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## Gifts of Communion: Recovering an Anglican Approach to the 'Instruments of Unity'

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### ABSTRACT

The Anglican Communion has developed 'Instruments of Communion' to aid communication and sharing of wisdom throughout the Communion. When the Archbishop of Canterbury invited bishops from the Communion to attend a meeting at Lambeth in 1867 to consult and seek common counsel for the good order and care of the churches of the emerging Anglican Communion the first of the Lambeth Conferences took place. In more recent decades the Anglican Consultative Council and Primates' Meeting have developed to enable the bishops, clergy and lay people of the worldwide Anglican Communion to listen to one another, share their life and join in common mission. In recent years these four elements in international Anglicanism – the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting – have become known as Instruments of Unity or Communion. Tensions and fractures in the Communion have raised questions about the value or use of the so-called Instruments of Unity. This article analyses the concept of 'Instrument' and assesses its value for understanding the nature of the Anglican Communion. It argues that the Instruments have a gift-like character and function in a quasi sacramental manner. As such they are indwelt rather than used in a tool like way. This approach to the Instruments of Communion gives high priority to the character and disposition of human agents participating in Communion structures and the importance of fostering a deeper communion among

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the Instruments for the sake of the Church and its witness to the gospel.

KEYWORDS: Anglican Communion, Instruments of Unity/Communion, ecclesiology, gift

### *Introduction*

The 'Instruments of Unity' have come under increasing pressure in recent years as the churches of the Anglican Communion have struggled with difficult issues to do with the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay and lesbian people. Some have argued that the 'Instruments' are no longer able to serve the interests of ecclesial unity, further that they have become part of the problem and either need to be significantly overhauled or even abandoned. Such concerns belong to deeper anxieties about the ability of the Anglican Communion to remain in tact. From this perspective the Instruments of Unity have become a focal point for many of the tensions and unresolved difficulties of a worldwide fellowship of churches. In this article I argue that the Instruments of Unity have a critical part to play in the well-being of the Anglican Communion but that in order to do this they need to be reconceived and appreciated as gifts both for and of the Communion. In short the 'Instruments' need to recover their proper instrumentality. This requires them to be re-assimilated into the organic life of the Communion and as a consequence assume a less focal importance. I believe that these kinds of shifts would assist in the recovery of a more accurate understanding of the nature of the Anglican Communion and its particular approach to taking counsel and finding wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

This article explores the Anglican idea of the Church and locates Instruments of Communion within that ecclesial context. I then analyse the concept of instrument, highlighting some of the serious flaws in the way the concept is employed in current discourse in society and Church. This leads to a reflection on the way in which the concept of Instrument might be understood as gift for communion. The article is thus a systematic and analytical ecclesial inquiry rather than historical. The latter is the more usual default in Anglicanism. The aim is conceptual clarity regarding Instruments for the purpose of

2. This article is a revised version of a section of a paper originally prepared for the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO) meeting in Cape Town, December 2010.

encouraging renewed practice. Implicit in this is an approach to 'ecclesial deficit' in the Communion that is located not in structural arrangements but the moral world of those who constitute the Instruments of Communion. Hence the article is about recovering an Anglican approach to the Instruments and an organic and wholistic approach to Instruments that meshes with the Anglican idea of the Church.

### *The Anglican Way*

#### *Anglican Polity as Conversation*

Anglican polity – its organization, governance and order – is part of the way in which the Anglican idea of the church has developed over time in changing contexts. Anglican polity is contingent and could have been and no doubt will be different in the future. The expansion of Anglicanism in association with the British Empire and beyond has meant that today Anglicanism is an exceedingly complex worldwide phenomenon in 160 countries with over 80 million adherents. Not surprisingly there have emerged various structures to assist in the coherence of the Anglican idea of the church as it has spread throughout the world. Given the kind of church it is, it is clear that there will be great diversity and local variation in the ways Scripture, worship and mission are read, performed and practised.

In one sense we might say that the Anglican way is no different from any other way of being the church of Jesus Christ. We may wish to affirm that God's gift of life together – the church's immersion in the world and its hope and striving for the coming Kingdom – is not unique to the Anglican idea of the church. But then how does it go about practising its life in a godly way? For Anglicans conversation, listening, forbearance, and hope are key elements (Gal. 5.22–23). The challenge is how to keep the conversations circulating in an expanding and increasingly complex and conflictual environment. This has been a critical issue for Anglicans. The reason is that conversation, listening, attending to the other is absolutely key to the idea of the Anglican way because this presumes (a) connectedness with each other as a gift already given by God and (b) recognizes that this is significantly complexified through immersion in history and diverse cultures and (c) such conversations remain central to the Anglican way as it continues to develop an intensity of life reflecting the love of God. Short-circuiting conversations is the sure and certain way for the Anglican idea of the church to suffer distortion and corruption. The reason is that it is through conversation and subsequent discovery of our deep and abiding bond in Christ that Anglicans are empowered to practise the practices of

attending to the incarnate Lord. Conversation where there is genuine communication breeds fresh wisdom. An ecclesial communicative competence involves attending to others who are different. We do this in the knowledge, faith and hope that this conversational habit seasoned by the Spirit enlivens our practice of Christian discipleship. In short, for Anglicans conversation is the way of ecclesial wisdom and it is part of the DNA of the idea of Anglicanism.

The crucial importance of these things can be seen in the way Anglicans have developed structures for governance and order. What we don't have are tight and/or uniform frameworks and controls – provincially or internationally – via doctrinal, constitutional or liturgical means. This is not to say Anglicanism does not have such elements; it does. It is a question of how they operate in the Anglican idea of the church that is critical. In short the Anglican way insists on the creation of space and freedom to develop an intensity of life in relation to the triune God, one another and the world.

