

Twenty years ago, in June 2006, Archbishop Rowan Williams wrote in his significant and still-worth-reading reflection, "[The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today](#)"

There is no way in which the Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment. Neither the liberal nor the conservative can simply appeal to a historic identity that doesn't correspond with where we now are.

So where are we now? How, [as the new Archbishop of Canterbury begins her ministry in the Communion](#), as we look ahead to [a meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Belfast Archthis summer](#), and as we consider, as I did in [Part 1, the recent actions of GAFCON](#), has the Communion changed further in the two decades since Rowan Williams wrote those words and what are the possible futures?

To begin to answer questions such as these it is helpful to

1. identify four broad areas of deep and ongoing disagreement,
2. look back over what has happened since 2006, and
3. distinguish and evaluate the 3 main distinct and competing visions for global Anglicanism.

## 1. Four areas of disagreement

Although other areas could be identified, the following four have come to the fore in recent decades. Different responses to them have shaped and continue to shape the various alternative visions for global Anglicanism.

**First**, triggered by different understandings and responses in relation to human sexuality and the respect due to the [1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution I.10](#), but for many going deeper to touch on matters of biblical authority, there have been disagreements relating to what can be described as ***theology, faith or confession***.

**Second**, in addition to this it has become clear that there are also quite different understandings of what it means to be a communion of churches. In particular, how one combines both provincial autonomy and interdependence and mutual accountability within a communion of churches within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. These disagreements might be described as matters of ***ecclesiology, order, or institutional life***.

**Third**, those wider and deeper questions about ecclesiology more generally have then led to disagreements concerning ***the membership of the Communion***. In particular, there has been disagreement as to whether this should be open to change —through some processes of discipline or exclusion or restructuring—on the basis of

differences arising out of theological developments and divergences or out of unilateral actions by provinces which undermine the Communion's common life.

**Fourth**, interacting with all this is the increasing recognition of the need to address ***the impact of colonialism and current imbalances of power*** on the Communion's established structures (the four Instruments of Communion) and culture.

## **2. The last quarter century: A brief overview**

Any attempt to summarise the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Anglican Communion is rather rash but some sort of map is necessary to understand how we got to where we are and the different options now before us. I attempted a longer and differently structured account a year ago which can be found [here](#).

### *2.1. Archbishop Rowan's two failed approaches & GAFCON*

At the time of Archbishop Rowan's reflections quoted above, there were two broad pathways being explored, both of which ultimately failed leading to a third option arising apart from the Instruments.

#### *2.1.1. Repentance and Restraint*

First, [The Windsor Report of 2004](#) (with wider supporting documents [here](#)) had offered a strategy focussed on ***repentance and restraint*** in relation to actions rejecting Lambeth I.10 and actions intervening in other provinces. It had famously warned in its final paragraph that

There remains a very real danger that we will not choose to walk together. Should the call to halt and find ways of continuing in our present communion not be heeded, then we shall have to begin to learn to walk apart ([para 157](#))

#### *2.1.2. Recommitment and (Possible) Reconfiguration*

Second, arising out of that Report and at the heart of Archbishop Rowan's reflection and preferred way forward there was [the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant](#). This sought ***recommitment and (possible) reconfiguration*** in relation to the Communion's membership. In the words of the Archbishop,

The idea of a 'covenant' between local Churches (developing alongside the existing work being done on harmonising the church law of different local Churches) is one method that has been suggested, and it seems to me the best way forward. It is necessarily an 'opt-in' matter. Those Churches that were prepared to take this on as an expression of their responsibility to each other would limit their local freedoms for the sake of a wider witness; and some might not be willing to do this. We could arrive at a situation where there were 'constituent' Churches in covenant in the Anglican Communion and other 'churches in association', which were still bound by historic and perhaps personal links, fed from many of the same sources, but not bound in a single

and unrestricted sacramental communion, and not sharing the same constitutional structures. The relation would not be unlike that between the [Church of England](#) and the Methodist Church, for example. The ‘associated’ Churches would have no direct part in the decision making of the ‘constituent’ Churches, though they might well be observers whose views were sought or whose expertise was shared from time to time, and with whom significant areas of co-operation might be possible.

The rejection of the covenant by Church of England dioceses effectively ended this as a viable way forward although [a number of provinces have formally entered into the covenant](#).

### 2.1.3. *Renewed Confessionalism*

Faced with the failure of these approaches—particularly the first and its call for repentance—there arose GAFCON which first met in 2008 (two years after Rowan’s reflection) and offered a **renewed confessionalism** as the solution in its [Jerusalem Statement and Declaration](#).

