

Windsor Continuation Group

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS Part One

A Presentation at the Lambeth Conference

This document is NOT a report by the Windsor Continuation Group. It constitutes their preliminary observations on the life of the Communion and of the current state of responses to the recommendations of the Windsor Report, and offering some suggestions about the way forward. These observations are offered to the Lambeth Conference for conversation and testing. Are they an accurate description of the current state of our life together?

1. Where we are: the severity of the situation

- (a) **The reality of our current life is complex**; presenting issues are not always the issues that we are actually dealing with. Doctrine, theology, ecclesiology, ethics, anthropology, culture, history, political and global realities are all dimensions. There are competing value systems at work and a lack of clarity about a shared value framework.
- (b) **Much has been undertaken in the Communion through and in response to the Windsor Process**, but as a Communion, we appear to remain at an impasse. There is inconsistency between what has been agreed, and what has been done. A gap between promise and follow through. Cf.:
- Resolutions at General Convention (June 2006), HoB at Camp Allen (March 2005), New Orleans (September 2007)
 - Undertakings and affirmations of the primates (Dromantine, January 2005; Dar es Salaam, February 2007)
 - Resolutions and responses by the House of Bishops and General Synod in Canada (2004, 2006, 2007)

The gap is manifested in:

- Inconsistency between the stated intent and the reality – including the use and abuse of language, e.g. moratorium, “initiating interventions”.
 - The implications of requests and responses are either not fully thought through or they are disregarded. The consequences of actions have not always been adequately addressed.
- (c) **Breakdown of Trust**
- There are real fears of a wider agenda – over credal issues (the authority of scripture, the application of doctrine in life and ethics and even Christology and soteriology) and polity (comprehensiveness, autonomy and synodical government); other issues, such as lay presidency and theological statements that go far beyond the doctrinal definitions of the historic creeds, lie just over the horizon. Positions and arguments are becoming more extreme: not moving towards one another, relationships in the Communion continue to deteriorate; there

is little sense of mutual accountability and a fear that vital issues are not being addressed in the most timely and effective manner.

- Through modern technology, there has been active fear-mongering, deliberate distortion and demonising. Politicisation has overtaken Christian discernment.
- Suspicions have been raised about the purpose, timing and outcomes of the Global Anglicanism Future Conference; there is some perplexity about the establishment of the Gafcon Primates' Council and of FOCA which, with withdrawal from participation at the Lambeth Conference, has further damaged trust.

- There are growing patterns of episcopal congregationalism throughout the communion at parochial, diocesan and provincial level. Parishes feel free to choose from whom they will accept episcopal ministry; bishops feel free to make decisions of great controversy without reference to existing collegial structures. Primates make provision for episcopal leadership in territories outside their own Province.

- There is distrust of the Instruments of Communion and uncertainty about their capacity to respond to the situation.
- Polarisation of attitudes in the Churches of the Communion, not just in North America
- The symptoms of this breakdown of trust are common to all parties in the current situation – felt and expressed by conservative and liberal alike.

(d) Turmoil in The Episcopal Church

- There has been development from individual members leaving congregations, to congregations leaving parishes and dioceses, to dioceses seeking to leave provinces.
- Parties within the Episcopal Church have sought allies within the wider Communion, who are seen as only too willing to respond.
- Litigation and interventions have become locked into a vicious spiral – each side seeing the actions of the other as provoking and requiring response
- At this time, it would appear that the divisions in the United States will play out in the wider Communion (particularly in Canada).

(e) All this amounts to a **diminishing sense of Communion** and impoverishing our witness to Christ, placing huge strains on the functioning of the Instruments of Communion.

(f) Such turmoil affects our relations with **our ecumenical partners**, many of whom face similar tensions. Some partners are beginning to raise questions about the identity of their Anglican partner. In the light of the ecumenical movement, there can no longer be tensions in one Communion that do not have wider repercussions across the whole Christian family.

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2. Where would we like to be: Towards a Way Forward

If we are to survive as an international family of Churches, then the *Windsor Report's* suggestion of a shift of emphasis to 'autonomy-in-communion' might yet require a further step to 'communion with autonomy and accountability' cf. recommendations in the *Virginia Report* of the International Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, and the *Windsor Report*. The covenant process is intended to bring the Communion to a point where its understanding of Communion is renewed and deepened. There are a number of fundamental questions which need to be answered:

