

Orientis Aura
Perspectives in Religious Studies

A Parting of Ways and the End of the Orchestra? Anglicanism After GAFCON in East and Southeast Asia

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Introduction

A new era for Anglicanism has been ushered in by the formal rejection of the (so-called) four ‘Instruments of Unity’, spurned by GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference), inaugurated at a council held in Jerusalem in 2008.¹ GAFCON represents millions of Anglicans, mainly concentrated in the developing world, with some estimates reckoning that their numbers constitute a comfortable majority of the Anglican Communion. On 17th October 2025, GAFCON announced their formal separation from the global Anglican Communion, and their refutation of its polity, claiming that the “the future had arrived”,² and also rejecting “the so-called Instruments of Communion, namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates Meeting”:

We declare that the Anglican Communion will be reordered, with only one foundation of communion, namely the Holy Bible, “translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church’s historic and consensual reading” (Jerusalem Declaration, Article II), which reflects Article VI of the 39 Articles of Religion...We cannot continue to have communion with those who

¹ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2025/24-october/news/world/gafcon-letter-declares-that-it-is-the-communion-now-minus-canterbury-and-all-related-instruments>

² See *Ready for Harvest*, ‘The Global Anglicanism Split in Two Today’, <https://youtu.be/IMxOLiS9DOo?si=8HbnqsZBZ5NsKoyX>

advocate the revisionist agenda, which has abandoned the inerrant word of God as the final authority...³

It is hard to immediately see what the implications of such a Declaration might be for the Anglican provinces of East and Southeast Asia. Some of the provinces are, by tradition and ethos, of high church persuasion (e.g., Korea, Japan). Others are more Protestant and Evangelical (e.g., Singapore). Hong Kong, and others in the region, are by tradition broad, liturgically ordered and accommodating in character. It would be hard to envisage any of these provinces moving towards GAFCON in the near future. So, although it is beyond the scope of this paper to make predictions, what follows in this paper is an examination of some of the attempts made in recent decades that have sought to maintain the unity of Anglicanism. In particular, we explore the four ‘Instruments of Unity’ and their fate, against a background of increasing tension and division across the Anglican Communion. We conclude with a note on what Anglicanism might be able to learn from the approach that China took towards the proliferation of and competition between Protestant churches in the postwar era.

Four Instruments of Unity

Since the latter third of the 19th century, Anglicans worldwide have described the framework for their unity, across an expanding global compass, in terms of a quadrilateral. First proposed by the American Episcopalian William Reed Huntington in 1870, the Lambeth Conference of 1888 formally adopted the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, comprising the scriptures, historic creeds, the two dominical sacraments (i.e., Baptism

³ <https://gafcon.org/communique-updates/the-future-has-arrived/> GAFCON’S Jerusalem Declaration, Article II, claims “to reflect Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion”. But Article VI says nothing about the scriptures being inerrant. Rather, it asserts that the scriptures “contain all things necessary to salvation so that whatsoever cannot be read therein, or proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” The churches of the Anglican Communion recognise the primacy of scripture in the formulation of doctrine, along with reason and tradition. Furthermore, there are many things in scripture that are not regarded as “requisite and necessary for salvation”. Traditionally, Anglicans have understood that some statements of scripture may be areas of disagreement. While there are things which are to be regarded as required beliefs, there are also things which may be regarded as “indifferent” with respect to salvation.

and Eucharist), and the historic episcopate (locally adapted). Huntington proposed the quadrilateral as a means and basis for God's blessing, whereby an eventual "home reunion" with the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches might become possible.

In the mindset of many Anglican thinkers, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral has been conflated with, or superseded by, the later Wesleyan Quadrilateral, a theological framework devised by Alfred Cook Outler for Methodists to guide their understanding of faith. Formally adopted by the American United Methodist Church in 1968, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral consists of four key elements: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. These elements were not necessarily seen as equal sources of authority, but rather as interconnected components that informed and shaped theological reflection. The Methodist Quadrilateral emphasises that the four elements are not mutually exclusive but rather work together to provide a holistic understanding of Christian faith. While scripture is the foundation, tradition, reason, and experience may all play a pivotal role in shaping and interpreting religious truth.

Over the course of the 20th century, mindful of the tensions that the Anglican Quadrilateral framework was being made to endure – liturgical reform (e.g., the 1928 *Prayer Book*), gender, sexuality, and subsidiarity (e.g., local or indigenous self-governing, etc) – the framework was augmented by four 'Instruments of Unity'. Two had existed since the latter third of the 19th century, namely the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lambeth Conferences (though we note that even the first Lambeth Conference attracted only two-thirds of the Bishops eligible to attend). To these two instruments were added the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and the Primate's Meeting in the final third of the 20th century.

At the dawn of the 21st century, these four 'Instruments of Communion' were still held to be able to frame, implement and express the unity of Anglicans worldwide. Naturally, the instruments do not have executive or legislative authority over the churches of the Communion,

but function as tools of communication and cooperation. Anglicanism has no *magisterium*, common liturgy, global Catechism or agreed theological syllabus for training its clergy. Anglicanism is not a dogmatic faith. The ‘Instruments of Unity’, were, therefore, a means for framing and containing diversity and maintaining unity.

But this all changed in October 2025, when GAFCON announced its rejection of the ‘Instruments’ and its formal separation. GAFCON represents millions of Anglicans, primarily in the developing world, and is estimated to be a majority of the Anglican Communion. On 17th October 2025, they formally separated from the global Anglican Communion and rejected the four ‘Instruments of Unity’: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conferences, the Anglican Consultative Council, and global meetings of the Anglican Primates.

With GAFCON’s departure, the Anglican Communion has officially fractured; countless members have made their unilateral declarations of independence. This development signifies a pivotal turning point in the long-standing battle for Anglican identity and authority, a struggle that has persisted since the 16th century and intensified with the ordination of women from the 1970s and the debates on sexuality from the 1990s onwards. The fragmentation will inevitably result in increased separatism within the Church of England, including new provinces for ‘confessing’ churches and new forms of alternative episcopal oversight. GAFCON has made it clear: the divides have already begun, and the future landscape of Anglicanism will be irrevocably altered.

