

From Edinburgh to Georgetown: Anglican Interfaith Bridge-Building

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In 1910 Anglicans participated in the Edinburgh Missionary conference at which the issue of the relation of Christianity to other faiths was raised in a new and serious way. A century later, the ninth of the Christian–Muslim Building Bridges seminar series, begun in 2002 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey, took place at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. In between these two events there lies a century of Anglican engagement in interfaith activities which, after a slow beginning, gathered forceful momentum during the latter part of the twentieth century and produced some distinctive Anglican perspectives and contributions, especially in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This essay highlights key markers and phases in the overall process, and attempts to discern the Anglican voice in interfaith engagement, especially in regard to theological dimensions and concerns.

The Anglican journey of interfaith bridge-building during the past one hundred years or so reflects the wider development of Christian engagement with other faiths as well as gives evidence of particular and distinctive Anglican contributions. In order to review and reflect upon the contemporary situation, we need to find a clear and distinctive point of commencement of this journey, discern its contours, and identify distinctive markers on the way. The great international missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, and inclusive of Anglicans, marks the effective beginning of the contemporary

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Christian interfaith journey. Here, the issue of the relation of Christianity to other faiths was raised in a new and serious way, leading eventually to the emergence of contemporary Christian engagement in interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue. For our purposes, the terminus for the specifically Anglican journey we are concerned with is a century or so later at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. For, in 2010, the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, co-hosted with the President of Georgetown University the ninth of the Christian–Muslim Building Bridges seminar. This series was begun in 2002 by the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey. In between Edinburgh and Georgetown there lies a century of Anglican engagement in interfaith activities of varying sorts. This engagement began rather slowly, has often occurred in ecumenical contexts, takes place at both local and global levels, and has gathered forceful momentum that produced some distinctive Anglican perspectives and contributions. At the close of the journey we reflect on what—if anything—has emerged as a distinctive Anglican theology of interfaith dialogue.

An analysis of this Anglican interfaith journey reveals an interesting pattern, for between its commencement and the conclusion there are two significant turning points, each of which denotes a shift of focus and a change of gear. As it happens, these mark a broad pattern of fifty, forty, and ten years as the three distinct phases. In what follows I shall provide an overview of the journey and a measure of analytical reflection. What happened? What does it all mean? The resources that allow us to get some idea of Anglican thinking, engagement, and perspective with respect to interfaith relations are found primarily in the reports and determinations of the regular meetings of the Lambeth Conferences, together with more recent documents that also reflect wider Anglican Communion input.

The Starting Point: Edinburgh 1910

It has been said of this conference that it represents “a striking example of how creativity in theological reflection comes directly out of a concern for mission, rather than, as so often, doctrine and mission being held in separate compartments.”¹ Although the tenor of the conference was clearly evangelical, it nevertheless took a pragmatic

¹ Doctrine Commission, *The Mystery of Salvation*, in *Contemporary Doctrine Classics from the Church of England: The Combined Reports*, ed. Stephen Sykes (London: Church Publishing House, 2005), 397.

and empirical approach to engaging with other faiths “by drawing on evidence submitted from all parts of the world,”² even though the stated reason for this was to survey potential fields for mission. In effect, Anglican missionary theologians, alongside others, had begun to take serious cognizance of other faiths in wholly new ways. The groundwork for the later era of interreligious dialogue and Anglican engagement in the interfaith movement had been laid. Anglican interfaith beginnings were subsumed within ecumenical contexts and missionary concerns, and much of the interfaith journey of Anglicans since has been bound up in ecumenical expressions and actions, even as more distinctively Anglican approaches and contributions have emerged. What, then, of this journey?

First Phase: 1910–1960

A decade after Edinburgh, the 1920 Lambeth Conference said little about other religions and even less about interreligious relations. The tenor of the times was one of Christian triumphalism. Nevertheless, the first resolution did promote a vision of God’s kingdom inclusive of all nations,³ and the church’s mission to “every race and individual” was clearly affirmed.⁴ There is, however, an interesting note to Resolution 41 which draws attention to issues pertaining to “dealing with the large number of persons in their colonies and dependencies who profess different faiths,” in respect to which British and American government policy, namely “that of strict religious neutrality,” is affirmed on the one hand but, on the other, it is noted that governmental and bureaucratic hindrances are being placed on missionaries—with a clear “preference being shown for other faiths.” While missionaries should certainly work within the laws and rules that variously apply, equally “we claim that no discrimination should be shown against the Christian faith.”⁵ Interestingly, similar concerns are expressed by Christians today. But in the 1920s it would appear, perhaps, that the then secular society was inclining to the level playing field of religious plurality, in respect of which the church’s traditional hegemonic claim to priority was being challenged. At the fringes, other religious movements such as Spiritualism, Christian Science,

² *The Mystery of Salvation*, 397.

³ Resolution 1, in Roger Coleman, ed., *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences, 1867–1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 44.

⁴ Resolution 32, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 54.

⁵ Note to Resolution 41, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 56–57.

and Theosophy were also addressed.⁶ However, these were stated to be theologically deficient and, indeed, inherently antithetical to Christianity as such. Any note of positive appreciation of other faiths would be reserved for the major religions only.

