In what follows, I look at the section on Scripture offered in the Windsor Report, and comments on some aspects of it. After reviewing the Windsor Report on Scripture section by section with some comment, I take up another perspective (implicit in the Windsor report) on how Anglicans do theology and understand ecclesiology, to explore it critically in relation to a particular passage from the gospels. I should preface all these remarks by stating that originally I thought that from the opening analytical and theological sections of the Windsor Report almost the only strong and redeemable material is the section on Scripture, but on closer reflection, it seems to me even the sections of Windsor on scripture have serious flaws.

Sections 53 and 54—Scripture as Bond and Authority for Anglicans

The Windsor report begins by asserting that scripture is the central specific bond which holds Anglicans in communion, and that as such it ought to be seen as a focus and means of unity. In relation to that centrality of authority it sets the understanding of the foundations of Anglican theology as “scripture tradition and reason”, and notes the ongoing practice of placing the reading and singing of scripture at the centre of Anglican worship. (Section 53) The report makes the assertion that “[w]ithin Anglicanism, scripture has always been recognized as the Church’s supreme authority…. On closer reflection this is both false and seriously problematic. The Church’s supreme authority is Jesus Christ, and to go a step further, in none of the classic Anglican formularies (the Creeds, the Articles, the Catechism or Supplementary Instruction, the Ordinals, the Solemn Declaration or the Lambeth Quadrilateral) is scripture ever referred to as the Church’s supreme authority.

The report then backpedals hard to clarify that the ‘authority’ of scripture is not something in and of itself, but is the “authority of the triune God, exercised through scripture” [report’s italics], and goes on to state that when we apply this notion “to an entire understanding of the Church’s mission and common life, …its implications need to be thought out more fully.” (Section 54) It seems to me essential that he hold fast to the proposition that the ‘central specific bond’ which holds Anglicans together is Jesus Christ, not Scripture—Christians are first disciples of a person not a book. At this point in our history it seems increasingly clear that worship of scripture instead of worship of Christ is driving Anglicans apart. That said, many of us have experienced the power of scripture to energize a group of differing souls, to give them focus, to enable them to listen to one another, and to hear God’s voice for them. That power lies to a considerable degree in a common acknowledgment of what Section 54 articulates, that it is “authority of the triune God, exercised through scripture” to which we are responding—even though we may differ radically on how God exercises that authority through scripture. For some, even the language that God ‘exercises authority’ through Scripture is questionable—this language too is foreign to any of our classic formularies. The Holy Spirit may speak through Scripture, but this still requires an exercise in understanding and discernment to hear aright what the Holy Spirit may be saying to the Church in any given time and place. Or Scripture may be understood as a collection of Spirit-breathed

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1 This is material excerpted from two longer lectures, an earlier version (2004) of the lecture given in March 2006 at Christ Church in Edmonton (also available on the web), and a lecture given in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land in June 2005, addressing the Windsor Report from a more broadly critical perspective (see below n.2). For the primary text see The Windsor Report 2004. The Report of the Lambeth Commission on Communion. (London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2004).

2 I have elsewhere criticized the opening theological sections of the Windsor Report [Scripture, Diversity, Synodality in the Anglican Communion—Should Canadian Anglicans Walk the Way of Windsor? A Lecture on The Windsor Report Given to a Gathering in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land. May 26, 2005]. I believe that one of the problems we now face is that there has been insufficient public critical assessment of the first two sections of the Windsor Report and their underlying presentation of the issues and theological assumptions, and that we can only have worse and worse results by following the recommendations of the report because they are based on bad theology, pernicious metaphors, false assumptions, and deliberate misrepresentation of facts and situations. Because the report chooses the path of the ‘Satan’, the ‘Accuser’, (as the scriptures and our Lord characterize one of the forces that corrupt and divide the creatures of God), it can only lead to an endless spiral of accusation, conflict, blackmail, and retribution.
‘Witnesses’; and here too the Church has a shared responsibility for discerning the value of any one and of ‘all’ the witnesses for any given moment in its history and mission.