What then, of the four ‘Instruments of Communion’ for those who remain? Can this framework maintain unity across the Anglican churches and provinces for those who opt to remain in communion with the See of Canterbury? As a reminder, the four ‘Instruments of Communion’ are, at present:

1. The Archbishop of Canterbury: spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion.

2. The Lambeth Conference: a once-per-decade meeting of Bishops from around the world to discuss local and global issues and responses.
3. The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC): a body composed of representatives from clergy and laity from member churches who develop policy and advise on the communion's global mission.
4. The Primate's Meeting: a convention of leaders from national churches convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury for consultation and prayer on ministry and global and local issues.

The recent *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals* (Advent 2024)⁴ publish-ed by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order, attempted to address the Anglican Communion's structure and leadership, particularly the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, in response to ongoing disagreements and divisions. There can be no doubt that such an intervention is necessary and timely. But they did not anticipate the GAFCON schism. Nonetheless, are the proposals workable? The IASCUFO proposals suggested broadening leadership responsibilities within the Communion's instruments, aiming for a more collaborative and equitable model. Specifically, the proposals recommended:

- *Revised Description of the Communion:*
A new way of describing the Anglican Communion, recognising its global nature and the shared heritage that binds its member churches.
- *Broadened Leadership of Instruments:*
Shifting from a primarily Canterbury-led structure to a more diverse and shared leadership model.
- *Rotating Presidency of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC):*
Proposing that the ACC presidency be rotated among the five regions of the Communion, elected from among the primates by the Primates' Meeting.
- *Sharing Leadership in Meetings:*
The Primates' Standing Committee should play a role in calling and

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convening both the Primates' Meeting and the Lambeth Conference, alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The proposals sought to address the current challenges and divisions within the Anglican Communion by fostering greater collaboration among the member churches. The proposals acknowledge the Archbishop of Canterbury's continuing pastoral and personal role, but suggest a wider sharing of responsibilities in leading the Communion, and propose amending resolution 49 from the 1930 Lambeth Conference (c.f. Appendix of the IASCUFO *Nairobi-Cairo Report*, p. 42 – additions and modifications for the 2024 version are indicated in bold italics):

Resolution 49, 1930	IASCUFO Wording Proposed, 2024
<p>The Anglican Communion is a fellowship within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, which have the following characteristics in common:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. they uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order as they are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer authorised in their several Churches;b. they are particular or national Churches, and, as such, promote within each of their territories a national expression of Christian faith, life and worship; andc. They are bound together not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the Bishops in conference. <p>The Conference makes this statement praying for and eagerly awaiting the time when the Churches of the present Anglican Communion will enter into communion with other parts of the Catholic Church not definable as Anglican in the above sense, as a step towards the ultimate reunion of all Christendom in one visibly united fellowship.</p>	<p>The Anglican Communion is a fellowship within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional Churches, which have the following characteristics in common:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. they <i>seek to</i> uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order as they are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer as authorised in their <i>distinctive</i> Churches;b. they are <i>autonomous</i> Churches, and, as such, promote within each of their territories a <i>local</i> expression of Christian faith, life and worship; andc. they are bound together through the shared inheritance, mutual service, common counsel of Bishops and others in conference, and historic connection to the See of Canterbury, by which they seek interdependently to foster the highest degree of communion possible with one another. <p><i>We make this</i> statement praying for and eagerly awaiting the time when the Churches of the present Anglican Communion will enter into <i>full</i> communion with other parts of the Catholic Church not definable as Anglican in the above sense, as a step towards the ultimate reunion of all Christendom in one visibly united fellowship.</p>

These mooted amendments to the 1930 Lambeth Conference resolution 49 are striking. Can Anglicanism merely be defined by “shared inheritance”, “mutual service”, and “[a] historic connection to the See of Canterbury”? This is a contested claim. Some parts of the Anglican Communion were never formed through a historic connection to Canterbury. Indeed, the Scottish Episcopal Church does not owe its origins to the Church of England. But the *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals* are casting an even wider net, and this could well amount to a miraculous draught of fish also needing a net of some considerable proportions (c.f., *John* 21 and the 153 varieties of fish caught). The proposed revisions open the door for the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) to claim full membership of the Communion. Some ‘Continuing Anglican Churches’ that have left the Communion over the course of the last two centuries could justifiably claim their affiliation has been magically rekindled. The Free Church of England, Methodists, Presbyterians from the Church of Scotland, some Quaker, and other stand-alone denominations qualify as valid members under the amended definition proposed by IASCUFO.

Furthermore, “interdependently [fostering] the highest degree of communion possible” reads more like an ecumenical aspiration than some boundary-defining phrase setting out the ground for the ecclesial identity and unity of any denomination. As such, they are also more likely to hasten the very ends and the processes of fragmentation that I suspect they sought to avert. The question that must be asked of the proposed new definition of Anglicanism being mooted is, “whom or what would this amended document *exclude*?”. Before the GAFCON split in October 2025 was announced, such sentiments would have already been seen as relatively weak. They now appear to be redundant. That said, some further questions necessarily follow. But before articulating the questions and reservations arising from the IASCUFO Report, it is essential to note the context in which it emerged in its current form.

The *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals* clearly understand that Anglican polity has now passed the point whereby, as the journalist and broadcaster Jeremy Paxman once quipped, the Church of England believes that “there was no issue that could not eventually be resolved over a cup of tea in the

Vicar's study".⁵ Anglicanism might well have been a polity that was once-upon-a-time quintessentially peaceable and polite, in which arguments seldom got out of hand. But global Anglicanism no longer inhabits such a space. Wars on gender and sexuality suggest that theological disputes are likely to remain divisive and polarising, with the elusive gel of unity unable to set, and the balm of Gilead unable to provide its customary healing calm.

The *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals* are the result of a long-term piece of work, commissioned at the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in 2023. A sub-group was set with a brief to embark upon some renewed exploration of "*structure and decision-making to help address our differences in the Anglican Communion*" (emphasis mine). The ACC resolution underlined "*the importance of seeking to walk together to the highest degree possible and learning from our ecumenical conversations how to accommodate differentiation patiently and respectfully.*" The work was also honouring the call of the 2022 Lambeth Conference to seek an answer to two questions:

1. To what extent are the Instruments fit for purpose?
2. To what extent might some (or all) of the Instruments be reconfigured to serve the Communion of today and the future?"

Thus, we can discern an inner pulse in the *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals*. It is *straining* for unity, and the choice of language in the text – phrases and words – is *stretching* towards the most optimistic poles of interpretation. For example, the very use of the term 'instruments' in the IASCUFO document occurs more than sixty times. In turn, this is supported by the use of the word 'symphony' on a dozen occasions – drawing on the earlier (2015) *Towards a Symphony of Instruments*:⁶ However, I contend the authors have confused harmony with unity.

