

# The Anglican Covenant

a CHURCH TIMES guide

## CHURCH TIMES

### The Covenant: gift or shackle?

A FALSE distinction is sometimes made between faith and religion. Faith is supposedly free, the preserve of the unbridled spirit; religion is a codified set of doctrines and rules. In reality, as St Paul thought he had explained to everyone's satisfaction nearly 2000 years ago, a sound doctrine is what sets people free, sweeping away ignorance to enable them to hear the Holy Spirit clearly. This, in turn, leads to right behaviour, based on love of neighbour.

The remarkable thing about the Anglican Communion up to the present is that this balance between freedoms and responsibilities has been tipped so decidedly towards the former. Whereas national Churches operate within a legal framework that regulates ministry, liturgy, property, and governance, the relationship between the different provinces internationally is held together by "bonds of affection" and little else. This has been a point of pride among many Anglicans when they compare it with the centralised power structures of other denominations. The argument runs, however, that this degree of affection lasts only while the Anglican provinces have little to do with each other and are allowed to go their own way without check. This is not how the modern world works, however. The Western liberal finds it hard to tolerate the unjust treatment of minorities in the South on the grounds of tradition. Southern conservatives feel compromised by Western liberalism, which they associate with decadence. Both camps know instantly and fully what the other is doing. The bliss of ignorance, distance, and time can no longer be relied upon to hold the Communion together.

And so we arrive at the Covenant. It might be thought odd that we devote so much space to a text that is readily available on the web and has been in its final form for more than a year. But it is necessary to counter the view that this is somebody else's concern, of interest only to international bureaucrats and theologians. Over the next few months, every diocesan synod must debate this text and come to a view on whether to recommend its adoption. The Covenant is a key issue for anyone concerned about how the Church functions around the world. In this category, we hope, each of our readers fits.

Of course, there was no immaculate conception. The Covenant was born out of conflict, as Marilyn McCord Adams points out — a response to the fragmentation triggered by the consecration of a gay bishop in the United States. One thing that synods will have to decide is whether the text has overcome its dubious origins, or whether these have left it flawed. The debate about it has certainly been unbalanced, concentrating mostly on Section Four, which tackles the question what should happen to a province that fails to comply with the Covenant requirement for constraint. Dr Williams spoke early on of two methods of handling diversity: council and covenant. Thanks to the various debates, we know plenty about what to do with a province or diocese that innovates without agreement, but too little about how to nurture that agreement.

The paradox is that the portion of the Communion which was most enthusiastic about the Covenant, the conservative South, has now virtually disowned it. Bishop Akao argues on these pages that, watered down through successive drafts, the Covenant now offers no threat to recalcitrant provinces and is consequently no longer fit for its purpose. For others, the weakening of that element of threat is a recommendation, although it raises the question what, now, the Covenant is actually for. Ultimately, its effect on the Communion cannot be known in advance. To vote in its favour, therefore, is to step into the dark. Such is the present state of the Communion, however, that to vote against it might well lead Anglicans into similar obscurity.



## Through uncharted waters with Dr Williams at the helm

The Archbishop's guidance has been crucial, reports  
*Pat Ashworth*

IT IS almost five years since the Archbishop of Canterbury first set out his thinking on the Anglican Covenant. The 3000-word reflection that followed the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States, in June 2006, was hailed as "momentous" for its frank recognition that the Anglican Communion faced a stark choice: sacrifice or separation.

A stormy debate at the Convention had ended in a highly nuanced resolution about the consecration of more gay bishops. The politicisation of a theological dispute had taken the place of reasoned reflection in the Anglican Church, Dr Williams suggested. "It isn't a question of throwing people into outer darkness," he emphasised, "but of recognising that actions have consequences."

The "tacit conventions" in the Communion needed spelling out, he observed, "not for the sake of some central mechanism of control, but so that we have ways of being sure we're still talking the same language."

Dr Williams suggested that the best way forward was an opt-in covenant between Churches, as suggested in the 2004 Windsor report. He acknowledged that some Churches might be unwilling to limit local freedom for the sake of wider

witness, and, even at this early stage, the idea was floated of a two-tier Communion of "constituent" Churches in covenant with the Anglican Communion and other "Churches in association" — a relationship he likened to that between the Church of England and the Methodist Church.

Whatever happened, he said, "there is no way in which the Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment."

HE MOVED rapidly to set things in motion in advance of the Primates' Meeting scheduled for February 2007. By September 2006, he had appointed the Archbishop of the West Indies, the Most Revd Drexel Gomez, to chair the Covenant Design Group (CDG), and, in a pastoral letter, acknowledged: "We are entering uncharted waters for the Communion, with a number of large issues about provincial identity and autonomy raised for all of us."

His observations on the possibility of a Covenant had "on the whole been received with sympathy", he reported. A stormy Primates' Meeting in Tanzania in February 2007 resulted in an ultimatum to the Episcopal Church in the US to clarify its position on same-sex blessings.

Keeping the Communion together might look to some people "like prolonging the life of a dysfunctional or abusive marriage", Dr Williams said. But the outline of a covenant document suggested "ways in which we could commit ourselves to a future process where consultation was fully built in. . . Whether it can all come together remains to be seen."

Days later, he told the General Synod: "It is folly to think that a

decision to 'go our separate ways' in the Communion would leave us with a neat and morally satisfying break between two groups of provinces."

The group that had been working on a draft Covenant had made "far more progress than anyone expected, and was able to submit a draft for discussion to the Primates, which will now be circulated for further comment from provinces."

"This tries to outline what a 'wholly consultative' approach to deciding contentious matters might look like — with some of the inevitable consequences spelled out if this is not followed. This is not, I must stress, threatening penalties, but stating what will unavoidably flow from more assertions of unqualified autonomy."

THE "appropriate channels" in each province studied a draft text, a revised version of which was to be evaluated at the Lambeth Conference in July 2008.

In his first presidential address to the Conference, the Archbishop weighed the arguments of the Communion as a loose federation against those wanting "more consistent control of diversity". He remained convinced that "the option to which we are being led is one whose keywords are of council and covenant. It is the vision of an Anglicanism whose diversity is limited not by centralised control but by consent — consent based on a serious common assessment of the implications of local change."

A covenant "should not be thought of as a means of excluding the difficult or rebellious but as an intensification — for those who so

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# covenant

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choose — of relations that already exist. . . Whatever the popular perception, the options before us are not irreparable schism or forced assimilation.”

In his second presidential address, he sought to allay expressed unhappiness about the “legalism” implied in a covenant: “We should be clear that good law is about guaranteeing consistence and fairness in a community; and also that in a community like the Anglican family, it can only work where there is free acceptance.”

He declared: “We need to speak life to each other, and that means change. I’ve made no secret of what I think that change should be — a covenant that recognises the need to grow towards each other (and also recognises that not all may choose that way). I find it hard at present to see another way forward that would avoid further disintegration.”

To move in the direction of a more “catholic” Church would be a weighty message — and even a prophetic one, he suggested in his final presidential address. “So is this our message? Our Communion longs to stay together — but not only as an association of polite friends. It is seeking a deeper entry into the place where Christ stands, to find its unity there.

“We have a recognition — though still with many questions — that a Covenant is needed. . . I intend to convene a Primates’ Meeting as early as possible in 2009. . . We may not have put an end to our problems, but the pieces are on the board. And, in the months ahead, it will be important to invite those absent from Lambeth to be involved in these next stages.”

AT THE February 2009 meeting of the General Synod, Dr Williams identified the central question to be what a global Communion might look like, but warned: “We mustn’t have excessive expectations of the Covenant.

“It’s very tempting to think that a robustly phrased covenant would solve our problems; would give an instrument for — and the words have been used this morning — ‘enforcing compliance’. Unless we had an international system of canon law,

that would not be possible, and we’re not there yet, and I don’t see us getting there very quickly.”

THE Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), the Communion’s decision-making body, met in Jamaica in May 2009. Archbishop Gomez warned at the start that the Communion was close to breaking up if it could not state simply and clearly what held it together.

The meeting had to vote whether to accept the Covenant and send it out to the provinces for consideration and adoption. The stumbling-block was Section 4, which deals with the enforcement of the terms of the Covenant. In what seemed to many to be a confused and controversial process, the ACC voted by the narrowest of majorities not to send it out until there had been further consultation on section 4.

Dr Williams acknowledged that there remained “an intensely felt stand-off between groups in our Communion”, but reported agreement on the substance and timescale of the Covenant. He said: “We have not in this meeting given evidence of any belief that we have no future together.” The meeting had sanctioned an element of delay, but he urged: “The texts are out there. Please pray them through, and talk them through, starting now.”

The Covenant did underline the possibility of division, he said. “Some people speak of the future of the Communion as a federation. . . an association within which some groups are more strongly bound to one another, and some groups less strongly bound. I suspect that may very well be, if all provinces do not sign up to the Covenant, and I hasten to add that’s not what I hope. It’s what I think we have to reflect on as a real possibility.”

THE General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the US met in July 2009, passing only “descriptive” resolutions. Dr Williams commented tersely to the General Synod in York: “I regret the fact that there is no will to observe the moratorium in such a significant part of the Church in North America.”

In a reflection later that month, he acknowledged: “A realistic assessment of what Convention has resolved does

not suggest that it will repair the broken bridges in the life of other Anglican provinces.”

The Covenant proposals had been a serious attempt to do justice to that aspect of Anglican history that had resisted more federation, he reflected. “They remain the only proposals we are likely to see that address some of the risks and confusions already detailed, encouraging us to act and decide in ways that are not simply ‘local’.

“They have been criticised as ‘exclusive’ in intent. But their aim is not to shut anyone out. . . For those whose vision is not shaped by the desire to intensify relationships in this particular way, or whose view of the Communion is different, there is no threat of being cast into outer darkness — existing relationships will not be destroyed that easily.

“But it means that there is at least the possibility of a two-fold ecclesial reality in view in the middle distance. . . it has been called a ‘two-tier’ model, or, more disparagingly, a first- and second-class structure. But perhaps we are faced with the possibility rather of a ‘two-track’ model, two ways of witnessing to the Anglican heritage. . . To recognise different futures for different groups must involve mutual respect for profoundly held convictions.”

THE Covenant was finally sent out to the provinces in December 2009. Dr Williams said in a message that the bulk of the text “identifies what we hold in common, the ground on which we stand as Anglicans. . . The

last bit of the Covenant text is the one that’s perhaps been the most controversial, because that’s where we spell out what happens if relationships fail or break down.

“It doesn’t set out, as I’ve already said, a procedure for punishments and sanctions. It does try and sort out how we will discern the nature of our disagreement: how important is it?” He hoped that, by the time the ACC met in 2012, many provinces would have adopted it “into their own understanding and identity”.

IN HIS presidential address to the Synod in February 2010, Dr Williams said that the Covenant had been “attacked in some quarters for trying to create an executive power, and for seeking to create means of exclusion. This is wholly mistaken.

“There is no supreme court envisaged, and the constitutional liberties of each province are explicitly safeguarded. But the difficult issue that we cannot simply ignore is this: certain decisions made by some provinces impact so heavily on the conscience and mission of others that fellowship is strained or shattered, and trust destroyed. The present effect of this is chaos.”

Dr Williams did not relish “a situation in which there are different levels of relationship between those claiming the name of Anglican”, but suspected that “without a major change of heart all round, it may be an unavoidable aspect of limiting the damage we are already doing to ourselves.

“I make no apology, though, for pleading that we try, through the Covenant, to discover an ecclesial fellowship in which we trust each other to act for our good — an essential feature of anything that might be called a theology of the Body of Christ.”

IN MAY 2010, in the Episcopal Church in the US Canon Mary Glasspool, a partnered lesbian, was consecrated bishop. Global South Primates, meeting in Singapore, called for a review of “the entire Anglican Communion structure”.

