

Rector's Response to the Windsor Report

The Lambeth Commission Report (The Windsor Report) strikes me as a very balanced and peace-seeking report. It suggests ways to let the progressive North Americans and Northern Europeans be tentative prophetic presences without separating the Anglican Communion into feuding factions.

Put another way, the report accurately acknowledges that we in the Episcopal Church USA were within our rights as we adhered to our national church polity and its provisions when our General Convention voted as it did to accept New Hampshire's election of Gene Robinson as their bishop, and when some fifty of our bishops consecrated him to that office. Yet the report also accurately points out that at the same time we in the Episcopal Church USA did not adhere to the polity provided by the "Instruments of Unity" of the worldwide Anglican Communion. These are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference of the bishops of the Anglican Communion worldwide, and the Anglican Consultative Council, composed of prelates, clergy, and lay persons from around the world. These "Instruments of Unity" urged our province to delay until the mind of the church could be more consistent. We did not heed their wishes, and many within and outside our communion are aggrieved by our action.

The report also admonishes certain "southern hemisphere" bishops and disaffected north American congregations to desist from their efforts to establish alternative episcopal oversight in the United States and Canada, and it commends arrangements made by the ECUSA to provide supplementary episcopal oversight to such congregations.

The most positive recommendation of the report seems to me to be the request to the American/Canadian church to provide a theological and scriptural (and I would add scientific) analysis of just how our prophetic stance deepens and clarifies the Gospel message, for the discussion and edification of the communion generally. Such work has already been done, and needs to be continued—with opponents allowing the Spirit to work in conversations with each other. As the report notes, the challenge will be still to balance our inclination to go our own way at our own pace against our inclination to remain in communion with those whose theology, practice, and reading of Scripture are clearly divergent from our majority—all of whom style ourselves Anglican.

The hard parts of the report are the suggestions that somehow Gene Robinson and the co-consecrators are somehow tainted by their theology and so are *personae non gratae* at Anglican gatherings. That seems at best ungracious and unanglican. A proposed Covenant binding all branches of Anglican Christendom is also problematic.

In the middle are the institutional, cautious recommendations for a moratorium on comparable episcopal consecrations and the (diocesan-approved) blessing of same-gender unions. I suspect this is where the real discussion in North America and northern Europe will take place. Likewise in the middle is the recommendation that the American and Canadian churches express regret for the hurt other people have felt about the actions we believe were undertaken in deep integrity. That should be fairly easy to accomplish.

Theologically, it is useful also to acknowledge that the whole church does have an interest in what constitutes "holiness of life." The report discusses this as an adiaphora and subsidiarity issue, as a matter that touches on the faith and practice of all Christians. Our northern American and European understanding of holiness of life may turn out to illuminate the entire church's understanding.

At the very least, the Windsor recommendations provide a way forward for remaining in communion with one another, providing a rationale for allowing time to digest what has happened. I would describe that as potentially good, in that it allows the world to judge us not by a misapplied scriptural yardstick but by the fruits we bear--as Jesus recommended.

I know from my experience how much love and goodness there is in places (like I trust St Paul's is) where people can be recognized as the children of God as they fully are; and that there's (again in my experience) more love in a St Paul's kind of place than in the places that are so bitterly on the opposite side. I have made clear where I stand in this debate, and I have no doubt about where the passage of time will reveal the truth to reside.

--The Rev. Bennett A. Brockman October 19, 2004