- i. **Can we recognise the Church in one another?**
 - Anglicans are currently failing to recognise Church in one another;
 - We value independence at the expense of interdependence in the Body of Christ
 - We denigrate the discipleship of others
 - This has led to internal fragmentation as well as to confusion among our ecumenical partners.
- ii. **What is a Communion of Churches?**
 - Recovering a common understanding of what it means to be a global communion
 - A common understanding of the place and role of the episcopal office within the *sensus fidelium* of the whole Church.
- iii. **What is our shared understanding of the role of a bishop in the communion of the Church?**

Towards the Shaping of the Future

(a) The Anglican Covenant

- The Covenant proposals are an important response to these issues. It is, therefore, crucially important that all Provinces engage seriously with the proposed Covenant. If the questions we have identified above are to be addressed they can be resolved most obviously by the implementation of the Covenant.
- In the past the Lambeth Quadrilateral provided Anglicans with a framework for understanding the identity and unity of the Church. The instruments of communion, rethought and strengthened alongside the Lambeth Quadrilateral, will help us to regain a sense of Anglican identity and unity and thus recognise Church in one another.
- The approval of the covenant needs a definite timeline to ensure confidence that the process has credibility.

(b) Work on the Instruments to enable them to sustain communion

- There is currently a lack of clarity about the role of each of the instruments and their relation to one another
 - **The Archbishop of Canterbury** - is described as having an 'extraordinary ministry of *episcopate*, support and reconciliation' (*Lambeth, 1988*); 'the central focus of unity and mission within the Communion [with authority] to speak directly to any provincial situation on behalf of the Communion where this is deemed to be advisable'. (*Windsor Report 2004*)

- **The Lambeth Conference** – There are questions concerning the authority of a Lambeth Conference and the nature and of the authority of its Resolutions.
- While acknowledging that resolutions of one Conference have been reviewed, and directions changed at a later Conference, nonetheless, like the resolutions taken by councils of bishops in primitive Christianity, they are of sufficient weight that the consciences of many bishops require them to follow or at least try to follow such resolutions. They are taken after due debate and after prayer by the ministers who represent the apostles to their churches (*cf Owen Chadwick, in “Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences”, ed. Coleman, 1992, p.xvii*).
- **The Anglican Consultative Council** - ACC is not to be understood as a synodical body at the Communion wide level. It is ‘*consultative*’. Its Constitution provides for the bringing together of bishops, clergy and laity in order to advise, encourage and inform the Provinces. It is particularly valued by those who emphasise the contribution of the whole people of God in the life, mission and the governance of the Church.
- There are questions about whether a body meeting every three years, with a rapidly changing membership not necessarily located within the central structures of their own Provinces, can fulfil adequately the tasks presently given to it.
- Not all believe that a representative body is the best way to express the contribution of the whole people of God at a worldwide level. There are many ways in which the voice of the whole body can be heard: diocesan and Provincial synods, networks, dialogues and commissions.
- **The Primates’ Meeting** - recognising the need and importance for collegial consultation and support for the Archbishop of Canterbury, it is a body that could be called together as occasion requires in between Lambeth Conferences.
- Recognising that different models of primacy exist, a great virtue of the Primates’ Meeting is that the Primates are in conversation with their own Houses of Bishops and located within their own synodical structures. They are, therefore, able to reflect the breadth and depth of the conversations and opinion in their Provinces.

In considering the future development of the Instruments of Communion it is vital to take account of their ecclesiological significance as well as whether they are fit to respond effectively to the demands of global leadership. There needs to be a process of communion wide reflection which leads towards a common understanding.

(c) Processes and Commissions:

- (i) The Listening Process
- (ii) The Hermeneutics Project – The Bible in the Church)
- (iii) The Principles of Canon Law Project
- (iv) A Faith & Order Commission

These four initiatives are already in hand, but we see them as vital for strengthening the life of our Communion. The Listening Process and conversation on issues of sexuality needs to continue. We also recommend the continuation of plans for The Bible in the Church. Such projects are urgent and vital if we are to regain a sense of common values and mutual understanding.

The Common Principles of Canon Law Project (Anglican Communion Legal Advisers Network) gives a sense of the integrity of Anglicanism and we commend the suggestion for the setting up of an Anglican Communion Faith and Order Commission that could give guidance on the ecclesiological issues raised by our current ‘crisis’.

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3. How do we get from here to there?

The various initiatives set out in Part Two and the Covenant is a longer term process to reverse the trends described in Part One; to restore the sense of trust, fellowship and communion on which we thrive. In the period leading up to the establishment of a covenant, however, there are urgent issues which need addressing if we are going to be able to get to the point where such a renewal of trust even becomes possible.