“It is my own passionate hope,” Dr Williams said, “that our discussion of the Anglican Covenant in its entirety will help us focus on [the] priority [of mission]; the Covenant is nothing if

not a tool for mission. I want to stress again that the Covenant is not envisaged as an instrument of control.”

HE REITERATED this in his first presidential address to the new General Synod in November 2010. “The Covenant text itself represents work done by theologians of similarly diverse views, including several from North America.

“It does not invent a new orthodoxy, or a new system of doctrinal policing, or a centralised authority, quite explicitly declaring that it does not seek to override any province’s canonical autonomy. After such a number of discussions and revisions, it is dispiriting to see the Covenant still being represented as a tool of exclusion and tyranny.”

He described it as offering “the possibility of a voluntary promise to consult. . . Now the risk and reality of [rupture] is already there, make no mistake. The question is whether we are able to make an intelligent decision about how we deal with it. To say yes to the Covenant is not to tie our hands. But it is to recognise that we have the option of tying our hands if we judge, after consultation, that the divisive effects of some step are too costly.”

The Synod went on to debate the draft Act of Synod adopting the Covenant. It received overwhelming support in all three Houses (News, 26 November). Dr Williams had pleaded in the debate for the Covenant not to be seen “solely through the lens of one or two current issues” and for it to be viewed as “an attempt to set out a structure for consent rather than a structure for discipline”.

He repeated: “I do want to resist very strongly the suggestion that the Covenant proposes or creates a central authority. . . We are not suddenly creating an ecclesiastical authority in mid-air, completely separate from the ways in which local Churches, including ours, can work.

“We are trying to understand what it is to be properly accountable to each other. We’re not ruling out innovation, and we’re not attempting, through the Covenant, to declare in advance the impossibility of this or that development. We’re looking for a way of talking in an adult fashion about how we decide the level of seriousness involved.”

## An alternative to Nigeria v. the United States

**How do Churches co-operate? Here is a way, says Gregory Cameron**

gospel is preached; healing and hope are transmitted; fellowship is confirmed. Life in parishes continues largely unscathed, except where the divisions have hit hardest. Yet the global family is close to disintegration,

as was foreseen by the Lambeth Conference in 1930:

Every church in Communion is free to build up its life . . . this freedom naturally and necessarily

carries with it the risk of divergences to the point even of disruption. In case any such risk should actually arise, it is clear that the Lambeth Conference as such could not take any disciplinary action.

Formal action would belong to the several Churches of the Anglican Communion individually.

Must such disciplinary action be chaotic? Does it have to be Nigeria v. the Episcopal Church in the United States; Uganda v. Canada; both extremes v. the Archbishop of Canterbury? Rather, could there be a unifying framework undergirding an authentically Anglican approach to faith, and expressing commitment to co-operation?

The Windsor report proposed a covenant. Many Anglican Churches already had ecumenical covenants; so the concept was not new. The vision was to sustain relationships around a set of common core commitments.

BETWEEN 2007 and 2009, the Covenant Design Group (CDG) produced three drafts. Its papers, and the many responses to consultations, are available on the Anglican Communion website ([www.anglicancommunion.org](http://www.anglicancommunion.org)). These pages reveal that the group sought consensus. Significant changes were introduced, and diverse viewpoints and per-

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NOWADAYS, competing groups claim to safeguard Anglicanism — orthodox, mainstream, and inclusive. Stridency is increasing. The wider Communion has witnessed unilateral excommunications, exclusions, rival churches, and ruinous lawsuits.

The Instruments of Communion have been undermined: the Lambeth Conference boycotted, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) traduced as the lackey of liberalism, the Primates’ Meeting maligned as an overreaching cabal, and the competence of the Archbishop of Canterbury challenged. Worldwide Anglicanism is beginning to look as if it has no coherent faith, and no coherent polity.

There is faithful discipleship: the





It started badly,  
and has not got  
much better,  
**Marilyn McCord  
Adams argues**

## Born of outrage, this is just confusion

THE Anglican Covenant now forwarded to us is spoiled by its history. It was conceived in indignation, and determination to discipline has brought it to birth.

In the summer of 2003, in the Episcopal Church in the United States, Canon Gene Robinson, a partnered gay man, was ordained as Bishop of New Hampshire, while, in the Anglican Church of Canada, the diocese of New Westminster approved and used liturgical rites for the blessing of homosexual couples. Pan-Anglican Primates expressed outrage.

The Archbishop of Canterbury responded by appointing the Lambeth Commission, whose remit was crisis-management and damage-control. The Windsor report proposed strengthening pan-Anglican polity by assigning new disciplinary and gate-keeping functions to the existing Instruments of Communion.

National Churches would be required to submit any changes that might cause controversy in doctrine

or praxis to pan-Anglican authorities, who would decide whether the Communion could tolerate a province's giving them institutional expression. If the answer was no, the said province was not to proceed, on pain of excommunication.

Although the various draft covenants have assigned these new tasks to first one pan-Anglican body and then another, all agree that for a national Church to covenant means that it commits itself to shared discernment about whether innovations are compatible with Anglican "essentials"; to mandatory caution that denies innovations institutional expression, unless and until pan-Anglican bodies agree; and to "accommodating" the "requests" of pan-Anglican bodies on pain of "relational consequences", including provisional or permanent exclusion from Anglican Communion decision-making processes.

The fact that the Instruments cannot have legislative or judicial authority over legally autonomous national Churches turns out to be a red herring. Each draft Covenant redefines membership in terms of "mutual accountability" and "interdependence". Private associations are entitled to set their own house rules.

SUCH centralised disciplinary procedures are enough, on paper, to

raise liberal hackles. Supporters make matters worse when they declare that "only the whole Church knows the whole truth": Christ would not let the whole Church ultimately go wrong, but individual provinces can be mistaken (see Dr Williams's "Challenge and Hope", 2006, as well as the 1997 Virginia Report, 4.27 and 5.23, and the 2007 Kuala Lumpur Report II.51.29).

But that is not all. Even if the Anglican Covenant could not be law, in that its meaning cannot be given in abstraction from its application to cases.

The Windsor report was written with an air of presumptive legitimacy and invited Primates to act on its recommendations for dealing with the Episcopal Church in the US and the diocese of New Westminster. This means that, for better or worse, proposed Anglican Covenant machinery has had a trial run.

The first phase was marked by primatial tyranny. The 2005 Primates' Meeting in Northern Ireland embraced the Windsor report as the way forward, summoned the Episcopal Church and New Westminster to answer for themselves at the Anglican Consultative Council at Nottingham, and enforced their provisional "voluntary" withdrawal from pan-Anglican decision-making bodies.

The 2007 Primates' Meeting in Tanzania was fiercer still, requiring the Episcopal Church in the US to stop local bishops from authorising same-sex blessings and to be explicit that elections of non-celibate homosexuals as bishops would not be approved.

In Tanzania, the Primates moved to set up a pastoral council to look after conscientious-objector-Windsor-compliant congregations and dioceses in the US. The Primates also demanded that the Episcopal Church drop lawsuits to recover the property occupied by would-be secessionists.

All of this was done without any legal authority, and in advance of anyone's covenanting to anything.

Meanwhile, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed various panels of reference to hear North American complaints, remained aloof from the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops, and encouraged many to think that Windsor-compliant dioceses seceding from the Episcopal Church would be granted membership in the Anglican Communion.

What conclusion would any liberal draw? To give power of veto over institutional policy to foreign Primates, who are in no way answerable to the province in question, invites the abuse of power.

GAFCON and moderate Evangelicals are frank: this was

precisely the sort of discipline they envisaged. But, in the second phase, Windsor machinery has not continued to deliver "the relational consequences" they had in mind.

Episcopal Church representatives to faith-and-order groups were demoted to observer status after the Episcopal Church "did it again" and consecrated a coupled lesbian as Suffragan Bishop of Los Angeles.

But the Archbishop of Canterbury invited bishops from the Episcopal Church, except for Bishop Robinson, to the Lambeth Conference in 2008. The Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop has attended every Primates' Meeting since her election in 2006.

Moreover, the Windsor report sought to tighten pan-Anglican institutions, but the Archbishop of Canterbury turned both Lambeth 2008 and the 2011 Dublin Primates' Meeting into fellowship groups, which were ill-suited for global governance.

IF ACTIONS speak louder than the words they interpret, the trial run of the Anglican Covenant leaves us confused about what it is trying to say. Does it mean that non-compliance with pan-Anglican requests has "relational consequences" that would remove offenders from decision-making bodies?

Will it strengthen the Instruments of Communion to give the Anglican Communion more institutional coherence, or will the Communion go back to being a fellowship group with co-operative ventures? How can we — why should we — sign a document when we cannot tell what it means?

What the trial run does showcase is an Anglican Communion dominated by Primates. The first phase features primatial oligarchy, in which the Primates' Meeting plays a leading part.

The second phase spotlights primatial monarchy, in which the Archbishop of Canterbury uses his powers to call or not call meetings (the Lambeth Conference and the Primates' Meeting) and set agendas to manipulate outcomes (by turning Lambeth 2008 and the Dublin 2011 Primates' Meeting into "share" groups, focused on restricted topics, thereby disallowing substantive debate).

Why would anyone who loves a liberal Church want to covenant for that?

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spectives incorporated. The early sections (The Anglican Inheritance of Faith, and Our Anglican Vocation) were surprisingly easy to write, and received little sustained criticism.

Both sections point to ideas and documents firmly embedded in the Anglican tradition, including the classic appeal to scripture, tradition, and reason (1.2.2). The CDG aimed not for novelty, but for existing common ground.

The toughest question concerned the interdependence of Anglican Churches. How do they co-operate? The 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences requested the Primates to exercise "enhanced responsibility" in the maintenance of Communion, and the Primates' Meeting had taken the lead in current tensions.

The first (Nassau) draft of the Covenant sought to describe this experience. Such a primatial model was heavily criticised, however, and the ACC assumed the lead in the second (St Andrew's) draft.

This proposal fared little better. Could perhaps the (Joint) Standing Committee liaise between the Instru-

ments, and act as a clearing house for discernment? It was this proposal that appeared in the third (Ridley Cambridge) draft.

THREE significant worries emerged. First, is the character of Anglicanism being massaged towards confession-alism? The Covenant is not a confession, it is about relationship. It has no articles of faith, and where Anglican faith is articulated, the text points away from itself to existing foundational statements, such as the Lambeth Quadrilateral.

**'The allegation  
that the C of E  
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simply not true'**

Second, is the Covenant partisan, appeasing one party and corraling others? Significantly, questions of sexuality are not addressed. The Covenant is oriented towards grounding debate in the Anglican inheritance, not foreclosing it.

It is noteworthy that recent opposition to the Covenant comes from those pursuing the exclusion of the Episcopal Church in the US, precisely because they cannot identify the discipline desired.

Third, does the Covenant centralise power? While the Covenant does give a vital place to the Standing Committee, its work is straitly qualified. If the Standing Committee is to act, it is only after processes of patient engagement have failed (Sections 3.2, 4.2.4).

Its conclusions must follow consultation and advice from both the ACC and the Primates' Meeting (4.2.6). Even then, the Standing Committee can make only recommendations.

As was articulated in 1930, "Formal action . . . belong[s] to the several Churches of the Anglican Communion individually." A stronger expression of the fear of centralisation alleges that somehow

the Church of England could be subject to a new quango. Such an allegation is simply not true. The Standing Committee can advise but not compel, warn but not instruct.

Today, some desire a single confessional Anglicanism. Draft confessions, such as the Jerusalem Declaration from the GAFCON Primates, already exist. Others look for untrammelled autonomy, apparently without bounds and without responsibility.

Anglicanism historically seeks a *via media*, even if the extremes and the *via media* have often been reinterpreted. The Covenant is the latest in a long line of documents articulating central ground. It will not end arguments, but it does set out the grounds for continuing communion: core affirmations, and a coherent account of our life in Communion. Early indications are that, in fact, when provinces weigh the arguments, they can affirm the Covenant's balance of autonomy and interdependence.

