

## CHAPTER 9

# The Anglican Communion Covenant

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On December 18, 2009, Kenneth Kearon, secretary general of the Anglican Communion, sent the final text of the Anglican Communion Covenant to each communion province for formal consideration for adoption. By late 2012, it had been accepted fully in some form by seven provinces. Others had been less positive and many had not reported progress. Most notably and significantly, the Church of England's diocesan synods failed to give it the support necessary for General Synod to consider adopting it.

Whatever happens in coming years, the covenant represents a significant development in the life of the Anglican Communion. Although it has generated much discussion online, only a few publications address it in detail (see Chapman 2008; Doe 2008; Hill 2008; Guyer 2012). This chapter seeks to explain and assess the final text by setting it in a broader context. It explores the covenant's origins, noting attempts to address the same issues before the 2004 Windsor Report that have often been forgotten or ignored (Section One). It then charts its development, the changing content, and debates as the Covenant Design Group produced three drafts before the agreed final text (Section Two). The content of that final text is set out (Section Three) before a short concluding assessment of the covenant's impact on the Communion (Section Four).

## Section One – The Path to the Covenant Proposal

The Anglican Covenant was proposed by the Lambeth Commission on Communion in The Windsor Report (TWR) of 2004 (Lambeth Commission on Communion 2004). The Commission was established by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2003 to report “on the legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal Church (USA) to appoint a priest in a committed same sex relationship as one of its

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bishops, and of the Diocese of New Westminster to authorise services for use in connection with same sex unions,” and specifically on issues related to impaired and broken communion. It was mandated “to include practical recommendations . . . for maintaining the highest degree of communion that may be possible in the circumstances resulting from these decisions, both within and between the churches of the Anglican Communion” (Lambeth Commission on Communion 2004, 13). Section C examined “Our Future Life Together” and addressed the issue of “Canon Law and Covenant” (paras 113–20), while Appendix Two proposed “a preliminary draft and discussion document” (para 118).

Among what TWR described as the “overwhelming” arguments for adopting a covenant, the Commission gave priority to the fact that “it is our shared responsibility to have in place an agreed mechanism to enable and maintain life in communion, and to prevent and manage communion disputes” (para 119). It also pointed to a covenant embodying “communion as a visible foundation around which Anglicans can gather to shape and protect their distinctive identity and mission” and providing “an accessible resource for our ecumenical partners in their understanding of Anglicanism” (para 119).

Although goals such as these remained paramount, this context of the original proposal has had a number of consequences in relation to the covenant’s reception and how it has been interpreted, particularly by its critics. First, it has been closely tied to disputes about sexuality, despite the fact that another section of TWR (Section D) addressed these matters, and at no point did any draft of the covenant address the issue. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, those most sympathetic to Anglicans blessing same-sex relationships were most skeptical or hostile to the idea of a covenant. Second, by combining the covenant with a proposal in relation to canon law and offering a draft with a strong legal tone, the covenant was portrayed as marking a shift from a communion held together by relational “bonds of affection” to one whose focus was more juridical and canonical. Third, the question of the relationship between the covenant and membership of the communion was raised in such a way that the covenant could be portrayed as seeking to exclude current members of the communion: “it may be that the Anglican Consultative Council could encourage full participation in the Covenant project by each church by constructing an understanding of communion membership which is expressed by the readiness of a province to maintain its bonds with Canterbury, and which includes a reference to the Covenant” (para 120). Fourth, although it was stressed that the covenant should be “largely descriptive of existing principles” (para 118), the TWR draft proposed (in Article 27) a new power – “The Archbishop of Canterbury shall decide all questions of interpretation of this Covenant” and, if approved by the Joint Standing Committee, “the decision of the Archbishop shall be regarded as authoritative in the Communion.” This ignited concerns that the covenant represented a centralizing, authoritarian vision, undermining or even destroying traditional provincial autonomy. All four of these concerns were taken on board during the covenant’s redrafting, but they remain at the heart of many doubts about the covenant proposal.

