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Anglican Ecclesiology and the Anglican Covenant

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ABSTRACT

How can we explain the fact that the Anglican Covenant divides people of equal integrity and comparable wisdom around the world? We need to ask whether we have correctly understood both the ecclesiology of the Anglican Communion and the terms of the Covenant. What is implied in being a Communion of Churches, where the churches are the subjects of the relationship of communion (*koinonia*)? What does the Covenant commit its signatories to and, in particular, what does it say about doctrinal and ethical criteria for communion? Is it legitimate to apply biblical covenant language, in which the covenant relationship is between God and Israel, to relations between churches? By addressing some of the concerns of those who oppose it, a case is made in favour of the Covenant and some reassurances are offered. In conclusion, the mystical dimension of being in communion is affirmed.

KEYWORDS: Anglican Communion, Anglican Covenant, Anglican ecclesiology, *koinonia*, autonomy, catholicity

The proposed Anglican Communion Covenant sharply divides people of equal integrity and comparable wisdom who have the good of the Anglican Communion at heart. For some the Covenant is the best hope of holding the Communion together, an expression for today of

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what historic Anglicanism has stood for ecclesiologically.[2] For others the Covenant is a pernicious proposal that is completely un-Anglican and will wreck the Communion once and for all.[3] The Covenant is seen as either a necessary development of Anglican ecclesiology, or as an unacceptable deviation from it. Individual Anglicans who agree with each other on many things find themselves divided over the Covenant. How can we explain this puzzling phenomenon? The division of opinion among Anglicans over the Covenant raises several questions which call for some analysis. First, have we understood the nature of Anglicanism correctly, and particularly the ecclesiology and polity of the Anglican Communion? Secondly, have we understood the terms of the Covenant correctly; why is it thought necessary; what does it contain; and is covenant language appropriate for our situation? I will take these questions in order.[4]

The Nature of Anglicanism and the Ecclesiology of the Communion

First then, we should ask, apropos the Covenant: have we understood the nature of Anglicanism, and particularly the ecclesiology of the Communion, correctly? What sort of entity is the Anglican Communion? How should we describe and define it? What is it like? We search in vain for exact comparisons.[5] Although we often hear the expression, even from Anglican leaders, 'the Anglican Church worldwide', or something similar, the Anglican Communion is clearly not a single, global church. Its constitution, organization and structure is not that of a global church: it is much looser, more dispersed, more *ad hoc*. Worldwide Anglicanism

2. Cf. Archbishop Rowan Williams' video address, 5 March 2012: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbjqyMa8TvA; text: http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2380/; see further http://www.yestothecovenant.org/index.html; and http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/.

3. Cf. Diarmaid MacCulloch: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3U1uQh184Q; see further http://noanglicancovenant.org/.

4. This is an expanded version of a paper given at a conference on the Covenant at Wycliffe College, Toronto, in May 2012.

5. Cf. Norman Doe, *An Anglican Covenant: Theological and Legal Considerations for a Global Debate* (London: Canterbury Press 2008), pp. 47–51. A helpful analysis of recent Anglican history is provided by Bruce Kaye, *Conflict and the Practice of Christian Faith: The Anglican Experiment* (Eugene, OR; Cascade Books; Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011). See also Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

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lacks the attributes of a single church. There is no universal canon law of the Anglican Communion, no central legislative organ or synod, no comprehensive, integrated oversight, no overall disciplinary framework, no common policy-making body.[6] Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion is not a global church.

On the other hand, the Anglican Communion is more than a mere collection of churches. It is not simply a confederation of separate churches of diverse character that meet from time to time to consult and confer. Its life is different to that and stronger. Worldwide Anglicanism has a common fundamental ecclesiology. So it is not quite the same sort of animal as the Lutheran World Federation or the World Methodist Council, both of which contain churches with different ecclesiologies – in particular, episcopal and non-episcopal. Within the Anglican Communion there is a shared ecclesiology, though there is some variation of polity, especially with regard to the distribution and exercise of authority. That is to say, the fundamental ecclesiological principles of the member churches are held in common, though their practice of governance is not everywhere identical.[7]

In some respects the ecclesial profile of the Anglican Communion is closest to that of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The affinity between certain aspects of Anglican and Orthodox ecclesiology has often been noted.[8] Just like Orthodoxy, with its concept of autocephaly (each

6. There is, however, a substantial body of canonical principles that can be drawn from the corpus of the canon law of the Anglican churches and which is held in common: *The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2008). See also the discussion by Christopher Hill, 'Ecclesiological and Canonical Observations on *The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion*', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 14 (2012), pp. 400–407.

7. Cf. Colin J. Podmore, 'A Tale of Two Churches: The Ecclesiologies of the Episcopal Church and the Church of England Compared', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 10 (2008), pp. 34–70; reprinted in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8 (2008), pp. 124–54. At least some of what Dr Podmore calls differences of ecclesiology, I would understand as differences of polity, though of course polity should always be grounded in ecclesiology and always has ecclesiological implications.

