

A Provincial Response from the Church in Wales
To the Saint Andrews Draft of the Anglican Covenant

Question One. *Is the Province able to give an “in principle” commitment to the Covenant process at this time (without committing itself to the details of any text)?*

The Church in Wales is able to affirm its commitment to the process of the Covenant, without committing itself to the details of any text. However, it would be fair to say that the response across the Province is varied and complex. Some find the very concept of a Covenant difficult, whilst others have concerns about its nature (and in particular the danger of it being punitive rather than relational). Others recognise the need for a Covenant although it would only be fair to point out that the earlier version of the Covenant was only noted by the Governing Body.

It is also our view that:

- The covenant process ought to be dynamic. It should allow for the possibility of movement and development in matters of doctrine, and should be a process which allows for an understanding of the truth as continually moving and evolving in the ongoing story of salvation and which at the same time remains faithful to the tradition received. In its perception of the truth every generation will inevitably create new boundaries. This could be described as the dynamic praxis which directs Anglican life. It should always be mindful of the role of the Holy Spirit, the needs of the human person, the evolving nature of context and of the historical process all of which should inform the way we think about specific moral issues.
- Retaining and reinforcing the ‘Via Media’ aspect of Anglican identity is of great significance. The challenge consists in our being able to steer a middle way between Anglicanism on the one hand developing a Curia and on the other hand accepting what might be called Confessionalism. We need to hold things in tension while allowing flexibility.
- Much Anglican theology in recent years in the West has stressed the meeting of the claims of the modern world by an Anglicanism that combines order and freedom. This must not be lost. This is at the heart of an Anglican ‘Via Media’. This should not impair our local autonomy but should permit a process of addressing issues that affect the wider Communion in a relational and mediatory way and which always seeks the good of the province or diocese. The ‘Via Media’ approach was

criticised by Newman as lacking the ability to develop.¹ In some ways we are a provisional church as we await not only unification into the 'great church' inclusive of all Christians, but also the fulfilment of all things in Christ (*eschaton*).

Authority: This is a subject which recurred in the context of all three of the questions put to us but which is particularly relevant to our answer to question one

- ***Authority in the Instruments of Communion.*** The Anglican concept of authority is a dispersed one focused through conciliarity. The post-Reformation conciliar model which includes theologians, laity, clergy and bishops is essential to the exercise of authority. The existing Instruments of Communion, and any which might be developed in the future (e.g. Canon Law), should be set within this conciliar model. The proper exercising and distribution of authority across the various Instruments of Communion is essential to maintaining a *Via Media* Church.² A developed ACC would be the best expression of such a model. It would represent the Communion in the three houses of bishops, clergy and laity and its authority would be focused through the Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The primates, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, would provide checks and balances to authority from within this conciliar model. Building on the work of reconciliation undertaken in the preceding months, a relational and theological approach to Canon Law would help to facilitate an international Anglican Canon Law which would ultimately be accepted by individual provinces. The first 'building block' in the form of a common 'ius communio' already exists and is mirrored in the good practice described in many provincial constitutions.
- ***Authority as involved with Relationships.*** The exercising of authority should be modelled on participatory and egalitarian principles (team-building is again important here) while recognising that many provinces may find this particular model of authority challenging. This is one area where making allowances for contextual difference is crucial. For this to be possible, a considerable amount of work will need to be done beforehand (i.e. during the 'moratorium' period) in the sphere of relationship building, forgiveness and reconciliation before this is possible, especially if we are to avoid the kind of vagueness and ambiguity which trigger further conflicts in the future. We already have

¹ Morris, Jeremy. N. (Fall 2003). "Newman and Maurice on the Via Media of the Anglican Church: Contrasts and Affinities". *Anglican Theological Review*.

² Catholic Christianity is described in the scriptures, defined in theology and creeds, mediated in word and sacrament, and verified in the life of the faithful (the consensus fidelium). The 1948 Lambeth Committee Report on the Anglican Communion argues that dispersed authority is the result of this process of mediation. Episcopal authority is part of this process, and once divorced from this process it is in danger of being separate from the life of the church. There must therefore be a close relationship between pastoral care and episcopal authority.

an example of this kind of ambiguity in the premature attempt at Windsor to reconcile autonomy and communion ('autonomy-in-communion') which so far has not been very successful. We want to be a Communion and not simply a Federation. Authority, properly exercised, reinforces good relationships through reconciliation and restoration both of which require the establishment of certain boundaries ('checks and balances'). The Covenant should therefore provide for disciplinary measures which are relational and potentially restorative rather than punitive. A basic canonical principle is the restoration of the individual and group.

