

Windsor Report Working Group – Report 2006

**WINDSOR REPORT WORKING GROUP**

**THE WINDSOR REPORT 2004: A FURTHER RESPONSE**

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**Preface**

This report represents the response of the above named group to the Windsor Report and such subsequent relevant material as it has been able to obtain. It is another step in the process by which the Church of Ireland debates and receives the recommendations of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, referred to hereafter as the Windsor Report. Further reflection will continue to be required by the Church of Ireland on many issues contained in the Windsor Report and on the many matters arising from the debates surrounding its recommendations as they emerge from other Provinces and interest groups within and beyond the Anglican Communion. The central concern of the Windsor Report relates to how constituent members of the Communion understand what it is to be “the Church” in the fullest possible meaning of the word. This inevitably has repercussions for our relationships with other churches.

In responding to the Report we have addressed the questions posed at the outset of the consultation period but as Questions Three and Four seemed rather repetitive of what had gone before, our responses to Questions One and Two contain our substantive response to Questions Three and Four also.

## **Introduction**

The debate on where to locate the limits of legitimate diversity within the Anglican Communion is not a new one. For example, the Donaldson Committee Report arising out of Lambeth 1930 discussed the matter at some length and the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood is a more recent example of a “limits of diversity” debate. Similarly the debate which issued in Lambeth 1.10 was an attempt to provide the current position on the limits of acceptable diversity on one aspect of human sexuality.

We understand that Lambeth 1.10 has become particularly emotive in some circles, especially when not taken in its entirety. It is the understanding of the Working Group that, although in its original context an articulation of the Lambeth Conference 1998, and subsequently unanimously affirmed by the Primates' Meeting, it reflects accurately the wider feeling of the substantial majority of Anglicans. Furthermore, the language it uses is not that of anathema and excommunication, nor does it seem to us prematurely to foreclose on the wide-ranging and on-going debate on the nature of human sexuality. We hope that this important debate can proceed with calmness and dignity, not least within the Church of Ireland.

However, the procedure by which contentious issues affecting the entire Communion have been addressed and resolved in the past has not been adequate to deal with the more recent issues arising, for example, out of the debate on human sexuality and may prove not to be adequate to deal with further contentious issues as they arise.

We would suggest three reasons why this may be so. First, those dioceses of North America most closely involved in the disputes surrounding human sexuality have chosen hitherto to ignore the mechanism available for the consideration and reception of contentious matters which had been used in the past, most recently in the case of the ordination of women. This is not simply a breach of procedure. It is a breach of faithfulness to the Communion and any further such actions would have a devastating effect on the Communion. Unfortunately a similar lack of consultation occurred in relation to recent decisions within the Church of Sweden.

Secondly, the recent growth in the numbers of Anglicans world-wide and the increasing confidence of the Anglican Churches in Africa, the Far East and South America as truly equal, autonomous Provinces (rather than colonial outposts) has put pressure on the informal procedures which had evolved to deal with difficulties in much less diverse circumstances. It is worth remembering that canon law is currently Provincial rather than Communion-wide.

Thirdly, the presenting issues of human sexuality giving rise to the current crises have about them a potency which is unmatched by any other set of issues and for which it is all but impossible to find useful parallels in our past experience. This would suggest to us the need for a cautious approach, bred of mutual respect and the sincere desire for a mature resolution. The onward march of events world-wide suggests that this approach can hardly be underlined sufficiently forcefully.

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The Working Group noted that gender issues and issues surrounding expressions of human sexuality have proved to be most visceral and divisive in the Anglican Communion. It is not entirely clear why this should be so. It is an issue which concerns the Working Group. We suggest further analysis, constructive theological study and guidelines as a matter of importance.

The Working Group report acknowledges that there is a number of ways in which the Church of Ireland and the Anglican Communion could respond to this tangle of issues. One would be to allow the debate to continue in the hope that it will be conducted with Christian charity and forbearance and will have a constructive, though as things currently stand, entirely unforeseeable, outcome. However, the debate on human sexuality has been raging for decades, and the tone of the discussion is not a harbinger of constructive or creative outcomes.

Another approach might be to acknowledge the permanent existence of "two integrities", (or more) living peacefully together, though at peace largely because they lead parallel, and not integrated, existences. This seems to us, at the very least, to be the road to an Anglican Federation and insidiously destructive of the fullness of Communion which Section A of the Windsor Report so accurately summarises and which we feel is essential to the future of Anglicanism.

