



The
GENIUS
of
ANGLICANISM:

PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROPOSED ANGLICAN COVENANT

Essays and Study Questions



CHICAGO Consultation



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Essays and Study Questions



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INTRODUCTION



Jane Shaw

An Anglican Covenant was first seriously mooted in the Windsor Report, which was presented to the Primates of the Anglican Communion at their meeting in October 2004. The Windsor Group was convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the wake of the election and consecration of an openly gay priest, Gene Robinson, as Bishop of New Hampshire, which had provoked opposition in some parts of the Anglican Communion. Counter-moves by conservatives led not only to threats that they would leave – which some vociferous minorities did— but also to ‘border crossing’ by some conservative bishops. One question at stake was the autonomy of the different Anglican provinces, while another was the unity of the Anglican Communion. In 1878, at the second Lambeth Conference, it was affirmed that each branch (or province) of the Anglican Communion was considered qualified to regulate its own separate affairs, while all were united in the maintenance of one faith; and as recently as 1993, the distinguished historian Sir Henry Chadwick described the Anglican Communion as a “fairly loose federation of kindred spirits, often grateful for mutual fellowship, but with each province reserving the right to make its own decisions.”¹

The covenant before us, the final version of which was produced in December 2009, by a group appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, would present a significant challenge to this idea of provincial autonomy. Signing up to the covenant would be a prerequisite for participation in the governing bodies of the Anglican

Communion. Whether individual provinces will do this is open to question: several conservative provinces in the Global South, led by Uganda and Nigeria, have already declared that they will not. Once individual provinces signed up to the covenant, they would be subject to discipline by a centralized ecclesiastical authority if they broke the bounds of what was agreed upon as acceptable practice and doctrine in the Communion as a whole.

Should the Episcopal Church agree to the covenant? The 77th General Convention, which met in 2009, asked the church to consider the covenant and its implications, so that an informed decision reflecting the ‘mind’ of the whole church can be reached at the next meeting of General Convention (2012). The essays in this collection provide important analyses of the covenant and its consequences.

It is often argued—I have made the argument myself—that covenants are not very Anglican (we avoided them when they were all the vogue amongst the Reformers of the sixteenth century) and, in any case, we do not need another covenant: we have one already in the baptismal covenant, which makes baptism the foundation of Christian life and faith, thus marking out a significant role for the laity. This is a distinctive hallmark of the Episcopal Church: from the very beginnings of an Anglican Church in America, the laity had a particular role in its governance. The bishop of London had oversight of the church in America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but no bishop of London

ever stepped foot on American soil. Consequently, there were no bishops in the Episcopal Church until the late eighteenth century. This means that although the language of ‘covenant’ was not part of baptismal rites in the Episcopal Church until the 1979 Prayer Book, the significance of leadership shared by the laity and clergy has a long history in this country. One test of the proposed Anglican Covenant, for Episcopalians, then, is whether it coheres with this baptismal understanding of the Church, and its understanding of lay ministry and, as Ruth Meyers explains, there is very little about the role of the laity or indeed baptismal theology in the covenant.

Rather, as several of our contributors point out, the Anglican Covenant proposes an enhanced role for bishops, especially primates, in maintaining the unity of the Communion through discipline. The covenant concentrates power—especially a new judicial control—in the hands of a 15-member group known as the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury serves as President of this group. Five members are primates, elected to the position by their fellow primates. The Anglican Consultative Council chooses the remaining nine members. Currently, three of the nine are bishops, two are clergy and four are lay people. This group would “make recommendations as to relational consequences which flow from an action incompatible with the Covenant.” As Fredrica Harris Thompsett puts it in her essay: “Unlegislated edicts issued by unrepresentative bodies pave the way for a concentration of power at the highest levels of the Anglican Communion.” Sally Johnson points out that the enforcement provisions of the covenant would be based not on procedural or substantive due process but rather on the discretion, the whim even, of the Standing Committee.

This means that the proposed covenant departs from the broader Anglican tradition in two key ways. First, Anglicanism has always emphasized a dispersed rather than centralized authority; and secondly, the emphasis on “moral

reasoning and discipline” in the proposed Covenant is not within the tradition of Anglican ethics and moral reasoning. The Anglican way has not hitherto been punitive, but rather has attempted to model the breadth of Christianity, holding all within the fold, and combining the intelligent interpretation of scripture, sensitive reasoning and an appeal to a dynamic tradition in coming to moral decisions. We should therefore be under no illusions that an Anglican Covenant would maintain ‘tradition.’ On the contrary, it would introduce innovations in the very nature of our church, and of Anglicanism broadly writ, that we need to assess clear-sightedly.

Should a national church put itself under the authority of an unelected, pan-Anglican body? Mark Harris points to the particular problems this raises for the Episcopal Church: bishops would become accountable to a body greater than that which elected them. If we take the case of gay bishops — the very issue that triggered the proposed covenant — Harris writes: “Nothing in our ordinal (or for that matter the ordinal of the BCP of the Church of England) suggests any conformity to any body outside the synodical structure of national or regional church to which we belong.” In other words, the selection of candidates for ordination would be subject to terms other than those set by the national church. (It is worth noting that in the case of the Church of England, it is not only the authority of the national church that would be at stake, but the sovereignty of Parliament, given the established nature of the church.)

We should of course remember that while the presenting issue of the day is homosexuality, in twenty or thirty years our disagreements will be about something different. In the past, Anglicanism has had a genius for allowing a breadth of belief, and this has enabled issues that were purely of their moment to pass. The Church of England looked like it might fracture on the issue of candles on the altar in the early twentieth century, and how inconsequential does that look now!

We will always disagree. That is normal. The question before us is how we achieve unity. The covenant tries to impose unity through agreement. As Timothy Sedgwick points out, this necessarily constitutes an attempt to purify the faith. Ironically, he notes, “seeking a greater unity and integrity of faith through increased specification of belief and uniformity of conduct” can increase rather than diminish divisions. This means that the covenant may exacerbate our current problems. “To put it bluntly,” Fredrica Harris Thompsett writes, “I do not see imposing discipline as a solution to disagreements about women’s ordination and homosexuality.” Lasting ecclesiastical relationships are not shaped on paper; they are formed through relationships.

Winnie Varghese evokes the gift of these relationships “across borders we might not otherwise cross” in the story of her meeting with the bishop of Madras of the Church of South India. If we are to have a covenant, then it should be one that encourages the unrealized potential in transformative encounters of the sort Varghese describes. “It would be quite something,” she writes, “if we generated a document that strengthened or organized some of that potential, but I don’t think we’ve seen that document yet.” What the covenant process acknowledges is that we already live in international webs of relationship. But the documents and procedures that have so far attempted to strengthen those relationships “offer a definition of communion so minimal as to be almost cynical.” She continues: “They accomplish the purpose of unity, while all but encouraging provinces to seek discipline against one another when they take a prophetic stance on behalf of the least amongst us.”

There is another way, along a path blazed by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism, which built the Covenant for Communion in Mission on the Five Marks of Mission.² As Gay Jennings points out, this mission-driven covenant, which was commended to the Communion by the Anglican Consultative Council in 2005, recognizes “that

God’s work in one province may be radically different from God’s work in another.” It also “eschews uniformity, punitive action and centralized authority in favor of our love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The Anglican Covenant now before us does not focus on mission, nor recognize that the Churches of the Communion minister in dramatically different contexts, But it calls us to reflect on the nature of the church, the meaning of unity and our relationships with one another across the Anglican Communion. Ellen Wondra reminds us that this reflection, on the part of each Church in the Communion, is essential work, in order that we discern what our distinctive mission is – in its own context and worldwide. But she also reminds us that what we discern as our mission may turn out to be exactly what is most questioned under the terms of the covenant with the consequence that the covenant itself may be called into question.

Notes

¹ Henry Chadwick, “*Making and Remaking Ministry*” in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, ed. Sarah Coakley and David A. Pailin (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 21

² The Five Marks of Mission are to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek to transform unjust structures of society, and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

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THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT AND THE PROPOSED ANGLICAN COVENANT



Ruth Meyers

In discussions of the proposed Anglican Covenant, I've heard more than one Episcopalian suggest that the only covenant we need is the Baptismal Covenant. But this proposal is a non-starter. The Baptismal Covenant that has become so familiar in the Episcopal Church since 1979 is not a shared text in the Anglican Communion. However, reflection on our Baptismal Covenant may help Episcopalians evaluate the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant.

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Baptismal Covenant that has become so familiar to Episcopalians is in some ways a happy accident in the development of the 1979 Prayer Book. Previous prayer books had asked adult candidates or the parents and godparents of infants and young children: "Dost thou believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith, as contained in the Apostles' Creed?" and "Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?"

As drafting of a new baptismal rite began, the committee proposed a rather modest restatement of the earlier questions: the Apostles' Creed in its entirety, a promise to obey and follow Christ, and a question about seeking and serving Christ. Over the course of Prayer Book revision in the late 1960s and early 1970s, bit by bit, the Standing Liturgical Commission formulated additional questions and eventually the title "Baptismal Covenant."

There is great wisdom in the flow of the

Baptismal Covenant. The promises are directly related to the creedal questions. Indeed, viewed from biblical, historical and ecumenical perspective, the Baptismal Covenant is primarily about God and the relationship God establishes with us in baptism. This is why the Creed is so important. It tells us who God is and what God has done for us. It tells us that God loves us and calls us into relationship.

The creedal questions summarize our trinitarian faith. This is not an abstract geometry — three persons in one God. Rather, in our responses to the questions, we proclaim our belief in God, whom we know because God who created heaven and earth also sent Jesus and continues to send the Spirit. It is here that the creedal questions of the Baptismal Covenant link to the questions of commitment. God who sent the Son and sends the Spirit also sends the Church. God who yearns to draw all the world into the divine life calls us to participate in God's self-giving love for the sake of the world. Thus, in the Baptismal Covenant we begin by professing our faith in the triune God, and so we remember who we are and whose we are, we remember what God has done for us, and we remember that God in Christ establishes a covenant with us.

The covenant of baptism is fundamentally God's initiative. Our response to that covenant is to live as Jesus Christ lived, to live according to power of the Holy Spirit, to participate in God's self-giving love for the world.

The promises we make in the last five questions of the Baptismal Covenant spell out how we will respond to God's initiative. The

sequence of grace, then response, is implicit in the sequence of the Baptismal Covenant. Even then, it's not all about our efforts. To each question about commitment, we respond, "I will, with God's help." Our salvation lies not in what we do ourselves, but in what God does for us and through us and with us.

One gift of the Baptismal Covenant in the Episcopal Church is a renewed understanding of the significance of baptism as the foundation of Christian faith and life. Bonnie Anderson, President of the House of Deputies, recently explained this perspective in response to a *New York Times* article about clergy burnout:

Ministry is not solely the work of professionally trained clergy. Rather it is a shared enterprise in which lay people are equal partners. Clergy burnout occurs because both parties lose sight of this fact. The result is clergy who believe that they must meet everyone's needs while playing the role of a lone superhero, and members of the laity who are either infantilized or embittered because they cannot make meaningful contributions to their church.

Embracing a circular ministry model that values and uses the gifts of laity and clergy while sharing power and authority engages everyone in the work of reconciliation. The big questions are: Will the clergy be able to give up their ascribed power? And will the laity be able to step up to the challenge of their baptism?¹

A role for laity in the leadership of the church may be traced to the origins of the Episcopal Church as a colonial church built apart from any meaningful oversight by bishops. Our first steps toward self-governance, after the Revolutionary War when we were no longer part of the Church of England, were conventions of laity and clergy because we had no bishops. Nevertheless, the baptismal emphasis of the 1979 Prayer Book marks a significant shift. Previous Prayer Books had used essentially the rite we inherited from the Church of England. A baptismal promise to

walk in God's ways was implicit in the sixteenth-century rites and made explicit in 1662. But this rather vaguely worded question became much more explicit in the 1979 Baptismal Covenant.

ANGLICAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF COVENANT

Prior to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the language of "covenant" was not part of Anglican baptismal rites. Godparents made a "solemn promise and vow" on behalf of infant candidates, a vow that included, according to the Catechism, renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh; affirmation of the Christian faith as articulated in the Apostles' Creed; and a promise to "keep God's holy will and commandments." This vow is a human action, a promise made in response to the promises of Christ in the Gospel. While some scholars see this as essentially a covenant, others emphasize that Thomas Cranmer, chief architect of the sixteenth-century Prayer Books, avoided the term "covenant."