Within the Windsor Report, the covenant was clearly a response to a much wider and more fundamental challenge than divisions over sexuality – “how to make the

principles of inter-Anglican relations more effective at the local ecclesial level” (para 117). It sought a covenant which would deal with “the acknowledgement of common identity; the relationships of communion; the commitments of communion; the exercise of autonomy in communion; and the management of communion affairs (including disputes)” (para 118). These are longstanding challenges the Anglican Communion has faced and sought to address in ways similar to the covenant.

The most recent attempt to address them prior to the Windsor Report was from Professor Norman Doe, who served on the Commission. At the Primates’ Meeting in 2001, Doe gave a presentation on canon law in the communion (Doe 2001) which led to a consultation that identified 44 shared principles of canon law across the communion and gave background to the content of TWR’s draft covenant (the final principles are in Anglican Communion Office 2008). Although undeveloped, his paper referred to a possible concordat between provinces, a precursor of the later covenant proposal.

Doe’s proposed concordat and Windsor’s covenant are simply new ways of addressing concerns already identified in the 1980s. Similar solutions had already been considered. In 1986, a group chaired by Archbishop Robin Eames (who chaired the Lambeth Commission over 15 years later) produced a paper for ACC-7 in Singapore in 1987. This recommended that the provinces “should adopt a common *Declaration*” as “a sign of the Church’s adherence to apostolic faith and order” and also “a sign of communion between the Churches” (Lambeth Conference 1988, para 20). This proposed Declaration appears not to have been taken forward at the time (although it was discussed in some provinces), but ACC-7 agreed unanimously to a more tentative report produced in Singapore, introducing the concept of the Instruments of Unity and entitled “Unity in Diversity within the Anglican Communion: A Way Forward” (Anglican Consultative Council 1987). The ideas in the Declaration proposal derive from the same principles which shape the covenant. This is evident in the Discussion Paper for Lambeth 1988 which notes that “if communion between Provinces is to be maintained and nurtured then there must be some limits to autonomy in areas of theological and moral significance” (Lambeth Conference 1988, para 24), and that “at the very least the areas covered by the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and by the proposed declaration should be matters of Communion-wide significance” (para 25).

The next stage appears to have been a paper entitled “Provincial Constitutions: Autonomy and Interdependence” commissioned by the secretary general and written by David Chaplin for ACC-8 in 1990. It revived the idea of a Draft Common Declaration to be included in provincial constitutions along with a suggested article “on the relation of the Province to other Provinces of the Anglican Communion” (Chaplin 1990). It also proposed that provincial constitutions “could at least ensure that inter-Anglican consultation takes place by permitting reference or appeal outside the Province when matters of doctrine and discipline are in dispute”. It suggested the Primates’ Meeting as “the appropriate body to become the Committee of Reference for the Communion to which disputed doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters might be referred” (paras 17–18). The document, however, gained minimal support. Mentioned only in passing in the ACC report – “there was no high level of enthusiasm in any Section for the Common Declaration” (Anglican Consultative Council 1990, 143) – resolution 21 stated that it

regarded “the document ‘Provincial constitutions: autonomy and interdependence’, circulated to the Council, as premature” (Anglican Consultative Council 1990, 162–3). It appears this judgment brought to an end for over a decade serious plans for institutional developments akin to the covenant. Attention turned instead to developing a theology of communion through *The Virginia Report*.

This brief historical sketch demonstrates that the covenant proposal was not as novel as first appeared to most people in 2004. It is rather the fruit of bringing together that theological reflection on communion from the 1990s with these earlier, forgotten institutional proposals that sought to give expression to what unites Anglicans and outlines how they should live out their autonomy-in-communion when facing difficult decisions.