#### *A Conciliar Fellowship*

What this means is that Anglicanism gives priority to what might be termed a certain theological and practical poise. This involves both a holding and being held together while it practises the practices that attend to God and the kingdom. But it aspires to do this together as a conciliar fellowship rather than apart because communion is God's gift. Godly practice emerges through mutual engagement and immersion in the world. Living the truth is thus an ecclesial activity that cannot be subverted or avoided by recourse to practices that close down conversations, and prevent listening and responding to one another. The truth of God has a social form, and practices that intensify this have priority.

As a result the Anglican idea of the church includes a balance between authority in its dispersed and focused forms. It also means that governance, doctrine, liturgy, mission and worship operate in a dynamic matrix of practices. Its standards of doctrine, its liturgical forms and rhythms, its rich tapestry of provincial constitutional arrangements, and its ordered episcopal life (including all the baptized), are intended to serve the fuller and richer social life of the peoples of the world with God and each other. It is patently not the case that Anglicans may believe anything and everything, that for example, there aren't any norms for judgement in respect to doctrine and liturgy. What is particular is how the Anglican idea of the church insists that such elements of its life are in dynamic relation in order to serve the intensification of life together.

In other words the Anglican idea of the church aspires to be ecclesial in a conversational and conciliar manner. This is not easy; in fact it is inherently difficult in a messy world and messy church. Is it any wonder that it is so challenging to state with final clarity what Anglicanism is. The truth of its life is a work in progress and is subject to a number of recurring distortions that diminish its capacity to be the fellowship of churches it aspires to be. In this respect Anglicanism eschews rigid forms of top down control and is equally wary of practices that exclude (both overtly and subtly) rather than include people in conversations, listening and reform of practice. Both of these are distortions of the Anglican idea of the church.<sup>3</sup> And both of these ways of handling conflict and resolving matters of dispute transpose truth seeking into a question of power.

The well-known, fascinating and frightening exchange between Jesus and Pilate in John's Gospel sharpens our reflections. The purpose of Jesus' life in the world is 'to testify to the truth' (Jn 18.37). The follower is the one who 'listens' to Jesus. Pilate is affronted that Jesus refuses to attend to him. His words do not accord with the truth. Pilate shifts the ground of the exchange to a matter of power. 'Don't you realise I have power either to free or crucify you?' (Jn 19.10). Pilate does not need to be attentive to anyone, power is its own justification, listening contributes nothing. Distortions in Anglican life arise when conflict is resolved through appeals to power or attempts to grab power. Truth is the first casualty. Redistribution and sharing of power is a truthful way to live together but distortion arises when we move from a concern for truth to recourse to power in lieu of truth seeking.

3. Daniel Hardy in 'Anglicanism in the Twenty-First Century: Scriptural, Local and Global', unpublished paper, ARR 2004, identifies two basic dynamics in Anglicanism today that falsify the Anglican idea of the Church. One response is an over-authoritarian response that seeks to control the emergence of the church in new times and places by focusing on the past and stressing permanence. This response places a premium on stability and fixity.

The other kind of response to an emergent Anglicanism is an over-realization of the ecclesia in new possibilities. The accent here is on change in response to new situations. The focus shifts from permanence to progress. This move is quite understandable, indeed necessary, for the gospel is always requiring new and fresh interpretation. But the danger is always that the reference to the ultimate aim of Anglicanism – of a renewed and fuller sociality with God – is often lost sight of or ignored. As a result the Church is assimilated to a prevailing cultural, social, economic dynamic that is fundamentally self-referential. The focus on progress becomes disconnected from the wider sociality of the church that it is intended to serve.

It sets in train a dangerous dynamic which replaces high quality face-to-face relations with relationships governed by power differentials based on political and economic superiority. Current Anglican conflicts often mask unresolved tensions between truth seeking and political manipulation through appeals to power. The latter occurs in both top-down exercise of power and bottom-up versions that appear more democratic but which can be equally manipulative and controlling.

What then are some of the key ways by which Anglicans maintain conversations and practise conciliarity? In the modern period three new structures have emerged in response to the emergence of the Anglican Communion of churches and the consequent need for maintaining appropriate coherence through common counsel: the Lambeth Conferences; Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting. The latter two structures have only emerged in recent decades, the first Lambeth Conference was in 1867. The communal element in the three structures is the obvious focus on meeting together to take counsel (a) by all the bishops of the Anglican Communion and churches with which it is in full communion, (b) by representatives of all the baptized, (c) by those bishops called by their provincial churches to be the first among equals. Anglicanism is evidently committed to seeking wisdom through conversation among all levels of church life: diocesan, provincial and international. These three structures are particular gatherings of persons for listening and common counsel 'for the care of the churches'. In more recent times the above three structures - together with the Archbishop of Canterbury - have been identified as 'Instruments of Unity' though originally it was 'Instruments of Communion' - in my view a more satisfactory term which I will return to at the end of this article.

### *The Concept of an 'Instrument'*

The concept of 'Instruments of Unity' had its origins in the ecumenical movement from the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> At this time the temptation for Anglicans

4. Michael Poon, 'The Anglican Communion as Communion of Churches: On the Historic Significance of the Anglican Covenant', presented at the IASCUFO Capetown meeting, 2010, para. 37 writes: 'The term "instrument of unity" was used in discussions on the ecclesiological significance of the varieties of "Christian councils" that have emerged in the post-War years. Lukas Vischer insisted that Christian Councils should be "instruments of unity". By this he meant the ecclesial reality should not be sought in Christian Councils but in the communion among

to adopt such language was ‘overwhelming’ and this can be traced to the seventh Anglican Consultative Council in 1987.<sup>5</sup> The concept of ‘instrument’ was invoked in the Virginia Report of 1998 and since then it seems to have become part of the stock-in-trade of international Anglican discourse. In Michael Poon’s view the ‘uncritical use of concepts from the ecumenical movement’ such as the concept of ‘instruments of unity’ aggravates what has been termed as an ‘ecclesial deficit’ in Anglicanism.<sup>6</sup> He states: ‘The last decade saw the creation of concepts and structures to uphold the Communion at international level, without thinking through their ecclesial

