

GENERAL SYNOD

THE ANGLICAN COVENANT PROPOSAL

1. In February the Primates of the Anglican Communion asked all Provinces to consider and offer comments by the end of the year on the draft of a possible Anglican Covenant that had been prepared by a design group and discussed by them in Tanzania. The text of the draft Covenant is attached to this note.
2. The Primates noted that this would be only the first stage in what, if the Covenant idea found favour, would be quite a protracted process, involving the 2008 Lambeth Conference, the subsequent meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council and the subsequent submission to provinces for approval.
3. The House of Bishops discussed the Primates' request in May and agreed a motion for Synod to consider in July. The text of the motion, which the Bishop of Chichester will move, is on the agenda. It touches on how the Church of England should engage with the proposed process and prepare a response for submission before the end of the year.
4. To resource this debate, the following documents are attached:
 - (1) A Foreword by the Archbishops (**Annex 1**).
 - (2) A contextual note by the Bishop of Chichester (**Annex 2**).
 - (3) A more detailed background note by Dr Martin Davie, theological consultant to the House of Bishops (**Annex 3**) which draws upon some preparatory thinking on the idea of a Covenant by the Faith and Order Advisory Group.
 - (4) A copy of some material prepared by Jonathan Clatworthy and Paul Bagshaw of the Modern Churchpeople's Union (**Annex 4**) and circulated at the request of the House. Given the range of comment that the idea of a Covenant has generated, the House thought that members of Synod might find it helpful to be able to read more than one analysis of the issues that arise.
 - (5) The latest text of the draft Covenant (**Annex 5**) on which the Church of England and other Provinces have been asked to comment.
5. Immediately before a member of the House of Bishops moves the motion, the Synod will be addressed by the Archbishop of the West Indies, the Most Revd Drexel Gomez, who chaired the Covenant Design Group. Members wishing to read the full report to the primates from the Design Group can access it at:

http://www.aco.org/commission/d_covenant/docs/covenant.pdf

[hard copies are also available from the General Synod Office on request and will also be available at the Information Desk in York].

WILLIAM FITTALL
Secretary General
11 June 2007

Foreword

There has already been much discussion about the idea of an Anglican Covenant in recent months, including some preliminary discussion by the bishops of the Church of England. The House of Bishops welcomes this debate by the General Synod as part of a longer process of reflection across the Communion. No-one expects a definitive verdict at this stage; but it is important to think through whether the whole idea of a Covenant for the Communion is of value, and the papers circulated will greatly assist such thinking. The plans for the Lambeth Conference have made provision for a full discussion there in the light of responses from the Provinces.

As the papers collected here make plain, the Covenant is not meant to be a new creed or code, dictated by some authoritarian body divorced from the real life of the Communion's member provinces. It is, of course, in some degree a response to a crisis – and we are all rightly cautious about creating lasting structures in reaction to temporary crises. But our present troubles in the Communion have raised the question, 'What is the nature and extent of the responsibility we have to and for each other as Anglican provinces, and how is it grounded in the mutual responsibility of members of the Body of Christ?' This entails deeper questions about our responsibility to and for the whole of our heritage of reading Scripture intelligently in the context of living tradition, and about how that is to be transmitted to those who follow us. And, arising from all that, there are issues about what sorts and levels of consultation and shared decision-making would be an appropriate expression of such responsibility. The Covenant is not an attempt to create an international executive; but if something like a Covenant does come into effect, it may be easier to express and explore the consequences of developments proposed in one province or another, so that decisions may be better informed, and more adequate strategies for dealing with conflict may be created.

Inevitably, this implies that we have to recognize that there are some limits to Anglican 'diversity'. It is simply a matter of fact that some questions – not only the debates over sexual ethics – are experienced as fundamentally Church-dividing issues. It could be that a well-structured Covenant would help us *not* to treat every divisive matter with the same seriousness and enable us to discern what was really – theologically and ecclesially – at stake when disagreements arose. It is not a tool for promoting schism or canonizing heightened intolerance, but an element in the continuing work of handling conflict without easy recourse to mutual condemnation.

And that is the point that we hope will be considered carefully. Whether or not a Covenant is adopted, the question of handling conflict will not go away. In the age of instant global communication, this question is likely to be sharper than ever. If we do not have a Covenant in the Communion, we shall not be absolved from the imperative to manage our conflicts and tensions better than we have been doing. Unless we can do better, the future of the Communion is going to be more and more fragile and uncertain, and we can't just appeal to some imagined traditional Anglican way of handling things without fuss. That is why many of those who have been engaged in dealing with the fallout from recent conflicts – in particular the Primates of the Communion and the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council – have concluded that something like a Covenant is a constructive path for the future, and why the hope has been expressed that the bishops attending the Lambeth Conference will be ready to work with the concept and with the proposals already outlined. We hope the Synod will consider their arguments with sympathy.

+ Rowan Cantuar:

+ Sentamu Ebor:

An Anglican Covenant?

“Now as there is great cause of communion, and consequently of laws for the maintenance of communion, amongst nations; so also amongst nations Christian the like in regard of Christianity hath always been judged needful. And in this kind of correspondence amongst nations the force of general councils doth stand. For as one and the same law divine .. is unto all Christian churches a rule for the chiefest things; by means whereof they all in that respect make one church, as having all “but one Lord, one faith and one baptism:” so the urgent necessity of mutual communion for preservation of our unity in these things, as also for order in some other things convenient to be every where uniformly kept, maketh it requisite that the Church of God here on earth have her laws of spiritual commerce between Christian nations; laws by virtue whereof all churches may enjoy freely the use of those reverend, religious, and sacred consultations, which are termed Councils General To speak of this matter as the cause requireth would require very long discourse. All I will presently say is this: whether it be for the finding out of any thing whereunto divine law bindeth us, but yet in such sort that men are not yet thereof on all sides resolved; or for the setting down of some uniform judgement to stand touching such things, as being neither way matters of necessity, are notwithstanding offensive and scandalous when there is open opposition among them; being it for the ending of strifes touching matters of Christian belief, wherein the one part may seem to have probable cause of dissenting from the other; or be it concerning matters of polity, order, and regiment in the church; I nothing doubt but that Christian men should much better frame themselves to those heavenly precepts which our Lord and Saviour with so great instancy gave as concerning peace and unity, if we did all concur in desire to have the use of ancient councils again renewed, rather than these proceedings continued, which either make all contentions endless, or bring them to one only determination, and that of all other the worst, which is by sword.”¹

This is a personal reflection on the present situation, and the task of preparing a first draft of a possible Church of England response which has been assigned to the Theological Group of the House and the Faith & Order Advisory Group [FOAG].

A summary

In this paper I shall be setting out the main reasons which have led me to become a reluctant convert to the need for an Anglican Covenant. I shall concentrate the principle of the Covenant rather than any particular form proposed, although my argument will favour the approach of the Covenant Design Group over that attached (unfortunately I think) to the Windsor Report.