### 2.2. *Archbishop Justin’s two failed approaches & GSFA/GAFCON*

The failure of these two approaches is what Justin Welby inherited when he became Archbishop in 2013.

#### 2.2.1. *Reconciliation but Relational Consequences*

Archbishop Justin initially sought to find a path of **reconciliation** leading to [his first gathering of Primates in 2016](#). This, for the only time throughout these decades, succeeded in bringing together, albeit briefly, leaders from all the provinces including those GAFCON provinces that have otherwise consistently stayed away from meetings of the Instruments since 2008 and, uniquely, the new province in North America (ACNA). However, the apparent agreement reached there did not stick and the **relational consequences** in terms of differentiated status in relation to aspects of Communion and ecumenical life were only implemented to some degree for a few years.

#### 2.2.2. *Recognition of Diversity*

Then, in preparation for, and at, the much-delayed Lambeth Conference in 2022, Archbishop Justin instead sought to **recognise diversity** and give an acknowledged place both to those upholding Lambeth I.10 and those who had decided in their own contexts to reject it.

#### 2.2.3. *Resetting*

These shifts in the Archbishop’s position, and his attempt to use his leadership to reverse previous Communion approaches and effectively undermine rather than reaffirm Lambeth I.10, [led the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches \(GSFA\)](#)

[to instead call for a \*\*resetting\*\* of the Communion](#). This GSFA alternative “reset” approach was already taking shape in the form of [their own covenantal structure first launched back in 2019](#). It was given even further momentum following the Archbishop supporting the Prayers of Love and Faith in early 2023 to which the GSFA leadership responded with their [Ash Wednesday Statement](#). This then led in turn to the GSFA and GAFCON agreeing to work together on such a “reset” at GAFCON’s Kigali meeting later that year and more recently GAFCON’s own initiative to establish a Global Anglican Communion (GAC) both of which were [explored in my previous article](#).

### 2.3. *IASCUFO & NCP: A new Communion approach redefining and restructuring*

Meanwhile, the Communion Instruments began their own work post-Lambeth on the future shape of the Communion which could be described as focussed on **redefining and restructuring** the Communion and its existing Instruments. This work has been focussed on [the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order \(IASCUFO\)](#) which at ACC in 2023 presented a paper on “[Good Differentiation](#)” and secured [a resolution](#). Following meetings in Nairobi in September 2023 and [December 2023](#) in Cairo it presented proposals to [the last Primates’ Meeting under Archbishop Justin, in Rome in 2024](#). These were further revised and then published in December 2024 as the [Nairobi-Cairo Proposals \(NCP\)](#). These offered a new description of the Communion and proposed changes to broaden its leadership. Following further consultation and feedback, [a Supplement](#) to these appeared in February 2026. As it closes, it highlights its main recommendations, which will be brought to the ACC this summer, in [para 25](#):

The proposals boil down to three urgent calls for our common life:

- Acknowledge developments in the structures of the Communion since 1930.
- Acknowledge that communion has been damaged between some churches, but that real communion remains, both as God’s gift and as something Christ calls us to intensify.
- Ensure the Communion’s leadership looks like the Communion.

Details of all this can be found on [the Anglican Communion Office webpage relating to NCP](#).

### 2.4. *Conclusion: Three Current Options*

In short, at this stage in this long journey we now have three main proposed ways forward in the light of this recent history:

- the official NCP with a proposed **redefining and restructuring** of the existing Communion
- **two strategies for resetting** the Communion.

- the GSFA's covenantal structure which offers a potential **realignment and recalibrated intensification** of inter-Anglican relationships in a form which could in principle work alongside the NCP and
- GAFCON's GAC which adds in to its "reset" approach the need not just for realignment and refocussing but for its leaders to implement a disengagement from the Communion. This therefore effectively amounts to **rejection and replacement** of the existing Communion structures, even if the NCP should be implemented.

### 3. Examining the three current options

In the light of (1) the four areas of disagreement identified above and (2) the shared history of previous attempts to address those disagreements, what are we to make of these 3 options as to how to proceed?

