RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA TO THE ST. ANDREW’S DRAFT OF AN ANGLICAN COVENANT

The propriety or intended function of a covenant, at this time, in the life of the Communion, had earlier been strongly questioned.

It is observed that, though the clamour for a covenant arose in the wake of the present unhappy brokenness in the Communion, based on the issue of unfaithfulness to biblical interpretation, yet its aim is neither a recipe to the present crisis nor can it bring about the reconciliation and restoration we were yearning for but which have eluded the Communion for some time now. In its present state, the covenant is out to forge a post-modern Anglican Communion, whose trappings will be accommodative of all shades of religious opinions and practices.

The purpose or call for a covenant, therefore, at this time, raises serious questions that cannot easily be glossed over. Added to this is the fact that, in its present state, the draft covenant in its language, style and presentation, raises serious issues of faith and practice for biblically faithful children of God.

Signing in to the covenant requires some consideration on the following:

(i) We are strongly convinced that the current rift in the Communion would not have arisen if the instrument of Communion had been either administratively or collegially effective in mutually galvanizing the cherished fellowship in the Communion. Here we pick on the Primates Meeting, where every Province of the Communion is represented. If the common opinion and consultations that take place in respect of faith, order and mission, as they affect each member Province or general life of the Communion at the Primates Meeting are mutually respected, the weight of our current challenges would have been without hazard. Therefore for an effective Communion Covenant, we advise the review of the role of the Primates Meeting, to secure the sinews and ligaments of the Communion.

(ii) The office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, commonly looked up to as the point of convergence for all the Communion, should be clarified, to enable it nip in the bud, in a collegial manner, an untoward activity in the life of the Communion.

As head of the Communion and Chair at the Primates Meeting, fellow Primates could be given a role to play in his coming to an office which he would administer in collaboration with them.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, because of historical reasons shall be accorded a place of honour and be made to play the role the British Monarch plays in the Commonwealth of nations.

The role presently associated with the Archbishop of Canterbury should now devolve to the Chairman of the Primates Meeting who shall be elected from among the Primates and made to hold office for a period of time. The ten yearly gathering of bishops shall also be made to rotate among member Provinces of the Communion.

(iii) We feel strongly uneasy about the way the draft covenant wants us to understand or endorse the clause on our interdependent life in the Communion (3.2; 3.2.3.). To affirm the clauses in this section would mean accepting an indefinite period or process of patience and listening while the issues perniciously dividing us continue to take root without genuine efforts made at repentance, reconciliation and restoration, which alone can bring the Communion back to good health.

CONCLUSION:

While awaiting further developments on the covenant from the design group, the Church of Nigeria reaffirms its commitment to initiatives that would enhance the unity of the Communion. It is hoped that the final outcome of the Covenant will reflect orthodox biblical teachings and our cherished Anglican heritage.