I shall conclude that the Covenant must be strong and detailed enough to help the Anglican Communion understand the implications of “bonds of affection” and minimise the danger of the present crisis (crises) recurring or leading to irreparable schism.

It should not however try to solve or resolve matters of present dispute, because they have revealed rather than caused an underlying problem of Anglicanism, which has been well described as an “ecclesial deficit.”

I shall also argue that no form of covenant will be sufficient to guarantee the future of the Anglican Communion. Further work is also needed on the operation, powers and interaction of the existing “instruments of communion,” and not least on the need for personal ministry at every level. Most important of all there needs to be conversion. We should not forget TS Eliot’s words about humankind (written, tellingly, in 1934):

¹ Hooker. *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* I.X.14

*They constantly try to escape
From the darkness outside and within
By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.*²

Why this paper?

All Anglican Provinces have been asked to comment by the end of 2007 on the proposal for an Anglican Covenant.

Time is not on our side, and the Theological Group has not been able to consider either the final form of Dr Davie's more substantial text or any version of my own note, while FOAG has had less opportunity for extended discussion than it would normally expect to give to such material.

What the House considered in May and what will be before the General Synod in July is very much "work in progress." On the other hand, the acuteness of the crisis in the Anglican Communion does not allow us the luxury of extended procrastination. I start from the twin convictions that we must do something and that being rushed into the wrong thing would make an already bad situation worse. I also take for granted that failure to find a satisfactory way forward for the Anglican Communion will lead to intolerable tensions within the Church of England and our own episcopal fellowship.

I am a reluctant convert to the need for a Covenant and am conscious of the dangers both of action and inaction. My hesitations arise from my own experience and convictions. My "conversion" has occurred both as I have learnt more about the reality of Anglicanism and also as, it seems to me, as some unresolved elements in our past are leading to a rapid unravelling.

I resisted for a long time the logic of Stephen Sykes' criticisms of the "no special doctrines" claim for Anglicanism. I have however come to see that even if we teach nothing other than what may be read in Holy Scripture or may be proved thereby³, the proportion in which different doctrinal elements are held, the way in which we approach their explication in understanding and Christian living, and the methods we use to evaluate developments all imply a certain doctrinal stance which is distinctive.

Our failure over the years to provide some minimal but sufficient statement of what it means to be Anglican has led to an unexamined defence of "comprehensiveness" as a virtue in itself, meaning by it something very different than was envisaged by the classical Anglican writers who coined it. More recently, it has merged with contemporary concepts of "inclusiveness" and is proclaimed as the heart of the gospel.

*"For too long Anglicans have appeared willing to evade responsible theological reflection and dialogue by acquiescing automatically and immediately in the coexistence of incompatible views, opinions and policies."*⁴

A Covenant might be a partial remedy. It should indicate those areas of faith (including morals) and order where unanimity of heart and mind belong to the nature of the faith itself and are essential for Eucharistic communion. It should indicate those areas in which freedom of interpretation enriches unity. It needs to show that the Anglican way of being a Christian unites us to the Church throughout the world and throughout the ages. It must not propose as a basis for Anglican identity

² Choruses from *The Rock VI*

³ cf. *Article VI*

⁴ *For the Sake of the Kingdom* Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission ACC 1986 p 60

anything less than the unity of the Catholic Church. It must not propose more either. Rather it needs to demonstrate how our particular emphases and the proportion between them serve both Anglican unity and the goal of the full visible communion of all Christ's people.

Thus while I still fear a neo-confessional move, I argue for an Anglican Covenant but not for any Anglican Covenant.

What is the question to which the Covenant is the answer?

As soon as the question is asked, people take sides. Depressing though it is to admit, support for and opposition to the idea of a covenant usually tends to reveal immediately where people stand on some of the more substantive theological and moral questions involved in our present crisis.

Some see the question as about the departure of some Provinces from the faith of the Church throughout the ages as received by the churches of the Anglican Communion. Others see it as a threat by obscurantist forces against the insights of freedom, justice and democracy. Both groups claim theological justification for their positions.

More fundamentally, it seems to me that the current crisis has revealed rather than caused the breakdown of trust and communion between Anglicans. It has exposed unresolved differences about such matters as the place of morals and order within the faith of the Church, about the sacramental nature of the Church and authority in the Church. This crisis has therefore a more far-reaching capacity to divide Anglicans than the rather obvious presenting issue of same sex relationships.

In other words, we have to ask basic questions about what we believe the essential features of the Church to be, what we understand the ecclesial status of different aspects of the Anglican Communion to be. Entailed in such questions is what kind of church we are, to what authorities do we appeal, and are there any agreed criteria for interpretation? We certainly need to find a common way of relating being a Communion to being in Communion and how all this relates to Eucharistic sharing. We can no longer limp along between the two opinions. Is the communion of the Church a seamless whole in which common faith, worship, life and witness are all entailed? Or is holy communion a rather detached activity in which people should either be forced to participate despite a lack of common faith or from which they might rather lightly stand back without ecclesial consequences?

It is perhaps timely that, as part of a continuing attempt to discern what the churches may eventually be able to say together, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has recently published a text on *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.

Among the areas where convergence is still difficult to establish is the sacramental nature of the Church.

“Although all churches agree that the church is a sign and instrument, some churches express their understanding of the reality of the church in Sacramental terms; some speak of the church as Sacrament; others do not normally use this language, or reject it outright.

The churches who use the expression “Church as Sacrament” do so because they understand the Church as an effective sign of what God wishes for the world: namely, the communion of all together and with the Triune God, the joy for which God created the world (notwithstanding the sinfulness of Christians).

The churches who do not use the concept of Sacrament for the Church do not do so for at least two reasons, namely (1) the need for a clear distinction between the Church and Sacraments: the

Sacraments are the means of salvation through which Christ sustains the Church, and not actions by which the Church realises or actualises itself; and (2) the use of the word "Sacrament" for the Church obscures the fact that, for them, the Church is a sign and instrument of God's intention and plan - but it is so as a communion which, while being holy, is still subject to sin.

Behind this lack of agreement lie varying views about the instrumentality of the Church with regard to salvation. Yet those who have become accustomed to call the Church "Sacrament" would still distinguish between the ways in which baptism and the Lord's Supper on the one hand, and the Church on the other, are signs and instruments of God's plan. And those who do not use the phrase "Church as Sacrament" would still uphold that the Church is God's holy instrument for his divine purpose"⁵

A covenant might help Anglicans give their own answer to this question and in doing so also begin to respond to the increasing frequency with which ecumenical dialogue partners ask who they are addressing when they talk to Anglicans. If, as we have officially stated on many occasions, we seek the full, visible unity of the Church, what is our answer? We could admit, once and for all, that we simply do not have the will to find a basis on which to stand together or from which to speak to other churches. But that is not, I think, what most people believe to be right.

This is not to suggest that the "recognition" of churches is a simple matter or that we should allow Anglican polity to be driven by the perception of others. The problem highlighted by the present sense of crisis is primarily an internal matter of the integrity of Anglicanism.