## Section Two – Designing the Covenant

The covenant idea was quickly supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his 2004 Advent Letter and by the 2005 Primates’ Meeting, but one-third of the responses to the Windsor Report proposal did not support a covenant. A consultation paper, “Towards An Anglican Covenant,” was prepared for the March 2006 Joint Standing Committee which was then circulated for consultation (Anglican Communion Office 2006). This asked whether the concept of an Anglican Covenant was still viable and its summary of responses captures well what would remain the main areas of disagreement about the covenant. It noted (para 5) that opponents “worry that a covenant might be seen to alter the nature of the Communion towards that of a narrowly confessional family, with the attendant danger that preparedness to sign up to the covenant becomes a test of authentic membership.” They fear “establishing a bureaucratic and legalistic foundation at the very heart of the Communion,” risking “inspired and prophetic initiatives in God’s mission,” “threatening Anglican comprehensiveness” and establishing “a centralised jurisdiction.” Supporters argued (para 6) that a covenant “would clarify the identity and mission of the Churches of, or in association with, the Anglican Communion” and “by articulating our ecclesiological identity . . . help the Anglican Communion in self-understanding and in ecumenical relationships.” It could provide “a fundamental basis of trust, co-operation and action” among Anglican churches and “express what is already implicit, by articulating the ‘bonds of affection’, that is, the ‘house rules’ by which the family of Anglican churches wishes to live together” so as “to develop a disciplined and fulfilling life in communion.” The paper set out three goals for the covenant – relational (para 8, assisting reconciliation), educational (para 9), and institutional (para 10, “providing what is currently lacking – an agreed framework for common discernment, and the prevention and resolution of conflict”).

It soon became clear that the hope of establishing agreed moratoria on controversial actions would not happen to the satisfaction of many in the communion. Following the American church’s General Convention, Archbishop Rowan published a reflection in June 2006 entitled “The Challenge and Hope of being an Anglican Today” (Archbishop of Canterbury 2006). In this, he acknowledged that “there is no way in which the

Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment” and spoke in more detail about the covenant proposal. He included the following important passage highlighting that the covenant could bring about differentiation among Anglicans:

The idea of a ‘covenant’ between local Churches (developing alongside the existing work being done on harmonising the church law of different local Churches) is one method that has been suggested, and it seems to me the best way forward. It is necessarily an ‘opt-in’ matter. Those Churches that were prepared to take this on as an expression of their responsibility to each other would limit their local freedoms for the sake of a wider witness; and some might not be willing to do this. We could arrive at a situation where there were ‘constituent’ Churches in covenant in the Anglican Communion and other ‘churches in association’, which were still bound by historic and perhaps personal links, fed from many of the same sources, but not bound in a single and unrestricted sacramental communion, and not sharing the same constitutional structures.

In this continuing fraught context, in January 2007, the Archbishop of Canterbury announced the membership of a Covenant Design Group (CDG). It comprised 11 members from across the communion, with a leading Global South primate and member of the Lambeth Commission (Archbishop Drexel Gomez of the West Indies) as Chair. Meeting four times between January 2007 and April 2009, the CDG produced three draft texts, each refined in the light of feedback from provinces, individuals, and organizations across the communion. What follows highlights key elements in the covenant’s evolution, with special reference to the most controversial elements: who would be given oversight of the covenant, what powers they would have, and what processes would be followed when a breach of the covenant was alleged.

### *The Nassau Draft (January 2007)*

At their first meeting, rather than working with the draft in the Windsor Report, the CDG drew on work by Australia (Anglican Church of Australia 2006) and, in particular, the Global South (Global South 2006), to produce a quite different first official draft covenant (Covenant Design Group 2007a). In addition, they were resourced by various responses to “Towards An Anglican Covenant” and input from appointed consultants.

The CDG vision was to “hold together and strengthen the life of the Communion” by offering a “clarification of a process of discernment which was embodied in the Windsor Report and in the recent reality of the life of the Instruments of Communion, and which was founded in and built upon the elements traditionally articulated in association with Anglicanism and the life of the Anglican Churches” (Covenant Design Group 2007b). The group, however, stressed their perception of urgency – the communion’s life “would suffer irreparably if some measure of mutual and common commitment to the Gospel was not reasserted in a short time frame.”