#### 3.1. The NCP's redefining and restructuring

##### 3.1.1. The NCP and the 4 disagreements

The NCP has arisen out of the following assessments of the four areas of disagreement drawing on lessons learned from the history sketched above:

- There is now an even greater plurality of theologies present in the Communion as the calls for repentance and restraint (2.1.1) have gone unheeded and many now see Canterbury itself as having gone beyond the Communion's consensus. In addition, contrary to Archbishop Justin's attempt at Lambeth 2022, the Communion cannot simply recognise this diversity (2.2.2) and continue as before without losing many provinces representing most Anglicans.
- This means that the Communion is no longer what it has historically claimed to be and that its ecclesiological self-understanding therefore needs to acknowledge the various degrees of Communion that exist within its own life and to develop with some redefinition of the Communion itself.
- The actual membership of the Communion is, in practice, unable to be changed by means of *either* discipline *or* seeking renewed commitments to the old ecclesiological self-understanding which might then entail reconfiguration (2.1.2) *or* relational consequences being implemented (2.2.1).
- The Instruments need to be restructured not only in the light of the above points but also because of the need to move on from a colonial Communion and to address the current power imbalances and reality of new significant bodies within Communion such as GAFCON (2.1.3) and GSFA (2.2.3).

In short, given (a) membership of the Communion is not going to be changed (other than by provinces choosing to withdraw from it) and (b) member provinces have exercised their autonomy in ways that have impaired, some would even say 'broken', their communion with other provinces, it is necessary to be brutally honest that the Communion is not what it was and its description of itself and its order needs to change in the light of that reality.

### *3.1.2. Redescribing the Communion*

A key element in the NCP is therefore that the new description of the Communion, adapting that from the 1930 Lambeth Conference ([see NCP Appendix for details of the changes](#)), should be that what the churches in it have in common is no longer that "they uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order....". This is because, while many provinces do believe this remains the case, many member provinces can no longer affirm this of other member provinces: "Full communion amongst us cannot be assumed by all Anglican churches but should be sought...full communion in the one catholic and apostolic faith and order cannot simply be claimed, as if it has been achieved" ([Supplement, para 7](#)). Rather, the members churches "seek to uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order". This is a significantly different and reduced claim which recognises the reality of degrees of communion rather than the past tendency to work with a simple binary "in communion"/"out of communion".

### *3.1.3. Repositioning Canterbury*

In addition, many provinces now view Canterbury as having joined those provinces which no longer "uphold and propagate" Catholic faith and order as they once did and so they are no longer "in communion with the see of Canterbury" in the same way. As a result, and in the light of the "evolution of the Anglican Communion in the last century [which] helps us grasp the living connection to the See of Canterbury that all Anglicans share" ([Supplement, para 11](#)), it is proposed that the initially primary definition of the Communion's churches as being "in communion with the see of Canterbury" be removed. Instead it is proposed that it now be said that what binds the churches together includes, among other things, "historic connection with the See of Canterbury".

This change in relation to Canterbury arising in part of the theological and ecclesiological differences that have arisen then combines with the need to address questions of colonialism and power imbalances to also lead to a reconfigured place for the Archbishop of Canterbury among the Instruments. The NCP has struggled to find consensus here with the Primates rejecting its initial more radical proposal of "an elected primate who might serve alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other Instruments of Communion as chair of the Primates' Meeting, and potentially as president of the Anglican Consultative Council" ([Primates Communique para 13](#)). The next idea of "a rotating presidency of the ACC between the five regions of the

Communion” ([para 84](#)) have now been changed to proposing removal of that role of President of the ACC and suggesting that a preferable approach would be “simply for the Archbishop of Canterbury to invite the regional primates (who comprise the Primate’s Standing Committee) to share his or her ministry in the Communion in a collegial way and to begin to think about formalising such an arrangement in a kind of council” ([para 16](#)).

#### *3.1.4. Conclusion on NCP*

In summary, the Communion in the NCP is seeking to honestly state the sort of Communion we have become and maintain its current membership by recognising the varied degrees of communion that now pertain—member churches do not need to say of other member churches that they uphold and propagate Catholic and Apostolic faith and order—and by removing Canterbury as the centre to which all spokes of the wheel are firmly connected. Faced with continued pressure along the various fracture lines, this may help the current member churches buy time and make space within these new arrangements as [Ephraim Radner has argued as part of an important series discussing the NCP](#). The Communion on this description has, by keeping as much as it can of its *breadth* of membership, *reduced* the depth of communion it previously claimed for itself and thus, in some ways, becomes more like an ecumenical enterprise.

The NCP recognises that this is a diminishment but believes that in a context of what it describes as “differentiated communion” there is still hope that “In time, by God’s grace, the sharp disagreements of Christians and churches can find resolution in a renewed, visible, catholic consensus” ([para 55](#)). In particular it notes that

The Covenantal Structure of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches, for instance, may be viewed in this light as a helpful contribution to the discernment of doctrinal and ethical truth within the Anglican Communion. The GSFA has said repeatedly that it hopes to see the Communion articulate afresh with vigour the catholic and apostolic faith and order of the Church as a renewal of her mission, and that it has no plans to depart from the Anglican Communion. In a family of churches increasingly aware of its diversification and eager to recover a fullness of communion one with another, contributions from such fellowships and networks should be expected. They stand as outworkings both of provincial autonomy and the mutuality of “common counsel,” in hopeful service of the unity and faithfulness of the Anglican Communion ([para 56](#)).

