

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie

**Band:** 96 (2006)

**Heft:** [4]: Towards further convergence : Anglican and Old Catholic ecclesiologies

**Artikel:** Anglican and Old Catholic ecclesiology, both local and universal, in light of the Windsor Report

**Autor:** Wright, J. Robert

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-405021>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 21.03.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

---

# Anglican and Old Catholic Ecclesiology, both Local and Universal, in Light of the Windsor Report

*J. Robert Wright*

## 1. Introduction

There are many different schools of thought as well as national and regional understandings that contribute to the global tradition of Anglican ecclesiology,<sup>1</sup> and there is also the question as to whether a mere description of a dozen or so different writers would suffice without a discussion of any key documents of an official sort. In addition and more importantly, since this essay is prepared for the international Anglican-Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, one must also underline the need for a comparative study of ecclesiology in both these church-traditions side-by-side, a study that might well merit a book on its own.<sup>2</sup>

Anglicans have been rather slow to appreciate the importance of ecclesiology as a subject of study. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, an obvious reference to which one might turn for information, in its current, third edition (1997) still defines 'ecclesiology' as 'the science of the building and decoration of churches'! But Anglican interest in ecclesiology, as doctrine or theology about the church itself, has been greatly accelerated in the last few years, prompted especially by disagreements over sexuality. Probably the most prominent and widely discussed official document in Anglican ecclesiology today, which is a document that purports to be about ecclesiology even though it grows out of the current crisis over sexuality, is the Windsor Report (hereafter usually, WR), pre-

---

<sup>1</sup> For an introduction, see J. Robert Wright, 'Prolegomena to a Study of Anglican Ecclesiology', in: Donald S. Armentrout (ed.), *This Sacred History: Anglican Reflections for John Booty* (Cambridge MA: Cowley Publications, 1990), pp. 243–256.

<sup>2</sup> For a beginning, but one that did not address directly the question of comparative ecclesiology, see J. Robert Wright, 'Anglican and Old Catholic Theology Compared', in: Gordon Huelin (ed.), *Old Catholics and Anglicans 1931–1981* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 125–140. For background on Anglican relationships with the Old Catholic churches from an ecclesiological perspective, see William A. Norgren, 'The Concordat Relationships', in: J. Robert Wright (ed.), *A Communion of Communion: One Eucharistic Fellowship* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 184–211.

pared by the Lambeth Commission on Communion.<sup>3</sup> Given the potentially divisive nature of these debates themselves, the Commission was asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to address the question of how the Anglican Communion could continue to live and function with churchly identity in such fissiparous conditions, and thus the Windsor Report is immediately relevant to any discussion of Anglican ecclesiology today.

The subject assigned to this paper for this conference is the tension or polarity that exists between the church as local and the church as universal, especially as it may relate to similarities and possible convergences between Anglicans and Old Catholics who still live together in a relationship of intercommunion or full communion that has lasted some seventy-five years. It will be the thesis of this essay that, commendable as the Windsor Report is in many ways, its treatment of two important international ecumenical dialogues of the Anglican Communion, each of which sheds light on the tension between 'local' and 'universal', is unfortunately inadequate, and that some deeper understanding of these issues may possibly come from looking at one insight and one difficulty that are present in Old Catholic ecclesiological writing.

Let us first have a look at Windsor itself, 1) where I think the authority of scripture and that of the Pope are contrasted rather misleadingly in a way that plays off the one against the other rather than illustrating the considerable range of agreement that ecumenical dialogue has produced, and 2) where I think inadequate attention has been given to the extensive diversity in organization and non-essential teaching that allows the various Orthodox churches to co-exist without any one centralized authority. Once these problems in Windsor, which in one way are manifestations of the tension between the local and the universal, have been assessed, I shall then touch upon one insight and one difficulty in which I think the ecclesiological legacy of Old Catholicism, from churches with whom we are in full communion, may shed some light.

