

## THE ANGLICAN COVENANT

### **A Response from the Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean.**

#### **To the Most Revd Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury**

Six of the seven dioceses of the Province of the Indian Ocean, because of their geographical location, permanently face the risks of being hit and destroyed by cyclones. It is a fact that because of its comprehensive nature, the Anglican Communion, like our islands is always at risk of being hit and potentially threatened to be destroyed.

Let us now reflect on how we, here, islanders in this part of the world, have been able to face and challenge those realities and embrace the new learnings that have emerged from them while confronting them with vigor, wisdom and a renewed sense of hope.

In the 1960's, one of those islands, Mauritius, of which I am a native, experienced a moment of great distress when it was brought to its knees after the passage of "Carol", one of the worse cyclones ever recorded.

Severe gusts of wind crushed down our most essential infrastructures and thousands of Mauritians became homeless overnight. It was unthinkable that, as a nation, we would grow out of this experience stronger and capable of giving ourselves new life and hope and meaning. To-day, as one of the leading African nations, we have been able to overcome risky situations by our constant willingness to construct our lives on new foundations. These foundations have been built and secured because we have been willing to challenge those unfortunate realities. We would not have escaped destruction if we had unintelligently ignored them. So, with a sense of pride and patriotic zeal, we seriously set ourselves to start anew, by accepting what we had learned from those realities.

We find ourselves to-day in a period of the history of our Communion where dark clouds, like the ones prevailing under cyclonic conditions, are brooding over the Church.

But, there is a way by which we can face up to the storm. As we go through the "eye of the storm", period of calm, reflection and consolidation, we have to learn to welcome the stranger in our midst. A time when we learn to talk not to each other but with each other.

There is now an urgency for all the stake holders of this Communion to deal with the stranger that is within ourselves. This will sustain us in the next step which requires us to embrace the stranger in the other. The stranger is Christ incarnate in the knitting of the "Communion" tapestry.

Christ will meet us on our way to "Emmaus" – Transformation is then experienced.

This way of doing the “Emmaus Theology” will help us to look beyond our structures which at times limit the scope of collaborative unity. The structural nature of our polity at Provincial level tends to affirm one’s own identity and prevents the whole from being prominent over the part. It is imperative to shift from a particular “structural mode” to an all-embracing “relational one”. We are called, as Richard Hooker reminds us, “to hold together each to serve each other’s good, and all to prefer the good of the whole before whatsoever their own particular”.

The challenge now is to discover what is needed to foster such a mentality in the Communion. In his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul lays emphasis upon the fact that we are earthen vessels which contain a treasure.

The “Communion” is another jar of clay which holds a treasure which shows that the all surpassing power is from God. We cannot afford to-day to supersede this power on our own. This is a time where we are hard-pressed, perplexed, struck down, but are we not imbued with the life of Jesus that gives life to our mortal bodies? Life is at work with us so there is a need to bring restoration and renewal. With an urge to be more relational, yet structural, and to be faithful to the spirit of the “Windsor Report”, we have to mould ourselves as “ambassadors of reconciliation” if we wish to bring the Good News of God to the “*agora*”, to the alienated world, to the alienated Church.

So, we bishops, clergy and people of the Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean are firmly convinced that the proposal Anglican Covenant is crucial to maintain a world wide communion of churches. It will help us as a “communion” to engage in a process of mutual consultation leading to a consensus on the basics of faith and practice necessary to maintain communion. It is a tool to discourage those churches who make radical innovations in a unilateral fashion.

The covenant, as we assess it, is that it is a comprehensive strategy which places on local churches the charge to decide whether they shall or shall not be a component of the Communion. The instruments of Unity and the actual distinctness of the Anglican Faith and practice such as the Lambeth quadrilateral have been unable by themselves to hold the Communion together. So, our distinctness as Anglicans needs a consensus of faith and a new agreement which will act as a tool of authority as we face theological disputes and in the exercise of holding together the various provinces.

We cannot afford today to sacrifice global communion to favour the decisions of local provinces. This leads to an intensification of the momentum towards schism.

As we see it today, we note that some established provinces of the west are deeply penetrated by the philosophy of pluralism and the theory that generates it.

But as we analyse it closely, we have difficulty to understand the scope of tolerance that it conveys. Rejecting the Covenant becomes therefore an expression of exclusion that puts at stake the authentic expression of Apostolic Faith. The Anglican Covenant enables us to build up a consensus and a confidence about the essentials of Christian faith, an imperative for the life and order of worldwide church.

Without this consensus in faith and practice that the covenant represents, we shall continue to be challenged by western imperialism.

The adoption of and Anglican Covenant gives us an opportunity to renew our commitment to the basics of apostolic faith and to develop a suitably Christian and Anglican process for engaging and settling debates about the common boundaries of faith and practice.

Tolerance within a framework is possible when church life is justly determined on mutually agreed principles. This will help us to discourage unilateral imposition and diminish the extension of a western cultural hegemony.

So, as the past is our teacher, the Mauritian Experience of “Cyclone Carol” is one of transformation. The shattered houses made of wood and corrugated iron sheets have been replaced by concrete buildings.

Therefore, the Covenant is a concrete way by which we can consolidate our life as a Communion.