This first draft introduced two central features of all future drafts – the fundamental structure of affirmations and commitments and a threefold focus on faith, mission, and shared life situated between a preamble and concluding declaration. One notable feature which did not survive in future drafts was the extensive citation of biblical texts in each section.

The sixth section, in which each church made commitments with regard to the unity of the communion, opens with commitments to the communion's common good, consultation, and seeking of a common mind about matters of essential concern. These would remain central features in all future drafts. It also proposed, however, that adopting churches commit "to heed the counsel of our Instruments of Communion in matters which threaten the unity of the Communion and the effectiveness of our mission" (Covenant Design Group 2007a, 6.4). This implied an unqualified commitment to their judgment overriding provincial autonomy. Furthermore, within the Instruments, the Primates were given a special status (reflecting requests of the 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences). The guidance of the Instruments was to be sought in matters of serious dispute "by submitting the matter to the Primates Meeting" who would "offer guidance and direction" (6.5). Finally, the Nassau draft called on provinces to "acknowledge that in the most extreme circumstances, where member churches choose not to fulfil the substance of the covenant as understood by the Councils of the Instruments of Communion, we will consider that such churches will have relinquished for themselves the force and meaning of the covenant's purpose, and a process of restoration and renewal will be required to re-establish their covenant relationship with other member churches" (6.6).

This draft was considered at the February 2007 Primates' Meeting in Tanzania which also established the timetable for revision and final agreement on a covenant text at ACC-14 in 2009. That meeting also had to monitor responses to Windsor's moratoria requests and the increasing divisions within the American church. Its proposals for a Primates' Pastoral Council to address these, and its insistence on clarification of the church's commitment to the moratoria led to concerns in some circles about how the Primates might use the powers offered in the Nassau Draft. As a result, Kathy Grieb, one of the two Americans on the CDG, warned ECUSA's House of Bishops in March that "the best source for understanding the logic of the proposed Anglican Covenant and the best evidence for how it is likely to be interpreted in the future is the recent Communiqué of the Primates" (Grieb 2007).

### *The St. Andrew's Draft (February 2008)*

In early 2008, the CDG met in the context of ongoing division over the American church's response to the Windsor moratoria. As Archbishop Rowan stated in his Advent 2007 letter, "we have no consensus" (Archbishop of Canterbury 2007) about whether the response was adequate. In addition, a number of provinces, unhappy about the Archbishop's decision to invite American bishops (apart from Gene Robinson) to Lambeth but not to invite "missionary bishops" consecrated by other provinces

to serve in America, announced their bishops would not attend Lambeth. Instead, they began planning the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) for just before Lambeth.

The second St. Andrew's Draft drew on responses from 13 provinces and many other bodies (see Covenant Design Group 2008a, 2008c). The CDG considered whether to abandon the title of 'covenant' and return to some of the earlier terms used prior to Windsor (such as 'common declaration'), but unanimously favored retaining 'covenant.' Its overall vision and rationale remained clearly one of "autonomy-in-communion."

The draft (Covenant Design Group 2008d) made the threefold structure of affirmations and commitments much more explicit and added explanatory notes, highlighting the use of traditional sources such as the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Church of England's Declaration of Assent. It also removed the biblical references and instead offered an eight-paragraph introduction providing a biblical and theological rationale drawing on ecumenical agreements (Covenant Design Group 2008e).

Unsurprisingly, it was the final sixth section of Nassau (now section 3.2) which required most work and saw most change. There was a stronger emphasis on autonomy with the provinces being described as "autonomous-in-communion" (3.1.2) and committing to "respect the constitutional autonomy of all of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, while upholding the interdependent life and mutual responsibility of the Churches, and the responsibility of each to the Communion as a whole" (3.2.2., drawing on words from the Primates' Communique in Tanzania). One effect of this was that, rather than committing to heed any advice from the Instruments, it was clearly stated that any request "would not be binding on a Church unless recognised as such by that Church" (3.2.5e). It was, however, still held that not adopting such advice "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" (3.2.5e).