A more explicit understanding that baptism involves a covenant became common among Anglican theologians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Influenced by Reformed theology in which covenant was central to the meaning of baptism, Anglican divines spoke of the covenant entered into at baptism. "The whole life of a Christian man and woman should be a continual reflection how in Baptism we entered into covenant with Christ," wrote John Hackett, Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in 1671. Samuel Wesley encouraged regular renewal of that covenant by participation in the Eucharist: "By baptism we are admitted into the new covenant, and because there are few who come to age without having been guilty of some breaches of this Covenant, we do, after we have taken it upon ourselves in confirmation, renew it again at the Holy Communion." For Samuel's son John, renewal of the covenant at communion was not enough, and John Wesley urged an annual renewal.²

The language of "covenant" re-introduced to Anglicanism in the 1979 Prayer Book

has been adopted in a few other churches of the Anglican Communion. Representatives of the Anglican Church of Canada attended meetings of the Standing Liturgical Commission as the Prayer Book was being revised. So it is not surprising that the baptismal rite of the 1985 Canadian *Book of Alternative Services* is quite similar to our 1979 rite, including the Baptismal Covenant. The churches in Mexico and Central America, which until the 1990s were part of The Episcopal Church, continue to use Spanish translations of the 1979 Prayer Book, including the baptismal rite with the covenant. The Prayer Book of the Philippine Episcopal Church has a Baptismal Covenant with an additional question about diligence in the study of scripture. Contemporary rites in Brazil and Melanesia use some but not all of the questions in their Baptismal Covenant.

Other churches in the Anglican Communion have also introduced a more contemporary form of the 1662 question “Wilt thou then obediently keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?” But they have chosen not to identify these questions as part of a “baptismal covenant.” The latest baptismal rites in the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church include questions nearly identical to those of the Episcopal Church’s Baptismal Covenant, but the creedal questions are separate from the additional questions, and these latter questions are identified as “Commitment to Christian Life” (Scotland) or “Commission” (England).

This is more than a difference in terminology. The churches that do not have a “baptismal covenant” share with the Episcopal Church an understanding that the grace bestowed in baptism bears fruit in a life of Christian witness and service. But in the Episcopal Church, the Baptismal Covenant both expresses and symbolizes a radical re-forming of what it means to be church. Baptism is the foundation of our approach to ministry and church life. Thus the Catechism in the 1979 Prayer Book identifies the ministers of the church as “lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.”

Ordained ministries are particular expressions of the more fundamental baptismal gifts of ministry. So, for example, as the Episcopal Church was considering the ordination of women in the 1970s, one argument advanced in favor of this step was “ordain women or stop baptizing them.” A similar case is made in favor of the ordination of qualified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

Perhaps in the understandings of baptism that are emerging from our engagement of the Baptismal Covenant, the Episcopal Church has a gift we might offer others in the Anglican Communion. Perhaps this understanding of baptism may enable us to recognize and celebrate more fully the gifts of our baptized sisters and brothers throughout the Anglican Communion. Perhaps that renewed understanding of baptism may enable us to join hands with those sisters and brothers, and together share in the mission of God’s reconciling love for the world.

But appreciating baptism is not sufficient for the task at hand. How does this baptismal emphasis help us consider the proposed Anglican Covenant?

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROPOSED COVENANT

In its second draft, the Covenant Design Group added an introduction that offers a theological foundation for the document. The official commentary on this draft emphasized the importance of the term “covenant”:

The Covenant Design Group was unanimous in believing that we cannot abandon the word and concept of ‘covenant’, and for several reasons: theologically, we believe that it is correct to say that covenant emerges out of communion, and also ‘serves’ communion, both in terms of God’s relations to us, but just as importantly in our mutual relations as reflective of God’s life that we share. It is related, in a concrete way, to the expression of ‘bonds of affection’ in their pneumatic, relational and responsible power. The distinction between ‘covenant’ and other possible con-

cepts ('concordat', 'compact', etc.) is quite clear in these respects. Finally, the term now has an accepted currency within the Communion that commends its common usage.³

Only minor changes to the Introduction were made in subsequent drafts, in response to comments submitted to the design group. Additionally, the design group added to the covenant text a provision explaining that the Introduction is not to be considered part of the covenant but is always to be included with the text of the covenant and "shall be accorded authority in understanding the purpose of the covenant."

This Introduction sets the proposed covenant in the context of the communion we share through Christ, and more broadly the biblical covenants that furthered our divine calling into communion: the covenants that God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David; the new covenant, written on the people's hearts, that God promised through the prophet Jeremiah; the new covenant established through Jesus' blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. In each of these covenants, God acts first, making promises to a people. Through our communion, we serve the Gospel, making manifest to the world the mercy and grace of God, offering to the world God's reconciling love.

Here, the parallels to the covenant of baptism are obvious. God calls us into communion, just as the covenant of baptism is God's initiative. The commitments articulated in our Baptismal Covenant flow from the communion that is God's gift to us.

While the Baptismal Covenant emphasizes commitments lived out in the world, the Introduction to the proposed Anglican Covenant stipulates that the gift of communion "entails responsibilities for our common life before God." "Covenant" describes our action as churches with one another. Thus, it says, "we covenant together as churches of this Anglican Communion to be faithful to God's promises through the historic faith we confess, our common worship, our participation in God's mission, and the way we live

together."

Although set within the framework of God's promises to us, this covenant is not so much a response to God as it is a set of promises to one another. The emphasis on our commitments to one another is underscored by the exclusion of the Introduction from the text of the covenant, and further accentuated by the provisions of Section Four, which sets out procedures for accountability to one another and introduces the possibility of "relational consequences which flow from an action incompatible with the Covenant."

Certainly, individuals and churches can enter into covenant with one another. The covenant of marriage comes to mind here. But as we consider this proposed covenant, we should understand that it is asking us to do something different than the Baptismal Covenant, which articulates our promises in response to God.

ASSESSING THE PROPOSED COVENANT

How do biblical, theological, and liturgical understandings of covenant, both the premises articulated in the Introduction to the proposed Anglican Covenant and the Episcopal Church's Baptismal Covenant, help us assess the proposed covenant for the Anglican Communion?

Biblical covenants as well as the Baptismal Covenant establish a relationship between God and the people of God, in which God takes the initiative and acts out of divine love. In these covenants, we are reminded who we are and whose we are. How well does the proposed Anglican Covenant help us know who we are and whose we are? To what extent does it reflect the scriptural understanding of covenant presented in its Introduction? Does it lead us more deeply into the knowledge and love of God?

While the biblical covenants are God's gift to us, calling us into communion with God, they also call us to faithful response. As discussed above, the Baptismal Covenant expresses this call and response in its sequence of creedal affirmation followed by questions of commitment, and

even the responses to those final five questions underscore God's action: "I will, *with God's help*." To what extent does the proposed Anglican Covenant foster our response to God's unconditional love?

Beyond the dynamic of God's call and our response in the Baptismal Covenant, the 1979 Prayer Book baptismal rite has fostered an understanding of lay ministry and the significance of leadership shared by laity and clergy. The proposed Anglican Covenant says little about the role of laity. The first section acknowledges "rigorous study by lay and ordained scholars" as one means by which Anglicans are better able to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest scripture. The only other reference to laity is the factual statement in Section Three: "The Anglican Consultative Council is comprised of lay, clerical and episcopal representatives from our Churches." Can the Episcopal Church recognize in the proposed Anglican Covenant its understanding of authority and its approach to church governance? How well does the proposed Anglican Covenant cohere with the baptismal focus of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer?

The proposed covenant says little about baptism. Section One uses the language of the nineteenth-century Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral to affirm the Apostles' Creed as the baptismal symbol and baptism as one of the two sacraments "ordained by Christ himself." Section Three begins with the affirmation "that by our participation in Baptism and Eucharist, we are incorporated into the one body of the Church of Jesus Christ, and called by Christ to pursue all things that make for peace and build up our common life." Is not this the source of our unity as Anglicans? We share a common heritage, tracing our roots in one way or another to the Church of England. Even more important, we share a common baptism, tracing the source of our life to the waters of new birth. Does the Anglican Covenant in its entirety cohere with this baptismal understanding of the church?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Dr. Meyers suggests that "the understandings of baptism that are emerging from [the Episcopal Church's] engagement of the Baptismal Covenant" may be "a gift we might offer others in the Anglican Communion." How is the Baptismal Covenant meaningful to you? How might you articulate the Baptismal Covenant as a gift to the Anglican Communion?

How has an emphasis on baptism enhanced our understanding of lay ministry and of the role of the laity in the Church? Is it significant that the "proposed Anglican Covenant says little about the role of laity"?

Dr. Meyers emphasizes the sequence of grace, then response. In covenant, God takes the initiative, and we respond. How would you describe the grace that God has initiated toward us in the gift of the Anglican Communion? How would you describe the response we might offer to God in thanksgiving for the gift of the Anglican Communion? Does the proposed Anglican Covenant articulate such a sequence of grace, then response? If so, how? If not, how might it be improved?

Dr. Meyers asks: "How well does the proposed Anglican Covenant help us know who we are and whose we are? ...Does it lead us more deeply into the knowledge and love of God?" How would you answer her questions?

Dr. Meyers cites the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and quotes from Section Three of the proposed covenant, affirming "that by our participation in Baptism and Eucharist, we are incorporated into the one body of the Church of Jesus Christ, and called by Christ to pursue all things that make for peace and build up our common life." She asks: "Is not this the source of our unity as Anglicans? We share a common heritage, tracing our roots in one way or another to the Church of England. Even more important, we share a com-

mon baptism, tracing the source of our life to the waters of new birth. Does the Anglican Covenant in its entirety cohere with this baptismal understanding of the church?"

Notes

¹ Bonnie Anderson, in "Letters: The Pressures Faced by Today's Clergy," <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/15/opinion/l15clergy.html>; published August 14, 2010; accessed 15 October 2010.

² Colin Podmore, "The Baptismal Revolution in the American Episcopal Church: Baptismal Ecclesiology and the Baptismal Covenant," *Ecclesiology* 6 (2010): 30.

³"An Anglican Covenant - Commentary to the St Andrew's Draft," http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/st_andrews/commentary.cfm; accessed 15 October 2010.

Chapter Two

RECEPTION



Ellen K. Wondra

Between now and the 77th General Convention in 2012, the Episcopal Church and its members have been asked to study a proposed Anglican Covenant and to decide formally at some point whether or not the Episcopal Church will participate in.¹ At the same time, the Episcopal Church continues to discuss other matters that are important to the daily lives of its members and various organizations, and many of these don't come from the Anglican Communion Office, the Episcopal Church Center, or diocesan offices. They come from the lives, the beliefs, and the practices that church members are engaged in, whether or not these practices have ever been formally evaluated, let alone formally authorized, by the church. The church is asked to come to some clarity on all of these matters and, in at least some cases, make a yes-or-no decision. In the course of doing so, there will be disagreement and dissension as well as mutual acceptance and understanding. Many of us will be deeply involved in these processes, and we hope and pray not only to gain wisdom but also to pass it along to others.

But how does the church know what is true, or good, or right? How does the church know how it is being led by the Holy Spirit? Sometimes the answer is relatively easy to figure out: it's written in Scripture, proclaimed in the Creeds, an integral part of the liturgy and Prayer Book. Sometimes there are predominant teachings, disciplines, and practices that most people continue to find right, good, and fitting. But sometimes it's not that simple. Often enough, Scripture doesn't tell us everything we need to

know. We need to ponder and pray, and ultimately interpret in order to see how, for example, a commandment about the Sabbath is fitting for us now (e.g., Exodus 20:8-10, Mark 2:27-28).

New situations and developments change human relationships, societies, and understandings. We understand what it means to be male and female, for example, much differently now than we did fifty years ago, let alone two thousand years ago. How, as faithful Christians, are we to understand such developments, and what effect do they have on our prayer, our actions, our living together? Studying and discussing these things always involves controversy and conflict; so how do we engage these issues and still stay together?

These questions are as old as Christianity itself.

Acts 15 tells us about a dispute that arose early in the life of the church: did Gentile converts have to be circumcised, as Jewish Christians were? The questions arose from practice: Paul, Barnabas, and others had been baptizing Gentiles without requiring male circumcision. Others said that all Christians had to keep the Torah, including this most distinctive practice. This raised not only the question of what it meant to be Christian, but also of how the church would discern and decide. There was argument and debate, both in western Asia, where Paul and Barnabas were preaching, but also in Jerusalem, where Paul and Barnabas were sent by the churches to seek counsel and even settle the dispute (Acts 15:1-5 NRSV).