(*F* note continued)

the Churches. “As structures, Christian Councils have only *an instrumental ecclesiological significance* in the promotion of this communion.” This instrumental and provisional role was underscored in the 1982 “Consultation on the Significance and Contribution of Councils of Churches in the Ecumenical Movement” in Venice and the 1986 Second Consultation on Councils of Churches as “Instruments of Unity within the One Ecumenical Movement” in Geneva.’ For Vischer see Lukas Vischer, ‘Christian Councils: Instruments of Ecclesial Communion’, *Ecumenical Review* 24.1 (1972), pp. 72–87 (77, 80). See also Hervé Legrand, ‘Councils of Churches as Instruments of Unity within the one Ecumenical Movement’, in Thomas F. Best (ed.), *Instruments of Unity: National Councils of Churches within the one Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988), pp. 55–71; More generally see Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991).

5. Poon, ‘The Anglican Communion’, para. 38: ‘The “instruments of unity” concept appeared in the Seventh Meeting of ACC in 1987. It was used in the Report “Unity and Diversity within the Anglican Communion: A way forward” as a collective name for the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates’ Meeting. Before this, Lambeth 1978 used the term “structures in the Anglican Communion; in 1984 the Secretary General used the term “inter-Anglican organization” in his ACC-6 Opening Speech’.

6. Poon, ‘The Anglican Communion’, para. 37. The idea of an ‘ecclesial deficit’ was discussed in the *Windsor Continuation Group Report to the Archbishop of Canterbury* in December 2008. In section D of that report, para. 51, it was noted that ‘a central deficit in the life of the Communion is its inability to uphold structures which can make decisions which carry force in the life of the Churches of the Communion, or even give any definitive guidance to them’. The report then noted that ‘Other commentators will argue that such mechanisms are entirely unnecessary, but this touches upon the heart of what it is to live as a Communion of Churches’. The ecclesial deficit concerns both the determination of the limits of diversity in the fellowship of Anglican churches and capacity to exercise authority to discipline churches that disregard such limits. What this means is that the notion of an ‘ecclesial deficit’ is an essentially contested ecclesiological concept.

implications and their connection to the ecclesial realities of the particular Churches. So the Communion structures unwittingly set Anglican Churches worldwide on a collision course with one another. These terminologies came from specific Protestant denominational settings; but there was little discussion and explanation of what they mean in Anglican terms ecclesiology [*sic*].<sup>7</sup>

There is little to suggest that the concept of 'instruments' has been subject to critical assessment as to its appropriateness or what it might signify. Instruments are things that you use to achieve certain ends. A hammer is an instrument for striking a nail in order to build or repair some structure; a dentist's drill is an instrument. This tool-like quality is reflected in the etymology of 'instrument' meaning a 'tool or apparatus'. It is originally connected with a musical instrument. Interestingly it also includes the sense of 'arrangement and furnish'. 'Instrumental' (adj.) points to something that is 'serviceable' or 'useful'.<sup>8</sup>

The musical background to 'instrument' offers a wider framework in which to consider the concept. For example, in music instruments belong to a rich environment that includes harmonic, orchestral and symphonic dimensions. In this context instruments play a part in an organic offering directed to successful performance. In this sense the instrument only comes to life as it is integrated into the musician's own existence. Referring to the way in which an external object (in this case a musical instrument) becomes an extension of the user, Michael Polanyi states: 'We pour ourselves into them and assimilate them as part of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them'.<sup>9</sup> This requires a 'purposive effort', 'commitment' and 'a manner of disposing ourselves'.<sup>10</sup> The external object becomes an instrument or tool when it is assimilated into the operation of the user. A merger takes place and the instrument becomes an extension of the body.

7. Poon, 'The Anglican Communion', para. 38.

8. In the late thirteenth century the usage is in relation to a 'musical instrument', from the Latin, *instrumentem* meaning 'a tool, apparatus, furniture, dress, document'; from *instruere* meaning to 'arrange, furnish' (see instruct). The broader sense of instrument as 'that which is used as an agent in a performance' is from the mid fourteenth century. Instrumental as 'musical composition for instruments without vocals' appears from 1940. Instrumental (adj.) is from the late fourteenth century; 'of the nature of an instrument', from instrument + al. The meaning as 'serviceable, useful' is from 1600. Musical composition for 'instruments only' is attested by 1940. For further see *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

9. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 59.

10. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, pp. 60-61.

As Polanyi demonstrates, however, this assimilation is neither automatic nor simple and can disintegrate. For example, when attention is directly focused on the instrument/tool rather than on the purpose for which it is being used the capacity of the user to achieve the intended goal is seriously diminished.<sup>11</sup> Thus if a pianist switches attention from the performance to the particulars – the act of striking the keys – the performance will suffer. An actor who becomes fixated on the next word and gesture can be paralysed with ‘stage fright’. In both cases fluency is restored only as the pianist or actor cast their attention beyond the particulars to the purpose of the act.

This brief discussion indicates that the concept of an instrument is complex. An instrument is originally an external object differentiated from the user. The transposition of an external object into an instrument, as noted above, requires skill whereby the object external to the user becomes part of his/her own existence. The move from object to instrument involves overcoming the natural distance between person and object. Overcoming this distance belongs to the skill of knowing and doing. The skill and intuitive connection between user and instrument through intelligent effort and imaginative endeavour (which cannot be explained simply as the effect of repetition of a task) is the basis for successful achievement of the purpose. The wisdom built up in such processes transcends the mechanical and technical dimensions and enters the domain of personal knowledge. Polanyi likens this process to a person being blindfolded and having to use a stick (with a probe at the end of it) to explore a particular space.<sup>12</sup> The stick and probe at the end eventually become an extension of the hand. At first the sensory data flowing upwards from the probe at the tip of the stick to the palm are difficult to discriminate. Slowly the blindfolded person learns to discriminate more finely between different surfaces, densities and so on.

11. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 56.

12. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 61, writes: ‘If we were blindfolded we cannot find our way about with a stick as skilfully as a blind man does who has practised it a long time. We can feel that the stick hits something from time to time but cannot correlate these events. We can learn to do this only by an intelligent effort at constructing a coherent perception of the things hit by the stick. We then gradually cease to feel a series of jerks in our fingers as such – as we still do in our first clumsy trials – but experience them as the presence of obstacles of certain hardness and shape, placed at a certain distance, at the point of our stick ... When the new interpretation of the shocks in our fingers is achieved in terms of the objects touched by the stick, we may be said to carry out unconsciously the process of interpreting the shocks ... we become unconscious of the actions by which we achieve this result.’

A mental picture is built up in the mind. This occurs through a growing organic connection between the probe and the person; the natural discontinuity of the probe from the user's hand is slowly overcome; an organic reintegration is achieved. The illustration reminds us that an instrument can function as an important heuristic or finding mechanism. But the quality of this is entirely dependent on the degree to which the user achieves a high level of organic connection between himself/herself and the instrument. In this process the nature of the entity changes from external object to instrument as extension of the self.

The foregoing discussion points to two key issues regarding instruments. First is the inescapable *personal dimension* associated with the use of instruments. The loss of the sense of human agency and participation in the use of instruments is a feature of contemporary life with its accent on individualism, fragmentation and functionality. In this context instruments can be easily evacuated of their human dimension and equally easily deployed in the inappropriate exercise of power and authority. Moreover, human agents themselves can be subject to objectification and treatment as mere instruments. A second related issue is the problem of *loss of focus* on the purpose for which an instrument is intended. When 'the eye is taken off the ball' and becomes fixed on the instrument in the hand the focal awareness shifts to a secondary element. This can arise from anxiety and lack of confidence or lack of well-formed habits of use. When this occurs it means that the end or purpose becomes of secondary importance; it moves into a subsidiary awareness. The result is poor performance.

#### *Recovering the Ecclesial Dimension of Instruments*

The above reflection on instruments has some important consequences for our understanding of the Instruments of Communion. Most obviously the Instruments of Communion do not operate divorced from human agency. Indeed it is critical for their proper operation that the personal dimension remains paramount and that the focus is firmly on the purpose for which the 'Instruments' are designed.

#### *Instruments of Communion and Personal Agency*

When there are complaints about the Instruments of Communion not working well and/or that they seem brittle or unresponsive often the real issue concerns the depersonalizing of the 'Instruments' in question. The problem is masked when the 'Instruments' are identified merely as parts of the *structure* of polity. This is only partly true. The fuller picture is

that the instruments are gatherings of *human agents in particular sets of relationships*. It can be easily forgotten that the Instruments of Communion are constituted by persons-in-relation. Whilst such bodies of people may have particular tasks and purposes the application of the concept of 'instrument' to such gatherings introduces some serious distortions and challenges regarding the nature of the body. Most obviously as instruments they forfeit something of their personhood. An instrument might participate in common cause with a user in the service of a higher purpose – and to this extent become assimilated to the body as its extension – however, as an instrument it is not co-terminus with the body of persons; nor can or ought it be identified with them. Persons-in-relation are more than mere instruments.

And this begs the question of 'who exactly is using the instrument?' Furthermore when a relatively small representative body (or bodies) is identified as an instrument (tools or apparatus) the real challenge is to show how the organic connection to the larger body is sustained. In terms of the discussion above it is axiomatic that an instrument is only an instrument as it has been assimilated into the body. In the context of the church the 'body' is nothing less than the wider ecclesial body in which the instrument dwells. Yet the designation of something as an instrument only occurs as that larger body 'pours itself into the instrument, dwells in them and makes them a part of its own existence'. This requires, as Polanyi has pointed out, a certain disposition towards the instrument; purposive effort, commitment and a 'manner of disposing oneself'. In other words the status of representative ecclesial bodies as instruments places fundamental responsibility on the wider church to be the kind of church that knows how to pour itself into and indwell its own so-called 'Instruments of Communion'.

The 'Instruments of Communion' are not benign and mute awaiting deployment by others. When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates are identified as Instruments of Communion expectations are raised concerning the delivery of hoped-for outcomes through such 'Instruments'. When the 'Instruments' fail to achieve desired outcomes it often leads to calls for new instruments or prioritizing the use of instruments and/or sharpening some instruments that are pronounced blunt and inadequate. But instruments are as intelligent and powerful as those who use them through indwelling them. And in the present case the 'Instruments' are a group of persons accountable to a broader constituency in whose hands they operate. This can create a great deal of confusion.

Instrumentalizing the interpersonal dynamics of life together is always dangerous and disfigures the true relations between the people of God. In this respect the externalizing of the 'Instruments' (and associated reification) has the effect of fragmenting and breaking up what is otherwise an organic unity. The reason it does this is because an instrument, while initially an external object, through intelligent use is assimilated into the body. In this process the external object is transposed into an instrument. However, the ecclesial bodies established to promote unity were intended from the outset to be an organic part of the whole rather than bodies external to the ecclesia of God or over and against it. Perhaps the more serious 'ecclesial deficit' in the Communion lies in the failure to accord the Instruments of Communion their proper organic relation to the whole but rather to treat them as external lobby groups in order for different interest groups to exercise influence on the whole or act in self-serving ways.