**Sections 55 and 56—Scripture’s Internal Understanding of Its Own Authority in Relation to Mission**

The report then goes on to explore how Jesus and the early Christians understood the notion of ‘authority’ suggesting that it was “not conceived as a static source of information or the giving of orders…but in terms of the dynamic inbreaking of God’s …sovereign, saving, redeeming and reconciling rule over all creation. It ties this authority to the work of Jesus and the work of the Spirit. Thus is says that if we are to be faithful to scripture’s own notion of ‘authority’, “it must be seen that the purpose of scripture is not simply to supply true information, nor just to prescribe in matters of belief and conduct, nor merely to act as a court of appeal, but to be part of the dynamic life of the Spirit through which God the Father is making the victory which was won by Jesus’ death and resurrection operative within the world and in and through human beings. Scripture is thus part of the means by which God directs the Church in its mission, energises it for that task, and shapes and unites it so that it may be both equipped for this work and itself part of the message.” (Section 55)

It is difficult to read this section of the report without seeing it as a frontal attack on contemporary fundamentalist approaches to scripture with their fixation on inerrancy, factual information, moral prescription, and proof-texting. I would understand this section to be consistent with a long line of Anglican interpreters, and with our BCP Catechisms and other fomularies. To be an Anglican is to eschew fundamentalism in all its forms.

The next section explores in relation to several passages from the epistles how scripture functions in this dynamic way noting: the centrality of the apostles as witnesses to the resurrection, the announcement of the Good News as the vehicle to call men and women to salvation, the origins of the New Testament itself to be vehicles of the Spirit’s work in energizing the church in its mission and shaping it in the holiness of the new creation. Thus it asserts, from the earliest period it was the reading of the scriptures and apostolic writings in worship as acts of praise and to enable the Church to draw fresh strength for mission and holiness. (Section 56)

**Sections 57 and 58—The Interpretation of Scripture within the Church and by Bishops**

The report then goes on to explore issues of scripture and interpretation. First and foremost it claims, scripture must be read “at the heart of worship in a way which … allows it to be heard, understood and reflected upon, not as a pleasing and religious background noise, but as God’s living and active word. The message of scripture, as a whole and in its several parts, must be preached and taught in all possible and appropriate ways. It is the responsibility of the whole Church to engage with the Bible together; within that, each individual Christian, to the fullest extent of which they are capable, must study it and learn from it, thoughtfully and prayerfully. Within this context, the Church’s accredited leaders have a responsibility, through constant teaching and preaching, to enable the Church to grow to maturity, so that when difficult judgements are required they may be made in full knowledge of the texts.” (Section 57) I quote the entirety of this significant section and note key themes it touches: reading as part of worship attesting to God’s living and active word, preaching and teaching in all possible and appropriate ways, the whole Church as well as individual Christians engaging the scriptures, and the responsibility of church leaders in this task.

This leads to an explicit reflection on the place of bishops as teachers of scripture who must exercise a “prayerful teaching ministry [so that] the authority of God vested in scripture is brought to bear—in mission within the world and in wise teaching to build up the church.” (Section 58) In the light of this foundational section of the report, I would note that it is absolutely confounding in the later recommendations on the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury to find the following statement: “This office has a very significant teaching role. As the significant focus of unity, mission and teaching, the Communion looks to the

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3 See for instance Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, on the outpouring of the Spirit and the inspiration of scriptures, and also *What Happens in Holy Communion*, where in the introduction he takes up in a more pointed way issues of the inspiration and interpretation of the scriptural witness.
office of the Archbishop to articulate the mind of the Communion especially in areas of controversy.” (Section 109) Surely in the light of section 58 about the teaching role of bishops, the teaching role of the Archbishop of Canterbury must extend to more than simply the passive articulation of the “mind of the Communion in areas of controversy.” Should the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury as bishop in the Church not also include the interpretation of scripture in ways that challenge the whole Church to its gospel proclamation and with prophetic witness? I heartily welcome the report’s call for bishops to become more active and engaged as teachers of scripture—this is in line with our own Canadian Ordinal which insists that the first responsibility of a bishop is “to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ’s resurrection and interpreting the Gospel” (BAS 636). But if we are going to accept this principle of the teaching role of bishops across the communion, then we need to hear the Archbishop of Canterbury equally taking on this responsibility in the life of the whole church, not simply sitting by as a mouthpiece for whatever group in the church happens to have taken control of the ‘mind of the church’ this month or week. 4