In a paper I wrote by invitation for the first Fellows Forum sponsored by the Episcopal Church Foundation, entitled 'Tradition and Innovation in Anglicanism' and published in the fall of 2000,<sup>4</sup> I concluded with the

---

<sup>3</sup> The Lambeth Commission on Communion (ed.), *The Windsor Report* (Harrisburg PA, London: Morehouse Publishing, 2004), 93 pages.

<sup>4</sup> J. Robert Wright, 'Tradition and Innovation in Anglicanism: Is Tradition Always the Enemy of Innovation? Some Historical and Ecumenical Examples', *Anglican Theological Review* 82 (2000), pp 765–778, at pp. 777–778.

question, 'Who decides whether some proposed development in doctrine is really an innovation that so contradicts the tradition that it can not be tolerated?' My thought continued: 'In the Anglican Communion we have been asking these sorts of questions in recent years with increasing frequency and urgency, especially since the last Lambeth Conference but even before. In spite of such evolving developments as the Anglican Consultative Council and the Meetings of the Primates, there are still no effective means for mutual consultation that go so far as to produce common and agreed decision making that can facilitate the reception, or rejection, of proposed innovations that may be good or may not be. My view, my conclusion, is that we need a way to do this.' And then I summarized the way in which the Virginia Report,<sup>5</sup> prepared for the 1998 Lambeth Conference, put the question to us: can we go on as a world Communion, with morally authoritative, but not juridically binding decision making structures at the international level? And the same question was also put to Anglicans by no less an authority than Archbishop Robert Runcie.

These questions have been pressed to the top of the Anglican agenda by events of more recent years, and I believe that the Windsor Report, at long last, does present an indication (albeit tentative and still not perfect) of the direction that the Anglican Communion wishes to move in such matters. The present essay will not attempt to chronicle or interpret the generally negative response that the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson has received at the official level from a significant number of the Episcopal Church's ecumenical partners and elsewhere, a subject noted in Windsor (paras 28, 130) but too vast for treatment here. Instead, we shall focus upon two ecumenical frontiers that have been of particular interest to Anglicans for many years, namely the Roman and the Orthodox churches, and how these dialogues with these churches relate to the tension in ecclesiology between the local and the universal. It is regretfully my view that the Windsor Report does less than full justice to classical Anglican hopes for ecumenism in both of these directions.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 'The Virginia Report. The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission', in: *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* (Harrisburg PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), pp. 17–68.

## 2. The Roman Catholic Church

The first ecumenical frontier comes to the fore when one asks what the WR says about the Roman Catholic Church, especially as regards universal authority. Already the Virginia Report (5:20) in 1997 had posed to Anglicans the question: 'Is not universal authority a necessary corollary of universal communion?' The ARCIC (Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission) *Final Report* (1981) and subsequently ARCIC's *The Gift of Authority* (1999) have raised a similar question, and all of these have pointed, within limits, in the direction of a closer relationship to the universal authority of the Roman see. And yet one now reads in the WR (para. 42) the firm statement that 'The Anglican Communion does not have a Pope' (which is certainly true) but also in the same paragraph (which is entitled 'Authority') the contrast is asserted that 'The Anglican Communion has always declared that its supreme authority is scripture.'<sup>6</sup> To set the contrast this way, as though for 'us' the authority is the Bible and for 'them' the authority is the Pope, is further reinforced in Windsor para. 70 where it is stated that in the Roman Catholic Church 'the Pontiff, with the support of the Curia, enjoys "supreme, full, immediate and universal ordinary power", which he can always freely exercise,' whereas (again quoting Windsor para. 70) 'The Anglican way, theological, symbolic and practical, is diffused among the different aspects of the life of the Communion precisely in such a way as to give supreme authority, in the sense outlined above, to scripture as the locus and means of God's word, energising the Church for its mission and sustaining it in its unity.'