### **3.2. GSFA’s Covenant - realigning and recalibrating intensification**

#### *3.2.1. The GSFA and the 4 disagreements*

In relation to the 4 areas of disagreement and the recent history, the GSFA's position may be sketched along the following lines:

- The greater plurality of theologies present in the Communion requires those who do continue to uphold and propagate catholic and apostolic faith and order to renew their commitment to doing this and to deepen their communion with one another in this calling.
- This means that the Communion is no longer what it has historically claimed to be and that the Instruments have failed to prevent this development or respond to it adequately (ie by securing repentance and restraint or recommitment leading to reconfiguration or relational consequences). The idea of such recommitment in a covenant is now needed between those who share a commitment to historic Anglican faith and order.
- As the actual membership of the Communion is not going to change, the Anglican Communion is not what it has claimed to be. Those provinces who wish to uphold the traditional vision of the Anglican Communion need to create new structures and consider their relationship to the ongoing Communion Instruments and historic member churches.
- These new structures will also be post-colonial and will seek to address historic and current power imbalances.

### *3.2.2. A new proposed covenant*

This vision was developed into [a conciliar, covenantal structure](#) by the Global South, a recognised group within the Communion which has existed and met regularly since 1994 (see history timeline [here](#) and [appendix in the covenant document](#)). Those involved in the process from 2016 onwards included people who were also part of GAFCON and it led to [the 2019 Cairo covenant at the 7<sup>th</sup> Global South gathering which was revised in 2021](#).

In using the language of “covenant” the GSFA clearly implied some degree of continuity with the approach of the failed Anglican Communion Covenant (2.1.2) and a concern not just for matters of faith but also order or, in its own words, “relational commitments to one another” as well as a shared “doctrinal foundation”. It is, however, a significantly different document from that earlier covenant not least in its stronger account of shared faith although it is important that its “Fundamental Declarations” do not refer to GAFCON’s Jerusalem Declaration and Statement. The First Assembly gathered under this new covenantal structure took place in Egypt in June 2024 and a [communiqué](#) was issued by 10 members of its Primates Council (8 Communion Primates and 2 non-Communion Primates). The second assembly is due to meet in 2027.

Among the 4 objectives of the covenantal structure is “to work for the well-being of our Anglican Communion as we see ourselves as an intrinsic part of the Communion” ([para 3](#)) and the Anglican Communion is defined simply as

The family of Anglican Churches that, in God’s providence, can trace their historical origin to the history of ecclesiastical expansion of England in its colonial sphere and in its missionary work in propagating the Gospel in different parts of the world in accordance with the Reformation Formularies of the Church of England. ([Section 3.6](#))

### *3.2.3. GSFA & The Instruments*

In 2022 most bishops in provinces within GSFA attended the Lambeth Conference rather than staying away but many of them did not share in communion and [their communique from it](#) made clear their unhappiness and commitment to “reset” the Communion. This history of continued, critical engagement meant that it was, therefore, highly significant that 12 GSFA Primates took such a strong stance in response to Prayers of Love and Faith, [clearly stating](#) that “The GSFA is no longer able to recognise the present Archbishop of Canterbury, the Rt Hon & Most Revd Justin Welby, as the “first among equals” Leader of the global Communion” (para 3) and that “Given this action by the Church of England’s General Synod, we believe it is no longer possible to continue in the way the Communion is” (para 6).

GSFA members have been an integral part of IASCUFO as it has worked on the NCP. It remains to be seen the extent to which those NCP proposals for the wider Communion are a sufficiently serious (at least initial) “reset” of the Communion and its self-understanding and structures. It is clear that for GSFA provinces there has been a seemingly irreversible “realignment and recalibrated intensification” in their pattern of communion, away from the historic Instruments even though they have remained engaged with them. But various questions now arise:

- Can the NCP still be welcomed by the GSFA as not incompatible with the GSFA’s identity and calling?
- Can NCP thus lead to the GSFA having continued commitment to, and involvement in, the wider Communion through its Instruments?
- Can NCP allow the GSFA to take a “remain and reset” stance in relation to the Instruments rather than “remove and replace”?
- Will a post-NCP Communion take the GSFA more seriously if it remains engaged and its churches continue to be the main areas of growth while Western churches continue to decline?