8. *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984* (London: SPCK, 1985), 28 (p. 18): '… even though the seniority ascribed to the Archbishop of Canterbury is not identical with that given to the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Anglican Communion has developed on the Orthodox rather than the Roman Catholic pattern, as a fellowship of self-governing national or regional Churches'. Cf. Methodios Fouyas, *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

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church has its own head) and its lack of a centralized organization, the Anglican Communion consists of self-governing churches that are in a relationship of communion with one another and that consult and confer from time to time and recognize a common bond. Like Orthodoxy, Anglicanism is united by a shared faith, shared sacraments and a shared ministry focused in the episcopate. And, as in Orthodoxy, the Anglican experience of communion is sometimes damaged by disagreements about leadership, disputes about jurisdiction, and even acts that amount to internal schism.

However, the Anglican Communion has a more structured global common life than Orthodoxy has. Orthodoxy does not have the equivalent of all of our Instruments of Communion. Although the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch is comparable in some ways to that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as *primus inter pares* among the bishops and metropolitans, there is no exact parallel in Orthodoxy to the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council.

So it seems that the polity of the Anglican Communion is unique; there is nothing quite like it in Christendom. The Communion has consistently described itself as a Communion of Churches. The Lambeth Conference 1930 defined the Communion as 'a fellowship, within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces, or regional Churches in communion with the see of Canterbury'.[9]

The Anglican Communion is made up of churches. That may seem to be stating the obvious, but in my view it needs to be said, very clearly. In the Communion, we often refer to the member churches as 'provinces' and there is some authority for that in our documents, including in the key definition of Lambeth 1930 that I have just mentioned. But, the term 'province' is ultimately unsatisfactory to describe the member bodies of the Communion. Confusingly, some Anglican Churches consist of more than one province and some 'provinces' consist of more than one (national) church. But perhaps more importantly, the semantics of 'province' are inappropriate. The term 'province' can suggest that the member churches of the Communion are outposts of some central body, branch offices that relate back to head office. In common parlance, at least in Britain,

9. Lambeth Conference 1930, Resolution 49: Roger Coleman (ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences 1867–1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), pp. 83–84.

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the adjective 'provincial' implies 'removed from the capital, out in the sticks'. A provincial mentality is thought to be a limited and somewhat uncultured one. There is the expression, 'to go down to the provinces'. Provincial implies 'at a lower level' or 'removed from where it's at'.

Perhaps it is these sorts of assumptions that lie behind the common assumption that, because the Anglican Covenant has stalled in the Church of England, that is the end of the story for the Covenant. That is not necessarily so, and definitely should not be the case. The Church of England is one Anglican church out of thirty-eight. All of those churches are in the process of deciding about the Covenant. They should not be influenced by what has happened in the Church of England: they should consider the Covenant on its merits. There is still much to play for. If a consensus develops throughout the Communion in favour of the Covenant, the Church of England will not want to be left on the margins and will have the opportunity to take a second look at the Covenant from 2015 onwards.[10]

The constellation of meanings surrounding the word 'province' is completely inappropriate for the member churches of the Communion. There is no hierarchy of churches; there is no inner circle or outer circle; there is no head office. Each church is on the same level of importance as every other church. It is not the case that all are equal, but some are more equal than others! In the ecclesiology of communion each church is equidistant from every other church. All are equally self-governing; there cannot be degrees of autonomy. Either you are responsible for your own affairs or you are not. The truth that the member bodies of the Communion are churches underlines their responsibility for their own affairs, under God.

But churches not only have a responsibility for their own life and mission: they have responsibilities towards the wider Church as well. No church is the whole Church; therefore no church can be self-sufficient. No church lives to itself. A church that tries to live to itself alone cannot be a church. To adapt the famous words of John Donne, the poet who was Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in the seventeenth century: 'No *church* is an island, entire of it self …'. The churches of the Anglican Communion are connected, not by an overarching organization, not by any kind of universal jurisdiction, but essentially

10. See further Andrew Goddard, 'The Anglican Communion Covenant and the Church of England: Ramifications', http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=712.

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by mutual commitment leading to consultation. As the Lambeth Conference 1930 put it, the member bodies of the Communion 'are bound together not by a central legislative and executive authority but by mutual loyalty sustained by the common counsel of the bishops in conference'.[11]

Many churches of the Anglican Communion define themselves in relation to the Church Catholic as a whole or in relation to the wider Communion, particularly the Church of England, or both together. Thus the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia defines it as 'a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ', but also notes that it, 'being derived from the Church of England, retains and approves the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer', together with the Ordinal and the Thirty-nine Articles.[12] It also affirms: 'This Church will remain and be in communion with the Church of England in England and with churches in communion therewith so long as communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained in this Constitution.'[13] The Anglican Church of Canada declares that it is 'an integral portion of the one Body of Christ composed of Churches which [are] united under the One Divine Head and in the fellowship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church'.[14] The Episcopal Church, echoing the Lambeth 1930 statement, defines itself as 'a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly

11. Goddard, 'The Anglican Communion Covenant', p. 84.

12. Constitution and Canons of the Anglican Church of Australia (The Green Book). The Constitution immediately goes on to affirm the autonomy of the Church within certain limits of faith and order: '… but has plenary authority at its own discretion to make statements as to the faith ritual ceremonial or discipline of this Church and to order its forms of worship and rules of discipline and to alter or revise such statements, forms and rules, provided that all such statements, forms, rules or alteration or revision thereof are consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained herein and are made as prescribed by this Constitution. Provided, and it is hereby further declared, that the above-named Book of Common Prayer, together with the Thirty-nine Articles, be regarded as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this Church, and no alteration in or permitted variations from the services or Articles therein contained shall contravene any principle of doctrine or worship laid down in such standard.'

