

IDENTITY, GRACE AND THE HUMAN CONDITION
(The Windsor Report)

Who are we? What are we about? Why?

(Introduction)

INTRODUCTION

The FOREWORD in the Windsor Report, written by Archbishop Robin Eames, chairman of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, begins with this question: What do we believe is the will of God for the Anglican Communion?

As an educational resource, the Windsor Report makes some assumptions about what Anglicans know about theology, Church history, and Church polity. For adult discussion the following might be helpful:

(1) What is Anglicanism? (References: G. Rowell, *The English Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, Abingdon, p.227ff. Sykes, Booty, Knight, *The Study of Anglicanism*, Fortress Press, p190-193.)

1) (Limited definition) Anglicanism may be said to consist of the faith, practice and spirit of the churches of the Anglican Communion.

(2) (Broader definition) When we speak of Anglicanism we often use the words *Anglican ethos*. *Ethos* means the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature and guiding beliefs of a group or institution. *Ethos* is a way of seeing things from a particular perspective. It is a culturally formed stance, a reasoned moral, theological and spiritual posture by which one confronts reality with a concern for truth, comprehension and balance. Anglicanism is the one, holy, catholic, and Apostolic Church influenced and formed by England's history since the days of St. Alban and Celtic conversion. Queen Elizabeth I herself observed that she and her people followed "no novel and strange religions, but that very religion which was ordained by Christ, sanctioned by the primitive and Catholic Church and approved by the consentient mind and voice of the most early Fathers."

WHAT IS THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION?

The Anglican Communion is the fellowship of those churches around the world in communion with the See of Canterbury, sharing its theology and liturgical traditions, having a spiritual tie with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Communion's titular head, and offering membership by accepting Canterbury's invitation to the Lambeth Conference. (The first conference of Anglican Bishops met at the Archbishop of Canterbury's London home, Lambeth Palace, September, 1867. The conference, called "the Lambeth Conference," meets once every decade.)

FACTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Because Anglicanism is an ethos, a method of approach, an attitude of mind, “a way of being in the world” which endeavors to be comprehensive and searches for the *via media* (the middle way) between extremes, it is not a denomination. We may be called “Anglican” because of a spiritual heritage with England, but Anglicanism and the Anglican Communion cannot be referred to as a denomination within the Christian Faith. **Anglicanism can exist without the Anglican Communion.**

Anglicanism is characterized by two cultural attitudes: comprehensiveness and pragmatism. The first expects a broad knowledge of all sides and aspects of an issue; the second demands that a solution be both practical and peaceful, resolved without violence and destruction of unity. These cultural attitudes also produced a high regard for reason, the sciences and the natural order.

In studying the Windsor Report it is important to reflect upon the significance of the traditional “instruments of unity” and the historic “bonds of affection” that have been disrespected in recent Provincial decisions.

The Instruments of Unity (Section C, pp.41-44), which assist in holding the Anglican Communion together as it makes important decisions, are:

- The Archbishop of Canterbury
- The Lambeth Conference
- The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC)
- The Primates’ Meeting

The “bonds of affection” which have characterized the Anglican Communion through the years is a so-called *double bond*. All Anglicans have our bond of affection through Christ and our bond of affection through our ties with the Archbishop of Canterbury. We may have serious disagreements, but Anglican history reflects resolving our differences without division because of our common affection for our Lord Jesus Christ, and our common affection for the freedom the Holy Spirit brings in Anglicanism.

Reading: Windsor Report pages 4-7. Reflect upon these statements:

The Report is offered as a “pilgrimage toward healing and reconciliation” because the unified Anglican Communion is and has been an instrument of God’s grace for the world. (Is that “grace” important enough to keep the Anglican Communion together?)

There is a cost emotionally, politically and culturally when dealing exhaustingly with the issues that have necessitated this report. That cost is the painful and wasteful distraction from Christ’s mission to a hurting, oppressive, violent world. Is it possible, suggests Ephraim Rudner, author of *The End of the Church*, that

Bishops who leave the Episcopal Church over matters of human sexuality are dividing the Church even more than was true of the Reformation period, making unity even further from that goal of our being “one as the Son and the Father are one”?

Reading: Windsor Report pages 11-14, paragraphs 1-11

Reflect upon:

- (1) Why is there a reference to the Trinity periodically throughout the material?
- (2) What appear to be the elements of our common life as Anglicans? (Paragraph 7, p.13). Why are liturgy, the Book of Common Prayer and the Eucharist so central?
- (3) Is the place where we meet on the floor of debate or on our knees at the Altar?
- (4) What have been the ten commonly accepted Principles of Partnership among Anglicans worldwide? (Appendix p.74-77)