The significant position of the Primates' Meeting was removed from this draft. In a provisional draft appendix offering "Framework Procedures for the Resolution of Covenant Disagreements" (Covenant Design Group 2008b), it was the Archbishop of Canterbury and Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) which took the central roles in overseeing and resolving conflict. The CDG acknowledged that this procedural appendix "will need much scrutiny and careful analysis" and encouraged "comments and response" (Covenant Design Group 2008a, on clause 3.2.5). The appendix set out principles of informal conversation and of consultation. If the former failed, the archbishop, advised by three assessors, would determine the seriousness of the situation and whether he should issue an urgent request to a church or refer the matter to another instrument, a commission, or mediation. Timetabled processes were set out for each of these routes, and churches would have to respond to any request from an instrument within six months. A failure to accept the request would be referred to the ACC. It would determine whether or not such rejection by the church concerned was compatible with the covenant. If not, the ACC or the church itself could determine whether it had

“relinquished the force and meaning of the purposes of the Covenant” (Covenant Design Group 2008b, 8.4).

### *The Ridley Cambridge Draft (April 2009)*

The St. Andrew’s Draft was widely discussed, particularly at the Lambeth Conference. A meeting of the CDG in Singapore in September 2008 was presented with a 75-page summary of responses from bishops (Cooper 2008). This showed about two-thirds being very or reasonably content with the concept of a covenant but about 10 percent with serious reservations about the concept and whether the covenant expressed a firm foundation for Anglicans’ common life. The vision of interdependence in Section 3 caused the greatest concern. However, the more conservative bishops who were absent from Lambeth largely failed to respond to this survey (there are no replies from either Uganda or Nigeria). The CDG produced a 33-page commentary responding to Frequently Asked Questions, commenting on the current draft text and signaling likely changes in the third and final draft (Covenant Design Group 2008f).

The third Ridley Cambridge Draft (Covenant Design Group 2009) was further shaped by 21 provincial responses, and many from other interested parties. It retained the introduction (though clarified it was not formally part of the covenant, 4.4.1) and the preamble largely unchanged. Section One included the full Lambeth Quadrilateral and made other revisions, ensuring its content drew on established Anglican texts and thought. Section Two on mission was strengthened and expanded. Section Three – subject to most comment – was significantly reworded. Its overall vision of autonomy and interdependence was retained although “autonomous-in-communion” was replaced with “in communion with autonomy and accountability” (3.1.2). The overall principle remained “the Communion guides, each Church decides.” Additions included an outline of the characteristics of issues likely to threaten the communion’s unity and common mission (3.2.5), and a commitment to mediated conversations (3.2.6).

The most significant development was the inclusion of a fourth section titled “Our Covenanted Life Together.” This set out procedures for adoption of the covenant, its maintenance and conflict resolution, withdrawal from the covenant, and amendment of the text. Although addressing matters covered by the second draft’s appendix, it did so in significantly different ways. First, and most strongly, it made clear that provinces remained autonomous. They were not subject to “any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction” (4.1.1), not limiting their “autonomy of governance” (4.1.3), and not granting to anybody the power or authority to “exercise control or direction” over their internal life (4.1.3). Second, the oversight of the covenant was granted to the Joint Standing Committee, comprising representatives elected by the ACC and the Primates. Third, the juridical and punitive tone many discerned and objected to in the earlier appendix was replaced with a focus on discerning together and proposing the “relational consequences” of controversial actions. The idea of “relinquishment” of the covenant by a province was also replaced with a possible declaration that a particular action was “incompatible with the covenant.”