13. Constitution I, 1, 1–6. The Constitution Canons and Rules of the Anglican Church of Australia 2010.

14. Statement of Principles within the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Canada.

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constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer'.[15] The Church of England affirms in the first of its Canons that it 'belongs to the true and apostolic Church of Christ'.[16] And in the Preface to the Declaration of Assent it affirms that 'the Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.[17]

Clearly, to be a church is not simply to be a church *tout court*! To be a church is to be placed in relation to the Church universal, the Church that is the Mother of us all. Particular churches and the universal Church cannot exist without each other. They are mutually constitutive, holding each other in being simultaneously.[18] So the more we emphasize that we – Australian Anglicans, Canadian Anglicans, Episcopalians, Church of England people – are a church, an autonomous church, the more we actually underline the truth that we exist only within the Church as a whole. Without the Church Catholic we do not exist. It is only in living relationship with the universal Church that we can know the reality of catholic faith and order within our own community. The Holy Spirit and all the means of grace that the Spirit employs are given to the Body of Christ, which is a Spirit-bearing Body. As we indwell the Body we share in the Spirit and the Spirit's gifts. Each local eucharistic assembly, gathered by its bishop, receives the fullness of the Church only as long as it remains in communion with other local churches – and, in intention, with them all. When churches are in communion they partake of catholicity. That cannot be said of churches that choose to exist in isolation.[19]

So what is the Anglican Communion? Certainly not a global church; but not a mere federation of completely separate churches either.

15. Constitution of the Episcopal Church: Preamble.

16. Canon A 1: 'The Church of England, established according to the laws of this realm under the Queen's Majesty, belongs to the true and apostolic Church of Christ; and, as our duty to the said Church of England requires, we do constitute and ordain that no member thereof shall be at liberty to maintain or hold the contrary.'

17. Canon C 15.

18. Cf. Paul McPartlan 'The Local Church and the Universal Church: Zizioulas and the Kasper-Ratzinger Debate', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 4 (2004), pp. 21–33.

19. An insight of Orthodox theology that has fed into the more widely received eucharistic ecclesiology. Cf. Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloe: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Ecclesiological Investigations 13; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2011), p. 215.

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In reality it is a communion of churches, no more and no less, and that is the beauty of it. The churches of the Anglican Communion subsist in a relationship of communion with each other. They are at the same time self-governing and inter-related. Anglican churches are called to walk the tightrope between autonomy and interdependence. But what does that imply in theology and practice?

By calling ourselves a communion we are intentionally positioning ourselves in relation to the key New Testament Greek word *koinonia*, which is translated in English-language Bibles as 'communion', 'fellowship', 'sharing' or 'partnership'. *Koinonia* speaks of sharing together in something greater than ourselves.[20] It is our fellowship with the Father and the Son and with each other (1 Jn 1.3). It is our sacramental communion in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10.16). It is our solidarity with the apostolic community and its faith (Acts 2.42). It is our practical partnership in proclaiming the gospel (Phil. 1.5). *Koinonia* points to our joint participation in the life of grace, our lived unity with God the Holy Trinity and with all the baptized (2 Cor. 13.13). Through faith and the sacraments, the Holy Spirit has made us ontologically one in the body of Christ. To be united with baptized believers in the body of Christ is to be united with Christ himself. *Koinonia* is at the same time mystical and practical; profoundly spiritual and down to earth.

When we map this theological reality of communion (*koinonia*) empirically on to the actual relationships between churches, as set out in numerous ecumenical agreements, we see that communion involves three dimensions: recognition, commitment and participation. First, recognition of one another, on the basis of apostolic faith and order, as sister churches belonging to the one holy catholic and apostolic Church; secondly, mutual commitment to live and act together in fellowship and to do this through appropriate conciliar channels; and, thirdly, unrestricted mutual participation in the sacramental life of the Church, that is to say, a common baptism and a shared Eucharist celebrated by a common ordained ministry. These three dimensions of mutual recognition, mutual commitment and mutual participation are the key components of ecclesial communion.

To be in communion brings privileges and it brings responsibilities. We are called to maintain communion and to build communion.[21]

20. But see the critical examination of this interpretation in Andrew T. Lincoln, 'Communion: Some Pauline Foundations', *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009), pp. 135–60 and my Editorial in the same issue, 'A Challenge to Communion Ecclesiology', pp. 132–34.

