

**The Covenant as Catechetical Ecclesiology:
A Response to the St. Andrew's Draft for An Anglican Covenant[1]
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The history of schism is the history of the churches failing to be the Church. This is a central thesis informing the following response to the St. Andrew's Draft of an Anglican Covenant, which has been adapted from a series of posts on the author's blog, *Communion in Conflict*.^[2]

On the Introduction to the Text

The Introduction raises four significant concerns. First, the foundational assumptions of the particular form of Communion Ecclesiology expressed in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Introduction may be inadequate to the task of addressing the myriad challenges that face a church when in significant conflict. The value of the truth that "in the communion of the Church we share in the divine life"^[3] is difficult to assess when the very communion of any particular local church (or communion of churches) is at stake.^[4] The Covenant Design Group should therefore evaluate whether this form of Communion Ecclesiology can actually bear the weight of the challenges of a church in conflict and adjust its ecclesiological framework accordingly.^[5]

Second, Paragraph 3 of the Introduction to the text points to a foundational truth that ought to be made more explicit throughout the text of any Covenant itself: The edification of the Church equips the Church for carrying out its mission more effectively in the world.^[6] To this end, concrete suggestions will be made in an Appendix entitled "Proposed Revisions and Additions to the St. Andrew's Draft" (Appendix 1) and referenced throughout this response.

Third, (and perhaps most importantly) the Covenant should avoid any language that papers over the Anglican Communion's own complicity in the sin of schism, which is precisely what statements such as the following do:

4. In the providence of God, which holds sway even over our divisions caused by sin, various families of churches have grown up within the universal Church in the course of history. Among these families is the Anglican Communion, which provides us a special charism and identity among the many followers and servants of Jesus.

The tone of this statement is much too sanguine and complacent about the very problem the proposed Covenant is trying to address: Schism. True, God's grace intervenes when we sin. It is

God's *modus operandi* to redeem in Christ what is fallen, which is why Anglicans can claim any Spirit-given "charism" whatsoever. Further, while it is also true that "various families of churches have grown up within the universal Church in the course of history," and that "the providence of God...holds sway even over our divisions caused by sin," the way these two statements are juxtaposed lends an air of "*O felix culpa!*"—"O happy mistake!"—to the schism that the Anglican Communion itself is guilty of—and not just the foundational schism of Henry VIII, but *all* of the schisms that Anglican churches have been party to over the course of their histories.

The net result is that the theological rationale for the Covenant process provided here and elsewhere in the Introduction is missing the proper penitential posture for our own schismatic sins against the unity of the Body of Christ, and thus lacks a certain integrity.[7] The Anglican Communion is unlikely to achieve (or, rather, to be graced with) internal unity without walking the way of the cross of penitence. This observation raises the question of whether the Covenant process itself is trying to avoid some painful realities about the effects of schism. If part of the vocation of the Church is, as Ephesians counsels, to speak the truth in love, the Covenant process cannot attain its ends while avoiding a frank admission of the painful truth of Anglicanism's own complicity and collusion in past and present schisms.

The omission of such an explicit recognition of the Communion's own history of schism is perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Covenant process. Thus, any final Covenant should adopt a tone of humility that recognizes that the Covenant is addressed by schismatics to other schismatics, with the hope of serving the fuller visible communion of the whole Church. The Covenant must maintain a penitential tone throughout and avoid any tendency to regard the churches in communion with Canterbury as somehow less schismatic than those that are not.[8]

On the positive side, the following statement from paragraph 5 summarizes nicely what is assumed throughout this response as the central purpose of a Covenant:

[W]e recognise the importance of renewing our commitment to one another, and our common understanding of the faith as we have received it in a solemn way, so that the "bonds of affection" which hold us together may be affirmed. We do this in order to reflect in our relations with one another God's own faithfulness in his promises towards us in Christ. (2 Cor 1.20-22)

Yet this cogent statement of the Covenant's central purpose raises a fourth concern, namely that it is not clear how such a renewal can be effectively catechized or enforced by means of the Covenant itself. This lack of a clear connection between the purpose of the proposed Covenant as articulated above and its catechetical (and possibly disciplinary) implementation is a significant barrier to the success of the entire project. To this end, this response will make frequent reference to "the central purpose of a Covenant," taking the statement from paragraph 5 above as its

touchstone.

In addition to the central purpose of a Covenant to renew and strengthen our commitment to each other is the “for the sake of which” we commit to each other in the first place: Mission. The following words from paragraph 6 articulate well and with humility what the “special charism” of Anglicanism from an ecumenical perspective might include:

We give ourselves as servants of a greater unity among the divided Christians of the world. May the Lord help us to “preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

The Introduction rightly recognizes that our life together must always be oriented to mission, without which any church cannot be what God in Christ calls the Church to be. Thus, while *commitment* may be the Covenant’s central *purpose*, frequent mention will be made in this response to “the mission that the Covenant supports,” meaning the mission of the whole Church.

On Section One: Our Inheritance of Faith

For the central purpose of a Covenant, 1.1.1 through 1.1.4 appear to be rather axiomatic, while 1.1.5, on common prayer, gets at the heart of what holds the Anglican Communion together, and 1.1.6 gives a much-needed acknowledgment of the Covenant’s ecumenical context. The overall function of 1.1, however, is unclear. Is the Covenant Design Group worried that statements that appear axiomatic to (at least some) contemporary readers may at some later date prove disputable? Is 1.1 therefore somehow intended to be prophylactic? If 1.1 is intended to function as an adequate expression of an Anglican understanding of the content of the apostolic faith and mission that the Covenant supports, it would be helpful to make this explicit, at least in a Commentary.