*The Final Text (December 2009)*

The Ridley Cambridge Draft was presented to ACC-14 in Jamaica in May 2009. Faced with a new and controversial section, the ACC accepted the first three sections, but asked the Archbishop of Canterbury “to appoint a small working group to consider and consult with the Provinces on Section 4 and its possible revision” (Resolution 14.11, Anglican Consultative Council 2009, 46) before sending the text for approval. A subgroup of the CDG met and, after considering responses to Section 4 from over 20 provinces, made some minimal revisions, including the renaming of the Joint Standing Committee as the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, a consequence of changes to the ACC Constitution (Covenant Working Party 2009a, 2009b).

### Section Three – The Anglican Communion Covenant Text

The preceding section has traced some of the key themes, areas of contention, and developments that occurred in the process of producing the final text (Covenant Working Party 2009a). This section summarizes its content through an overview of each of the seven parts, particularly the four central sections and their affirmations and commitments.

*Introduction*

Although the introduction is always annexed to the covenant, it is not part of it but “shall be accorded authority in understanding the purpose of the Covenant” (4.4.1). It opens with 1 John 1.2–4 in which our communion together is rooted in our communion with the Father and the Son who has revealed eternal life to us. Its eight paragraphs draw particularly on Ephesians and the Corinthian letters to offer a Trinitarian-based communion ecclesiology, citing the 2007 Cyprus Statement of the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue. God’s covenants are traced through salvation history, and the responsibilities arising from the call and gift of communion are summarized. This situates the history of the Anglican family of churches and the step of covenanting together “as churches of this Anglican Communion to be faithful to God’s promises through the historic faith we confess, our common worship, our participation in God’s mission, and the way we live together.” Different aspects of this faith, worship, mission, and common life are then described with the clear statement that “to covenant together is not intended to change the character of this Anglican expression of Christian faith” but to renew our commitment.

*Preamble*

The Preamble names the covenanting bodies as “Churches of the Anglican Communion,” highlights their global sweep with reference to Revelation 7.9, and states a

threefold goal – more effective proclamation in different contexts of God’s grace revealed in the gospel, offering God’s love in responding to need and maintaining unity – in the context of seeking wider growth and unity in Christ.

### *Section one – our inheritance of faith*

Each covenanting church makes an eight-fold affirmation of faith and eight commitments as to how to live this out contextually in the power of the Spirit. Our communion is not ultimately Anglican but in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church worshipping the triune God (1.1.1). The catholic and apostolic faith is summarized in words from the Church of England’s Declaration of Assent, and its formularies are acknowledged alongside their varied appropriation among Anglicans (1.1.2). The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is then affirmed (1.1.3–6), as is the importance of “shared patterns” of “common prayer and liturgy” (1.1.7) and our joining, with other churches, in the apostolic mission of all God’s people (1.1.8).

The commitments begin by agreeing to teach and act “in continuity and consonance” with Scripture and received faith, order, and tradition, “mindful of” Anglican councils and ecumenical agreements (1.2.1). Theological and moral reasoning and discipline are similarly to be “rooted in and answerable to” Scripture and tradition (1.2.2), a witness to Christ-centered renewal, and a reflection of God’s gift and call to holiness (1.2.3). There is commitment to contextual appropriation of Scripture informed by wider communal reading, teaching, study, and the fruits of scholarship (1.2.4), so that it can illumine and transform (1.2.5). Living out our inheritance also requires “prophetic and faithful leadership” (1.2.6) and sustaining Eucharistic communion (1.2.7) in the context of the whole body of Christ seeking “to discern the fullness of truth into which the Spirit leads us, that peoples from all nations may be set free to receive new and abundant life in the Lord Jesus Christ” (1.2.8).

The section thus seeks to enable churches to express their shared Anglican identity in the context of wider Christian identity and the transforming mission of God. It relates Scripture, tradition, and reason, recognizing the need for a common affirmation of inherited faith and shared pattern of ecclesial discernment alongside contextual and developing expressions of this faith.