At the next Lambeth Conference, in 1930, ecumenical issues and relations with other churches featured highly, but there was no specific attention given to other religions as such. However, things were soon to change. The year 1948 saw the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), of which the Church of England, together with many Anglican and other churches from around the globe, was a foundational member. The ecumenical age had now reached a new height of intentionality and expression. It was in this broader ecumenical context that the stimulus to interfaith engagement of one sort or another can perhaps be more clearly seen. Significantly, the Lambeth Conference which met also in 1948 endorsed human rights as applying to all as “equally the objects of God’s love,” with a clear implication that such rights extend to all people, irrespective of faith.⁷ In this same year the UN Covenant on Human Rights—which included references to freedom of religion and belief and to freedom of religious education—was promulgated, and it was endorsed at the Lambeth Conference.⁸ At this juncture Anglicans, along with other Christians, were being drawn inexorably into a new worldview that situated Christianity and the Christian church as one faith among many. Religious plurality was the *de facto* reality, in respect to which the demands of equity and justice meant a new era of theological reflection was called for. How would Anglicanism respond?

In the 1950s the church was rather more focused on evangelical mission; dialogical engagement with other faiths was not yet a feature of church life. Thus Lambeth Conference 1958 attended to ecumenical and church unity matters, with the mission of the church being grounded in the concern “to present Christ to people everywhere.”⁹ On the one hand Resolution 67 reaffirmed the “conviction that freedom of religion includes not only freedom of worship but also freedom to propagate and to teach,”¹⁰ yet a substantial affirmation of the

⁶ Resolutions 55–65, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 61–64.

⁷ Resolution 6, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 92.

⁸ Resolution 8, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 92.

⁹ Resolution 58, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 132.

¹⁰ Resolution 67, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 135.

role of the church's work of reconciliation—Christians are to be “in love and charity with their neighbours”—is also found in Resolution 100.¹¹ The issue of other religions, or peoples of other faiths, is not directly addressed but arguably subsumed within these other foci. This is reflected, for example, in the influential work of Anglican missiologist Max Warren who, while General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) from 1942 to 1963, oversaw a very influential book series (1959–1966) published by SCM Press under the general title *Christian Presence*.¹²

Turning Point 1: The Early 1960s

By the time of the third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in 1961, the context for thinking about interreligious dialogue within the wider ecumenical movement, inclusive of Anglicanism, was not religious plurality as such but rather secularization. The theological significance of secularization held attention, not the presence *per se* of other religions within the world. Nevertheless, during the 1960s, the stimulus to local reflection and development of an interfaith outlook engendered by the WCC program *The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men* (1956–1971) managed to bring the issue of interreligious dialogue to the fore. One contributing factor was that during this time the ecumenical movement came to appreciate the insights and impacts of Asian Christian leaders who, for the most part, had a much more open and appreciative stance toward other religions than heretofore had been the case with, in particular, British, American, and European Christian leaders. But there was yet another important factor at play, one which, together with these other two, would have an impact upon Anglican sensibility especially: between 1962 and 1965 the Roman Catholic Church held the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II).

One of the most important documents to come from Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, comprises a declaration on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religions which “advocated openness to other religions along with an uncompromising stand on the uniqueness of

¹¹ Resolution 100, in Coleman, *Resolutions*, 143.

¹² See Tim Yates, “Evangelicalism without Hyphens: Max Warren, the Tradition and Theology of Mission,” *Anvil* 2, no. 3 (1985): 238.

Christ.”¹³ And in another Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, the salvific validity of other faiths, especially that of Islam, was given recognition: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God.”¹⁴ The lead given by Vatican II in respect of the engagement and interest of the wider church in interreligious dialogue cannot be underestimated. It is one of the factors that fed the growing engagement of the Anglican Church in the interfaith journey.

Second Phase: Later Twentieth Century

This phase of the Anglican interfaith journey roughly encompasses the last four decades of the twentieth century. It is here that a more distinctive Anglican engagement with and reflection upon interfaith matters can be seen emerging. As it happened, Lambeth Conference 1968 was the first time when interreligious dialogue was officially commended, albeit with reference to the ecumenical context of interfaith engagement. Resolution 12 states: “The Conference recommends a renewed and vigorous implementation of the task of inter-religious dialogue already set in hand in the study centres organized by the World Council of Churches and other bodies, and urges increased Anglican support both in the seconding of personnel and in the provision of money.”¹⁵ Also, in concert with the contemporary ecumenical focus that linked ideologies to religion in respect to the dialogical mandate, the resolution commended “similar assistance for dialogue with Marxists and those who profess no religious faith.” However, the *Renewal in Faith* report of Lambeth 1968 contained a section—“Co-operation with those of other Faiths”—in which the then contemporary renewal and growth in other religions was noted, “of which Christians should not be ignorant.” Dialogue with these faiths is affirmed theologically, for “Christians must be prepared to listen and to learn. In this way their own witness to the truth of Jesus

¹³ Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 129.

¹⁴ Francesco Gioia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963–1995)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 42.

¹⁵ Resolution 12, in *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK and New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 32.

