

Presentation to the Anglican Primates meeting at Dromantine, N Ireland, February 2005, made on behalf of the Windsor Report Reception Reference Group by the Most Revd Bruce Cameron, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church

[slide 1] Following the publication of the Windsor Report in October last year, the Primates' Standing Committee invited Archbishop Peter Kwong, with the assistance of a Reception Reference Group (RRG), to co-ordinate responses to the Report from the provinces of the Anglican Communion. In his letter to the provinces, Archbishop Peter wrote, "My hope is really to be able to gain some sense of where Anglicans, Episcopalians and members of the United Churches stand on the issues raised in the Report, and the recommendations made... This is a formidable challenge but I feel it is vital that the primates are able to have the widest and best possible information for their meeting next February."

The Reference Group met ten days ago in London for two full days and, in the absence of Archbishop Peter because of illness, I was asked to stand in for him. However, the people who did most of the work both before and during those two days were the members of the RRG. Let me introduce them to you... **[slide 2]**

[slide 3] We had the task of receiving a total of 322 responses of varying size: some short, one-paragraph emails; others, two or twenty pages of thought out views; others in book form representing a more in depth analysis of the Windsor Report. **[slide 4]** Of those responses, 108 came from what we will classify as 'sectors', ie, from provinces, dioceses, organisations, Houses of Bishops, theological institutes and mission agencies, as well as the ACC networks and agencies. 214 responses were from individuals. Significantly, 140 of these came from individuals in the USA and Canada, and only 30 came from Anglicans in other parts of the world. The rest were from non-Anglicans.

A minority of these responses directed themselves specifically to the guidelines posed by Archbishop Peter Kwong and those mainly from the sectors. Others, as I said, did either an in depth analysis of the Report or responded to the specific issue of the church's attitude to homosexuality.

How did we operate? The RRG decided to try to consider the responses in the light of the eight areas and questions outlined by Archbishop Robin in his presentation. In this way, we hoped it might aid our discussion as primates over the next few days. In doing so, we will not be able to do full justice to these in depth analyses from various groups, most of which will have been sent to you individually. I refer to such booklets as *Repair the Tear*, *Has Anglicanism a Future?*, and *The Faith Once for All Delivered*.

Over our two days together, two of the RRG worked on two particular areas with the help of a statistical analysis carried out by Steve Jenkins of the ACC. So the report of the RRG will highlight the statistical material followed by a short narrative of salient points which those two members of the RRG felt important from the responses received. **[link to RRG report and pie charts]**

One final introductory point. The statistical material is based on a judgement of how far respondents: agreed with the Windsor Report; agreed but with reservations; disagreed.

[slide 5] But maybe the most significant data which might be viewed as the overall context of this report is that, of these respondents expressing a preference:

- 113 wished the Communion to stay together
- 28 expressed the wish that the Communion would move closer together
- only 29 could be said to accept the possibility of the Communion separating.

We move, then, to different sections and responses.

1 Sections A and B

[slides 6 and 7] The statistical material reflects a high level of agreement especially among the ‘sector’ respondents – a pattern we will find repeated in other areas.

Many respondents expressed their gratitude that the report should begin by considering the scriptural and theological basis for its recommendations. What, however, seemed important to the RRG was to bear in mind those areas of qualification which came from both sides of the present disagreement. So we would articulate them as follows:

Scripture

[slide 8] No one questions the authority of Scripture and the place it should play in the church’s discernment of how it acts. But there is significant disagreement over the question of interpretation of Scripture and the weight we gave to Scripture over against the other Anglican ‘authorities’ of tradition and reason. For some “Scripture stands alone as the final authority” and is in a different category to that of the other two. Others see the triad in terms of the three-legged stool. Omit or over-emphasise one and the stool may well collapse. So maybe we need to be reminded once more what the Windsor Report is saying and challenging us to do.

Paragraph 61

“If our present difficulties force us to read and learn together from Scripture in new ways, they will not have been without profit.”

Episcopate

More is reflected in other sections but respondents did warm to the concept of bishops as teachers. A number wanted to strengthen that more collaborative model touched on in paragraph 66 of the Windsor Report, and the need to discuss and develop what we mean by a church that is episcopally led and synodically governed. A number of respondents pointed out the different understandings of the authority and ministry of bishop in different provinces, governed as much by cultural factors as theological ones. And this would not only refer to the difference between North and South. It is true, for example, between England and Scotland!

Bonds of affection

While interdependence is strongly affirmed, we sometimes sensed different understandings. ‘Autonomy in Communion’ was interpreted by some as encouraging independence, while others see it as restricting independence.

Adiaphora

This provided some interesting responses and in general was seen as a helpful concept by many. Reservations seemed to appear around the question of how and who decides those 'Communion issues' which are pertinent to the whole Communion, as opposed to issues that can be locally determined.