In about the year 50 CE, "the apostles

and the leaders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate,” Peter gave his argument against a circumcision requirement. Then there was silence, more discussion, and a statement by James saying that he had changed his mind and now agreed with Peter. “Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among them and send them” to the early Gentile believers (Acts 15:6-22 NRSV). As they did so, they said of their discernment and decisions that “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” to proceed in this way—a statement that is both confident and provisional (Acts 15: 28).

But this decision by the apostles did not end the controversy. There were still those who disagreed and those who hadn’t made up their minds. Yet, with the support of this first church council, Paul and others continued to proclaim the Good News to the Gentile world, and over time the decision not to require converts to be circumcised was embraced as a general and common (if not universal) policy.

The story of the Council of Jerusalem helps us see a number of things. First, there are aspects of Christian faith and practice that are discerned to be characteristically Christian—catholic, in the sense of universal, and are acknowledged across Christianity. Second, what these aspects are is to be determined not only by Scripture and tradition, but also by “consent”—that is, by the way in which we together actually say and show what our faith is. Ultimately, all of this is guided by the Holy Spirit, who both preserves and leads the church into all truth (John 6:13).

Ever since, the church has continued to work out important, controversial matters in the same way: by recognizing that something apparently new is going on and should be pondered; then gathering together, debating and discussing; and finally coming to a consensus of some sort, “the consent of the whole church,” and stating or teaching it. And then there is a further

step, during which the decision about the controverted matter is handed on to all the church, to see if it indeed is found to be consonant with the faith as Christians have received it over the ages. In contemporary ecclesiology and ecumenical theology, this process is called *reception*.

“Reception,” as the great church historian Henry Chadwick has written, “. . . concerns the recognition by believers, who aspire only to obey the Gospel, of other believers with other customs who also aspire to obey.”² Recognition is a mutual, relational activity: people whose beliefs, teachings, or practices differ from each other must recognize *each other* as those “who aspire only to obey the Gospel.” This must happen between persons, but also between persons and church bodies, among church bodies, with other churches, and so on.

Reception does not concern only recognition or agreement in teaching (or doctrine). It also includes church structures and practices, the church’s liturgy and worship, the shaping of Christian lives, and daily lives as Christians live them. So, for example, over the centuries, much of the church has received particular forms and structures of governance (though there is by no means universal agreement here), a particular shape to the liturgy, a shared sense of what it means to “love your neighbor,” and so on.

More profoundly, when we speak of reception, we begin with the fact that the first thing we receive is the Christian faith itself, which we receive as a divine gift.³ The grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit enable believers to recognize the truth of the Christian faith. They respond to this recognition through repentance, conversion, and formation in Christian belief and life for the sake of service, witness, and mission. Through teaching, witness, and mission in the power of the Spirit, they also hand on the faith to others (1 Cor. 15:1, Gal. 1:9-12). In other words, reception involves the whole of the Christian life, lived corporately and individually. And, as each of us lives into life as a Christian, reception of our faith itself takes time,

probably a lifetime. Similarly, corporate reception of particular teachings and practices also takes time; and it is to be expected that there will be disagreement and controversy along the way, sometimes for decades and even centuries.⁴

Throughout, we trust that the Holy Spirit will both maintain us in and lead us into all truth. At the same time, as Anglicans have long recognized, not everything that is taught or done by the church or its members does in fact express the truth of the gospel; the church may err, even in matters of faith.⁵ Through the process of reception, we discern the extent to which a particular teaching, corporate form, or practice is consonant with the faith that we have received from God in the context of the church. And during the process of reception, no one (except God alone) knows what the outcome of that discernment will be. Or when it will be.

Scripture tells us that there are “varieties of gifts but one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4); these gifts fund differing insights, points of view, and practices. Recognizing this, Anglicans have generally believed that the church is more likely to discern, decide, and receive decisions when they are made by the whole people of God rather than any one group alone. So our corporate life and our organization—our polity—are structured so that bishops, deacons, priests, and laity all have a say in processes of discernment, decision, and reception. Within these orders of ministry, different orders have different responsibilities and kinds of authority (spelled out in the baptism and ordination rites of the Prayer Book) and therefore different perspectives. It is by bringing all together that the “mind of the church” is determined and articulated.

At the same time, different member churches of the Anglican Communion arrange their lives together in different ways. In some churches bishops have a great deal more authority than they do elsewhere; in other churches, the laity along with bishops and clergy have a decisive voice. These variations on a single theme of ordered and dispersed authority can produce

conflict and discord; but they can also produce a much richer and deeper understanding of potentially divisive matters.

Because there are varieties of gifts, the ongoing processes of discernment, decision, and reception cannot require that everyone agree on everything. Often what we have reached is *differentiated consensus*, in which the process of reception recognizes that there is a “fundamental commonality” where there had been difference before, along with “remaining differences” that should be worked on further.⁶ The Anglican Covenant, in a sense, is one means of stating such a differentiated consensus while also setting out a general way for the Anglican Communion to deal with differences that have global implications.

From another angle, the covenant is a way of encouraging and testing reception. That is, when a particular church decides to adopt the covenant and to participate in the Anglican Communion in the ways the covenant describes, that church is indicating that it has received or is in the process of receiving the covenant’s various statements of fundamental beliefs. It is also indicating that it is willing to order its life and practices so that it will stay in the particular relationships that the covenant indicates.

By the same token, when a particular church decides *not* to adopt the covenant, it is saying (among other things) that the covenant does *not* (yet) give an adequate account of what has been received, what is in the process of being received, and what is not and perhaps should not be received. This most likely does not mean that such a church does not hold the particular beliefs about God and the church laid out in the covenant. Rather, it may mean that that church believes some parts of the covenant are sufficiently flawed as to require further work. In other words, that church may be identifying remaining differences and asking that discernment of the significance of these differences continue.

In the Introduction and Sections One, Two and Three, the covenant attempts to give an

adequate overview of the Christian faith as Anglicans have received it and of its implications for our sharing in the mission of God in the world and for our life together. Many Anglicans are likely to find most if not all of this representative of what we believe. Even if not every word is to our liking, we are likely to be able to say “Yes!” to a critical question: “Am I willing to be in communion with people who believe this?” In other words, “I recognize those with whom I do not agree as faithful others Christians aspiring to live out the Gospel.” That “Yes” also indicates that in these matters, differences do not have to be divisive; we can live together with a differentiated consensus.

Section Four of the covenant then asks each church to affirm “the following principles and procedures, and, reliant on the Holy Spirit, [to commit] itself to their implementation.” Here the earlier affirmations of shared beliefs are moved into a very particular, concrete set of practices. In many ways, this is the nub of the covenant. Section Four asks this question: “Given that we can live together in communion on the basis of what has been said before, is this the way we agree we should actually go about our life together, especially when conflict arises?” Each church must then look at its own policies and practices, its canon law and polity, its actions. Perhaps most importantly, it must examine what it is discerning as its particular mission, both in its own context and worldwide. At the same time, it may very well be that what each church discerns as its particular mission is precisely what is the most likely to be questioned under the terms of the covenant. And if so, each church’s discernment may call the covenant itself into question.

For example, over several decades the Episcopal Church as a body has come to a differentiated consensus about human sexuality, including both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. That is, we affirm that all Christians, regardless of sexual orientation, are children of God, and are called to ministry as baptized

members of the Body of Christ. That affirmation then helps us discern and shape our witness and mission; it helps us recognize to whom we should extend ourselves in witness and service. While not everyone agrees with the practice, the ordination of both homosexual and heterosexual persons is common across the Episcopal Church although there is no canon that requires bishops to accept. How human sexuality ought to be expressed in relationships is a matter of considerable controversy and conflict, and how that conflict may be resolved is not yet clear; further discernment is needed.

All of this has come to the fore not first and foremost on the basis of formal theological study or official church action, but rather through the discernment processes that take place in the daily lives of Christians.⁷ From this beginning in informal, unofficial discernment, the Episcopal Church has moved as well into more formal processes of discernment, decision, and reception. And these processes are continuing. In the meantime, we continue by the grace of God to live faithfully together and to proclaim God’s Good News to the world in word and deed.

Under the Anglican Covenant, how are we, the Episcopal Church, then to live faithfully in relationship to the Anglican Communion and its other constituting churches? In the vast majority of situations, this will not be a problem. But churches who agree to Section Four of the covenant commit themselves to certain processes of dealing with serious disputes when they do arise, processes that have real consequences. What those consequences may be is not actually spelled out in the covenant. Perhaps they would be like those the Episcopal Church has experienced already, when official Episcopal Church representatives to the Anglican Consultative Council were asked to refrain from participating in body’s 2005 meeting; or when duly appointed Episcopal Church representatives were removed in 2010 from some international ecumenical dialogues.

Of course, the Episcopal Church, like other churches, is already living with the consequences of its decisions and practices. What the proposed covenant does is to spell out a formal and official way of determining and carrying out consequences. There may be “a variety of gifts but the same Spirit,” but there may also be uses and expressions of those gifts that are not compatible with how the Anglican Communion defines itself officially. The fact that a formal agreement is even proposed presupposes this.

With the proposal of the covenant, it becomes incumbent upon all Anglican churches to engage in the very careful and complex processes of decision and reception. In many ways the question is to what extent these processes will also serve the local churches of the Anglican Communion in their widely varying cultures and contexts. Put another way, are there or can we foresee developments in one context that call for actions that will be highly controversial in another? If so, are these actions of such significance that they warrant, even require, Anglican churches to seek to exclude the offending church from the councils of the Communion? How is the church’s mission served by marginalizing those whom some are not able to recognize as aspiring only to obey the Gospel? Or is living with ongoing controversy itself a grave obstacle to the church’s participation in God’s mission in the world?

The answers to these questions are far from easy to discern and decide. We do not know how Paul and Barnabas would have proceeded had the Council of Jerusalem decided circumcision was a necessary part of Christian initiation. We don’t know what the consequences of such a decision would have been. We do know that the church must at times make significant, public decisions; and that in the past it has sometimes done so well, furthering faith and mission, and it has sometimes done so poorly. We know that not all decisions are congruent with what is discerned, and we know that not all decisions are in fact received, even in a differenti-

ated consensus. So we must trust in the Spirit even as we struggle with each other to discern what such trust might mean.

The ongoing nature of discernment, decision, and reception means that for the time being we live with things as they are and toward things as they might be. We live with firm conviction in our faith, but also with certain knowledge that the same faith can be expressed in different ways, in word and in deed. We live with Godly joy and delight in each other’s companionship in faith—in our communion one with another—and at the same time with controversy, deep disagreement, and all the emotions such things evoke in and among us. And at some point, we the church decide. And even when we decide matters that may seem abstract, or disconnected from our lives, in every case what we decide has real consequences in the daily lives of concrete persons. It is always particular women and men whose vocations, lives, and even faith are put to the test through the church’s deliberations. In one regard, this is profoundly as it should be: Christianity is first and foremost about the Person of God and of God’s incarnate Wisdom and Word, Jesus Christ. In another regard, however, we must keep in mind that while we deliberate, we are likely asking particular people to bear disproportionate burdens of suffering, patience, and forbearance, and that may be a further wounding of the Body of Christ of which they are members incorporate.

Finally, we must remember that discernment and reception do not end until God’s Kingdom comes on earth. It is not yet clear what is coming into being, nor how the purposes of God will be fulfilled, either in history or beyond it. Where these processes may take us, we cannot know at this time. We are, therefore, called to live with uncertainty, controversy, and even the possibility of error. We are also called to live in trust and hope in the God who is making all things new, and whose Spirit will lead us into all truth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Dr. Wondra offers the early church's debate over circumcision as an illustration of the process of decision making in the church. After argument and debate, after discernment and decision, the controversy continued for some time. What does the circumcision debate tell us about how we make decisions in the church today?

Dr. Wondra says that it takes time for us to receive our faith. How has your faith changed over time?

Dr. Wondra describes reception as a process: (1) recognizing something new is going on, (2) debating and discussing, (3) reaching some sort of consensus, (4) stating that consensus, and (5) handing it to the church to see if it is accepted. How does the process in the proposed Anglican Covenant relate to this historic pattern?

Dr. Wondra writes: "Because there are varieties of gifts, the ongoing processes of discernment, decision and reception cannot require that everyone agree on everything. Often what we have reached is *differentiated consensus*." What is differentiated consensus? How might the Anglican Communion maintain unity through differentiated consensus?