Christ will be strengthened and their respect for the faith of others will win respect for their own faith.” Furthermore, “Dialogue in words must be matched with co-operation in service.”¹⁶ The interweaving of dialogue, witness, proclamation, and diaconal action is thus expressed, together with a stress on the quest “for closer co-operation and understanding with Jews” and a nod, at least, to talking also with Muslims—for all three faiths “look back to Abraham.”¹⁷ And, significantly, the “Development for Mission” section includes a reference to “co-operating confidently with those of other faiths, or of none, who are unable to make Christian credal affirmation but who can see the secular significance of what we believe to be theological truths.”¹⁸ Clearly interfaith matters were now firmly on the Anglican agenda, albeit heavily tinged with the wider theological concerns relating to secularism, and a developmental trajectory was underway at this point within Anglican circles.

Resolution 37, “Other Faiths: Gospel and Dialogue,” from the report of Lambeth Conference 1978 provides the first substantial theological statement of an Anglican approach to people of other faiths.

1. Within the Church’s trust of the Gospel, we recognise and welcome the obligation to open exchange of thought and experience with people of other faiths. Sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit among them means a positive response to their meaning as inwardly lived and understood. It means also a quality of life on our part which expresses the truth and love of God as we have known them in Christ, Lord and Saviour.
2. We realise the lively vocation to theological interpretation, community involvement, social responsibility, and evangelisation which is carried by the Churches in areas where Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Islam are dominant, and ask that the whole Anglican Communion support them by understanding, by prayer, and, where appropriate, by partnership with them.
3. We continue to seek opportunities for dialogue with Judaism.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Renewal in Faith*, in *Lambeth Conference 1968*, 77.

¹⁷ *Renewal in Faith*, in *Lambeth Conference 1968*, 77.

¹⁸ *Renewal in Faith*, in *Lambeth Conference 1968*, 78.

¹⁹ Resolution 37, in *The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978* (London: CIO Publishing, 1978), 52.

This is a significant statement indicating the extent to which the Anglican interfaith journey had blossomed and deepened. Indeed, the issue of relationships with other religions surfaced in a number of Lambeth 1978 reports, either directly or indirectly. For instance, population demographics and allied issues of religious affiliation were spoken of as facts that “have to be taken seriously and what God is saying to his Church through them, discovered.”²⁰ The context of practical cooperation is elsewhere stressed: “There are many opportunities today for Christians to stand alongside those of other faiths in the many tasks of nation-building, of seeking justice and peace, of working for the realization of the Kingdom of God.”²¹ Thus, within the

interdependent “global village” of our times, Christians in every country are neighbours to people who belong to other faiths and ideologies, as well as those who live without religion at all. Every member Church of the Anglican Communion is called to take seriously the question of relationships with people of other faiths and to make more adequate provision for training, for reflection, and for mission in this area.²²

The ongoing importance of dialogue with Judaism was noted and affirmed, and deferential reference was paid to dialogue activities of the wider church, namely those of the WCC and the Vatican.²³ A substantial overview statement about interreligious dialogue is also given, namely that dialogue is not evangelism although it is still an avenue “by which Christians may share the Good News about Jesus with those who worship God within another faith”; that dialogue is a modality of discipleship—of “living out our faith in Christ in service of community with our neighbours,” thus “at best it is a genuine meeting of particular individuals in the integrity of their personal lives and convictions”; and that dialogue requires the Christian to ask three questions: (a) What is there in the faith of the other that signifies the presence of God? (b) How is my faith received, understood, and viewed by the other? (c) What is God saying to us within the dialogical context? Finally, that dialogue does not involve “a denial of the

²⁰ *Lambeth Conference 1978*, 87.

²¹ *Lambeth Conference 1978*, 89.

²² *Lambeth Conference 1978*, 89.

²³ *Lambeth Conference 1978*, 91.

uniqueness of Christ”; rather, it leads to seeing that uniqueness “in inclusive, rather than in exclusive, terms.”²⁴

In his opening address to Lambeth 1988 Archbishop Robert Runcie stated: “For me all people of faith, all those with spiritual awareness, possess potential for greater unity through dialogue, through fellowship, and the service of the wider community.”²⁵ Indeed one of the Conference’s reports affirms the necessity of “the encounter with other faiths and ideologies”: “By listening to others we can learn what dialogue there may have been between God and persons of other faiths. Such listening and learning is not in competition with proclamation.”²⁶ Lambeth Conference 1988 viewed mission as a process that includes evangelization, contextualization, enculturation, and dialogue. Within the *Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns* report of this conference there may be seen something of a nascent interfaith theology.²⁷ The lead theological motif for dialogue is given with respect to understanding God in terms of “being with” and also the Christian life as a form of “being with.” The “intimate relationship between God and humanity which we know in the person of Jesus is the fundamental paradigm of God’s relationship with the world.”²⁸ Significantly, anything “which is ‘exclusively’ true of the incarnate Lord is true of one who is precisely the most ‘inclusive’ reality, the divine life rejoicing in itself and seeking to share itself. All of creation is caught up in this movement, for all of creation has been called into existence by this movement of divine love.”²⁹ Furthermore, “the Spirit who is given is the universal Spirit of God”; thus, an “interpretation of the person of Christ or of the Spirit which diminishes the universality of their presence or of their work ultimately diminishes the significance of the reality of the Church.”³⁰ An Anglican perspective, as articulated by this Lambeth Conference, could not be clearer.

An exclusivist position is regarded as running the risk of reducing God to a tribal totem; by contrast, the universality of God the Creator

²⁴ *Lambeth Conference 1978*, 92.

