

A note on the Windsor Report

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What has the Report offered as a whole?

1. A definition of "communion" generally
2. An insistence that we, as Anglican churches, are "in fact" bound up in this general definition as a reality of our life.
3. A definition of the responsibilities of this communion
4. A description of how these responsibilities have been contradicted by ECUSA, Canada, and "interveners"
5. A description of the structures by which "communion responsibility" can be better advanced and enacted
6. A recommendation of ways to move towards (5) above.

The Commission has chosen to work with a kind of "ideal" Communion, contrast it with the present, and then describe structures that would uphold the ideal. But the moving from the present situation towards the attainment of these ideally structured futures is passed over.

This leads to some of the most glaring omissions as well as pointed assertions. For instance, why didn't they "invite" Robinson to resign? That would have been consistent with many things they say -- about bishops and their vocation and purpose, about communion responsibility, and about not scandalizing others. But Robinson's fate is placed within the mature decision-making of the American church, now clearly and ideally instructed as to its communion character and imperative. Again, many people will be struck by the scolding given to the episcopal "boundary-crossers" who have overstepped geographical jurisdictions (i.e. AMiA, Southern Cone, etc.). I think, however, that all this and more is consistent with their sense of the "ideal": if we know that a functioning Communion doesn't do such things, then we can hardly recommend their continuance.

In short – and this is important to see in order to understand both the limitations and achievements of the Report – the Commission has decided to describe a "container for communion" that, they hope, will be a vehicle for responsible life together in contrast to the present chaos (what they call the "crippling prospect" of repeated conflict in par. 119). They have, by contrast, avoided describing what communion can be or must be in the actual face of or when engaged in the midst of ecclesial chaos. This is a decidedly clear attempt to sidestep communion life as it is bound up with human sin; and instead address the challenge to communion posed by structural impediments.

This is not to say that the thrust is untheological. The Report obviously aims – and Central African Primate Abp. Malango’s statement makes the point (“[the Report] clearly sets out the fact that as a commission we have aimed to work for healing and restoration”) -- at articulating common life from *within* a context of engraced life together in Christ. One could of course argue – as I would – that one simply cannot shove to the side of the matter of “communion”, for the sake of some other discussion, the whole element of “life in Christ” that is tied up with ongoing repentance, correction, restitution, and restoration. For communion in Christ is wrongly apprehended, in part, to the degree that it cannot essentially embody a common life lived within the daily reality of human fallenness among members of the Church. (Here, the weak use of Scripture and of the Old Testament’s informing reality for understanding “life in Christ” in this discussion becomes apparent.) Still, the Report chooses to leave this aspect unexplored, except by implication in its opening Scriptural discussion of “holiness of life” in communion (par. 3 and 4). This theological lacuna – in which the concept of mutual “discipline” and “restoration” makes no appearance, nor with it foundational understandings of the Body of Christ within a world of sin – is unfortunate.

It is not, however, subversive of the Report’s contribution to a useful way forward.

There are, for example, some very clear “judgments” that have been made (despite Abp. Eames’ claim to the contrary in his Forward)..

Since we actually "are in fact in communion":

a. ECUSA, Canada, and the Cross-Provincial Interveners (e.g. AMiA) have clearly acted "in opposition" to communion realities, or in ways "incompatible" ("compatibility" being a favorite term throughout) with communion "principles" (cf. par. 122). This explicitly includes the violation of “communion teaching” explicated in 1998 Lambeth I.10 (cf. par. 26), and the assertion that the present matter is definitely *not* one of “reception”, but of opposing established teaching (par. 69). At one point the current “movement towards the authorization” of same-sex blessing “rites” in various American dioceses (and via a clear interpretation of 2003 GC Resolution B-051 as so authorizing) is said to “constitute a denial of bonds of communion” (par. 141). This is extraordinarily decisive language, coming not simply from aggravated Primates, but from a highly diverse body drawn from around the Communion and not clearly weighted, as a whole, towards one argument or another.

And there *is* a moral judgment made in the Report. For although not "entirely or exclusively blameworthy" in this denial – because the structures of communion have not been well-ordered within Anglicanism up to the present – people like ECUSA and Canada are clearly "responsible" for their actions because they pursued them in "full knowledge" of their "offense" to others (pars. 128-9). That is, they may not be guilty of canonical violations (although this too is hinted at –

cf. the questions raised about ECUSA's "commitment" to its own Constitution in Par. 129), but they are certainly guilty of having injured their brothers and sisters in Christ through scandal (cf. also pars. 87-96 on *adiaphora* and the "strong and the weak").