### *3.2.4. Conclusion: GSFA & The NCP*

It could be that these two approaches can sit together as effectively two levels of communion among Anglicans (possibly a reconfiguration of the two levels quoted above from Archbishop Rowan on the Anglican Covenant back in 2006?):

- 1) the “wider” historic member churches, now self-acknowledged in NCP as quasi-ecumenical Instruments who seek but do not share catholic and apostolic faith and order and
- 2) the “deeper” historic vision of communion life on the basis of shared faith and order, now only able to draw together a subset of those historic churches (and newer Anglican churches) in a new structure offering a deeper degree of communion than that now offered by the historic Communion and its Instruments.

The continued engagement of (2) with (1) would need to be carefully considered and negotiated so as to enable it to have integrity and not be seen as legitimating those churches whose actions have led to the need to “reset” the Communion. It could, however, result in continued partnership and mutual support across the breadth of global Anglicanism. The GSFA could become a preserving or even transforming influence on the wider body, and on the internal lives of non-GSFA provinces in that body, in the service of deeper communion in the truth. It was, perhaps, in large part a concern that this might be the trajectory that GSFA is on that led to the recent events in GAFCON [discussed in the first part of this article](#).

### **3.3. *GAFCON and GAC – rejecting and replacing***

#### *3.3.1. GAFCON/GAC and the 4 disagreements*

In relation to the 4 areas of disagreement and the recent history, the distinctive elements of the position of GAFCON, historically and especially now in the light of the [October 2025 Martyrs Day Statement](#) and [Abuja Affirmation](#), may be sketched along the following lines:

- The greater plurality of theologies present in the Communion is a sign of its failure as this development represents a departure from historic Anglican faith rooted in Scripture and the formularies and is often a sign of conformity to contemporary Western culture. Those embracing false teaching on sexuality are therefore not true Anglicans and need to repent.
- The Communion is no longer what it has historically claimed to be and the Instruments have failed to prevent this development or respond to it adequately. It has become, in practice, dominated by an unacceptable relativism which simply recognises diversity, a flaw also seen in the NCP. The true church is defined confessionally and GAFCON’s Jerusalem Declaration and Statement (2.1.3) provide such a contemporary confessional basis for authentic Anglicans.

- As the actual membership of the Communion is not going to change, the Anglican Communion is no longer what it has claimed to be and it is impossible to “walk together” as if it was. The Communion should have stuck by its initial insistence on “repentance and restraint” (2.1.1) and then taken action against those churches which did not repent. Given its failure to do so, it is deeply compromised and this is what led to the creation of GAFCON and now the Global Anglican Communion (GAC) because true Anglicans need to disengage from corrupt structures and work together.
- The Communion’s focus on Canterbury and financial dependence on northern (especially North American) provinces means there are both historic/colonial and current power imbalances. The Canterbury Instruments are incapable of addressing these adequately and these problems partly explain the Communion’s failure to respond as it should have done in recent decades. New non-Canterbury structures are therefore now needed, with people disengaging from the failed Canterbury Instruments.

There is clearly a great deal in common between GAFCON and GSFA in relation to

- their understanding of what has gone wrong and the need to challenge and differentiate from what is seen as false teaching,
- the history of past failed solutions in the Communion (2.1 & 2.2), and
- the need for a recognisable form of global Anglicanism that is distinct from the historic Communion and embodies the deeper communion and shared faith that no longer exists across all Communion churches.

However, [as part 1 explored](#) in more detail, alongside these shared understandings and commitments, there are also tensions and differences which recent events in GAFCON have particularly brought into prominence.

### *3.3.2. How to view “revisionist” churches?*

In relation to the first area of theology and faith, there is agreement about the need to reject false teaching which both GAFCON and GSFA see as having taken a hold in many provinces (including now the Church of England) and having not been properly addressed by the Communion through its Instruments.

Where there may be differences is over how to view those individuals and churches which have embraced new teaching. Are they to be viewed as fellow Christians who have fallen into error *or* as those who are no longer Christians? If it is the latter then the composition of the historic Anglican Communion is now to be viewed as more akin to an inter-faith rather than a Christian fellowship. If it is the former, however, then on the basis that “Christian unity is union with Christ, a gift from God that comes from trusting the words of Jesus which the Father gave him” (Abuja Affirmation) then questions arise such as

- What patterns of communion and partnership are still possible with these Christians in error?
- Whether the Anglican Communion can be viewed as more akin to an ecumenical rather than faithfully Anglican fellowship?
- Whether the proposed NCP redefinition of the Anglican Communion might be sufficient to signify that we are now dealing with a body that makes quite different claims about what membership in it entails vis-à-vis other member churches than throughout GAFCON's life so far?
- Whether how to relate to the Instruments and other historic Anglican churches might now be considered along the lines of other ecumenical partnerships?

