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THE WINDSOR REPORT

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When it finally came the publication of the Windsor report was a bitter disappointment. It falls far short of what is needed given the crisis now engulfing the Anglican Communion.

The Lambeth Commission, which produced the report, was under immense pressure not least because of the time constraint. It is a wonder that they produced anything. We believe, however, that the outcome was prejudiced from the start first, because it was chaired by Robin Eames who is clearly not orthodox and also because the committee was over-represented by 'western' liberals and those who have bought into the liberal agenda or methodology.

Church Society has produced an analysis of the report which seeks to show why the report is faulty not simply in its conclusions but in its very assumptions. This has been circulated to members and is available from the Society offices or from our website.

What to do?

It would be possible to make the best of a bad job. However, we believe that a lot of change will be required in order to achieve this and the whole process will drag out interminably. It will require that each Province discuss the proposals separately as well as the Anglican Consultative Council. No doubt further committees would be set up and papers produced to look at the implementation of some of the proposals. All this is part of the revisionist agenda, it wears the church down and it treats the underlying issue, the acceptance of immoral behaviour, as if it was a valid option.

For this reason we have argued that it would be far better if the Primates ignored the report. Instead they should take decisive action based on Biblical teaching and historical practice. If the process suggested by Eames is embarked upon it will destroy the Communion. Some will leave but the rest will be sucked into the process and because in the interim immorality will be tolerated the long term acceptance of this will be the only possible outcome.

The alternative is simple, the Episcopal Church of the United States and the Anglican Church of Canada should be excluded from the Communion and then further steps can be taken.

If the proposals in the report to increase the legal powers of the Archbishop of Canterbury or any international Anglican body were followed through this would change the nature of the Communion. We are not a papal Church and should shun any temptations to become one. The report is also misdirected in that it fails to recognise that the problem lies with those who teach error rather than just with a few people who have done something the rest disagree with. These are not minor mistakes; they skew the whole report.

Discipline is a mark of the true Church. It is necessary to safeguard the faithful, to uphold the honour of God's name, and to bring sinners to their senses. It also has a role in a fellowship such as the Anglican Communion. At the international level, discipline entails rebuking those in error and

then, if they do not repent, by breaking fellowship. Included in this should be a refusal to take part in certain acts of fellowship, exclusion from international committees and gatherings, and also the refusal to recognise certain acts (such as the validity of orders).

As a matter of record the following summary of the Windsor Report and recommendations are taken from the leaflet produced by Church Society.

Summary of the report

The Windsor report begins by seeking to justify the idea of theological development. It speaks of the primacy and authority of Scripture but in such a way as to legitimise theological development, even when such development appears to be in flat contradiction to what all previous generations of Christians understood to be the plain meaning of Scripture.

The report, therefore, defines the crisis faced by the Anglican Communion in terms of two provinces having taken action against the wishes of the remainder. It is open to the possibility, even seems to expect, that with time the majority may accept and agree with the development.

The report then seeks to define the Anglican Communion institutionally. Based on this, and the view of Scripture already set out, it therefore sees the present crisis in terms of actions that threaten the unity of the Communion.

When the report suggests action it calls merely for expressions of regret from those who have threatened the unity of the whole. Furthermore, all its other suggestions are primarily institutional.

This report is therefore typical of what we have come to expect in the western liberal churches. Whilst appearing to say useful things it is actually flawed in its underlying approach, in its analysis of the problems, and in the way in which it seeks to find solutions.

If the Anglican Communion is to survive the present crisis it will be necessary for the Primates to ignore the recommendations of the Windsor report and take decisive action.

Action to be taken now.

The Communion needs a much clearer and more definite statement of its common beliefs. The starting point for this are the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

The Communion must break free from the mindset that says every truth is up for grabs. It will need to take as given those truths which are given to us in Scripture, and which have found expression in the historic creeds and in the formularies of the Anglican churches. There may be instances when by common consent some issue should be revisited, but these will be rare.

There clearly need to be some central bodies to serve and give expression to the Communion as a whole. However, any attempt to give more authority to these bodies must be undertaken very warily.

The central bodies will need to make decisions at times to determine when members of the Communion have acted in ways that are incompatible with the teaching of Scripture.

The primary means of discipline should be the breaking of fellowship. This will be expressed in different ways as circumstances dictate, it could include:

- refusing to participate in fellowship together;
- refusing to have fellowship through giving and receiving;
- exclusion from representation in some or all of the central bodies; and
- refusing to recognise the validity of orders.

In the particular instance facing the Communion at this time, the most obvious response would be for the Primates of the Communion to resolve and declare, with the consent of the Archbishop of Canterbury, that the Episcopal Church of the United States and the Anglican Church of Canada are no longer part of the Anglican Communion. They should, therefore, be excluded straight away from the meetings of Primates and Bishops and from the representative bodies, such as the ACC.

The aim is not to punish but to bring about repentance, to safeguard the faithful, and to uphold the honour of God's name. Such action would need to include spelling out of the terms under which these churches would be readmitted to communion. This must include;

- clear statements that their actions have been wrong;
- the undoing and rescinding of certain resolutions;
- the passing of resolutions explicitly upholding Biblical morality and rejecting the innovations they have introduced; and,
- the introduction of discipline within their own life to give expression to these statements and resolutions.

If the fellowships concerned make it plain that they cannot and will not go back then they must be allowed to go their way. They have ceased to be part of historic Anglicanism and should no longer be part of the Communion.

Until such time as these provinces repent provision must be made to offer genuine support and fellowship to those within the provinces who uphold Biblical standards. This must eventually include representation in the central bodies of the Communion and the recognition of their orders.

Since ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada are now outside the Anglican Communion Diocesan and Provincial Boundaries will no longer be a barrier to providing adequate pastoral care or to evangelism and church planting.

There is nothing to be gained by the sort of compromise represented in the Windsor report. Instead, now is the time for honesty. The Anglican Communion will be best served by gracious yet decisive action. In the grace of God it is possible that such action will serve to bring back the western churches from the very brink of destruction.