²⁵ *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988, The Reports, Resolutions and Pastoral Letters from the Bishops* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1988), 22.

²⁶ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 81.

²⁷ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 92–99.

²⁸ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 92.

²⁹ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 93.

³⁰ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 93.

is to be given utmost seriousness in respect to the consideration of the Christian response to other faiths. Thus this 1988 Conference spoke “of the need to correct our particular expression of Christian faith in the light of other Christian experience” on the one hand, and admitted, on the other, the prospect that Christians “may also have to correct it in the light of the commitment of non-Christians.”³¹ And it spoke of daring “to believe that we will see there something of the presence of the God who called them, no less than us, into being who and what they are.” Thus “it does not surprise us to find echoes of the Gospel in the deep convictions of our non-Christian brothers and sisters.”³² This is strong stuff. The report went on to make a further significant point: whereas it was once the case that “the general approach of early Christian apologists was that all truth is the truth of Christ,” today the hope is “that Anglicans will continue to be open to the search for an ever-deeper understanding of the things of God, calling upon the insights of the many traditions, cultures and languages in which the Churches of the Communion are to be found.”³³ The Anglican endorsement of interfaith dialogue is unequivocal, when it is a

common and mutual exploration of the ultimate significance of the human condition. Understood this way, it cannot preclude the proclamation of the Gospel. On the contrary, such open and honest discussion necessitates proclamation, for we come to “dialogue” already enriched by a particular understanding of the significance of our common humanity, an understanding which is both grounded in and defined by the reality of Christ.³⁴

Patience, and paying careful attention to the other, was also advocated: “Our partner may literally speak a different language from our own as well as having a *religious* language which requires patient learning in order for us to understand.”³⁵

Four distinctive features of interreligious dialogue were articulated in Resolution 20 of Lambeth 1988. First, dialogue begins whenever people meet each other. Second, dialogue requires a context of mutual trust and understanding (and acceptance as co-equally valid,

³¹ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 94.

³² *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 94.

³³ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 94.

³⁴ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 95.

³⁵ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 96.

though different). Third, dialogical exploration aids the capacity for shared service to the wider society. And fourth, the dialogue event itself (in the sense of the doing of it, not dialogue as agency) is an effective medium of authentic Christian witness. The affirmation of dialogue ended on an eschatological note: “In time, we will learn to hear something of the hidden conversation between God and another human being. We shall be richer for that; our understanding of God will be richer for that. Perhaps, our partner will also be richer for that.”³⁶ Thus interfaith dialogue was commended “as part of Christian discipleship and mission,” given that dialogue begins with people interacting; depends upon the mutuality of trust, respect, and understanding; makes possible shared communal service; and becomes the medium of authentic witness.³⁷ Furthermore, this dialogue is commended as an ecumenical activity, to be pursued in partnership with other Christian churches, with a highly applied and pragmatic focus. One of the most influential documents (Appendix 6) of Lambeth 1988, *Jews, Christians, and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue*, spoke of interreligious dialogue as embracing the motifs, or “ways,” of understanding, affirmation, and sharing, in which an implicit theology of relationality was clearly to the fore.

A decade later, in the report of the Lambeth Conference 1998 *Called to Be a Faithful Church in a Plural World*, a stimulating comment on the vision of St. John in Revelation 21:22–26 was offered:

Peoples of diverse cultures and nations dwell together in the unity of God’s reign. . . . There is community with God and each other. . . . There is unity in diversity; all are embraced in God’s love. . . . God is glorified as the Nations offer to God and share within their common life the heritages and honour of their diverse cultures.³⁸

A pointer is given to trinitarian doctrine as being at the heart of a relational theology of *koinonia* that underpins the understanding of unity in community. The multifarious relationships that engage us within our creaturely existence constitute the primary vehicle by which we are encountered by God. It is part and parcel of the church’s calling “to welcome a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural setting for its witness to glory

³⁶ *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 97.

³⁷ Resolution 20, in *Lambeth Conference 1988*, 218.

³⁸ *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 185.

in the diversity of God's creation, rather than a grudging and reluctant tolerance."³⁹ The story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:22–11:18) asserts that "God's love reaches out beyond the known boundaries of race and religion. . . . God has no favourites."⁴⁰ Noting the wide variety of context and nature of interfaith relationships, the evangelical desire to bear witness to people of other faiths is set alongside acknowledgment that "there are aspects of truth about God and creation which are present in Other Faiths."⁴¹ And, significantly, "a renewed understanding of the Triune God's ways with humans helps many Christians to be open to persons of Other Faiths" with the advice given that relationship between Christians and people of Other Faiths should "be founded on mutual respect, sensitivity to their deepest faith commitments and experiences, and a willingness to be their servants for Christ's sake. . . . Relationship should issue in dialogue that searches for common beliefs, acknowledges honest differences, and enables us to work together in service of the world."⁴² This report ends with a call to "all peoples of faith to deplore all manifestations of religious intolerance and ideological fanaticism and to affirm in clear terms the principle and practice of religious freedom."