2 Section C

[slides 9 and 10] The statistics of both sectors and individuals reflect some divided opinions. The RRG would suggest that if we, as primates, respond positively to this question, then we should acknowledge some of the feedback from respondents as guidance to the ACC and others as they move towards refining and implementing the proposals.

Instruments of Unity

[slide 11] The main focus of comment was on the section dealing with the enhanced role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, some individual suggestions were made about the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meetings and the ACC. A number noted that three out of the four Instruments of Unity were exclusive to the episcopate and wondered if, for example, the ACC required to be strengthened and generally become more synodical, especially if there were to be any development of Canon Law as envisaged in the Windsor Report. But on to the proposal that produced the most comment...

Archbishop of Canterbury

The Council of Advice, while welcomed by some respondents, did raise some concerns about: increasing bureaucracy; how representative it would be; whether it would be a permanent body; and inevitably, what it might cost and who would pay.

Where there seemed to be even more anxiety, was in the exact nature of this 'enhanced role'. Questions related to: possible conflict with the autonomy of provinces; concern about who appoints; the possible tension between being Primate of the Church of England and the enhanced Anglican Communion role. Above all, a number did highlight the danger of creeping centralisation. There was a strong plea for more study on this proposal.

Covenant

[slide 12] There seemed to be agreement and welcome for the principle of a covenant (note Scottish reservation about the name 'covenant' since in its ecclesiastical history, covenant had resulted in violence and division, not unity and reconciliation!).

However, a number felt more work had to be done on the Appendix 'example' given in the Windsor Report before it would become acceptable.

Some expressed concern about turning the Anglican Church into a 'confessional' church and there was a desire expressed by some that it should be less legalistic and more a statement of principle.

On the other hand, there are those who fear any ‘watering down’ of what is outlined in the Windsor Report and that it should remain a “legal authorisation by each church for signing and solemnizing by the primates in a liturgical context.”

3 Election of bishops

[slides 13 and 14] The statistics reflect a strong level of agreement within the sectors, but less so among individuals.

The two key issues are identified in the Windsor Report: that of the nature of the episcopate as local/global, and therefore the question of acceptability to the whole church. **[slide 15]** The great majority of those who commented on this issue accept that a bishop is both local and universal. But there is concern by some that the legal or indeed theological right, as they see it, of the local church to elect their own bishops might be impeded by the second issue.

Therefore the implication of such a term as ‘acceptability’ needs to be spelt out. What would it mean in practice? Are we talking about ‘consultation’ with a form of ‘veto’ by the whole Communion? At one end of this debate, there were views such as:

“Any consecration that assumes a departure from apostolic faith is not a legitimate consecration.”

At the other end:

“A moratorium on consecrating a homosexual bishop who is honest and open would be unjust. It is also contrary to the United Nations’ Convention on Human Rights.”

4 Public rites of blessing for same sex unions

This primarily focuses on the action of the Diocese of New Westminster in 2003, but there was also a concern about what might develop in other provinces, especially those where the civil law is now recognising such partnerships.

[slides 16 and 17] The statistical material reflects a significant difference between sector and individual responses.

[slide 18] The majority, though, would support the Report’s call for a moratorium. On both sides of the argument there is a desire to have a set time period, and also a firm commitment to listening and dialogue.

What the individual responses did reflect were particularly polarised viewpoints. They were more outspoken, even extreme, in their language, whether in condemning such rites and relationships or in condemning the church for intolerance and prejudice.

The RRG clearly felt the emotion of respondents, which simply underlined the need for time for listening and dialogue to take place.

Clarification re ECUSA

5 Call to ECUSA

[slide 19 and 20] Here, as in the previous section, we see, especially among individual responses, a much more polarised response.

Regret or repentance

[slide 21] While in the ECUSA House of Bishops' *Word to the Church* there would seem to be an expression of regret in line with that requested by the Windsor Report, there are quite a number of respondents who would demand more.

Quotes:

Repair the Tear – Recommendation that the primates should “confirm that statements of regret must signify the repentance necessary for true reconciliation.”

Rwanda – “We issue a call to repentance on the part of ECUSA and New Westminster, finding regret to be an insufficient and misleading term.”

On the other hand, there are those who felt that paragraph 134 went too far:

Wales – “W134 was a difficult section for our working party. Some felt the bishops from North America who had followed due ecclesiastical process had nothing to apologise for.”

The problem in this matter concerns different understandings as to what the regret or repentance is for. Is it about the consequences of hurt and pain felt by other parts of the Anglican Communion – the “bonds of affection”? Is it for ignoring the views expressed through the Instruments of Unity – the Lambeth Conference/Primates' Meeting? Or is it that the acceptance of homosexuality, and expressions of that, is for some ultimately and undeniably wrong in the sight of God?

Attendance at Anglican gatherings

The question of attendance now depends on the primates' view of the previous point and how we assess the position of ECUSA in the light of the House of Bishops' statement.

Moratorium

There would seem to be significant support for a moratorium, as with the public rites of blessing of same sex unions. But again, from both sides of the argument, there is a desire for a timescale for such a moratorium and a commitment to study dialogue during that time.