Instrumental language also leads the wider body into behaving as though the so-called instruments are in their hands to manipulate. While this might be how inanimate instruments operate in relation to users is it a category mistake to apply this to the duly authorized councils of the people of God? If in the church instruments are treated as though they were inanimate objects to manipulate, this resolves into an issue of power and is immediately vulnerable to sectional interests. This is where the language of instruments can deceive the ecclesial body into thinking that the repair of the Communion can be achieved simply by creating new or improved instruments. The ills of the church are subtly relocated to the instrument. The 'Instruments' move into the church's focal awareness rather than remain in its subsidiary awareness. This only masks the deeper and more pressing issue concerning the character and disposition of the body that gathers for counsel on behalf of the wider ecclesial body it represents. The primary need is not so much change of instrument as recovery of the organic sense of the whole. This can only be achieved by what has been referred to above as a 'purposive effort', 'commitment' and an appropriate 'manner of disposing ourselves' to one another. It begs a question: what kind of people do we need to be in order to take common counsel? When the Instruments of Communion fail to recognize their fundamentally personal dimension it is extremely difficult for such a question – which concerns ecclesial character – to arise, let alone be pressed in any meaningful manner.

Thus when the gatherings of the leaders and representatives of the Anglican Communion – bishops at Lambeth, the Primates of the Communion, lay and ordained in common Council – are identified in

a simplistic way as 'Instruments' it can distort what such gatherings are and what can be expected from them. In the first place the transposition of such gatherings into 'Instruments' is dangerous because it immediately distances such structures of wisdom from the thing itself; from the being of the church. Instruments in this case get things done but are not automatically or essentially part of the entity that is being attended to. The objectification and externalizing of the 'Instruments' distorts the proper functioning of instruments in the life of the church because it disconnects them from the exercise of responsible human agency. The result is ongoing fragmentation and division.

A genuine embrace of the instrumental character of its representative ecclesial bodies would not allow them to be treated as external objects to be politically manipulated, dismissed or rearranged. This kind of activity reveals a failure to grasp the true nature of an instrument as that which has become fused with the body in such a way that it genuinely operates as an extension of the body. In fact what we tend to see occurring is a dismemberment of the Anglican Communion's governing bodies through a distancing of the ecclesia from its own inner structures. This is a deep irony given the purpose of such structures is to enhance the intensity and quality of life together.

### *Instruments and the Question of Focus*

The difficulty the Communion faces is complex and it involves competing views concerning the purpose to which the Instruments of Communion ought to be applied. In other words there is dispute and disagreement as to the purpose to which the 'Instruments' are to be put. As we have seen above, in the case of the pianist and the actor, when they switch their attention to the particulars, the performance suffers through paralysis or disintegration of the symbiotic relationship between the person and the instrument. In Anglicanism today there appears to be a switch from the performance to the particulars. This, as I have said, arises in part because there is dispute and conflict about the performance and direction of the ecclesia. When this is contested with sufficient intensity the default is always to the instrumental particulars in order to correct or manipulate them to achieve a desired outcome. This is a form of ecclesial clumsiness arising from an inappropriate self-consciousness.<sup>13</sup> When the desired outcomes are contested there is a

13. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 56, states: 'The kind of clumsiness which is due to the fact that focal attention is directed to the subsidiary elements of an action is commonly known as self-consciousness.'

consequent increasing pressure placed on the 'Instruments' to serve different purposes.<sup>14</sup> Under such conditions the 'Instruments' cannot function freely in the service of a greater end because they have become the focal attention. When this occurs the effort, commitment and manner of disposing ourselves is no longer directed to the end or purpose of the ecclesia and becomes fixated on the operation of the particular instruments.

It will come as no surprise that eventually the 'Instruments' are pronounced meaningless and inadequate for the purpose for which they were established. If we do not know how to use the instrument any longer or do not believe it can do what it is supposed to do then it ceases to be a living instrument and appears as a peculiar artifact irrelevant and meaningless. Polanyi has identified the problem succinctly: 'If we discredit the usefulness of a tool, its meaning as a tool is gone.'<sup>15</sup> In an ecclesial context this not only spells the end of the instrument but more importantly it is a sign of a dismembered body. The analysis of the way an instrument works in such a context reveals the deeper wound of the body and the pain caused through a disordered ecclesial spirit (Gal. 5.13–21).

The proper focus for the Instruments of Communion is communion with God.<sup>16</sup> In this context the 'Instruments' have a subsidiary function, John the Baptist like, pointing to a greater reality and calling. However, in times of crisis the 'Instruments' become easily overburdened. I noted above that in the case of the pianist or actor fluency was only recovered when they cast their attention forward to the purpose of their work; to the performance beyond the particulars, beyond their own act. When they recovered the transcendent purpose they recovered their fluency. One theologian has said that the

greatest threat to Anglicanism today is that ... the personal will (what each person wants), and the will of sectional interests in the Church are displacing love for the truth. ... What is needed is to move radically in the opposite direction: attentiveness to the truth, to the infinite identity of God in acting (in Christ through the Holy Spirit) in the world to bring

14. Whilst all may espouse the ideal of being one church exactly what such oneness looks like – theologically, ecclesially and juridically – is in dispute. In other words what is contested is the practice of being one church.

15. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 57.

16. Communion is strengthened as more and more parts of our lives and church are directed to God's purposes. The instruments of communion are means through which the life of the church can be directed towards God. This implies a recovery of the transcendence of the instruments beyond the merely pragmatic.

it to its final end: attentiveness to God for God-self. All will depend on *whether we can 'place' everything in relation to the truth of God's own life*, as that is found through the right kind of attentiveness to the richness of God's presence and blessing as they are found in worship and corporate life when they respond to God's purposes for the world'.<sup>17</sup>

Placing everything in relation to the truth of God's life involves what has been identified above as a purposive effort, commitment and a manner of disposing ourselves that befits the fruit of the Spirit. This process is easily undermined when the Instruments of Communion are treated as external objects rather than organically related to the web of practices by which the ecclesia attend to God. When this happens it only contributes to the grief of the church and masks the deeper problems to do with ecclesial character and spirit.