Clearly—and as Lambeth Conference 1998 itself notes—interfaith concerns were more visible at this than any previous Lambeth Conference. Indeed, invited guests from other religions were present, especially at the Opening Service at which the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, spoke "of both dialogue and Christian witness in his personal journey in inter-faith relations."⁴³ Recognition was made of the fact that "a great deal of our inter-faith work is done ecumenically"⁴⁴ and an important paper by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, *Embassy, Hospitality and Dialogue: Christians and People of Other Faiths*, was given.⁴⁵ The practical and cutting-edge element of promoting mutual tolerance and religious freedom surfaced in two specific resolutions in which Anglicans were called "to enter into dialogue with members of other faiths, to increase our mutual respect and explore the truths we hold in common and those on which we

³⁹ *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 209.

⁴⁰ *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 212.

⁴¹ *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 212.

⁴² *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 213.

⁴³ *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 268.

⁴⁴ *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 273.

⁴⁵ See *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 305–325.

differ” and to prepare for the threefold task of “witness, dialogue and service.”⁴⁶ Finally, on a somewhat newly-emerging negative note, concern was voiced for persecuted Christians, a phenomenon occurring mainly in some Muslim majority contexts, with the stated need to monitor interfaith, and especially Christian–Muslim, relations.⁴⁷ So we are brought to the end of the twentieth century and to the next turning point in our overview of the Anglican journey into interfaith engagement and dialogue.

Turning Point 2: The New Millennium

The advent of the new millennium was a source of global interest, angst, and celebration. The anticipated Y2K phenomenon that would usher the collapse of computer networks failed to materialize, as did the many predictions of endtime doom. For the most part, celebration was the dominant response. One day merged into the next, so the transition was nothing special at one level; but our human propensity for marking time was played out to the full nevertheless. If there was a sense of an old order giving way to a new, this was to be rudely re-directed in a wholly unanticipated way with the events of September 11, 2001—forever etched in global historical consciousness as simply “9/11.” The juxtaposition of the use of passenger aircraft as a tool of mass destruction and the fact that the perpetrators carried out their crime in the name of a religious ideology, in this case Islam, both thrust Islam firmly into the limelight even more than had been the case in previous decades, and brought to clear awareness the need to address religious issues and harness religious leadership and sensibilities for the sake of communal harmony and global security. Religion was suddenly, and inexorably, on the public and political agenda. Since 2002 there has been a plethora of initiatives and events in the field of interfaith relations, including in particular relations with Muslims, all precipitated by an act of religiously inspired terrorism that gripped the imagination and engendered the so-called war on terror. Interfaith concerns and activities were now to become a priority in many quarters, not least the churches—including, of course, Anglican churches around the globe.

⁴⁶ Resolution III.11, *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 400; compare with Resolution I.2, 375.

⁴⁷ Resolution III.12, *Lambeth Conference 1998*, 401; see also Resolution V.34 on “Christian–Muslim Relations,” 432.

Third Phase: Into the Twenty-first Century

In the first decade or so of the new century, interfaith engagement as well as angst has mushroomed. In tracking the particular journey we are here sketching, I will touch upon but a select few elements. First, there are the two uniquely Anglican initiatives with respect to Christian–Muslim dialogue found in the Al-Azhar Agreement that established a “Joint Commission of Anglican Christians and Sunni Muslims” with Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and in the Building Bridges seminar series. Both of these Christian–Muslim dialogical events were set in motion in 2002 by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. Carey is on record as having stated: “Our responsibilities as religious leaders and scholars [are] to help our communities live together in ways which do not suppress our own identities but open us up to the riches which the other offers” and, further, that this invites Christian participants in interfaith activities to dare “to believe that God has drawn us together. In neither of our faiths is God a subject of idle intellectual curiosity. We are concerned with the living, loving God who brought all things into being and who seeks to bring his creation to its proper fulfilment, with the human family living together in justice and peace.”⁴⁸

The year 2002 was something of a watershed in terms of formal and high-level expressions of Anglican-initiated Christian–Muslim engagement, and each has resulted in a pattern of scholarly meetings, on an annual basis more or less, hosted alternately by Christian and Muslim organizers. In both cases Muslim participation, engagement, and support has been readily forthcoming. Further, with the Building Bridges seminar series, Christian involvement has not just been limited to Anglicans; rather, the Anglican initiative has been fulfilled on the Christian side by being also an exemplary ecumenical venture.

Although there appears to have been more active interest in Islam, relations with other faiths are by no means overlooked by Anglicans. Indeed, this wider interfaith interest, including theological reflection, has been well-expressed in the Anglican document *Generous Love*.⁴⁹ The foreword by Archbishop Rowan Williams gives the

⁴⁸ George Carey, “Introduction,” in Michael Igrave, ed., *The Road Ahead: A Christian–Muslim Dialogue* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), x.

⁴⁹ Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, *Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue—An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2008); http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents/generous_love.cfm.

clue to its reach and significance: “Many Christians are torn between wanting to affirm the importance of dialogue and not wanting to compromise their allegiance to the one Lord and Saviour whom they proclaim as the desire of all nations.” It further notes that the document “is offered for study to the Anglican Communion—and more widely—in the hope that it will stimulate further theological thinking among Anglicans who share that double conviction that we must regard dialogue as an imperative from Our Lord, yet must also witness consistently to the unique gift we have been given in Christ.” However, rather than being in any sense an Anglican “last word,” this is a document that endeavours, in a fairly succinct manner, to articulate the contours of a broadly Anglican perspective on interfaith engagement. Grounded in the affirmation of the Trinity, reflecting on contemporary context and Anglican heritage, the document asserts the place of scripture, tradition, and reason in theological method, and focuses on the twin themes of the “embassy” and “hospitality” of God with respect to the *modus vivendi* of Christian engagement in interfaith relations. Arguably, *Generous Love* is a blueprint of an Anglican theology of interfaith engagement.