Not a new question

A report to ACC-7 (Singapore 1987) observed that, "*While the existing instruments of unity have been adequate in developing and sustaining Anglican cohesiveness, there is emerging an awareness of the need to evaluate and reform them. A fundamental reason for this is that increasing diversity within the Communion could threaten its unity.*"⁶ The issue is far older than that of course, and may arguably be traced back even to various post-Reformation attempts to articulate a reformed Catholicism.

The issue of diversity is not itself problematic, of course, and is positively rather than negatively entailed in the very idea of Catholicism itself. The wrong kind of unity is no less a threat to the Church than the wrong kind of diversity. It is important that protagonists for and against the covenant should both understand this.

The issues facing us today were directly addressed in a discussion paper prepared for the 1988 Lambeth Conference.

The working group which carried out the preparatory work for the 'Unity in Diversity' document recommended that the member Churches of the Anglican Communion should adopt a common Declaration which would be used at major events in the life of the Church such as the ordination or installation of bishops. This would be a sign of the Church's adherence to apostolic faith and order and would also be a sign of communion between the Churches. Such a declaration might well become another instrument of communion. It is necessary, however, to ensure that such a document, while remaining faithful to apostolic faith and order, is as comprehensive as possible and takes full account of the different traditions within Anglicanism. Also, it is undesirable that a declaration based on the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral should be merely about denominational identity. It should be framed in such a way that the involvement of the Provinces in ecumenical

⁵ *The Nature and Mission of the Church* FO Paper 198 WCC 2005 II.A.48

⁶ "Unity in Diversity within the Anglican Communion: A Way Forward" in *Many Gifts, One Spirit* ACC1987 (the Report of ACC-7 Singapore) Part 3

activity is not jeopardised. With these factors in mind, the initial draft submitted by the working group was revised. The following is a revised text of the declaration :-

- i. *The Church (of the Province) ofdeclares itself to be united under one divine head in the fellowship of the one , Holy , Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*
- ii. *It professes the Faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Catholic Creeds, to which faith the formularies of this Church bear witness and which the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.*
- iii. *It celebrates the divinely instituted sacraments, particularly those of Baptism and Holy Communion, as ordinances of the universal Church.*
- iv. *It expresses its continuity with the apostolic tradition of faith and witness, worship, fellowship and ministry by means of the historic episcopal order. It is in communion with each of those Churches which preserve the historic threefold order of the ordained ministry and are in communion with the See of Canterbury.*
- v. *It looks forward to the unity of all Christians based on a common recognition of the place of the Holy Scriptures, the Catholic Creeds, the dominical sacraments and historic order in the Church of God.*⁷

This was one of a number of preparatory documents for the 1988 Lambeth Conference which look remarkably prescient. Another was the 1986 report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission *For the Sake of the Kingdom*.

The virtual ignoring of this report by the 1988 Lambeth Conference and of the Virginia Report, which addressed the same need, by the Conference of 1998 suggests that there is a major gap to be filled if the Anglican Communion, and indeed its member churches, are to have any ecclesial credibility.

Talk about a Covenant does not seem to me to be different in substance from talk about a common “statement” or “declaration.” Nevertheless we are now in a critical situation in which “Covenant or nothing” seems to be the question before us. “Nothing” will lead to irreparable damage to the Anglican Communion, and consequently to the Church of England; the wrong kind of covenant likewise.

A covenant need not compromise a legitimate autonomy; the paper *Instruments of Communion*, to which I have already referred, commented that

*“Provinces of the Anglican Communion are certainly autonomous in the legal sense, but exactly how far does that autonomy extend in the theological and morals sense? It is clear 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. It is true that questions will arise as to which issues are of merely local or provincial significance and which have wider implications.”*⁸

This rather brings us back to Hooker with whom I began!

John Hind
Chichester 30th April 2007 (revised 11 June 2007)

⁷ *“Instruments of Communion and Decision-Making: the Development of the Consultative Process in the Anglican Communion”* in *The Truth Shall Make You Free* ACC 1988 (Report of the 1988 Lambeth Conference) Appendix 5, para 20

⁸ paras 23,24

The rationale for the development of an Anglican Covenant

The outward order of the Church is ... no indifferent matter; it is on the contrary, of supreme importance since it is found to be related to the Church's inner meaning and to the Gospel of God itself. For the good news that God has visited and redeemed His people includes the redeemed man's knowledge of death and resurrection through his place in the one visible society and through the death to self in which each member and group has died. And in telling of this one visible society the Church's outward order tells indeed of the Gospel. For every part of the Church's true order will bear witness to the one universal family of God and will point to the historic events of the Word-made-flesh.

(Michael Ramsey - *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*)

Introduction

In paragraph 118 of *The Windsor Report* of 2004 the Lambeth Commission on Communion called for the development of an Anglican Covenant, seeing this as an important way of responding to the issues currently facing the Anglican Communion:

This Commission recommends, therefore, and urges the primates to consider, the adoption by the churches of the Communion of a common Anglican Covenant which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion.⁹

In the responses to *The Windsor Report* there was a high level of support for this proposed development, with two thirds of those responding either supporting the idea of a covenant in principle or supporting the covenant as set out in the report itself.¹⁰

In his Advent Pastoral Letter to the Communion in November 2004 the Archbishop of Canterbury also gave his public support to the covenant idea.

The Windsor document sets out a possible future in which we willingly bind ourselves closer together by some form of covenant. I hope we will see virtue in this. No-one can or will impose this, but it may be a creative way of expressing a unity that is neither theoretical nor tyrannical. We have experience of making covenants with our ecumenical partners; why should there not be appropriate commitments which we can freely and honestly make with one another.¹¹

In February 2005 the General Synod of the Church of England welcomed a report from the House of Bishops accepting the principles set out in the Windsor report. This report stated that: 'The House supports the drawing up of an Anglican Covenant'¹² and the supporting paper from the Chairmen of the Faith and Order Advisory Group and the House of Bishops Theological Group declared in similar fashion:

⁹ *The Windsor Report* London: Anglican Communion Office 2004 p.62

¹⁰ Joint Standing Committee – *Towards an Anglican Covenant – A Consultation Paper on the Covenant Proposal of the Windsor Report*. March 2006 Para 2. Text at www.aco.org/commission/covenant

¹¹ Text at www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/releases/2004/041127.html

¹² *The Windsor Report – Report by the House of Bishops* GS 1570 2005 p.3

The suggestion that there should be an Anglican Covenant also seems to be a helpful one, though further work would clearly be needed, as the Windsor Report recognises, to produce a draft which might commend general support.¹³

After reflecting on the responses to the covenant proposal, the meeting of the Anglican Primates held at Dromantine in Northern Ireland in February 2005 commended it: ‘as a project that should be given further consideration in the Provinces of the Communion between now and the Lambeth Conference 2008’ The Primates also asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to explore ways of implementing this.¹⁴

Following on from Dromantine, a small working group called together at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion produced a consultation paper on the Covenant proposal, *Towards an Anglican Covenant*, in March 2006 and responses to this paper were invited and received from around the Communion. In January this year a Covenant Design Group under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of the West Indies produced a draft text for an Anglican Covenant in the light of this earlier material and the responses to it.¹⁵

The report of the Covenant Design Group was considered by the Primates at their meeting in February at Dar es Salaam and commended for study across the Communion, with a request that Provinces should submit an initial response to the draft text by the end of the year.¹⁶

However, although the process of developing an Anglican covenant thus continues to move forward, with the support of the Church of England, it needs to be noted that not everyone is convinced that such a covenant is desirable. Although two thirds of the responses to *The Windsor Report* were favourable to the covenant idea, one third were unfavourable and this opposition to the covenant concept does not appear to be lessening. In this respect it is important to know who is in favour and who is against and in what interest either take their position.