### *Section two – the life we share with others: our anglican vocation*

The five affirmations and commitments open with affirmations echoing elements of the introduction – communion as God’s gift within his global transforming mission (2.1.1), and thanks for the historic development of this among Anglicans as mission created a global communion (2.1.2). There needs, however, to be humility and penitence (2.1.3) alongside acknowledging the communion’s call into God’s mission (2.1.4) with other churches and traditions (2.1.5).

Churches therefore commit to evangelization and healing and reconciling mission marked by mutual accountability in sharing resources (2.2.1). The mission is that of

God in Christ and is summarized (2.2.2) in the Five Marks of Mission now widely accepted among Anglicans. Drawing on ecumenical agreements, these were originally set out in the *MISSIO* Report of 1999 following ACC-6 (1984) and ACC-8 (1990). There is again recognition of the need for humility, openness, and ongoing conversion (2.2.3), and a commitment to revive and renew mission structures (2.2.4) and order mission Christo-centrally and Eucharistically “in the joyful and reverent worship of God” (2.2.5).

Once again, the covenant seeks to draw on well-known words and principles. Its affirmations and commitments enable local churches to locate themselves, as the fruit of mission, in a wider global Anglican and ecumenical context, through understanding their holistic mission as a sharing together in God’s mission.

### *Section three – our unity and common life*

As noted earlier, this section underwent significant revision throughout the drafting process as it sought to give expression to the vision of communion life developed in recent decades in a manner that gained wide support. It now contains four affirmations and seven commitments.

Each church affirms its sacramental incorporation into one body and the call to peace and building each other up (3.1.1). That takes shape in a resolve “to live in a Communion of Churches.” The character of this is described in terms of each church ordering its own life “in communion with autonomy and accountability” (3.1.2), a key phrase capturing the covenant’s vision. This requires trust in the Spirit’s work and seeking to affirm our common life through the instruments of communion which enable us “to be conformed together to the mind of Christ” in a distinctively Anglican pattern of shared life summarized in words from the 1930 Lambeth Conference (3.1.2). There follows an affirmation of “the central role of bishops” in key aspects of this life together as a communion of churches (3.1.3) before the final, longest affirmation. This states the importance of communion instruments in “the discernment, articulation and exercise of our shared faith and common life and mission” (3.1.4), and describes the four particular instruments that exist and their responsibilities (3.1.4).

Affirmation of this interdependent life entails commitment to a pattern of life marked by certain virtues, practices, and disciplines. These are set out in the commitments. Churches commit to exercising autonomy with “regard for the common good of the Communion” and to work with the instruments (3.2.1), respecting other churches’ autonomy and upholding mutual responsibility and interdependence (3.2.2, a reference to the 1963 Toronto Congress). In areas of theological debate, there is commitment to a pattern of shared discernment (3.2.3) and to “wide consultation” in the quest for “a shared mind . . . about matters of common concern” (3.2.4). Diligence, care, and caution will be shown when an action “may provoke controversy, which by its intensity, substance or extent could threaten the unity of the Communion and the effectiveness or credibility of its mission” (3.2.5). Should conflict arise, there is commitment to “mediated conversations” (3.2.6), recognizing we are compelled “always to uphold the highest degree of communion possible” (3.2.7).

This section thus sets out a practical vision of life in communion, drawing on the theological work of recent decades and the often painful experiences of recent divisions. It seeks agreement on how as Anglicans in autonomous churches we live and discern the leading of the Spirit together across cultural and theological diversity.

#### *Section four – our covenanted life together*

This is undoubtedly the most contentious of the covenant's sections. Rather than being structured around affirmations and commitments, each church affirms principles and procedures and commits to implement them. These cover four areas. The least contentious will be noted first. In freely adopting the covenant "to live more fully into the ecclesial communion and interdependence which is foundational to the Churches of the Anglican Communion" (4.1.1), each church "recognises in the preceding sections a statement of faith, mission and interdependence of life which is consistent with its own life and with the doctrine and practice of the Christian faith as it has received them," and recognizes these elements as foundational (4.1.2). Autonomy is clearly and repeatedly safeguarded (4.1.3). Members of the communion are invited to enter by their own procedures (4.1.4), and other churches may be invited to adopt it (a contentious issue, given the new Anglican province in North America). Adoption does not grant a church recognition by or membership of the instruments (4.1.5) but makes the covenant active for the adopting church (4.1.6), although it remains free to withdraw (4.3.1). The relationship of the introduction to the covenant is explained (4.4.1) and a process of amendment laid down, with three-quarters of covenanting churches needing to ratify any proposal before it has force (4.4.2).