We come now to the one Lambeth Conference that took place during this last decade of the one hundred years of our Anglican interfaith journey. It is clear that interfaith relations, while remaining important, did not attract the same level of attention at Lambeth 2008 as had been the case during the previous four decades. In part this was because active interfaith engagement has become embedded within the life of the Anglican Communion in many parts of the world, including the United Kingdom. It is no longer such a “new thing.” And it was also certainly the case that the great proportion of time and energy of Lambeth 2008 was with internal ecclesial issues. Nevertheless, the report (*Lambeth Indaba*) of the Conference includes a section on Relations with other World Religions⁵⁰ which, as the Executive Summary notes, marks a commitment to a “shared understanding of the relationship between Christianity and other world faiths” that “seeks to be true to the Gospel of Christ and the generous love of God to all humanity.”⁵¹ Recognition of living in a context of religious diversity is

⁵⁰ *Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008, Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity*, August 3, 2008, §85–98; [http://www.lambethconference.org/vault/Reflections_Document_\(final\).pdf](http://www.lambethconference.org/vault/Reflections_Document_(final).pdf).

⁵¹ Executive Summary, *Lambeth Indaba*, note 8.

reiterated, and also that dialogue “arises from our love and concern for all humanity, who like us are created in the image and likeness of God” and that the aim of dialogue “is not compromise, but growth in trust and understanding of each other’s faith and traditions. Effective and meaningful dialogue will only take place where there is gentleness, honesty and integrity. In all of this, we affirm that Christianity needs to be lived and presented as ‘a way of life,’ rather than a static set of beliefs.”⁵²

Furthermore, it was stated that “there are situations where the word *conversation* is a more appropriate word than *dialogue*, and it is clear that hospitality is a key principle for dialogue.”⁵³ Situations of acute difficulty are also acknowledged: “In some situations, Christians are faced with hostility and even persecution, and entering into dialogue with people of other faiths can be difficult and even dangerous, if not impossible.”⁵⁴ Arguably, Lambeth Conference 2008 did little more than provide a succinct overview of the status quo of Anglican interfaith engagement. It intimated that interfaith relations are a matter of “business as usual,” notwithstanding that “usual business” can at times encounter unusual contexts, issues, and circumstances, and these continue to need specific and intentional addressing.

Georgetown 2010: Our Journey’s Terminus

As already noted, the Building Bridges program has been a very significant component of contemporary Anglican interfaith engagement, and continues to be so. On the one hand, there is the desire to see substantial outcomes; on the other, there is recognition that in order to achieve such outcomes, something else must happen first—and continue to happen. This is, perhaps, where the distinctive Anglican contribution comes in: facilitating relationships, and engendering the climate of mutual respect, hospitality, and trust. Building relationships, as much as discerning substantive cognitive outcomes, set the scene for the second of the seminar events in 2003, where the intent was “to make better sense of how we relate to the other.”⁵⁵ Building relationships of mutual trust and acceptance requires honest address-

⁵² *Lambeth Indaba*, §85, 89.

⁵³ *Lambeth Indaba*, §90.

⁵⁴ *Lambeth Indaba*, §93.

⁵⁵ Rowan Williams, “Introducing the Seminar,” in Michael Ipgrave, ed., *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and Qur’an Together* (London: Church House Publishing 2004), xii.

ing of difficulties and stumbling blocks. Relationship develops in the process of “finding the appropriate language in which difference can be talked about rather than used as an excuse for violent separation.”⁵⁶ The effect of an Anglican-facilitated relationship building process was perhaps seen to significant degree with the 2005 seminar co-hosted by Muslim, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic church leaders of Sarajevo. After some ten years of bitter internal strife, the three faith communities now hosted this major interreligious and international dialogue event.

It was this developing climate of deep relational and scholarly trust that enabled the addressing of more problematic concerns of justice and rights at the 2006 seminar. At the 2007 event, for the first time, “some Qur’anic texts were introduced by Christian scholars, and some biblical texts were introduced by Muslim scholars” and it was noted that such a cross-reading may “be seen as a sign of the collegiality that is possible when faithful believers who have grown to trust and respect one another meet in openness in the presence of their respective scriptures.”⁵⁷ The relational aspirations evinced at the first Building Bridges gathering would seem to have borne distinctive fruit in this sixth event. The seminar series completed its first decade with the tenth meeting held in May 2011. While the series is an Anglican initiative and commitment, it is by no means an Anglican affair *simpliciter*; intrareligious as well as interreligious relations are being drawn upon, developed, and strengthened in and through this series.

Anglican Interfaith Ethos, Method, and Theology

Paul Avis notes that Anglican self-identity as a *via media* is the way of relational balance and interaction: “an attempt to reconcile opposites and to transcend conflicts.”⁵⁸ Anglicanism advocates ideals rather than dogmatic certitudes; it is marked by relational openness rather than structural impediment. *Generous Love* affirms the Anglican juxtaposition of scripture, tradition, and reason in its exposition of

⁵⁶ Rowan Williams, “Analysing Atheism: Unbelief and the World of Faiths,” in Michael Ippgrave, ed., *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur’anic Perspective* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), 12.