Dr. Wondra writes: "What we decide has real consequences in the daily lives of concrete persons. It is always particular women and men whose vocations, lives, and even faith are put to the test through the church's deliberations." Who will "bear disproportionate burdens of suffering, patience, and forbearance" as the church debates the issues which divide us now?

Dr. Wondra closes with these words: "We are, therefore, called to live with uncertainty, controversy, and even the possibility of error. We are also called to live in trust and hope in the God who is making all things new, and whose Spirit will lead us into all truth." When in your life

have you lived hopefully with deep uncertainty? What happened?

Notes

¹ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/index.cfm> for the text; http://www.episcopalchurch.org/newsline_124319_ENG_HTM.htm for the official letter asking the Episcopal Church to engage in study of it.

² Henry Chadwick, "Reception" in *Communion et Réunion: Mélanges Jean-Marie Roger Tillard*. G. R. Evans and Michel Gourges, eds. (Leuven, University Press, 1995), 95.

³ J. D. Zizioulas, (1985). "The Theological Problem of 'Reception'." *One in Christ* XXI no. 3 (1985): 189.

⁴ The reception of the Council of Nicaea (325) is a classic example.

⁵ The Articles of Religion, Article 19, *Book of Common Prayer*, 897.

⁶ William G. Rusch, "The Landscape of Reception," in *Seeking the Truth of Change in the Church: Reception, Communion and the Ordination of Women*, ed. Paul Avis (London: T & T Clark Ltd, 2004), 16. See, for example, the final report of the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM), *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (London: SPCK, 2007).

⁷ See *To Set Our Hope on Christ: A Response to the Invitation of Windsor 135* (Office of Communication, Episcopal Church Center, 2005).

WHAT ARE BISHOPS FOR AND THE QUEST OF UNITY



Timothy F. Sedgwick

The proposed Anglican Covenant is above all about *épiskope* (the Greek noun meaning oversight) and all about bishops as an ordained office. In particular the two central questions are, “What are bishops for?” and “What power and authority should they have in forming the life of the church?” More broadly, the proposed Anglican Covenant addresses the central questions of the church: How is the church to be faithful to Jesus Christ? How should the church order its life for the sake of the Gospel? What does that mean and what does that require? The answers to these questions tell the story of the church in its development, divisions, and reformations. The proposed Anglican Covenant can only be understood as part of this larger story as given and received in the churches that form the Anglican Communion.

WHAT ARE BISHOPS FOR?

The story of bishops begins with the early church. In the New Testament the Greek word *épiskopus* is translated in English as overseer or as bishop (from the Latinization of *épiskopus*¹). There is a long history from the New Testament reference to the one who has oversight to the development of the ordained office we now call bishop.

In the early church three elements were central to *épiskope*. Writing in about 115, Ignatius of Antioch emphasized that oversight was given by the one who presides at the Eucharist. In obedience to Jesus’ command, Eucharist is

the central act of worship in which the church is the body of Christ offering itself to God for the sake of the world. In this offering the church marks its fundamental reality as communion (as *koinonia*), as bound together in the intimate love of God and neighbor. *Episkopus* (the one who exercises oversight) was the elder in the community who embodied and represented the Christian faith in his life. Like the host or community leader, in calling the community together in celebration of their faith, this person provided oversight.

In the second half of the second century (from between 130 and 140 to 202 when he died), Irenaeus speaks of a second element of *épiskope*, the bishop as teacher. Reflecting his writings against false teaching, oversight is given by the one who teaches. The one who provides oversight is the one who proclaims the faith in the local congregation and so preserves the continuity of faith as apostolic, as an unbroken *tradition* that begins with the apostles (coming from the Latin transitive verb *traditio*, meaning handing over or passing on).

Cyprian—in the first half of the third century (from between 200 and 210 to 258)—claims a third element as central to understanding *épiskope*. The one who gives oversight is the one who shares that faith in common with other leaders of communities of faith. This reflects the coming together of oversight in a regularized position, what we would call an office. Bishops gather together in councils as a collegial body, as

colleagues, hence the later term “college of bishops”. In gathering they bring together local communities in relationship to each other in order to express and further the church as universal communion. This reflects the bishop as teacher but adds the element of the bishop as pastor. Pastoral oversight in this sense is not individual pastoral care but more the role of the shepherd who rules or governs the flock. In this sense the bishop has been understood as the chief pastor who provides the bond of unity and identity for the communities of faith.

These three elements in understanding *épiskope*—presiding over Eucharistic worship and the community, teaching, and acting as pastor—came to be understood as integral one to the other.² The one who presides is the teacher, not as a pedagogue, nor as schoolteacher, but as one who embodies the Christian faith in their life and understanding. The teacher stands at the head of the class. The coach calls the team together. In turn, the one who teaches is the pastor who shepherds. You can’t teach without discipline, though discipline without wisdom is arbitrary rule.

Together these three elements explain why the office of the bishop comes to be understood sacramentally and as a divine gift. Meaning and function cannot be separated. The office of the bishop is a sign of the unity of the church as a matter of *épiskope*. The bishop signifies and effects (brings about) the unity of the church as a communion of persons bound together as the bishop presides, teaches, and pastors.

Central to the further development of the office of bishop is the development of the priesthood as a separate position or role in the church. Sometime at the end of the second century or in the third century, priesthood as a distinct order of ministry came into existence. In part this reflected the growth of the church. Bishops came to assume regional oversight over a group of local churches in which priests exercised *épiskope* on behalf of the bishop. In the local church the priest presided over worship and was teacher and pastor.

In the development of the church from the 4th through the 8th century, in addition to bishops of each local church, there came to be bishops having oversight over each metropolitan district. These were presiding bishops and were referred to as primates or patriarchs. In the fourth century there were four patriarchal sees with oversight over the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople and one patriarchal see in Rome with oversight over the churches in Rome. Bishops from these five sees variously gathered in a series of councils from 325 (the First Council of Nicaea) through 787 (the Second Council of Nicaea).

In these “ecumenical councils” (literally meaning world-wide councils), *épiskope* was broadly speaking collegial or conciliar. Bishops having oversight over local churches gathered together to come to understandings of matters of doctrine and discipline. Authority as a whole, though, remained largely dispersed. Regional churches were left under the authority of their own bishops who sought to teach and discipline in light of the teachings of the councils and the practical realities of local congregations.

By the 11th century, the Bishop of Rome became the final teacher and pastor of Christian faith in the churches of West as distinct from the Eastern churches with their four Patriarchs. Councils within the Roman Church were not abolished but were largely shaped by papal concerns and questions and so reinforced papal authority. Claims of papal authority were exercised through teachings, the authority of appointments, and the power of absolution and excommunication. Reform movements within the Roman Catholic Church variously sought to balance what we may call “a monarchical episcopate” with a more collegial model.

Further “reform” of the monarchical episcopate in the West was at the center of the Protestant Reformation beginning in the 16th century. Understanding all human institutions as fallen, the Reformers claimed that the teaching and unity of the church depended upon the

inner testimony of the Holy Spirit and in that light Scripture as the Word of God bearing its own witness to the truth. From this foundational claim flowed the development of the doctrines of justification by faith, *sola scriptura*, and the priesthood of all believers. The reformers, however, did not promote an individualistic approach to salvation. The Protestant reformers believed that Christian faith required *épiskope*. Far from renouncing church order, teaching, and discipline, congregations were to insure the regular reading of Scripture, true worship, and right teaching as given in catechisms and confessions of faith. Protestant reformers re-conceived forms of *épiskope*. Teaching and governance were not to be identified with a monarchical episcopate or even an episcopate balanced by the councils of the church. Rather, *épiskope* was given in more communal forms of authority.

The historical development of the varied exercises of *épiskope* in the different Christian churches—the early church, Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism—reveals shared understandings of the nature of *épiskope*. However, history also reveals the dangers in the various ways of organizing power and authority in the church.³ Dispersed authority insures that the gospel is grounded in the local community and its experience of God in their lives. However, such dispersed authority can give rise to such diversity that the universal character of Christian faith and of the church as a community of faith is lost from view. Episcopal authority as given in the college of bishops—and even more so when tied to the Pope—makes possible the common expressions of faith as a matter of belief and practices. However, the centralization of authority may be imposed and deny the authentic expressions of faith as a life lived by particular people before God. This tension between dispersed and centralized authority has been a tension in discerning the work of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost and was raised in the initial formation of the church by Paul regarding whether Gentiles could be Christian (Acts. 10-15).⁴

WHAT SHOULD BISHOPS DO?

The proposed Anglican Covenant moves towards a specific answer to the ordering of *épiskope* and with that the role and authority of bishops in the Anglican Communion. Two central questions are raised for the churches that form the present Anglican Communion in their consideration of whether or not to adopt this proposed ordering of *épiskope*. The first question is descriptive. Does the proposal honor the present ordering of *épiskope* and the role and authority of bishops in their own church? The second question is normative. Will the proposed covenant further the unity and integrity of faith within one's own church in relationship to other churches?

Reasonable and faithful persons may disagree about whether or not to adopt the proposed covenant. What makes an informed choice difficult is that while the proposed Anglican Covenant provides a clear description of the meaning and purpose of *épiskope*, it proposes an answer to the role and authority of bishops without any critical discussion of the history, development, and understandings of the office of the bishop in the churches that presently form the Anglican Communion.

The meaning and requirements of *épiskope* for Anglicans are given in the statement of the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral, adopted by the Episcopal Church's General Convention in 1886 and by the bishops of the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference in 1888: "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."⁵ The proposed Anglican Covenant restates this fundamental claim and the corresponding challenge of *épiskope* to sustain the integrity of faith and unity between local congregations and a worldwide church.

Quoting from a statement made by the Primates after their meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, in March 2009, the proposed Anglican Covenant says, "Each Church affirms its resolve

to live in a Communion of Churches. 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.’” The letter goes on to quote from a statement issued by the bishops of the 1930 Lambeth Conference, saying, “Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together ‘not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference’ and of the other instruments of Communion.” (3.1.2)

Agreement among Anglicans on the truth of the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral does not solve the question of what *épiskope* requires or the variety of ways in which *épiskope* may be structured. The statement, for example, doesn’t indicate how bishops should be elected or what power and authority the bishop should have to exercise *épiskope*. In fact, the power and authority of the bishop in relationship to others in the church in the exercise of *épiskope* has developed in differing ways within the Anglican Communion. While the Church of England has become increasingly collegial in receiving input from those involved in and affected by the decisions of bishops, bishops stand at the center of power and authority. Bishops hold the power and authority for the election of new bishops, the appointment (and reappointment) of bishops to specific dioceses, and the development of the teaching of the church (which can then be enacted by Episcopal election and appointment). In this way, the Church of England insured order and conformity in the missionary churches planted in the worldwide reach of the British Empire. Not until the 1988 Lambeth Conference were a majority of the bishops in attendance not appointed by the Church of England.

The Episcopal Church and other post-colonial churches in the Anglican Communion have, however, ordered the role and authority of bishops differently. As the original name of

the Episcopal Church indicates, in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, bishops are central to the church’s self-understanding. However, bishops in the Episcopal Church are chosen in a different fashion than their counterparts in the Church of England, and they exercise a more limited authority. The office of the bishop, the episcopacy, is certainly not monarchical. It is far more collegial and even communal or synodical in character. Whether at the diocesan level or the national church level, laity and clergy come together in synod to govern with particular responsibilities and powers, most often in a system of checks and balances reaching down to the local congregation, reaching across between laity and clergy, and reaching up to the bishop him or herself.

Dioceses in the Episcopal Church, for example, elect bishops through representatives of congregations, requiring in most cases a majority vote by laity and by clergy. Bishops are then ratified by the consent of a majority of diocesan bishops and a majority of diocesan Standing Committees (i. e. governing bodies composed of lay and clergy representatives). Bishops, moreover, having oversight over one diocese, cannot be transferred to assume diocesan oversight apart from the election by another diocese. At the level of the national church, bishops share authority in the life and work of the church in a bicameral system of checks and balances between a House of Bishops and a House of Deputies with diocesan lay and ordained representatives. Given dispersed authority—for example, in the case of the election of Gene Robinson as diocesan bishop of New Hampshire or in the election of Mary Glasspool as suffragan bishop in the Diocese of Los Angeles—the presiding bishop cannot veto or repeal a diocesan election assuming a majority of bishops and Standing Committees consent to the election.