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# Not red nor green: amber is the Anglican colour

The Covenant is permissive, not coercive, argues *Normon Doe*



THE Church has always had norms of conduct, designed to assist its mission and witness to Jesus Christ. Alongside the normative texts of scripture and liturgy, the Church also has its law-books. All three are fundamental to Christian discipleship and ecclesial life, addressing issues of governance and ministry, doctrine and worship, sacrament and mission.

The body of legal norms — canon law, in the widest sense — serves to facilitate and order the communion and mission of the Church. Usually, it does so quietly, largely because its norms are internalised in the daily conduct of the faithful as they carry out their ministry through and beyond the institutional structures of the Church.

Certainly, we do not notice them when we are in agreement. Sometimes, however, canon law itself comes under the public spotlight — particularly in times of discord. When disagreements within a province become disputes, there are domestic mechanisms available. These seek to balance the communion of the faithful corporately, and the autonomy of the antagonists individually. But with disagreements at the global level of the Anglican Communion — between provinces — there is no canonical framework to balance Communion and provincial autonomy.

The absence of such an agreed framework has, to a significant degree, exacerbated current conflicts in the worldwide Anglican Communion, such as those over human sexuality and same-sex partnerships. Antagonists may demonise each other but clothe their arguments in scripture, reason, and tradition.

Conservatives accuse liberals of betraying what the conservatives genuinely believe is the clear mandate of scripture. Liberals accuse conservatives of literalism, and failure to respond to what the liberals genuinely believe to be the needs of people in the modern world.

The middle ground berates the extremes, arguing that the Church has more compelling issues to address — AIDS, poverty, the state of the planet — than functional or constitutional issues about how the Anglican Communion is run.

But conflicts have consequences. They jeopardise the mission of the Church, damage ecumenical relations, and result in claims of impaired communion. They may also lead to the creation of laws in other Churches offering facilities for those who abandon Anglicanism and seek to continue their traditions elsewhere.

It was this absence of an agreed global mechanism, and the consequences flowing from it, that led the Lambeth Commission, in its Windsor report of 2004, to suggest the adoption, by each Church of the Anglican Communion, of a covenant that spells out formally what it means to be in ecclesial communion; how the exercise of provincial autonomy involves working together with the wider family of the Communion; and how contentious issues that threaten

communion ought to be addressed in a spirit of mutual interdependence.

After extensive consultation and various drafts, the Anglican Covenant is now being considered by the Churches of the Communion for adoption or rejection. The provinces of Mexico, Myanmar, and the West Indies have already agreed to it.

THE Covenant itself, however, has become something of a focus of disagreement. Some opponents consider it too strong: it will restrict the freedom of Churches to innovate. Others see it as too weak: it does not give the Communion and its institutions enough authority to direct Churches in controversial matters.

On the other hand, its supporters see it as an adult way of setting out the basic ground rules by which the worldwide Anglican family should achieve its objectives, and how it should address making decisions on difficult issues of common concern. Indeed, that is the fundamental principle at the heart of the Covenant in terms of global Anglican polity: the Communion guides; each Church decides.

The Covenant is of profound historical significance for global Anglicanism. It seeks to promote, for the first time formally, interdependence between the theological category of communion, and the legal category of autonomy, by spelling out the mutual expectations of provinces in terms of faith, mission, and order.

It presents what Anglicans acknowledge in each other in these fields. It is programmatic in so far as its commitments are designed for common action in the world.

It is not a coercive instrument. Adoption is voluntary. It provides a framework for a global family to address difficult issues, with its road map for dispute resolution designed to facilitate the re-establishment of bonds of affection in a mature fashion. It also meets the need for ecumenical partners to have a coherent view of global Anglicanism.

IMPORTANTLY, the Covenant concept is not new in Anglicanism. The Communion already has a tacit covenant in conventional or informal norms on inter-Anglican relations, as well as its Covenant for Communion in Mission. But these do not bind. If ratified synodically by the provinces, the Covenant would represent a binding and solemn agreement of mutual commitments, voluntarily entered.

Moreover, Anglicans have formal juridical covenants at provincial level — each Church has its own

**‘Supporters see it as an adult way of setting out the ground rules of decision-making’**

consensual compact in the shape of a constitution and canons.

There are also obvious precedents. Baptism, marriage, and ordination are all covenantal in character: promises are voluntarily exchanged; commitments are solemnly undertaken; and the autonomy of the parties is limited by the duty to have regard for others.

Ecumenical covenants are equally commonplace — voluntary instruments by which Churches regulate their relationships of communion with other Churches. Above all, perhaps, the instruments of comparable international ecclesial communities provide inspiration for the Anglican Covenant.

The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, the international conference of Old Catholic Bishops in the Union of Utrecht, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Baptist World Alliance all have covenantal constitutions that spell out the terms of communion between the member Churches, enable the exercise of autonomy within a framework of interdependence, and prescribe the manner in which mutual decisions are to be made.

ANGLICANS should be reassured that the Anglican Covenant is broadly consistent with the theological and legal understandings of covenant in scripture, sacramental tradition, and the experiences of ecumenism and comparable global ecclesial communities. There is nothing extraordinary in the Anglican enterprise.

Although the project is driven by theology, ecclesiastical politics, and

pragmatism, covenanting would involve participation in a conventional ecclesial experience for which there are numerous enduring principles and precedents. An Anglican Covenant would appear novel, but spiritual, sacramental, and structural, covenanting is a well-trodden Christian path.

The Anglican Covenant does not represent the Communion as the primary manifestation of Anglicanism with authority to limit the freedom (or autonomy) of its member Churches (the “red-light” model).

The Covenant does not see the autonomous provincial Church as the primary manifestation of Anglicanism, under which the province has an unfettered freedom, without any restraint from the global family (the “green-light” model).

Rather, the Covenant sees partnership between the Communion (the family) and each autonomous Church as the primary manifestation of Anglicanism, one that protects the autonomy of the province (its legal freedom), subject to the competence of the Communion (through its instruments), to guide in a limited field of highly contentious matters of common concern (the “amber-light” model). This is the Anglican way.

*Dr Norman Doe is a Professor of Law at Cardiff Law School. He was a member of the Lambeth Commission, served as a consultant in canon law to the Primates’ Meeting and the Lambeth Conference, and has written several books, including An Anglican Covenant: Theological and legal considerations for a global debate (Canterbury Press, 2008).*

## We must work internationally

The universal Church requires a better way to discern the truth, says *Simon Killwick*

I REJOICE every Sunday to see the Anglican Communion at worship in my church, as many of the congregation come originally from other provinces of the Anglican Communion, mainly in the West Indies and Africa. The same would be true of many Anglican parishes in the big cities in this country: the Anglican Communion is over here, not just over there.

The international nature of the Church is an essential part of the biblical and Catholic faith. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John sees a wonderful vision of heaven, where people of all nations worship together before the throne of God (7.9-10).

In the Nicene Creed, we say: “We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” The unity of the Church is not an optional extra to Christianity; it is an article of faith. The New Testament is clear that Christ came to unite all peoples and things in himself (Ephesians 1.9-10).

The Church of England claims to be part of the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church: the very word “Catholic” means “universal”, or

“according to the whole”. St Vincent of Lerins famously wrote in his *Commonitory* that “all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense ‘Catholic’, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally.”

We need each other, internationally, in order to discern the true faith.

St Vincent’s *Commonitory* has a remarkably contemporary feel about it. He says that we need the universal Church to help us interpret scripture, “because, owing to the depth of holy scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands it in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters.”

This is why we need his tests of Catholicity in discerning the truth. Vincent discusses the idea of development in religious knowledge (1500 years before Newman), and readily admits the possibility of progress, so long as it is real progress, and not alteration of the faith: “Regard must be had to the consentient voice of universality, equally with that of antiquity, lest we either be torn from the integrity of unity and carried away to schism.”

WE CANNOT carry on as if the rest of the world did not exist, because the discernment of Christian truth can take place only on a universal or international basis. The Church of

England would be hugely diminished without the Anglican Communion. We would be so much less than the international vision of the Church that is both scriptural and Catholic.

Obviously, we need to look wider than the Anglican Communion for universality, but, given that we have the Communion, and that it is international, we cannot continue to let it drift into ever-increasing fragmentation.

Even apart from such ecclesial considerations, we live in such a global village, with instant news 24/7, that it is impossible to ignore the international dimension. We cannot go back from where we are now; the only way is forwards — and that means that the provinces of the Anglican Communion must learn to consider each other more in future decisions over matters of faith.

The Anglican Covenant has been designed to help the whole Communion to do just that. It has been criticised by some for being too prescriptive, and by others for not being prescriptive enough. Both criticisms miss the point, which is that we should discern the truth together on an international basis.

For the Covenant to work as it should, it needs the genuine participation of all Anglicans worldwide; it will also need to look beyond the Anglican, to a more ecumenical and universal approach.

HOW might we discern the truth on an international basis? When an

*Continued opposite*



# A useful compendium, but lose the chocolate teapot

The Covenant leaves too many questions unanswered, thinks  
*Alan Wilson*

IN THE village where I began my ordained ministry lived two clans who had feuded, off and on, for 500 years. Local lore says that their young men were having a customary New Year punch-up down by the riverside, when their neighbours hit on the novelty, for the 1920s, of telephoning the police.

The brawl on the banks of the Thames was reaching positively Glaswegian proportions by the time the Keystone Cops from the city lurched into view in their shiny new paddy-wagon. At this point, both tribes laid aside their ancient quarrel for 20 minutes, dealt with the police, hurled their paddy-wagon into the lock, and then got back down to business. A copper's lot is not a happy one.

If the Anglican Covenant is supposed to patch up the Anglican Communion after the culture wars

over sexuality which gave rise to the Windsor report, it has probably already failed. Those whose consent would be necessary for it to achieve that purpose have said openly that they just don't buy it. The paddy-wagon is in the lock, and it won't be taking anyone off to the cells tonight. The thought may allay liberal fears as much as disappoint conservative aspirations.

This failure is probably a mercy, because seven years is a long time in politics — even church politics. Much has changed. As the dust settles on what some felt was sub-Christian bickering about sexuality, colonialism, and biblicism, perhaps a real opportunity is opening up to work out who we really are and what we stand for.

None of the contentious issues of 2003 has gone away, but the energy has drained away from fighting over them. Certainly, in the pews around here, people would sooner stick their heads in a food mixer than see the Anglican dog return to this particular vomit. The Christian faith is about following Jesus Christ, and loving God and neighbour, not having punch-ups by the riverside to feed the self-importance of our most zealous pharisees.

When all is said and done, Anglican Churches are no more than delivery systems for the

Kingdom — expressions of discipleship. We did not become Anglicans to build an Anglican brand, but in order better to follow Jesus Christ. We are Anglicans to be Christians, not the other way around. Our ecclesiology, largely implicit, points to this fact by its very incompleteness.

THE first three sections of the Covenant clearly express a reformed Catholic view, based on Archbishop Fisher's principle: "We have no doctrine of our own — we only possess the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic creeds, and those creeds we hold without addition or diminution."

The procedural fourth section is a chocolate teapot. Do with it what you will, but do not expect it to hold boiling water. I would detach it from the useful stuff as quietly and as

tactfully as possible. Lawyers say that this cannot be done, but I seriously question whether a civilisation capable of conquering space can really be that incapable.

The useful compendium in sections 1-3 could seriously help dioceses and deaneries to explore what being Christian means for them. It could unlock some fascinating questions that are all too seldom addressed.

What does it mean to be a Christian today? How far is an Anglican a member of a global society, and to what extent simply a Christian living out faith in a particular local culture? What kind of local inculturation for mission requires central regulation, and what kind do Churches have to trust other Churches to handle for themselves?