In this paper we shall explore the rationale for the development of an Anglican Covenant. We shall also look at the key concerns that have been raised about this proposed development and attempt to show how these concerns can be addressed.

The Biblical basis of the covenant concept

Any consideration of the idea of an Anglican covenant needs first of all to take into account the fact that to be part of the Christian Church at all is to be part of a covenant community. This is because, according to the biblical witness, God’s saving activity through the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit leads to the creation of the Christian Church as the community of the new covenant.

The biblical witness on this point is summarised by the International Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) in its paper *Responding to the proposal of a covenant*. The clarity and thoroughness of this part of its paper makes it worth quoting in full.

¹³ Ibid p.21

¹⁴ Dromantine Statement Para 9. Text at www.aco.org/primates/downloads/index/cfm

¹⁵ See *The Report of the Covenant Design Group meeting in Nassau, 15th-18th January 2007 under the chairmanship of the Most Revd Dr Drexel Gomez Archbishop of the West Indies*
Text at www.aco.org/commission/d_covenant

¹⁶ *The Communiqué of the Primates Meeting in Dar es Salaam 19th February 2007* Para 15 Text at www.aco.org/primates/downloads/index.cfm

It begins by summarising the basic belief about the purposes of the creator God that lie at the heart of the Christian faith.

Everything about being Christian – worship, prayer, mission, fellowship, holiness, works of mercy and justice – is rooted in the basic belief that the one God who made the world has acted in sovereign love to call out a people for himself, a people through whom he is already at work to anticipate his final purpose of reconciling all things to himself, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1.10). This is what the creator God has done, climactically and decisively, in and through Jesus Christ, and is now implementing through the Holy Spirit. But this notion of God calling a people to be his own, a people through whom he will advance his ultimate purposes for the world, did not begin with Jesus. Jesus himself speaks of the time being fulfilled, and his message and ministry look back, as does the whole of earliest Christianity, to the purposes of God in, through and for his people Israel.

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus as the story of how God's purposes for Israel and the world reach their intended goal. Paul writes of the gospel of Jesus being 'promised beforehand through God's prophets in the holy scriptures', and argues that what has been accomplished in Jesus Christ is what God always had in mind when he called Abraham (Galatians 3; Romans 4).

The earliest Christian writers, in their different ways, all bear witness to this belief: that those who follow Jesus, those who trust in his saving death and believe in his resurrection, are carrying forward the purposes for which God called Abraham and his family long before. And those purposes are not for God's people only: they are for the whole world. God calls a people so that through this people – or, better, through the unique work of Jesus Christ which is put into effect in and through this people in the power of the Spirit – the whole world may be reconciled to its creator.

The Commission goes on to show how throughout the Bible the term 'covenant' focuses this understanding of God and His purposes.

In the Old Testament:

A key term which emerges from much Jewish and Christian writings and which brings into sharp focus this whole understanding of God and God's purposes is *covenant*. The word has various uses in today's world (in relation, for instance, to financial matters, or to marriage), but its widespread biblical use goes way beyond such analogies.

God established a covenant (*berit*) with Abraham (Genesis 15), and the writer(s) or at least redactor(s) of Genesis, in the way they tell that story, indicate clearly enough that God's call of Abraham, and the covenant established with him, was intended to be the means whereby God would address the problem of the human race and so of the entire created order. Genesis 12, 15 and the whole story address the problem set out in Genesis 3-11: the problem, that is, of human rebellion and death and the consequent apparent thwarting of the creator's plan for his human creatures and the whole of creation (Genesis 1-2). And these texts claim – this claim is echoed right across the Old Testament – that God has in principle solved that problem with the establishment of this covenant. Already the story offers itself as the story of God's uncaused, gracious and generous *love*: God is under no obligation to rescue humans, and the world, from their plight, but chooses to do so and takes the initiative

to bring it about. As the story develops throughout the Old Testament this *covenant love* is referred to in various terms, e.g. *hesed*.

The covenant with Abraham is then dramatically developed as God fulfils a promise made in Genesis 15, namely that he would rescue Abraham's family from slavery in Egypt. The story of the Exodus, with God bringing the Israelites through the Red Sea and pointing them towards their promised land, reaches a climax when they arrive at Mount Sinai and are given the Law (*Torah*) as the covenant charter, prefaced by God's declaration that Israel is to be his holy people, a nation of priests chosen out of and on behalf of the whole world (Exodus 19).

The Law is meant to sustain Israel as the *covenant community*, the people who are bound to the creator God as in a solemn marriage vow (as in Hosea), and to one another as God's people, and through whom God's purposes are to be extended in the world.

This vocation and intention is sorely tested as Israel repeatedly rebels against God, and the covenant is repeatedly renewed (Deuteronomy 31; Joshua 9, 24; 2 Kings 11.17; some have suggested that the Psalms provide evidence of frequent, perhaps annual, 'covenant renewal').

The prophets regularly call Israel back to the obligations of the covenant, obligations both to God and to one another. But Israel, the bearer of God's covenant promises which ultimately embrace the whole world, proves unfaithful, and is driven into exile – which the prophets interpret in terms of the covenant, understanding exile as covenantal punishment for covenantal disobedience. This is the more striking in that the covenant always envisaged Israel's being given the promised land, and the land being blessed when Israel is obedient to the covenant (see Deuteronomy, and e.g. Psalm 67).

It is at this point that there emerges the promise of a *new covenant*, through which (this is the point) God will at last do in and through Israel what the earlier covenants intended but did not bring about. Jeremiah 31 (similarly, Ezekiel 36) speaks both of the forgiveness of the sins which had brought the earlier plans to ruin and also of a new knowledge of God which will come to characterise God's people.

In the New Testament:

It is this ancient promise which the earliest Christians saw as having been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus himself, indeed, spoke at the Last Supper of his forthcoming death as establishing the new, sin-forgiving covenant, and of the bread and the wine as somehow symbolizing that event, with that significance – and thus also effectively symbolizing the way in which his followers could find new life, together as a community and as individuals, through feeding on him and his saving death.