⁵ C.f. Jeremy Paxman, 'The Church of England's fight to survive', *Financial Times*, September 7th 2017: <https://www.ft.com/content/fced3f20-9294-11e7-a9c6-11d2f0ebb7f0>

⁶ *Towards a Symphony of Instruments: A Historical and Theological Consideration of the Instruments of Communion of the Anglican Communion*, London: ACC, 2015.

The shortcomings of the musicological analogy should not surprise us, and astute readers of the *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals* document would quickly note that the word ‘orchestra’ does not appear in the text at all. Neither does the word ‘conductor’ nor ‘performance’. It is a peculiar lacuna that speaks of a “symphony of instruments” yet gives us no clue as to what this medley of instruments might sound like, nor how the music is to be arranged, conducted and performed. The unity of which the IASCUFO 2024 Report speaks, is, in other words, one that is *remotely* notated and textual. This is a musical score – a light and straightforward piece of composition – showing how the parts for different instruments or voices *might* fit together.

The IASCUFO 2024 Report offers a musical-analogical blueprint for devolved ecclesial performance, indicating not just the notes but also rhythm, tempo, rubrics and other instructions. Analogically, the Report is a short piece of sheet music that any purchaser may take home and decide how to play and perform. The text and notation, including implied cadence and timbre, are matters that have been devolved for local interpretation and performance. That is *not* a “symphony of instruments”.

I am also concerned by the problems encountered in the somewhat limited peripheral ecclesial vision implied by the word ‘instrument’. In modern usage, instruments cover medicine, justice, torture, punishment, tools of coercion, measurement and weight. For sure, and dating from the 13th century, ‘instrument’ does indeed mean (from the Old French) “a means, device or apparatus” for making music. But the earlier Latin *instrumentum* was a much broader term, covering tools, legal documents, mechanisms, implements, utensils and other means used to produce mechanical effects.

By the 14th century, an ‘instrument’ had also extended its reach to cover jurisprudence – a written document by which formal expression was given to a legal act, which might include commissions, authorisations and other declarations. The word ‘instrument’ could also be used of body parts or organs with special functions. One thinks of Chaucer’s Prologue to The

Wife of Bath's Tale (*The Prologe of the Wyves Tale of Bathe*, 3.1, lines 149–150) where she states “in wyfhode I wol vse myn instrument as frely as my makere hath it sent”. In other words, though married, I will use my genitalia as freely as God gave it – thus claiming that her sexual generosity towards others is her natural state – thereby claiming ownership and rights over her own personal ‘instrument of communion or unity’. Notoriously, the Wife of Bath states she has had five husbands, starting when she was 12. (NB: Chaucer uses the term ‘instrument’ of male genitalia in far more disparaging terms in the same *Prologue*, at line 132).

The obvious issue that arises hinges on the question of what is meant by “Instruments of Unity” when Anglicans use the term. What *type* of instrument, exactly? There is no clear answer to that question, though the context of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral suggests some kind of device being used for securing and maintaining a framework. The implication is mechanistic, not symphonic. The instruments are to be used and applied to the framework of the Quadrilateral. There may be some legal inferences too, alongside hints of weights and measures. There is also, perhaps held in reserve, a hint of the potential for the instruments to be used as devices of punishment, or even an apparatus with some capacity for coercion.

But ‘Instruments of Unity’, unless they have been fully worked into a musicological analogy that would cover the whole meaning and implications of a “symphonic gathering” (i.e., properly performed and conducted, etc), will most likely imply lightly sketched legal principles. By combining the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral with the four ‘Instruments of Unity’, the legal-light interpretation is arguably the only viable one that Anglicans can honestly own in a spirit of humility and truthful realism. The music entirely hinges on the instruments (naturally), yet their motto might easily have been “less is more”. Rather like good jazz, the power of music often comes through the hybridity, and the meaning found as much in the spaces between notes as when the instruments are not being used.

The End of the Orchestra?

With the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII's separation from the See of Rome (1534) fast approaching, the reigning monarch remains Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The 250th anniversary of Samuel Seabury's consecration as the first (democratically elected) Episcopal Bishop in America also falls in 2034. The demand for a more widespread democratic polity within Anglicanism is increasing. Subsidiarity is already the defining hallmark of Anglican provinces, and it is hard to see how the gradual dissolution of the Communion into a kind of pan-Protestant federalism will be averted. So how might the coming decade begin to pan out across the Communion, especially in regions such as the Caribbean, East and Southeast Asia, and South and Central America, where the debates that have divided Anglicans are far from settled?

In the global Anglican polity, and especially in the version carried and promoted by the Church of England's leadership, I suspect we are seeing some of the dynamics that closely match those that were illuminated and critiqued in James C. Scott's work.⁷ Scott, a political scientist and anthropologist, observed that most states, empires, and imperial regimes believed they could apply rational order and thinking across their domains of governance. We see this on a small scale with diocesan centres in the Church of England over-dictating to local parishes. Internationally, the post-colonial era is already teaching us that imperial knowledge ignores practical-local knowledge at its peril.

This leaves us with a puzzle over the Anglican 'Instruments of Unity', or at least for those who may wish to continue using them (GAFCON has rejected them). If these 'Instruments' could now be adapted, used and performed locally, in what sense do such instruments belong to some larger whole? Looking at current maps of the Anglican Communion, I am reminded of E. F. Schumacher's observation that the person with an imaginary map, supposing it to be truthful, is usually worse

⁷ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, Berkeley: Yale University Press, 1998.

off than the person who has no map at all. In the case of the latter, reliance on local conversations, gathering nearby data and advice, the use of all senses and intelligence, will likely lead that person to the place they need to go. In contrast, the person equipped with an imaginary map will constantly struggle with the gaps between the reality encountered and what the charts have laid out. The limits of any ‘blueprint’ ecclesiology (even one poetically conceived) or missiology will always be found out locally on the ground.

