

THE ANGLICAN
COMMUNION COVENANT:
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH SHOULD
NOT ADOPT IT

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PROVINCE IV SYNOD

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METHOD OF PRESENTING

1. Need to understand Covenant in itself and how it will work to make an informed judgment to adopt or not
2. Assumes some knowledge of Final Draft Covenant and the history of the Covenant
3. Focus on the Covenant itself with quotes from it (underscored for emphasis)
4. How sub-sections of the Covenant relate to each other
5. How provisions of the Covenant will have an impact in practice

OUTLINE

1. Anglican Communion as a Family of Churches
2. Covenant creates two “classes” of Churches
3. Now You See It; Now You Don’t
 - A. Context vs. Uniformity
 - B. Autonomy vs. Accountability and Discipline
4. Centralizing Power in Instruments of Communion
5. Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion
 - A. Jurisdiction and Powers
 - B. “Incompatible with the Covenant”
 - C. Lack of Due Process
 - D. The Real “Teeth” in the Actions of SCAC

OUTLINE – 2

6. Impact on a Church's Autonomy in Fact (not in Theory)
7. What If ? – Some scenarios
8. Why TEC Should Not Adopt
9. Outline of an Alternative to this Covenant

Anglican Communion as Family – 1

“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...” (Introduction # 4)

“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.” (Introduction # 7)

Anglican Communion as Family – 2

“As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we embrace challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional, and international levels.”

(Sec.2.1.4)

“The Covenant can be understood as a description of life in the Anglican family. It contains an agreement about what the family’s values are, what its purpose is, and how it lives together.” (Official TACC Study Guide p. 1.)

“Family” is a Good Model

- Churches of the Anglican Communion are like adult siblings (or perhaps, adult cousins)
- Bound together by common ancestry and affection
- In healthy families, adult siblings don't tell each other what to do or end relationships over decisions about marriage, raising children, etc.
- Ask one's siblings to enter a Covenant of Kinship?? (Legalistic “solution” to a relationship problem)
- Set up a structure in which a designated “authority” can make “recommendations about relational consequences” that other siblings must follow?

The Covenant Creates Divisions

- GAFCON already rejected the Covenant
- Creates two “classes” of Churches in the Anglican Communion – those who covenant and the others
- Recognized in Preamble of 12/09 Final Draft (“We as Churches of the Anglican Communion” rather than “We the Churches” as in prior drafts)
- Ireland and S.E. Asia have “subscribed” and “acceded” with conditions. Adding “conditions” leads to further fragmentation and posturing

“Recognition” of Different Contexts – 1

“Each Church affirms ... 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.” (Sec. 1.1.6)

“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....” (Sec. 3.1.2)

“Recognition” of Different Contexts – 2

“The churches of the Anglican Communion live out this shared faith in many different contexts. The application of the faith may vary, depending on the needs of the mission of God in these different places.” (Official Study Guide, p. 6)

A Single Orthodoxy and Tradition – 1

“Common understanding of faith and order we [Covenanting Churches] have received” (Intro. #5)

“Our faith embodies a coherent testimony to what we have received from God’s Word and the Church’s long-standing witness.” (Intro. #7)

Each Church affirms ... “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.” (Sec. 1.1.2)

A Single Orthodoxy and Tradition – 2

Each Church ... “commits itself ... to uphold and proclaim a pattern [singular] of Christian theological and moral reasoning and discipline that is rooted in and answerable to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the catholic tradition.” (Sec. 1.2.2)

Each Church ... “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. (Sec. 4.1.1)

No Change in Anglican Communion; No Loss of Autonomy – 1

“To covenant together is not intended to change the character of this Anglican expression of Christian faith.” (Intro. # 5)

“Each Church ... commits itself ... to respect the constitutional autonomy of all of the Churches of the Anglican Communion.” (Sec. 3.2.2)

No Change in Anglican Communion; No Loss of Autonomy – 2

“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.” (Sec. 4.1.3)

Accountability and Discipline – 1

“We recognise ... the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God’s promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation.” (Intro. # 4)

“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’ [\[15\]](#)”. (Sec. 3.1.2)