The question of the moratoria

- The Windsor Report sets out requests for three moratoria in relation to the public Rites of Blessing of same sex unions, the consecration to the episcopate of those living in partnered gay relationships and the cessation of cross border interventions.
- There have been different interpretations of the sense in which “moratorium” was used in the Windsor Report. Our understanding is that moratorium refers to both future actions and is also retrospective: that is that it requires the cessation of activity. This necessarily applies to practices that may have already been authorised as well as proposed for authorisation in the future.
- The request for moratorium applies in this way to the complete cessation of (a) the celebration of blessings for same-sex unions, (b) consecrations of those living in openly gay relationships, and (c) all cross border interventions and inter-provincial claims of jurisdiction.
- The three moratoria have been requested several times: Windsor (2004); Dromantine (2005); Dar es Salaam (2007) and the requests have been less than wholeheartedly embraced on all sides.
- The failure to respond presents us with a situation where if the three moratoria are not observed, the Communion is likely to fracture. The patterns of action currently embraced with the continued blessings of same-sex unions and of interventions could lead to irreparable damage.
- The call for the three moratoria on these issues relates to their controversial nature. This poses the serious question of what response should be made to those who act contrary to the moratorium during the Covenant process and who should make a response.

New Ways of Responding

We make the following suggestions for situations which might arise in different parts of the Communion:

- the swift formation of a ‘**Pastoral Forum**’ at Communion level to engage theologically and practically with situations of controversy as they arise or divisive actions that may be taken around the Communion. Such a Forum draws upon proposals for a Council of Advice (Windsor), a Panel of Reference (Dromantine), a Pastoral Council (Dar es Salaam) and the TEC House of Bishops’ Statement (Sept 2007) acknowledging a ‘useful role for

communion wide consultation with respect to the pastoral needs of those seeking alternative oversight’.

- The existence of such a Forum might be included in the Covenant as a key mechanism to achieve reconciliation
- Part of the role of a Forum might be for some of its members, having considered the theological and ecclesiological issues of any controversy or divisive action, to travel, meet and offer pastoral advice and guidelines in conflicted, confused and fragile situations. There is a precedent in the method of the Eames’ Commission in the 1980s.
- The President of such a Forum would be the Archbishop of Canterbury, who would also appoint its episcopal chair, and its members. The membership of the Forum must include members from the Instruments of Communion and be representative of the breadth of the life of the Communion as a whole. Movement forward on this proposal must bear fruit quickly.
- We believe that the Pastoral Forum should be empowered to act in the Anglican Communion in a rapid manner to emerging threats to its life, especially through the ministry of its Chair, who should work alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury in the exercise of his ministry.
- The Forum would be responsible for addressing those anomalies of pastoral care arising in the Communion against the recommendations of the Windsor Report. It could also offer guidance on what response and any diminishment of standing within the Communion might be appropriate where any of the three moratoria are broken.
- We are encouraged by the planned setting up of the Communion Partners initiative in the Episcopal Church as a means of sustaining those who feel at odds with developments taking place in their own Province but who wish to be loyal to, and to maintain, their fellowship within TEC and within the Anglican Communion.
- The proliferation of *ad hoc* episcopal and archiepiscopal ministries cannot be maintained within a global Communion. We recommend that the Pastoral Forum develop a scheme in which existing ad hoc jurisdictions could be held “in trust” in preparation for their reconciliation within their proper Provinces. Such a scheme might draw on models derived from religious life (the relationship of religious orders to the wider Church), family life (the way in which the extended family can care for children in dysfunctional nuclear families) or from law (where escrow accounts can be created to hold monies in trust for their rightful owner on completion of certain undertakings. Ways of halting litigation must be explored, and perhaps the escrow concept could even be extended to have some applicability here.

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Why bother with all this?

Much faithful witness continues – converts are baptised; disciples are nurtured; vocations are encouraged; the scriptures are studied; the Gospel is proclaimed.

Anglicanism as a distinctive global expression of Reformed Catholicism: not only in its content, but in its processes – diverse, patient, hospitable and tolerant.

“We believe in this Communion”; a Communion which contributes to the wider life of the Church in the ecumenical community, and gives witness in a world of many faiths.

The bishops at the Lambeth Conference need to take the opportunity to explore large questions concerning authority, accountability, Communion with Autonomy and discipline and to examine the Instruments of Communion and what relation between the instruments would most faithfully reflect and strengthen the ecclesiology of the Anglican Communion as well as taking the opportunity to affirm the direction of the covenant process.

At the Indaba on the work of the Windsor Continuation Group,
a focus question could be:

What might mutual accountability under God in life and mission look like at its best in the period between now and the completion of the Covenant process?

What personal sacrifices might it involve for each of us?