On a spectrum from monarchical to communal, *épiskope* in the Church of England is conciliar and collegial but more towards the monarchical episcopate. In the Episcopal Church

épiskope is also conciliar and collegial but leans more towards the communal as exercised in synods (most often called diocesan conventions or convocations and General Convention in reference to the national church). In terms of governance, the Episcopal Church is post-colonial in that it has formed its own ordering of episcopacy apart from the Church of England.

In the Anglican Communion, other churches vary in their approach to *épiskope*. The churches that broke from England first—such as the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the Anglican Church of Australia, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of South India—differ in order and discipline but in terms of *épiskope* also lean more towards the communal while also clearly embracing the episcopate as conciliar and collegial in character.

The proposed Anglican Covenant clearly expresses the ways in which *épiskope* and the office of bishop must be collegial and conciliar. This is given in commitment to the instruments of unity and to multiple processes of consultation. Power and authority to govern the life of the churches that have constituted the Anglican Communion is centered in the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and the Primates' Meeting. The Standing Committee itself is constituted by seven persons elected by the ACC, the chair and the vice-chair of the ACC (who are also elected by the members of the ACC), and five persons constituting the Primates' Standing Committee. The Archbishop of Canterbury serves as an *ex officio* member of the Standing Committee and serves as chair when present.

In considering charges brought to it against actions by churches within the Anglican Communion, the Standing Committee “shall make recommendations as to relational consequences which flow from an action incompatible with the covenant. These recommendations may be addressed to the Churches of the Anglican

Communion or to the Instruments of the Communion and address the extent to which the decision of any covenanting Church impairs or limits the communion between that Church and the other Churches of the Communion, and the practical consequences of such impairment or limitation. Each Church or each Instrument shall determine whether or not to accept such recommendations.” (4.2.6)

Here the means of discipline are broadly conciliar and collegial. The Standing Committee is a council and seeks input broadly from others and, in turn, makes recommendations to others having specific authority over aspects of the life of the Communion. On the face of it, this reflects Anglican polity and *épiskope*; however, it establishes a form of *épiskope* tied to a centralization of discipline.

The centralization of discipline proposed in the covenant significantly departs from the early church and from the communal character of *épiskope* in the Protestant tradition. The Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral shared this Protestant understanding in its first three claims: that the unity of the church requires (a) agreement that Holy Scriptures are the revealed Word of God containing all things necessary to salvation, (b) agreement that the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are sufficient statements of the Christian Faith, and (c) agreement regarding the centrality of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. In terms of the episcopate, the Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral emphasized (d) agreement on the office of the bishop but that its exercise was “locally adapted.” In this fourth claim in the quadrilateral, Anglicans affirm the office of the bishop as a sign of a faith and life shared in common without assuming a centralization of authority within Anglicanism as a whole.

The centralization of authority in the Roman Catholic Church and in the proposed Anglican Covenant make possible administratively and juridically a greater agreement on the meaning and practice of Christian faith. This is what Charles Taylor has described as a form of “puri-

tanization”, of purifying Christian faith in seeking a greater unity and integrity of faith through increased specification of belief and uniformity of conduct.⁶ Ironically, such centralization may result in increased divisions. Jeremy Taylor indicated this problem in the 17th century given the bloody divisions between Catholic and Reformed views of the church. As he writes in his sermon, “Via Intelligentiae”: “when truth and peace are brought into the world together, and bound up in the same bundle of life; when we are taught a religion by the Prince of peace, who is the truth itself, to see men contending for this truth to the breach of that peace; and when men fall out, to see that they should make Christianity their theme: that is one of the greatest wonders in the world. . . . Disputation cures no vice, but kindles a great many, and makes passion evaporate into sin: and though men esteem it learning, yet it is the most useless learning in the world.”⁷

From this perspective, the proposed Anglican Covenant pits Puritans of different stripes against liberals with many views. Puritans see only a centralized and ultimately bureaucratic form of the Episcopacy as necessary for the integrity of Christian faith and witness. They seek the integrity of belief and practice at the cost of ever increasing division. Liberals see diversity in understandings and practices as essential to a faith that is received and lived among different people and across cultures. They court the danger of a tolerance that undermines teaching and witness.

The danger of the loss of integrity in the life and mission of the church is the central problem assumed in the proposed Anglican Covenant. The Puritan answer to the problem of diversity, however, is not as self-evident as assumed or at least as proposed by the proposed Anglican Covenant. The consequences in terms of time, attention, and cost are not even considered. Perhaps most significantly, the Puritan and liberal responses differ in what they believe are the limits and importance of shared communion among those who differ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Dr. Sedgwick characterized the early ecumenical councils as “collegial or conciliar,” reflecting a dispersed authority. He contrasts that tradition with the development of “a monarchical episcopate” emerging from Rome in the Western church by the 11th century. Where do you see the proposed Anglican Covenant falling on the continuum between collegial and monarchical models of *épiskope*?

How do you prefer to participate in institutions of government, authority and oversight? Do you lean toward collegial or monarchical models? Why?

Dr. Sedgwick writes: “Dispersed authority insures that the gospel is grounded in the local community and its experience of God in their lives. However such dispersed authority can give rise to such diversity that the universal character of the Christian faith and of the church as a community faith is lost to view.” How have you experienced diversity in community?

Dr. Sedgwick writes: “Episcopal authority . . . makes possible the common expressions of faith as a matter of belief and practice. However, the centralization of authority may be imposed and deny authentic expression of faith as a life lived by particular people before God.” How have you experienced authority expressed in community?

Dr. Sedgwick notes that churches in the Anglican Communion vary in their approach to *épiskope*—the churches that broke from England first tending to be more post-colonial, communal and collegial in nature, in contrast to the more monarchical episcopates in England and in the more recently independent churches. How do you think these differences in history and structure influence the Anglican Communion today?

After describing the proposed process of discipline in the Anglican Covenant, Dr. Sedgwick

writes: “The centralization of discipline proposed in the covenant significantly departs from the early church and from the communal character of *épiskope* in the Protestant tradition. . . . The centralization of authority in the Roman Catholic Church and in the proposed Anglican Covenant make possible administratively and juridically a greater agreement on the meaning and practice of Christian faith.” What benefits and risks do you see in this proposed change?

Notes

¹ See “bishop”, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1989).

² See Richard A. Norris, *The Business of All Believers: Reflections on Leadership* (NY: Seabury, 2009) for an account of the different understandings of the early church and corresponding understandings of leadership, esp. pp. 48-61.

³ See Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (NY: Continuum, 2009), pp. 48-158.

⁴ On Acts 10-15, in response to the very question of the tension between the universal and the local that gave rise to the Anglican Covenant, see *To Set Our Hope in Christ: A Response to the Invitation of the Windsor Report Para. 135* (New York: Office of Communications, Episcopal Church Center, 2005), section 2.10-2.13, pp. 13-17

⁵ The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), pp. 877-78; text from the adopted text of Lambeth 1888, resolution 11.

⁶ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007), pp. 541-542.

⁷ *Jeremy Taylor: Selected Works, The Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. Thomas K. Carroll (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 355.

Chapter Four

“INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW: A LAY PERSON’S PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROPOSED ANGLICAN CONVENANT”



Fredrica Harris Thompsett

My father was a lawyer. He taught me to read very carefully any document that I would be responsible for signing or approving. What does the document ask me to do? Mother was an actress who encouraged me to pay attention not only to individual performances but also to the overall play. What is at stake, she would ask? What crisis, tension, or story does this play address? And, centrally, what is the playwright’s overall intent?

These and other basic questions stay with me as I join with other deputies to the 77th General Convention to consider the proposed Anglican Covenant. Some of these: Are we being asked to confirm a significant change in the polity of The Episcopal Church (TEC)? Why, and why now, do we need this proposed covenant? Is approving this text, as I have heard said, the best or only way to “stay at the table” and “seek deeper communion” with others among our Anglican Communion sisters and brothers? Why is this text of particular importance for lay leaders? If we approve this covenant, what kind of foundation are we building for our future life together? You may be asking yourself many of the same questions.

As a professional Episcopal historian and Anglican theologian, I also bring considerations about historical precedent to our common deliberations. For example, the way this text speaks about “tradition” is of concern. As a theologian I am interested in and frankly frustrated by the

ecclesiology—the theology of the church—as it is proposed and envisioned in this text. I wonder too if the covenant, with its emphasis on “discipline,” implies shifts in Anglican social ethics and pastoral theology.

One thing that I do know for sure: 99% of the people who will be affected if the proposed Anglican Covenant is enacted are laity. It will not surprise my clergy and lay colleagues that I believe the ministry of the laity should be one of the central foci of any document that proposes to change our relationships with one another. I confess that I am an unabashed admirer of TEC’s polity, of the restored liturgical prominence of Holy Baptism with its explicit promises in the full Baptismal Covenant, and of the ways our 1979 Book of Common Prayer advocates, specifically in the Catechism, the “ministry of the laity” as taking our “place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.” Like many of those who will read this reflection, I have responsibly, and I hope effectively, taken my place in parish, diocesan, national and international committees and commissions.

It is with these experiences and questions in mind that I share these reflections. There is much in general to be applauded in the biblical and missional grounding of the proposed covenant. I am grateful for those, especially from TEC, who have patiently tilled, turned over, and to a great extent, improved this contested proposal. To be brief, however, I wish to follow

my father's advice and pursue a few of the places where I am hard pressed to affirm this statement. The issues I address below are places where I, and perhaps you, wish to learn more.

TECHNICALITIES AND ASSUMPTIONS

At a recent deanery meeting in my diocese, an effective local leader asked why Episcopal laity, in particular, should be concerned about the future relational dynamics in the proposed text. "Isn't this text," he asked, "primarily addressing technicalities about bishops and primates?" He had read the text carefully and had found only a few direct references to laity. Most of the language does refer to "bishops in conference," "episcopal collegiality" and "Houses of Bishops" located within their own "synodical structures." Yet this lay leader's question reminds me that this proposed covenant includes unnamed assumptions and phrasing that is not always clear. It also presents controversial conclusions as though they were rooted in some long-standing consensus. In the political language of our day, we would say that in some instances the proposed covenant lacks transparency.

I experienced many of these same dynamics in the late 1980s and early 1990s when I served on The Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC). The documentary product of this Commission was the "Virginia Report." I have written elsewhere about the ups and downs of this experience and my disappointment with the final Report.¹ Here I wish to emphasize the importance of understanding the language and assumptions at work in inter-Anglican documents.

Let's consider the word "collegial," for example. In IATDC's deliberations the phrase "personal, collegial, and communal" was used to describe the ways Anglican bishops exercise authority. At the start of our conversations I assumed that "collegial"—as noted in Merriam-Webster's first and long-standing definition of this term—meant "power or authority vested

equally in each of a number of colleagues. Instead I was directed to an 1887 usage, which the same dictionary describes as "equal sharing of authority, especially by Roman Catholic bishops." I was literally, and rather crisply, informed that our Anglican bishops functioned "collegially" with authority parallel to the Roman Catholic "College of Cardinals." Could this be true? This understanding of episcopal collegiality, the Virginia Report also insists, is a central reality in "Anglican experience at the diocesan, Provincial and Communion-wide levels."² This assertion did not then and still does not accord with many, if not most, of my encounters with bishops' leadership in the Episcopal Church. In our Diocesan and General Conventions, I have not observed TEC being led primarily by "bishops in synod."

Nor do these assumptions about the exercise of "episcopal collegiality" ring true to me as a historian of both the Reformation in England and of the American church. Queen Elizabeth I—the real Tudor "founder" of the 16th-century Church of England—intentionally grounded her "Settlement" of Church governance in parliamentary actions with laity involved. She clearly had no fondness for Roman Catholic polity, let alone meetings of English bishops. Nor did Queen Elizabeth take it upon herself to speak for other countries. "Flexibility," a Tudor historian has recently written, "was a key to survival."³ The Reformation in England took hold gradually in communities of common prayer where all members, not just a few leaders, endeavored to live out their faith despite considerable diversity and uncertainties. Similarly, early American Episcopal history indicates that church leaders were at best apprehensive about episcopal authority. As early as 1784, an informal Convention declared "that to make canons there be no other authority than a representative body of the clergy and laity conjointly [meeting]."⁴ In considering the proposed covenant, it is important not only to question and clarify the way language is used, but also to discover where and how a phrase or

assertion has been previously employed.