Accountability and Discipline – 2

“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.” (Sec. 4.2.1)

Centralization of Power – Virginia Report 1997

- 5.20 The world-wide Anglican assemblies are consultative and not legislative in character. There is a question to be asked whether this is satisfactory if the Anglican Communion is to be held together in hard times as well as in good ones. Indeed there is a question as to whether effective communion, at all levels, does not require appropriate instruments, with due safeguards, not only for legislation, but also for oversight. Is not universal authority a necessary corollary of universal communion? This is a matter currently under discussion with our ecumenical partners. It relates not only to our understanding of the exercise of authority in the Anglican Communion, but also to the kind of unity and communion we look for in a visibly united Church.

Centralization of Power

“...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.” (Sec. 3.1.2)

“Each Church affirms ... 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.” Sec. 3.1.4

Centralization of Power

“Each Church commits itself ... 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 (Sec. 3.2.1) ... [and] to seek a shared mind with other Churches, through the Communion’s councils, about matters of common concern....(Sec. 3.2.4)

The Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion

- Formerly known as the “Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting”
- “The Standing Committee is a 14-member group (15, if the Archbishop of Canterbury is present, as he is an ex officio member, as well as being its President). Seven of its members are elected by the members of the ACC, and five are members of the Primates’ Standing Committee. The other two members are the Chair and Vice-Chair of the ACC, elected by the members in plenary session. Their function is together to assist the Churches of the Anglican Communion in advancing the work of their mission worldwide.”

www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/scac/index.cfm

“Jurisdiction” of SCAC

“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 Anglican Communion on behalf of the Instruments.” (Sec. 4.2.2)

“Where a shared mind has not been reached [regarding the meaning of the Covenant or the compatibility of **an action** by a covenanting Church with the Covenant] the matter shall be referred to the Standing Committee.” (Sec. 4.2.3 and .4)

What Actions Can Come to the SCAC?

Standard for determining issues or actions that may be brought to the Standing Committee is vague and subjective:

“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.” (Sec. 3.2.5)

Powers of SCAC (Sec. 4.2)

- Facilitate agreement
- Take advice from whomever it chooses
- Refer the question to the ACC or PM for advice
- Request Church to defer taking action [indefinitely]
- Recommend “relational consequences” to the IOCs if the Offending Church does not defer its action
- Based on advice from the ACC and the PM, declare that an action or decision is or would be “incompatible with the Covenant,” and recommend “relational consequences” to the IOCs or the other Churches of the Anglican Communion

Many Bases For SCAC's Finding a Church's Action "Incompatible with the Covenant"

- Contrary to Scripture and the catholic and apostolic faith (1.2.1)
- Contrary to "Christian theological and moral reasoning and discipline that is rooted in and answerable to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the catholic tradition" (1.2.2)
- Fails to uphold "the highest degree of communion possible" (3.2.7)

More Bases For SCAC To Find a Church's Action "Incompatible with the Covenant"

- Fails to "have regard for the common good of the Communion in the exercise of its autonomy or to support the work of the Instruments of Communion with the spiritual and material resources available to it.... " (3.2.1)
- Examples: an act against the counsel of Lambeth Conference Resolution I.10 of 1998 or failing to contribute enough funds to the IOCs (3.2.1)
- Fails "to act with diligence care and caution in respect of [an] action which may provoke controversy or threaten the unity of the Communion" (3.2.5)

Examples of “Relational Consequences”

- Suspension from Anglican Consultative Council
- Suspension from participation in Primates’ Meeting
- Suspension from ecumenical conversations
- Non-invitation to Lambeth Conference

- Q: Could SCAC recommend that Church X refuse table fellowship with Church Y ?