Section 4.2 addresses the thorny issue of "the maintenance of the covenant and dispute resolution" stressing the covenant's role in enabling "mutual recognition and communion" and the responsibilities undertaken by participation (4.2.1). It authorizes "The Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting" to monitor its functioning "on behalf of the Instruments," supported where necessary by other bodies (4.2.2). In the face of questions of interpretation or application, churches have a duty to live out the covenant commitments (4.2.3) and, where a shared mind has not been reached, questions are referred to the Standing Committee which will "make every effort to facilitate agreement" and take advice (4.2.4). It may request deferral of a controversial action. If this request is declined, it may recommend "relational consequences" to any instrument "which may specify a provisional limitation of participation in, or suspension from" the instrument while processes continue (4.2.5). Advised by ACC and Primates, it may declare an action or decision "incompatible with the Covenant" (4.2.6) and recommend relational consequences resulting from such incompatibility. However, "each Church or each Instrument shall determine whether or not to accept such recommendations" (4.2.7). Decisions relating to the covenant are limited to members whose churches "have adopted the Covenant, or who are still in the process of adoption" (4.2.8). In addition to these communion-wide processes, each church undertakes to

establish its own means of overseeing the covenant's maintenance in its own life and to relate to the instruments on covenant matters (4.2.9).

This section therefore seeks to be faithful to the vision of Section Three, respecting the autonomy of provinces and the instruments (hence the emphasis on recommendations and requests), while enabling greater coordination of communion responses faced with the consequences of controversial actions.

### *Declaration*

The closing declaration is in the form of a prayer expressing resolve to partake in the covenant “for fruitful service” and “binding ourselves more closely in the truth and love of Christ.” It concludes with the blessing of Hebrews 13.20–21.

## Section Four – Concluding Assessment

It is too soon to determine the Anglican Communion Covenant's impact on the life and future of the communion. As we have seen, since it was proposed, the covenant has had its stern critics but has based itself on decades of Anglican and ecumenical reflection, agreement, and experience, and, as it took shape from 2004, intensive consultation and revision. It articulates a vision of what it would mean to be a communion of autonomous but interdependent Anglican churches within the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, seeking to live in deepening communion. What is less clear is whether or how this vision will become a reality.

The covenant is already in force between adopting provinces but the Church of England (and perhaps some other significant provinces) will not be immediately adopting it. As was recognized from the start, the covenant alone cannot solve the tensions and divisions within the communion. In the short term, differing responses to it may even increase these. There are at least two major alternative visions of being a communion of Anglican churches. One is the confessional vision focused on GAFCON and its Jerusalem Declaration. This has the support of a number of Southern primates, the new non-communication province in North America and, through the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, congregations, and networks in Northern provinces. The other vision is of a looser association (sometimes described as a federation) where autonomy and diversity are privileged and there is less concern with seeking and sharing a common mind.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury foresaw in 2006, the communion is therefore going to be marked by both covenanting and non-covenanting provinces for some time. The final balance or fragmentation between these may take some time to become clear. The response of African and wider Global South provinces, most of which have yet to decide whether or not to adopt the covenant, will be crucial. In particular, it remains to be seen whether a new Archbishop of Canterbury, the other instruments, and the standing committee, which oversees the covenant on their

behalf, can keep or regain the confidence of sufficient provinces, reform communion structures, and so facilitate a relatively smooth transition to a covenantal Anglican Communion.

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