The proposed covenant, as the Executive Council 2010 Study Guide helpfully notes, is built upon a number of earlier international Anglican documents. These recent texts say they were each occasioned by matters of “urgency” or “crisis.” When IATDC was convened in the 1990s the “matter of urgency” challenging the “unity and order of the Church” was specifically named as the ordination of women to the priesthood and the consecration of women bishops.⁵ Language used in the proposed covenant is much broader. It points to “any action which may provoke controversy, which by its intensity, substance or extent could threaten the unity of the Communion” (3.2.5). Granted those drafting the proposed covenant may well have painted with a broad brush to provide both for current and future challenges that could threaten the Communion. Yet, since the central presenting cause of controversy is not directly named in this proposed covenant, the text lacks transparency about the “action” it seeks to remedy. I wonder: what if the proposed covenant were discovered centuries from now without accompanying contextual information, would it leave future readers guessing at the nature of the intense threat? World hunger perhaps? The HIV/AIDS pandemic, or global ecological collapse? I return to my mother’s theatrical query: what is this drama really about?

ASSERTING POWER, SURRENDERING AUTHORITY

Ecclesiology, the theology of the nature of the church, is principally about the organization of power. This includes humanity’s response to divine power as well as the employment of personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural power. Exercising authority within the institutional church has often been a concern for Anglicans, as church history makes clear. For example, what authority or authoritative body decides how ministry is ordered, who names and addresses crises, what programs and initiatives are approved, how mission is understood and shaped? Two matters in particular interest me as

a lay leader.

I am first concerned about the steady movement toward centralizing authority vested in channels dominated by primates and other bishops. Citing the “crisis” occasioned by the ordination of women, the Lambeth Conference of 1988 called for “enhanced responsibility for the Primates’ Meetings.”⁶ IATDC, the Commission on which I served, responded by briefly discussing and asking questions about four “world-wide” structural components: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates’ Meeting. These four vehicles for international communication were eventually identified in the Virginia Report as “instruments of unity.” It is important to note that two of these instruments—The Primates Meeting and the ACC—were instituted fairly recently. They first appeared in the 1970s, largely in response to the “urgent” matter of women’s ordination. It is also true that the Virginia Report was not adopted by TEC, the ACC, or the Lambeth Conference of 1998, although this Conference did ask somewhat rhetorically: if “effective communion” did not require “appropriate instruments . . . ?”⁷ I have detailed this progression to illustrate the persistent evolution of the four instruments now presented to us with disciplinary teeth in the proposed covenant. Here they are renamed as “Instruments of Communion,” or simply as the “Instruments.” In these texts and in other inter-Anglican conversations, that notion that the Instruments should exist and should have power has been largely assumed, never actually agreed upon. Yet the drive toward centralizing authority in bodies beyond the influence of the average layperson continues to gather momentum. One of the more recent structural adjustments in the life of the Communion is that the “Joint Standing Committee of the Primates’ Meeting and the ACC” has evolved into a smaller “Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, and is now simply called the “Standing Committee.” TEC members, by the way, should not think that this Standing Committee is similar in structure,

composition, or authority to diocesan Standing Committees in our Province.

The bureaucratic dynamic at work is not difficult to discern. Unlegislated edicts issued by unrepresentative bodies pave the way for a concentration of power at the highest levels of the Anglican Communion. The end result may be useful for those who sign on to this document. It might also have advantages for international ecumenical conversations with other highly centralized faiths.⁸ Yet whether this reflects traditional Anglican ecclesiology is another matter, one that I will address after I raise my second concern as a layperson.

What does the centralization of ecclesial power called for in the proposed covenant portend for a church whose ecclesiology is grounded in the authority of the baptized? The centrality of baptism is a gift from our earliest Christian ancestors that is now restored in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Baptism shapes our primary and continuing identity as Christians in worship and in daily living. My mentor Verna Dozier, one of the wisest teachers of Scripture I've been blessed to know, warned laity about giving up our authority: "religious authority comes with baptism. . . . [it] is of God. Human beings do not give it. Human beings cannot take it away. *Sinful human beings, however, can surrender it.*"⁹ (emphasis added.)

I raise this concern as even my most charitable reading of the proposed covenant does not give the impression that it is grounded in a theology that honors the baptism of lay people as fully as it honors the ordination of clerics. It is to be expected that the proposed covenant does cite "Baptism" as an inheritance "each church affirms" (1.1 and 1.1.5). Yet I remain concerned that the authority of the baptized is at best misunderstood, if not ignored, in the proposed covenant. The proposed covenant does clearly prefer an ecclesiology shaped from the bureaucratic top down rather than outward from baptismally grounded communities of faith.

TRADITIONAL POLITY: AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?

Some backers of the proposed covenant are trying to portray increased centralization as a necessary development of Anglican tradition. Yet this is not accurate. Traditional understandings of authority in the Anglican Communion have called for authority to be "dispersed" throughout the Communion.¹⁰ Similarly resolutions of Lambeth Conferences have historically been explained as advisory rather than binding. Also, until recently, most description of authority have referred to and deferred to the authority of "autonomous" provinces. The proposed covenant attempts to honor this legacy of provincial autonomy in this muddled and contradictory assertion that each Church will commit itself:

To respect the constitutional autonomy of all of the Churches of the Anglican communion, while upholding our mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ, and the responsibility of each to the Communion as a whole. (3.2.2.)

The language in the text above invoking "mutual responsibility and interdependence" (MRI for short) has been affirmed by Anglicans since the Toronto Anglican Conference of 1963. The desire expressed at that gathering to focus on the "Church's mission in response to the living God,"¹¹ gave rise to the "Five Marks of Mission" – which are included in the proposed covenant in Section 2.2.2, and which were approved by TEC's 76th General Convention. TEC has already approved an inter-Anglican "Covenant for a Communion in Mission" which does require active supportive relationships.¹² My question is whether it is appropriate to co-opt language about mission and human need as grounds for approving the communion-wide judicial system presented in the proposed covenant? To do so might suggest that the drafters of the covenant now believe the primary mission of top leaders in

the Anglican Communion is exercising judicial control. I, for one, hope this is not the case.

Language about “moral reasoning and discipline” (1.2.2.) suggests to me yet another departure from long-standing Anglican tradition. Members of the Communion are not familiar with emphasizing discipline, restraint, or taking “authority over” autonomous Provinces. Signers would commit themselves: “to teach and act in continuity and consonance with Scripture and the catholic and apostolic faith, order and tradition” (1.2.1.) Language of the proposed covenant suggests a developing Anglican magisterium, a centralized teaching authority.

You might expect me, as an historian, to be a huge fan of tradition. Indeed this is true. It is also true that we use the word “tradition” in different ways. I, and many other Anglican scholars, turn to the work of Richard Hooker, the formative theologian of the English Reformation. Tradition, for Richard Hooker, was not abstract. Nor was it, as English historian Henry R. McAdoo once commented, “an ever-increasing accumulation of irreversibles.” Tradition was shaped by ongoing communal reflection in a particular locale. Hooker named it as the “voice of the English Church.” Tradition arose out of common experience in a particular context, similar to the flexible and ongoing development of English “common law.” Such law was not transferable to other peoples and nations. It was a valued and transformative process with the essential qualities of moving faithfully and growing with the times. Simply put, tradition has traditionally embraced both continuity and change. Hooker, much like Thomas Cranmer in his Preface to the early English Books of Common Prayer, acknowledged that most elements of church life change because they are no longer convenient or useful. In adopting the Anglican Covenant are we stating that traditional Anglican polity is no longer convenient or useful for the Episcopal Church?

RELATIONAL CONSEQUENCES AND FUTURE INTENTIONS

If we in the Episcopal Church agree to

the proposed Anglican Covenant, what kind of foundation are we building for our future life together?

The introduction to the covenant signals the need for “discipline as a witness to God’s promise” in an unstable and fragmented world (Introduction, 4). Merriam-Webster’s first definition of “discipline” is “punishment.” This dictionary also cites “control gained by enforcing obedience or order.” In the language of the proposed covenant, punishing or reprimanding actions are presented as “relational consequences” (see 4.2.4., 4.2.5., 4.2.7.). For provinces that are described as autonomous to willingly put themselves under a higher ecclesiastical authority seems at best a contradiction in terms. For the Churches of the Anglican Communion to engage God’s mission at the highest level by imposing “relational consequences” seems inconsistent for a structure that is called a “Communion.”

I also keep wondering if lasting ecclesiastical relationships can be shaped on paper. I believe they grow out of the primacy of God’s mission and of communities enacting this imperative through relationships expressed in specific active ways, locally, nationally, and globally. A former student once observed that she learned best by “doing” and not simply “talking.” I regularly encounter expansive visions of the church’s future that are being shaped in the continuing vitality and power of local congregations and communities. Shouldn’t we keep on seeking a larger-minded foundation for life together in the Communion, one based on growth in mutual understanding rather than on punishment? I recall the prophetic sermon preached by the (now retired) suffragan bishop of Massachusetts, Barbara C. Harris. If I remember correctly, she urged us with persistent humility to pursue “the hard work of practicing relational openness of theological exchange in the face of mounting calls for new orthodoxy.”

I may be a pragmatic pessimist. To put it bluntly, I do not see imposing discipline as a

solution to disagreements about women's ordination and homosexuality. Do you? On the other hand, I may well be an optimist. If so, the perspective of a student and scholar of Anglican history and theology has led me to believe that the Anglican Communion may still be faithfully strengthened without stifling diversity, avoiding future controversy, and further enabling structures at the highest levels to determine what are matters of common good.

Is the proposed Anglican Covenant the best way to seek deeper communion for the long and short term? I look forward to joining with other clergy and laity as we explore these and other questions for reflection.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Noting that 99% of the people who would be affected by the proposed covenant are laity, Dr. Thompsett quotes a lay person at a local deanery meeting who asked, "Isn't this text primarily addressing technicalities about bishops and primates?" What is the significance that the covenant language speaks to "bishops in conference," "Episcopal collegiality," and "Houses of Bishops," and has few direct references to laity?

What does it mean to you that the disciplinary remedies proposed by the covenant would be provoked by "any action which may provoke controversy, which by its intensity, substance or extent could threaten the unity of the Communion" (3.2.5)?

Tudor historian Norman Jones has said, "Flexibility was a key to survival" for the English Reformation. Will disciplinary procedures that can be put in motion by "any action which make provoke controversy" give Anglican leaders more flexibility in dealing with conflict, or less?

The covenant vests significant authority in four "Instruments of Communion" – the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the An-

glican Consultative Council, and the Primates' Meeting. Is it significant that the ACC and Primates' Meeting are fairly recent institutions? Is it significant that only the ACC includes members from the laity?

Dr. Thompsett says: "Language of the proposed covenant suggests a developing Anglican magisterium, a centralized teaching authority." As an historian, she prefers "Tradition . . . shaped by ongoing communal reflection in a particular locale" which Richard Hooker named "the voice of the English Church." "Such law was not transferable to other peoples and nations." She cites Stephen W. Sykes' contention that traditional understandings of authority in the Anglican Communion have called for authority to be "dispersed" throughout the communion. What is your understanding of traditional Anglican polity?

Dr. Thompsett questions whether disagreements over issues such as women's ordination and homosexuality can best be solved by "imposing discipline." What do you think?

Notes

¹ "The Primacy of Baptism: A Reaffirmation of Authority," in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: the Anglican Communion in the Twenty-first Century*, Ian T. Douglas & Kwok Pui-lan, eds. (New York: Church Publishing, 2001), 247–69.

² The *Virginia Report*, 3.21-23. The full text of this Report is available online, see www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-1.pdf, accessed 10/4/2010.

³ Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religious and Cultural Adaptation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 199 and 202.

⁴ Quoted in Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 285.

⁵ See the Introduction and Appendix I in the Virginia Report.

⁶ Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference, 1988, No. 18.

⁷ *The Official Report*, Resolution III.8.h, 399.

⁸ See Bishop Christopher Epting's reflections on the proposed covenant in *Episcopal Café* <http://www.episcopalcafe.com/lead/anglican-communion/an-ecumenist-off-two-minds-on.html#more>, accessed October 5, 2010.

⁹ Verna Dozier, *The Calling of the Laity*, *Verna Dozier's Anthology* (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1988), 115-16.

¹⁰ Stephen W. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbays, 1978), 87-100.

¹¹ See <http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto-mutual1963.html>, accessed Sept 12, 2010.

¹² The "Five Marks of Mission" were adopted by the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC6-1984, and ACC8-1990), and at the last 2009 General Convention (D025) see http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/commissions/iascome/covenant/covenant_english.cfm, accessed September 12, 2010.