To me, in these two paragraphs (42 and 70), the Windsor Report is contrasting two very different kinds of authority, a human person (the Pope) and a written book (the Bible), and it revives the old and stereotypical view of the Reformation as having been a struggle between Pope and Bible with local churches lined up on one side or the other. There is little or no acknowledgement that in the Roman Church today there is a marked increase of reliance upon God's written word and a much greater tendency to seek God's

---

<sup>6</sup> This assertion will be critically examined later in this essay. See further J. Robert Wright, 'The "Official Position" of the Episcopal Church on the Authority of Scripture', *Anglican Theological Review* 74 (1992), pp. 348–361 and 478–489; published in revised form in: Frederick H. Borsch (ed.), *The Bible's Authority in Today's Church* (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), pp. 43–70.

will by prayerful study of scripture, whereas in the Anglican Communion (for better or for worse) there has been an increased tendency to regard the Archbishop of Canterbury as a personal and living focus of Anglican unity especially in some parts of the third world, and I do not dissent, for in the words of Windsor he is now described as being the 'first' of our Anglican Instruments of Unity. And likewise at the universal level, the Pope is coming to be similarly regarded in Anglican ecumenical dialogue, as the ARCIC *Final Report* remarks at one crucial turning point (end of para. 23, page 64): 'It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see.' The point is reinforced when in an Elucidation in the same Report (page 76) we read: 'According to Christian doctrine the unity in truth of the Christian community demands visible expression. We agree that such visible expression is the will of God and that the maintenance of visible unity at the universal level includes the *episcopate* of a universal primate. This is a doctrinal statement.'

For myself, I do not object to such developments in Anglican ecclesiology, but I do think it unfortunate that Windsor can be read as saying that for Anglicans scripture is virtually the only textbook for doctrine whereas Roman Catholics must still depend upon an infallible Pope and Anglicans should want none of it. Certainly Anglicans might not particularly welcome the recent papacy just as it stands, as a common and agreed way of decision making for the universal church, but neither can the text of scripture (on its own and with no interpretation) be seen as a viable candidate for that function. Rather, scripture and universal ecclesial authority are both necessary, and the Anglican-Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue has made important suggestions toward that end which are hardly acknowledged in the Windsor Report. Surely both churches have by now moved far enough along the ecumenical journey not to accuse the other of being seriously flawed because of some deficiency that is already in process of correction. Surely the Roman Church would claim that the symbolic placement of scripture in the ritual of Vatican Council II or in the funeral of Pope John Paul II was every bit as important as the Anglican affirmation that 'scripture takes first place' (as the WR para. 53 reads the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral) and that for the Anglican tradition bishops especially are the 'teachers of scripture' (para. 58). Surely both churches can agree that scripture is held as a 'universal authority' by both of them, but that a personal living focus of leadership is also desirable in both for the sake of 'energising the Church for its mission and sustaining it in its unity' (WR para. 70). To contrast the supreme authority of scripture

with the supreme pontiff in Rome, I believe, is to confuse two quite different variables, when in fact each church is trying in this ecumenical age to accord some kind of authority to each phenomenon on its own terms. Thus, there could well be some clarification in Windsor, lest its paragraphs 42 and 70 be read as retreating from the Anglican position of openness toward a universal authority of papal leadership that was affirmed in the *ARCIC Final Report* and in *The Gift of Authority*, or as retreating from the process toward full communion that was conceived by Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey in their joint declaration of 1966. It is all the more incongruous to find the WR later arguing for an ‘enhanced dependence on the see of Canterbury’ (para. 110), while at the same time the other Anglican primates were concerned lest this might detract from their own ‘proper provincial autonomy’!