From that moment on, believing in Jesus, following him, seeking to live out his accomplishment through mission in God's world (bringing it to new fruitfulness and justice, as Israel's obedience was to bring blessing to the land), take place within what can with deep appropriateness be described as the *new covenant community*, constituted and reconstituted as such again and again not least precisely through sharing (*koinonia*, 'communion' or 'fellowship') at his table.

According to Paul, all those who believe in Jesus belong at this table, no matter what their personal, moral, ethnic or other background, and are thereby to be renewed in faith and

holiness and energised for God's mission in the world. Baptism, the sign of entry into the renewed covenant, marks out not just individuals but the whole community of the baptized. To live as God's covenant people is thus the basic call of Christians, of the church of God.¹⁷

This being the case, no Anglican who takes the biblical witness seriously can simply reject the idea of covenant as such. To be an Anglican is to be part of the Christian Church and to be part of the Christian Church is to be a member of God's covenant community.

The idea of developing an Anglican covenant is not, therefore, a matter of creating a covenant relationship from scratch. As members of Christ's body Anglicans already participate in God's covenant with his people. This covenant binds them to each other and to all other Christian people because of what God the Father has done and is doing through Christ and the Spirit.

The overall case for an Anglican Covenant

If Anglicans are already in this sense in covenant with each other then what does it mean to develop an Anglican covenant? The IATDC report addresses this point as well. It states that:

There is no sense, of course, that introducing the notion of 'covenant' into talk of mutual relationships between Christians implies the establishment of a *further* 'new covenant' over and above *the* 'new covenant' inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Rather, all use of covenantal language in relation to the church today must be seen as a proposal for a specific kind of recommitment within that same covenant, in particular situations and in relation to particular communities.¹⁸

The idea of the development of an 'Anglican covenant' therefore does not mean the development of a covenant between God and the churches of the Anglican Communion. There is (and can only be) one covenant properly so called, the covenant that exists between God and the one Church of Jesus Christ that is constantly renewed as God's people gather together to hear and receive God's covenant promises declared in word and sacrament.

What the development of an Anglican covenant would involve would be a re-commitment of the churches of the Anglican Communion, as manifestations of the one Church of Jesus Christ, to live out the implications of this one covenant in their relations with each other in the context of the difficulties that the Communion is currently facing.

To put it another way, it would involve a renewed commitment to abiding by a set of 'house rules' for the common life of the Communion, house rules that flow out of and reflect the covenant relationship that Anglicans and Anglican churches have with one another as result of their common membership of the body of Christ and that will provide a clear and agreed framework within which they can seek to fulfil the Pauline injunction that they should be a people 'having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind' (Phil 2:3)

This then raises the further question as to why it would be a good idea for the churches of the Anglican Communion to make this kind of renewed mutual commitment. The answer that has been put forward in response to this question is that the crisis within the Anglican Communion over the issue of same sex relationships has revealed that there is an 'ecclesiological deficit' within the

¹⁷ The International Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission *Responding to the proposal of a covenant* October 2006 1.1-1.4

¹⁸ *Ibid* 1.9

Communion. That is to say, there is a lack of agreement, both in principle and in practice, among the churches of the Communion about what it means to be part of God's new covenant community and to live accordingly, and it is this lack of agreement that is at the root of the Communion's current difficulties.

More precisely, there is disagreement between them about whether to accept the principle set out in the *Virginia Report* that: '...any decisions which touch the faith and order of the universal Church need to be offered for testing within the wider ecumenical fellowship'¹⁹ and whether the acceptance of this principle means that such decisions should not be acted upon if the wider ecumenical fellowship decides that they are theologically unacceptable.

This has recently been made clear by developments in The Episcopal Church²⁰ and in the Anglican Church of Canada and the reactions to these in other parts of the Communion. These developments have shown that the churches of the Communion not only differ in their approaches to human sexuality, but also in their view of how divisive issues should be handled in the life of the Communion and specifically on the question of when a church has the right to act autonomously and when it should defer to the views and interests of the Communion as a whole. It is these differing approaches that have led to danger of the Communion falling apart.²¹

In order to prevent the current situation of division within the Anglican Communion constantly recurring, either over the issue of human sexuality or over other issues, what is needed is for the churches of the Communion to reach agreement about what it means to live together as part of God's new covenant community and for them to then formally recommit themselves to living in this way. It is this process of agreement and recommitment that the development of an Anglican covenant is intended to assist.

Obviously, an attempt to develop a covenant cannot of itself bring about either agreement or renewed commitment. However, what it may be able to provide is a framework within which this agreement and re-commitment can occur. A parallel is the way in which the attempt to develop new ecumenical relationships has led to the Church of England to reach sufficient agreement on fundamental matters of faith and practice with other churches to enable a mutual commitment to common life and mission.²²

The overall case for the development of an Anglican covenant is summarised as follows in *Towards an Anglican Covenant*:

...a well written and concise covenant would clarify the identity and mission of the Churches of, or in association with, the Anglican Communion. By articulating our ecclesiological identity, a covenant will also help the Anglican Communion in self-understanding and in ecumenical relationships. A covenant could provide, for all provinces and/or national churches, a fundamental basis of trust, co-operation and action in relationship with one another and in relation to the whole Communion. A covenant could

¹⁹ *The Virginia Report* Ch 5 in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing 1999 p.55

²⁰ The Episcopal Church (TEC) is the name chosen by the former (Protestant) Episcopal Church of the United States of America (ECUSA).

²¹ This point is developed in detail in the *Windsor Report*

²² This has been the case, for example, with the *Meissen Agreement* between the Church of England and the EKD, the *Reuilly Agreement* between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches and the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain. It is also the case in the recently published agreed statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*.

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. These would be intended to develop a disciplined and fulfilling life in communion.²³

As the response from the Church of England’s Faith and Order Advisory Group to the Covenant Design Group notes, such a covenant would need to:

...allow space for proper cultural variation in understandings of the gospel and for the development of doctrine and ethics, whilst ensuring that the authenticity and faithfulness of such variations and developments is tested through processes of common counsel and mutual listening and in such a manner that they do not lead to the fracturing of communion.²⁴

The specific advantages of an Anglican Covenant

That is the overall case for the development of an Anglican Covenant. In addition a number of specific advantages of such a covenant have been spelled out both in the *Windsor Report* and in *Towards an Anglican Covenant*.

Paragraph 119 of *The Windsor Report* suggests four specific advantages:

Firstly, the development of a covenant will provide the opportunity to put in place a mechanism to help prevent the recurrence of the sort of crisis that has recently crippled the Communion:

The Anglican Communion cannot again afford, in every sense, the crippling prospect of repeated worldwide inter-Anglican conflict such as that engendered by the current crisis. Given the imperfections of our communion and human nature, doubtless there will be more disagreements. It is our shared responsibility to have in place an agreed mechanism to enable and manage life in communion, and to prevent and manage communion disputes.

Secondly, the development of a covenant will help provide a visible foundation Anglicanism, which will be useful, both for Anglicans themselves and for their ecumenical partners:

A Covenant incarnates communion as a visible foundation around which Anglicans can gather to shape and protect their distinctive identity and mission, and in so doing provides an accessible resource for our ecumenical partners in their understanding of Anglicanism.