Sections 59 and 60—Interpreting in the Contemporary Anglican Church, Challenges and Pitfalls

The report then goes on to explore some of the key issues for contemporary interpretation of the scriptures: the possibility that we might hear only an echo of our own voices or points of view; the possibility that we hear only some early Christian interpretation to the exclusion of all that comes after; the importance of all aspects of historical study for the continuing illumination of questions relating to the scriptures so that we are not understanding them anachronistically. It notes how challenging this can be on all sides. (Section 59). It then goes on to note the importance of doing the task with an equal awareness of the entrenched assumptions of the Enlightenment and those of pre- or anti-critical conservatism. There is an obligation of biblical scholarship “to be free to explore different meanings and to be constrained by loyalty to the community of the Church across time and space” There is thus a dialogue that must take place when new interpretations are proposed that calls scholars to accountability for showing how such an interpretation “not only accords with but actually enhances the central core of the Church’s faith”, and that requires the Church “not to reject new proposals out of hand, but to listen carefully, to test everything, and to be prepared to change its mind if and when a convincing case is made.” (Section 60) These two sections are important, as they both balance, but also articulate more clearly the issues addressed in Section 55. Section 59 takes up from the standpoint of models of interpretation some of the problems issuing from contemporary conservative interpretation (but certainly not limited to conservatives): hearing scripture simply as reinforcing accepted cultural taboos or points of view normalized by long acceptance; losing the distinction between the voice of scripture and our own voice or perspective; a fixation on certain early Christian interpretations that imagines that the 2000 years between us and them have no further relevance for our understanding; the necessity of all forms of historical understanding to assist us in avoiding anachronistic exegesis. Section 60 takes this up from a stance critical primarily of contemporary ‘liberal’, historical and post-modern exegesis. This is clear from its comment on becoming locked in the assumptions of the Enlightenment (high valuation on the inerrancy of human reason) but it also, as in the previous section, notes how conservatives can become locked in the same trap of fixating on pre-critical or anti-critical assumptions. This section seeks to articulate expectations for Anglican Biblical scholars; on the one hand they are to be free to explore different meanings, on the other hand if they are Christians they have also an obligation to the community of the church not only in our own period but to its continuity across time and space. The report then reframes this interaction as one of mutual accountability between scholars/interpreters and ecclesial community. Scholars have an obligation to account for new interpretations and how they

4 These comments should not be taken as reflecting on the specific actions of the present Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, although it should be noted that there have been repeated public demands that he cease functioning as a public theologian and function only as a mouthpiece for Lambeth decisions. One of Archbishop Williams’s intellectual strengths is his ability to challenge individuals on multiple sides of a debate to deeper reflection. The Windsor Report, however, seeks to make the passive mouthpiece role a feature of the teaching of future Archbishops of Canterbury. The church deserves better than this limited vision.
relate to and enhance the central core of the Church’s faith. The Church has an obligation to listen carefully to new proposals, to consider, to weigh and even to change its mind.