There can be no question but that those who have disturbed the Communion in the present conflict bear an enormous burden of "scandalizing" offence. Within the context of traditional understandings of the Christian Church, rooted in New Testament testimony, this is a grave judgment indeed.

b. Hence, the "offenders" must "apologize" and live into the reality of the membership in communion, especially in the context of newly ordered structures such as the Commission recommends.

c. Furthermore, they must cease and desist from repeating their irresponsibilities ("moratoria" on gay bishops and same-sex blessings [of *all* kinds, not just those called "marriages"-- 134, 141, 143f.]).

d. They must exercise conscientious distance from communion counsel while they order their relationship with the Communion (par. 134)

e. Alternative Episcopal Oversight must be offered by ECUSA and Canadian bishops to those "dissenting" with their "irresponsible" communion teaching. However, the form of this oversight is appropriately given (in ECUSA) by the process already outlined by the U.S. House of Bishops (known as DEPO); and this, we are told, needs to be "accommodated" to various needs and realities on the ground, perhaps even including the engagement of foreign bishops, if mutually agreed to.

e. Finally, new structures need to be put into place to make sure nothing like this happens again.

This last is the important point. The Commission obviously believes that the "reality" of communion in which we in fact already live requires us to maintain as far as possible our faithful adherence to life together within existing structures. These structures are both fundamentally sound and accepted in certain respects – e.g. episcopal government, "autocephaly" as a form of "provincial autonomy in communion", etc. (cf. pars. 80-86) – but also in need of some refashioning in certain secondary respects.

Thus, the foundational elements of our communion polity must continue to be respected and worked within even during a transition into more clarified secondary structures. This explains the Report's rebuke of those Primates and bishops who have crossed provincial and diocesan boundaries and of those ECUSA bishops who have absented themselves from or repudiated their own House of Bishops' attempts at working together; the rejection of parallel

jurisdictions (par. 154); and the avoidance of any extraneous “demand” that this or that elected minister (e.g. Robinson) vacate their see (an internal matter to a provincial church). No doubt, many conservatives will object to this. But the Commission’s rationale must at least be clear: the communion must continue to function as a “communion” in its essential facets, if in fact there is to be sustained accountability and also change for the sake of accountability in the present and future.

The proposed changes in this regard are significant, and demand carefully scrutiny and acknowledgment.

a. an enhanced role for the Archbishop of Canterbury: now he must “articulate the mind of the Communion especially in areas of controversy” (par. 109); he may also use his role of “inviter” (par. 110) more clearly and fully, in order to maintain the “unity” of the Communion – that is, he may need *not* to invite certain persons because of the scandal their presence might cause. (This last is obviously very important and has implications for discipline that are not actually spelled out in the Report.)

b. create a Council of Advice for the Archbishop of Canterbury that would help him exercise his “ministry of unity” (explained above), through advice and a certain representative counsel. (This, by the way, looks nothing like a “star chamber” as reported, although presumably they would assist the AbC in doing his own “articulating” and “inviting”.)

c. make the ACC more ordered, coordinated with other “instruments of Unity”, representative, and tied to the Primates.

d. continue the direction of having the Primates Meeting move towards acting as Lambeth’s “Standing Committee” (par. 106) – the implication being that it should act in a more executive fashion.

e. Lambeth Conferences should be acknowledged as having certain resolutions stand as authoritative teaching (see Appendix I.3 on suggested means of designating a “hierarchy” of Lambeth teachings)

f. the adoption of a communion-wide “covenant”. This will be one of the most discussed elements of the Report. Its suggested “draft” articles in the Appendix are not very concrete – nor are they meant to be, if they are to remain useful in the long-term -- but they at least represent acknowledgement of commitment to teaching, values, decisions, etc. of the whole communion as being the basis for membership within the Communion -- cf. articles 8, 9, 10, 13, 16. Much could be made of these, although they remain rather broad, and not exactly defined in their method of illuminating membership integrity. Presumably the various Instruments of Unity, with the Archbishop of Canterbury representing leadership, would prove the means of raising and adjudicating membership adherence to the

Covenant. (There is nothing clearly stated about provinces who choose not to adopt the Covenant leaving the Communion. But that is probably a good implication.)

Much of the ecclesiological material explicated by the Report as well as the recommendations for clarifying structures clearly sets the actions of ECUSA, her bishops, Canada, and the Interveners in a position of having violated the Communion's common life *already*. In this manner the Commission has done the useful work of taking the *Virginia Report* (a document clearly informing the Commission's work) and actually applying its principles to a concrete situation. They have thereby fulfilled a kind of theological procedure set in motion at the 1988 Lambeth Conference whereby the Communion was asked to think through the practical implications of its developing communion life.

By contrast, and to repeat an earlier observation, an obvious choice was made by the report is to avoid *any* discussion of "discipline" within the Communion, now or in the future. (A word search shows that the only reference to "discipline" in this sense is in par. 4, noting Paul's exercise of discipline vs. "scandalous behavior" in 1 Cor. 5 -- the reference is perhaps important theologically and by implication; but no more.)