I also note, finally, the assertion in Windsor that scripture is the ‘central fact of unity within the Anglican Communion’ (para. 63), and one wonders whether this too was intended as a contrast to the Roman Catholic Church? Or is there some uniquely superior way in which this scriptural principle of unity is thought by Windsor to be more true for Anglicans than for other churches? Is this the beginning of a process to declare scripture, by itself, another ‘Instrument of Unity’? Or is this assertion being made for the sake of those parts of the Anglican globe where there is a more exclusive allegiance, even a fundamentalistic allegiance, to ‘scriptural primacy’ than in England or the USA or certain other provinces? Anglicans may well believe, with Windsor, that scripture is the central fact of their unity, but why did Windsor not also repeat, from the *ARCIC Final Report* (pages 64 and 76), that unity in truth demands visible expression in the *episcopo* of a universal primate?

Presumably the claim of the Windsor Report that ‘The Anglican Communion has always declared that its supreme authority is scripture’ (para. 42) is thought to be founded upon the statement of article 6 of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion that ‘Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation’ as well as upon the question asked in the Ordinal of the English Prayer Book of 1662 of those chosen to be Bishops, ‘Are you persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all Doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?’ Most loyal Anglicans would probably acknowledge these phrases as part of our historic Reformation heritage, but when they are abbreviated and summarized in order to make the claim just quoted from WR 42, presumably in order to make the contrast that Windsor makes with the pa-

pany, they run us directly into potential conflict with the Orthodox way of understanding, which will be the subject of the next section of this essay. This problem was perceptively foreseen some time ago by the eminent Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky: 'We cannot assert that Scripture is self-sufficient; and this not because it is incomplete, or inexact, or has any defects, but because Scripture in its very essence does not lay claim to self-sufficiency. ... The liberty of the Church is shackled by an abstract biblical standard for the sake of setting free individual consciousness from the spiritual demands enforced by the experience of the Church. This is a denial of catholicity, a destruction of catholic consciousness; this is the sin of the Reformation. Dean Inge neatly says of the Reformers: "their creed has been described as a return to the Gospel in the Spirit of the Koran." If we declare Scripture to be self-sufficient, we only expose it to subjective, arbitrary interpretation, thus cutting it away from its sacred source. Scripture is given to us in tradition.'<sup>7</sup>

### **3. The Orthodox Churches**

If it be the case that the WR drives an unnecessary split between papacy and scripture in not doing justice to the agreed results of the Anglican Communion's international ecumenical dialogues with the Church of Rome, so also I believe that the WR, which itself purports to be about ecclesiology, could further benefit from attention to the so-called '*communio* ecclesiology', or 'Eucharistic ecclesiology', that has been the subject of much of the international Anglican dialogue with the churches of the Orthodox East. This can be seen especially in the agreed document known as the Dublin Statement (1984).<sup>8</sup> Collectively, the Orthodox churches at present are composed of various groupings, in which the special place of honor is accorded to the four ancient autocephalous or self-governing patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem), followed by eleven other autocephalous churches also designated by geographical place names, followed by another group of churches that are described as autonomous but not autocephalous, as well as a few others.

---

<sup>7</sup> Georges Florovsky, 'The Catholicity of the Church', in: *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Collected Works 1 (Belmont MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 37–55, at p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

Timothy Ware described all these churches and their organization in the first edition of his famous paperback *The Orthodox Church* as a family of self-governing churches, 'held together, not by a centralized organization, not by a single prelate wielding absolute power over the whole body, but by the double bond of unity in the faith and communion in the sacraments'.<sup>9</sup> 'Each church', Timothy Ware went on to assert, 'while independent, is in full agreement with the rest on all matters of doctrine, and between them all there is full sacramental communion.' And the Ecumenical Patriarch (of Constantinople), the Orthodox agree, holds a position of special honor and is understood to coordinate the other churches but does not have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of other churches. Anglican affinity for this type of ecclesiastical organization is boldly affirmed in reports of previous Lambeth Conferences, that of 1948 remarking that 'In 1930 the Report of the Lambeth Conference said that there are two types of ecclesiastical organization prevailing today: "that of centralized government and that of regional autonomy."' And the 1930 Report continued: 'The Anglican Communion belongs to the second type, a system it shares with the Orthodox Churches of the East.'<sup>10</sup> Agreement of Anglicans with this sort of Eucharistic ecclesiology held by the Eastern churches finds one of its fullest expressions in para. 13 of Dublin, where we read: 'At each local Eucharist, celebrated within the catholic Church, Christ is present in his wholeness, and so each local celebration actualizes and gives visible expression to the Church's catholicity. Communion in the Eucharist is also the outward manifestation of the common faith and the Christian love which binds together all the local churches in the one catholic Church. Their communion is likewise expressed in the constant contact and communication between the bishops and members of different local churches through meetings in council, exchange of letters, mutual visits, and prayer for each other.'