A third approach and the one adopted after much discussion by this Working Group, is that of commending a clearly defined procedure to give authoritative guidance in disputed matters on a) whether the matter under dispute is of the *esse* of the Catholic Church and essential to its life or is, in the given circumstances, to be considered among the *adiaphora* and therefore to be dealt with locally, and b) provide authoritative guidance on matters that are of the *esse* of the Church.

We do not feel that the provision of such a process need necessarily lead to undue centralisation or the creation of an Anglican curia, and would caution against the use of such emotive terms. We are not suggesting the creation of a centralised authority but that a diffused authority be brought together in certain circumstances.

Comprehensiveness and mutual forbearance are amongst the most important characteristics of Anglicanism and are some of the gifts which we can bring to the treasury of the universal Church. However, neither is limitless or indiscriminate and it is our view that comprehensiveness can best flourish where a space for theological essentials is created and sustained.

Our study of the Windsor Report and subsequent discussion have convinced us that many of its recommendations have much to contribute to the future health and growth of the Anglican Communion.

**Commentary**

**Q1. What in the description of the life of the Communion in Sections A and B can you recognise as consistent, or not, with your understanding of the Anglican Communion?**

- 1.1 It is our view that sections A and B describe a state of Communion, firmly rooted in the New Testament and which is highly desirable, if not yet attained, within the Anglican Communion. Ideally, it should also apply as between the Anglican Communion and other ecclesial bodies. We recognise that the unity of true communion finds expression in many ways: through bonds of affection and canon law; through mutual forbearance and mutual responsibility; through the interchangeability of ministry and shared commitment in mission.
- 1.2 It is also our view that, although the terms of communion within and beyond Anglicanism are supremely theological, that does not preclude some legal element in their expression to safeguard them, and to mark their importance as constitutive of the health of communion. For instance, the Church of Ireland's Preamble and Declaration and Canons Ecclesiastical give legal expression to many theological issues.
- 1.3 In relation to matters of communion, Christian marriage which has both a legal and an affectionate aspect, provides an apposite parallel. The love of two people for one another leads them to desire and see the necessity of a legal bond where their love can be protected and develop. Bonds of law are not necessarily destructive of bonds of affection. In the case of marriage, and as we would contend, in the case of communion, both are necessary for stability, endurance and growth.
- 1.4 **Autonomy.** Windsor Report, Section A, paragraph 8 and further developed in Section B, paragraphs 72-86 relating to the nature of autonomy within the Anglican Communion, seem to us to be of key importance for the future of our life as a Communion. Quoting the Anglican Congress of 1963 on "mutual inter-dependence and responsibility in the Body of Christ", the Windsor Report characterises Anglican provincial autonomy as "autonomy-in-communion" whereby a body is autonomous within the confines of its relationship with others "being free to order one's own life within a wider obligation to others." (paragraph 76)
- 1.5 It is very clear from recent events within the Anglican Communion that the radical nature of this inter-relatedness has not always been appreciated or observed and that voluntary Provincial self-regulation simply has not worked and cannot guarantee ordered and peaceable co-existence. In the light of this, it seems to us wise to consider more formal and transparent procedures for expressing and safeguarding the obligations of autonomy-in-communion.

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- 1.6 **Scripture.** The treatment of Scripture in the Windsor Report is comprehensive and nuanced. It summarises the range of approaches to Scripture in a balanced manner and, more importantly, acknowledges the supreme importance of Scripture, interpreted and lived, as touching matters of faith and morals. In this regard we commend the wording of the draft Covenant which “affirms Holy Scripture, as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith, and holds the essentials of the Apostolic Faith, as summed up in the Creeds”. (Windsor Report, Appendix Two, Part 2 Article 1(3).)
- 1.7 The call to read Scripture involves mature study, wise and prayerful discussion and a commitment to hearing and obeying God as God speaks through Scripture. It also involves being open to a fresh illumination of the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth. Questions of interpretation will rightly be raised, not as an attempt to avoid or relativise Scripture and its authority, but as a way of ensuring that it really is Scripture that is being heard, not simply the echo of our own voices. (Windsor Report, paragraph 61 & 59)
- 1.8 To help prevent inordinate or inappropriate inculturation in any interpretation of Scripture, we believe it is important for our world-wide Communion to be willing to learn from different cultures and settings as we read Scripture together. Indeed the Windsor Report states "it is by reading Scripture too little, not too much, that we have allowed ourselves to drift apart." (Windsor Report, paragraph 67)
- 1.9 Nevertheless there may be times where agreement of interpretation on issues which threaten the internal cohesion of the Anglican Communion cannot honestly be reached. It is therefore important to engage in a process of further consultation and, for that consultation to have due regard to the tradition of the Universal Church. (Windsor Report, paragraph 68)
- 1.10 Although it is no longer possible to convene an Ecumenical Council and thereby bring together the authority of Scripture and the authority of the Church into their due relationships, it seems to us necessary for the future peace of the Anglican Communion to have some procedure through which authoritative guidance can be given in cases which go to the heart of the Gospel and are of the *essse* of the Church.
- 1.11 To fail to do so is gravely damaging to the mission of the Church, not least because the Church itself cannot render obedience to the Gospel in matters about which it is in a constant state of conflict. Confrontation devoid of accommodation damages the very core of the Church. It is a luxury which no-one can afford.