The recovery of a *proper focus* and *personal dimension* of the Instruments of Communion are prerequisites for their healthy operation. When the instruments remain locked in the language of *structure* with minimal recognition of the significance of personal agency for their effective use they remain disconnected from the life of the church. What is required is a recovery of (a) the persistent focus on the purpose of the 'Instruments' as ways through which God draws the church towards himself, and (b) human agents who steadfastly insist that the 'Instruments' are not simply structural artefacts but are constituted by people in relation for the nurture of communion with one another and the Lord.

#### *Default to Instrumentalism within a Culture of Anxiety*

When it comes to the church as a community of persons in relation to each other, God and the world the recourse to instrumental language is a clue that the ecclesial 'life-world' has been invaded and overrun by a process of rationalization with a consequent loss of focus and capacity for high quality interpersonal exchange.<sup>18</sup> When human

17. Unpublished paper, ARR 2004, 'Anglicanism in the Twenty-First Century: Scriptural, Local and Global'. Hardy is commenting on the famous aphorism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge that captures the matter well: 'He, who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth, will proceed by loving his own Sect or Church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all' (S.T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* [ed. John Beer; London: Princeton University Press, 1993], p. 107).

18. I have in mind here the remarkable analysis of Jürgen Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action. II. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (trans. Thomas McCarthy; Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), where he

exchange is instrumentalized this is usually a sign of anxiety. It is an anxiety that whatever is there is in need of some overhaul and an instrumental approach is – within a market-driven rationalized world – the simplest and most logical method to adopt. Then it is a question of who wields the instruments; in whose hands are the tools of trade. Instrumentalism becomes the means by which sectional interests are more easily prosecuted. The accent invariably falls on power and who has it. Of course the issue of power is not new but the introduction of a rational technical language to identify structures of persons seeking common counsel changes how the gatherings are construed and for what purpose.

When this happens we end up with a ‘puncture repair kit’ approach to the problems and challenges of Anglicanism. But the wound needing healing cannot be fixed with a patch. In fact it is not the kind of wound that can be fixed in an instrumentalist manner. Healing and repair can only come through deep listening and forbearance and attending to the richer idea of Anglicanism. The instruments are in fact *persons in relation seeking wisdom through common counsel*. When this reality is screened out in subtle and not so subtle ways the ‘Instruments’ can be subject to significant ecclesiastical jostling and power play. Not surprisingly they will be identified as rather blunt instruments at best and we will not be surprised by calls for different instruments that will fix the problems or for a revamping or removing some instruments and/or enhancing the authority of one instrument and diminishing another.

The above developments belong to a more general mood of anxiety in response to difficulties faced in and by the churches of the Anglican Communion. Phrases like a ‘new authoritative proceduralism’, ‘confession obsession’, ‘creeping primacy’, calls for ‘increasing doctrinal rigidity’ and ‘enhanced ecclesial authority’ make sense within a climate of anxiety and concern that present structures and procedures for handling conflict and disagreement are inadequate.<sup>19</sup> A fundamental mistake that is easily made in the present circumstances is to treat the diverse national churches of the Anglican Communion no longer as ‘interrelated but self-governing churches, but rather as a single global

*(Footnote continued)*

discusses the effects of rationalization on modern society, and the uncoupling of the lifeworld from the system.

19. See Christopher Brittain, ‘Confession Obsession? Core Doctrine and the Anxieties of Anglican Theology’, *Anglican Journal of Theology*, 90.4 (2008), pp. 777–99 and especially pp. 789, 791, 793, 794.

church governed by a centralized authority'.<sup>20</sup> To this extent it is almost axiomatic that traditional structures for counsel will – under pressure for new ecclesial arrangements regarding enhanced communion authority – be instrumentalized. Furthermore, those who defend a broken and fallible church will probably be viewed with suspicion, or as perhaps well intentioned but misguided. This was a sentiment echoed by Richard Hooker in another turbulent time of the church:

He that goeth about to persuade a multitude, that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers; because they know the manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment is subject.... And because such as openly reprove supposed disorders of state are taken for principal friends to the common benefit of all ... under this faire and plausible color whatsoever they utter passes for good and currant.<sup>21</sup>

The default to an instrumentalist approach to church governance belongs to this more general anxiety in contemporary Anglican life. For example, the Anglican theologian John Webster asks whether the current mood in some quarters of Anglicanism to strengthen the authority of ecclesial structures indicates a worrying loss of confidence in the Reformation principal of *sola scriptura*.<sup>22</sup> It can appear as if the church is attempting to 'regain control of its sacred text'. But this is to forget, as Oliver O'Donovan has reminded us, 'that we must think of the Church as formed by the Scriptures, rather than forming the Scriptures'.<sup>23</sup> Strictly speaking *sola scriptura* 'is a way of describing the church's proper relationship to Holy Scripture'.<sup>24</sup> Anglicanism has a long tradition of gathering together to read the Scriptures and wrestle together to discern what God is saying in diverse situations. The Anglican way has been clear; 'the primary location for the reading of Scripture is in the context of common worship'.<sup>25</sup> This also means that diversity of interpretation and conflict is part of the Anglican DNA. As a result we should never be surprised that Anglicans frequently read and interpret the Bible quite differently depending on the nature of their socio/political/economic/cultural locations.