21. The Eames Commission stressed that all concerned in disagreements over the ordination of women should endeavour to live in the highest degree of

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Our duty to the Body is to uphold and strengthen its communion. For us this is not a grim duty, but the overflowing of charity – *agape*, *caritas* – without which, as Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's Prayer Book says, 'all our doings are nothing worth'. Charity is 'the very bond of peace and of all virtues'. It is a supreme expression of charity when we do all we can to remain in communion with our fellow Christians, who themselves are in communion with God the Holy Trinity. It is our communion with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ's Church that constitutes us as Christians. Communion in charity is our very life-blood; without it, as the collect says, we are counted dead before God.[22]

We can settle for a cheap kind of communion with our fellow Anglicans, a fellowship of those like ourselves, those with whom we can rub along comfortably; this is to seek the communion of congeniality. It costs us little and merely reinforces our prejudices. Cheap communion is communion without the cross. But there is also a costly form of communion, which is the fellowship of those who are different. To maintain and celebrate communion with those who are different to ourselves within the Anglican Communion, some of whose views we may find difficult to stomach, is painful. It takes enormous effort and is only made possible by grace in the strength that comes through prayer. But that is what costly Christian discipleship involves.[23]

One of the sources of the Collect for Quinquagesima from the Book of Common Prayer, 1662, from which I have been drawing, is Eph. 4.1-3. It resonates strongly with 1 Corinthians 13 and is a benchmark biblical statement of communion in charity:

> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all …

In the Anglican Communion much play has been made of 'the bonds of affection' and these are the bonds that are often appealed to

(F'note continued)
communion possible: *The Eames Commission: The Official Reports* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1994).

22. Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole?* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), ch. 10.

23. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (trans. R.H. Fuller; London: SCM Press, 1959), pp. 35–37.

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in times of tension.[24] There is indeed much genuine affection shared between Anglicans from one member church to another, from one end of the world to the other, and between the Old World and the New, the North and the South. But is the expression 'bonds of affection' robust enough for our needs at the present time, when relationships are strained and in some cases severed? It is not affection but charity that can take the strain. It is charity that draws us together as Christians and as churches. As Newman beautifully puts it, the Holy Spirit lives in the heart of Christians 'as the never-failing fount of charity, which is the very sweetness of the living waters'.[25] As the power, the virtue, that makes communion possible, charity is not an easy ride; it comes at a cost. It is not painless to exercise patience and kindness; to eschew envy and arrogance; to be willing to give way to others; to bear all things, believe all things and endure all things (1 Cor. 13.4-7). That is asking a good deal, but if we are not willing to go down that road can we call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the *imitatio Christi*?

Out of his experience of offering unconditional love to handicapped people, Jean Vanier has written: 'Communion means accepting people just as they are, with their limits and inner pain, but also with their gifts and their beauty and their capacity to grow; to see the beauty inside of all the pain.' Vanier continues: 'We can only truly love people who are different; we can only discover that difference is a treasure and not a threat, if in some way our hearts are becoming enfolded in the heart of the Father, if somehow God is putting into our broken hearts the love that is in God's own heart for each and every human being.'[26] Communion infused with charity is the key to Anglican unity.

Why the Covenant?

So far we have been thinking about the nature and constitution of the Anglican Communion. In that description, 'a communion of

24. E.g. The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004), Foreword by the Most Revd Dr Robin Eames, Archbishop of Armagh, Chairman, p. 11: 'The ''bonds of affection'', so often quoted as a precious attribute of Anglican Communion life ..'.

25. John Henry Newman, *Parochial Sermons* (London: Rivington, 1835), II, p. 254 (Sermon XIX, Whit-Sunday: 'The Indwelling Spirit').

26. Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), cited in Stanley Hauerwas, *Learning to Speak Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), p. 76. See also A.E. Harvey, 'Schizophrenia in Young People and the *nekrosis* of Christ', *Theology* 115.2 (2012), pp. 92–98.

churches', both terms – churches and communion – are load-bearing. The member bodies of the Communion are churches in their own right, but they are not churches on their own; they are bound together in a particular form of unity, ecclesial communion. Now we turn to our second area of enquiry: why has the Covenant been proposed and what does it contain? So why the Covenant?

Two sets of issues, both of which came to a head in 2003, led to the proposed Covenant. First, issues concerning human sexuality: the election and consecration to the episcopate of a priest living in a same-gender union in the Episcopal Church of the USA, and public rites of blessing of such unions in the Diocese of New Westminster within the Anglican Church of Canada. Second, issues concerning cross-border interventions by bishops of Anglican churches in the global South within dioceses where some parishes or congregations were disaffected by these developments and were looking for outside support. The phenomenon of intrusion into another bishop's jurisdiction was not new in 2003, but was intensified by the developments concerning human sexuality that became critical at that time. So in summary form we may say that at the present time the Anglican Communion is under stress because of disagreements about Christian morals and disagreements about what kind of mutual obligation is involved in membership of the Communion. The Anglican Communion is in danger of breaking apart over these two sets of issues.

