

## **An Anglican Covenant - Commentary to the St Andrew's Draft**

### **General Comments**

The Covenant Design Group (CDG) received formal responses to the 2007 Draft Covenant from thirteen (13) Provinces. The Group were hopeful that the lack of formal discursive responses from other Provinces does not necessarily signal disapproval. The CDG is cognisant of mitigating factors (such as the lack of translations of the text available, other foci in the local lives of Provinces and lack of consultative resources, etc.). Of the formal responses we did receive, all signalled a willingness to move forward, despite various questions and concerns, and a clear mandate was given to this meeting of the CDG.

Originally, the 2007 Nassau draft cited a number of Biblical passages without showing clearly their relationship to the text of the covenant. Many Provincial Responses therefore questioned the scriptural references contained in the draft. The St. Andrew's draft takes a different approach, showing its biblical framework primarily in the introduction and conclusion, and referencing scriptural passages throughout the draft. This present draft intentionally uses biblical language wherever possible and is rooted in Scripture, through phraseology, direct quotation in the text, through some explicit engagement with Scriptural passages in certain parts of the text (e.g. the Introduction) and through discussion and indication of the Scriptural base and soil of the Covenant.

Several comments pointed to the confusing numbering and divisions of the Nassau Draft. We have sought to make this clearer. Now, the Covenant is broadly divided into three main sections, offering first affirmations and then commitment dealing with shared faith, mission, and the maintenance of communion.

The Covenant Design Group noted that in some of the responses both the idea of covenant and the usefulness of the term "covenant" were questioned, both in terms of its use in the Old Testament and its historic connotations in some parts of the Anglican Communion. The idea of a covenant was first suggested in the Windsor Report and a sample covenant was put forward in Appendix 2 of that document. Subsequently, the desirability of a covenant has been reaffirmed by 3 out of the 4 Instruments of Communion.

As to the term "covenant", the CDG discussed other suggested alternatives such as "concordat" or "common declaration," each of which has its own difficulties, and finally returned to "covenant" as the best descriptor of the task ahead of us. Almost all of the responses received expressed a readiness to work with the idea of covenant.

The CDG was unanimous in believing that we cannot abandon the word and concept of 'covenant', and for several reasons: theologically, we believe that it is correct to say that covenant emerges out of communion, and also 'serves' communion, both in terms of God's relations to us, but just as importantly in our mutual relations as reflective of God's life that we share. It is related, in a concrete way, to the expression of 'bonds of affection' in their pneumatic, relational and responsible power. The distinction

between 'covenant' and other possible concepts ('concordat', 'compact', etc.) is quite clear in these respects. Finally, the term now has an accepted currency within the Communion that commends its common usage.

We noted the historical use of 'the bonds of affection' and asked ourselves: What is the bare minimum of infrastructure that the communion needs? At a time of fragmentation, a covenant is a basis for mutual trust and reduced anxiety. Habits of civility and mutuality of respect have taken us a long way in the past. We are now in a place where our structures must provide a framework for the context of our belief.

Some have asked about the proposed covenant: What difference does it make in the life of the Communion? Does it simply make explicit what is already implicit, or is it a device for achieving something else? Some responses raised questions about the rationale for the Covenant: "what positive difference will it make?" Is it just about "conflict management" or discipline, so that the final section is the "real reason" for the Covenant? Questions have also been raised around the Communion as to why the Lambeth Quadrilateral is not enough. The present concern is to achieve sufficient accountability among Provinces to be able to work more corporately. That will mean creating some structures. The proposed draft Covenant is our answer to all of these questions.

We have sought to emphasize more obviously the missionary element constitutive to our valuing of unity. Finally, we also believe that our revisions in the final sections provide some greater clarity about what is at stake – a way of life "in communion" that is faithful to the form of our Gospel vocation.

We have sought, through the use of phraseology borrowed from the recent Anglican-Orthodox Cyprus Agreed Statement<sup>[1]</sup>, to be faithful in describing the relationship of the Anglican Communion to the Universal Church. At the same time, despite the desires of some that the Covenant provide a more definitive statement of Anglican ecclesiology, we recognized the still-open-ended character of this task, and sought not to pre-empt its fruit and conclusion by too precise formulations in this way.