- **Authority and Contextuality** The exercising of authority should take account of contextuality. The increased moral ambiguity of the western world produces disagreement as to how to respond to this and, further, produces complexity as people divide into groups about how to respond. Such complexity must be recognised as needing an adequate response. Simplistic notions of authority fail to answer this point. Instead, the development of participation is crucial.
- **Authority and the challenge of GAFCON.** This body is led by a Council of Primates but will this promote or hinder the re-building of good relationships within GAFCON itself (which has disagreements of its own) or within the Anglican Communion? Does such a hierarchical model promote trust? Mutual accountability should temper the need for a 'top down' hierarchical model. Submitting to one another is not about passive acquiescence but is part of an active taking of responsibility for the good of the whole Communion and for the good of those with whom we disagree, without patronising them.

Question Two *Is it possible to give some indication of any synodical process which would have to be undertaken in order to adopt the Covenant in the fullness of time?*

If the Covenant is to be accepted by the Church in Wales, then it has to be by Bill procedure through the Governing Body, its supreme legislative authority. The Constitution of the Church in Wales recognises that it is part of the Anglican Communion which it defines as "a family of churches, within the Catholic Church of Christ, maintaining apostolic doctrine and order and in full communion with one another and with the See of Canterbury"³. Nevertheless it is an autonomous church and for there to be any major changes to its self understanding, it requires a two thirds majority in each of its three houses of bishops, clergy and laity. Before this process takes place, it may also decide to refer the matter for consultation to the dioceses.

³ Volume 2 of *The Book of Common Prayer (1984)*, page 692.

Question 3 *In considering the St.Andrew's Draft for an Anglican Covenant, are there any elements which would need extensive changes in order to make the process of synodical adoption viable?*

The Indaba Reflections Group summarises the concerns which would be shared by many in the Church in Wales:

"In particular:

- *The biblical and theological bases of the Covenant need to be clarified and developed in a more profound way.*
- *The proposed Covenant is formulaic rather than relational, and could thereby prove punitive, restrictive and limiting, rather than facilitating unity.*
- *The Instruments of Communion could become micro-managers.*
- *There is concern that this Covenant process could prove expensive to implement and concern as to who would pay for it.*
- *There is concern that the Province rather than the Diocese might become the local church. There is also some uncertainty as to how Provinces might relate to the Communion.*
- *Our modality is historically the "bishop-in-synod" rather than "episcopally led and synodically governed".*
- *The broad sweep of the text reads as a very Western document.*
- *The position of the United Churches is not addressed.*
- *What happens if the Church of England is the offending church?*
- *The appendix is particularly seen as over-detailed and an instrument of punitive measures.*
- *There is a danger that we are simply papering-over the problems, whereas healing needs to take place first.*
- *The Instruments of Communion need time to evolve before we can be sure what form a Covenant should take.*

*Suggestions: The Covenant could be a more generous document, couched as an invitation. It should be an instrument of listening before anything else. We need to steward ourselves to give attention to the "bonds" as well as the "affection". We ought to ask "What can we do for the Communion?" not vice versa."*⁴

There is also a very difficult Constitutional issue which the Church in Wales would face – its willingness to surrender its autonomy to an outside body. In recent years, it has revised its Constitution over the election of bishops so that the final say should the Electoral College fail to elect to a particular See, would lie with its Bench of Bishops and not the Archbishop of Canterbury as hitherto. It is also about to revise its disciplinary procedures so that there can be no appeal to anyone outside its own structures. The question then arises as to whether it would be willing to surrender its autonomy in matters of faith,

⁴ *Lambeth Indaba Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008, paragraphs 140 and 141.*

doctrine or morals at a time when it has made itself more autonomous in other areas? (We are not talking here about revising the apostolic and Nicene creeds.) The Provincial Secretary of the Church of England, William Fittall, put his finger on the dilemma for his church at the 2007 Synod of that church. He was talking about the Nassau draft of the Covenant but the point holds good for any Covenant and applies to the Church in Wales as well since the latter would be delegating its decision-making powers to an outside body, be it Primates, the ACC or the Archbishop of Canterbury. In other words, it would be giving others “the ability to give direction about the course of action that the Church in Wales should take”. The present appendix gives that power to others and could prove problematic.