

UNITY *in* DIVERSITY OR UNITY *vs* DIVERSITY

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The Windsor Report, The St. Michael Report and
the Challenge Ahead**

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The Hon. Ronald C. Stevenson QC
“Unity *in* Diversity or Unity *vs.* Diversity?”

Abstract

General Synod 2007 will deal with a deferred motion that would affirm the authority of dioceses to authorize blessing of committed same sex unions. The Synod will do that in a context shaped by two Reports: one says the issue is one of non-credal doctrine; the other calls for a moratorium on such rites, for continuing study of biblical and theological rationale for and against such unions, and for any Church moving toward such rites to demonstrate how they meet the criteria of scripture, tradition and reason. Two versions of such a demonstration would be required - a scholarly thesis for theologians and a plain language version for others. Most Anglicans fall between the polarized positions and need to be reminded that diversity is one of the strengths of Anglicanism. Statements of bishops in widely separated provinces of the Communion refute any false impression that all Anglicans outside North America reject diversity around sexuality issues. The St. Michael Report suggests that the Synod may have to choose between concern for the unity of the Communion and making a decision for which the Synod feels it has an urgent gospel mandate. Synod planners hope to enable the Synod to make its decisions decently and in order.

Biography

The Hon. Ronald C. Stevenson is a graduate of the University of New Brunswick (BA) and Dalhousie University (LLB) and an honorary graduate of the University of King’s College (DCnL). He practiced law in Fredericton from 1953 to 1972 and was a judge of the Court of Queen’s Bench of New Brunswick from 1972 to 1994. A former member of the Diocesan Synod of Fredericton and the Synod of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, he successively served as chancellor of those synods. He has been a member of nine General Synods and has been Chancellor of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada since 1999. Justice Stevenson participated in the Anglican Communion Legal Advisors’ Consultation at Canterbury in 2002 and in 2003 presented a paper on Anglican Understanding of Authority to the International Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance.

Unity *in* Diversity or Unity *vs.* Diversity

... because both sides in a religious controversy tend to identify their position with the will of God, it often takes a long time before the participants are prepared to accept the fact that they cannot win and must compromise.¹

General Synod 2007 - Context

The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada will meet in June 2007 in a context shaped largely by the Windsor and St. Michael Reports and the events that precipitated them.

Three factors led to the appointment of the Lambeth Commission on Communion. They were

- (1) the approval by the synod and bishop of the Diocese of New Westminster in June 2002 of the blessing of same-sex covenanted unions and the issue and first use of a Rite of Blessing in that diocese in May 2003,
- (2) the actions of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in the U. S. A. (TEC) in the summer of 2003, most particularly the Convention's consent to the election of the Rev. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire, and
- (3) the intrusion or involvement of Anglican bishops and archbishops in dioceses and provinces other than their own without the consent or approval of the local bishops.

The Lambeth Commission was appointed in October 2003. It issued the Windsor Report a year later. While that Commission was at work, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met and made two relevant decisions. First, it adopted a motion affirming the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships. That motion was proposed from the floor as an amendment to a multi pronged resolution that had emanated from the Standing Committee on Faith, Worship and Ministry and from the Council of the General Synod. The debate on the integrity and sanctity motion was cut short by an unfortunate use of the parliamentary device of moving that the question be put - a procedural motion that is not debatable and which when passed prevents any further discussion of the substantive motion before the Synod. The second relevant decision of the General Synod was to defer to the 2007 Synod a clause in the multi pronged resolution that

¹ N. Keith Clifford, *The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), p. 223.

would have affirmed the authority and jurisdiction of any diocesan synod, with the concurrence of its bishop, to authorize the blessing of committed same-sex unions. When the General Synod deferred that item, it requested the Primate to ask the Primate's Theological Commission to review, consider and report whether the blessing of such unions is a matter of doctrine. The Primate acceded to that request and the Primate's Theological Commission produced the St. Michael Report in May 2005.

So the General Synod in 2007 will have before it the motion deferred from 2004, the Windsor Report, and the St. Michael Report containing the opinion of the Primate's Theological Commission that the blessing of committed same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine, that it is not a matter of core doctrine in the sense of being credal doctrine, and that the issue should not be a communion-breaking one.