I don't mind putting a few more personal cards on the table at this point. In what circumstances is it biblically and theologically justified for individuals and churches to break communion? The New Testament is instructive here. There was hardly anything right with the Christians at Corinth: the community was riddled with heresy, schism, exclusivism, anarchy and immorality. Corinth was an utterly dysfunctional church – yet Paul calls the Corinthian Christians saints and treats them as a church in his two surviving letters. As for the Galatians, they had even embraced 'another gospel' (1.6-7), yet Paul treats them as churches. Other New Testament case studies suggest that separation is justified when the faith of the Incarnation – 'Jesus Christ come in the flesh' – is denied, and only then. As the First Epistle of John tells us, this is how we recognize the spirit of the antichrist (1 Jn 4.2-4). If we turn to our own tradition, we find that the classical Anglican divines held that separation is required if we are ourselves forced to affirm teachings or actions that we believe to be wrong – in other words, when they are made conditions of communion. The sixteenth-century Reformers taught that Christians should not separate from their church as long as the ministry of word and

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sacrament remained; the existence of causes of scandal in a church was not sufficient justification. In fact I cannot think of one great teacher of the Christian Church who could be invoked to support the view that we should separate from a church because we are scandalized by some things that go on in it.[27]

The Anglican Communion's response to the crisis caused by these two sets of developments – in the areas of human sexuality and pastoral intervention – was the Lambeth Commission, which produced *The Windsor Report* in 2004. The report made two main recommendations: first, a moratorium on the consecration of bishops in same gender partnerships, public rites of blessing and episcopal interventions; second, a Covenant for the Anglican Communion. The moratorium has been only partly observed and the future of the Covenant is unclear at the time of writing, though to date many more churches have accepted it than have rejected it.

What is the Covenant intended to achieve?[28] It seems highly significant to me that it does not attempt to deal with the substantive issues that triggered the crisis; they are actually bracketed out. The Covenant's focus is purely on how we relate to one another as churches in communion and what form of behaviour is appropriate within communion. At its most basic, the Covenant seeks to extend the courtesy, charity and sensitivity that we try to show to our fellow Christians individually and locally, to the level of inter-church relationships. It seeks to prevent such a crisis as we are now experiencing ever happening again, and it does that by making provision for consultation, mediation and restraint when controversial actions are being mooted. In my opinion, the Covenant deserves to be supported wholeheartedly for several reasons.

First, the Covenant appears to be the only way forward for the Communion. I am not aware of any other worked-out proposal for

27. See further Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, ch. 8: 'Building and Breaking Communion'. The teaching of various Anglican divines on questions of separation is given in Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective* (London and New York: T&T Clark, rev. edn, 2002), *passim*.

28. See further: John Rees, 'Covenant and Communion', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 14 (2012), pp. 235–55 – particularly helpful on section 4 of the Covenant; Andrew Goddard, 'Unity and Diversity, Communion and Covenant: Theological, Ecclesiological, Political and Missional Challenges for Anglicanism', in Mark D. Chapman (ed.), *The Anglican Covenant: Unity and Diversity in the Anglican Communion* (London and New York: Mowbray, 2008), pp. 47–80; Benjamin M. Guyer (ed.), *Pro Communione: Theological Essays on the Anglican Covenant* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

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securing the unity of the Communion as one body in the face of current difficulties. The future of the Anglican Communion is in jeopardy at the present time and specific measures are needed: the Covenant is the sole candidate for consideration. It seems that to reject the Covenant is either to hope to muddle through somehow without a plan, or to opt for *communion without constraints*. In either case, there is no such luxury.[29] The real alternative to the Covenant, it seems to me, is to allow the present sharp tensions to be worked out in the formal separation of some Churches of the Communion from others – and that means schism and the fracture, reduction or possible break-up of the Anglican Communion.

Secondly, the Covenant is an embodiment of mutual commitment. The key to the significance of the Covenant, for me, is that by subscribing to the Covenant, Anglican Churches will signal their intention to remain together. They will signal this to themselves, to all the other Anglican churches throughout the world, and to other Christian world communions, who are watching with concern and do not want to see the Anglican Communion fail as a worldwide fellowship of churches. Such a failure would indicate a serious weakening of global Christianity and a diminishing of Christian witness on the world stage. It would also bring grief and heartbreak to millions of Anglican Christians around the world as they became separated sacramentally from each other. The Covenant is located in the area of *moral intentionality*.

Third, the Covenant is true to the Anglican understanding of the Church. I cannot see that it is in any way 'un-Anglican', as some have claimed. Behind that reservation lies a concern that the Covenant asks too much of member churches and fatally compromises their autonomy. I do not share that perception. I do not start from the principle of autonomy, but from the truth of one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. 'Autonomy' cannot be the first thing that we have to say about ourselves as Anglican churches; it should be some way down the list. The attributes of the Church of Christ that we affirm in

29. For historical examples of the juridical issues raised by 'provincial autonomy' see Frances Knight, '"A Church without Discipline Is No Church at All": Discipline and Diversity in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Anglicanism', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), *Discipline and Diversity: Papers Read at the 2005 Summer Meeting and the 2006 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Brewer, 2007), pp. 399–418. See also Mark Chapman, '"By Schisms Rent Asunder, By Heresies Distrest": Anglicanism after the Windsor Report', in Gerard Mannion (ed.), *Church and Religious 'Other'* (Ecclesiological Investigations, 4; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008), ch. 10.