Such a paradigm for ecclesiology derives from the patristic period of the early church and has its theological model in the Greek term *perichoresis* which was a dance among three or more equals in mutual relationship, used by St. John of Damascus to explain the relationship of the persons

---

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p 15; no change in subsequent editions through 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Lambeth 1948, part II, p. 82, quoting Lambeth 1930, p. 153 (cf. p. 54, resolution 48).

of the Trinity when he said: 'They are made one, not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other without any coalescence or commingling.'<sup>11</sup> Beginning with a Trinitarian paradigm such as this, in which the fullness of the Triune God dwells in each person of the Trinity, the Russian Orthodox theologian Nicholas Afanassieff and others have reasoned that the unity and fullness of the whole church likewise belongs to each local church and dwells especially within its Eucharistic celebration rather than to one universal superchurch. Thus, he says, 'the local church is autonomous and independent, because the Church of God in Christ indwells it in perfect fullness',<sup>12</sup> and from this Orthodox perspective it seems assumed (although not proven) that there is full agreement on every major point of doctrine.

A modern Western church historian, accustomed to verification procedures not so common in the Orthodox East, might well want to question or at least to test such assertions or truth-claims by Orthodox apologists such as Ware and Afanassieff as to whether they constitute *full* agreement on *every major point*, but the fact remains that the Orthodox churches of the East do present before the Christian world an appealing picture of unity-in-communion that depends much less, rather than more, upon any central and 'enhanced' role for one leader than that which is advocated for the Archbishop of Canterbury in WR paras 105–110. Rather than drawing upon the agreement recorded in Dublin that 'the Anglican Communion has developed on the Orthodox rather than the Roman Catholic pattern as a fellowship of self-governing national or regional Churches' (Dublin, para. 28), in which 'the bishop who has seniority does not have the right to intervene arbitrarily in the affairs of a diocese other than his own' (Dublin, para. 25), the 'enhanced' role for Canterbury depicted in the Windsor Report sees his office as the 'central focus of both unity and mission within the Communion', and as being the office that 'articulate[s] the mind of the Communion especially in areas of controversy' (Windsor, para. 109).

---

<sup>11</sup> John of Damascus, 'An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith', translated by S.D.F. Salmond, book 1, chapter 8, in: *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 9 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; Oxford and London: Parker, 1899), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Afanassieff, 'The Church Which Presides in Love', in: John Meyendorff (ed.), *The Primacy of Peter* (London: Faith Press, 1963; reprint Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), pp. 108–110, at p. 109.

Given the long history of ecclesiological agreement in Anglican-Orthodox dialogue (as can be seen in Dublin, para. 13), it does seem somewhat surprising that the WR (whose purpose was supposed to be to explore the range of ecclesiological models that could be available for the current crisis) has made only a passing gesture to ‘the orthodox polity of “autocephaly”’ (para. 75, the word ‘orthodox’ neither capitalized nor explained) and has not developed a paradigm or model analogous to the autocephalous Orthodox patriarchates of the East as an alternative to the much more centralized pyramid topped by Canterbury that it has offered in Windsor paras 109–110 and expanded in the final articles of its draft Anglican Covenant, whose article 27 proposes that the Archbishop of Canterbury shall decide ‘all questions of interpretation’ and that his decisions ‘shall be regarded as authoritative in the Communion’.<sup>13</sup> This is not the paradigm of Eucharistic ecclesiology, no matter how desirable or necessary this solution may be for the Anglican Communion at present. The Orthodox model of *communio* or Eucharistic ecclesiology does seem to secure a more satisfactory balance between the church as local and the church as universal, and allows for more diversity in non-essentials without an overarching control from the top.