As for the section on the commitments, 1.2.1 is such an amorphous statement that it is unclear what it really accomplishes. It appears likely that one church could accuse another church of violating 1.2.1 for just about any reason. Does 1.2.1 do anything more than add fuel to the fire? How is it a constructive contribution to a Covenant? Likewise, 1.2.2 begs the question of how any of these standards are determined or upheld. Since there is no structure within Anglicanism currently for determining with any authority what is “rooted in and answerable to the teaching of Holy Scripture...” or what constitutes “holiness,” what function does 1.2.2 fulfill? None of this is to say that 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 ought to be deleted, but that their intended constructive function needs to be made somehow more explicit. A suggestion to this end is provided in Appendix 1.

1.2.3, on the other hand, has a clearly articulated intended constructive function, with one exception: 1.2.3 should not mention here “existing canonical disciplines” because this is far too

vague and strikes an ominous note discordant with the overall irenic and harmonious tone of 1.2.3. Perhaps this notion could be explicated in a Commentary as a gloss on 1.2.3, but the phrase itself should not by any means make it into the final text of the Covenant.[9]

The double-edged nature of the ambiguous statements found in 1.2.4 and 1.2.5 smacks of a text politically cobbled together in order to address (though unlikely to satisfy) the anxieties of liberals and conservatives alike. Do they therefore constructively address the problem the Covenant is intended to remedy?

1.2.6, on the other hand, gets at the heart of the purpose of a Covenant in committing the churches to “pursue a common pilgrimage with other Churches of the Communion to discern the Truth.”

Looking at 1.2 holistically, a reordering of the commitments might draw out the constructive purpose of the more ambiguous ones. This is attempted in Appendix 1.

On Section Two: The Life We Share with Others: Our Anglican Vocation

The affirmations of 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 are unnecessary to the central purpose of a Covenant, though they do elucidate the mission of the Church that the Covenant is intended to support. Overall, there is nothing theologically objectionable in these affirmations.[10] In 2.1.3 however, the phrase “all the saints” in the last line should be replaced by either an ecclesiological less ambiguous phrase such as “all the baptised” or (as suggested in Appendix 1) a more *fully* ambiguous phrase such as “all Christians.”

On its own, section 2.2 appears somewhat thin, though it does put some flesh on the commitments in section 1.2. If it can be made clearer that the function of 2.2 is to elucidate the mission of the Church that the Covenant is intended to support, its placement would make more sense.

These somewhat ambivalent assertions above concerning the purpose and usefulness of Section Two as a whole raise the question of whether our “Anglican Vocation” is so well integrated as to require little mention in the text, or so badly integrated as to lack much specificity. A more positive assessment is that the “Anglican Vocation” is in the final analysis coterminous with the “Christian Vocation.” That is, there is nothing an Anglican should do that is different or unique, vocationally speaking, compared to any other Christian. Here, a distinction may be drawn between our *unique* Anglican charism and our *common* Christian vocation: The Anglican *charism* may be to model for a fragmented Church how to maintain communion in the midst of conflict and how to create space for the discernment of God’s will in the power of the Holy Spirit so that the mission given by Christ to the Church might be more faithfully carried out, but this

modus operandi is distinct from that *vocation* which pertains to the mission work of the Church at all times and in all places—and under all circumstances. Perhaps the point is that the mission of the Church must be carried out even when the Church is in conflict. If so, how might this point be included in the text itself? Again, concrete suggestions may be found in Appendix 1.

On Section Three: Our Unity and Common Life

Section 3.1.1 and the first clause of 3.1.2 are central to the purpose of an Anglican Covenant. The Draft gets into hot water, however, when it begins to employ the phrase “a common mind” as an end goal of conflict resolution, and thus this phrase detracts from the purpose of an Anglican Covenant during those times in which “a common mind” eludes the Communion. While a Covenant might be seen as creating the conditions under which “a common mind” might be sought, putting this forward as an explicit goal may be setting the Communion up for failure. For if the Communion is unable to come to “a common mind” even under the guidance of a Covenant, the value of the Covenant itself may be called into question. If, however, the purpose of the Covenant is to reinforce mutual commitment *whether or not* the Communion has “a common mind,” then any reference to this goal must be explicitly within the context of what the parties to the Covenant are committed to do “in the meantime.” To this end, substitute language is suggested in Appendix 1.

If the goal of the Instruments of Communion is a catechetical and missional one: to teach and equip us for living together as we proclaim the Gospel, even in the midst of our disagreements about the very content of the Gospel and how that Gospel is to be lived out (i.e., our conflicts over faith and morals), then the Covenant is a worthwhile project. Indeed, a Covenant may be essential to the Anglican Communion’s practice of being the Church.[11] A more theologically and ecclesologically adequate description of the goal of the Instruments of Communion, therefore, is that they are to equip the churches to maintain communion even in the midst of conflict as those Churches seek the Mind of Christ, which is the only sort of “common mind” worth having and the only sort of “common mind” Scripture enjoins us to pursue (Cf. Philippians 2:1-11).

Although 3.1.3 is an adequate expression of one traditional self-understanding by the Church of the role of bishops, as the current crisis in the Anglican Communion demonstrates, bishops are not, contrary to the bald assertion in 3.1.3, “a visible sign of unity.” It would be wonderful were they visible signs of unity, but bishops historically have been catalysts of and lightning rods for conflict, whether they initiated the conflict or not. The Covenant should reflect a thoroughly unsentimental, realistic, and historically-based view of the episcopate as it has been experienced in the fragmented churches.[12] That these fragmented churches themselves have often referred rhetorically to the episcopate as “a visible sign of unity” is no reason to continue to parrot a traditional assertion that is in dire need of further critical assessment. There may be a long tradition of the bishop as “a visible sign of unity,” but there is an equally long tradition of bishops

who have been visible signs of disunity, on both the left and the right of the theological spectrum.