A key question which the group addressed was "Is the Draft ecclesologically coherent?" Is, for instance, the final section at odds with previous affirmations regarding interdependence? We have reflected seriously on this matter, and believe that the character of ecclesial communion does not submerge the responsible choices that local churches must engage in order to be faithful to their calling by and under Christ. A model which empowers the Churches of the Anglican Communion to speak to one another and inform each others life, while respecting provincial autonomy does indeed embody the kind of "autonomy-in-communion" that informs the Draft.

## **The Introduction**

Several comments expressed a desire for greater theological breadth in the Introduction, that might better reflect the relation between Trinity and communion,

the forms of ecclesial life this represents, and the place of the Anglican Communion in particular within this reality. The section was expanded in this direction and has now sought to offer a fuller theological rationale.

## **The Preamble**

The Preamble uses the form, “the Churches of the Anglican Communion”. These are the churches recognised in the Schedule of Membership of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). At present they consist of 34 national or regional Provinces, the 4 United Churches of South Asia and 6 extra-provincial churches, dioceses or, in one case, a parish, duly recognised by ACC procedures.

## **Section One: Our Inheritance of Faith**

### **Clause 1.1.1**

Some responses wondered if the first section on the “One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church” should be framed in terms of “recognition” relating to other Churches’ membership within it. We decided that, in this Covenant, the signatories needed to affirm their own self-understanding, and not their view of other churches, and therefore the covenant itself must be limited to simple affirmation.

The unity of the universal Church is the communion in faith, truth, love and common sacramental life of the several local churches. The catholic Church exists in each local church; and each local church is identified with the whole, expresses the whole and cannot exist apart from the whole.

### **Clause 1.1.2**

Some Provinces do not formally recognise the 39 Articles within their canons and constitutions. We, however, accepted one suggestion that the realities of Scripture, Creed, and formularies be more closely linked, but in a way that did not transgress the particular canonical and historical diversity of Anglican churches with respect to the last element.

### **Clause 1.1.3**

Some responses questioned whether the Covenant unduly limits the sacramental life of the Anglican churches to only two sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist). There are some different views held among Anglican churches regarding e.g. the “number of sacraments” and their meaning. This statement in clause 1.1.3 is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of sacramental theology or to resolve questions about the nature or number of the sacraments. The CDG decided, therefore, to stick to the express wording the Lambeth Quadrilateral in this respect, as articulating “constitutive” elements of the Church, without seeking to define further other sacramental realities.

### **Clause 1.1.4**

The group have now incorporated (as several submissions suggested) all four elements of the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral in this opening section.

#### **Clause 1.1.5**

The group have added a clause referring to the importance of Common Prayer as one of the defining characteristics of Anglicanism and of our common bonds.

#### **Clause 1.2.2**

One of the questions addressed to the Design Group was “Where in the Covenant does the lively and responsible role of human reason, so consistently important to Anglican practice, find a substantive mention?” Taking up one suggestion, the active and disciplined use of reason in theological and moral decision-making, bound to Scriptural authority, was used to replace a previous paragraph (3.3).

#### **Clause 1.2.3**

The CDG accepted that there is an obligation to work to sustain Eucharistic communion even where there is conscientious objection.

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

#### **Clause 2.1.3**

The ecumenical dimensions of Anglican witness and mission are expressed more explicitly both here and in 1.1.6.

#### **Clause 2.2.2**

There was some discussion about the adequacy of the stated “Five Marks of Mission” and several attractive suggestions were received with respect to enlarging the outline. However, because these five marks have already emerged from inter-Anglican discussion and been given a real measure of reception around the Communion, this is one of several places where the CDG elected to honour the wording of the original text, in this case that of the MISSIO Report of 1999.

In spite of our own questions about the sufficiency of the list and ACC-8’s own questions about that sufficiency, we agreed to maintain this enumeration, cognizant (along with the original commission that proposed them) that they may not yet fully represent the summary shape of our missionary commitments. At the same time, we have tried to indicate the missionary essence of a range of elements dealt with in other sections. It remains an open question as to whether the commissions would want us to suggest revisions of their language that may occur to us?