Just what does it mean to be Anglican? Does it involve membership of a global denomination?

The New Testament knows of local churches — small "c" — as part of the whole mystical body of Christ, the first-fruits of the whole human race redeemed: Church with a capital C. What room is there, in that scheme of things, for "denominations", self-contained mini-Churches developed over the past 300 years, defining themselves over and against each other about particular dogmas?

Perhaps we are supposed to organise our life around denominations. Different as they are, they all use much the same

grandiloquent biblical sound-bites to capture their unique selling points. How much authority should we invest in defining and defending the corporate brand?

THESE questions may lead to others. Homosexuality, the main bone of contention in 2003, was not even defined in a modern sense until the last century. There is nothing in any historic creed about it, and next to nothing in the Bible — possibly three or four verses, at a pinch. So how do we deal faithfully with new issues beyond the scope of our base formularies?

What part should bishops, synods, rules, and lawyers play in the Church? When people in the family fall out, do we tinker with the system, or address the problem itself? If we could not use effectively the instruments that we had, what chance is there that we will use new ones better?

What do we mean by church unity? How can legal engineering create unity, and how can it impede it? Is it about producing a single visible organisation in some ideal sense, or does it transcend particular organisations?

Is the Church, ultimately, a smooth-running spiritual society, or humanity as a whole, fully redeemed in Christ? If the latter is God's purpose, the people you chuck out now come back in the end anyway; so you might as well learn how to live with them.

These are big questions. I hope that, as the Covenant goes out for discussion, lay people's answers will be as carefully received as those of lawyers and ecclesiastical technocrats have been so far in this process. And if the ordinary people of God, the *plebs sancta Dei*, who came through the gay wars with their credibility far more intact than that of their bishops, should be allowed a voice, I hope our elders and betters will be listening.

*Dr Alan Wilson is the Bishop of Buckingham.*

This would, however, be consent in solely Anglican terms, and any matter so determined would also need the consensus of the whole, or universal, Church, before it could be confidently taken to be the truth.

The requirement for unanimity (or near-unanimity) sets a high bar for development in the Christian tradition; it might be argued that this would stifle development and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of unity, however: we should be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit . . ." (Ephesians 4.3-4).

We should, therefore, be looking for consensus, not simply majority votes. If a development is genuinely of the Spirit, it will become clear over time in various parts of the world. It may take time, but it will come to command consensus. If, instead, a development brings only division, and no consensus emerges, that should warn us that it is not of the Spirit.

Truth and unity go hand in hand in the Christian tradition: we cannot discern truth in isolation from the rest of the Church. Because the Church is essentially international, the discernment of Christian truth can take place only on an international basis. The Anglican Covenant embodies this insight, and commits provinces to listening to each other, and to the wider Church, in the discernment of truth.

It is about being faithful to the biblical vision of international unity — "one body and one Spirit" — and fulfilling our claim to be part of the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.

*Canon Simon Killwick is Rector of Christ Church, Moss Side, Manchester, and a member of the General Synod.*

*Continued from previous page*

Anglican province is contemplating a significant change, it should consult on an international level within the Communion. The Covenant envisages that this will involve the Standing Committee of the Communion, which may refer to the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council.

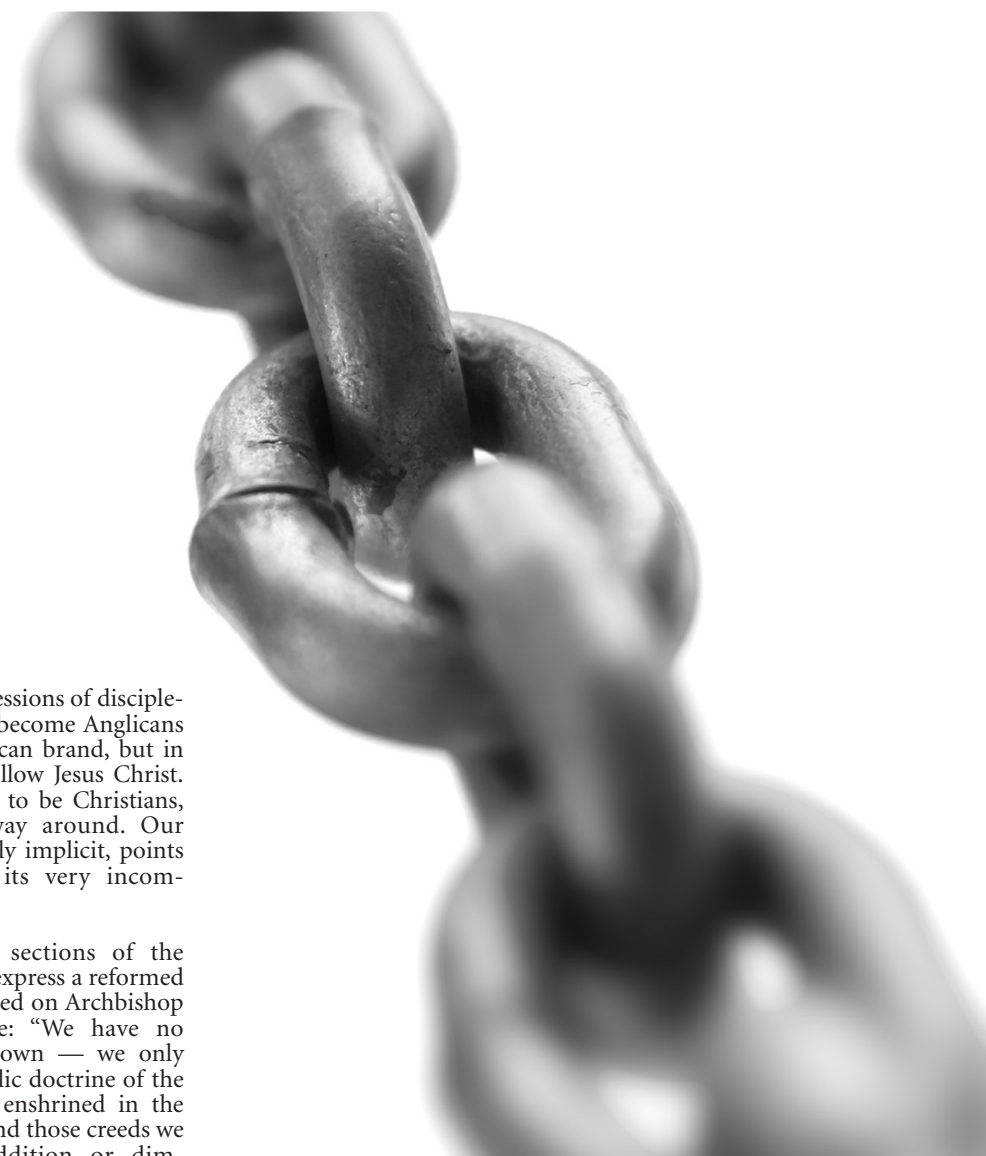
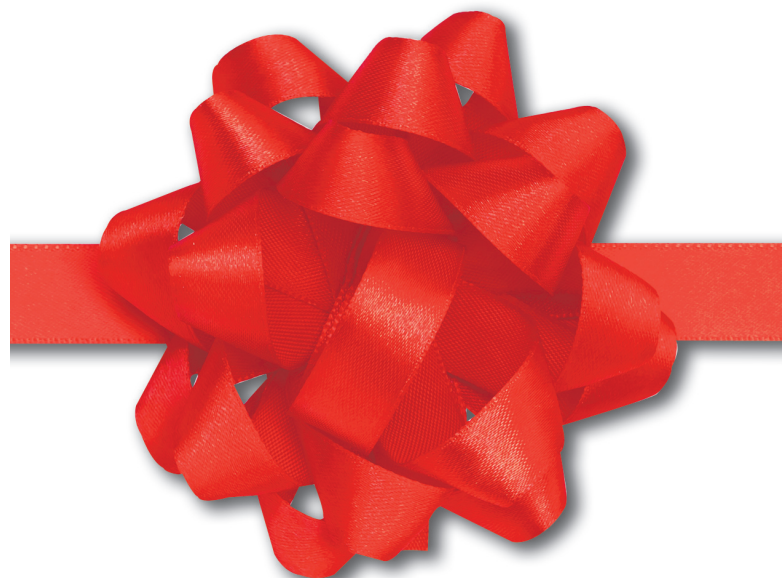
If the proposed change proves controversial, then a process of discernment will be needed. Historically, Christian truth has often been discerned through controversy: the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation emerged through centuries of argument.

The process of discernment must be international; it will require prayer, theological study, and debate. It will also take time: we need to learn from history that the

discernment of truth can take even centuries.

THERE needs to be a genuine waiting on God, and on each other, within the Body of Christ. Because the Anglican Communion is not complete in itself, but a part of the whole Body of Christ, we need to take seriously the position of our ecumenical partners on any question that is being discerned.

How do we know when a matter has been finally discerned? It must obviously be capable of being demonstrated from scripture, and of being seen as an organic development of the Christian tradition. It must command international consent within the Communion — meaning unanimous, or near-unanimous agreement, following the precedent of the early Councils of the Church.



**'When families fall out, do we tinker with the system, or address the problem itself?'**



## covenant

Cohesion must come before covenant, says

John Akao

AFRICAN Christian understanding of a covenant agrees with the Christian theological interpretation of covenant as a strong commitment to a relationship between two or more parties on agreed terms. Covenant presupposes that both parties accept the terms, are in communion, and are committed to respecting and being bound by the terms, as well as subject to the consequences of obeying or violating it.

In traditional African society, covenant is sacrosanct, and cannot be trivialised without dire repercussions — more so when oaths have been sworn in the name of God. The fear of God underscores respect for divine laws and religious worship. In virtually every African society, there exist sets of moral laws called taboos (abominations), which are strictly adhered to.

These values existed before the coming of Christianity: they were only reinforced by it. Indeed, African morality is similar to the biblical portrait of Jewish and early Church moral values. This attitude was transferred to Christian faith and ethics by African converts to Christianity. They therefore manifest biblical precepts in accordance with the word of God in their faith, worship, and morals.

Whenever African culture comes into conflict with Christian tenets, culture bows to the superiority and authority of scripture. The African spirituality does not dwell on philosophical abstractions to the detriment of spiritual realities such as belief in God, judgement, heaven, and hell. It accepts sin as evil. Therefore Africans interpret deviant behaviours, such as homosexuality, as abominable actions that corrupt the

# It cannot stop the unravelling

Church, dilute the Christian faith, and jettison the biblical foundations of the “faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1.3).

With the possible exception of Yahweh’s suzerainty covenant with Israel, covenant is voluntarily entered into by two parties. It is never forced by one party upon another on unequal terms. Thus, covenant is a consummating factor and a uniting mechanism to project the unity of a people, not a tool to force two conflicting parties into union.

THE idea of an Anglican Covenant was suggested by the Global South to check the drift of some members of the Communion, especially in the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Anglican Church of Canada, as well as some other parts of Europe, such as Germany and the UK, in the wake of a revisionist agenda manifested radically by the recognition of same-sex relationships by the Church, especially the consecration of two same-sex practitioners as bishops in the Episcopal Church in the US.

Unfortunately, the original idea of a covenant to bring back erring members who have embarrassed the Communion and torn apart its fabric was adopted by the Anglican establishment, which fashioned a covenant which in motive, content, and thrust deviates from the original objective of healing and unifying the Communion.

To African Anglicans, the present Covenant is crafted to persuade orthodox Anglicans to commit to



fellowship with revisionist groups who have perpetrated aberrations, but who unrepentantly defy various moves to bring them back on course.

The Church of Nigeria is aware of its weaknesses as a body of Christ, and the fact that it is part and parcel of Nigerian society, with all its weaknesses and imperfections. Nevertheless, we do not use this to redefine the ideals expected of society. We believe in the transformative power of the gospel to engender a new society among us.