20. Brittain, 'Confession Obsession?', p. 793.

21. Quoted in Brittain, *Confession Obsession?* (from Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 1.1.1.).

22. Quoted in Brittain, *Confession Obsession?*, p. 794.

23. Quoted in Brittain, *Confession Obsession?*, p. 794.

24. Comment of Kevin Vanhoozer quoted in Brittain, *Confession Obsession?*, p. 795.

25. Brittain, *Confession Obsession?*, p. 795.

This cannot be reduced simply to the undesirable influences of relativism and cultural values at variance with the gospel. Rather it has to do at heart with the truth of life together with the incarnate Lord in a messy world. We have no business expecting Anglicans to interpret the scriptures in a similar way. However, it is entirely to be expected that Anglicans will refer their interpretations and readings of Scripture to others with whom they are joined in Christ. We have no business sealing off our readings and interpretation of Scripture from the wider church for the purposes of scrutiny, repair and enhancement. The Anglican idea of the church means Scripture is a dynamic witness to the incarnate Lord in the midst, always calling the peoples of the world into a richer and deeper life together and not apart.

An incipient instrumentalism can also be observed in the increasing pressure to sign off on freshly minted doctrinal or confessional statements. Such moves run the risk of treating such statements as final and irrevocable; in Webster's phrase as 'capital in the bank'.<sup>26</sup> This results in a loss of interconnectedness between doctrine, confession, liturgy and wider discipleship. It is not the way doctrine has traditionally functioned in Anglicanism. My intention here is not to become embroiled in a much larger argument about Scripture and confession in the life of the church but to simply make the point that there is a creeping instrumentalism in the way the Anglican church operates with its traditional markers for believing, worship, governance and discipleship. This impacts on the way the Instruments of Communion are treated and regarded.

#### *An Instrumental Approach to Common Counsel*

This creeping instrumentalism regarding Anglican structure explains, in part at least, the proposal circulating that the Primates of the Anglican Communion ought to be the final arbiters of the ills that afflict us. A consequential aspect of this proposal is the downgrading of the ACC which, I believe, would represent – if it came about – a weakening of the Anglican idea of the church. The reason is that as a Communion of Churches embedded in diverse world contexts, Anglicans have come to appreciate the great wisdom to be found when representatives from the whole church attend to each other. This fact alone suggests that part of the difficulty of the ACC resides in the relative infrequency of its gatherings.

To be sure enhancing primatial authority may appeal as a recovery of an ancient ideal of episcopal authority. However, such a development,

26. Brittain, *Confession Obsession?*, p. 795.

in the present context, would further concentrate not only authority but also conflict. This would place even greater stress on the Primates to creatively harness the heightened conflict. This requires a high degree of ecclesial intelligence and capability. Achieving this may well require, in the first place, high-level mediation procedures for the Primates. This is made more difficult to the extent that the Primates are treated as an 'instrument' and continue to participate in the web of difficulties this bequeaths. In sum the proposal to strengthen primatial authority will ensure that the Primates become the object of cynicism and disappointment whilst concealing deeper problems regarding right disposition, character and motives with respect to ecclesial leadership. In any case, if Gregory of Nazianzus is a reliable witness, the ancient ideal might leave a lot to be desired.<sup>27</sup>

The proposal that the Lambeth Conference should be restricted to diocesan bishops seems attractive to some not least because it would significantly reduce the number of bishops attending and thereby enable them to get on with the business of decision-making on behalf of the Anglican church. However, the origin and evolution of the Lambeth Conferences does not place resolutions and decision-making as high priorities. Furthermore, the proposal to restrict Lambeth to diocesan bishops fails to recognize that provincial structures of governance and needs differ markedly across the Anglican churches; that the notion of a diocese varies in nature and extent in the church and bishops, who are not diocesan bishops, nonetheless remain bishops and not half bishops. Episcopal life and organization is messy, and Lambeth as it presently functions is a response to life on the ground rather than an idealized form of church at some remove from reality. The idea of Anglicanism is a practical one and indeed pragmatic to the core but not for that reason unprincipled. Anglicanism is an idea that incarnates a principled pragmatism. The idea of Anglicanism includes an episcopal polity – the diocese is a somewhat fluid configuration at best – and this suggests that bishops

27. Gregory of Nazianzus struck a note of realism regarding bishop's meetings: 'For my part, if I am to write the truth, my inclination is to avoid all assemblies of Bishops, because I have never seen any council come to a good end, nor to be a solution of evils. On the contrary, it usually increases them. You always find there a love of power which beggars description; and, while sitting in judgment on others, a man might well be convicted of ill-doing himself long before he should put down the ill-doings of his opponents. So, I retired into myself; and came to the conclusion that the only security for one's soul lies in keeping quiet.' (Epistles of Gregory CXXX, Letter to Procopius, AD 382).

listening and taking common counsel is a genuinely corporate affair where all belong. However, within a rapidly changing environment the proposal for greater frequency of face-to-face gatherings might contribute to stronger ecclesial bonds and improve mutual understanding and accountability.

Historically the See of Canterbury has operated as the reference point for the bond in Christ shared by the churches of the Anglican Communion. In terms of an emergent world ecclesial body Canterbury, as the focal point of unity through history, makes sense. It is of course thinkable that this focal point for the unity of the Communion might be replaced by another focal point or even a moveable one. However, the cost is historical continuity. What is theoretically possible might not cohere with the practical life of the church. Furthermore, the way in which such a change occurred would have to be faithful to the idea of Anglicanism. Accordingly, a new point of unity would have to be such as to foster the ultimate goal of the Anglicanism, that is, it would have to contribute to the fuller realization of our life together in Christ. Such an achievement requires mutual exchange and a high level of communicative competence. In fact, communicative competence and the achievement of genuine communication presumes willingness, even expectation, that people will be changed in any exchange. This is extremely difficult to achieve at this time in our history. The temptation is to disconnect via strategies identified above which evidence strong control either of the top-down or bottom-up variety. Intransigence and stubborn resistance to conversation are more familiar patterns at present. The danger in the present context is that such a move is more likely to be the result of pressure from particular sectional interests but lack genuine consensus. The result would be a focal point for the Communion based no longer on historical circumstance – and a somewhat idiosyncratic process at that – but one based on political power via a democratic process whereby the majority rule. The focal See for Anglicanism would have become another instrument to achieve certain political ends.