Thirdly, the development of a covenant will help prevent the sort of unilateral action by individual Anglican provinces that have led to the current crisis within Anglicanism:

The solemn act of entering a Covenant carries the weight of an international obligation so that, in the event of a church changing its mind about the covenantal commitments, that church could not proceed internally and unilaterally. The process becomes public and multilateral, whereas unilateralism would involve breach of obligations owed to forty-three other churches. The formality of ratification by the primates publicly assembled also affords a unique opportunity for worldwide witness.

Fourthly, a worldwide covenant may assist churches in their relations with their respective states:

²³ *Towards an Anglican Covenant* para 6

²⁴ Faith and Order Advisory Group *A Contribution to the Discussion of an Anglican Covenant* p.4

A worldwide Anglican Covenant may also assist churches in their relations with the states in which they exist. At such moments when a church faced pressure from its host state(s) to adopt secular state standards in its ecclesial life and practice, and international Anglican Covenant might provide powerful support to the church, in a dispute with the State, to reinforce and underpin its religious liberty within the State.

Paragraphs 7-10 of *Towards an Anglican Covenant* argue that a covenant would have relational, educational and institutional benefits for the Communion.

Relational: The formulation and adoption of a covenant, while unable to resolve our current difficulties, could assist the process of reconciliation post-Windsor. It would do so by focussing on that which unites us, reaffirming our commitment to one another, and thereby helping to heal and strengthen the bonds of affection that have been damaged in recent years.

Educational: It could also become a significant educational tool within the Communion, enabling Anglicans worldwide to understand and deepen their commitment to the beliefs, history and practices they share in common and their development of these as they engage together in God's mission in the world.

Institutional: Any covenant also has the potential of providing what is currently lacking – an agreed framework for common discernment, and the prevention or resolution of conflict. It could do this by bringing together and making explicit much that until now has been a matter of convention within the Communion's common life.

Concerns about the Covenant

As well as setting out what it sees as the general and specific advantages of the adoption of an Anglican covenant, *Towards an Anglican Covenant* also summarises as follows the key concerns that have been expressed about the covenant proposal:

...some 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. Others might see a potential danger in establishing a bureaucratic and legalistic foundation at the very heart of the Communion; putting at risk inspired and prophetic initiatives in God's mission and threatening Anglican comprehensiveness. There is also a fear that the Anglican Communion might become a centralised jurisdiction. If the covenant were too detailed, it might prove too restrictive or inflexible to address unforeseen future challenges; if it were too general, it might commit the Communion to little or nothing: in either case, it would be inadequate.²⁵

This paragraph identifies a number of different concerns and we shall look at each of them in turn.

Concern 1: *...a covenant might be seen to alter the nature of the Communion towards that of a narrowly confessional family,*

²⁵ Similar concerns about the proposal for an Anglican Covenant have been voiced by a number of bodies within the Anglican Communion and the Church of England. See, for example, The Modern Churchpeople's Union's paper 'Response to: Towards an Anglican Covenant a consultation paper on the covenant proposal of the Windsor Report' which can be accessed via the MCU website www.modchurchunion.org.

The worry here is that there will be pressure from some of the churches of Global South, and from conservative groups in other parts of the Communion, for the adoption of a covenant that has a very detailed and precise theological basis and that this will lead to the exclusion of those liberal Anglican churches who would not be prepared to sign up to it.

There are a number of points that need to be made in response to this concern.

Firstly, a distinction needs to be made between a ‘confessing’ church and a ‘confessional’ church. A ‘confessing’ church is any church that confesses Christ and the gospel before the world as all Christians are called to do. A ‘confessional’ church, on the other hand, is a church that adheres to certain specific statements of belief.

Secondly, it is clear that Anglicanism is not only a ‘confessing’ tradition but also a ‘confessional’ tradition in the sense that there are specific statements of belief to which the churches of the Communion individually and collectively subscribe. For example, the Catholic Creeds and the three ‘historic formularies’ (*The Thirty Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *1662 Ordinal*) are accepted as doctrinal authorities by the Church of England²⁶ and for the Communion as a whole the Lambeth Quadrilateral sets out the Anglican understanding of what the visible unity of the Christian Church involves.

In his essay ‘Where shall doctrine be found?’ in the 1981 Doctrine Commission report *Believing in the Church*, NT Wright suggests that a ‘confession’ is a document: ‘...in which the Church says to God, to the world, to itself and to the next generation, ‘This is where we stand, and what we stand for.’²⁷ If the term ‘confession’ is defined in this way it is clear that there is a strong confessional element to the Anglican tradition in the sense that there are some documents that are seen by the Church of England and the other churches of the Communion as declaring where they stand and what they stand for.²⁸

The issue of whether Anglicanism is confessional in nature has been confused by a long standing debate about (a) whether the *Thirty Nine Articles* should be seen as a confession of faith in the same sense as the confessions of faith produced by the Lutheran and Reformed churches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and (b) whether the Articles have the same status within Anglicanism as, for example, the Augsburg Confession has within the Lutheran tradition or the Westminster Confession has had in parts of the Reformed tradition.

The answer to (a) is that from a historical point of view the Articles should be viewed as one of the confessions of the Reformation period. Much of the material in the Articles came from the Lutheran Augsburg and Wurtemberg confessions, the Articles had the same function as other Reformation confessions (namely to make clear what the Church of England stood for both in terms of its

²⁶ See Canon A5: The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church and are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordinal.

²⁷ *Believing in the Church* London: SPCK 1981 p. 125

²⁸ It is worth noting, for example, that in The Episcopal Church the ‘Baptismal Covenant’ contained in the baptism service in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* has achieved confessional status in the sense that it is seen as declaring where The Episcopal Church stands in terms of a commitment to working for peace and justice and respect for the dignity of every human being. Thus Bishop Paul Marshall of Pennsylvania responded to the outcome of the Primates Meeting in Tanzania by referring to the Baptismal Covenant: ‘We will not even entertain the idea of a fast from observing the baptismal covenant’s promises about respecting the worth of all persons. We will not fast from actively seeking peace and justice for all.’ (www.episcopalcafe.com: statement by Bishop Paul Marshall 21 February 2007)

fundamental theology and in relation to specific issues of controversy) and the Articles were regarded as the Church of England's confessional statement at the time when they were produced.²⁹

The answer to (b) is that the Articles have had a rather different status to that enjoyed by the Augsburg or Westminster Confessions in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions because within Anglicanism the role of the Articles as a doctrinal authority has been balanced by the doctrinal importance that has been given to the liturgy and, in many parts of Anglicanism, to the witness of the Fathers of the first five centuries.

However, acceptance of this latter point does not negate the confessional nature of Anglicanism. It remains the case that there are documents that are seen as declaring, either explicitly or implicitly, what Anglicanism stands for. This in turn means that an Anglican covenant that re-stated where the churches of the Anglican Communion stand and what they stand for would not be alien to the Anglican tradition.