One can not help but suspect that the pressing influence of the current Roman Catholic model and the understandable demands for someone to take authority in the Anglican Communion and tell the Roman Catholic Church what Anglicans believe and tell the North Americans where they must stop, may have weighed heavily upon the controlling Anglican leaders in Britain and therefore upon the Lambeth Commission who produced the Windsor Report, no matter whatever leanings towards the Orthodox have been observed in the present incumbent of the see of Canterbury. I myself see problems in the Orthodox model, but if the Lambeth Commission had wanted to lay out more than one ecclesiological alternative for the Anglican Communion to consider in its present quandaries, and if it wanted to make more room for local independence, local decision-making, and local self-governance, it seems curious that more was not made of Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology in the Windsor Report itself. The ‘universal authority’ in a ‘visibly united church’ that the Virginia Report longed for (5:20) and that Windsor seems to advise, is now less of an ideal, less appealing, to many North American Anglicans at least in view of the present situation.

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. ‘Proposal for the Anglican Covenant’, in: *Windsor Report*, pp. 65–71.

One would not want to say that the Eastern Orthodox churches have chosen to 'walk alone' or apart from each other, but in them there does seem to be less than the full visible unity and less than the complete agreement that would seem to be demanded by Windsor which is following more of a Roman Catholic and universalist model. For the Orthodox, the 'highest degree of communion possible' (to use the term of Lambeth 1988) may not mean agreement on every significant point, whatever they may claim. Nor does it seem necessary for Anglicans all to agree on such things as women bishops, allegiance to every one of the Thirty-Nine Articles, monogamy rather than polygamy, direct ordination to the priesthood, invariability of ordination by not just bishops but by bishops in the historic succession, and other theoretically 'bearable anomalies' (Lambeth 1998). Nonetheless, at least a case can be made for Dublin's assertion that both Anglicans and Orthodox share a pattern of being 'self-governing national or regional Churches' in the sense of making greater room for local (national or regional) churches, and thus in the view of many Anglicans the Orthodox tradition of Eucharistic or *communio* ecclesiology may well deserve more consideration than the Windsor Report has allowed.

#### **4. Old Catholic Perspectives in Convergence**

It has been the thesis of this essay that, commendable as the Windsor Report is in many ways, its treatment of two important international ecumenical dialogues of the Anglican Communion, with the Roman Church and with the Eastern Orthodox, each of which sheds light on the tension between 'local' and 'universal', is unfortunately inadequate, and that some deeper understanding of these issues may possibly come from looking at one insight and one difficulty that are present in Old Catholic ecclesiological writing. I think it was Archbishop Rinkel of Utrecht who emphasized that the church does not have to be uniform in one geographical location for it to be one and catholic, and that for a statement of faith the Nicene Creed was all that was necessary.<sup>14</sup> I believe that such a view, which allows much room for local self-governance and even local doctrinal diversity outside the borders of the Creed itself, is held by a good many other Old Catholic

---

<sup>14</sup> The recent doctrinal accords of the Church of Rome with many of the Oriental Orthodox churches without reaching agreement on the Chalcedonian definition of faith also comes to mind.

writers, such as Werner Küppers. I think it is also sustained in more recent times in such a theologian as Jan Visser who, as I believe he once told me, holds this view in fusion with a Trinitarian model of Eucharistic ecclesiology that goes back to John of Damascus and is echoed in much Orthodox thought and allows a great amount of autonomy and independence to local or national churches. This is the insight that I think Old Catholic ecclesiology brings, and which it shares with many Orthodox writers such as John Zizioulas. It remains for the Old Catholic participants of this conference to assess whether their tradition does indeed claim this insight.