⁵⁷ Michael Ippgrave, “Introduction: Humanity in Context,” in Michael Ippgrave and David Marshall, eds., *Humanity: Texts and Contexts—Christian and Muslim Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), xvi.

⁵⁸ Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 28.

a theological methodology for interfaith reflection. Not only is scripture a necessary component within interfaith dialogue, it is also “to be interpreted in the light of tradition and reason,” which are “shaped by the lived experiences of Christians” in church and society: “Tradition and reason are deployed in Anglicanism through the lived experience of Christian discipleship in a very wide range of different contexts.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, prayer, worship, and social and pastoral concerns have ever accompanied and marked Anglican relations with persons of other faiths and cultures. “One of the distinctive emphases arising from these priorities has been to place at the centre of our experience a deep, strong and Christlike friendship with people of other faiths.”⁶⁰ In consequence, the document avers, “It is evident that our churches can be renewed in their life and mission when they commit themselves as part of their discipleship to presence among and engagement with other faith communities.”⁶¹ The trinitarian focus and pattern in this document testifies to the strong relational orientation of the Anglican approach to interreligious engagements.

Our human relationships at their best are marked by a dynamism and interactivity capable of changing all involved through genuine encounters which lead us into new life. Those we called “other” are no longer over against us, but present to us and us to them, human beings whose energy connects with ours and ours with theirs, those who are fellow guests in God’s house with us. . . . We will listen to and receive from our neighbours even while we speak and give to them, and in this mutuality of encounter we can experience God’s gracious presence in a new way.⁶²

Gordon Light suggests the distinctive way of being Anglican is “the gift of connecting”: “The Anglican genius is the genius of relationship.” The Anglican Communion is “a family as wide and culturally diverse as the world itself. Within the life of our own Anglican Communion is a living experience of a plural world. We speak and encourage the language of diversity; we understand the tensions of living in

⁵⁹ *Generous Love*, 7.

⁶⁰ *Generous Love*, 8.

⁶¹ *Generous Love*, 8.

⁶² *Generous Love*, 15.

a household of faith that is linguistically, theologically and culturally composite.”⁶³ He goes on to argue that Anglicans, in particular,

learn about bridging distances between cultures, about the nature of community, about justice, about letting the Gospel find a home in different ways according to local custom. We do not fear pluralism and we can attest to its benefits. . . . The pluralism of international Anglicanism reinforces our commitment to openness and hospitality.⁶⁴

Jayasiri Peiris speaks of “the need for each faith to welcome the contribution other faiths can make to its own self-understanding, and helping it towards the fulfilment of the spiritual and theological content of one’s own faith.”⁶⁵ This would seem to be an apt description of the Anglican approach to other faiths. Indeed, in the 2005 Church of England Doctrine Commission’s *Contemporary Doctrine Classics*, a sketching of theological responses to other faiths alighted on trinitarian motifs (Love, Spirit and Word).⁶⁶ The Trinity is placed at the center of the Christian approach to interreligious dialogue. To be sure, it is nonsensical to affirm, on the one hand, that God is love and to then say, on the other, that “God brings millions into the world to damn them”; rather, this document affirms: “The God of Love also longs for all to come into relationship with him, and this is his purpose in creation.”⁶⁷ Religions differ on points of fact and matters of interpretation. Nevertheless, as Christians, we “assert that God can and does work in people of other religions, and indeed within other religions, and that this is by his Spirit,” and it is this that provides the “essential basis for genuine dialogue.”⁶⁸

Alec Vidler once remarked that “Anglican theology is true to its genius when it seeks to reconcile opposed systems, rejecting them as exclusive systems, but showing that the principle for which each

⁶³ Gordon Light, “Being Anglican in a Pluralist Society: A Canadian Perspective,” in Andrew Wingate, et al, eds., *Anglicanism: A Global Communion* (London: Mowbray, 1998), 142.

⁶⁴ Light, “Being Anglican in a Pluralist Society,” in Wingate, *Anglicanism*, 143.

⁶⁵ Jayasiri Peiris, “The Church in Sri Lanka and Relations with Other Faiths,” in Wingate, *Anglicanism*, 338.

⁶⁶ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 404–420.

⁶⁷ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 419.

⁶⁸ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 419.

stands has its place within the total orbit of Christian truth.”⁶⁹ It is clear that if there is a normative component to any Anglican theology of interfaith engagement that we might discern it would have to begin in, and be centred on, the Trinity. This is also the starting point for Michael Ipgrave’s own reflective work, in which he notes that, as well as being the cipher for Christian distinctiveness, the Trinity is understood as a signal of “divine presence and purpose in other religious contexts.”⁷⁰ Ipgrave illustrates a modern Anglican theological approach to interfaith engagement in his reference to the Trinity as being both foundational and distinctive. It is not without its problems; but it fairly represents one of the distinctive marks of the Anglican way. The key question for Ipgrave is: can this doctrine serve not only as an apologia for interreligious engagement, but also as an integral datum of it? Ipgrave asserts the concept of God as Trinity “implies taking interpersonal relationships very seriously indeed” and, therefore, that faith in God as Trinity requires the faithful to “acknowledge that their relationships with people of other religions will be an essential component in the outworking of their own faith.”⁷¹ But at the same time the very notion of the Trinity “can be understood as in some sense a universal pattern traceable in all religions.”⁷² Trinity speaks not only of a unique “person-identity” in terms of our understanding of God, but also of a “dynamic-process structure” imprinted upon the Creator’s handiwork, discoverable in contexts other than Christian.