### **Section Three: Our Unity and Common Life**

**Clause 3.1.3:** The central role of bishops as a visible sign of unity was recognised in The Windsor Report (para. 64) where it was stated that, “Bishops represent the local to the universal and the universal to the local”. We note the significance of the Episcopal office for the Communion of the Church as set out in Appendix Two of the Report of the Inter Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC), “The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church”[\[2\]](#).

**Clause 3.1.4:** There are many and varied links which sustain our life together include: The Anglican Cycle of Prayer, the various commissions, the Mothers’ Union, companion dioceses and parish relationships, mission agencies and networks.

Some comments indicated that the Covenant was somehow “canonizing” four instruments of Communion that have evolved in a somewhat haphazard way. We have therefore amended the text to allow both for the evolution of the Instruments, and to acknowledge the existence of other informal instruments and links.

While the Covenant does not preclude or even seek to limit the possible development of these and other Instruments, we nonetheless believe that the Instruments as now working represent a special means of faithfully maintaining our common life, and ones that need to remain at the centre of our common commitments. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s place within this grouping is maintained, even while his character as a “focus” – according to the redefinition adopted from the Windsor Report by ACC-13 – is acknowledged. The Archbishop of Canterbury exercises his ministry in a collegial manner with his fellow primates.

The order of listing the Four Instruments has been changed to follow their more formal chronological development. Their ministries have been described according to various Communion documents including, in the case of the ACC, its formal constitution.

The history of the Primates’ Meeting is set out in Paragraph 104 of The Windsor Report which states that its purpose was “to initiate consideration of the way to relate together the international conferences, councils, and meetings within the Anglican Communion, so that the Anglican Communion may best serve God within the context of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” It is noted that in Appendix 1(5) of the Windsor Report it was suggested that the Primates’ Meeting serve as a standing committee of the Lambeth Conference, but since this has not been received by the larger church, the Covenant Design Group decided not to include it in our description.

## **The Commitments in 3.2**

This was the most contentious section of the Nassau draft, and the one which therefore required our greatest attention, and which has been considerably rewritten. In articulating a model for interdependent life, we have tried to be faithful to a few models developed in the Windsor Report. The section therefore begins with a commitment to a common life would also respects the proper autonomy of our Churches.

### **Clause 3.2.2**

This statement of the autonomy of the Provinces is taken from that written by the primates in their meeting at Dar es Salaam, " directly from the schedule to their communique from that meeting.

### **Clause 3.2.5**

Many commentators on the Nassau draft did not like the pattern of consultation as proposed in the draft, which placed the Primates Meeting in a significant co-ordinating position. The St Andrew's Draft limits the commitments made by the Churches to ones of care and receptivity with respect to Communion relations. It is open to any Province or the instruments of Communion or indeed the national or regional Church itself to identify matters which threaten "the unity of the Communion" or " the effectiveness or credibility of its mission", and which therefore invoke a higher duty of care. The clause sets out four elements to that duty of care: consultation (3.2.5.a), Communion wide evaluation (3.2.5.b), mediation (3.2.5.c) and a readiness to consider a request on the controversial matter from the Instruments of Communion (3.2.5.d). The draft stresses that there is no intention to erect a centralised jurisdiction and that the Instruments of Communion cannot dictate with juridical force on the internal affairs of any Province. However, since Communion is founded on the mutual recognition that each Church sees in the other evidence of our Communion in Christ, we recognize that it cannot be sustained in extreme circumstances where a Church or Province acts in a way which rejects the interdependence of the Communion's life.

We recognize that the Communion may well require more detailed procedures which offer a way in which these principles and procedural elements may be lived out in its life. The group therefore attaches to the St Andrew's Draft a tentative draft for the possible shape such procedures might take. This procedural appendix will need much scrutiny and careful analysis. The CDG particularly welcomes comments and response on this appendix, while also recognizing its provisional nature in the St Andrew's Draft. It is important to note however that the elements set out in clause 3.2.5 are not intended to form a sequential process, but to be elements which can all be active and present at any stage in the process of common discernment and reconciliation.

### **Clause 3.2.6**

The commitments close with the renewal of the commitment to seek to live into the fullness of Communion into which we are called by our Lord.

#### **Notes:**

- [1.](#) *The Church of the Triune God*, the Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue, ACO, London, January 2007
- [2.](#) The Report, *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, is to be published by ACO later this year.