anglican-Methodist dialogue.

**b. Anglican-Uniting Issues for Further Dialogue**

5.4.2. The attempt to present the looser ‘communal episcopé’ of the Uniting Church as equivalent to Anglican polity at its most collaborative is not convincing. Rather than a ‘communal episcopé’, ours is more of an ‘episcopé exercised communally’—that is, by Bishops retaining the fullness of episcopé in their own persons yet sharing it with others in a more collaborative way (Synods being the classic example). Anglicans increasingly recognise the scope for broadening episcopé’, and the share that presbyters and laity can have in it, but this is quite different from the consensus approach of all councils and levels in the Uniting Church. This is not just a matter of theology but of a very different culture, that becomes evident to all who work closely with members of the other Church.

5.4.3. A further example of this difference is evident in different Church polity in matters of consensus. The Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia protects dioceses from the National Church imposing on them, while the whole cannot legislate in a way that dismisses the parts. Anglicanism works by checks and balances rather than consensus, however, believing that ‘Councils may err’ (Article XXI).

5.5. The plain recognition here that doctrines of ministry and Church polity are the central issues is good to have stated. We would suggest that there are deeper roots in Eucharistic theology and ecclesiology behind this, however, and a different understanding of how the Spirit guides the Church (see 5.4.3 comment, above).

5.7.1 & 2. The Anglican priest does not answer to the congregation (despite today’s plethora of covenants etc) quite as the Uniting Church minister does, specifically to the Elders. IASCER notes the incorrect suggestion in 5.7.2 that the Anglican priest has ministry delegated from that of

---

the Bishop at ordination. Archbishop Carnley also emphasises the restriction of the laying on of hands at presbyteral ordination to bishops and fellow presbyters in the Anglican Church, and not the laity who are involved in ordaining Uniting Church Ministers of the Word. This restriction secures the important symbolism of a distinctive historical mission that is not reducible to the Church's ministry as a whole being focussed in the ordained ministry.

5.8. A significant agreement on the diaconate nevertheless acknowledges the continuance of prior orders by those ordained to consequent ones in Anglican but not Uniting Church theology. As noted, diaconal presidency at the Eucharist is not widely supported or accepted in Anglican circles.

5.9. The significant agreement on the presbyterate has not resolved the issues Archbishop Carnley raises of the more Catholic understanding of the priest, beyond being a focus and enabler of the Church's generic priesthood. It is not necessary to separate talk of 'role' (Protestant) and 'being' (Catholic), however, as it is clear from the Ordinal that role and being are integral in the Anglican vision of ministry. Further dialogue would explore resources in the Uniting Church's traditions for a more ontological nature of the presbyterate manifest in the execution of its characteristic ministry.

6.4. Here the issues sharpen, as was also pointed out by IASCER. Although the section addresses ministry, the problems have in large part to do with Eucharistic sharing and the relationship between these proposals or their implications, and those presently allowed according to guidelines in *Steps to Unity*. Something more like the 'Interim Eucharistic Sharing' of *Steps to Unity*, section 8.3 seems to be envisaged. *For the Sake of the Gospel* departs from what has been called 'the ecumenism of need', as envisaged by *Steps to Unity* as an acceptable state of affairs between Anglican and Uniting Churches currently. It is recommended that the Joint Working Group pay particular attention to language here.

## **Conclusion**

Section 5.9 encapsulates what we believe to be the achievement but also the limitation of this report. It is right about the high level of agreement between our Churches overall, but details remain problematic. At the point that similarities in presbyteral and Episcopal ministry are listed, which are real and significant, nevertheless matters upon which many Anglicans insist are not addressed.

What the report calls 'personal episcopé' on behalf of bishops, and its equivalent for presbyters, is more important in the Anglican context, apart from the ministry of the whole Church. Similarly, as IASCER points out, the use of the word 'authentic' for the Eucharist in the joint report does not address traditional concerns about the 'validity' of the Eucharist (as in our dialogue with Roman Catholicism). The great gains of ecumenism, symbolized in the Lima Document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, are all evident in this Joint report, but the extent to which God is invested in sacramental specifics (as in the Eucharistic elements, and the person of the priest) as against a more inclusive presence in the Church's life, remain to divide us. This brings to issues of sacrament and ministry not only the specific element of personal episcopé but the deeper issues of God's action in the world, the objectivity of that action apart from human concurrence, and the role of the institutional Church in mediating that action. These issues remain, despite the very real agreement on so much that *For the Sake of the Gospel* represents.