THE following reasons underscore African Anglicans’ sense of caution towards the emergent Covenant in its present form:

1. During the drafting of the Covenant, not all parties were involved in the original formulations. Most African Anglicans were sent the draft for their comments after the structure and direction had been formed.

The offending Episcopal Church in the US remained defiant and recalcitrant, despite a series of appeals and resolutions. This attitude of the Episcopal Church towards the entire Communion smacks of arrogance and a colonial mentality against the African voice.

2. Whereas the African provinces

made a constructive critique of, and positive contributions to, the draft Covenant, their contributions were hardly recognised or reflected in subsequent revisions, leading to the emergent Cambridge version, which is seemingly the final form.

3. Whereas a covenant is ideally entered into by two communicating and fellowshiping parties, that is not the case in the present Anglican Communion. There is a conspicuous absence of cohesion in the Communion, which is a necessary foundation for a covenant.

At the moment, we cannot say that we have one Anglican Church. This does not refer to the characteristic shades of Anglicanism; for, even in diversity, we had hitherto maintained a remarkable measure of unity. That is now lost. We now behave like people in the era of the Judges of ancient Israel, when “there was no king in Israel and every man did as he pleased.”

4. The present Covenant distracts the orthodox Anglican voices from the main issues currently in contention in the Communion. It seeks surreptitiously to engender perpetual talking, and dissipation of valuable time, energy, and human and material resources in endless meetings, which have so far led nowhere, while in the

mean time the erroneous teaching and practices are being consolidated. African voices are aligned with the voices of GAFCON, the Global South, and the All Africa Bishops’ Conference.

5. The parameters of biblical interpretation in the Anglican Church are diversified. Unfaithfulness to God and dishonesty in biblical interpretation gave rise to the present problems. In this approach, the authority of the Bible is weakened against evil cultural and behavioural practices. Pressure by secular forces, such as human-rights activists, parliaments, lawyers, the entertainment world, and the educational system, to pursue deviant behaviour such as homosexuality appears to have overwhelmed the Church and compromised her prophetic voice.

We find it difficult to discern when the Church is speaking, and when society is speaking through the Church.

6. The Anglican Church in Nigeria is not able to subscribe to, or sign up to, the Anglican Covenant because it disagrees with the trend above. We hold scripture as God’s word, written to be interpreted in the light of the best biblical scholarship, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible occupies a central and controlling force in our corporate life as the Word of God — to be obeyed, not just a document to be rough-handled as an anachronistic piece.

Today, unfortunately, there is a rift as to which is superior — human culture or the Bible. For some, culture has the upper hand, and this we are unable to accept. This has brought the Bible down from the pedestal from which African Christians received it. We in Africa have decided that it is either the Bible or nothing else.

7. A group of people that lacks cohesion cannot easily enter into covenant. We will maintain relationship in mission and evangelism with any part of the Communion which is ready to uphold the scriptures as a rule for faith and practice in public and daily life.

As long as there is no cohesion, the idea of a covenant will remain impracticable.

*The Rt Revd John Akao is Bishop of Sabongidda-Ora, and chairman of the Theological Resource Group.*

# We’re too independent for this

Under a covenant, minorities suffer, Glynn Cardy says

IN 2012, the General Synod/te Hinota Whanui of the Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia will vote on the entirety of the proposed Anglican Covenant. Although predicting the outcome of any vote is fraught, I suspect that it will not pass, and the reasons for this will have little to do with the authorising of formal liturgical blessings for same-sex couples, the ordination to the episcopate of those in same-sex relationships, or cross-provincial interventions.

New Zealand is a little Church in a little country with a little budget. It has always been that way. We have had to survive by generating new ideas, trying them out, and taking risks. Context, mission, and innovation are closely entwined.

Those innovative ideas include giving the laity voting and vetoing

rights in our synods (1857); a Maori bishop to minister to Maori within the diocese of a Pakeha/European bishop (1928); the baptised receiving communion regardless of their age (1976); ordaining women priests (1976) and bishops (1987); and the partnership constitution (1992) creating a General Synod whose business requires assent from all three cultural streams of the Church — Pakeha/European, Maori, and Pacifica.

All of these innovations were motivated by missiological concerns. Most of them would have been opposed at the time by a majority of other provinces in the Anglican world. If the proposed Anglican Covenant had then been in force, it is likely that the overseas majority would have tried to prevent our Church’s proceeding in the direction we believed the Spirit was leading.

THE second reason why the Anglican Covenant is unlikely to get the required consent here in the Antipodes is our history of colonialism. As in other parts of the world, the indigenous tribes lost much of their land and resources — and thus their culture and power —

to the imperial onslaught of Western Christian civilisation. Despite treaties and covenants, colonial governments continued to assert their capricious will over the Maori tribes. The history of this country is marked by Maori attempts for justice and status.

The Anglican Church reflects this history. Maori were the first Anglicans here. Most services were in their language, as was the Prayer Book. Yet, with the arrival of the settlers from Britain, another Anglicanism arrived. Quite rapidly, power shifted into the hands of the immigrants, and Maori were marginalised in their own land and Church.

Slowly, over the decades, we have sought to redress this. The 1992 constitution was a large milestone. Status as an equal partner, with the authority largely to govern one’s own affairs, has now been achieved for Maori Anglicans after 178 years.

This proposed Anglican Covenant is not one of partnership, where all Provinces have to either agree or abstain: it is one where the majority rule. Our history teaches us that under such a covenant, minorities suffer, and that suffering is to the



detriment of the whole Church and its whole mission.

Lastly, it will be difficult to win support for the Anglican Covenant in New Zealand, because it is trying to impose a form of centralism upon a Church that is increasingly pluralistic. A Christ-centred world is not one where everyone thinks similarly, or agrees, but one where we celebrate that they do not. To impose sanctions on those who differ is to close our ears to what we may need to hear.

OUR history has taught us that interpretation is always culturally conditioned. The majority, whether liberal or conservative, are not always right, and the minority are not always wrong. Indeed, even our enemies reflect something of the omnipresence of God.

There are also the practicalities of being a little Church in a little country. At the end of the day, we have to learn to live with each other. We can argue with, and try to convince, others, but we cannot force agreement, and we cannot banish dissent.

Unity is not achieved through a subjugation of differences, but by coming to respect the variety of ways in which Anglicans live out their faith and engage in mission. Any attempt to impose uniformity just does not work.

The General Synod/te Hinota Whanui of the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia has little problem with the first three sections of the proposed Covenant; for they still allow for the breadth of interpretation which has been the hallmark of our denomination. It is the last section where there will be disagreement; for it runs counter to the mission, history, and contemporary culture of our land.

*The Ven. Glynn Cardy is Vicar of St Matthew-in-the-City, Auckland, New Zealand.*

# The annotated Covenant

We present the full text of the Anglican Covenant, with marginal notes compiled after consulting a range of opinion among a small group of informed contributors

1. We need to beware the possibility here of a mild form of the “fallacy of equivocation”. We can agree that “communion” and “covenant” are splendid, as we find them in the Bible, but that does not mean that everything we then go on to call “communion” or “covenant” is the same thing, or to be welcomed as an obvious good

References to Paul and the Pauline epistles are welcome — they have been lacking in recent Church of England ecclesiology

2. This passage skates over the differences between the biblical covenants under discussion here. The covenant with Noah was with all humankind; the covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David were not (other than in that they gesture towards Christ). What is more, Christ transforms the nature of covenant itself. The covenant with the people of Israel separated them and creates difference; the letter to the Ephesians (quoted here) emphasises that Christ’s death abolishes divisions

Sin appears in four of the eight clauses of the Introduction, and twice in clause 2, but not in the Covenant. Repentance occurs twice in section 2 of the Covenant, but not in the Introduction

4. Reads very smooth, not mentioning actually adjusting ourselves painfully to others

5. Surely the whole point is that the character of Anglicanism is being changed in an attempt to make it more centralised — when it is too centralised already. Anglicanism was never meant to be a world confessional body like the Lutheran World Federation

This means that we should reject the Covenant if it does change this character

6. Yes, mission is the priority — but just as its expression has changed over time, so it will be expressed differently in the diversity of global culture

## Introduction to the Covenant Text

“This life is revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have communion with us; and truly our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. These things we write so that our joy may be complete.” (1 John 1.2-4)

1. God has called us into **communion** in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1.9). This communion has been “revealed to us” by the Son as being the very divine life of God the Trinity. What is the life revealed to us? **St John makes it clear** that the communion of life in the Church participates in the communion which is the divine life itself, the life of the Trinity. This life is not a reality remote from us, but one that has been “seen” and “testified to” by the apostles and their followers: “for in the communion of the Church we share in the divine life” [1]. This life of the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, shapes and displays itself through the very existence and ordering of the Church.

2. Our divine calling into communion is established in God’s purposes for the whole of creation (Ephesians 1.10, 3.9ff). It is extended to all humankind, so that, in our sharing of God’s life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God might restore in us the divine image. Through time, according to the Scriptures, God has furthered this calling through **covenants** made with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David. The prophet Jeremiah looked forward to a new covenant not written on tablets of stone but upon the heart (Jeremiah 31. 31-34). In God’s Son, Christ Jesus, a new covenant is given us, established in his “blood . . . poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26.28), secured through his resurrection from the dead (Ephesians 1. 19-23), and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts (Romans 5.5). Into this covenant of death to **sin** and of new life in Christ we are baptised, and empowered to share God’s communion in Christ with all people, to the ends of the earth and of creation.

3. We humbly recognise that this calling and gift of communion entails responsibilities for our common life before God as we seek, through grace, to be faithful in our service of God’s purposes for the world. Joined in one universal Church, which is Christ’s Body, spread throughout the earth, we serve his gospel even as we are enabled to be made one across the dividing walls of human sin and estrangement (Ephesians 2. 12-22). The forms of this life in the Church, caught up in the mystery of divine communion, **reveal to the hostile and divisive power of the world** the “manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3. 9-10). Faithfulness, honesty, gentleness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love itself, lived out in mutual deference and service (Mark 10.44-45) among the Church’s people and through its ministries, contribute to building up the body of Christ as it grows to maturity (Ephesians 4. 1-16; Colossians 3.8-17).

4. In the providence of God, which holds sway even over our divisions caused by sin, various families of Churches have grown up within the universal Church in the course of history. Among these families is the Anglican Communion, which provides a particular charism and identity among the many followers and servants of Jesus. We recognise the wonder, beauty and challenge of maintaining communion in this family of Churches, and the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God’s promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation. **Therefore, we covenant 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.

5. **To covenant together is not intended to change the character of this Anglican expression of Christian faith.** Rather, we recognise the importance of renewing in a solemn way our commitment to one another, and to the common understanding of faith and order we have received, so that the **bonds of affection** which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified. We do this in order to reflect, in our relations with one another, God’s own faithfulness and promises towards us in Christ (2 Corinthians 1.20-22).

6. We are a people who live, learn, and pray by and with the Scriptures as God’s Word. We seek to adore God in thanks and praise and to make intercession for the needs of people everywhere through common prayer, united across many cultures and languages. **We are privileged to share in the mission of the apostles** to bring the gospel of Christ to all nations and peoples, not only in words but also in deeds of compassion and justice that witness to God’s character and the triumph of Christ over sin and death. We give ourselves as servants of a greater unity among the divided Christians of the world. May the Lord help us to “preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4.5).