Sections 61 and 62—The Holy Trinity at work in the Interpreting Church as Desired Norm
This section of the report concludes hopefully by calling on Anglicans “to re-evaluate the ways in which we have read, heard, studied and digested scripture. We can no longer be content to drop random texts into arguments, imagining that the point is thereby proved, or indeed to sweep away sections of the New Testament as irrelevant to today’s world, imagining that problems are thereby solved. We need mature study, wise and prayerful discussion, and a joint commitment to hearing and obeying God as [God] speaks in scripture, to discovering more of the Jesus Christ to whom all authority is committed, and to being open to the fresh wind of the Spirit who inspired scripture in the first place. If our present difficulties force us to read and learn together from scripture in new ways, they will not have been without profit.” (Section 61) It reiterates the presence of the Spirit as the inspiring force behind the scriptures, and offers a final aspiration that “our shared reading of scripture across boundaries of culture, region and tradition ought to be the central feature of our common 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.” (Section 62)

Do as I Say, Not as I Do—Windsor’s Inherent Contradiction in Handling Scripture
This is strong and heartening stuff—perhaps one of the finest sections of the entire report, and one can see in it, I suspect, the hand of Tom Wright, the distinguished (and relatively conservative) New Testament scholar, now Bishop of Durham. I have already noted the fundamental contradiction between what this foundational theological section articulates, and what the report later imagines regarding the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Such contradictions are quite common in ecclesial documents. More disturbing to me is the fact that the entire Windsor report confines itself almost exclusively to quoting from a few passages in the letters of Paul (or those attributed to Paul). There are only one or two references to the teaching of Jesus about community or communion, and almost no use of the Old Testament and its immense witness to the complexities of keeping a community together. The report chooses only one of many biblical metaphors for the life of the faithful community and life in communion—that of the head and the body. The vision of the place of the scriptures in the life of the Church articulated by the report is superb, but in its own practice it draws only on parts of the Bible where the primary dynamics at play are prescriptive and legalistic. In other words the Windsor report uses the scriptures in exactly the opposite way it is arguing Anglicans ought to use and interpret them.

Thus, in its own use of Scripture, the Windsor report follows a pattern (exemplified by other recent ecclesial documents such as the Virginia Report and the Gift of Authority) in which the opening section lays out a wonderful and glowing statement of a theology, that on close examination is simply the pretext for a subsequent analysis and recommendations which only superficially rise out of the theology. The theology presented in the opening sections of these documents is often extremely narrow in scope—frequently the rich range of scriptural metaphors and images is narrowed down to one or two which then control the presentation. Windsor is no exception to this pattern.

The Windsor Report’s Functional Version of the Biblical Canon
What, for instance, is the scriptural canon on which Windsor draws? As noted above, if we examine the report closely, we discover that the canon of scripture for the drafters of this major report sparked by intense conflict and division within our church consists of the book of Ephesians, First Corinthians, Second Corinthians chapters 3-4 and 13, Matthew 28:18-20, Romans chapters 1 and 14-15. What observations might we make about this canon?

1) It is Marcionite and thus heretical. The report does not contain a single reference to the Old Testament. Does the Old Testament offer nothing to assist us in understanding division and conflict within a community of faith?

2) With the exception of two verses from Matthew it is a canon that does not include the Jesus of the gospels, or even the community of
the early church as imagined by the gospels or any of the non-Pauline epistles. It is a canon that effectively consists only of Paul (or pseudepigraphical Paul, depending on one’s view of the authorship of Ephesians).

Do we as Canadian Anglicans want to be part of a church which takes as normative a reading of scripture in which the gospels and the teaching of Jesus are considered irrelevant to the consideration of our most deeply perturbing conflicts and problems? Do we as Canadian Anglicans want to subscribe to a vision of interpreting the Bible which sees the Bible (including the New Testament) as primarily the source for legalistic directions to be used to control and discipline one another? Do we as Canadian Anglicans really believe that with witness of the Old Testament has nothing to teach the contemporary church about what might be involved in a community seeking to live faithfully before God over the long haul of history—do the narratives of the Torah, the former and latter prophets, and the wisdom collections have nothing to offer us or the Anglican communion to shape our common life wisely and truthfully?

