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[Church of England Synod: Anglican Communion Covenant Process](#)

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Full text of Archbishop Drexel Gomez' speech to the Church of England Synod

Archbishop Gomez is chair of the Anglican Communion Covenant Design Group

I speak to you as the Primate of a separate and autonomous Province of the Anglican Communion; it is one which takes great pride in its distinctiveness, and yet also in being part of the Catholic Church, finding its particular expression through the Anglican inheritance which it received from the Church of England. So I speak to you as someone who both sees and upholds a proper independence for my Province, but one which is rooted also in connectedness; which could not survive in isolation, and which would never wish to do so.

There can be little doubt that I am speaking to you at a time of great tension within the Anglican Communion. The "bonds of affection" which once held our fellowship together are strained; indeed some would say broken. A state which has been described as "broken or impaired" already is declared between some of our Provinces. Suspicion is rife, as well as accusations of heresy, bad faith and of theological and ecclesiological innovation. Rumours abound that there are plots to carry forward in some provinces a bold agenda on gay marriage, and to require toleration of it across the Communion. Other rumours inform us that the primates are plotting to impose a "collective papacy" on the Anglican Communion. Bishops and archbishops are taking over the care of churches outside their own provinces; new jurisdictions are being erected and bishops are being consecrated and set up in a spirit of competition. People are taking up more and more extreme positions and then defending them; no matter how well founded or sincere the objections.

In the three years since the Windsor Report was published, positions across the Communion have, if anything, polarised and there is less trust now between different parties and between different provinces than there has been for a long time. Everyone claims to be the defender of the true spirit of Anglicanism, and to describe that spirit as orthodox, mainstream, comprehensive or inclusive. The language has become more strident, and quite frankly, scaremongering is commonplace.

In a situation which is becoming increasingly overheated, we need to hear a voice of calm. We need to identify the fundamentals that we share in common, and to state the common basis on which our mutual trust can be rebuilt.

This is essentially all that the covenant proposal is – no more and no less. It is not intended to define some sort of new Anglicanism, or to invent some new model of authority, nor to peddle a narrow or exclusive view of what Anglicanism is. It is intended to state concisely and clearly the faith that we have all inherited together, so that there can be a new confidence that we are about the same mission.

The initial draft covenant text which has been prepared by the Design Group which I chair represents a first attempt to describe Anglicanism in a way which we intend to be true to the best and highest of all the Church of England and the other 37 provinces of the Anglican Communion, wish, under God, to be. But this first draft is the beginning of a process, and not its end: the text which exists now is only at the beginning of a long period of analysis and testing.

The draft which has been developed by the Covenant Design Group looks like this. In spite of some idiosyncratic numbering the draft falls into three main sections: first, a description of the common Anglican inheritance (numbered section 2); second, a description of our common Anglican Mission (numbered section 4); and third, a description of our Communion life (numbered section 5). In each of these three sections the Design Group has sought to draft an affirmation of what is already inherited and agreed in the life of our Communion.

So Section 2 states the historic basis of Anglicanism, and draws largely for its words on either the Lambeth Quadrilateral or the Declaration of Assent used here in the Church of England.

Section 4 describes our Anglican vocation, using the Five Marks of Mission developed in the Communion by an Anglican commission on evangelism and mission building on the work of the Anglican Consultative Council and widely recognised across all Provinces.

Section 5 offers a description of the instruments of Communion which have developed over time in our common life, and sets out straightforwardly the way in which they function to support the life of the Communion.

In the Design Group, we hoped that we had done this task of description accurately and clearly. We believe that all Anglicans reading these affirmations should be able to recognise a statement in these sections of the Anglicanism which they have already been practising and living out in our 38 provinces.

From the basis of these affirmations, however, the text goes on to articulate three sets of commitments, which flow from the affirmations. These say basically:

- If this is the faith we have inherited, then we as Anglican churches commit ourselves to living out this faith together in a particular context of mutual respect and shared exploration (Section 3)
- If this is the mission with which we are charged, then this is the way we will engage in mission together (Section 4b)
- If these are the instruments of our common life, then this is the way we will use them in developing the Anglican Communion, and for each church to live up to its commitment of interdependence with the others.

I personally stand by the draft we have developed. But I already know from discussions at Dar-Es-Salaam in the Joint Standing Committee and amongst the primates themselves that there are points where we will be asked to look at our work again. Reservations centre largely on section 6 of the current draft, where the Design Group seeks to articulate the sort of commitments which arise out of an affirmation of the instruments of Communion.

The feeling amongst the primates for example, was that the role of the primates in this draft has been overemphasised and the voice of the laity under-represented. The Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and of the Primates felt similarly. It is a section that will clearly have to be revisited in detail.