There is a post-Windsor and post-St. Michael factor that also affects the context in which the General Synod will meet in 2007. Since July 20, 2005, for civil purposes, marriages of persons of the same-sex have been legal throughout Canada.²

All that is background to the subject I am asked to address - the process and procedure the General Synod will use to respond to the two Reports. First, a word about how the business of the General Synod is organized. Well in advance of a meeting of the General Synod a Planning Committee develops a template or grid allotting times for addresses, presentations, plenary sessions, and so on. In 2007, as in 2004, time will be set aside for the election of a Primate.

At the beginning of each day during the Synod the sessional Agenda Committee presents Orders of the Day which, for plenary sessions, lists the particular matters to be dealt with that day. Motions at the Synod come from two sources. There are motions that are proposed by the General Synod's Standing Committees and by its Council. And there are motions put forward by individual members of the Synod. Motions from the Standing Committees and the Council normally take priority over motions from members.

Process and procedure

How does the General Synod make decisions?

The General Synod is a deliberative and legislative forum. It reaches its formal decisions using parliamentary procedures governed by its constitutional documents and by its formal rules of order and procedure. Its authority and jurisdiction are defined by its constating documents - the Declaration of Principles and the Constitution of the General Synod.

² *Civil Marriage Act*, Statutes of Canada, 2005, chapter 33.

Except for matters over which diocesan synods have local or residual authority and matters expressly assigned to the synods of the four ecclesiastical provinces, the General Synod has authority and jurisdiction in all matters affecting in any way the general interest and well being of the Anglican Church of Canada and specifically with respect to 17 subject matters listed in the Constitution.

A formal decision of the Synod may take the form of a motion or resolution or it may be embodied in a Canon of the General Synod. A Canon is the ecclesiastical equivalent of an Act or statute passed by a secular Parliament or Legislature. Formal decisions are made during plenary sessions of the Synod. Occasionally the Synod resolves itself into a Committee of the Whole to allow for freer discussion unrestricted by formal rules. Usually no motions are made and no votes are taken during such discussions.

The General Synod comprises three Orders - Bishops, Clergy and Laity. It is a unicameral body, i.e., the episcopal, clerical and lay members meet and deliberate together. When it comes to voting, however, the rules vary depending on the nature of the proposal being considered. I will outline the normal rules for motions or resolutions on the one hand and for the enactment or amendment of Canons on the other.

On an ordinary motion two votes are taken - the clergy and laity vote as a group and the bishops vote separately. To pass, a motion must have the votes of a majority of the bishops and a majority of the clergy and laity voting together. But if any six members of the Synod request it, the vote of each of the three Orders is taken separately and, to pass, the motion must have the affirmative votes of a majority in each Order. In other words, if, on a vote by Orders, a motion falls short of a majority in any of the three Orders the motion is defeated.

There is another twist. If a motion passes on a vote by Orders, a request may be made for a vote by dioceses. That rarely happens - I have only seen that rule invoked on one occasion. A request for a vote by dioceses must be made by six members including two from each of three dioceses. The bishops, clergy and laity from each diocese then vote among themselves and the majority vote of the delegation becomes the vote of the diocese. If there is a tie in a diocesan caucus the diocese is not counted. Whether the motion is carried or lost is determined by the majority of the counted dioceses.

Those are the rules for voting on motions.

The rules for voting on a proposal to adopt or amend a Canon are different and they vary depending on whether the Canon deals with doctrine, worship or discipline.

A Canon that does not deal with doctrine, worship or discipline, the Pension Canon for example, requires a two-thirds majority in the Order of Bishops and a two-thirds

majority in the Orders of Clergy and Laity voting together. There is no vote by Orders, no vote by dioceses, and the Canon only has to be passed at one session of the Synod.

If a Canon touches on doctrine, worship or discipline, the Marriage Canon for example, the vote is taken by Orders and a two-thirds majority is required in each of the three Orders. There is no vote by dioceses. Furthermore, such a Canon or an amendment to such a Canon must be passed at two successive sessions of the Synod. And it must be referred to the diocesan and provincial synods for consideration after the initial approval. Those synods may not veto or amend the proposed Canon but they may make suggestions for the General Synod to consider when the Canon comes up at the following session of the General Synod.

What are the implications for proposed responses by General Synod to The Windsor Report and the St. Michael Report?

The Windsor Report Response Group, which was appointed by the Primate, and the Standing Committee on Faith, Worship and Ministry are preparing resolutions to respond to the two Reports. The form of the proposed responses will be finalized by the Council of the General Synod when it meets in March.

