

SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Provincial Responses to the Windsor Report: some brief comments

1. Reports were received from discussions at a joint meeting of the Standing Committee and the College of Bishops, at the Faith and Order Board, and at the Mission and Ministry Board. Minutes of these meetings are reproduced as appendices 1-3. In addition, important papers relating to particular issues written by the Secretary General and by the Convenor of the Committee on Canons are given as appendices 4 and 5.
2. In the brief comments which follow, an attempt is made to draw out particular themes which appear to have been prominent in the discussions. There is then an attempt to relate these to the particular questions asked by Archbishop Peter Kwong.
3. Discussions were wide ranging. There was a general recognition of the difficulty of the task facing the commission which had produced the Windsor report, and of the careful dissociation of the recommendations of the report from the particular events which had precipitated its production. It should be recognised, too, that any discussion which takes place around a document of this kind will focus largely on criticisms of the document – in a sense, it is there to be shied at.
With these caveats in place, a number of points emerged from the discussions.
4. Some responses to the Windsor report are broadly negative. Points made include:
 - The historical material set out in section A was felt to be insufficiently nuanced. It was noted that, in the past, unilateral action within Provinces had led to Communion-wide changes.
 - Some appear to have found the concept of adiaphora not to be a particularly helpful one. Perhaps the Instruments of Unity might be asked to define a diaphora more closely.
 - It was felt that the report in general failed to acknowledge the real diversity that (i) currently exists, and has always existed, in the Anglican Communion and that (ii) is a significant, distinctive characteristic of that Communion, and of its witness in a pluralistic context.
 - In addition to the presenting issues around the Church's attitude to same-sex relationships, it was noted that the exercise of Episcopal authority underpins a good deal of concern around the report. The novelty of 'flying bishops', introduced for pragmatic reasons in the Church of England following the decision to ordain women to the priesthood in that country, was felt to have set an unhelpful precedent in offering the model of alternative Episcopal oversight as a means of accommodating varied opinions.
 - Related to this, there was a concern that any pragmatic 'fix' to a particular difficulty faced by the Communion – such as that which might be provided in the present case by a Covenant – might solve problems in the present, but create new difficulties in the future.

- It was noted that the issues which had given rise to the Commission neither could nor should be divorced from broader socio-political concerns in the modern world, particularly concerning the relationship between the developed West and the rest of the world. Moreover, disagreements about the presenting issues of sexuality are not solely seen on a ‘north-south’ divide: in fact, they are experienced in microcosm within each Province.
 - The proposed covenant arrangements were felt to be restrictive, and could lead to the stifling of anything innovative in the future. The idea of ‘Anglican Communion Liaison Officers’ was criticised as being undesirable in principle and awkward in practice.
 - There was a fear that Convenantal arrangements constituted draconian measures for preserving unity at the expense of recognising a variety of perspectives on a given issue as legitimately Anglican. There was a fear that the restrictive nature of the Covenant as proposed might lead to fragmentation, rather than a search for fresh ways of living with diversity.
 - Practical concerns about the workability of a Covenant of the kind set out in the Windsor Report were expressed, (i) because of the voluntary limiting of Provincial autonomy implied, (ii) in terms of enabling any development of doctrine and practice to occur, (iii) in terms of the difficulty of defining what is, and what is not, a ‘Communion issue’, and (iv) in terms of the practicability of achieving cross-Provincial Canonical harmonisation. (See appendices 4 and 5 for fuller discussion of these points.)
5. In contrast to these negative points, some more positive comments regarding the suggestions of the Windsor report were made. For example:
- There was widespread affirmation of the importance and value of the Anglican Communion, and a fear that the present situation may lead to schisms which could only be a diminution of all concerned.
 - There was a recognition that the Anglican Communion needs to move forwards if it is to maintain its unity.
 - Whilst the proposals for a Covenant in the Windsor Report were criticised, there remained a feeling (i) that a Covenant arrangement could be helpful, and (ii) that an alternative Covenant to that proposed in the report might be a way forwards.
 - The possibility of the Anglican Communion as a whole developing a Synodical structure was raised. This might enable Provinces to communicate and debate controversial issues with greater immediacy and sensitivity to each other’s perspectives.
6. Certain points were noted from the experiences of the Scottish Episcopal Church as being germane to the discussions: it was felt that these might be offered to the Communion for its consideration. For example:
- Patience and good will are necessary if parties in disagreement are to achieve any kind of reconciliation. If people do not want to be reconciled, reconciliation will not be possible.
 - This Province has not gone down the route of ‘flying bishops’ to accommodate differences. Our Church models an alternative to this approach.

7. It is difficult to give clear responses to Archbishop Peter Kwong's four questions in the light of the discussions above. Conversations ranged widely, as the appendices to this digest indicate. A full understanding of the SEC's responses should be gleaned from these appendices and from points 4-6 above. Briefly, however, responses to these questions might be stated as follows.

1. 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?

There was a concern that the Report offers an idealised picture of Anglican history which minimises past differences of doctrine and practice. The concept of adiaphora was not found particularly helpful. Whilst some found the picture of the Communion accurate, there remained a concern that a systematic approach to its development was now being suggested, in contrast to the 'organic growth' that has characterised its past.

2. In which ways do the proposals in Section C and D flow appropriately from the description of the Communion's Life in Sections A and B?

Some found elements of inconsistency in the report, e.g. regarding the authority accorded respectively to the Scriptures and to the Archbishop of Canterbury. There were some who valued the fact that Anglicans can be united in spite of differences – indeed, this might be held to be characteristic of Anglicanism. The Report was felt by some to be a compromise in the interests of unity – which was felt to be preferable to schism.

3. What do you think of the ways in which the recommendations and proposals of the Report would impact on the life of the Communion if they were to be implemented?

Reservations were expressed about the practical workability of the proposals, particularly regarding the assessment of particular issues as 'Communion issues', and regarding the practicability of achieving canonical harmonisation between Provinces. Some felt that a Synodical process and clarification of ways of challenging Communion decisions were necessary.

4. How would you evaluate the arguments for an Anglican Covenant set out in paragraph 119 of the Report? How far do the elements included in the possible draft for such a Covenant in Appendix 2 of the Report represent an appropriate development of the existing life of the Anglican Communion?

There was much division about the Covenant. Some felt it to be a helpful way forward, and others did not; and of the former, some saw virtue in the model Covenant outlined in the Report, whilst others did not. Those with reservations about the Covenant believed it had the potential to stifle diversity and effectively to prevent the kind of organic growth which has occurred within Provinces in the past.

The Doctrine Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church
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