Windsor’s Ecclesiology—Selectively Ignoring the Richness of Biblical Metaphors for the Church

Let me pursue this more precisely. Windsor chooses to draw on the Ephesians metaphor of the body with Christ as Head as its putative focal metaphor for the Church, and chooses also to refer only to Corinthians for its primary metaphor for apostolic leadership as that of disciplining and punishing an unruly church (Sections 1-11). I don’t think we should underestimate the way that those two metaphors of choice dominate the entire report (e.g. the brilliant series of cartoon on the Website that appeared shortly after its release). But even in the New Testament, even in Ephesians, there are other metaphors for understanding the life of the church that might lead us to very different analyses of the situation of the Anglican Communion and recommendations about its life together.

For instance, Ephesians 2:13-22, which also speaks of reconciliation and conflict draws on two totally different metaphors, that of a large and capacious building or home for an extended household and that of citizenship. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” (Eph. 2:19-22) To imagine Christ not as a ‘head’, but as ‘foundation’ or ‘keystone’ of a building that is being built up together is a very different metaphor system in which Christ is not some sort of central ‘director’ but rather functions as a point of ‘stability’ over and around which a huge variety of potential forms and shapes of house and household can be elaborated. And to imagine members of the Anglican Communion as citizens (even in the Graeco-Roman sense let alone in a contemporary democratic sense) might lead to a very different analysis of the institutions of the Communion and participation and autonomy.

How Does the Church Learn? Minds, Bodies, Scripture and Doctrine

I will close by reflecting on another aspect of this report alongside a passage from Luke’s gospel. One of the metaphors or notions that underlies the Windsor report is that of the ‘mind’ of the church. This opens up the question of why the ‘mind’ of the church has more priority in understanding and assessing the faithfulness of the witness and action of the church than its ‘body’. The dichotomy is played out at several levels in the Windsor report—the total neglect of any discussion of the authority of real synods in ‘doing’ the theology of the church, and the confining of the notion of synodality to a gatherings of Bishops and Primates—‘heads’ as opposed to the limbs of the body.

Is our mission always first and foremost determined by the response of the mind and the head? When we think of how the daily life of the church is carried forth into the life of the world we recognize immediately that it is the day to day actions of the body of Christ that are the ‘actions of Christ’s grace’ transforming the world. Even if we are to take the ‘head’ and ‘body’ metaphors of the epistles as the important witnesses to an organic understanding of the Church that they are, are we ignoring something important about the very nature
of the ‘headship’ of Christ when we lapse so easily into a mind-body dichotomy in our working out of ecclesiological assumptions, structures, patterns and norms?

In this light I wish to reflect on an encounter related in the gospel and a story told by Jesus. As the episode begins, a crucial question is has been posed—what must we do to inherit eternal life? As the encounter unfolds the ‘law’ is summarized—to love God and to love our neighbour. A second question is posed—who is my neighbour?

Jesus then tells the story about the man ambushed and beaten and left for dead. In the story there are four other characters—a Priest, a Levite, and an Innkeeper. Often when this story is read, the repeated motif of the Priest and Levite coming on the injured man and passing by on the other side is portrayed as their complicity in a code of ‘purity’ which forbids them to touch the man. This reading, however, conflates the two characters, and also sets up their faithfulness to their moral code as bad. I wish to offer a different reading. The Priest and the Levite are both faithful people, and they are each a different person. Like all faithful people they are caught up in the life and systems of religious communities.

The Priest is a genuinely good person; he is part of a religious hierarchy responsible for the central religious acts of the community. He lives under an obligation to meet a higher standard of holiness than most others in the community so that he can function as a sacrificial mediator of God’s life to the community, and a key symbolic discipline of that commitment to life is an obligation to avoid all risk of contact with a dead body. He also comes from a group within Israel which had been deeply divided by conflict about standards of holiness, and he knows that his contacts can bring his own community of priests into disrepute.

The Levite is a member of a much larger group with responsibility for the day to day maintenance and operation of the temple, for its music, its gifts and offerings. The Levite must take account of the needs of the institutions of the worshipping community, of holding it all together. The Levite too is bound by obligations of behaviour and inherited traditions that ensure unity and cohesiveness of purpose. Neither the priest nor the Levite are bad or immoral—they understand that their primary allegiance and obligation is to witnessing to the holiness of God and to the constant and faithful unity in worship and practice of the entire community. Both Priest and Levite know and love God, and their entire lives are dedicated in intense discipline to God’s worship and adoration.