The St. Michael Report and the General Synod

The Primate's Theological Commission was asked whether the blessing of committed same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine. The Commission's answer is that it is a matter of doctrine but not a matter of what is often referred to as a 'core' doctrine, in the sense of being credal doctrine.

Logically, the Synod should decide whether it accepts the conclusions of the Primate's Theological Commission before it considers any action to authorize blessings. The Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee has proposed, and the Council of the General Synod has agreed, that a motion be placed before the General Synod to that end, i.e., a motion that the General Synod accept the conclusions of the Primate's Theological Commission that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine but is not core doctrine in the sense of being credal.

That motion will be voted on in the way I have described.

If the General Synod accepts the opinion of the Primate's Theological Commission how, then, must it proceed if it wishes to address the issue of blessings?

One of the 17 subject matters expressly within the jurisdiction of the General Synod is "the definition of the doctrines of the Church in harmony with the Solemn Declaration."

In May 2005, when the St. Michael Report was presented to the Council of the General Synod, I expressed my opinion, as Chancellor, that the General Synod may only exercise its authority to define doctrines by enacting or amending a Canon in accordance with the triple majority, two session requirements. My opinion is shared by several diocesan and provincial chancellors. If that opinion is correct, and if General Synod agrees that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine, the motion deferred from the 2004 Synod may not be appropriate.

At the last meeting of the Council of the General Synod the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee suggested two procedural options. One was a motion declaring simply that matters of non core doctrine may be addressed by resolutions of the Synod, i.e., that a Canon is not necessary. That runs counter to the opinion I have just mentioned.

The second suggestion was for a motion effectively declaring that the question of blessing same-sex unions is sufficiently important that any action to authorize blessings should be approved by a two-thirds majority in each of the three Orders at two successive Synods. Since that is the standard for a Canon dealing with doctrine the sensible way to proceed would be to propose a Canon to the Synod.

The Council discussed the proposals from Faith, Worship and Ministry and other options including a suggestion for requiring two-thirds majorities at just one synod and another calling for simple majorities in each order but at two synods. While the Synod might raise the bar for adoption of a specific motion, or might make it subject to ratification at a subsequent Synod, it cannot change the rules for adopting or amending a Canon.

The Council was not ready to choose among the suggestions that were made at the November meeting. It referred the procedural issue to a Committee of the Council which will report when the Council meets in March.

The Council's goal is to enable the Synod to deal with the substantive issue without getting bogged down in points of order and procedural rulings.

Assuming the General Synod accepts the conclusions in the St. Michael Report, and assuming that a majority of the members of each Order want to move toward authorizing the blessing of same-sex unions there are doubtless many ways in which the General Synod could do that. One would be to give first reading to a Canon for that purpose. Such a Canon need not be complicated but first reading would require two-thirds majorities in each Order. Another possibility would be a motion calling for preparation of a Canon for presentation to the next Synod in 2010. Such a motion could be adopted by simple majority votes.

Another possibility would be a motion calling for development of a comprehensive and coherent theology with respect to marriage in the Church, civil marriage both opposite-sex and same-sex, and the place of blessing rites for civilly married and common law couples, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Thus far we have isolated same-sex relationships from marriage. We have not considered redefining marriage as has been done in secular legislation. At some point we will have to decide whether the Church can maintain a distinction between heterosexual marriages and committed same-sex relationships.

The Windsor Report and the General Synod

The Windsor Report Response Group prepared a preliminary response that was presented to the Primates' Meeting at Dromantine in Northern Ireland in February 2005.³ The Response Group has continued its work and a draft final Response was considered by the Council of the General Synod in November past.⁴ The Council referred the draft back to the Response Group for revision. The Council will decide in March whether to forward a final draft to the General Synod for approval.

What, if anything, in the Windsor Report requires a response from the General Synod?

The Windsor Report does not expressly address any requests or recommendations to our General Synod. That is in contrast to the requests it specifically addressed to TEC,⁵ to bishops (including the Bishop of New Westminster) who had authorized

³ <http://www.anglican.ca/about/wrrg-report.htm>

⁴ A summary of the draft can be found at <http://www.anglican.ca/about/wrrds.htm>

⁵ *The Windsor Report*, paras. 134-135.

public Rites of Blessing,⁶ and to bishops who had intervened in dioceses or provinces other than their own.⁷

⁶ *ibid.*, para. 144.