Under 3.1.4, the description of the Archbishop of Canterbury's role should explicitly include the word "mission," as the other three Instruments do.[13]

The language of "the common good" in 3.2.1 is vague and possibly misplaced. An appeal to "the common good" is unlikely to forestall or resolve any conflict, and thus has no purpose in an Anglican Covenant. If 3.2.1 is to be retained in any constructive form, "common good" might better be replaced by the slightly more concrete (if still difficult to measure) term "edification."

An Anglican Covenant would be unnecessary if the balancing act called for in 3.2.2 could be fulfilled by a simple commitment. It thus has no purpose in an Anglican Covenant if the commitment cannot be articulated more concretely.

3.2.3, by contrast, is at the heart of the purpose for an Anglican Covenant in its very concrete commitment:

to spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and reflection to listen, pray and study with one another in order to discern the will of God. Such prayer, study and debate is an essential feature of the life of the Church as it seeks to be led by the Spirit into all truth and to proclaim the Gospel afresh in each generation. Some issues, which are perceived as controversial or new when they arise, may well evoke a deeper understanding of the implications of God's revelation to us; others may prove to be distractions or even obstacles to the faith: all therefore need to be tested by shared discernment in the life of the Church.

The main thrust of 3.2.3 should not only be retained in the final draft, but its implications should be drawn out in greater detail, either in the text of the Covenant itself or in a Commentary or study guide. To this end, the text following the first sentence might fit better in a Commentary, as it merely expands upon the concrete commitment so succinctly stated in the first sentence.[14]

The commitment in 3.2.4 to seek "a common mind" is deeply problematic for the reasons outlined at the beginning of this section. Further, the introduction of the idea that "a common mind" should be sought "about matters understood to be of essential concern, consistent with the Scriptures, common standards of faith, and the canon law of our churches" poses several problems specifically related to the questions of what is "essential," what is "consistent," and what is "common."

Since "essential" gets us into a potentially fruitless debate over what is and is not "adiaphora," it would be better simply to say that the aim of the shared discernment of the Anglican

Communion is to seek together with other churches the Mind of Christ on matters of concern that arise in its common life. The term “consistent” opens an entirely different can of worms. It begs the question of whether it is possible to be “consistent” in the first place when it comes to reconciling various interpretations of “the Scriptures, common (!) standards of faith, and the canon law of our churches.” The term “common” also begs the question as to the exact nature, content, and interpretation of the “standards of faith.” In short, the language here obscures rather than clarifies the main thrust of the concern, which is that whatever we are to do, we are to do it *together*, both internally and ecumenically.

If 3.2.4 is to be retained in the next draft, it might better be re-written as “to seek with other churches, through the Communion’s shared councils, the Mind of Christ in all things,” with the implicit understanding that this undertaking would utilize all the resources historically available to the Communion (Scripture, Reason, and Tradition—including canon law and discerned common experience). In seeking the Mind of Christ, however, canon law might at times be more of a hindrance than it is a help. At the very least, 3.2.4 does not appear to be the proper place to mention canon law.

3.2.5 places the burden squarely on those who challenge the *status quo*, which is almost by definition a “threat” to “the unity of the Communion.” (The only thing that doesn’t make change automatically a threat to unity is that it must be judged “in the view” of some group to be so; thus, nothing is a threat until there has been a reaction against it.) Further, “effectiveness” and “credibility” are very difficult criteria by which to measure the impact of any “threat” to unity. This section has a defensive, reactionary tone that is in danger of undercutting the earlier emphasis on “common discernment” as “an essential feature of the Church.” The overall tone is one of suspicion rather than hope, of fear rather than confidence. It is almost as if 3.2.5 is recommending that we become slaves of other peoples’ prejudices (and our *own*) rather than seeking our freedom in common discernment. Compared to other parts of the St. Andrew’s Draft, this part of 3.2.5 is entirely too negative.

As for 3.2.5.a through 3.2.5.e, there is nothing remarkable about the processes in a-d; these commitments merely enshrine business as usual. The phrase “according to such procedures as are appended to this covenant” in 3.2.5.b and 3.2.5.c, however, reference something extraneous to the Covenant text itself; this introduction raises concerns addressed in the next section of this response. Further, 3.2.5.e introduces something entirely new, in that if, at the end of the rather lengthy processes laid out in the Design Group’s Appendix, there is no satisfactory resolution, it contemplates the “relinquishment...of the force and meaning of the covenant’s purpose,” at least until an offending Church should “re-establish their covenant relationship with other member Churches.” An initial and necessarily tentative attempt at a more adequate formulation is included in Appendix 1.

3.2.5.e raises the question: What exactly *is* “the force and meaning of the covenant’s purpose?” It would appear that 3.2.6 provides the answer: “to have in mind that our bonds of affection and the love of Christ compel us always to seek the highest possible degree of communion.” But this way of formulating the Covenant’s “purpose” begs the question of what exactly the highest possible degree of communion in any given circumstance is. The Covenant Design Group should critically assess whether “degrees of communion” is a theologically adequate concept for the purposes of a Covenant. From the perspective of this response, the “force and meaning of the covenant’s purpose” is to define, as clearly as possible, what the responsibilities of communion entail. 3.2.6 should therefore not be about “seeking” but about “maintaining,” and should make clear that the proper maintenance of communion is accomplished through following, with God’s help, the commitments enumerated in the Covenant itself. 3.2.6 as currently worded in fact *weakens* the Covenant’s stated central purpose as expressed in Paragraph 5 of the Introduction.