Fears are expressed that if we do not clarify the length and purpose of a moratorium, it will simply not work.

Others ask: if we are irreconcilable on the issue of our attitude to homosexuality, is there any point in a moratorium? But we will note, later, the massive majorities for the ‘listening process’.

6/7 Care of dissenting groups/Situations of intervention

Statistics suggest once more a clearer majority among sector respondents to the Windsor Report recommendations than among individual respondents. [slides 22 to 25]

The issues here assume some acquaintance with some highly abstract ideas which may explain the difference.

Individuals may be responding to 'what it feels like', while institutions have a stronger grasp of the historical framework of episcopal order.

The RRG has identified from the responses some criticisms of the Report from which they offer some principles for further discussion.

Criticism of the Windsor Report

Moral equivalence

[slide 26] There is some strong criticism of the Windsor Report, that it sees 'intervention' as morally equivalent to the actions of ECUSA and New Westminster. Though some note that the Windsor Report does say that "we fully understand the principled concerns that have led to those actions". (paragraph 149)

Language

There was a concern among conservative respondents regarding the use of the word 'dissent'. Yet conversely, the language of persecution and victimisation is widely used in their comments. The evidence was thought to be patchy. And then lesbian and gay voices can also make claims of persecution and victimisation.

Naivety

In this whole area, there has developed, for a number of churches, a lack of trust in their bishops. How far, it is asked, is this personalising the issue?

Inadequacy

How do we judge the adequacy or inadequacies of episcopal oversight? One view is that the judgement should be made by those intended to be protected by the arrangement (CAPA). Some also questioned whether a bishop who is acting in ways inconsistent with the wider Communion could expect to maintain full authority within his/her diocese.

Jurisdiction

Some seek total transfer of jurisdiction. Others would not go so far – Act of Synod of the Church of England: "The bishop of each diocese continues as the ordinary of the diocese".

Principles

[slide 27] There are constitutional difficulties in transferring jurisdiction other than on a voluntary basis. No legal power vested in the Archbishop of Canterbury, primates, etc, could force a diocese or province to cede jurisdiction to any outside body.

Voluntary schemes are all that can be provided. Are the objectives to the ECUSA and the Canadian Church schemes fatal to them?

The problem remains one of trust. Would ‘dissenting’ groups be reassured of their security with the Communion by some internal system monitored by a primate or group of primates on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury?

Voluntary but with heavy symbolic weight.

Need to keep monitoring.

8 Listening process

[slides 28 and 29] The statistics for this section reflect overwhelming support. But the questions that this leaves us with are ‘how?’ and ‘by whom?’. There are the sceptics among the small group who “disagree” that this is just a commitment in word only and not in action: [slide 30]

“not much trust that this listening will happen”

“Politicisation of the issue militates against real dialogue.”

But as the support for a moratorium illustrated, this can only happen if a timescale is agreed and study and dialogue do take place.

There are concerns about whom we will listen to. Are we ready to hear gay and lesbian, conservative and traditional voices?

This, therefore, is a brief and speedy summary of the RRG’s reflection under the headings presented to us by Archbishop Robin Eames. The written report offers a fuller account.

There were some other responses of which I would briefly like to remind you.

9 Primates

[slide 31] Most primates made an initial statement to the publication of the Windsor Report but have not added to that, apart from the statement issued by the Primates of the Global South after the CAPA Conference, and this has been included in the report.

10 Ecumenical

Some of our ecumenical partners have also responded and these have been briefly summarised in the report. We have included in full the response of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations (IASCER).

11 The bigger picture

[slide 32] One member of the RRG prepared this brief synopsis of some of the bigger issues that some of the responses were pointing us to; that somehow we need to find a way to move on from where we are, to tackle some of those bigger issues that the

Gospel calls us to address, and of which we are in danger of losing sight - and therefore see the Windsor Report not so much as a way of patching up the Anglican Communion, as a launching pad for our mission and outreach in the world.

[slide 33]

12 Personal comment

Archbishop Rowan, I end with a personal reflection. As I read through the many responses, there were times when I felt a sense of foreboding. Are we trying to reconcile the irreconcilable? So many people hold such strong, passionate but opposing convictions. And yet there is this clear desire to find a way through, to seek a consensus.

There were opposing approaches to ecclesiology between those who saw church in terms of some systematic framework and those who saw church in a more organic way.

Convictions or consensus. Systematic or organic. Are we trying to reconcile the irreconcilable? I remembered a famous Scottish theologian of the Presbyterian variety, Professor Donald Baillie, who wrote a book about the centrality of paradox in the Christian faith, pointing to the very heart of the Gospel.

Humanity in all its weakness and its limitations.

Divinity in all its ?? and its limitless power.

And the Gospel is that the irreconcilable can be reconciled in Jesus Christ.

[slide 34] Bruce Cameron

Chairman of the Reception Reference Group

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