⁷ *ibid.*, para. 155.

Both the American delegation to the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Nottingham last year⁸ and the General Convention of TEC made responses.

The Diocese of New Westminster has responded⁹ as has the Canadian House of Bishops.¹⁰

I understand that none of the ‘intervening’ bishops have formally responded to the call The Windsor Report addressed to them.

The Lambeth Commission did say that the Canadian General Synod had acted in 2004 in ways incompatible with the Communion principle of interdependence. It expressed regret that the General Synod had issued the integrity and sanctity statement without attaching sufficient importance to the interests of the wider Anglican Communion.¹¹ The Windsor Report did not call for any apology or expression of regret from the General Synod for its integrity and sanctity affirmation, probably because the Lambeth Commission mistakenly understood that the reference of the doctrinal question to the Primate’s Theological Commission included a review of the theology behind the integrity and sanctity statement.¹²

Nevertheless, there are at least three aspects of the Windsor Report that are relevant to any discussion about authorizing Rites of Blessing.

First, in paragraph 141 the Report says that any Church proposing to authorize or develop such Rites should demonstrate why the proposal “meets the criteria of scripture, tradition and reason” and how such Rites “would constitute growth in harmony with the apostolic tradition as it has been received.”

Second, paragraph 144 called for a moratorium on all such Rites and recommended that provinces take responsibility for endeavouring to ensure commitment on the part of their bishops to the common life of the Anglican Communion.

Third, paragraph 145 called for continuing study of biblical and theological rationale for and against same-sex unions. It may be significant that the Report referred to rationales for and against unions, not for and against Rites of Blessing. The Report

⁸ *To Set Our Hope on Christ - A Response to the Invitation of Windsor Report* ¶ 135, (New York: The Office of Communication, Episcopal Church Center, 2005); <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHopeOnChrist.pdf> .

⁹ *Response of the Diocese of New Westminster to the Windsor Report*, May 14, 2005.

¹⁰ http://www.anglican.ca/news/news.php?newsItem=2005-04-27_statement.news

¹¹ *The Windsor Report*, paras. 122-123.

¹² *ibid.*, para. 139.

says the process of study and reflection should clarify what distinction, if any, exists between same-sex unions and same-sex marriage.

If General Synod takes any steps toward authorizing, condoning or recognizing either the blessing of same-sex unions or the marriage of same-sex couples it should consider establishing a process for the Canadian Church to respond to the Windsor Report's call for a demonstration of how such actions will meet the criteria of scripture, tradition and reason. Indeed, it can be argued that we need to demonstrate how the integrity and sanctity motion of the 2004 Synod meets those criteria.

There are two constituencies to which the General Synod has an obligation to do that. One constituency is the Anglican Communion. The other is the membership of the Anglican Church of Canada to which the General Synod is ultimately responsible. Two versions of such a demonstration may be needed – a scholarly thesis for the theologically trained and a plain language version for people in the pews of our churches.

In a recent essay Bishop Pierre Whalon says the question of creating a rite of same-sex blessing has remained an open question in TEC because its General Conventions and interim bodies have failed to agree upon a theological development that would validate such a rite. He says sound theology is needed.¹³ In a paper prepared for the Lambeth Commission¹⁴ Dr. Mary Tanner said:

As a Communion we have not begun to unpack together the biblical, theological or anthropological issues raised. Nor have we begun to listen to the experience of homosexual persons as the Lambeth Resolution [1.10 of 1998] called for.

In identifying the blessing of same-sex unions as a matter of adiaphora rather than one of core doctrine the Primate's Theological Commission may have been mindful of the statement in paragraph 36 of the Windsor Report that "Anglicans have always recognized a key distinction between core doctrines . . . and those upon which disagreement can be tolerated without endangering unity." Other passages in the Windsor Report suggest that the blessing of same-sex unions is an essential matter of common concern about which difference cannot be tolerated. Commission Reports, like the Scriptures, lend themselves to selective quotation. For instance, in paragraph 62 of the Windsor Report we find this:

. . . our shared reading of scripture across boundaries of culture, region and tradition ought to be the central feature of our common

¹³ <http://anglicansonline.org/resources/essays/whalon/reformanda.html> – *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda or So It Goes*

¹⁴ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/documents/200402processes.pdf>

life, guiding us together into an appropriately rich and diverse unity by leading us forward from entrenched positions into fresh appreciation of the riches of the gospel as articulated in the scriptures.