### 3.3.3. *Confessional Church vs Institutional Church?*

Overlapping between that first theological area of disagreement and the *second* area of disagreement over ecclesiology and order we find GAFCON in the Abuja Affirmation apparently working with a strong binary either/or categorisation of confessional and institutional understandings of the church:

[The Canterbury Instruments of Communion] seek to hold together a confused communion of institutional co-existence, based on the fiction of “walking together” with those who are walking away from the truth of the gospel and the teaching of Jesus.

True communion is confessional, rather than defined by a shared history or institutional structures....there is, and will continue to be, an institution that calls itself the Anglican Communion, which defines communion on an institutional basis. This body has recognised that its current institutional rules have failed to maintain genuine communion and is currently exploring the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals to change its institutional rules. But these proposals are based on a commitment to “walk together to the maximum possible degree” despite fundamental disagreement on the Bible's teaching. This cannot lead to true communion. There are not two Communion, but two incompatible definitions of communion – one confessional, the other institutional.

This appears to suggest a separation and even opposition between faith and order rather than recognising the need for both and for careful consideration of how the two relate properly to each other and how agreement (or not) in matters of faith shapes the forms of church order that are possible.

The reality is, of course, that all the churches in GAFCON are also “institutional” with church order and bishops. They also, in contrast to GAFCON or the Anglican Communion, have their own structures of church law. And GAFCON itself of course

in the same Abuja Affirmation re-ordered its own institutional life by disbanding a Council of Primates and instituting a Global Anglican Council. Although the legal basis of these arrangements remains far from clear [their practical effects are now becoming more public](#) with [an announcement on 27<sup>th</sup> March](#) and [an interview with the General Secretary](#). These include a significant reduction in the number of Primates now aligned with GAFCON/GCA (4 not the previous 9 historic Communion provinces and 3 new Anglican provinces), an expanded 15-member Council also including 5 bishops or Archbishops (Sydney and 4 in new provinces) as regional advisors and 3 guarantors (Archbishop Akinola, former Nigerian Primate and two lay people from ACNA and Nigeria). It is still the case that all members are men.

The negative rhetoric towards “institutional church” is not simply a theoretical issue but can have significant practical implications.

Firstly, GSFA’s covenant as we saw purposefully includes both faith and order, both doctrinal foundations and relational commitments. GAFCON, despite having institutions, has not had such clear relational commitments or even constitutional structures (again unlike the GSFA). It is this failure that may explain how recent developments appear to have happened under the name of GAFCON with little or no transparency about processes and without the support of a significant number of those in GAFCON leadership.

Secondly, with a supposedly purely confessional definition of the church attempts are often made to bring in new requirements over and above any agreed confession. This of course creates problems when there is no recognised due institutional process and order to do this. This happened, to a certain extent [in 2018 when GAFCON sought \(not wholly successfully\) to institute a moratorium against woman bishops](#) although it had been widely understood that this was one of the questions that was included within para 12 of the Jerusalem Declaration that said “We celebrate the God-given diversity among us which enriches our global fellowship, and we acknowledge freedom in secondary matters”. Now, in relation to leadership, GAFCON has decided that it is no longer simply a confessional movement but that there are new requirements concerning *institutional* matters:

Leadership in the Global Anglican Communion requires a principled disengagement from the Canterbury Instruments. Leaders who hold office in the Global Anglican Communion must not attend future Primates’ Meetings called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, nor attend the Lambeth Conference, nor attend ACC meetings or participate in Commissions of the ACC, nor personally approve financial contributions to the ACC...Office holders in the Global Anglican Communion who continue to participate in any Canterbury Instruments will not be able to continue in this role.

#### 3.3.4. *Principled Disengagement?*

The new requirement of “principled disengagement” that has been introduced for GAFCON leaders highlights another key area of debate within and perhaps largely between GSFA and GAFCON: the degree to which its members need to separate themselves off clearly from ecclesial structures which have introduced or tolerated false teaching. This, too, has in the past been understood to be a place where GAFCON said it would “acknowledge freedom in secondary matters”. While it was agreed (Jerusalem Declaration, para 13) that, “We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed. We pray for them and call on them to repent and return to the Lord” nothing was said about what such rejection meant in practice nor about what forms of relationship were and were not permissible. This has now changed with appeals being made to biblical authority for this new requirement of “principled disengagement” on the part of GAFCON leaders:

A full and public disengagement from these structures is necessary. The clear and consistent teaching of the New Testament is that those who seek to lead the church astray must not be tolerated and Christians must refuse to have fellowship with those who promote false teaching (Romans 16:17; 2 John 10-11; Revelation 2:20).