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- 1.12 None of what has been said is to suggest that it is a function of the Anglican Communion to be constantly handing down commands and anathemas. “Counsel” is the Church’s mode of address, on the understanding that counsel is not simply private advice, but a universal moral demand which does not have the enforcement of a legal sanction attached to it. Choosing to act outside the authoritative counsel of the Church (counsel supported by argument, persuasion the exposition of Scripture and, indeed prayer) would not result in excommunication, interdict or schism but would mark a Province placing itself in a position in which other Provinces may wish to review the state of communion with that Province.
- 1.13 ***Adiaphora and subsidiarity.*** It will be clear from the forgoing that we are in agreement with the Windsor Report in stressing the importance of the concepts of subsidiarity and *adiaphora*. However, simply to use the terms is not to settle the debate and some universally acknowledged process of discernment will be required to identify whether matters of dispute fall within these categories and can be dealt with locally with no damaging repercussions for the rest of the Communion. Such a process in the context of autonomy-in-communion would also have the authority to decide which matters *are* central to the integrity of the Gospel and where the acceptable limits of diversity need to be more closely and formally defined.

**Q2. In which ways do the proposals in sections C and D flow appropriately from the description of the Communion’s life in sections A and B?**

- 2.1 It is our view that doing nothing in relation to the disputes which have threatened the life and unity of the Anglican Communion is no longer an option. We acknowledge, and indeed insist, that any action that is taken has a theological justification and add our own words of encouragement to theologians who grapple with the issues threatening communion and with the issue of the meaning of “communion” itself.
- 2.2 However, the Church is not simply a theological debating society in permanent session. It is also a teacher and guardian of the faith and shepherd of souls. In fulfilling this role it is necessary for the Church to speak authoritatively on disputed matters as the need arises. To do this it must have some recognised and clearly understood way of arriving at such judgements. It must do so with great care, forbearance and pastoral sensitivity, taking care to acknowledge its fallibility but also acknowledging the Gospel imperative of speaking clearly as necessary in some matters.
- 2.3 **The Instruments of Unity.** The Instruments of Unity have grown “organically” out of the life of the Anglican Communion. In keeping with much else in modern society, changes within the Instruments have accelerated greatly over the past thirty or so years. The speed of modern communications

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and the growth of fully independent Provinces within the Communion have meant that matters which once could have been addressed across a number of Lambeth Conferences now clamour for resolution much more quickly. We must also remember the complexity of issues which affect members of the Anglican Communion culturally and sociologically and which regrettably remain largely unacknowledged and unaddressed.

- 2.4 We also acknowledge the risk of frantically grasping at any solution to our current *impasses* and we foresee the need for a great deal of work in theology, canon law and related matters before the implications of the Windsor Report can be fruitfully realised.
- 2.5 We also wish to draw attention to the financial implications for any reformed role for the Instruments of Unity if the proposals of the Windsor Report are to be realised in any practical sense.
- 2.6 Bearing all of this in mind, the Working Group is of the view that there is much merit in the proposals of the Windsor Report for a revised role for the Archbishop of Canterbury as the focus of unity of the Anglican Communion, supported, when the need arises, by a Council of Advice and working within an agreed Communion-wide Covenant. This however presupposes consultation across the whole Anglican Communion. In support of this we would make the following observations:
- 2.7 **The Archbishop of Canterbury.** Any revised or enhanced role given to the Archbishop of Canterbury would only be acceptable to the Church of Ireland, and potentially to the wider Communion, if the method of appointment to that position were to be the subject of a review which went beyond consultation within the Church of England.
- 2.8 Such a review may find that an enhanced role for the Archbishop of Canterbury would be acceptable to the Communion as a whole only if the Communion as a whole had a hand in selecting the officeholder. This would have very significant ramifications for the Church of England and in that sense the well being of the whole Communion may lie in its gift.
- 2.9 The advantage of having an Archbishop of Canterbury, the process of whose appointment is in some sense agreed by the whole Communion, is that he or she would be in a strong position as a moral and teaching authority. The nature of the power exercised would not be simply national or arbitrary or oppressive but derived through a consensus within the Communion which is even stronger than traditional ideas of conciliarity.
- 2.10 **The Council of Advice.** The personal moral authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the method of whose appointment has found favour with the whole Anglican Communion, would be further enhanced by the assistance of a Council of Advice drawn also from the whole Anglican Communion.