Appeals to formularies, doctrines and ‘Instruments of Unity’ are unlikely to hold the Anglican Communion together in the coming decade. Anglicanism is a Protestant and Reformed polity that preserved some affective Catholic accents (in many places and provinces, but by no means is this a majority) and chose to retain its Bishops. What the next decade will need is a more honest and searching quest for the basis upon which ecclesial-familial relations can remain cordial and collaborative, mutually supportive and constructive, and capable of offering a prophetic missional witness to the broader world. Some of this will mean separating the common core of our calling as Anglicans, and respecting (though not necessarily liking or affirming) emerging patterns of diversification, whether that be lay-celebrants in Sydney or LGBTQ-affirming Anglicans in other parts of the Communion. Here, I think of the sage advice imparted by Urban Holmes III:

‘...[our] course leads to living in the world as God sees the world. We can debate the trivial points, but the vision is largely clear. To love God is to relieve the burden of all who suffer. The rest is a question of tactics’.⁸

Internally, Anglicanism has sought mechanisms for managing (or policing) diversification, whilst seeking a plausible narrative for coherent catholicity and unity. Instruments and Quadrilaterals do not appear to be fit for purpose as things currently stand. So, what is to be done? I offer three observations.

⁸ Urban Holmes III, *What is Anglicanism?* New York: Morehouse, 1982, p. 95.

First, humility and truthful realism about the current state of Anglican polity need to form the basis for future conversations. For several decades – perhaps most of the post-war era – global Anglicanism has been captive to its own rhetorical alchemy, especially as a *via media* that combines the best of Catholic and Protestant worlds. There has also been a great deal of hubristic talk assuring congregations of church growth, revival, renewal, recovery in numbers and new forms of church. These were doubtless aspirational, and perhaps it was hoped they would also be morale-boosting. However, the base metal of mere rhetorical repetition – that change, transformation, growth, and the like is coming – cannot, by some miracle of alchemy, ever transmute into the solid gold of a genuine revival. The leadership of the Church of England, and for that matter the wider Anglican Communion, needs to be honest about the present state of affairs. Any vision must be cast from that foundation, and not from aspirations and myths.

Second, the language of current debates – same-sex relations and equal marriage come to mind – is being incautiously recast in response to somewhat shill demands and assertions, rather than patient, reasoned argument. It is not uncommon to read or hear of claims of “the Anglican doctrine of marriage being undermined”. Anglican theology does not regard marriage as a sacrament (c.f., Article XXV of the XXXIX Articles only claims that marriage is a “state of life *allowed* in the scriptures”), and it is not given the elevated state that would qualify it as a ‘doctrine’. The 16th-century Anglican position on marriage made it easier for the Church of England to (eventually) accommodate the remarriage of divorcees in the 20th century and (very slowly) to understand the equality women should enjoy within marriage as property owners in the 19th century. But these adjustments were not changes to the Anglican doctrine of marriage, because Anglicanism does not and has not had such a doctrine. It has a contested range of theological positions on marriage, and that has been the case since the early 16th century when Henry VIII sought the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon (NB: this was a dissolution of the union, as the legal means for divorce did not exist at the time).

Third, there will have to be a more profound and more concerted attempt to articulate and define the nature, purpose, and polity of global Anglicanism, as seen in documents such as the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals, if they are to work for the post-GAFCON remnant Anglicans. Here, the Advent 2024 IASCUFO Report kicks the proverbial can further down the road. I acknowledge that on its own terms this has been done quite well. However, it does not resolve the fundamental and existential tensions that are now surfacing nearly a century after the 1930 Lambeth Conference (resolution 49) that sought to describe the nature of the Anglican Communion. The direction of travel does appear to be that global Anglicanism will regard the Church of England as some kind of point of origin – “shared inheritance” and “[a] historic connection to the See of Canterbury” – but not serve as a guiding (North Pole) star to set some future course by.

Furthermore, the IASCUFO musicological analogy is not really developed. It is within the spaces, boundaries, silences and gaps that life can breathe. The difficulty of trying to police the spaces and close the gaps with prescriptive formularies, or assertive articles of faith that have been projected onto them, or some elevated claim of doctrine, is that they stifle the life of the body. Without the gaps and silences between musical notes, there is no symphony at all – just a wall of noise that prevents others from expressing themselves. No amount of appealing to the concept of ‘Instruments of Unity’ can compensate for the sense of being stifled.

Perhaps the best way forward is to cast a more penetrating light on the revised ‘Instruments of Unity’ and fully face the fact that the original ones that have evolved over the 20th century are (and always were) very limited in scope and capacity. Such instruments are highly unlikely to deliver the quality of unity, catholicity and coherence that the authors of the *Nairobi-Cairo Proposals* so admirably sought. If the Anglican Communion is to be, genuinely, a “symphony of instruments”, then orchestral manoeuvres will need to be brought into the light. The musicological analogy offered by IASCUFO is rich with potential but remains undeveloped. Symphonies need gathering, orchestration, and participation if they are to be seen and heard, inspiring and moving a wider audience.

That all said, I am not ultimately convinced that symphonic was ever the proper analogy to reach for in describing 21st-century Episcopalian polity. Anglicanism is more akin to jazz, comprising significant innovation with some lightly sketched composition. More a case of Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five', perhaps, than a symphony from Debussy or Mozart? Anglicanism plainly lacks the formality of a conventional written symphony, as though there was some definitive or dogmatic score from which all performers across time and space might essentially produce the same sound from one generation to the next. Beethoven's 9th symphony will sound very similar whenever and wherever it is played, and a recording of it made a century ago will not be so different from what one might hear today. As is the case with any other composer's symphony.

Anglicanism does *not* correlate here. It is, by its own definition, not a polity of some agreed composition. It is a *genre* of music locally adapted and performed. Anglicanism might have begun in England, but it needs little by way of Englishness to be itself in Chile, Korea, within a Māori diocese or in sub-Saharan Africa. In such places, the *Book of Common Prayer* has probably never been adopted, nor the XXXIX Articles affirmed. Social and theological interpretations of sexuality, modesty, morality and marriage differ markedly across cultures. Anglicanism will react and adapt to each culture locally. Of course, this has now been fully stress-tested by GAFCON, and the instruments were found to be broken and then rejected.

That said, and analogically, Anglicanism has developed as a mode of music that is very far from being a symphonic form that could be learned, performed and repeated as the constituents of an orchestra might typically expect. Quite plainly, Anglican liturgy itself, globally, is *not* uniformly scripted. It is locally adapted and of infinite variety, though retaining some morphological familial identity. It is not a symphony with many instruments creating a singular, coherent, scripted, and notated sound wherever it is performed or encountered across time and space. Rather, Anglicanism represents a wide variety of musical repertoires, interpretations and genres, with a relatively limited range of instruments.