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the Creed must surely come much higher up: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. The very first thing that we want to say about our own church, whichever that church may be, is that it belongs to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. But if we belong, with others, to something much greater than ourselves, then we belong *together* and not in autonomous isolation. So *interdependence* must be a key descriptor of Anglican ecclesiology and polity – or in *The Windsor* Report's phrase, 'autonomy in communion'.[30] The Covenant seeks to flesh out in practical terms what interdependence might mean. The Covenant can be seen as one possible outcome of a process of development within the Anglican Communion and its Instruments of Communion over the past several decades – a process not of centralization but of mutual involvement. Nevertheless, the Covenant can only be adopted by the free constitutional action of each member church of the Communion and any future consequences of the Covenant would need to be processed by each church in a similar way. Self-government is not threatened by the Covenant, though it is rightly placed in a broader context.

Fourth, the Covenant is orientated to the common good of the Communion. From mediaeval times, through the Reformation and right up to the present day, churches have used the language of the common good and applied it not only to the wider society, but to the Church as an institution.[31] As Churches that exist in a relationship of interdependence, it seems not too much to ask of us that we consider the common good of the Christian Church as a whole and of the Anglican Communion in particular, as a part of that whole. This takes us to the heart of what is meant by catholicity: *kat' holou*, 'according to the whole'. To be catholic means to be deeply conscious of being part of a wider whole and to act accordingly. The virtues of forbearance, patience, restraint, willingness to consult and to accept a degree of accountability to others come into play here. 'Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal. 6.2).

Fifthly, the Covenant is consonant with Anglican ecumenical endeavour and achievement which follows the 'twin track' of affirmation and commitment. Its roots are in the work of Faith and Order in which Anglicans have played a notable part for nearly a century. The idea of covenant pervaded the ecumenical movement

30. Paragraphs 72–86. Cf. Norman Doe, *An Anglican Covenant*, pp. 105–107.

31. See Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

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from the 1920s onwards. The Anglican Covenant 'is composed of the ecumenical hopes and toils of many generations'.[32] As the Covenant text itself affirms, Anglicanism's special charism is 'the ecumenical vocation to the full visible unity of the Church'. The 'catholic norms' that bring churches together ecumenically are the same as those that hold churches in being. The Anglican Covenant and the ecumenical enterprise, with all its convergences and commitments, are of a piece.

Finally, the Covenant is not set in stone, but may be amended by due process (4.4.2). Teething troubles can be ironed out. It can be improved and made to work better once it is up and running. The Covenant text does not have to be perfect in order to deserve support.

What Does the Covenant Say and What Does it Not Say?

It is hugely significant that the Covenant does not address the substantive issues that triggered the crisis in the Communion.[33] Moreover, it does not propose any doctrinal or ethical tests for the Communion or create new Communion structures. The doctrinal material that it contains is purely descriptive and is taken from existing texts. It draws on the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as it developed between 1886–1888 and 1920 and has been repeatedly affirmed by Lambeth Conferences and by many member churches of the Communion individually.[34] The Quadrilateral states a minimum ecclesiology – Scriptures, creeds, dominical sacraments and historic episcopate – as a basis for unity conversations with non-Episcopal churches. It is the very bottom line of ecumenical theology. So much more could be and has been said, not least in ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and Baptist traditions respectively. But it is a core that all Anglican churches already accept and affirm.

The Covenant text supplements the Quadrilateral with an extract from the Church of England's Preface to the Declaration of Assent,

32. Guyer in Guyer (ed.), *Pro Communione*, p. 15.

33. For resources on the substantive issue of same-gender relationships see Philip Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality* (London: SPCK, 2008).

34. J. Robert Wright (ed.), *Quadrilateral at One Hundred: Essays on the Centenary of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/88–1986/88* (Anglican Theological Review, March 1988, Supplement Series, Number Ten; Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications; London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1988); R. William Franklin, 'The Episcopal Church in the USA and the Covenant: The Place of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral', in Chapman (ed.), *The Anglican Covenant*, pp. 101–22.

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which describes what the Church of England professes doctrinally in a way that could be endorsed by any Anglican Church ('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'). The Covenant affirms at this point that the 'historic formularies' of the Church of England (the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, 1662, and the Ordinal), which have been widely received and adapted in the Communion, bear authentic witness to this faith. The report of the Church of England's Doctrine Commission that led to the present form of the Declaration of Assent was considered by the Lambeth Conference 1968 and its main recommendation was adopted by the Conference.[35] So this is not the Windsor Report telling the Communion that it should believe exactly what the Church of England believes, or anything else, for that matter. The Covenant is not doctrinally prescriptive, but purely descriptive.