And the intention is to take a very critical look at the draft in the light of comments received from the process of reflection and debate going on around the Communion. The task of the Design Group shall be to produce at least two more drafts in a process which is designed to listen to all the points made and which will finally meet the criteria that I set out earlier: that is to describe the Anglicanism that we already hold in common, as a basis for greater trust and less suspicion in the future. It is fundamentally based upon a vision where all 38 provinces of the Anglican Communion can meet as autonomous but independent equals, offering mutual accountability to our Anglican sisters and brothers on the clearly articulated basis of common expectations.

The need for such a common basis is pressing. I have no doubt that it would be lovely to go back to a day when we relied on no more than the affection generated by our mutual inheritance and care. But I'm afraid that those days have gone: at present, Anglican leaders are seriously wondering whether they can recognise in each other the faithfulness to Christ that is the cornerstone of our common life and co-operation. While some feel that there will be inevitable separation, others are trying to deny that there is a crisis at all. This is hardly a meeting of minds. Unless we can make a fresh statement clearly and basically of what holds us together, we are destined to grow apart. Do we Anglicans have a clear and shared identity? It is a question that our ecumenical partners are increasingly asking of us?

For decades, Anglicans have been wondering whether increasing diversity might force the Provinces apart, and asked what holds us together. The days of undefined affection are sadly over, yet this is also not a time when proposals which are brand new would win a broad consensus across the Communion. I believe that the Covenant can only succeed if it can accurately describe a sufficient basis to hold us together, and for us to want to stay together, based upon what we already hold and believe. This stresses the importance of getting the text of the covenant right.

I dismiss the idea that this represents somehow an attempt to chain any Province into submission before a powerful centralisation as a chimera: every Province I know, every Primate I know, values autonomy. But there is a real question as articulated by Archbishop Rowan: Can we recognise sufficient of our Anglican inheritance in each other to lead us to want to renew our commitment to live as a world communion?

Now I have also heard the opinion expressed that the idea of a covenant is alien to Anglicanism. I would not accept that charge.

First of all, we are a Covenant people. In his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 11, Paul wrote: "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." In so many ways, these words at the centre of our faith not only speak to us of the sacrifice of our Lord, and the celebration of the Eucharist which stands at the heart of every Christian community, but they also speak to us of God's covenant with us.

That covenant is an unbreakable covenant, founded in God's gracious attitude towards us. It is God who has called us to him: it is God who has made us his people. As it is written in the first epistle of Saint Peter: "Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." When we talk about covenant in the Anglican Communion today, some people speak of it as if the concept is strange to our life. But I have to say that if we are Christians, Christian life is born in covenant, is nurtured in covenant, and finds its destiny in God's covenant that he will bring us to eternal life. We are a covenant people.

We celebrate covenants in many contexts of our Christian life already – in Holy Communion, in the baptismal covenant, and the covenant whenever two persons are joined in Holy Matrimony. We live and breathe as Christians in the context of covenant. In all these cases, covenant is the joyful embracing of a common life – as members of the Church, as man and wife, as participants in the Body of Christ. Are we as Anglicans not able to be joyful any more about our interdependence in Christ?

Many Anglican churches have already covenanted with their ecumenical partners. The Church of England- Methodist covenant will be the subject of debate at this synod. If we can covenant with our ecumenical partners, and find enough in common to recognise a shared faith with them, it seems to me to be a pretty pass indeed if we Anglicans decide we cannot covenant with each other. (It may be said here that a clear statement of our Anglican identity would reassure our ecumenical partners that we know ourselves what our identity is!)

And if truth be told, there is some sense that we have been living by an implicit covenant together already; loosely based upon the Lambeth Quadripartite. But these limits have never been quite so agreed and recognised. Even so, it was said in the 1920 Lambeth Conference:

"The Churches represented (in the Communion) are indeed independent, but independent within the Christian freedom which recognises the restraints of truth and love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship."

Today we are not being asked to commit the Church of England to any specific clauses of a covenant, nor to mortgage yourselves to any particular aspects that may appear in the current draft. We are still a long way from a definitive text, in a process which will need the sustained wisdom and feedback of all the Provinces and all the Instruments of Communion before it is mature. What I understand you are on this occasion to consider is this: Are you willing to engage in principle with a process which seeks to find a common basis for the Provinces of the Anglican Communion to move forward together?

I said at the beginning of this address that in the West Indies we are proud of our autonomy lived in communion. This is as it should be. It is true of every Province of the Anglican Communion, even if some of those Provinces struggle with poverty, illness and injustice. But we also value our relationship with you, our first Province, the Church of England. I very much hope that you will be able to express your care for us, and your valuing of us by saying that we have a future together; by affirming "Yes, let us explore what holds us together. Yes – let us covenant to walk in a shared faith and shared hope – in Communion, as surely God intends us to be." After all, did not the Apostle Paul write that no-one can say of another member of the body: "I have no need of you"? (cf 1 Corinthians 12.21-23).