Harmony is hard and complex to achieve across cultures at the best of times. And unity between countries and culture can seldom be prescribed without some legislature, and Anglicanism simply does not possess that. Developing diversity and accepting local adaptation reside in the DNA of Anglican polity. Even Scottish Episcopalians, in the wake of the Reformation, developed a markedly different Eucharistic theology to that of their English neighbours. Anglicans in New Zealand have formally structured their ethnic diversity into their three distinct *Tikanga* (Māori, Pākehā and Pasifika), with the possibility of a fourth being added. Anglicanism in Europe contains overlapping jurisdictions with the (American) Episcopal Convocation, Church of England chaplaincies, Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church, and Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopalians. There are Old Catholics in full communion with Canterbury too, as are the Porvoo churches. Anglicans must also reckon with the Anglican Network in Europe (ANiE) – the churches under GAFCON. There are also networks of the German Anglican Church that are Reformed and more like the Free Church of England. Though they claim to be authentic, they are not in communion with Canterbury. This is not symphonic. It is, however, undeniably diverse.

The IASCUFO proposals represent another iteration of top-down ecclesiology; glossed with a lightly sketched and poetically conceived blueprint (i.e., ‘symphony’, ‘instruments’, etc). But as a work of ecclesiology, the *Nairobi-Cairo* document lacks concreteness and grounded granularity. It reads Anglicanism as a settled, evolving, composed polity that just needs a few tweaks to sound good and continue to be performed. Thus, the endeavour of the IASCUFO proposals has little chance of success. The methods and means for this kind of ecclesiology – aimed at rescuing a denomination facing a severe global identity crisis and riven by political and theological factionalism – need to differ from what the *Nairobi-Cairo* document proposes. The fact that the authors cannot see this simply highlights the problem.

Overall, general principles will do little to resolve specific bones of contention and the associated tensions that now permeate across Anglican Communion. As we have noted, these stresses have increased due to

divisions between those who support women's ministry and the recognition of same-sex relationships as compatible with biblical faith, and those who view these developments as unbiblical. These discussions reveal existing theological conflicts within the Church of England and its global provinces, often shaped by the mission societies that originally established them.⁹ Despite the tense and sometimes antagonistic coexistence of different ecclesial and theological polities in the Church of England, many overseas provinces are more theologically coherent.

Although early Lambeth Conferences affirmed the Book of Common Prayer as a common practice, this has changed over time. Later Lambeth Conferences promoted liturgical revision to suit local contexts, leading to similar liturgies across provinces. Charismatic renewal has added further complexity to Anglican worship styles since the 1960s. Additionally, the Anglican Communion encompasses the membership of the United Churches of North and South India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, as well as the Lusitanian Church of Portugal and the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Churches. Both the latter churches emerged from Roman Catholicism in the late nineteenth century. These churches never had a “historic connection to the See of Canterbury”. Indeed, the *Book of Common Prayer* is by no means included in the heritage of all provinces or congregations. The four Instruments of Unity – two established in the 19th century, and the two added in the late 20th century (i.e., the Anglican Consultative Council in 1968 and the Primates’ Meeting in 1978) – can do no more than monitor an ever-complexified Anglicanism. The Instruments cannot police, let alone prevent, the greater diversification of the polity.

And yet there are signs of hope. The Mothers’ Union, the largest lay-led body of Anglican women, reached its 150th anniversary in 2026. The Mothers’ Union is proactive in supporting and educating women in the developing world. Present in over 60 countries – about a third of Anglican provinces – its numbers are around 4 million women, half of whom are in India, and a further 1.5 million in Africa. Whilst the Church

⁹ The Church Missionary Society tended to establish more evangelical Anglican churches and provinces overseas, whilst those of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel tended to be more broad or high church.

of England's roll of Mothers' Union membership continues to decline – down to under 90,000 from 225,000 at the turn of the millennium – their ministry is a vivid testimony to what Anglicans can do together.

In response to the GAFCON declaration, the Anglican church in Hong Kong issued a clear pastoral letter, simply reaffirming their commitment to the wisdom and richness of the Anglican tradition:

“Part of the complexities of our world is the matter of religious disagreements, and as the wisdom of our Anglican forebears has taught us, we ought to approach it with the same principles of scripture, tradition, and reason. When we forgo balance between the three, we plunge ourselves into the trap of self-righteousness. Without tradition and reason, we cannot hope to understand scripture more deeply. Without scripture and reason, tradition becomes performative orthodoxy. And without scripture and tradition, reason alone will not be enough to lead us to God, and our faith will become no better than mere human ideology, easily swayed by secular trends. When we focus on just one of these principles, we invite pride into our hearts, as we become sure of our own correctness. We forget to be humble and considerate, and to acknowledge that we all have our own faults.”¹⁰

So, nonetheless, and despite the many concerns, I continue to harbour some real confidence that this extraordinary ecclesial-familial Anglican network might endure (granted, as a more attenuated entity), much like a normal family. It no longer needs to live under some fealty-bondage overseen by the Church of England or the Archbishop of Canterbury, aping the weak agency of some ageing presiding parent.

Setting aside the GAFCON partition, the remnant diverse scattered provinces of this Federal Anglican Family (which were only narrated as a Communion from the late colonial era) may well continue to affirm their “historic connection to the See of Canterbury”, meek though that is. Thereafter, they must turn their attention to the peoples and lands God has

¹⁰ Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, *Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop and Bishops*, October 25 2025: https://echo.hkskh.org/news_article_details.aspx?lang=1&nid=16438

called them to serve and see them and love them as God surely does. Everything else, as Urban Holmes III noted earlier, is tactics.

The Authority of the Bible in the GAFCON Partition:

The sheer boldness of GAFCON declaration issued in October 2025 proclaims that the Anglican Communion will be reordered, with only one foundation, namely the Holy Bible, “translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church’s historic and consensual reading”.¹¹ On the face of it, this looks plain and simple, though of course it is far from that. It will not take long for the traditional divisions to emerge between those advocating for the full ‘authority’ of the Bible and those insisting on its absolute ‘inerrancy’. These divisions were captured in the theological debate between James Packer and John Stott. Packer believed that:

“God caused to be written precisely what He willed, and His words were in no way altered or corrupted by the human agent through whom they were written down; so that we have no right to say of anything in Scripture that it is merely a human idea and not part of God’s word”.¹²

In contrast, Stott saw it differently:

“The fundamentalist emphasises so strongly the divine origin of Scripture that he tends to forget that it also had human authors who used sources, syntax, and words to convey their message, whereas the evangelical remembers the double authorship of Scripture.... On the one hand, God spoke, deciding what he wished to say, although without crushing the personality of the human authors. On the other hand, men spoke, using their human faculties, though without distorting the message of the divine author”.¹³

¹¹ Jerusalem Declaration, Article II, 2008, and reflecting Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, 1571.