7. Our faith embodies a **coherent** testimony to what we have received from God’s Word and the Church’s long-standing witness. Our life together reflects the blessings of God (even as it exposes our failures in faith, hope and love) in growing our Communion into a truly global family. The mission we pursue aims at serving the great promises of God in Christ that embrace the peoples and the world God so loves. This

*Introduction* This does not, in fact, introduce the Covenant text. Nor does it provide an interpretative lens for the text. But it does add 14 biblical references to the mere six in the main body of text (plus two in the Preamble, and one in the final Declaration)

1. The concept of communion (*koinonia*) has been dominant in Anglican thinking for the past 50 years, but it is in danger of turning in on itself. It needs to be matched with the concept of service (*diakonia*): the Church is to serve God and the world — not itself

It is interesting that they are happy to attribute authorship of 1 John to St John

2. Using the language of covenant here is “largely just a way of raising the stakes”; it “is not being used in any biblical sense and is no more helpful in inter-Anglican than it is in Jewish-Christian dialogue” — from an essay by John Barton in *The Anglican Covenant* (Mowbray, 2008)

3. What our way of resolving differences says to “the world” is indeed crucial; for we are called to demonstrate something more than the secular processes of treaties and power blocs

4. “Therefore”, in the final sentence, works only if the principle of the Covenant is already agreed

“We covenant together” is not happy English (neither is “growing our Communion” in 7)

Our common inheritance and distinctive witness are indeed important, but so is coming to terms with the colonial aspects, historical and contemporary, of what we now share

5. If no change to the character of Anglicanism, why has so much effort been expended? Is change merely an unintended consequence? “Bonds of affection” are replaced by covenanted bonds. This is a significant change

At the heart of this whole process is what our distinctive Anglican Way says about holding together unity and diversity: although it has been shaped by compromising historical factors such as establishment and Empire, it has resulted in something that, unlike other families of Churches, is neither monolithic nor merely associational

7. What does “coherent” mean? Internally consistent? Comprehensible? Monolithic? It is an elastic word

1. *The Church of the Triune God*, The Cyprus Statement of the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue, 2007, paragraph 1.2.



mission is carried out in shared responsibility and stewardship of resources, and in interdependence among ourselves and with the wider Church.

8. Our prayer is that God will redeem our struggles and weakness, renew and enrich our common life and use the Anglican Commun-ion to witness effectively in all the world, working with all people of good will, to the new life and hope found in Christ Jesus.

The Anglican Communion Covenant  
Preamble

Here, the *Preamble* offers to us the standard by which the Covenant should be judged

This is great, but could have had included more about what was done to bring to birth the Anglican Communion, that is, from every nation etc. The Anglican Churches are particularly “historical” in the way that others are not. This was an opportunity to make that clear

We, as Churches of the Anglican Communion, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, solemnly covenant together in these following affirmations and commitments. As people of God, drawn from “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7.9), we do this in order to proclaim more effectively in our different contexts the grace of God revealed in the gospel, to offer God’s love in responding to the needs of the world, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and together with all God’s people to attain the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4.3.13).

Section One  
Our Inheritance of Faith

1.1 Each Church affirms:

(1.1.1) its communion in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(1.1.2) the catholic and apostolic 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 [2]. The historic formularies of the Church of England [3], forged in the context of the European Reformation and acknowledged and appropriated in various ways in the Anglican Communion, bear authentic witness to this faith.

(1.1.3) the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and **ultimate standard** of faith [4].

(1.1.4) the Apostles’ Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the **sufficient** statement of the Christian faith [5].

(1.1.5) the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord — ministered with the unfailing use of Christ’s words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him [6].

(1.1.6) the historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church [7].

(1.1.7) the shared patterns of our common prayer and liturgy which form, sustain and nourish our worship of God and our faith and life together.

(1.1.8) its participation in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God, and that this mission is shared with other Churches and traditions beyond this Covenant.

1.2 In living out this inheritance of faith together in varying contexts, each Church, reliant on the Holy Spirit, commits itself:

(1.2.1) **to teach and act in continuity and consonance with Scripture** and the catholic and apostolic faith, order and tradition, as received by the Churches of the Anglican Communion, mindful of the common councils of the Communion and our ecumenical agreements.

(1.2.2) to uphold and proclaim a pattern of Christian theological and **moral reasoning** and discipline that is rooted in and **answerable** to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the **catholic tradition**.

(1.2.3) to witness, in this reasoning, to the renewal of humanity and the whole created order through the death and resurrection of Christ, and to reflect the holiness that in consequence God gives to, and requires from, his people.

(1.2.4) **to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest** the Scriptures in our different contexts, informed by the attentive and communal reading of— and costly witness to — the Scriptures by all the faithful, by the teaching of bishops and synods, and by the results of rigorous study by **lay and ordained scholars**.

(1.2.5) to ensure that biblical texts are received, read and interpreted faithfully, respectfully, comprehensively and coherently, with the **expectation** that Scripture continues to illuminate and transform the Church and its members, and through them, individuals, cultures and societies.

(1.2.6) to encourage and be open to prophetic and faithful leadership in ministry and mission so as to enable God’s people to respond in courageous witness to the power of the gospel in the world.

The Covenant recognises that there is a wide variety of contexts in global Anglicanism. That context will often set the agenda for the Gospel, and interrogate the tradition

1.1.2 There is always going to be a tension between faithfulness to the past (or at least how that past is now perceived) and what is said here about reasoning, scholarship, pilgrimage, and prophecy. That should not surprise us, given what the New Testament says about the Holy Spirit. The question is whether, and how, we continue together, not least in eucharistic communion (1.2.7), when there are different understandings of what the Spirit is doing

It is reassuring to read “uniquely revealed” and “ultimate standard”

Cf. the Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the C of E, which is often seen as a masterpiece, balancing tradition with the need to reflect modern contexts

The “commitments” do not seem to go far beyond motherhood and theological apple pie

The Covenant is not intended to close down debate, but to open it up

1.1.7 What this section might mean, and how it binds, is near the heart of contemporary debates in the ecclesiology and practice of the Church of England. Many might be well disposed towards the Covenant if it means obedience to liturgical norms across the Church of England — but it won’t

The Covenant acknowledges the important part that liturgy plays in Anglicanism: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, and the part played by the Prayer Book in the history of many Provinces (though not all) of the Anglican Communion

1.1.7 This appears to be an implied criticism of those provinces that have adopted the approach of breaking communion. Another sign that the Covenant is about process and not punishment

1.2.2 seems to be what the conservatives wanted, and 1.2.3 the liberal counter-requirement

“Moral reasoning” is not “reason”, as in Hooker’s “scripture, tradition, and reason”. This term opens up a path for the creation of an Anglican magisterium

What does “answerable” mean? Also, “catholic tradition” is undefined. It clearly cannot refer to the Vincentian test.

Scripture, tradition, reason — the classical three-legged stool, but expressed in the balanced form adopted by Hooker, when he first articulated the concept

1.2.5 “Expectation” renders this paragraph capable of infinite interpretation, so that no limitation on anyone is hereby imposed

This section restates the historic formularies which the Church of England shares, to a varying degree, with the rest of the Communion. The question is whether the Lambeth Quadrilateral is now insufficient, and so — as some member Churches are demanding — additional statements such as Lambeth 1.10 should be added as almost a foundational statement

1.1.4 “Sufficient” is a slippery word: sufficient for what? Sufficient, perhaps, to indicate the minimum of Christian belief. But a minimum is not sufficient for all questions, tasks, or situations. The Creed means anything only because it is understood within a wider tradition that explains what the words mean, or might mean. As so many words on a page, it is not “sufficient”, but it is when held within a framework of interpretation

1.1.8 The first of many references that acknowledge the place and importance of the whole people of God — that is, deliberately including the laity

1.2.1 What this means, and how scriptural interpretation relates to scriptural authority, is precisely the problem of the moment

1.2.1, 1.2.2 & 1.2.3 These correlate to scripture, tradition, and reason, but this document goes on to mention scripture a great deal more than tradition (or doctrine), and reason hardly at all. This document has very little historical instinct when it comes to theology. Hooker, for instance, more than anyone else, forged an Anglican theological sensibility, but he and his work are nowhere mentioned

1.2.4 & 1.2.5 This sidesteps the deep hermeneutical problems that lie behind Anglican divisions. There can be no agreement while there is no agreed way of approaching scripture. Post-Enlightenment fundamentalist interpretations of scripture (imported to Africa from the United States) have no place in Anglicanism. Anglicanism is not based on *sola scriptura*, but on a balance of scripture, tradition, and reason

1.2.4 “To hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” is from a collect composed for the second Sunday in Advent for first English Prayer Book of 1549. The reference to “rigorous study by . . . scholars” is significant. Note how many paragraphs relate to the scriptures, in contrast to tradition or doctrine

In this and other places, the Covenant text was deliberately tweaked from earlier versions to ensure that sufficient respect was paid to the place of the laity in the life of the Communion

2. Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.  
3. The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons  
4. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1886/1888  
5. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1886/1888  
6. cf. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888, The Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C15 of the Church of England.  
7. cf. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/1888



1.2.7 It is indeed true that the canons of the Church of England put a high premium on communion. The canon “Of schisms” comes among those setting out the groundwork (the “A” canons)

(1.2.7) to seek in all things to uphold the solemn obligation to nurture and sustain eucharistic communion, in accordance with existing canonical disciplines, as we strive under God for the fuller realisation of the communion of all Christians.

(1.2.8) to pursue a common pilgrimage with the whole Body of Christ continually 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.

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

2. The Covenant makes it clear that the Anglican Communion is centred on the revelation of God in Christ, not on Canterbury, but there has been a historical process that created Anglicanism and the Communion. The Communion still needs to understand its mission foundations and history in order to understand its vocation as a Communion of Churches in mission

2.1 Not much that is painful. Useful reiteration of ecumenical vision

2.1.1 The reference to “from east and west” alludes to Malachi 1.11, taken since the very earliest days of the Church as relating to the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice (*Didache* 14.1-3). The idea of the Church as both sign and first-fruits is important in the 20th century because of writers such as Henri de Lubac

2.1 Each Church affirms:

(2.1.1) communion as a gift of God given so that God’s people from **east and west**, north and south, may together declare the glory of the Lord and be both a sign of God’s reign in the Holy Spirit and the first fruits in the world of God’s redemption in Christ.

(2.1.2) its gratitude for God’s gracious providence extended to us down through the ages: our origins in the Church of the apostles; the ancient common traditions; the rich history of the Church in Britain and Ireland **reshaped** by the Reformation, and our growth into a global communion through the expanding missionary work of the Church; our ongoing refashioning by the Holy Spirit through the gifts and sacrificial witness of Anglicans from around the world; and **our summons into a more fully developed communion life**.

2.1.2 “Reshaped” is an affirmation of the Catholic continuity of the Anglican Churches with the Early and medieval Church

“Our summons into a more fully developed communion life” seems entirely to beg the question, and to foreclose disagreement about what the current crisis might call for in response — a tighter Communion, or a loose one?

2.1.3 Repentance, not least for failing to see Christ in each other, is something that both conservatives and liberals need to learn

Again, this passage sets the tone of the Covenant. It encourages patient engagement

(2.1.3) in humility our call to constant **repentance**: for our failures in exercising **patience** and charity and in recognising Christ in one another; our misuse of God’s gracious gifts; our failure to heed God’s call to serve; and our exploitation one of another.

(2.1.4) the imperative of God’s mission into which the Communion is called, a vocation and blessing in which each Church is joined with others in Christ in the work of establishing God’s reign. As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide **family** of inter-dependent churches, we embrace challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional, and international levels. In this, we cherish our mission heritage as offering Anglicans distinctive opportunities for mission collaboration.

2.1.4 The Anglican Communion is described here as a family (and in the Introduction, 4 and 7). This is an interesting choice of image, given Christ’s teaching about the family

2.1.5 Noting the wider ecumenical scene, there is an interesting difference between this document, which could be about trying to keep certain people in by pushing certain others out, and all the ecumenical dialogues, which have been about maximising what is common and trying to see the rest from different angles

This is a vague nod to ecumenism. In the late 1960s, the expectation was that most provinces of the Anglican Communion would enter into unity with other denominations to create United National Churches. Later, this was downgraded into less costly agreements (e.g. Meissen and Porvoo). This Covenant reads as if other Provinces were separate denominations

(2.1.5) that our common mission is a mission shared with other Churches and traditions beyond this Covenant. We embrace opportunities for the discovery of the life of the whole gospel, and for reconciliation and shared mission with the Church throughout the world. We affirm the ecumenical vocation of Anglicanism to the full visible unity of the Church in accordance with Christ’s prayer that “all may be one”. It is with all the saints in every place and time that we will comprehend the fuller dimensions of Christ’s redemptive and immeasurable love.