On the Commentary and the Appendix[15]

It is unclear what status the Commentary and Appendix might play in any final form of the Covenant. It has been suggested throughout this response that a larger and authoritative Commentary (perhaps issued conjointly by the four Instruments of Communion) might play an important catechetical role. The current Commentary appears merely to elucidate the Covenant design process. The Appendix, on the other hand, gives some sense of how a Covenant might be employed not as a catechetical tool, but a disciplinary one, and to the extent that it does, it perhaps detracts from the central purpose of the Covenant itself. Is the Appendix part of the Covenant? Is it necessary that there even be an Appendix? Similar concerns have been raised elsewhere in this regard.[16] For now, perhaps the most constructive point would be to warn the Covenant Design Group that taking on responsibility for explicitly stating how a Covenant might serve a disciplinary purpose might well delay or even derail the Covenant design process itself. Such questions might best be postponed until such time as a greater consensus emerges on the final text of the Covenant. At this stage, the Appendix appears premature at best and self-sabotaging at worst.

Conclusion: Concerns with the Text as a Whole

The Covenant Design Group should be concerned that throughout the text of the draft, it is possible to detect what might best be termed “escape clauses.” A Covenant with escape clauses, however, is not a Covenant.[17] Further, a Covenant with escape clauses can never prevent schism nor protect against schism, because the escape clauses themselves may be cited as justification for not fulfilling or living into the Covenant’s very purpose.

No matter how many covenants a church enters into, the sad truth is that there will always be Christians who are unwilling or unable to live into the essential feature of shared discernment

that is necessary if the Church is to avoid schism. That is, schism is always avoidable in theory, but in practice it is inevitable. The same is true of marriage: One cannot compel someone to stay in relationship, and thus while divorce is always avoidable in theory, all too often in practice it reaches the point of inevitability. In each case, the reason for this is our hardness of heart toward each other. The best one can hope for, then, is to become healthy enough so that one does not become unwilling or unable to live into the “essential feature” of the covenantal relationship, which in the Church is commitment to shared discernment over time. That is, just as spouses must do, Christians must intentionally open themselves daily to soft-heartedness toward each other, even as they maintain with integrity their commitments to truth and justice as they understand them under the guidance of Scripture, reason, and the apostolic tradition of the Church. Within the Church, the responsibility is each individual’s personally to model how to be in communion when the Church is in conflict. Like the marriage liturgy and the pastoral preparation required before that liturgy may be celebrated, the best thing a Covenant can do is make explicit what the responsibilities of communion entail and outline how they might be put into action, particularly in times of stress and conflict. Such a function is primarily *catechetical*. [18]

Like the marriage covenant, the one thing a Covenant can never do is *enforce* responsibility. Church discipline only works when people first recognize that they have a responsibility to commitment. But if people absolve themselves of this responsibility, there is no discipline in the world that can prevent schism, just as there is no pastoral response in the world that can force alienated spouses to reconcile. The best one can hope for is to catechize the parties to a Covenant, by means of the Covenant itself and teaching tools designed to integrate its truths within the context of communal and individual Christian discipleship, so that the process of absolving oneself of responsibility may be recognized and named by all the other parties of the Covenant, of whatever theological or political stripe, as contradictory to authentic Christian community. [19] This is a noble goal, consonant with upholding the truth of the Gospel and fulfilling its demands of justice; it integrates Christ’s call to unity with the Christian vocation to truthful and just witness. [20]

Clearly, such a goal cannot be accomplished without the continual grace of God and an unambiguous understanding by all parties of what the purpose of the Covenant is (Commitment) and why such a purpose is important in the first place (mission). The Covenant Design Group has made extraordinary progress in this direction. But to accomplish its task fully and courageously, it must take a prenuptial contract and transform it into a marriage covenant. This is no small task, but if done with care and skill, the final product will be attractive not only for the dynamic, mission-oriented stability it offers to the covenanting parties, but for what it gives to God: glory, honor, and fidelity to Christ’s prayer that we may all be one.

Appendix 1: Proposed Revisions and Additions to the St. Andrew's Draft

NB: Additions are underlined; deletions are in ~~striketrough~~; original footnotes in the Draft text do not appear here because they are unaffected by the following proposals.

Footnotes to the proposed language are not intended for inclusion in the text of the Covenant.

Proposal A. Change 1.1.3 to read:

(1.1.3) that central to its full sacramental life, it holds and duly administers the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him;

Explanation: The addition of "full sacramental life" makes it clear that the Anglican Communion as a whole does not restrict its understanding of the sacraments to Baptism and the Lord's Supper alone. The two Dominical Sacraments are "central" but not necessarily exclusive of an understanding of confirmation, ordination, matrimony, reconciliation, and unction as sacraments. At the same time, the additional language is restrained so as not to enforce a more "catholic" sacramental theology on those within the Communion with a more "reformed" understanding.

Proposal B. To section 1.1, add:

(1.1.7) that its participation and effectiveness in carrying out the apostolic mission of the whole people of God has, however, been limited by its past and present collusion in schismatic actions, and that continual repentance and openness to reconciliation within and among all churches are necessary in order to maintain the credibility of its own continued sharing in that apostolic mission in the world. We regret and repent of our part in schisms past and present, and hereby indicate our willingness to enter into or continue dialogue with all churches on the shape of mutual repentance necessary for reconciliation and fuller visible communion.[21]

Explanation: The above paragraph indicates clearly that this Covenant is addressed in humility by schismatics to schismatics, both within and beyond the Anglican Communion, and thus eliminates any attitude of superiority or any implication that the churches in communion with Canterbury are to be regarded as somehow less schismatic than those that are not. Further, an explicit statement of repentance opens up possibilities for new directions in ecumenical dialogue, including with recently alienated ecclesial communities.