¹² J.I Packer, ‘The Fundamentalism Controversy: Retrospect and Prospect’, Faith and Thought 90/1 (1958): 11.

¹³ John Stott, ‘Are Evangelicals Fundamentalists?’ *Christianity Today*, September 8, 1978; 45-46.

In the Bible and in wider Christian tradition (i.e., creeds, formularies, etc), truth has often emerged from lively disagreements rather than solely from the formal acceptance of existing beliefs or simple deductions from them. The ability to envision alternative scenarios has always been essential for the healthy development of the Christian tradition.¹⁴ Therefore, unilinear theories of development should be treated with some hermeneutical suspicion, and finding consensus within conflict should be taken much more seriously, whether one considers later church history or even the Bible itself. Thus, the statement from GAFCON carries some risk:

We cannot continue to have communion with those who advocate the revisionist agenda, *which has abandoned the inerrant word of God as the final authority* and overturned Resolution I.10, of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. [emphasis mine].

The risk for GAFCON is that the divisions between conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists will soon emerge on the contradictions within scripture and ‘second-order’ issues, such as women clergy.¹⁵ The differences are likely to result in further internal splintering and schism.¹⁶

Whilst churches may well base their claims and identity on tropes such as “the inerrant, pure Word of God” and the idea that their doctrines are thoroughly and comprehensively biblical and uncorrupted by the histories one might encounter in other traditions and denominations, such claims rarely advance beyond being mere tropes. This is because the Christian scriptures are themselves a derivative of the church, and not its cause. Moreover, the collection of individual scriptures we now know as

¹⁴ For example, in comparing the creation accounts in *Genesis* 1 and 2, the first account is styled in diction with God creating through speech, and humanity created last. In the second account, which is more ‘folk’ in style, Adam is created before the rest of creation.

¹⁵ For example, compare *Psalms* 68: 18 and Paul’s complete misquoting of the same verse in *Ephesians* 4: 8 or *Genesis* 1 and 2. On gender, there is already diversity in ACNA churches, with some refusing to accept women priests, whilst other ACNA provinces permit them.

¹⁶ See Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; and Martyn Percy, ‘The Anatomy of Fundamentalism’ in ed. James Dunn, *Fundamentalisms: Threats and Ideologies in the Modern World*, London: I B Taurus, 2015, pp. 47-68.

the Bible all have a history. The first collection of ‘authorised’ scriptures was probably undertaken by Marcion (circa 150), though his collation and theology were regarded as heterodox. In the early church, other scriptures such as gospels attributed to Thomas, Pilate, and Barnabas (circa 130), though popular, were dismissed as pseudo-writings and regarded as heretical.

On the other hand, writings such as the *Diatessaron of Tatian*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Didache*, and the *Epistles of Clement* were acceptable and, in some parts of the Christian church, are still affirmed. The ordering of the books in the New and Old Testaments is also a matter for debate. Early Christians placed *Revelation* at the end because it was the final book to be approved (on grounds of history and orthodoxy), but even Martin Luther thought the *Epistle of James* – he believed it potentially taught ‘salvation by works’ – should come after *Revelation*.

The Bible has more ambiguous edges than most Christians suppose. Some Christian traditions include the Apocryphal books within the Old Testament; others treat them as a kind of semi-detached appendix; and others do not regard them as scripture at all. The Bible is a bound collection of scriptures, but the contents and ordering are subject to some modest variables. The core of the Old and New Testaments is largely agreed. The Protestant Old Testament comprises 39 books, while the Roman Catholic Church recognises 46 books, and many parts of the Eastern Orthodox Churches recognise an additional 6 books. Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox share the identical 27-book New Testament Canon.

Temporal, regional and cultural variations in the make-up of authorised scriptures are relatively minor and need not concern us here. There is no need to debate the finer points of *Psalms* 151-155, 1 and 2 *Esdras* or the texts known as the *Prayer of Manasseh* or the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, nor 3 *Maccabees* (let alone 4 *Maccabees*, which is only used by the Georgian Churches). The Christian scriptures are multifaceted, containing addresses to God, laments, commands, words from and acts of

God, history, opinion, songs, parables, tales, advice, poetry, prose, genealogies, rubrics, proverbs, mysteries, tragedies, unfinished sentences, unicorns (yes, unicorns are mentioned in the *Authorised King James Bible*) and more besides.

Bibles are of a more mixed pedigree than many suppose. Chapter numbers, verse numbers and sub-headings are not original to the texts as received. Neither was punctuation. Indeed, words such as Annunciation, Visitation, Magnificat, Benedictus, Christmas, Beatitudes, and Nunc Dimittis (or Epiphany) do not appear in the Bible. As we noted in chapter six, sorting out what the Bible says, what someone claims it means, and what the Bible actually means are three distinct—but interrelated—propositions. In all this, language attaches itself to things we see, know, think we know, experience and think we think. Language manages known unknowns, and even the unknowns we don't know about. The point is that words are not precise and tend to round things up.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that there are two basic approaches to Bible translations and versions. The first is usually known as 'formal-equivalence' and is more of a literal approach, as seen in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the English Standard Version (ESV), and its predecessors. Formal-equivalence approaches aim to render the translated text as the same or as close as possible to the original Hebrew or Greek. However, this does not always work well, even functionally. For example, we do not "gird up the loins of [y]our minds" (*1 Peter* 1: 13, KJV), though we do know what the writer means (i.e., "get ready!", as in *Proverbs* 31: 7). Overall, word-for-word translations may not work. Poetry, psalms, metaphors, similes, parables – all of these have multiple meanings, so any translator must opt for the most likely interpretation that conveys the best sense of what a passage might be saying. What the Bible says and what it means are not necessarily congruent.

Because no translation can ever be completely literal, all versions of the Bible, once translated, will contain an element of 'dynamic-

equivalence' – which is the second type of approach to scriptural translation. This is a more thought-for-thought than word-for-word approach. Here, we are more concerned with meaning, as well as the original and current cultural resonances and impact. For example, in *Psalm 23:5* the text literally reads, "anoointed my head with oil". This is rendered by the *Good News Bible* as "welcomed me as an honoured guest". Few will appreciate a pint of sunflower oil poured on their head the next time they come round to a friend for dinner, so a dynamic-equivalent translation can be more readable than a more literal or word-for-word translation. Naturally, there are issues with any dynamic-equivalent translation, as they will inevitably take liberties with the text, such as losing the reference to oil and anointing completely, and going with the *meaning* (which is one of honouring and welcoming).