“THE HISTORIC EPISCOPATE LOCALLY ADAPTED . . . ”:
THE EPISCOPATE IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION



Mark Harris

THE BEGINNINGS OF AN ANGLICAN COMMUNION EPISCOPATE

The Anglican Communion can be understood to have its start in the deliberate decision to ordain bishops for emerging new national or regional churches, the churches of what would become the Anglican Communion.

When in 1783 the Rev. Samuel Seabury accepted election as bishop of Connecticut and went to England and then Scotland in search of ordination in the “historic episcopate,” it would have been difficult to imagine a worldwide community of churches called the Anglican Communion. What started with an act of hospitality by the Scottish Episcopal Church in ordaining Seabury (1784) became a flood of hospitality in the Church of England’s willingness three years later to give the precious and highly prized, indeed sacramental, gift of episcopal orders to emerging churches beyond its own sphere of governance.

THE GIFT OF THE HISTORIC EPISCOPATE

Now some 225 years later there are over 800 bishops worldwide whose orders as part of the historic episcopate grew from the Church of England. These bishops are elected or appointed by very different processes and are accountable to one another within their own general synods in different ways. The gift of the historic episcopate was not accompanied by an insistence that bishops exercise precisely the same sorts of responsibilities or that they gather in identical synodical (Church wide) organizations.

The Anglican Covenant assumes a certain commonality of the office of bishop in the vari-

ous churches. The core is the continued expectation that bishops will conform their lives to the sorts of pledges made by them at the time of their ordination, the core example of which is the Ordinal of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) of the Church of England. (The Ordinal being the book or section of the Book of Common Prayer that sets the form and prayers used at ordinations.) As prayer books of the various churches have undergone changes the Ordinal and its pledges have been expressed anew, always with the concern to continue the intent of the Church in ordaining persons to the orders of ministry.

The Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral

One hundred years after the beginnings of an Anglican Communion episcopate, the bishops themselves understood that they were committed to the episcopate, but not to any particular way in which that office and work were to be lived out. They believed that the desire to end the division of the church into many churches required both the willingness to change and the need to adapt.

In 1886 the bishops of the Episcopal Church meeting in Chicago put forward a “check list” of essentials around which ecumenical conversation about church union could take place. The Chicago version was notable in that it opened with a passionate statement of the desire to work for Christian unity. That statement included the following startling pledge, “That in all things of human ordering or human choice, related to modes of worship and discipline, or to

traditional customs, this Church is ready in the spirit of love and humility to forgo all preferences of her own.”

The core of the statement adapted by the House of Bishops was a set of four statements of essentials. The last of the four, found on page 877 of the Book of Common Prayer, reads as follows: “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.”

VARIATIONS ON A THEME: MAKING AND USING BISHOPS.

In actual practice the method of election or appointment of bishops, the rights, privileges and canonical duties of bishops, and the method of administration of diocesan offices vary greatly among the churches of the Anglican Communion. Churches in the Anglican Communion consider particular modes of worship and discipline, or traditions and customs essential. This includes customs and expectations about the episcopate. There are occasions when a bishop is compared to prince, a chief, a president, a beloved leader, etc. These have their parallels in civil leadership. The word “episcopal” echoes Roman civil structures. How we treat and understand bishops then is highly influenced by social constructs of leadership.”

There are widely different understandings in the Communion as relates to the method of choosing bishops (election or appointment and by whom), the canonical responsibilities of bishops both in their dioceses and in Church wide synods, the nature of the oaths taken by bishops on their ordination, the matter of subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the extent to which Episcopal leadership is related to lay and clerical leadership, and how from the community of bishops in a Church the Metropolitan, Primate, Moderator or Presiding Bishop is chosen.

That is, the Anglican episcopate does indeed differ locally in its method of administra-

tion and even in the extent to which it forgoes customs and traditions inherited from its past.

In the Episcopal Church we are sometimes surprised to see just how differently the episcopacy is understood from one diocese to another. And, should we visit other Churches in the Anglican Communion we find even greater differences. Many of these differences concern matters of local custom, the esteem given the office, but some are very clearly differences in the authority granted by canon in a particular church to its episcopal leadership.

The episcopate in the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has a long history of testing various “methods of administration.” These have led to new and innovative ways to make use of the office of bishop. Episcopal churches first organized by state and the first bishops were elected by statewide gatherings of electors (sometimes clergy and sometimes clergy and lay electors). The nomenclature began to change rather quickly from “state” to “diocese” and for missionary purposes state and church “units of government” were separated. But the notion that government was by the people persisted.

The idea that bishops are elected by constituents from within dioceses was certainly not the custom of the mother church where a complex process of government appointment is used. At the time this process of election by representatives of a diocese was unique among churches with the historic episcopate.

The Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church have had little to say about the process a diocese uses in the election of a bishops, primarily noting that dioceses will have their own canons regarding election and that all diocesan canons must be in sync with the canons of the whole church which includes certain general provisions about who can and cannot be included among candidates for election.

Missionary Bishops: Beginning in 1835 the Con-

stitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church authorized the election, by the House of Bishops, of missionary bishops whose work would be to expand the presence of The Episcopal Church beyond already existing dioceses. The missionary episcopate was an essential feature of the expansion of The Episcopal Church both domestically and internationally.

Bishops as a gift: In 1874 James Theodore Holly was consecrated bishop for the Church in Haiti. The Episcopal Church by this act ordained a bishop not for missionary work of this Church but for a new church in a foreign country. Bishop Holly's consecration was a notable innovation in the episcopate in that it continued the witness of the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church in ordaining bishops without requiring their inclusion in or obedience to the church ordaining them.

Suffragan Bishops: Beginning in 1907 The Episcopal Church began to ordain suffragan bishops. The initial impetus for this change came from a proposal from the Diocese of Texas to provide suffragan bishops for "colored work." This proposal was joined with others to produce a resolution presented to the 1907 General Convention. The effort to provide suffragan bishops for "colored work" was ultimately seen as a mistaken sidetrack but the ordination of suffragan bishops as assisting bishops in a diocese continued.

Area Bishops: The church has in the past twenty years experimented with a particular notion – a bishop for a people, namely the Navajo, with a jurisdiction consisting of primarily Navajo congregations within three dioceses – Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. The idea of a bishop for a particular people has been proposed many times – mostly for work with Native Americans but in the past also for African Americans. The bishop of an "Area Mission" is an innovative variation on the office of missionary bishop.

What all forms of the episcopate in The Episcopal Church have in common:

The common characteristic of the episcopate in the Episcopal Church is that the primary electors of a bishop are from the constituency the bishop will serve. In a diocese it is diocesan electors, in the case of missionary bishops it is the House of Bishops in whose name they begin new work, in the case of suffragans and area ministries it is election by constituents or by the House of Bishops, depending on the nature of the ministry. But in every case it is constituents that elect. The bishops and Standing Committees serve as a guarantee of the suitability of the elected bishop for office.

Other Anglican Churches models of election and forms of Episcopal ministry:

The Church of England has evolved an appointment process that over time has come more and more to include input from the constituency – members of the diocese. One of the features of that process is that with few exceptions the appointment of someone as bishop includes some elements of constituent approval and always the state and church acting as a guarantor of suitability.

Episcopal election by constituents seems also to be part of the life of many of the churches of the Anglican Communion. In other churches not so. For some, while nomination might come from a constituency group, the election comes directly from a general synod or from a house of bishops. In the Church of Nigeria, for example, election is by the Synod of the Church (Constitution 23.5) and affirmation by the Metropolitan. Synod consists of bishops, clergy and laity from every diocese. Election therefore is by representatives of the constituency of the whole church rather than the diocese in which the candidate would serve.

THE ANGLICAN COVENANT AND THE MATTER OF ELECTING BISHOPS.

The Anglican Covenant is "episcopal"

because the churches of the Anglican Communion are “episcopal” in structure – that is, every church in the Communion has bishops, whose particular role is to provide oversight to life of the church.

The Anglican Covenant is a covenant in which the episcopate plays a major part. In a document of roughly 5,000 words the word “bishop” occurs 14 times (including references to Archbishop). Primate, bishops who are heads of the various churches in the Anglican Communion, are mentioned eleven times. “Episcopate” and “Episcopal” give four more references. All told, some reference to the episcopate is made twenty-nine times.

The covenant reflects Anglican polity precisely because it promotes an episcopal polity. It supports governance by and with bishops.

The question then arises: does the Anglican Covenant promote and understand “church with bishops” in ways compatible with the Episcopal Church’s experience and polity?

What the Anglican Covenant says about bishops:

Here are some major statements made by the Anglican Covenant about bishops:

They are a source of teaching regarding scripture. (1.2.4)

They are called to be “in communion with autonomy and accountability.” (3.1.2)

They are guardians and teachers of faith, leaders in mission and visible sign of unity... (3.1.3)

A particular bishop, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has the place of honor among the bishops of the communion when they meet (Lambeth Conference) (3.1.4.1)

Bishops meet in the Lambeth Conference (3.1.4.2)

Bishops serve with other clergy and lay people on the Anglican Consultative Council.

(3.1.4.3)

Primates—bishops who are heads of churches—meet together as the Primates Meeting. (3.1.4.4)

Of these references perhaps the most important is 3.1.2. Here is the reference in its entirety: “Each Church affirms (3.1.2) its resolve to live in a Communion of Churches. 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.’ (A Letter from Alexandria, the Primates, March 2009)

“Trusting in the Holy Spirit, who calls and enables us to dwell in a shared life of common worship and prayer for one another, in mutual affection, commitment and service, 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. Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together ‘not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference’ (Lambeth Conference 1930) and of the other instruments of Communion.”

Note first that the notion of living “in communion with autonomy and accountability” is drawn from a 2009 Primate’s Meeting document. The experience of the various churches in the Anglican Communion in the past has been that of autonomous national or regional churches. The accountability has been among the bishops of that province—national or regional church. They hold themselves accountable to the pledges they make to uphold the faith and to be accountable to the common heritage—the elements of the Quadrilateral.

There is a real question as to the intent of the Anglican Covenant in seeking to make bishops accountable to some authority beyond the national or regional churches to which they

belong. The covenant's desire that we be "conformed together in the mind of Christ," by way of the instruments of communion (that is the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates Meeting) draws bishops into an accountability to persons and groups not part of their own synodical community and into a new set of norms concerning their position and work.

The Lambeth Conference of 1930 clearly stated that it was not authority that bound the churches of the Communion together but rather mutual loyalty. The Lambeth Conference was a means of sustaining such loyalty. The Anglican Covenant proposes that the other instruments of Communion have a similar role.

The Anglican Covenant then proposes that bishops are accountable to some greater body than the community that elected them and the national or regional church that affirms their election. It proposes that the sustaining loyalty grows from the bishops of the Communion meeting together, but also from specific bodies and persons who call bishops and their churches to a common accountability. The whole of the fourth section of the Anglican Covenant concerns the ways in which this 'supra-synodical' accountability is to be engaged.

The questions that arise out of this proposal are profoundly important to those churches where Episcopal election is by the constituency of the body (the Diocese) where the bishop is to serve. The clergy and laity who elect are in no way accountable to any body outside the synodical structures of their own Church.

Does the Anglican Covenant propose to reach into this process and call electors to account to some set of Anglican values and understandings not present in the materials set out in Sections One and Two of the Covenant? If so, what are they?

The Anglican Covenant is not clear on this, but some materials from Lambeth Conferences (i.e. Lambeth 1998, 1.10 on Sexuality), some statements of the Primates Meetings (on

the acceptance of the moratoria of the Windsor Report) and some legislation of the Anglican Consultative Council (the development of a Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion) seem to be "supra-synodical" Instruments of Accountability under the Covenant.

It remains a real question as to the appropriateness of including accountability to bodies and persons not engaged in the election and affirmation of bishops within a member church. Nothing in our ordinal (or for that matter the ordinal of the BCP of the Church of England) suggests any conformity to any body outside the synodical structure of national or regional church to which we belong.

If mutual loyalty of the world's Anglican bishops is sustained by meeting together, we have a good reason for such meetings as the Lambeth Conference. If such mutual loyalty is a product of accountability to various instrumentalities we have a very different basis for sustainability.

More importantly, we must ask if under the Anglican Covenant, the ability to explore new patterns of ministry (methods of administration) for the episcopate and the willingness to ordain bishops in a particular national or regional church who do not conform to "standards" set by some world-wide organizations or spokespeople is not severely limited.

The questions of just how such innovations in one church are to be understood by other churches in the Communion is real, and the Anglican Covenant is an attempt to provide a way forward. The question is, does it do so, and if so does it require that national or regional churches to revise their election process to either exclude particular candidates, or to require that bishops and standing committees to withhold consent to elections on the basis of some standards not agreed to by the electing constituents.