Thirdly, the fact that Anglicans have been willing to say either explicitly through statements of belief or implicitly through the liturgy 'This is where we stand and what we stand for' means that Anglicanism already excludes those who are not able to accept in terms of either belief or practice what Anglicanism currently stands for. Thus someone who cannot make the Declaration of Assent contained in Canon C15³⁰ cannot serve as either an ordained minister or a Reader in the Church of England. Similarly, a church that could not accept one or more of the elements of the Lambeth Quadrilateral could not be a member of the Anglican Communion.

This means that the development of a covenant will not mean a move from a non-confessional to a confessional Anglicanism or from a situation where everyone is accepted to a position where some begin to be excluded. The Anglican Communion is already, in the way just described, a confessional body of churches and, as such, one that upholds certain specific beliefs and practices to which not everyone is able to sign up.

What it might mean, and this is what people are afraid of, is that as the result of the covenant process the confessional basis of Anglicanism will become more detailed, with the forms of acceptable expression of Anglican theology being more precisely defined and the number of things

²⁹ For example, the earliest commentator on the Articles, Thomas Rogers, is clear that the Articles are to be seen alongside the other Lutheran and Reformed confessions of faith and the Articles were included in a *Harmony of the Confessions of Faith of the Orthodox and Reformed Churches* which was published in Geneva in 1581.

³⁰ Canon C15

Preface

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?

Declaration of Assent

I, *A B*, do so affirm, and accordingly declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service which are authorized or allowed by Canon.

that have to be accepted in order to be Anglican being increased, and that this will mean that some people who are currently part of the Anglican Communion will be forced out.

However, and this is the fourth point in this connection, there is nothing inevitable about a process whereby the development of a covenant leads to a narrower definition of Anglican belief and practice than that which currently exists. The churches of the Communion will decide collectively what the covenant contains in and it is entirely possible (and indeed likely) that what they will decide to do is simply ratify existing statements of Anglican belief and practice without adding to them in any way.

In any event, nothing will be able to be imposed on the Communion without the consent of the churches of the Communion and this means that any attempt to narrow down the confessional parameters of Anglicanism could only succeed if the Communion as whole decided to go in this direction and after a process in which opponents of such a move would have plenty of opportunity to argue their case.

It should also be noted that there is also a concern about exclusion among many conservative Anglicans. They fear that unless what they see as a drift towards unacceptable theological liberalism within Anglicanism is halted by clear theological boundary markers being laid down in an Anglican covenant, such liberalism will become the norm and they will end up being excluded either because of intolerance of traditional Anglicanism by liberal church authorities or because they will be conscientiously unable to remain in churches that deny the basic tenets of Christian belief and behaviour.

Concern 2: ... with the attendant danger that preparedness to sign up to the covenant becomes a test of authentic membership.

Once again, the fear here is a fear of exclusion. The fear is that membership of the Anglican Communion will become dependent on signing up to the covenant and that this will narrow down the basis of Anglicanism in an unacceptable fashion and lead to some people who are currently within the Anglican Communion being forced out of it.

It has to be admitted that the development of a set of Anglican 'house rules' could conceivably lead to the exclusion of those who are unwilling to live by these rules. Any rules drawn up for any community have the potential to exclude those who are unwilling to live by them.

However, the fact that such rules carry with them the potential for exclusion has not in the past prevented either human communities in general, or the Christian churches in particular, from drawing up sets of 'house rules' to govern their affairs. This is because such rules have been seen as necessary in order to avoid chaos and conflict and in order to give expression to the ideals of these communities and as a result those who wish to be part of these communities have had to agree to live by them.

A consistent argument that membership of the Anglican Communion should not be dependent on agreeing to abide by its 'house rules' would thus be difficult to sustain. A modified version of the argument could be put forward, however, which would say that there is a danger that the 'house rules' will be drawn up in such a way that they will arbitrarily exclude those who could otherwise play a valuable part in the life of the Communion.

As before, the real issue here is the fear that the development of a covenant will lead to a narrowing of the Communion that will result in both churches and individuals who are currently part of it being excluded from it. The response to this has to be repeat the point that any covenant will be agreed by the churches of the Communion and so the 'house rules' it contains will only be as broad or as narrow as the churches want them to be. The real question is whether, once the communion as a whole has decided what the rules should be, it is legitimate for one church within the Communion to claim a unilateral exemption from them and continue membership on its own terms.

It is difficult to see how a church could say simultaneously that it wished to be a full and authentic member of the Communion and that it proposed to ignore the house rules for life in the Communion agreed by the Communion as whole. What would 'authentic membership' mean in such a case?

Concern 3: Others might see a potential danger in establishing a bureaucratic and legalistic foundation at the very heart of the Communion; putting at risk inspired and prophetic initiatives in God's mission and threatening Anglican comprehensiveness.

The fear here is twofold.

The first fear is that there will be a shift from a 'relational' to a 'contractual' basis for Anglicanism. What this means that there is a fear that while at present Anglicanism is determined by a relatively informal network of relationships between people, both in terms of the bishops of the Communion taking counsel together at the Lambeth Conference and in terms of the numerous other forms of relationship that exists between both clergy and laity across the Communion, in future the nature of the Communion will be determined by what is laid down in a written document and by those whose job it will be to interpret this document and apply it to particular circumstances that may arise.

The second fear is that in the nature of things such a document will have a conservative effect in that it will inevitably restrict the possibilities of new ways of acting and thinking that may be necessary in order to take forward God's mission in an ever changing world.

Both of these fears can be seen to have some substance to them. It is possible to envisage the development of a form of covenant that was in effect a highly detailed code of international canon law that only those trained in the interpretation of such codes could properly understand and to envisage such a code leading the Anglican Communion to becoming an increasingly rigid entity in which legitimate change and development became very difficult to effect.

However, it is not necessary that an Anglican covenant would have to develop in this way. It is equally possible to envisage a relatively 'light touch' covenant which sets out in general terms what is required if the Communion is to flourish in accordance with the will of God and which avoids being unnecessarily prescriptive about details, which was flexible enough to allow for review and development as circumstances changed and which embodied the principle that only fundamental matters of faith and practice should be decided by the Communion as whole with all other matters being left to the discretion of the member churches.

It is also worth noting that 'Anglican comprehensiveness' is an ill-defined term. It is sometimes used to suggest that a willingness to allow as much doctrinal and liturgical latitude as possible is a defining characteristic of Anglicanism. However, in fact, Anglicanism is not now (and never has been) completely comprehensive in the sense of allowing an unlimited plurality of faith and practice. There have always been limits to Anglican belief and practice and these have been determined by the churches of the Communion individually and collectively. Anglican

comprehensiveness has been a principled comprehensiveness that has sought to avoid being unnecessarily detailed or prescriptive while being intolerant of those beliefs and practices that have been seen as incompatible with Scripture and the Catholic tradition.