The immediate controversy is between those who believe the issue is one upon which Christians may have legitimate differences and those Anglicans who believe that one or the other of the two pole positions is the right one.

Unity and Diversity

Absent some sudden and universal epiphany or revelation, the two extreme points of view will not be reconciled either soon or easily. But reconciliation does not require agreement and unity does not require uniformity. The Challenge Ahead for Anglicans is to recognize diversity and commit to remain united in that diversity. In a recent interview¹⁵ Archbishop Tutu said:

We have always boasted that the Anglican Church is a church that embraces and welcomes the most extreme diversities. We might say we disagree with you, my sister and brother, on this particular point, but we still remain sister and brother.

My impression is that only a small number of Canadian Anglicans firmly hold one or other of the two extreme positions and that most fall in the middle of the spectrum.

Archbishop Eames, in his foreword to The Windsor Report, said this:

During its work the Lambeth Commission has recognized the existence within the Anglican Communion of a large constituency of faithful members who are bemused and bewildered by the intensity of the opposing views on issues of sexuality. This group embraces worshippers who yearn for expressions of communion which will provide stability and encouragement for their pilgrimage. At times they have felt their voices eclipsed by the intensity of sounds on opposing sides of the debate.

And Archbishop Williams, in his September 2006 Pastoral Letter to the Primates of the Communion,¹⁶ referred to “those ordinary people of God . . . who are puzzled, wearied or disoriented by our present controversies.”

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<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/religion/stories/090906dnrelq&atutu.6fdb86.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/41/75/acns4190.cfm>

The challenge is not to persuade those ‘faithful members’, the puzzled ‘ordinary people of God’, to one point of view or the other. The challenge is to remind them that Anglicans may legitimately hold different positions.

Hardline statements emanating from those who lay claim to “orthodoxy” get a lot of publicity. The media tend to ignore moderate statements. The result may be a false impression that there are no Anglicans outside North America who are prepared to accept diversity around issues related to human sexuality and particularly homosexuality. That such an impression is false is illustrated by statements made by two provincial Houses of Bishops on opposite sides of the world.

Early in 2005 the House of Bishops of the Anglican Communion in Japan (Nippon Sei Ko Kai) commented on The Windsor Report.¹⁷ Their comments included the following:

6. At this time the NSKK wishes particularly to emphasize that element of the Anglican tradition which seeks all possible means to recognize the diversity which emerges in the process of the indigenisation (inculturation) of the Gospel.

7. Moreover, while the NSKK believes in the authority of the Scriptures, we understand that the text of Scripture was formed within a particular historical and faith context. Accordingly, we believe that, in a context which differs both in history and in the expression of faith, we are actually permitted a variety of ways of interpreting Scripture.

8. Based on the above assumptions (6 and 7), we cannot think that the Church can have only one, absolute view of human sexuality. While recognizing the authority of the Bible, there is every possibility that in the process of working out its message, differences of time and culture may be reflected in the understanding of human sexuality. We would like to think of the series of decisions and actions of [TEC] and [the Anglican Church of Canada] in this light.

9. This [Windsor] report makes a number of proposals concerning the way the unity of the Anglican Communion should be. However, the

¹⁷ An English translation can be found at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/dojustice/j264.html>

NSKK does not think that unity can be manifested only if we take the same interpretation of Scripture and the same theological standpoint concerning our basic understanding of human sexuality.

Later that year the Bishops of the Church in Wales issued a statement on homosexuality.¹⁸ They said, in part:

For some time, we have recognized that there are honest and legitimate differences on this subject. The church needs to engage prayerfully in this debate with humility, generosity of spirit, reflection on biblical witness, mature thought and careful listening. The harsh and condemnatory tone, which at times has coloured this debate, is unacceptable.

We uphold the traditional Anglican emphasis on Scripture read in the light of reason and tradition. We recognize that the interpretation of Scripture is in itself an area of divergence among Christians. We are at pains to emphasize the need to respect one another and remind the Church that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. Sexuality is only one aspect of a person's humanity.

As with many issues there exists a wide range of Scriptural interpretation within the Christian church. On same-sex relationships we acknowledge that the following fairly reflect the range of views held within the Church in Wales.