2.1.5 The final sentence alludes loosely to Ephesians 3.18

2.2 In recognition of these affirmations, each Church, reliant on the Holy Spirit, commits itself:

2.2 This is fine, but is there more to the life of the Church than mission?

(2.2.1) to answer God’s call to undertake evangelisation and to share in the healing and reconciling mission “for our blessed but broken, hurting and fallen world” [8], and, with **mutual accountability**, to share our God-given spiritual and material resources in this task.

Slipping in “mutual accountability” is obviously significant. But is it integral to structure?

2.2.2 If the Marks of Mission are modified (there is a proposal from Canada to add a sixth), will the Covenant need formal amendment?

(2.2.2) to undertake in this mission, which is the mission of God in Christ [9]:

- (2.2.2.a) “to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God” and to bring all to repentance and faith;
- (2.2.2.b) “to teach, baptise and nurture new believers”, making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28.19) through the quickening power of the Holy Spirit [10] and drawing them into the one Body of Christ whose faith, calling and hope are one in the Lord (Ephesians 4.4-6);
- (2.2.2.c) “to respond to human need by loving service”, disclosing God’s reign through humble ministry to those most needy (Mark 10.42-45; Matthew 18.4; 25.31-45);
- (2.2.2.d) “to seek to transform unjust structures of society” as the Church stands vigilantly with Christ proclaiming both judgement and salvation to the nations of the world [11], and manifesting through our actions on behalf of God’s righteousness the Spirit’s transfiguring power [12];
- (2.2.2.e) “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth” as essential aspects of our mission in communion [13].

2.2.2.d The dispute-settling process proposed by the Covenant does not set the world an example of “transforming unjust structures”, since it fails to meet the standards of natural justice in its own procedures

(2.2.3) to engage in this mission with humility and an openness to our own ongoing conversion in the face of our unfaithfulness and failures in witness.

(2.2.4) to revive and renew structures for mission which will awaken and challenge the whole people of God to work, pray and give for the spread of the gospel.

(2.2.5) to order its mission in the joyful and reverent worship of God, thankful that in our eucharistic communion “Christ is the source and

8. IASCOME Report, ACC-13  
9. The five Marks of Mission are set out in the MISSIO Report of 1999, building on work at ACC-6 and ACC-8.  
10. *Church as Communion* n26  
11. WCC 1954 Evanston, *Christ the Hope of the World*  
12. Moscow Statement, 43  
13. IARCCUM, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, 118



3.This whole section lays too much emphasis on the place of bishops. It has been forgotten that in 1968 the Anglican Consultative Council was meant to replace the Lambeth Conference, so that the wider Church could be represented.African bishops rejected this later,but bishops are not the whole Church. If the Lambeth Conference had stopped,there would not have been the attribution of authority to it which it was never meant to have.

3.1.1 Incorporation “in Christ” has come to the surface in recent Pauline scholarship as of the first importance in understanding not only his ecclesiology, but indeed his whole theology

3.1.3 One of the tensions not reflected here is the belief in some parts of the Communion that the part played by bishops, particularly to “guard the faith”, means that the Primates should govern the Covenant process.

More widely,Anglicans have to hold together the episcopal and the synodical, and how this is done will inevitably be influenced by the local (secular) politics, as well as by how each bishop understands the exercise of power and authority

3.1.4 “Consensus fidelium”: see, for instance, Newman’s *On Consulting the Faithful on Matters of Doctrine*

3.1.4.I Communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury is definitive of intercommunion in the Anglican Communion. Some contest whether the focus of the Communion should continue to be the Archbishop of the English see of Canterbury

3.1.4.IV Report of the Windsor Continuation Group, 69. Synods again

3.2 Presumably a deemed failure to have complied with any one of the following subsections could be determined to constitute an “action incompatible with the Covenant”.The vagueness of language is an invitation to abuse of process

goal of the unity of the Church and of the renewal of human community” [14].

Section Three  
Our Unity and Common Life

3.1 Each Church affirms:

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

(3.1.2) its resolve to live in a Communion of Churches. Each Church, **with its bishops in synod**, orders and regulates its own affairs and its local responsibility for mission through its own system of government and law and is therefore described as living “in communion with autonomy and accountability” [15]. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, who calls and enables us to dwell in a shared life of common worship and prayer for one another, in mutual affection, commitment and service, we seek to affirm our common life through **those Instruments of Communion by which our Churches are enabled to be conformed together to the mind of Christ**. Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together “not by a **central legislative and executive authority**, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference” [16] and of the other instruments of Communion.

(3.1.3) the central role of **bishops as guardians** and teachers of faith, as leaders in mission, and as a visible sign of unity, representing the universal Church to the local, and the local Church to the universal, and the local Churches to one another. This ministry is exercised personally, collegially and within and for the eucharistic community. We receive and maintain the historic threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, ordained for service in the Church of God, as they call all the baptised into the mission of Christ.

(3.1.4) the importance of instruments in the Anglican Communion to assist in the discernment, articulation and exercise of our shared faith and common life and mission. The life of communion includes an ongoing engagement with the diverse expressions of apostolic authority, from synods and episcopal councils to local witness, in a way which continually interprets and articulates the common faith of the Church’s members (*consensus fidelium*). In addition to the many and varied links which sustain our life together, we acknowledge four particular Instruments at the level of the Anglican Communion which express this co-operative service in the life of communion.

I. We accord **the Archbishop of Canterbury**, as the bishop of the See of Canterbury with which Anglicans have historically been in communion, a primacy of honour and respect among the college of bishops in the Anglican Communion as first among equals (*primus inter pares*). **As a focus and means of unity**, the Archbishop gathers and works with the Lambeth Conference and Primates’ Meeting, and presides in the Anglican Consultative Council.

II. **The Lambeth Conference** expresses episcopal collegiality worldwide, and brings together the bishops for common worship, counsel, consultation and encouragement in their ministry of guarding the faith and unity of the Communion and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4.12) and mission.

III. The Anglican Consultative Council **is comprised of lay, clerical and episcopal representatives** from our Churches [17]. It facilitates the co-operative work of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, co-ordinates aspects of international Anglican ecumenical and mission work, calls the Churches into mutual responsibility and interdependence, and advises on developing provincial structures [18].

IV. The Primates’ Meeting is convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury for mutual support, prayer and counsel. The authority that Primates bring to the meeting arises from their own positions as the senior bishops of their Provinces, and the fact that they are in conversation with their own Houses of Bishops and located within their own synodical structures [19]. In the Primates’ Meeting, the Primates and Moderators are called to work as representatives of their Provinces in collaboration with one another in mission and in doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters that have Communion-wide implications.

It is the responsibility of each Instrument **to consult with, respond to, and support each other Instrument and the Churches of the Communion** [20]. Each Instrument may initiate and commend a process of discernment and a direction for the Communion and its Churches.

3.2 Acknowledging our interdependent life, each Church, reliant on the Holy Spirit, commits itself:

(3.2.1) **to have regard for the common good of the Communion in the exercise of its autonomy**, to support the work of the Instruments of Communion with the spiritual and material resources available to it, and to receive their work with a readiness to undertake reflection upon their counsels, and to endeavour to accommodate their recommendations.

3.1.2 It seems remarkable to say that it is the “Instruments of Communion” that “enable” us “to be conformed together to the mind of Christ”, and not the foundational disciplines of the Church, which hardly seem to rely on the Instruments of Unity: Bible study and preaching, teaching, reception of the sacraments, liturgical, private, and communal prayer; and so on

The Church of England does not regulate its own affairs, and is therefore not autonomous: it is subject to the Crown and to Parliament. That is why a Measure is necessary to adopt the Covenant

The Covenant would create precisely that “central legislative and executive authority” whose absence the 1930 Lambeth Conference extolled in the quoted passage

The Covenant Design Group spent a great deal of time on this, and it replaced the older form “episcopally led, synodically governed” because this was felt to be too misleading. Synods, in Anglicanism, always include the laity, and this phrase was adopted to show the importance of the laity in the governance of the Anglican Churches

3.1.4.II The Lambeth Conference is both understated and overstated. It is understated in not giving much attention to the effect of resolutions. It is overstated in treating it as an institutional feature of the Communion, which it is not. The overstating also conceals the sole power of invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury — crucial in 2008  
3.1.4.III has a stylistic error: “is comprised of”

The inclusion of lay participation once again

3.1.4.IV We should note that the four Instruments are facilitating rather than judicial. A strongly juridical element comes in Section 4

It would be useful, as the Covenant suggests, to clarify the role and authority of the four Instruments of Unity

3.2.1.This is an odd statement: what is the “autonomy” of the Communion?

The document emphasises the autonomy of each province, because responses to earlier drafts pointed out that Churches would not sign up to anything that passed authority to another body

Footnote 18 has a syntax error. Either the “cf.” ought not to be there, or “are” should read “as”. Further evidence of haste in preparation. Not to mention inconsistency of numbering subsections

14. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, WCC  
15. A Letter from Alexandria, the Primates, March 2009  
16. Lambeth Conference 1930  
17. Constitution of the ACC, Article 3 and Schedule  
18. cf. the Objects of the ACC are set out in Article 2 of its Constitution.  
19. Report of the Windsor Continuation Group, 69.  
20. cf IATDC, *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, paragraph 113



3.2.2 The obligation to respect another Church’s autonomy appears to extend to all Churches of the Communion, not only those others who have adopted the Covenant

3.2.3 It is at this point that the document approaches the “elephant in the room”: the actions of the Episcopal Church in the United States towards gay and lesbian people. In theory, the issue could also be discrimination against women, or the persecution of gay people in other parts of the Communion, but the defining aspect here is things considered to be “controversial or new” (3.2.3). We might remember that the abolition of slavery used to come into this category

3.2.5 This seems well put, in light of biblical and theological teaching down the ages on the sin of scandal

3.2.7 A reference to 2 Corinthians 5.14

4. The theology begins to dry up, and it is soon gone. Yet the tradition, and particularly the scriptures, have a great deal to say about how to handle disagreement in the Church. It seems almost as if the drafters have said: “This is too hard for theologians — call for the lawyers”  
We are now out of the realm of “principles” alone, and into the territory of “procedures” alongside principles. The tone and style of English changes significantly

4.1 It is clear how Provinces may adopt the Covenant, but not the continuing status within the Communion of those Churches that decline to do so

4.1.1 airs “interdependence”. Is that actually able to live with “autonomy”?

4.1.2 Surely a significant phrase — “consistent with”, not in accordance with, or in line with

4.1.5 Why would any Church currently outside the Anglican Communion wish to adopt the Covenant, except as part of actually applying to join the Communion? In which case, what is the point of this paragraph?

4.2.1 What is the work here of the word “enable”? It seems odd, given that recognition and communion exist without the Covenant

(3.2.2) **to respect the constitutional autonomy** of all of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, while upholding our mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ [21], and the responsibility of each to the Communion as a whole [22].

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

(3.2.4) to seek a **shared mind** with other Churches, through the Communion’s councils, about matters of common concern, in a way consistent with the Scriptures, the common standards of faith, and the canon laws of our churches. Each Church will undertake wide consultation with the other Churches of the Anglican Communion and with the Instruments and Commissions of the Communion.

(3.2.5) to act with diligence, care and caution in respect of any action which 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.

(3.2.6) in situations of conflict, to participate in mediated conversations, which involve face to face meetings, agreed parameters and a willingness to see such processes through.