The potential shapes of discipline discussed by many in the past few months by many in the Communion are addressed only in the final paragraph 157, and referred to as "possible consequences" in terms of regrettable effects that represent the opposite of "reconciliation" (see also 110 on AbC's role as inviter to councils).

We need to be clear about this decision by the Commission: they chose to avoid one of the central arguments I myself feel needs making, which was that "discipline" and "communion" go together intrinsically, and must do so now. Some of weaknesses underlying this choice are visible in the sections on the "authority of Scripture", which demonstrate an unwillingness -- despite a commendable attempt at maintaining the dynamic character of Scriptures authoritative words -- to take seriously the concrete implications of the Scripture's historical power to shape the Church's life in a consistent fashion, within the realities of the world's unfolding under God's Providence. In this regard, little is said about the Anglican Communion's vocation in relationship to the larger Church (mentioned only in the context of formal ecumenical relationships), and to her own common shaping by the Scripture's reach and traditional explication. These are deep flaws in the Report.

But they are not mortal flaws, if one is willing to read the Report on its own terms as a description of positive desire. Which is not the same as wishful thinking, as the final paragraph darkly hints.

For we can be clear on what the Report states positively: there is a decisive *verdict* that has been made vs. ECUSA, its GC, and Gene Robinson's election: you have "denied the bonds of communion", there *is* a Communion teaching that you have no right to place up for grabs -- you can question it personally, but you cannot publicly violate it by actions and decisions, without thereby contradicting your identity as a member of the Body of Christ in this communion.

So, the answer to the question, "what do you teach? do you have a teaching?" is clear from the Communion's point of view and those who are a part of it: yes, and it is coherent with the Scriptures and the tradition of the world-wide Church. Not so clear is how many of our own bishops and clergy would respond. But in this, I think our leaders have been given a decisive choice: live in communion, or "walk apart" (par. 157). Now we are in the "choosing" period. Yes, there are individuals who do not want to live through the wrenching of this period. I'm not sure I do (although I'm not planning on leaving). But there is no moral failure involved in committing oneself to living through the period, and doing so in as ordered a way as possible. It may actually be the better part of Christian valor (although I wouldn't want to assert unequivocally this at this point).

Thus, I see the Report as laying out the necessary parameters for the choices to be made, laying them out clearly, laying them out without fudging. They have not, however, tried to force anyone's hand. There is a sense in which everyone is being treated like an adult, insofar as free will is assumed. In a real-world context, however, in which most of us and our people wander around like "sheep without a shepherd", treating us all like adults may well be naive. Still, it is a naivete born of hope, surely, and not malice.

What are some of the possible outcomes to the Report and its recommendations, with respect to our own situation?

1. There is no question but that the relevant acts of GC 2003 and the bishops who support it are seen have "denied" the reality of their communion responsibilities and common life.
2. The interpretation of B-051 as merely "descriptive" and not "permissive" has been contradicted by the Commission.
3. Unapologetic consecrators of Robinson are asked to withdraw themselves from Communion councils, and "representative functions".
4. "Moratoria" on relevant actions are viewed as not just local options, but communion-demanded.
5. There *is* a "communion teaching" that is not open for local dismissal, without thereby engaging in a moral violation against the Communion and its members. Conversation is one thing (and that is encouraged); but questioning the

established and authoritative character of this teaching is another. *We must and are permitted and even impelled by duty to insist on the public avowal of communion teaching.*

6. The call for some kind of profound and convincing “theological” rationale for changing the Communion’s teaching and discipline is not an invitation to clearing the field; it is a stern judgment on the *current lack* of such a rationale, as well as an encouragement to dig deeper.

7. The principle of “creating space” for communion teaching and witness is established. This could take a number of forms, including alternative episcopal oversight.

8. The question of currently ordained and non-celibate gay priests was not addressed. The implications seem fairly clear, however: their continued public functioning is problematic to say the least, although subject to the realities of pastoral prudence (cf. par. 143).

9. The Network is not addressed; and should it continue to function within the bounds of foundational communion life – as outlined in the Report – it seems unexceptionable. The AMiA is out as an option congruent with communion life.

10. The only wiggle room for our bishops’ public teaching and disciplinary action is to be in “conversation” with those who disagree with communion teaching. Unless, of course, a bishop chooses to “walk away” from communion itself (par. 157).

One of our own challenges is whether this is what we want to do as well. The Commission challenges us to this choice also; but they have offered a significant basis upon which the construal of one’s Christian integrity will be oriented towards the choice for communion.

Finally, it seems clear that the Primates will have to place all this in a context of immediate action; otherwise, it will be dismissed by precisely those who it is meant to affect.