The Samaritan too is a member of a faithful and moral community. Samaritans were a branch of the Israelite faith community who shared the same scriptures, understood and were faithful to the commandments, but who had been rejected by other branches of the community centuries before in the course of intense religious disputes over issues such as sexual morality, proper worship, and the genuineness of their scriptural tradition and interpretation. The Samaritan is someone who knows both faithfulness and marginalization. The story at this points shifts gears. The Samaritan simply begins to act—he picks up the injured person, binds up his wounds, takes him to the inn, and gives generously of his resources to ensure that the other person receives adequate care and healing.

It is the Samaritan, at the end of the parable that we are told is the one we should seek to emulate, the one who is most neighbour to the person who fell among thieves. The Samaritan is the one who truly loves and glorifies God in loving and caring for the neighbour. The Samaritan is portrayed as a person who takes action, who puts the body into motion. This becomes a story where the body in action becomes the source for ‘right teaching’ and in doing so for ‘doxology’.

To this point I have read the three characters—Priest, Levite and Samaritan, both as actors and as symbols of historically real communities, all genuinely moral and all genuinely seeking the will of God. We might move beyond the historical and see the Innkeeper as symbolic as well—perhaps of the world beyond our various internal communities of faith and morality. It is the Samaritan (not the Priest and Levite) who succeeds in teaching that world and drawing it into the further action for the love of the neighbour, the only action that (as 1
John claims so emphatically) can intimate us into knowing and loving God completely.

This idea that the mind of the community can be formed and transformed by the choice to enter upon a course of action is not limited to the parable of the Good Samaritan in the gospels. In Luke’s gospel it is Jesus setting foot and face toward Jerusalem that opens the way to his ‘Exodus’—that moment when creation is delivered from slavery into freedom, and community and holiness are recreated. All the gospels insist that it is what happens to Jesus body—his execution and death on the cross and its rising to life again both glorious and full of wounds—these very physical things are the things which transform and create the basis for our community and must be at the centre of the formation of its ‘mind’ if indeed, it is to be the mind of Christ. Both the gospels and Paul insist that it is the action of taking and blessing bread and wine that creates for us the gift of the Eucharist; and its place at the centre of Christian worship, formation, and nurture is a matter of our ‘doing’ the same. Christ does not tell us what we are to think about the Eucharist first. Christ commands us to do what he did. We do Eucharist first, and in doing so, we know the mind of our community transformed for the transformation of the world.

The dichotomy which the Windsor Report seeks to create is unhelpful, and leads to assumptive worlds more like those of the Priest and Levite which prioritize obligation to shared disciplines and understandings of holiness over the other possibility—that right action will transform and lead us to justice, love of God and neighbour, and the engagement of the world in its transformation.

It is possible to see another moral, theological, and ecclesiological framework in the gospels in which the actions of the dioceses of New Hampshire and New Westminster are the only helpful and transformative teaching which the church has had in its long history of interactions around the questions of same-sex human friendships and relationships. Both have made faithful decisions in the light of how they understand the foundational teaching of scripture and their inheritance of that teaching as reflected in the Anglican tradition as formed by Richard Hooker and his successors, and through the inheritance of the Book of Common Prayer and its tradition of worship and teaching, and in doing so the whole body of their diocesan churches have been engaged. We may not like what they are teaching us, and as with even the Samaritan’s decision to act in the parable it has not been without struggle, risk, and cost. But this way too, I would suggest is a genuinely Anglican approach to the interpretation of scripture, quite consonant with that great Hookerian tradition, in which action leads to reflection and new learning that empowers us to be faithful to the Gospel, and to call each other to new depths of communion and relationship, with one another and in the life of the Holy Trinity.