The Bible cannot be literally translated, but it is still literary. No translation is faultless, and no translation of *any* text can ever be 'perfect' or 'pure', because language itself does not work like that. Indeed, nor does purity. 'Pure' gold, orange juice, or comedy will all be deliberately diluted by degrees in some measure or unavoidably have contaminants. Furthermore, there is, in any case, no explicit agreement on the nature of the Bible or what it entails for fundamentalists. Some have 'high' views of inspiration but have abandoned inerrancy. Others qualify inerrancy, insisting that the doctrine applies only to the original autographs, excludes grammatical errors and misspellings, and is exempt from imprecision in some issues or apparent contradictions.

This has led scholars to identify at least five different versions of the doctrine of inerrancy: *propositional* (absolute); *pietistic* (i.e., a kind of spiritual biblicism); *nuanced* (some portions of scripture weigh more than others); *critical* (identifies non-essential errors); and *functional* (limited inerrancy, or particular infallibility). Each of these versions will produce a distinct kind of spiritual harvest. The freedom to interpret some parts of the Bible analogically rather than historically will open particular vistas of meaning for congregations and denominations. Even in the most tightly defined fundamentalistic communities, there is considerable divergence on

what constitutes an inerrant Bible. It remains unclear as to which kind of authority, infallibility or inerrancy GAFCON churches will appeal to.

Beyond GAFCON, any sample review of the authority of the Bible across denominations would reveal a similarly wide range of diversity. Some treat the sacred text as a 'Rule Book' (instructions to be carefully followed), others as a Guidebook (a few rules, many recommendations, warnings, suggestions, etc.), and most interchanging between the two. This leads us to make three observations.

First, as noted earlier, the Bible is a consequence of Christianity, not its cause. Whilst all Anglicans will be entirely committed to upholding the authority of the Bible, it still has to be read with care and discretion, and, crucially, interpreted. Christians do not disagree about what the Bible says so much as about what it means and the weight to attach to the different passages and their nuances.

Second, some Christians will believe that scripture was authored in heaven and brought to earth in an unimpaired, completely unambiguous form. In such a view, there is no room for doubt; knowledge replaces faith. Scripture is utterly authoritative: to question the Bible is tantamount to questioning God. It is vital to remember that this is a retrospective theological lens imposed on reading scripture. The text of the Bible does not make this demand on readers. This is how churches choose to read it.

Third, the Bible is far from clear on some matters. For example, there are many forms of observance that the New Testament urges upon us, to which we now pay little attention. Many Christians do not think twice about taking out a mortgage (collusion with usury). Despite the prohibition on eating meat products made from blood in the *Book of Acts*, few Christians today will deny themselves blood sausages, as the early apostles once did.

So, whilst the convention of GAFCON will be to use tropes about the full, final, absolute authority of scripture, shaping an ecclesial polity

through such tropes is always an interpretative exercise. Furthermore, even if appealing to scriptures such as 2 *Timothy* 3:16: “...all scripture is inspired by God...” (or better-rendered, ‘God-breathed’), or 2 *Peter* 3: 14-16, there was no agreement on what those scriptures were until the 4th century, with the canonical list summarised in the Athanasian letter (367) and the compass of what counts as the Bible remains a matter of debate.

So, in terms of the GAFCON Declaration of October 2025, it is worth remembering that very few forms of Protestant ecclesial polity will survive intact if they are founded solely on the assertion of holding “pure doctrines” based on “full and final scriptural authority”. They are almost bound to splinter and unravel at some stage, so further schism is most likely to be a ‘when’, not an ‘if’. There are some small denominations – Brethren, for example – that have managed to stay intact (though not with schism and haemorrhage). But these are sectarian-communitarian ecclesial polities, and that is not what GAFCON Anglicanism consists of.

Conclusion

That said, as we noted earlier, developments across the Anglican Communion are accelerating. On 17th October 2025, the Eve of the feast St. Luke (patron saint of healing), and on the day the Anglican Communion commemorates Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, the 16th century Protestant martyrs who resisted the Roman catholic Counter-Reformation, GAFCON issued a communiqué to the global Anglican church announcing that “the future had arrived”, and rejecting “the so-called Instruments of Communion, namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates Meeting”.¹⁷ The communiqué states:

We resolved to reorder the Anglican Communion as follows:

¹⁷ <https://gafcon.org/communique-updates/the-future-has-arrived/>

1. We declare that the Anglican Communion will be reordered, with only one foundation of communion, namely the Holy Bible, “translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church’s historic and consensual reading” (Jerusalem Declaration, Article II), which reflects Article VI of the 39 Articles of Religion.
2. We reject the so-called Instruments of Communion, namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates Meeting, which have failed to uphold the doctrine and discipline of the Anglican Communion.
3. We cannot continue to have communion with those who advocate the revisionist agenda, which has abandoned the inerrant word of God as the final authority and overturned Resolution I.10, of the 1998 Lambeth Conference.
4. Therefore, GAFCON has re-ordered the Anglican Communion by restoring its original structure as a fellowship of autonomous provinces bound together by the Formularies of the Reformation, as reflected at the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, and we are now the Global Anglican Communion.
5. Provinces of the Global Anglican Communion shall not participate in meetings called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, including the ACC, and shall not make any monetary contribution to the ACC, nor receive any monetary contribution from the ACC or its networks.
6. Provinces, which have yet to do so, are encouraged to amend their constitution to remove any reference to being in communion with the See of Canterbury and the Church of England.
7. To be a member of the Global Anglican Communion, a province or a diocese must assent to the Jerusalem Declaration of 2008, the contemporary standard for Anglican identity.
8. We shall form a Council of Primates of all member provinces to elect a Chairman, as *primus inter pares* (‘first amongst equals’), to

preside over the Council as it continues “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

...today, GAFCON is leading the Global Anglican Communion. As has been the case from the very beginning, we have not left the Anglican Communion; we are the Anglican Communion...”.