The difficulty that such Old Catholic ecclesiology seems to bring along with itself, and which I hasten to add is shared by Anglicans as well, is the question I raised near the beginning of this paper: ‘Who decides whether some proposed development is really an innovation that so contradicts the tradition that it can not be tolerated?’ Writers of Eucharistic ecclesiology often seem to assert, as a general principle, that every local church is always the same everywhere and therefore holds the same essential doctrine.<sup>15</sup> But how can this be proven, how can a conclusion about catholic doctrine be reached, without some sort of universal ecclesiology to guide the process and make the decisions? Scripture can not give an answer on its own to which everyone will agree, and so from this perspective the universal primacy of the Roman see, such as ARCIC bespeaks, and even an enhanced regional primacy for Canterbury, such as Windsor advocates, may be the way forward. Otherwise, how could a communion of churches which lacks ‘bonds of communion’, or at least ‘instruments of unity’ which can actually bind the members, continue to be a communion at all?

I am left wondering, though, as to whether Old Catholic ecclesiologists today tend to go so far as to favor an ‘enhanced’ role of authority for the see of Utrecht, referring the major questions of interpretation and decision to that see, analogous to the ‘enhanced’ role that Windsor and its Covenant favors for the see of Canterbury? Have any serious Old Catholic writers gone so far as to publish their agreement with the kind of papal primacy

---

<sup>15</sup> I recall Professor Kurt Stalder asserting something like this over a late-night discussion at a pub in a conference some years ago that was a distant predecessor of this one, and this is certainly the thrust that one finds in the writing of Timothy Ware and other Orthodox authorities (cf. e.g. Kurt Stalder, ‘Die Einheit der Kirche in den Lokalkirchen’ in: *Die Wirklichkeit Christi erfahren. Ekklesiologische Untersuchungen und ihre Bedeutung für die Existenz von Kirche heute* [Zürich: Benziger, 1984], pp. 77–104 [UvA]).

that is projected in the ARCIC *Final Report*? Is perhaps one major reason why Old Catholic ‘mainstream’ ecclesiology of the last few decades has gravitated in an Orthodox rather than in a Roman direction, precisely because ‘the local’ seems more safely protected under the cover of Orthodox eucharistic ecclesiology? Is the official toleration, or even welcome, of unions of persons of the same sex any different in churches of the Utrecht Union, such as the Netherlands, than it is in the Anglican churches of North America? If the Old Catholic churches of the Utrecht Union are not just ecumenical dialogue partners but already stand in full communion with the entire Anglican Communion, then why is their situation not addressed within the Windsor Report? The debates over homosexuality do have a bearing upon ecclesiology, and the local stands in tension with the universal on many frontiers.<sup>16</sup>

### *Deutsche Zusammenfassung*

Ekklesiologie ist in der anglikanischen Welt verhältnismässig spät als eine theologische Disziplin erkannt worden. In den letzten Jahren wuchs, angestossen durch Differenzen in Fragen der Sexualität, welche zu internen Spannungen in der *Anglican Communion* führten, das Interesse an ekklesiologischen Reflexionen. Der am meisten diskutierte neuere Text, der ja auch beansprucht, ekklesiologische Überlegungen zu bieten, ist der *Windsor Report* (WR) von 2004. Er kann auch für die Frage herangezogen werden, in welchem Verhältnis lokale und universale Kirche zueinander stehen, und zwar im Blick auf zwei wichtige ökumenische Dialoge, welche die Anglikaner führen. Diese sind nämlich in der Frage, wo für den Zusammenhalt einer weltweiten Gemeinschaft die höchste Autorität in der Kirche zu finden ist, im WR nicht zureichend berücksichtigt worden.