But neither does the Covenant propose any ethical tests for the Communion; there are no rules concerning Christian morals in it. No one is being asked to sign up to any particular ethical or moral position. What is profoundly ethical about the Covenant is that we are being asked to behave in a Christian way towards each other. It functions crucially in the realm of behaviour: how we should act towards one another when we are in a relationship of ecclesial communion. It is concerned with the virtues that belong to relationality. I think it is difficult to argue against the Covenant on this score, unless anyone thinks that the virtues of mutual forbearance and mutual responsibility, while applicable to individuals, are inappropriate for Christian churches.

Furthermore, the Covenant does not create any new structures for the Communion. It calls for each member church to appoint a means of relating to the Covenant. But for the Communion itself, the existing Standing Committee will act on behalf of the Instruments. Its role will be to monitor the progress of the Covenant, to consult and to take advice and then to make any necessary recommendations. If the Standing Committee sees that a church is not observing the Covenant by consulting about divisive proposals – or if its attention is drawn to such a circumstance – it will request that church to delay while consultation or mediation takes place. If the church declines to

35. Coleman (ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences*, p. 165: Resolutions of 1968, Resolution 43: 'The Conference accepts the main conclusion of the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine entitled *Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-nine Articles …*'.

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cooperate, the Standing Committee may recommend 'relational consequences' to the Instruments of Communion and to the member churches (4.2.5). What these consequences are is not spelt out, but they imply degrees of participation in the common life of the Communion, including the Instruments (the Lambeth Conference, the ministry of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council). The 'relational consequences' do not include the option of expelling a member church from the Anglican Communion.

How will the Covenant, if generally accepted, change the constitution and complexion of the Communion? It seems to me that it will not alter the constitution of the Communion or of the member churches; both will continue to govern themselves in the same way as they do now. But the Covenant will enhance our mutual commitment and intensify our engagement with one another as Anglicans and in that way it will change the complexion of the Communion – surely for the better.

It is a misunderstanding to see the Covenant, in the way that some do, as a sort of legal mechanism. Such process as there is, in Part 4, is quite long-range, step by step and subject to the decisions of the self-governing structures of each member church (4.2.7). The Covenant text is emphatic about this:

> 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. (4.1.3)

The Covenant is essentially an expression of what we owe one another as Christians and as churches: to listen, to consider advice, to show restraint, not to give offence, to accept accountability. It is precisely because we are already in communion that we need to specify ways of relating to each other that will protect that communion. Although the member churches of the Communion are self-governing, the Communion itself has a sort of polity already, through the four Instruments of Communion. I see the Covenant not as a way of changing the polity of the Communion, but as a way of working that will enable the Instruments, that already constitute the Communion's polity, to function more effectively. Altogether, I locate the Covenant in the area of moral and spiritual commitment to each other in Christ.[36]

36. See also Peter Doll, 'Autonomy or Communion? The Passion of the Episcopal Church', *Theology* 115.6 (2012), pp. 427–35.

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Is Covenant Language Appropriate?

The use of covenantal language to describe the relation between churches of the Anglican Communion has been challenged as inappropriate and unhelpful. Professor John Barton of the University of Oxford for one has pointed out that the extension of the covenant between God and his people to their relationship with each other cannot be found in the Old Testament. While 'covenant' is sometimes used for the relationship between individuals in the Old Testament, Barton points out that there is nowhere in the Bible where the two usages are combined in such a way that the covenant between God and Israel means that Israelites are bound 'covenantally' to each other.[37] However, I think there is more to be said on this score and that a coherent biblical basis for applying the language of covenant to internal church relations can be constructed in several steps.

First, in the Old Testament, the notion of covenant already flows into the idea of communion. Communion with God is not an idea that is foreign to the Old Testament. In fact it could be said to be the central theme of the Hebrew Bible. In salvation history Yahweh enters into community and communion with humankind; they are invited to 'walk with God' in a loving, trusting relationship, to know God's friendship and even to speak with God. It was precisely through the covenant that Yahweh entered into communion with Israel. Covenant (*berith)* can be interpreted as 'bond of communion'.[38]

Secondly, God's covenant assures his people of his consistency and dependability, evoking trust and security on the part of the people and calling for the personal qualities of love and loyalty.[39] Promises are at the heart of the covenant; a covenant is often seen as an exchange of promises. The covenant shows what sort of people the covenant people should be. The relationship of the people to each other cannot remain unaffected by God's covenant with them collectively.

37. John Barton, 'Covenant in the Bible and Today', in Chapman (ed.), *The Anglican Covenant*, pp. 193–203, at p. 202.

38. Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 1970). pp. 166–70; Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. John Baker; London: SCM Press, 1961), I, pp. 36–69; Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. A.W. Heathcote and P.J. Allcock; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), p. 211; Ephraim Radner, 'Foreword: The Covenant Way', in Guyer (ed.), *Pro Communione*, pp. xvii–xxvii. The expression 'bond of communion' for God's covenant with Israel is used by both Vriezen and Jacob.

39. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 38, 52.

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Thirdly, the many covenants between individuals in the Old Testament, such as the mutual pledge of David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20.16-17), are not 'secular' agreements (to see them as such would be grossly anachronistic), but have religious significance. They are accompanied by sacrifices and often appeal is made to God to witness and to guarantee the bond. Covenant and marriage are linked as images of God's relation to Israel (Mal. 2.14). Through covenant, whether with God or with fellow humans, the parties belong to each other.[40]

Fourthly, through covenant, Israel is constituted as a people, as the people of God. 'Covenant theology is through and through a theology of ''the people of Yahweh''.'[41] It is always God who initiates and makes the covenant; it is not made jointly, though of course it evokes a commitment in response.[42] It is made with the people corporately.[43] The essence of the covenant is, 'I will take you as my people, and I will be your God' (Exod. 6.7) or 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Jer. 31.33). The covenant makes the people. It is what has bound them together. They are to live and act as God's covenant people in relation to each other as well as in relation to their God. The vertical plane and the horizontal plane intersect.

Moving to the New Testament: the new covenant is made through the sacrificial death of Christ, represented sacramentally in bread and wine, his body and blood, at the Last Supper (Mk 14.22-24; Mt. 26.26-29; Lk. 22.14-20; 1 Cor. 11.25). Jesus gave his body and shed his blood 'for many'. God's action in Christ is precisely the fulfilment of the promises contained in the covenant (Eph. 2.12) Although there are comparatively few explicit references to the covenant in the New Testament, the allusions are many: the coming of Christ is heralded as the fulfilment of God's ancient covenant with his people (Lk. 1.72-75) and the covenant, with its themes of the law written on the heart, the intimate relationship between God and God's people, the knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sins, forms a strong sub-text throughout.[44] Moreover, the title 'the people of God (*ho laos tou theou*)

40. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 211.

41. Ernest Nicholson, *God and his People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 209.

42. Nicholson, *God and his People*, pp. 210–16.

43. Ludwig Koehler, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. A.S. Todd; London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), pp. 60–71.

44. C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), pp. 44–46: 'Although… there is only one place where the prophecy of the New Covenant is expressly cited as from scripture

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is now applied to the Church (1 Pet. 2.10; Tit. 2.14; cf. Heb. 11.25). It is not fortuitous that in the New Testament the Church is called the body of Christ: there are strong sacramental resonances here. By virtue of the new covenant Christians are brought into a corporate solidarity with each other through baptism into Christ's crucified, risen and glorified body (1 Cor. 12.12-13; Rom. 6.3-14; Gal. 3.27-28).

So it seems to me completely acceptable and indeed perfectly fitting for covenant language to be applied by extension from the relation of God to the Church to the relation of the component parts of the Church to each other.[45] This is not an illegitimate transfer; it is not merely an analogy. God's covenant takes effect not only on the transcendent plane, but also in the immanent sphere. God's promises to us inform and shape our promises to each other. That is of course what we find in certain Christian traditions, where the bond between members is described as a covenant[46] and in a number of ecumenical agreements, such as the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain.[47] Not all historical appropriations of biblical covenant language to ecclesiastical purposes are palatable to us today, but covenant remains the strongest metaphor that we can find for the commitment that we owe to each other in Christ. If this is the case ecumenically, how much more should it apply within our own Communion?

Final Word

Finally, we need to ask, 'Does it really matter?' Is the Anglican Communion worth keeping together? Is it worth fighting for? My answer to that question is an unequivocal, 'Yes', and that response is not simply sentimental – there is a profound theological reason for saying so. Communion (*koinonia*) is not a human construction – not 'man-made' – but a creation of the Holy Spirit. It is not at our disposal, to accept or reject. Communion – whether between individual

(F'note continued)
[Heb. 8.8-12], it seems clear that it was widely influential in the Church from an early date, since it has not only influenced Paul, Hebrews and the Synoptic tradition, and possibly the Johannine tradition too, but probably had a place in primitive liturgical forms' (p. 46).

45. See the discussion in Doe, *An Anglican Covenant*, chs. 2 and 3.

46. See Paul Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), ch. 2.

47. *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House; London: Church House Publishing, 2001).

Christians or between particular churches within the universal Church – is something given in the realm of grace. It is intimately connected to the sacraments. In baptism we are brought into communion sacramentally with the Triune God and with one another in the body of Christ. In the Eucharist – Holy *Communion* – we are continuously sustained and strengthened in that communion. Communion is God's greatest gift to us in this life and it will be perfected in heaven. Any actual expression of communion is to be treated with great respect and care. It is an imperative of Christian love to seek communion with our fellow Christians. We are called, by virtue of our sacramental union with Christ, to seek, maintain and extend communion. To do that we are inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is sometimes conceived as the bond of communion between the Father and the Son. Ultimately, then, the question of the cohesion of the Anglican Communion has a profoundly mystical dimension.

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