(3.2.7) to have in mind that our bonds of affection and **the love of Christ compel us** always to uphold the highest degree of communion possible.

Section Four  
Our Covenanted Life Together

Each Church affirms the following **principles and procedures**, and, reliant on the Holy Spirit, commits itself to their implementation:

4.1 Adoption of the Covenant

(4.1.1) Each Church adopting this Covenant affirms that it enters into the Covenant as a commitment to relationship in submission to God. Each Church **freely** offers this commitment to other Churches in order to live more fully into the ecclesial communion and **interdependence** which is foundational to the Churches of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion is a fellowship, within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, of national or regional Churches, in which each recognises in the others the bonds of a common loyalty to Christ expressed through a common faith and order, a shared inheritance in worship, life and mission, and a readiness to live in an interdependent life.

(4.1.2) In adopting the Covenant for itself, 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. It recognises these elements as foundational for the life of the Anglican Communion and therefore for the relationships among the covenanting Churches.

(4.1.3) Such mutual commitment does not represent submission to any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Nothing in this Covenant of itself shall be deemed to alter any provision of the Constitution and Canons of any Church of the Communion, or to limit its autonomy of governance. The Covenant does not grant to any one Church or any agency of the Communion control or direction over any Church of the Anglican Communion.

(4.1.4) Every Church of the Anglican Communion, as recognised in accordance with the Constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council, is invited to enter into this Covenant according to its own constitutional procedures.

(4.1.5) The Instruments of Communion may invite other Churches to adopt the Covenant using the same procedures as set out by the Anglican Consultative Council for the amendment of its schedule of membership. Adoption of this Covenant does not confer any right of recognition by, or membership of, the Instruments of Communion, which shall be decided by those Instruments themselves.

(4.1.6) This Covenant becomes active for a Church when that Church adopts the Covenant through the procedures of its own Constitution and Canons.

4.2 The Maintenance of the Covenant and Dispute Resolution

(4.2.1) The Covenant operates to express the common commitments and mutual accountability which hold each Church in the relationship of communion one with another. **Recognition of, and fidelity to, this Covenant, enable mutual recognition and communion**. Participation in the Covenant implies a recognition by each Church of those elements which must be maintained in its own life and for which it is accountable to the Churches with which it is in Communion in order to sustain the relationship expressed in this Covenant.

(4.2.2) The Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, shall monitor the functioning of the Covenant in the life of the

3.2.2 The Covenant is not a centralising document, a concept that it repeatedly disavows

3.2.3 This seems well put

Is that “shared discernment in the life of” the local autonomous Church, or the universal Church, or some invented construct in between?

Again, the commitment to patient engagement, to process, and not definition of doctrine

3.2.4 “Shared mind” is the obverse of “incompatible with the Covenant”. Politics rather than theology will determine what is compatible

3.2.6 Would a refusal to participate in such mediation processes constitute, of itself, action “incompatible with the Covenant”?

3.2.7 The moral and spiritual force of the Covenant comes here, with regard to the bonds of affection and upholding the highest degree of communion possible; but it is not clear whether this applies only to those accused of being “controversial or new”, or, some might say, to those who want to employ what is now in Section 4

4. There is a long way to go in terms of working out how we relate truth and love, and express that in terms of structures, and doctrinal and ethical discipline. Section 4 does not now bear the weight of the expectations it did, and this does need to be recognised by those who want more and those for whom this is all too much

4.1.1 “Freely” — this is fanciful, given the envisaged sense of “sign up to this or else” which will follow such a “procedure”, and given that those who choose to dissociate themselves from the Covenant will “trigger the provisions set out in section 4.2”

What will this achieve? Churches in different cultures are bound to go in different ways as the process of indigenisation proceeds. The basic need is to accept each other in diversity. There is a need to trust and accept what other Churches are doing

4.1.3 This denies what it is seeking to do; for it proposes submission to a higher authority. We need a much deeper understanding of a dispersed authority: not a centralised one, but one that is based on mutual acceptance

This is here to make sure no one can argue that the Covenant is about centralisation

4.1.5 As to those currently outside the Communion, the provision in 4.1.5. raises all kinds of questions: if, as some suppose, this could mean inviting the new alternative Anglican church in North America (ACNA) to adopt the Covenant, what status — notwithstanding what it says here about other membership implications — would follow for that Church in contrast with others which have refused such adoption?

4.2 Here is where the Covenant itself becomes “new and controversial”. For the first time, there are to be requirements that, if not met, will result in a decision by a central body, the Standing Committee (4.2.2), on “relational consequences” (4.2.7)

For some, no body such as this should have such power in our kind of Communion; while for others, such a synodical body would usurp the role of the Primates

21. Toronto Congress 1963, and the Ten Principles of Partnership  
22. cf. the Schedule to the Dar es Salaam Communiqué of the Primates’ Meeting, February 2007



4.2.3 An important question is how this squares with 4.1.3, “Such mutual commitment does not represent submission to any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction”

4.2.4 Some see the “relational consequences” as too weak. Others see them as ultimately juridical, and therefore a totally inappropriate means of resolving conflict: if, as is said at the beginning, communion derives from the Trinity rather than an organisational constitution, breaking that communion in this way is a very serious matter indeed

“Relational consequences”: George Orwell wrote in his 1946 essay “Politics and the English Language” that ugly English often cloaks ugly purposes. “Political dialects . . . are all alike in that one almost never finds in them a fresh, vivid, homemade turn of speech . . . simplify your English [and] when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself.”

It is difficult to see how the logic of the Covenant, from this point on, cannot but stand against change and development. The ordination of women provides a good test-case for this and other clauses: would Provinces have been forbidden from ordaining women (a “controversial action”) if the Covenant had been in place 40 years ago; and would they have been ejected if they had done so?

4.2.7 The autonomy of member Churches means that each is free to decide whether or not to apply any sanction

Is this a form of measuring how far the horse has bolted rather than locking the door?

4.2.9 The C of E does not appear to have any such mechanisms etc. in place, or planned to implement the undertakings it is here required to give. This paragraph appears to oblige it to set something up

So the Churches are to spend more time creating new structures and mechanisms — as if they did not have enough already

4.4.1 The status of the Introduction is defined by this paragraph, but its content adds little value

Our Declaration Will the Covenant be brought into, say, declarations of assent or consecration oaths, in provinces? If not, what happens when, ten years from signing, a House of Bishops somewhere, when asked to bring some contentious matter into covenantal consultation, responds by saying that they themselves had never signed the Covenant and do not feel bound by it?

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Anglican Communion on behalf of the Instruments. In this regard, the Standing Committee shall be supported by such other committees or commissions as may be **mandated** to assist in carrying out this function and to advise it on questions relating to the Covenant.

(4.2.3) When questions arise relating to the meaning of the Covenant, or about the compatibility of an action by a covenanting Church with the Covenant, **it is the duty of each covenanting Church to seek to live out the commitments of section 3.2.** Such questions may be raised by a Church itself, another covenanting Church or the Instruments of Communion.

(4.2.4) Where a shared mind has not been reached, the matter shall be referred to the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee shall make every effort to facilitate agreement, and may take advice from such bodies as it deems appropriate to determine a view on the nature of the matter at question and those **relational consequences** which may result. Where appropriate, the Standing Committee shall refer the question to both the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting for advice.

(4.2.5) The Standing Committee may request a Church to defer a controversial action. If a Church declines to defer such action, the Standing Committee may recommend to any Instrument of Communion relational consequences which may specify a provisional limitation of participation in, or suspension from, that Instrument until the completion of the process set out below.

(4.2.6) On the basis of advice received from the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, the Standing Committee may make a declaration that an action or decision is or would be **“incompatible with the Covenant”**.

(4.2.7) On the basis of the advice received, the Standing Committee shall make recommendations as to relational consequences which flow from an action incompatible with the Covenant. These recommendations may be addressed to the Churches of the Anglican Communion or to the Instruments of the Communion and address the extent to which the decision of any covenanting Church impairs or limits the communion between that Church and the other Churches of the Communion, and the practical consequences of such impairment or limitation. Each Church or each Instrument shall determine whether or not to accept such recommendations.

(4.2.8) Participation in the decision-making of the Standing Committee or of the Instruments of Communion in respect to section 4.2 shall be limited to those members of the Instruments of Communion who are representatives of those Churches who have adopted the Covenant, or who are still in the process of adoption.

(4.2.9) Each Church undertakes to put into place such **mechanisms**, agencies or institutions, consistent with its own Constitution and Canons, as can undertake to oversee the maintenance of the affirmations and commitments of the Covenant in the life of that Church, and to relate to the Instruments of Communion on matters pertinent to the Covenant.

4.3 *Withdrawing from the Covenant*

(4.3.1) Any covenanting Church may decide to withdraw from the Covenant. Although such withdrawal does not imply an automatic withdrawal from the Instruments of Communion or a repudiation of its Anglican character, it may raise a question relating to the meaning of the Covenant, and of compatibility with the principles incorporated within it, and trigger the provisions set out in section 4.2 above.

4.4 *The Covenant Text and its amendment*

(4.4.1) The Covenant consists of the text set out in this document in the Preamble, Sections One to Four and the Declaration. The Introduction to the Covenant Text, which shall always be annexed to the Covenant text, is not part of the Covenant, but shall be accorded authority in understanding the purpose of the Covenant.

(4.4.2) Any covenanting Church or Instrument of Communion may submit a proposal to amend the Covenant to the Instruments of Communion through the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee shall send the proposal to the Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates’ Meeting, the covenanting Churches and any other body as it may consider appropriate for advice. The Standing Committee shall make a recommendation on the proposal in the light of advice offered, and submit the proposal with any revisions to the covenanting Churches. The amendment is operative when ratified by three-quarters of such Churches. The Standing Committee shall adopt a procedure for promulgation of the amendment.

Our Declaration

With joy and with firm resolve, we declare our Churches to be partakers in this Anglican Communion Covenant, offering ourselves for fruitful service and binding ourselves more closely in the truth and love of Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever. Amen.

“Now may the God of Peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13.20, 21)

Note: The Standing Committee requested that the following statement from the Covenant Working Party Commentary on Revisions to Section 4 be highlighted at the end of the Text of the Anglican Communion Covenant as it appears on the Anglican Communion website: “ . . . the Standing Committee derives its authority from its responsibility to the two Instruments of Communion which elects its membership, and on whose behalf it acts” (Section 4.2).

4.2.2 Mandated by whom? Is this an attempt to give some jurisdictional authority/power to e.g. the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO)?

4.2.4 With the actual presenting issue, what would a split vote on the Standing Committee imply?

This phrase is not intended as a circumlocution for “punishment”. Rather, it acknowledges that actions have consequences, offence can be taken, and relationships can be strained. The question is: can such reactions be moderated by a system of consultation and advice?

4.2.5 Recent actions taken unilaterally by the Anglican Communion Office to downgrade members of IASCUFO to “consultants” show that a Covenant is not necessary to apply sanctions of the type envisaged — and arbitrarily

No more than a recommendation. The Standing Committee cannot direct any Church, but merely advise it

4.2.6 “The Standing Committee . . . ‘incompatible with the Covenant’.” This is juridical power

What is “incompatible with the Covenant”? Is it (a) what key people say is incompatible, or (b) what a sufficient vote says is incompatible? There is no objective standard, and no process for a review of, an appeal against, a decision

Would consecration of gay bishops be “incompatible”?

4.2.8 This clause serves to put pressure on the “progressive” Churches to sign up

The power given to the Standing Committee seems to be enormous, which is deeply problematic

4.4.2 This permits amendments to the Covenant to take effect without the prior approval of all the provincial Churches. Shades of the rows with the European Union over constitutional changes to European Treaties

Note It is important to note that the Standing Committee is not a free-standing body: it represents, serves, and is responsible to the ACC and the Primates. Hence this footnote