Some people, reading the Scriptures with integrity, reach the conclusion that the only proper context for sexual activity is marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union. Homosexual practice of any kind is therefore rejected.

Others, reading the Scriptures with integrity, adopt a more sympathetic understanding of homosexuality, but would not at present wish the Church to sanction homosexual practice.

Others, reading the Scriptures with integrity, conclude that orientation and practice are to be distinguished and that the Church can welcome same-sex relationships provided they are celibate.

Others again, reading the Scriptures with integrity, conclude that the Church cannot dismiss as intrinsically disordered permanent and committed same-sex relationships; they believe that through their internal mutuality and support, these bring creativity, generosity and

¹⁸ <http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/press/0298e.html>

love into the lives of those within them.

Others, reading the Scriptures with integrity, conclude, in the light of a developing understanding of the nature of humanity and sexuality, that the time has arrived for the Church to affirm committed homosexual relationships.

The challenge and call of our discipleship are to live, worship and work together in all our diversity. Rejecting all forms of stigmatization, we commit ourselves to listening to people whose sexual orientation may be different from our own.

The striking feature of that statement is that while the Welsh bishops identified five distinct points of view, they said each one is held by people reading the Scriptures with integrity. Their statement exemplifies the principle of recognizing and accepting legitimate diversity.

An Anglican Covenant

It was suggested that I might say something about the Windsor Report proposal for an Anglican Covenant. Because any final draft of such a Covenant will probably bear little resemblance to the draft attached to the Windsor Report, it would be premature to say very much.

The draft Covenant is essentially a proposal or a formal Constitution for the Anglican Communion. It would limit the autonomy of the member Churches of the Communion and would provide a framework for reviewing decisions of those Churches on what the Windsor Report calls “essential matters of common concern.”

The Primates of the Communion, in the communiqué they issued after their meeting in February 2005, recognized “that serious questions about the content of the proposal for an Anglican Covenant and the practicalities of its implementation mean that [it] is a longer term process.” They expressed caution about creation of an international jurisdiction which could override proper provincial autonomy.¹⁹

A year later the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates’ Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council²⁰ issued a Consultation Paper that said this:

¹⁹ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/00/acns3948.cfm>, paragraphs 9 and 10.

²⁰ *Towards an Anglican Covenant*,
<http://www.aco.org/commission/covenant/docs/Covenant%20Report.pdf>

Most Churches and Provinces should have little difficulty in signing up to such a Covenant, so long as the text confines itself to widely-established and respected principles. If, at the other extreme, the content includes some ceding of jurisdiction to the Archbishop of Canterbury, or to one or more of the Instruments of Communion, then there are many Churches and Provinces which for a variety of reasons will have serious reservations about signing up. . . . There can be no illusions: the detail of the Covenant will determine the extent of its acceptability.

There is likely to be a long process of clarification and development before a draft Covenant is ready for presentation to the Provinces of the Communion for acceptance or rejection.

Conclusion

I began by saying that General Synod will meet in a context shaped largely by the Windsor and St. Michael Reports and the events that precipitated them.

For the members of General Synod the Challenge Ahead is to ask themselves the questions the Primate's Theological Commission posed in the St. Michael Report:

Is it theologically and doctrinally responsible for one member church of the Communion to approve a course of action which it has reason to believe may be destructive of the unity of the Communion?

Is it theologically and doctrinally responsible to accept unity as the value which transcends all others, and therefore for a member church of the Communion to refrain from making a decision when it believes it has an urgent gospel mandate to proceed?

and to respond to the challenge in the final sentence of the St. Michael Report:

It is now for the Church to decide whether or not the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine.

In a monograph entitled *On Being Anglican: Consensus in Diversity*, Bishop Tom Frame, Bishop to the Australian Defence Force, quotes this passage from an essay by Canon Martyn Percy (who the Internet tells me is the Principal of Ripon College):

Because Anglicanism is a *via media*, there is an unwritten expectation that there will be very few ends that we actually arrive at — which places all the more importance on the means of not quite getting there. Therefore, politeness, integrity, restraint, diplomacy, patience, a willingness to listen, and above all, not to be ill-mannered — these

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are the things that enable the Anglican Communion to cohere, as it continues in its pilgrimage for truth.

Ronald C. Stevenson
January 2007