#### *Instruments as Gifts of Communion*

The so-called 'Instruments' are not just quirks of Anglican governance but particular ways of facilitating practices that attend to the incarnate Lord; of keeping conversations circulating and enhancing sociality. It would be more accurate theologically to speak of the Instruments of Communion as intensifications of ecclesial life. As such, the 'Instruments'

are particular representative focal points of the bond in Christ that the whole church participates in. When the people of such groups seek wisdom together they are signs and symbols of what the whole church is called to do and be. As they concentrate God's gift of oneness (in all its diversity and tensions) they simultaneously enhance the unity of whole body of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Their work is properly one of facilitating the overflow of Christ's bond with the world through the Spirit. In this way ecclesial structures of governance serve the intensification of our oneness with God in the world. The trinitarian dynamic at work here is the basis for Instruments of Communion being more appropriately designated as gifts of God. They have emerged in history as people have sought wisdom to live as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Gifts may have an instrumental dimension. However, when this nomenclature dominates the discourse between people the gift-like character of gatherings for common counsel is easily lost or transposed into technical management jargon. As observed above, instruments, to be properly instruments, have to be integrated organically into the life of the church. When instruments are treated as external objects the sociality of the body of Christ is threatened. The danger for Anglicanism at present in relation to the structures of communion is that we may jettison or spurn the gifts given for our common life in Christ and the unfolding life of the Kingdom of God.

The gift-like character of the Instruments of Communion can be enhanced by the consistent use of the language of 'communion' rather than 'unity'. Interestingly 'communion' was the original term in relation to instruments and was only later replaced by the term 'unity'. Communion is a broader and richer term theologically than unity. Unity has unfortunately been too easily associated with structural and legal aspects of the church. Such things are important but they are not the only or the most significant aspects of union with God and each other. 'Instruments of Communion' opens up possibilities whereas unity language tends to close down the perceived range of possibilities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the language of 'communion' offers a needed relational balance to the language of 'instruments'. The recovery of communion terminology is of a piece with the recovery of the role of human agency and theological focus on God that underlies the

28. It is an ecclesial version of the concept of 'the butterfly effect'. Theologically this is grounded in the deep interconnectedness of the whole of creation.

purpose of the Instruments of Communion. Language may not solve the problems but it has a part to play in changing expectations and attitudes.

The real challenge in respect to the above-mentioned structures is to recover the priority of a gift-centred approach to those locations for common counsel in international Anglicanism. The 'Instruments' always remain vulnerable to distortion and misuse. For example, the objectification of instruments opens up more conceptual and political space for sectional interests to prosecute their own ideas of communion, its repair and/or progress. It also promotes false expectations of what is possible. A gift-centred approach to the structures of our polity is more resistant to them being dragooned into impossible fix-it type tasks. A gift-centred approach belongs to an environment which fosters purposive effort, commitment and disposing of ourselves to one another. In this sense it is a reminder of the moral weight and vision of a godly ecclesia to which we are called. This points to the fact that a gift-centred approach is the language of conversion. The church is being called back to the ultimate goal or intent of the Anglican idea of the church to bear witness through its common practices to the incarnate Lord. A gift-centred approach will encourage a re-conceiving of such gatherings as places of wisdom within the ecclesial life world. In such a world the only remit is the agony of shared life seeking God's good counsel to foster and enhance the fuller life together in the coming Kingdom of God.

#### *Communion in the Instruments*

The danger in all that has been said thus far is that we might fail to recognize its corollary. That is to say, it is only when there emerges a deeper sense of the unity and/or integration between the Instruments of Communion that the true gift-like character of the 'Instruments' can be properly displayed. By treating each 'Instrument' somewhat separately or failing to recognize the interconnectedness of the 'Instruments' the church continues to foster the fragmentation and disconnection and breeds greater dissatisfaction and rejection of the means by which Anglicans maintain their common life. For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lambeth Conference have a natural reciprocity as does the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council. Closer intentional cooperation between these different 'Instruments' nurtures the Anglican ideal of an organic, conversational and conciliar ethos. The fact that there may be tensions between these different bodies is natural and to be expected but this is not a reason for jettisoning one or other of the bodies or diminishing one and exalting another. This is not the way of communion in the 'Instruments'.

*Conclusion*

At the outset of this article I discussed the importance of conversation within an Anglican doctrine of the church. It is not an add-on or something we engage in as a consequence of our agreements or because it might be useful to talk to one another across our differences. Rather, to be in conversation for Anglicans is the way we are the church of the living God. The burden of this article has been to argue for a different approach to the Instruments of Communion than currently obtains. Following an analysis of the concept of instrument and wider cultural issues to do with instrumentalizing entities and relations, I have argued for an approach to Instruments that includes human agency in the constitution of the Instruments. In truth there is no such thing as Instruments which human agents indwell and/or use. That is already to misunderstand the point of the article. Nor am I arguing that all we need to do is keep the conversations circulating. In other words, there is no structural difficulty; it is simply a failure to converse. That would be to miss the entire argument that is about understanding the organic relationship between structure and human agency that together constitute the Instruments as Instruments of Communion. The habits and character of the participants in the conversations and common counsel they seek *is what the Instruments are* rather than some structural frame in which such activity occurs. As such the Instruments belong to a moral world of speech and action. In this sense the 'ecclesial deficit' of the Communion is a moral and ethical deficit. How can it be otherwise within an Anglican polity?

The purpose of the Instruments of Communion is to enable the church to attend to the incarnate Lord. In this sense the Instruments are simultaneously God's gift to us for deepening Communion and gifts that have emerged out of our work with God in the world. As such the 'Instruments' have a sacramental character for it is in and through such human structures that the people of God dare to hear the voice of the Living God and discern signs of the coming Kingdom.