SCAC's Lack of Due Process

- “Bases” for violations of Covenant require (by definition) subjective judgments by SCAC
- “Standards” for SCAC’s decisions are so vague and imprecise as to lead to arbitrary decisions
- No explicit right of the Offending Church to be heard
- SCAC has full discretion over its own procedures and timetables
- No time limit on deferral of Offending Church’s action
- No appeal from SCAC’s “declaration of incompatibility with the Covenant”
- SCAC is an appointed body, not an elected one

SCAC “Only Recommends” ... BUT

- Section 4.2.3 requires all Churches “live out the commitments of Section 3.2” when a question arises
- Other Churches must “endeavour to accommodate the recommendations” of the IOCs (Sec. 3.2.1) or be in violation of the Covenant themselves
- Declaration that a Church’s action is or would be “Incompatible with the Covenant” gives the Offending Church a Hobson’s Choice:
 - Rescind the Action
 - Accept the “Relational Consequences”
- Rescinding actions means the Church really isn’t autonomous; the Higher Authority [SCAC] reviews decisions made by the Church

Reasons TEC Might Rescind an Action

- TEC's Preamble to its Constitution recites that it “is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury....”
- TEC must not be in violation of its own Constitution
- TEC might well have to rescind to be a “constituent” member in communion with the See of Canterbury
- Q: If the TEC were in “impaired communion” under “relational consequences,” what impact might this have in litigation with breakaway parishes in TEC?

Covenant's Impact on Diocesan Bishops

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral affirms “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.” This is an important value to TEC.

TEC Bishops must be cautious under Sec. 3.2.5 not to “provoke controversy,” and run the risk of being second-guessed by (and accountable to) persons who did not elect them about whether their actions are “incompatible with the Covenant.” Bishops may have to decide if their actions (or those of their Diocese) should be rescinded or to accept “relational consequences.”³⁰

What If ?

- TEC continues to consider Blessing Same-Gender Unions under Resolution 2009 C056 and proceeds to the next phase of the Blessings Project?
- The Anglican Covenant was in effect in the 1970's when TEC was considering the ordination of women? The consecration of women bishops?
- TEC continues to allow the nomination or election as bishops of homosexual persons in long term committed relationships?

Why TEC Should Not Adopt – 1

- Sections 1 to 3 are not consistent with the Anglican Tradition as experienced in the TEC's context
 - Church of England Historic Formularies – not for TEC
 - Statements supporting “Uniform Anglicanism”
 - Statements about accountability and discipline
- TEC will be accused of violating from the start. See #17 of the Southeast Asia Preamble to its Letter of Accession www.anglican.org.sg/index.php/blog/comments/preamble_to_the_letter_of_accession_province_of_southeast_asia
- Adopting the Covenant with “conditions” (as some others have done) leads to more fragmentation of the Communion

Why TEC Should Not Adopt – 2

- Adopting the Covenant “legitimizes” SCAC’s authority and procedures; it is better to live with arbitrary shunnings than “legally recommended” ones that others must obey in fact under 3.2.1
- It changes our ecclesiology by reducing our autonomy in fact (as opposed to “autonomy in theory”)
- Covenant does not recognize the ministry of the laity --
“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.” (Sec. 3.1.3)

Why TEC Should Not Adopt – 3

- The Covenant invites triangulation (by involving SCAC) rather than dialogue among Churches
- While the Covenant contains some good parts, the bad parts taint the whole.
- Power of SCAC to make “determinations” and “recommendations” will lead to greater Centralized Authority. Centralized Authority is contrary to the Traditions of Anglicanism
 - Inconsistent with the Church of England’s break from Rome and refusal to permit foreign control of English Church matters
 - Inconsistent with The Episcopal Church’s break with England after the American Revolution

Why TEC Should Not Adopt – 4

- Community of Anglican communities characterized by respect, care, support, dialogue and common service would be better than the artificial “unity” (a community with one theological culture) envisioned by the Covenant and enforced by the SCAC and IOCs
- “Unity” does not require uniformity or conformity
- Declining or deferring may lead to meaningful conversations among Provinces to develop a better Covenant

OUTLINE OF AN ALTERNATIVE COVENANT

1. Revise Introduction and Sections 1 through 3 to contain only those theological understandings that are in fact shared by all Churches in the Anglican Communion; remove references to accountability and discipline
2. Establish processes for dialogue (such as Indaba) between Churches for increased understanding and common mission even if the Churches do not agree on all matters of theology or its application
3. Incorporate the Covenant For Mission as a central value of the Anglican Communion