Proposal C. The following section replaces in toto 1.2 in the St. Andrew's Draft and is re-numbered accordingly:

(1.2) In living out this inheritance of faith together in varying contexts, each Church of the Communion commits itself:

~~(1.2.3)~~ (1.2.1) to ~~seek in all things to~~ uphold in all things^[22] the solemn obligation to sustain Eucharistic communion, ~~in accordance with existing canonical disciplines~~ as we strive under God for the fuller realisation of the Communion of all Christians;

~~(1.2.6)~~ (1.2.2) to pursue a common pilgrimage with other churches of the Communion, and when possible, other churches and traditions beyond this Covenant, to discern the Truth, that peoples from all nations may truly be set free to receive the new and abundant life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(1.2.3) to engage in mutual discipleship, including commitments to:

~~(1.2.1)~~ (1.2.3.a) uphold and act in continuity and consonance with Scripture and the catholic and apostolic faith, order and tradition;

~~(1.2.2)~~ (1.2.3.b) uphold and proclaim a pattern of Christian theological and moral reasoning and discipline that is rooted in and answerable to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the catholic tradition and that reflects the renewal of humanity and the whole created order through the death and resurrection of Christ and the holiness that in consequence God gives to, and requires from, his people;

~~(1.2.4)~~ (1.2.3.c) ensure that biblical texts are handled faithfully, respectfully, comprehensively and coherently, primarily through the teaching and initiative of bishops and synods, and building on habits and disciplines of Bible study across the Church and on rigorous scholarship, believing that scriptural revelation continues to illuminate and transform individuals, cultures and societies;

~~(1.2.5)~~ (1.2.3.d) nurture and respond to prophetic and faithful leadership in ministry and mission to equip God's people to be courageous witnesses to the power of the Gospel in the world.

(1.2.4.e) maintain a spirit of penitence and humility when we fail to live into these commitments, recognizing that it is by God's grace alone that we are given the strength to sustain Eucharistic communion and a common pilgrimage in the midst of conflict.

Explanation: By reordering the commitments, it is made clear that the five sub-commitments are part of the practice of mutual discipleship, and are specifically for the sake of the first two, namely sustaining Eucharistic communion and pursuing a common pilgrimage, so that no party may claim to be living into any of the latter five if that party is not concretely connecting its expression of the latter five to the first two. Further, the addition of 1.2.4.e continues the penitential tone of the Covenant as a whole.

Proposal D. To section 2.1, add a new 2.1.2, reading

(2.1.2) that we have neglected this gift of communion, even in our legitimate concern to uphold the truth and obligation to justice that the Gospel teaches and requires of us.

Explanation: This affirmation continues the penitential tone begun in Section One and carried throughout.

Proposal E. Re-number 2.1.2 to 2.1.3 and 2.1.3 to 2.1.4, changing the latter to read:

~~(2.1.2)~~ (2.1.3) the ongoing mission work of the Communion. As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we embrace challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional, and international levels. In this, we cherish our faith and mission heritage as offering Anglicans distinctive opportunities for mission collaboration.

~~(2.1.3)~~ (2.1.4) that our common mission is a mission shared with other churches and traditions beyond this covenant. We embrace opportunities for the discovery of the life of the whole gospel and for reconciliation and shared mission with the Church throughout the world. It is with all ~~the~~ saints Christians^[23] that we will comprehend the fuller dimensions of Christ's redemptive and immeasurable love.

Explanation: Removing "all the saints" and substituting a broader term strengthens the ecumenical intent of this statement.

Proposal F. Change 2.2.2. to read:

(2.2.2) In this mission, which is the mission of Christ, each Church undertakes to live into this Covenant in ways that will assist each other:

Explanation: The additional language makes it clear that the function of 2.2 is to elucidate the mission of the Church that the Covenant is intended to support, and that living into the Covenant reciprocally supports mission.

Proposal G. To section 2.2, add

(2.2.3) to live out this mission of the whole Church at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, even and especially when in conflict.

Explanation: This commitment makes more explicit that the function of 2.2 is to commit concretely to the mission of the whole Church whether any particular churches are in conflict or not.

Proposal H. Change 3.1.1 to read:

(3.1.1) that by our participation in Baptism and Eucharist, we are incorporated into the one body of the Church of Jesus Christ, and called by Christ to pursue all things that make for peace and build up our common life. This call to edification equips the Church for carrying out its mission more effectively in the world.

Explanation: While the additional sentence may be better-suited to a Commentary, it makes explicit the concern of Paragraph 3 of the Introduction, introducing it into the text of the Covenant itself.

Proposal I. Change 3.1.2 to read:

(3.1.2) its resolve to live in a Communion of Churches. Each Church, episcopally led and synodically governed, orders and regulates its own affairs and its local responsibility for mission through its own system of government and law and is therefore described as autonomous-in-communion. Churches of the Anglican Communion are not bound together by a central legislative, executive or judicial authority. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, who calls and enables us to live in mutual affection, commitment and service, we seek to affirm our common life through those Instruments of Communion by which our Churches are enabled to ~~develop a common mind~~ seek more fully the Mind of Christ;

Explanation: The substitute language “seek more fully the Mind of Christ” replaces “develop a common mind” in order to provide a more Scriptural and theologically adequate description of the goal of discernment in communion.

Proposal J. Change 3.1.3 to read:

(3.1.3) the central role of bishops as guardians and teachers of faith, and leaders in mission, ~~and as a visible sign of unity~~, representing the universal Church to the local, and the local Church to the universal. This ministry is exercised personally, collegially and within and for the eucharistic

community. We receive and maintain the historic threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, ordained for service in the Church of God, as they call all the baptised into the mission of Christ;

Explanation: Although a bishop is called to be “a visible sign of unity,” the historical reality, including the reality that has led to the proposal of an Anglican Covenant, is counterfactual. By excising this language, the role of the bishop is described less in ideal terms and more in practical terms.