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- 2.11 Bearing in mind the Standing Committee of the Church of Ireland's stated view that the Communion should not introduce a novel Instrument of Unity without first reviewing the agreed basis of unity, we believe that a Council should only be convened as the need arises.
- 2.12 The Council of Advice would be convened to address issues identified as sufficiently important by the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Anglican Consultative Council or Provincial Synods and would provide guidance on whether a matter was or was not among the *adiaphora* or would have a significant impact on the Anglican Communion and therefore require special consideration.
- 2.13 **The Covenant.** In the absence of any agreed body of canon law across the Anglican Communion, or indeed of agreed principles of canon law, we see great value in the introduction of a Covenant to provide a legal framework within which the revised Instruments of Unity would work.
- 2.14 The form of Covenant as proposed in the Windsor Report would of course require the close scrutiny of the General Synod but the first impression we have of it is as a good working document which could form the basis of critical scrutiny for individual Provinces.
- 2.15 We recognise that the adoption of such a covenant by individual Provinces could be a laborious process as it would require its incorporation *in toto* into the legal framework of each Province if it were to fulfil the function envisaged for it within the Windsor Report. However the alternative, in our view, is the accelerating disintegration of the Anglican Communion.
- 2.16 In addition, we view the discussions surrounding the introduction of a Covenant and the establishment of an Anglican Communion Legal Advisers Network, as envisaged in resolution 13 of ACC 12 (2002), as mutually enhancing.
- 2.17 **The Primates' Meeting and Anglican Consultative Council (ACC).** The debate regarding the membership relationship between the Primates' Meeting and the ACC has moved on considerably since the publication of the Windsor Report and it now seems unlikely that the Primates will sit *ex officio* on the ACC.
- 2.18 As to whether the Primates are considered as the Standing Committee of the Lambeth Conference, only the Lambeth Conference can so decide. However, it is our view that within Anglicanism the distinction between a Primate (whether an Archbishop or a Presiding Bishop) and any other bishop is largely administrative and does not denote or confer a greater authority as regards their teaching office.

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- 2.19 If the Archbishop of Canterbury were to have an enhanced role, supported, where necessary, by a Council of Advice which were itself representative of the Instruments of Unity and working within a Communion-wide Covenant, it is unclear exactly what interests would be served by an enhanced role for the Primates' Meeting.
- 2.20 We see also some merit in there being some level of distinction between resolutions of the Lambeth Conference as suggested in paragraph 4 of page 78 of the Windsor Report. However, we also foresee considerable difficulties in finding a workable mechanism within the Conference for deciding which resolutions "touch upon the authentic proclamation of the Gospel" and which do not. Even if such a mechanism were agreed and applied to resolutions tabled on the Agenda before the Conference began it is unclear how the process would work if the wording and scope of a resolution changed in the course of debate.
- 2.21 However one area of concern within the overall constitution of the Instruments of Unity which definitely requires urgent consideration is that of lay representation. As things stand lay people are represented on the ACC only, and even there at a fairly meagre level. Consideration needs to be given by the Instruments of Unity themselves to how best to incorporate a stronger lay voice in the counsels of the Communion.

### **Conclusion**

This report represents the Working Group's response to the invitation of Standing Committee to reflect on the Windsor Report and subsequent relevant material. We have not commented in detail on every aspect of the Windsor Report but we feel we have addressed the major issues and completed our task.

We would wish to acknowledge the work of the Preliminary Response which was included in the General Synod Book of Reports 2005 and which we have benefited from studying in detail. Our own response differs in emphasis from that of the Preliminary Response although we agree entirely with the view that further theological enquiry is urgently needed in many areas relating to such matters as communion and human sexuality.

We acknowledge also the difficulties that face the Anglican Communion whichever road it takes. We are under no illusions about just how difficult it will be to move forward on the basis of the broad principles laid out in Windsor Report but we take the view that it is essential to make the attempt, otherwise the tradition which we love will no longer be a "Communion" in any profound sense.