Im WR (Nr. 42 und 70, vgl. auch 63) werden einerseits die Heilige Schrift und andererseits der Papst als zwei gleichsam alternative, auf derselben Ebene angesiedelte Grössen einander gegenübergestellt, in denen die Anglikaner bzw. die Römisch-Katholiken angeblich jeweils die höchste Autorität für das Leben der Kirche und ihre Entscheidungsfindungen sehen. Das entspricht weder der neuen Hinwendung zur Schrift in der römisch-katholischen Kirche noch anglikanischen Überlegungen, im Erzbischof von Canterbury einen Fokus der Einheit der *Anglican Communion* zu sehen; es entspricht auch nicht den differenzierten Ergebnissen des bisherigen anglikanisch-römisch-katholischen Dialogs (ARCIC) mit der Rede einer personalen Episkopē im Horizont der universalen Kirche. Liegt hier eine Verbeugung gegenüber

---

<sup>16</sup> An earlier and much shorter version of this essay, without reference to Old Catholic ecclesiology, appeared in the *Anglican Theological Review* 87 (2005), pp. 629–635.

einem tendenziell fundamentalistischen Schriftverständnis in bestimmten anglikanischen Provinzen vor?

Ähnliche kritische Rückfragen an den WR ergeben sich auch im Blick auf den Dialog mit den Orthodoxen. Dies betrifft nicht nur das eben erwähnte Schriftverständnis, sondern mehr noch das Modell einer universalen anglikanischen Kirchengemeinschaft, das im Blick auf die erwogene (künftige) Position des Erzbischofs deutlich wird (vgl. Nr. 105–110 sowie Art. 27 des angehängten *Anglican Covenant*). Dieses entspricht mehr einer von der (römisch-katholischen) Universalkirchen-Ekklesiologie her entworfenen und daher tendenziell zentralistischen Sicht des Verhältnisses von Lokalkirche und universaler Gemeinschaft von Lokalkirchen, als dies in den früheren anglikanischen und in gemeinsamen orthodox-anglikanischen Feststellungen (vgl. *The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984*, Nr. 13 und 28) der Fall war. Es ist schade, dass der WR nicht ein alternatives Modell des Verhältnisses zwischen lokalkirchlicher (d.h. nationalkirchlicher) Eigenständigkeit und verbindlicher universaler Kirchengemeinschaft auf der Grundlage einer eucharistisch zentrierten *Communio*-Ekklesiologie zur Diskussion stellt; dies würde jedenfalls in der jetzigen Situation vielen nordamerikanischen Anglikanern mehr zusagen.

Aus altkatholischen Äusserungen zum Thema der Gemeinschaft von eigenständig verwalteten Lokalkirchen scheint hervorzugehen, dass Unterschiede und daher Pluralität in der Lehre und in der kirchlichen Ordnung Raum haben, solange sie nicht die Substanz des Glaubenssymbols verletzen. Freilich ist auch die altkatholische – genau wie die anglikanische – Theologie mit der Frage konfrontiert: Wer entscheidet, ob eine Entwicklung (wie die Ordination von Frauen zum Presbyterat oder die Weihe und Segnung von in homosexueller Partnerschaft lebenden Getauften) in inakzeptabler Weise der christlichen Tradition widerspricht? Da die Bibel aus sich selbst dies nicht in einer für alle eindeutigen Weise beantworten kann, ist vielleicht die Anerkennung eines primatialen Bischofssitzes, dem angesichts strittiger Fragen, welche die Aufrechterhaltung der Gemeinschaft von Lokalkirchen gefährden, die Aufgabe verbindlicher Interpretation und Entscheidung übertragen wird, ein Schritt in die richtige Richtung. Haben sich altkatholische Theologen – im Blick auf den Erzbischof von Utrecht oder sonstwie – in diesem Sinn geäußert?