Proposal K. Change 3.1.4 I. to read:

I. The Archbishop of Canterbury, with whose See Anglicans have historically been in communion, is accorded a primacy of honour and respect as first amongst equals (primus inter pares). As a focus and means of unity, he ~~gathers~~ serves the apostolic mission of the whole Church through his ministry ecumenically, and within the Communion by gathering the Lambeth Conference and Primates’ Meeting, and ~~presides~~ presiding in the Anglican Consultative Council;

Explanation: The phrase “the apostolic mission of the whole Church” indicates that the Archbishop of Canterbury’s role is not merely for the sake of the Anglican Communion alone, but also has an essential ecumenical dimension, which connects the mission that the Anglican Communion undertakes to the mission of the whole Church.

Proposal L. Change 3.2.1 to read:

(3.2.1) to have regard to the ~~common good~~ edification of the Communion in the exercise of its autonomy, and to support the work of the Instruments of Communion with the spiritual and material resources available to it;

Explanation: “Edification” is slightly more concrete and perhaps more measurable than “common good.” It is also a more theological and Scriptural category, while “common good” is more of a philosophical category.

Proposal M. Change 3.2.2 to read:

(3.2.2) to take such actions as are necessary in order to show due respect to the constitutional autonomy of all of the Churches of the Anglican Communion and to uphold by strict adherence to this Covenant the interdependent life and mutual accountability of the Churches, and the responsibility of each to the Communion as a whole.

Explanation: While the intention of 3.2.2 is a good one, in its current form it is too abstract. This revision, while not fully solving the difficulty, points to concrete actions that the Churches may choose to undertake. In its current form, it is more likely to be used as an accusation by one Province against another, rather than pointing concretely to the need of any Province to abide by the commitment.

Proposal N: Change 3.2.3 to read:

(3.2.3) to spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and reflection to listen, pray and study with one another in order to discern the will of God. Such prayer, study and debate is an essential feature of the life of the Church as it seeks to be led by the Spirit into all truth and to proclaim the Gospel afresh in each generation. ~~Some issues, which are perceived as controversial or new when they arise, may well evoke a deeper understanding of the implications of God's revelation to us; others may prove to be distractions or even obstacles to the faith. all therefore need to be~~ Any issues that may arise, therefore, must be tested by shared discernment in the life of the Church.

Explanation: This is an edited version of 3.2.3, the deleted text being better suited to a Commentary. In fact, only the first sentence is strictly necessary, as the following two are also a gloss on it; they are retained here because 3.2.3 is so central to the purpose of a Covenant and they are helpful in underscoring this point.

Proposal O: Change 3.2.4 to read:

(3.2.4) to seek with other churches, through the Communion's shared councils, ~~a common mind about matters understood to be of essential concern, consistent with the Scriptures, common standards of faith, and the canon law of our churches.~~ the Mind of Christ in all things.

Explanation: The excised language detracted rather than elucidated the main thrust of this commitment, which is that the Mind of Christ is best sought through the shared councils of the Communion. By not capitalizing "churches," this further indicates a possible ecumenical scope, as other churches not of the Anglican Communion may be invited to share in the Communion's councils. This construal may be noted explicitly in a separate Commentary on the Covenant.

Proposal P: Change 3.2.5 to read:

(3.2.5) to work at all times for the unity of the churches by ~~act with diligence, care and caution in respect to actions, either proposed or enacted, at a provincial or local level, which, in its own view~~

~~or the expressed view of any Province or in the view of any one of the Instruments of Communion, are deemed to threaten the unity of the Communion and the effectiveness or credibility of its mission, and to consenting~~ to the following principles and procedural elements:

Explanation: The excised language was alien to the prior tone of the Covenant and constituted a possible “escape clause.” This revision deletes any “prenuptial” language and replaces it so that it focuses solely on the covenantal concern for unity.

Proposal Q: Change 3.2.5.b and 3.2.5.c by deleting:

(3.2.5.b) to accept the legitimacy of processes for communion-wide evaluation which any of the Instruments of Communion may commission, ~~according to such procedures— as are appended to this covenant;~~

(3.2.5.c) to be ready to participate in mediated conversation between parties, which may be in conflict, ~~according to such procedures as are appended to this covenant;~~

Explanation: The text of the Covenant should not refer to anything extraneous to the Covenant itself as binding on its signatories. Should procedures be enacted, this must be done separately so as not to detract from the central purpose of the Covenant itself. While additional procedures may in fact support the purpose of the Covenant, it is inappropriate to bundle those procedures with the Covenant, as such a bundling may exceed the remit of the Covenant Design Group.

Proposal R: Change 3.2.5.e to read:

(3.2.5.e) Any such request would not be binding on a Church unless recognised as such by that Church. However, commitment to this Covenant entails an acknowledgement that in the most extreme circumstances, where a Church chooses not to adopt the request of the Instruments of Communion, that decision may be understood by the Church itself, or by the resolution of the Instruments of Communion, ~~as a relinquishment by that Church of the force and meaning of the covenant’s purpose, until they re-establish their covenant relationship with other member Churches~~ as requiring a mutual recognition and acknowledgment of faults that seeks each other’s forgiveness as God in Christ has forgiven us.