Is this a case of ‘game over’? Probably, and yet not quite. Short-term separation is now a reality. But the medium and longer-term may look different. If Anglicanism is not, in fact, the kind of Protestant-Catholic *via media* it has been espousing for almost two hundred years, then there may be some new hope in consolidating its identity around its rather more robust Protestant roots.

Clearly, one option for Anglicans is to embrace the religious consumer market and adapt to compete with other denominations. Or, for that matter, the other sport and leisure activities on a Sunday or a weeknight. One might describe this as the ‘American Model’. That model correctly assumes that state churches (at least Protestant ones) across Europe will cease to be protected by national governments. Furthermore, that nationalism itself does not require one variety of Christian faith to be privileged above the others. And that, in any case, religious choice and consumerism have already undermined any notion of a state-endorsed Christian monopoly being successfully imposed. The Church of England will, eventually, copy the Welsh example and become the Church in England.

But what of the alternatives? In India, the Protestant churches, including the Anglicans, have merged to form the Church of North India and the Church of South India. The Church of England is in full communion with both. In China, a form of state-ordered (some would say ‘controlled’) catholicity has been adopted to prevent the multiplication and denominational diversification seen in the West, and, ultimately, individualism. Officially, there are just two kinds of church in China – Catholic and Protestant. The Roman Catholic Church is subject to some state control – especially in the choosing of its Bishops. Whilst this has produced tensions with the Vatican, the Chinese Roman Catholic Church

is undeniably recognisable in polity and practice, doctrine and orders. The Protestant Church of China – also known as The Three-Self Patriotic Movement – is a single body rather than an ecumenical expression.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) was begun in 1951 by a Cantonese Christian named Wu Yao-Tsung (1893–1979) and promoted a strategy of ‘self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation’ (hence ‘Three-Self’) to remove foreign influences from the Chinese churches and to assure the Communist government that the churches would be supportive of the newly established People’s Republic of China under Mao. Wu’s background bears on the emergence of a single Protestant body for China: he was a member of a Congregational church in China, worked for the YMCA, attended Union Theological Seminary in New York, and was a proponent of the social gospel throughout the 1920s. Mao’s Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) repressed and banned active Christianity – even the TSPM. The Chinese government restored the TSPM in 1979, partly to counter the trend of the ‘unregistered’ meetings of the growing House Church Movement, which are still subject to degrees of harassment and hounding. That said, there is growing evidence of tolerance towards house churches, provided they meet openly and their meetings are not billed as ‘secret’.

The TSPM expresses Chinese Protestant Christianity in two distinct ways: first, through its accountability to and relationship with the state, and second, through its purposeful unity and singleness, contrasting with diversity and choice. This is sometimes known as ‘Sinicisation’. Unity is prized above freedom, the common good and collective over and against individualism. This has an impact not only on Christianity but also on other faiths: the state ‘recognises’ those who build everyday life or contribute to culture. But at the same time, it does not need to take into account those who do not seem to contribute in this way.¹⁸

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion, see Hu Yingqiang, ‘Protestant Christianity and Chinese Religions: An Ecumenical Perspective’, in *Chinese Theological Review*, vol. 22, pp. 25–41, 2010.

In effect, Chinese culture has produced what the European Ecumenical Movement could not engineer – a visible oneness in which ‘styles’ of churchmanship (e.g., Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, etc.) are subordinated within a single Protestant movement of equality and mutual respect for otherness. True, critics will say that this is ‘state-controlled’ (but ‘sanctioned’ is arguably a better term), and that this has consequences for the Chinese House Church Movement – persecution, even. However – and this is perhaps unfashionable to say – *all* unsanctioned movements in China are seen not only by the government but also by broader Chinese culture and society as potentially inimical to Chinese oneness. The apparent threat posed by the House Church Movement lies not in its theology, or even, necessarily, in its witness, but instead in what it represents in terms of individualism and consumerism, which are seen as the potentially deeper problem.

At a church service I attended in Shanghai some years ago – in a TSPM church that was, in fact, a Methodist building before Mao came to power in 1951 – what was striking was the vibrancy of the worship and the freedom of the worshippers. The standard service I attended (one of eight on offer that Sunday) was packed with over a thousand worshippers. Each service had a ‘style’ (Anglican Choral Evensong was offered at 6 pm, with something more Presbyterian in character earlier in the afternoon). Yet the TSPM was a single, unified congregation.

Given this, it is not so hard to imagine a coming together of mainstream Protestant denominations and churches in the not-too-distant future. The theological differences between them are relatively minor and often a question of emphasis or accent. The larger differences are primarily liturgical. Furthermore, the styling of churches can keep faith with their history, whilst also indicating where their proclivities lie on divisive issues of order and identity, such as sexuality and gender. This suggests that the future of the Anglican Communion likely lies in becoming a form of Protestant federalism. Indeed, it is already dissolving into that state, similar to the kinds of divisions encountered in other global Protestant denominations, namely, north-south, liberal-conservative, progressive-traditional, developed-developing, and so forth. Whilst these

dividing lines are seldom neat, and rarely quite as fixed as those inside each kraal supposes, the federal model works for Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and others.

Anglicanism is moving the same way. If there were a marital parallel to draw on, then no absolute divorce would need to be entertained. Just separate living arrangements (i.e., partitions), with each party keeping the family name, and remaining reasonably proximate. But even if divorce were to happen, then the family name is kept by all the parties concerned – as the Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians can all testify. That is indeed what Anglicanism is now developing, and in truth, it has been doing so for some time. It is just that what was once implicit is now explicit, and what was once fluid is now crystallising. The possibility of coming together once again cannot be ruled out. But in the meantime, the ecclesial parties, for the sake of everyone's well-being, agree to live apart.

What can be said about the Anglican churches in the 21st century is that they are very different from Roman Catholicism. And unless Anglican churches wish to renounce their fundamentals, their future lies in closer ties among themselves through various kinds of pan-Protestant collaboration, as modelled by the Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations. Indeed, and in this new era, we are already seeing ACNA and GAFCON clergy operating on the mainland of China, albeit under the TSPM arrangements and not reviving Anglican congregations as a separate denomination (but concede they have tried)¹⁹. It is possible to construct familial forms of close ecclesial federalism in which the parties involved can benefit from the strength, support, and nourishment afforded by these new arrangements, without ceding their identity. All those participating might have much to give and much to gain. It would be a high irony if India's or China's reform of Protestant Christian denominations offered a model that would save their Anglican counterparts on a broader canvas. Still, stranger things have happened.

¹⁹ Confirmed in conversation with ACNA clergy, October 2025.