Continued participation in these Canterbury-led meetings gives credence to the lie that it is possible to “walk together despite deep disagreement” with those who have abandoned biblical teaching. A separation from the Canterbury Instruments is necessary to demonstrate that such teaching is not of secondary importance. The warning of the prophet Amos rings true: “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

Whether or not one agrees with this stance it appears here to be clear and principled. However, other parts of the Abuja Affirmation then muddy the waters considerably. Alongside these comments it is noted that the new requirements are set up so as to enable “a Gafcon Branch chair in a mixed province to participate in Global Anglican Communion leadership” thus enabling people in Sydney diocese to continue to be involved. A little later in the statement this is explained in these terms, reaffirming the past understanding of articles 12 and 13 of the Jerusalem Declaration:

Gafcon has always acknowledged that it is a matter of conscience, when rejecting the authority of revisionist leaders, as to whether one remains or not in a compromised ecclesial structure. We stand, for example, with those who remain within the Church of England who assent to the Jerusalem Declaration, who seek to remain as a faithful witness within the Church of England structures. And we stand with those who have joined Gafcon-authenticated jurisdictions, such as The Anglican Network in Europe, who are a faithful witness in the UK and Europe.

There appears to be no awareness as to the deep tension, bordering on incoherence, in holding together these two stances: *Why in the looser, non-legal Communion structures which privilege provincial autonomy is “principled disengagement” now required in faithfulness to Scripture but in the tighter provincial structures that are “revisionist or mixed” which have binding legal structures and shared finances “it is a matter of conscience...as to whether one remains or not in a compromised ecclesial structure”?*

It would seem to most observers that “continued participation” in synods and colleges of bishops within a “revisionist or mixed” province such as the Church of England or the Church of Ireland or Australia, risks to a much greater extent giving “credence to the lie that it is possible to ‘walk together despite deep disagreement’ with those who have abandoned biblical teaching” than attending the ACC or Primates Meetings or Lambeth Conferences (whose decisions are not binding on any members) whilst clearly rejecting the practices of other provinces in attendance.

Why then is attending the latter now unacceptable compromise but the former able to be accepted as principled engagement? The only possible (but not particularly plausible) explanation I can see is that—without explaining or justifying such a claim—the GAFCON/GAC leaders have decided that

- (1) they believe (a) refusing to attend meetings where “revisionist or mixed” provinces are fully involved is the one and only means with integrity to the end of principled differentiation within the Communion and (b) that the GAC now clearly embodies the historic Communion and the Canterbury Instruments do not (“The Global Anglican Communion is not a new Communion, but the historic Anglican Communion reordered from within”) but
- (2) they believe (a) *both* continued engagement in specific “revisionist or mixed” provinces (eg Sydney in Australia, the CEEC and Alliance in CofE) *and* leaving such provinces (eg Diocese of the Southern Cross, Anglican Network in Europe) are principled means to the end of principled differentiation and reordering that have integrity and (b) that such “revisionist or mixed” provinces have not clearly been replaced as the authentic Anglican churches by those who have left them and been recognised by GAFCON.

But if (2) is the case then why is attending international meetings with representatives of such “revisionist or mixed” provinces now suddenly a red line?

This tension is even sharper should the ACC this summer accept the redefinition of the Anglican Communion proposed in the NCP and noted above: why when the already looser-than-provincial bonds are recognised to now be even looser (such that there is no longer any claim to there being full communion in apostolic faith)

should a policy of “principled disengagement” suddenly become a new and enforced requirement for participation in GAFCON/GCA leadership?

### 3.3.5 Conclusion: GAFCON/GCA

GAFCON’s [claim](#) is that

There are not two Communion...The Global Anglican Communion is a return to this historic sense of the Anglican Communion... True communion is a voluntary fellowship which at its heart is neither synodical nor legal. The Global Anglican Communion is neither a breakaway Communion nor an alternative Communion. The Jerusalem Statement clearly says that “We cherish our Anglican heritage and the Anglican Communion and have no intention of departing from it”. What has occurred instead is a shift of the stewardship of the Anglican Communion from the Canterbury Instruments to the Global Anglican Communion. We are returning the Anglican Communion to its roots. The Global Anglican Communion is not a new Communion, but the historic Anglican Communion reordered from within.