The adoption of an Anglican covenant will not change this. The limits of a principled Anglican comprehensiveness will be determined by the churches of the Communion just as they always have been. If the parameters change during the process of developing the covenant it will simply be because the churches of the Communion agree that this should happen on the basis of what they discern to be the will of God and it is difficult to argue in principle that they should not have the freedom to do this.

The final point that needs to be noted in connection with this area of concern is that if the covenant succeeds in producing a mutually agreed basis for the life of the Anglican Communion this will provide a framework in which the networks of relationship that form the lifeblood of the Communion can continue to flourish and to develop.

The danger that the recent crisis in the Communion has highlighted is the danger of the Communion breaking up into warring factions in a way that will lead to a serious long-term breakdown of relationships. It is this danger that the establishment of a covenant is intended to help prevent in future. So far from replacing the networks of relationship within the Communion an Anglican covenant is thus intended to support them.

Concern 4 There is also a fear that the Anglican Communion might become a centralised jurisdiction.

The concern here is that the proposed Anglican covenant is part of a process that will lead the Anglican Communion in the direction of a centralised jurisdiction with power moving away from the member churches of the Communion to the 'Instruments of Communion' (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council).

The first point that needs to be made in response to this concern is that if it reflects a distrust of the Instruments of Communion as such then this something that needs to be directly challenged. As the *Virginia Report* emphasises, a better understanding of the role of the Instruments of Communion should lead to the more effective exercise of personal, collegial and communal oversight within the Anglican Communion:

A deeper understanding of the instruments of communion at a world-level, their relationship to one another and to the other levels of the Church's life should lead to a more coherent and inclusive functioning of oversight in the service of the *koinonia* of the Church. When the ministry of oversight is exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way, imbued with the principles of subsidiarity, accountability and interdependence then the community is protected from authoritarianism, structures serve the personal and relational life of the Church and the diverse gift of all is encouraged in the service of all. The Church is thus opened up to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit for mission and ministry and enabled to serve more effectively the unity and community of humanity.³¹

Secondly, the point needs to be made once more that a covenant will only contain what the churches of the Communion believe it ought to contain. If it ends up, for example, giving more power to the Primates meeting or to the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury than they currently possess this

³¹ *The Virginia Report* Ch 6 in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* p.63

will be because that is what the churches have decided should happen because it is demanded by the nature of the gospel. The covenant will reflect this decision. It will not have created it.

It would be perfectly possible to envisage a scenario in which the covenant simply reflects the current status quo with regard to the way in which jurisdiction is exercised in the Anglican Communion. There is nothing in the covenant concept itself that either rules out this outcome or renders it unlikely.

Concern 5 If the covenant were too detailed, it might prove too restrictive or inflexible to address unforeseen future challenges; if it were too general, it might commit the Communion to little or nothing: in either case, it would be inadequate.

This concern is based on the assumption that the covenant must either be too detailed and therefore too restrictive and inflexible to meet future challenges or too generalised, committing the Communion to little or nothing and therefore a waste of time. Why bother to introduce a covenant if it is not going to change anything?

The point that needs to be made in response to this concern is that there is no good reason to accept that any covenant will necessarily be either too detailed or completely vacuous. Why could there not be a covenant that was sufficiently detailed as to have real content, but not so detailed that it failed to allow room for appropriate flexibility either now or in the future?

The importance of this concern is not that it rules out the idea of an Anglican covenant as such, but that it highlights two opposite errors that those responsible for drawing up a covenant must seek to avoid.

There are two further concerns that are not noted in *Towards an Anglican Covenant*, but that need to be taken seriously.

The first of these is the concern that any covenant will result in the development of a self-consciously Anglican identity that will differentiate the churches of the Anglican Communion from their ecumenical partners and therefore ending up hindering rather than enhancing the unity of the Church as a whole.

The answer to this concern is that while this is, of course, always a possibility, there is no reason why it should be the case. If the development of a covenant is a matter of the churches of the Communion giving expression to what they see as the key elements of their life together before God as part of God's new covenant community, why should these not be defined in a way that is compatible with the continuing search for visible unity with Christians of other traditions?

The development of a covenant does not have to be a case of the Communion turning in on itself. There is no reason, for instance why insights from existing ecumenical agreements should not form part of the covenant material or why ecumenical partners should not be asked for their comments and suggestions about the covenant. As we have said before, the covenant will be shaped by what the churches of the Communion believe to be God's will for His people and why should this result in something that is unfriendly to the cause of ecumenism?

The second is the concern that the nature of the covenant will be something that will be contested by the various factions within the Communion and so will serve as a focus for disunity rather than unity.

Given the state of the internal politics of the Anglican Communion at the moment this is a concern that has to be taken very seriously. There is always the possibility that the development of the covenant will become a battlefield in which the various groups within the Communion will seek to achieve the victory of their position and the defeat of their opponents. If this happens it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for the covenant process to achieve its aim of bringing Anglicans together and providing the Anglican Communion with a better future.

However, three further points have to be noted.

(a) We cannot simply continue as we are. We do need to find some way of dealing with the ecclesiological deficit within Anglicanism in order to prevent the sort of crisis facing Anglicanism at the moment continuing to recur in the future. Neither pretending that there is not really a crisis nor simply seeking to return to the *status quo* before the present crisis erupted are viable options. The development of a mutually agreed covenant provides us with a potentially creative way forward and therefore, if possible, this is the route that the Anglican Communion needs to take.

(b) This final concern leads to a very gloomy view of the future of Anglicanism. If we are in a situation of such entrenched conflict that it will be impossible to agree together upon a covenant that expresses our commitment to each other as part of the body of Christ and how we intend to live together in future in a way that enables us to glorify God together as his new covenant people, then it is very difficult to see anything ahead of the Anglican Communion except disintegration.

If, however, we are not convinced that this is the only future for the Communion, if we think that it is possible for the Communion to have a future marked by unity rather than by conflict and disintegration, and if we think that this kind of future is what fidelity to the gospel of Christ requires (Eph 4:4-6), then it is surely our duty to try to make this happen and the importance of the covenant proposal is that it provides a way for us to do so. If this is the case then it deserves our support.

(c) The development of an Anglican Covenant has to be approached in a proper spirit. Rather than seeing this development terms of a political contest in which there will be winners and losers or even as a form of political negotiation in which, for example, there is an attempt to broker a compromise between those who want more authority to be given to the instruments of communion and those who think that this would threaten the freedom of the individual Anglican churches to operate according to their own rules, it needs to be viewed as a spiritual exercise in which the churches of the Communion seek individually and collectively to discern the will of God through prayer and reasoned reflection on Scripture, the Christian tradition and the historical situation in which God has placed us.

We are promised in the gospels that if we ask, seek and knock then we will receive (Mt 7:7-11, Lk 11:1-15) and we need to approach the development of an Anglican Covenant with confidence in this promise.

Thou hast said, 'Seek ye my face.'

My heart says to thee,

'Thy face, Lord, do I seek.' (Ps 27:8)

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