As Ipgrave notes, the 1989 Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine of the British Council of Churches offered the view that this Christian doctrine may be “a resource for interreligious encounter, at least through its anthropological implications,”⁷³ thereby asserting the idea of co-humanity and human interconnectedness across difference are grounded in the trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Spirit. However, I find this line of thinking too close to implying a “triplicity” of divine person-entities for comfort. Communal language can too easily make of Trinity a Triumvirate rather than a Tri-unity. Nevertheless, the 1986 Anglican Consultative Council document *Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue* also makes “a clear affirmation

⁶⁹ Alec R. Vidler, *Essays in Liberality* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 166.

⁷⁰ Michael Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue: Plenitude and Plurality*, Religions and Discourse, vol. 14 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 18.

⁷¹ Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 11.

⁷² Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 21.

⁷³ Ipgrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 22.

of the general principle of Trinity as a resource for dialogue.”⁷⁴ The trinitarian emphasis also comes through clearly in the 2008 *Generous Love* document, which states that an Anglican “contribution will be distinctively shaped by the ways in which our Church responded to the Christian plurality of the post-Reformation world, developing the contours of a Trinitarian approach which can inform our responses to religious diversity today.”⁷⁵ If the Trinity is the theological grounding and reference point, the key focal doctrinal issue raised by interfaith relations from an Anglican perspective would surely be that of salvation. And in *The Mystery of Salvation* statement of the Doctrine Commission we find the following:

By living and working with people of other faiths, and by recognising their integrity and faithfulness as well as, in many cases, their goodness and love, questions of salvation arise. Can the God of love, revealed in Christ, reject such people whom we admire? They follow a way of life based upon religious discipline, prayer and reading of Scriptures. Can the quality of their lives be separated from their religious belief? If not, how can we find an adequate way of speaking of salvation, one that both affirms the significance of the biblical witness to Christ and at the same time can take account of what we see before us?⁷⁶

An ambivalent openness would seem to be proclaimed. For if, on the one hand, it is proper for Anglicans to “think of salvation in the broadest sense as encompassing all that heals and enhances human life” such that “clearly aspects of salvation are available in many ways, not only explicitly through Jesus Christ,”⁷⁷ it is equally clear that Anglicanism asserts, on the other hand, that “ultimate salvation” is to be found only in Christ—with the unequivocal conclusion that “mission remains the central task of the Christian Church.”⁷⁸ Of course, there would be many who would demur on the point of a hard separation of mission and interreligious dialogue, preferring instead to see trinitarian-grounded theology yielding a more open and inclusive un-

⁷⁴ *Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue* (London: Church House Publishing, 1986), cited in Igrave, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue*, 22.

⁷⁵ *Generous Love*, 4.

⁷⁶ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 298.

⁷⁷ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 421.

⁷⁸ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 422.

derstanding of mission, one that embraces interreligious dialogue and engagement as inherent to it. And so, indeed, we find the assertion that

In the ultimate sense, salvation is defined by having Jesus Christ as its source and goal. This pluralism and this exclusivism are reconciled, not in some form of inclusivism (in the usual sense) but eschatologically. . . . It may be, too, that our understanding of Christ will itself be enhanced when people of other faiths are gathered in.⁷⁹

It is the encompassing fullness of God's love which is to the fore: "We deny the fullness of that love if we deny the truth and goodness which Christ, as Logos, and God by the Spirit, can also inspire in those of other faiths and of none."⁸⁰ Nevertheless,

we believe that God has chosen to provide the fullest revelation of himself in Christ, and the fullest revelation of his love for all humanity in the cross and resurrection. Hence we naturally pray that God will bring all people, including those of other faiths, to explicit faith in Christ and membership of his church. This is not because we believe they cannot be saved without this—but because this is the truest and fullest expression of his love, and we long for them to share it.⁸¹

There is a theological difficulty here, even if, *prima facie*, it all looks fine. For, in the end, the question of relations with peoples of other faiths requires us to take theological cognisance of their "otherness" and not subsume it *a priori* within our limited worldview, however enthusiastic we are for it. There are many Anglican theologians who espouse variants of the pluralist response to other religions, as well as those who favor some inclusivist version—the debates about the nature and categorization of the different responses rage on. In the meantime, it seems clearly the case that the marks of an Anglican theology of interfaith engagement are decidedly relational and trinitarian, evincing a sense of the encompassing fullness of God's love being to the fore such that salvation has universal scope. The Anglican

⁷⁹ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 421–422.

⁸⁰ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 422.

⁸¹ *The Mystery of Salvation*, 422.

approach could be said to admit a paradoxical mixture of being “exclusively inclusive” on the one hand, and “inclusively pluralist” on the other. But whatever assessment is made of the theological drivers and orientation, it is clear from even this cursory overview that the fact and reality of the Anglican journey of interfaith engagement, and on-going reflection upon it, is here to stay. The task of bridge-building is well underway.