Explanation: The excised language contradicts the central purpose of a Covenant as mutual commitment and introduces a prenuptial-style “escape clause” in place of a covenantal re-commitment. The substitute language is adapted from the fourth petition of the Prayers in the Marriage liturgy of the 1979 U.S. Book of Common Prayer (Cf. page 429). This proposal hardly cuts the Gordian Knot of discipline and schism, no more than the fourth petition in the Marriage liturgy

solves the problem of separation and divorce, but it points positively toward reconciliation rather than focusing on a nebulous ecclesial status (“a relinquishment”) external to the committed covenantal relationship envisioned in the rest of the text. Further, it carries forward a penitential tone appropriate to the Covenant as a whole and de-focuses on the rejecting Church as the “identified patient” who alone is saddled with the “problem,” recognizing that there is a mutual responsibility for recognizing faults and seeking forgiveness.

Proposal S: Change 3.2.6 to read:

(3.2.6) to have in mind that our bonds of affection and the love of Christ compel us always to ~~seek~~ maintain through faithful adherence to the commitments of this Covenant the highest possible degree of communion.

Explanation: By referring specifically to the commitments of the Covenant, the Covenant defines the common boundaries of communion within which the “highest possible degree of communion” may be maintained.

Appendix 2: An Executive Summary Covenant as Catechetical Tool[24]

The following partial “executive summary” style text is intended to function analogously to the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: as a *brief*, digestible statement that may be memorized or used as a teaching tool in other ways. It is offered here as an example of how the Covenant might be distilled so that its main purposes are taught more effectively throughout the Communion.

[The original placement of text lifted from the St. Andrew’s Draft may be found in brackets.]

(1.0) By our participation in Baptism and Eucharist, we are incorporated into the one Body of the Church of Jesus Christ, and called by Christ to pursue all things that make for peace and build up our common life. [3.1.1]

(2.0) Therefore, each church of the Communion commits itself: [1.2b and parallels]

(2.1) to live in a Communion of churches; [3.1.2]

(2.2) to seek in all things to uphold the solemn obligation to sustain Eucharistic communion as we strive under God for the fuller realisation of the Communion of all Christians; [1.2.3]

(2.3) to pursue a common pilgrimage with other churches of the Communion to discern the Truth. [1.2.6]

(2.4) to spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and reflection to listen, pray and study with one another in order to discern the will of God. [See footnote below][3.2.3]

(2.5) to seek with other churches, through the Communion’s shared councils, the Mind of Christ in all things. [3.2.4]

(2.6) to have in mind that our bonds of affection and the love of Christ compel us always to maintain through faithful adherence to the commitments of this Covenant the highest possible degree of communion. [3.2.6]

[Footnote to 2.4.] Such prayer, study and debate is an essential feature of the life of the Church as it seeks to be led by the Spirit into all truth and to proclaim the Gospel afresh in each generation. Any issues that may arise, therefore, must be tested by shared discernment in the life of the Church. [3.2.3]

[1] This response is intended to be read alongside the text of the Draft itself as a commentary; I thus refrain from quoting many sections, instead referencing them merely by paragraph number. The Draft text may be found online at http://www.aco.org/commission/covenant/docs/st_andrews_documents_2008.pdf.

[2] Cf. <http://communioninconflict.blogspot.com/search/label/Anglican%20Covenant> for these posts in their original form; to read the whole series in order, start from the bottom. It should be noted that this response differs in some significant ways from the original posts, as I have had leisure to reflect upon how I might best present something constructive to the Covenant Design Group. Rather than criticizing the Covenant project itself, as many others have, I have done my best in this response to focus on what might improve the text that has been presented to the Communion, operating on the assumption that the Covenant process and its work products are the primary mode of constructive theology available at present.

[3] The Introduction quotes from the 2007 Cyprus Statement of the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church and the Triune God*, par. 1-2.

[4] From the perspective of this response, while the baptized do indeed share in the divine life through communion in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, that communion may (arguably) be limited by the form (i.e., polity, health, conflict) taken by the local church through which the baptized participate in the Church universal. Thus, it is important not to make too facile an analogy between the universal Church and its often conflicted expression in a local church. Throughout this response and the proposals appended to it, this distinction between the universal Church and local church(es) will be maintained, and denoted primarily through capitalization, except where “Church” is used as a proper noun (e.g., Church[es] of the Anglican Communion).

[5] To this end, I offer my own theses on what I have termed “Conflict Ecclesiology,” found online (in the right-hand sidebar) at <http://conflictecclesiology.blogspot.com/>. I do not assume that any one framework is adequate on its own, but rather that employing a variety of frameworks may be a more realistic and constructive methodological approach than relying solely or even primarily on Communion Ecclesiology. My primary concern with Communion Ecclesiology, true and beautiful as it may be, is its lack of constructive solutions for churches that fail to live into its idealized framework, and in this regard, I am unconvinced as to its utility in addressing *any* church conflict, present or future.

[6] Cf. <http://communioninconflict.blogspot.com/2007/02/edification-defined-little-exegetical.html> for my working definition of “edification.”

[7] This is true, for instance, of Paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Introduction, as well. Paragraph 7 glosses over the schismatic shadow side of our Anglican history, while Paragraph 8 neglects to mention the fact that in order for God “to redeem our struggles and weakness, and renew and enrich our common life,” repentance is essential.

[8] For example, any Covenant may wish to make an explicit statement of regret for past and current acts of schism perpetrated by Anglican churches, including those acts that made the Church of England an entity separate from Roman jurisdiction. At the same time, it should make clear, either in the text or in a Commentary on it, that the subjection of the present-day Anglican Communion to Roman jurisdiction would not “heal” that schism, as a mutual repentance on the part of Rome and Canterbury would be necessary. The Covenant, or a Commentary on it, should indicate a willingness to enter into mutual dialogue on the shape of this repentance with the Church of Rome. The same should be indicated regarding the other ecclesial communities that have separated from and/or from which Anglican churches have separated themselves throughout history, for example the Methodists.