This appears to deny that they have embraced what I have described as a “reject and replace” approach. However, some of the claims made in the paragraph above from the Abuja Affirmation require considerably more historical and theological justification than has yet been provided and (as discussed in 3.3.4) the logic of the different stances in relation to engagement with mixed ecclesial bodies needs much more explanation. For many the new step does not look like the principled stance it claims to be but at best a politically pragmatic judgment and at worst a divisive power-play. By adding a requirement that GAFCON leaders retreat from the Communion Instruments and by announcing the creation of The Global Anglican Communion—it remains to be seen whether GAFCON totally rebrands now as GAC—it is hard not to see “reject and replace” as an accurate description of what is now being proposed.

## 4. Conclusion

Archbishop Rowan Williams was right in 2006 that “There is no way in which the Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment”. Twenty years on it is now necessary to acknowledge that what once constituted the Anglican Communion is no longer to be found in *any* existing pattern of relationships among Anglicans across the world. The reality is that there is a spectrum in which there are (at least) 5 distinguishable groups of provinces that can lay the claim to being “Anglican” in some sense:

1. Historic provinces which have to varying degrees become “revisionist” in relation to sexuality ranging from those accepting same-sex marriage (eg TEC and Scotland) through those currently having services of blessing for same-sex couples (eg Wales) to the CofE with its Prayers of Love and Faith.

2. Historic provinces that have not embraced such developments and remain committed to Lambeth I.10 and are not clearly seeking differentiation from those within Group 1 within the life of the Communion (various provinces including some of the broader historic Global South).
3. Historic provinces that are seeking differentiation from those within Group 1 within the life of the Communion but seeking to remain engaged with integrity with Group 2 and, where possible, Group 1 (this would be broadly the current GSFA covenant stance).
4. Historic provinces that have differentiated by disengagement and are now becoming part of GAFCON/GAC in which Group 3 provinces can be members but not now leaders (Nigeria, Uganda and Rwanda and, surprisingly, as it only joined the historic Communion as a distinct province in 2018, Chile).
5. Anglican provinces that have never been part of the historic Communion structures and show no signs of wishing to enter them (eg ACNA, the new province in Brazil, REACH)

Although it is hard to work out the numbers, even of churches let alone worshipping Anglicans, in each of these 5 groups, in such circumstances a strong case can be made, (especially in the light of the history and 3 visions currently on offer discussed above) that there is little value in fighting over the “Anglican Communion” brand name. It would be far better to abandon crude in/out binaries in relation to ecclesial communion among Anglicans and to recognise that within and across all these 5 groupings there are varying *degrees* of ecclesial communion. Serious consideration as to how, across them, the highest degrees of communion can continue to be nurtured and even take shape institutionally is the real challenge as is how each of these share in the wider building of ecumenical relationships.

The historic Instruments will likely continue to successfully gather together more provinces (across groups 1-3) than any other structure but those so gathered may well in future represent a much diminished, and declining, proportion of those globally who identify as Anglicans. What those gathered by the Instruments now have in common is also significantly reduced in terms of shared faith and order as the NCP recognise. There is however much that is still held in common and such gatherings, if honest about their limitations, can continue to be of value for those attending and for the wider church and world. That is why the NCP are such an important and potentially significant development.

What about the vision of life in communion with a shared faith and order which the historic Instruments previously developed and sought to articulate and to (unsuccessfully) uphold in the Windsor Report and the Anglican Communion Covenant? This is a vision which the Instruments no longer embodies in the way that they did in the past. That vision—and the vision of such communion life with non-Anglicans as well—remains, however, the great goal within the NCP. It also

continues to shape the development of other ecclesial networks within the Anglican scene. Elements of this vision are now to be discerned taking shape in different forms in both GSFA (currently embracing groups 3-5 and in its non-covenantal form some within group 2) and GAFCON/GAC (groups 4 and 5). What is more, as the Abuja Affirmation witnesses, those in groups 4 and 5 also recognise that there are Anglicans within even group 1 with whom they are happy to remain in full communion.

To pick up those words of Archbishop Rowan, “Where we are now”, whether we are “liberal” or “conservative” Anglicans, clearly “doesn’t correspond with” our “historic identity”. We are indeed in new and uncharted waters for us but thankfully God is the God who at the beginning hovered over the waters of a dark, formless and empty earth and brought forth light and order and, as we prepare to celebrate, the God who raised the broken body of his crucified Messiah from the dead into newness of life.