[9] In such a Commentary, I hope that the point would be made that any “canonical disciplines” must have as their sole purpose to support Christians and Christian communities in upholding this “solemn obligation.” Otherwise, “canonical disciplines” could be read as a sort of “escape clause” for breaking the solemn obligation of sustaining Eucharistic communion.

[10] On a relatively minor note, I recommend changing “His” to “God’s” in the Draft text here, and elsewhere avoiding *any* pronouns in reference to the Trinity or any of the Persons, except perhaps when referring specifically to the Second Person as incarnate in Jesus Christ. Such word edits are not detailed in Appendix 1.

[11] This is particularly true if unity can come to be regarded by all Anglicans as belonging (alongside other attributes such as truthful and just witness), to the being (*esse*) of the Church, and not merely as an “optional extra” or “adornment” contributing to its wellbeing (*bene esse*). Many of the negative assessments of the Covenant process have treated unity as belonging to the *bene esse* of the Church, while justice belongs to its *esse*. Such a view is a distortion of the necessary coinherence or *perichoresis* of unity and justice in the Church’s being, just as any view that would relegate justice to the *bene esse* of the Church while regarding unity as belonging to the *esse* of the Church would be a distortion in the opposite direction. As with many theological debates, the solution is not either-or but both/and.

[12] In this regard, a future Draft may wish to affirm not that bishops *are* “a visible sign of unity,” but that they are *called to be* a visible sign of unity. Such an affirmation might be coupled with a recognition that historically, bishops have failed in this regard, which would add to the penitential tone of the Covenant. Since, however, bishops are not always themselves to be blamed for the disunity they engender (or at least not *entirely* to be blamed), the revision proposed in Appendix 1 simply excises the problematic language.

[13] I owe this suggestion to The Reverend Canon Gregory Cameron, Deputy Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, who pointed out in an aside during his keynote address at a conference that the Archbishop of Canterbury was the only one of the four Instruments of Communion whose purpose according to the St. Andrew’s Draft apparently had nothing explicitly to do with mission! That conference was “An Anglican Covenant: Divisive or Reconciling?” at the Desmond Tutu Center, General Theological Seminary, New York City, 10-12 April, 2008. Canon Cameron’s address, *Boundaries Old and Boundaries New: Views from the Edge of the Anglican Communion* may be found online at <http://www.gts.edu/tcarchiveANGCOVT.asp>.

[14] As note 4 above points toward, however, a distinction must be made between the capacity of a local church (given the limits of its particular form) for participating constructively and truthfully in discernment in the midst of its conflicts and the “essential feature” of the universal Church in undertaking discernment ecumenically, which may itself be limited by its existentially fragmented context, as manifested in the local churches. In other words, there is no guarantee that a local church will “be led by the Spirit into all truth” apart from its ontological grounding in the universal Church—to assume otherwise verges on the hubristic. The crucial implication of 3.2.3, however, is that further fragmentation at the local level does nothing to assist the universal Church in fulfilling its call to that “essential feature” of discernment, and thus, in order for a local church to participate more effectively in the mission of the universal Church, it must take steps to ensure that it participates faithfully and with steadfast commitment in the shared discernment of the *whole* Church.

[15] The Commentary and Appendix may be found online, on pages 11-16 and 17-20, respectively, at: http://www.aco.org/commission/covenant/docs/st_andrews_documents_2008.pdf

[16] Cf. <http://communioninconflict.blogspot.com/2008/04/brief-commentary-on-commentary-and.html>.

[17] At best, a covenant with “escape clauses” is akin to a prenuptial agreement. A statement by the General Convention Deputation of the Episcopal Diocese of New York makes the same point in its response, found online at <http://jintoku.blogspot.com/2008/06/on-saint-andrews-draft.html>, viz.,: “This draft continues in the mode of a pre-nuptial agreement rather than a covenant of irrevocable commitment.”

[18] To this end, I have included Appendix 2 as an example of how an “executive summary” of the Covenant may be used as a catechetical tool.

[19] Properly catechized by means of a Covenant, this “naming” becomes an effective disciplinary mechanism for enforcing the central purpose of the Covenant itself precisely because it allows parties of differing theological

perspective to maintain the boundaries of communion together rather than in an adversarial manner. Admittedly, such discipline is much more difficult than one that is imposed by mechanisms within the Covenant itself, but from the perspective of this response, any such mechanisms would in practice simply end up contradicting the central purpose of the Covenant. It therefore makes more sense to frame the Covenant as a catechetical tool rather than as a disciplinary tool, as discipline without a firm catechetical foundation will inevitably lack effective (i.e., reformative *and* unitive) force.

[20] The quandary, from one point of view, is in how to remain committed to each other in the midst of conflict without compromising one's own deeply held theological commitments. This quandary is resolved, at least in part, by recalling that one's theological commitments are for the sake of the mission of the Church, which participates in the eschatological reality of salvation through communion with each other through Christ in the here-and-now of the Church's life. Rather than relativizing theological commitments, this perspective puts them in service of communion, which even in conflict is the context for shared discernment and effective witness as the Church lives ever more deeply into its mission in the world. In simple terms, it is through not giving up on each other that we bear witness to each other and to the world at large that God in Christ never gives up on us.

[21] For consistency's sake, "Churches" in the previous paragraph, 1.1.6, should be changed to "churches," the capital being reserved for proper nouns or the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Nicene Creed.

[22] The phrase "in all things" might be expressed better by replacing it with an allusion to the Eucharistic prayers, e.g., "always and everywhere," and/or by adding "under all circumstances," to convey an intent analogous to the marriage vow "for better for worse."

[23] Or, "Christians" might be replaced with the more specific term "the baptised."

[24] The original text was posted as "A Radically Redacted Anglican Covenant" online at <http://communioninconflict.blogspot.com/2008/05/postscript-radically-redacted-anglican.html>.