Are we prepared to limit elections to particular classes of candidates, accept requirements that we not give consent to the election of bishops for specific reasons, or accept a process

of shunning that is without warrant in any past Anglican understanding of the gift of the episcopacy? Does the Anglican Covenant engage this church with the need to revise its method of election of bishops and its autonomy as a church in formal ways?

It is imperative that deputies and bishops to the 2012 General Convention be prepared to engage the issues of just how the Anglican Covenant modifies the Lambeth Quadrilateral's desire to be in union with those who maintain "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."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The fourth essential of 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." How consistent or inconsistent is the proposed covenant with that essential?

Why is it important to the Episcopal Church that we elect our bishops as we do? How is that tradition a factor in the consideration of the Anglican Covenant?

Canon Harris says: "The Anglican Covenant... proposes that bishops are accountable to some greater body than the community that elected them and the national or regional church that affirms their election." Yet, the "clergy and laity who elect are in no way accountable to any body outside the synodical structures of their own Church." He asks, "Does the Anglican Covenant propose to reach into this process and call electors to account to some set of Anglican values and understandings not present in the materials set out in Sections One and Two of the covenant? If so, what are they?" How would you answer Canon's Harris' concern?

The Lambeth Conference of 1930 described the relationship of the Churches of the Anglican Communion as being bound together "not by a central legislative authority and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference." The Anglican Covenant proposes to add "the other instruments of Communion" to this relationship of bonding. Harris asks us to consider the difference between relationships of "mutual loyalty" sustained by "bishops in conference" as contrasted with "supra-synodical" Instruments of Accountability.

Canon Harris says, "How we treat and understand bishops ... is highly influenced by social constructs of leadership." In what ways is it significant that there are very different episcopal practices throughout the communion? (i.e. "rights, privileges and canonical duties of bishops;" diverse methods of administration of diocesan offices; contrasting models of Episcopal leadership – prince, chief, president, beloved leader, etc.)

If churches create new patterns of ministry, how might they be impacted by conformity to standards set by other bodies in the Anglican Communion?

SECTION FOUR: THE DEVIL YOU KNOW



Sally Johnson

In an article titled “Devil and Details” about the Appendix to the St. Andrew’s Draft (February 2008) of the proposed Anglican Covenant, published on Episcopal Café, I raised concerns about the process set out for dealing with disagreements in the Anglican Communion. While the commentary on the proposed covenant that accompanied this draft stated that there was “no intention to erect a centralized jurisdiction” or to give “juridical force” to the decisions of the Instruments of Communion, the proposed procedures looked like a juridical process lacking, however, both adequate due process protections and means of summary resolutions. Additionally, the timelines for resolving disputes were inconsistent with the polity of the Episcopal Church.

Serious concerns were raised around the Communion about the juridical nature of the Appendix and its inclusion in a “covenant” meant to support “bonds of affection.” The Ridley Cambridge Draft (April 2009) replaced the Appendix with Section Four, “Our Covenanted Life Together,” a more general statement of how the covenant would be overseen and how questions about a Church’s actions would be handled. At its May 2009 meeting, the Anglican Consultative Council requested that Section Four of the Ridley Cambridge Covenant be reviewed and revised. That was done by a group appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The final version of the covenant was released in December 2009.

The focus of this article is on the procedures and processes for handling disputes articulated in this final draft. Unfortunately, the deletion of the Appendix and its replacement with Section Four does not resolve any of the issues previously raised. In fact, it may have made matters worse instead of better. The Appendix attempted, if inadequately, to create a justice system in which the outcome could be respected based on the process used to reach it (often referred to as “the rule of law”). Section Four, however, proposes a justice system in which the outcome is supposed to be respected based on the nature of the group that makes the decision, rather than on how the decision is made. In doing so, the new system gives significant power and great discretion to a group that previously did not exist.

In the final draft of the proposed covenant, references to the “Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting” have been changed to the “Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion.” While this might appear to be an insignificant change, it may be a highly significant one. The language itself suggests that there is a body, “the Anglican Communion,” that has a “Standing Committee” with independent authority and governance powers separate from the meetings (Lambeth Conference and Primates’ Meeting), the office (Archbishop of Canterbury) and the body (Anglican Consultative Council)

referred to in recent years as “Instruments of Communion.”

OVERVIEW OF SECTION FOUR PROCESS

The Appendix to the previous draft of the covenant specified, in some detail, procedures, decision makers and time frames for the processes of handling conflicts under the covenant. In contrast, Section Four of the current covenant provides generally that the “Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, monitors the functioning of the covenant in the life of the Anglican Communion on behalf of the Instruments” and advises on questions relating to the meaning of the covenant. The Standing Committee is empowered to: make every effort to facilitate agreement;

- take advice from such bodies as it deems appropriate to determine a view on the nature of the matter at question and those relational consequences which may result;
- refer the question to both the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting;
- request the acting Church to defer a controversial action;
- make recommendations for “relational consequences” to any Instrument of Communion including provisional limitation of participation in or suspension from, that Instrument until completion of the covenant processes when a Church declines to defer its action;
- make a declaration as to whether an action or decision of a Church “is or would be incompatible with the covenant;” and
- make recommendations of relational consequences to the Churches of the Communion or the Instruments of Communion including whether communion is impaired or limited with the acting Church and the practical consequences of such.

While the deletion of the Appendix and reworking of Section Four may have addressed concerns about the overly juridical tone of the Appendix, the changes did not resolve the essential question of what process will be used to exercise the authority given to the Standing Committee and the Instruments of Communion.

With the exception of information about which bodies can raise an objection to a Church’s actions, nothing more is specified about the conflict resolution process than what is summarized above. Other than that, nothing ... nothing... is specified about the processes, procedures or timing of the outlined process. In essence, the Standing Committee receives a question, receives assistance from unspecified “committees or commissions” mandated by unspecified authority, takes advice from any body or anybody it deems appropriate and decides whether to refer the question to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting. The Standing Committee then decides whether to request a Church to “defer” a decision or action and what relational consequences should result if it does not. It then moves on to a determination of whether or not a Church’s action or decision is or would be “incompatible with the Covenant.” The Standing Committee does this “on the basis of advice received from the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting,” not on the basis of a process or procedure in which the Church whose action is in question participates in any way, other than to the extent it has representatives on the ACC (from which it could already be barred) and a primate at the Primates’ Meeting (from which its primate could have been excluded). (See “Consequences Prior to Decision” below.)

Agreeing to an undefined, unspecified process in which the decision-making bodies have full discretion to act in any manner they deem best—not only as to the process but as to the standard and burden of proof, information considered, and all other aspects of the dispute resolution system—is what the covenant contem-

plates. In the words of the rule of law, there is no procedural due process and no substantive due process guaranteed by the covenant. The outcome is to be trusted and respected based on the persons/bodies making the decisions rather than a system based on how the decision is made.

EASE OF INITIATING AND CONTINUING THE PROCESS

As with the Appendix, the only threshold that must be met in order for the dispute resolution process to begin is that a Church or Instrument of Communion claims that a Church's action or decision may be "incompatible with the Covenant." The covenant says "where a shared mind has not been reached" the matter "shall" be referred to the Standing Committee. The covenant doesn't say who decides whether there is a "shared mind" such that referral to the Standing Committee is mandated. The covenant does suggest the Standing Committee can decide to take no action on the matter other than to "make every effort to facilitate agreement." That is one area in which Section Four constitutes an improvement over the procedures of the Appendix.

CONSEQUENCES PRIOR TO DECISION

The potential consequences for the Church whose actions are being questioned are severe even before the process is completed. The Standing Committee may request the Church to defer a controversial action and if it does not, the Standing Committee can recommend to any Instrument of Communion that the Church be suspended or its participation limited in an Instrument until the completion of the process. Thus, prior to any determination on the merits, a Church could be prohibited from participating in the Anglican Consultative Council, its bishops could be excluded from a Lambeth Conference or its Primate barred from participating in the Primates' Meeting. There is no requirement that the Church in question be consulted on this issue, and it has no right to be heard.

TIME LINE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POLITY OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Unlike the Appendix, the final covenant contains no time line for the dispute resolution process. It does contemplate that the Primates' Meeting and Anglican Consultative Council would take action based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee. A Primates' Meeting can be called at any time. The Anglican Consultative Council meets about once every three years. General Convention meets every three years. Executive Council meets every three months. It is likely that any controversial decision taken by the Episcopal Church would have been taken by our General Convention, and that only the General Convention could respond. We have already seen examples of the Instruments of Communion requesting bodies of the Episcopal Church, specifically the House of Bishops, to take actions in response to Anglican Communion concerns that the body is not authorized to take.

CONCLUSION

Serious attention needs to be paid to the enforcement provisions of the covenant because they are based not on procedural and substantive due process—the rule of law—but on the discretion, one is tempted to say whim, of the Standing Committee.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Ms. Johnson writes of her concerns that the proposed Anglican Covenant may create a juridical process lacking in structures of due process, summary resolution, and clear timelines. How do you understand each of these judicial structures as they function in our secular legal system? Do you believe these structures to be important in the church's life?

Ms. Johnson wonders how the church might support "bonds of affection" by juridical force? How might you answer her?

Ms. Johnson writes that “Section Four... proposes a justice system in which the outcome is supposed to be respected based on the nature of the group that makes the decision, rather than on how the decision is made. In doing so, the new system gives significant power and great discretion to a group that previously did not exist.” What is your understanding about the composition and powers of the proposed Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion?

Ms. Johnson notes that “the only threshold that must be met in order for the dispute resolution process to begin is that a Church or Instrument of Communion claims that a Church’s action or decision may be ‘incompatible with the covenant.’” What sort of claims can you imagine that might trigger a dispute resolution process? Would a Standing Committee be the best venue for resolving such disputes and strengthening bonds of affection?

Should a Church whose actions are being questioned be suspended or have its participation in an Instrument of Communion curtailed prior to a determination of the merits of the accusation against it, as the covenant proposes? If so, under what circumstances?

Ms. Johnson is concerned that there is no timeline for the dispute resolution process. Is that a serious concern for you?

In her conclusion, Ms. Johnson writes: “Serious attention needs to be paid to the enforcement provisions of the covenant because they are based not on procedural and substantive due process — the rule of law — but on the discretion, one is tempted to say whim, of the Standing Committee.” Should the churches of the Anglican Communion be concerned by a lack of definition of due process or should they trust the discretion of a Standing Committee?

Chapter Seven

A COVENANT FOR MISSION



Gay Clark Jennings

So, it appears the Anglican Communion already has a covenant!

RESOLUTION D027

The 77th General Convention meeting in Anaheim, California in 2009 adopted Resolution D027 titled “Five Marks of Mission.”¹

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 76th General Convention adopt the following “Five Marks of Mission” as articulated by the Anglican Consultative Council and addressed to the Anglican Communion:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth; and be it further

Resolved, That the 76th General Convention recommend the Five Marks of Mission as the five top strategic priorities for the Episcopal Church, and request Program, Budget, and Finance and the Executive Council to center the budget for the 2013-2015

triennium around these strategic priorities; and be it further

Resolved, That Convention recommits The Episcopal Church to mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ with the provinces and churches of the Anglican Communion in keeping with “A Covenant for a Communion in Mission” commended by the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC13-2005); and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the General Convention communicate the substance of this resolution to: The Archbishop of Canterbury, the General Secretary of the Anglican Communion, the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and Primates, and the leadership of the churches and provinces of the Anglican Communion.

Resolution D027 adopted the Five Marks of Mission for The Episcopal Church and recommitted The Episcopal Church to mutual responsibility and inter-dependence in the Anglican Communion in keeping with the *Covenant for Communion in Mission*.

So where did this covenant, which seems to have hidden in plain sight, come from, and what would it mean if the Episcopal Church and the rest of the Anglican Communion truly embraced the Five Marks of Mission as their top

priorities?

The Five Marks of Mission were developed by the Anglican Consultative Council between 1984 and 1990 and promulgated to the Anglican Communion.² The five marks are intended to lay a foundation and promote a common understanding of what it means to participate in God's mission to a world desperately in need of Good News.

Shortly after the Five Marks of Mission were distributed to the Anglican Communion, MISSIO, the Standing Commission for Mission of the Anglican Communion, which met between 1994 and 1999, reviewed the marks as part of its work. Its report, *Anglicans in Mission*, urges provinces and dioceses to develop or revise their own scriptural understandings of mission:

“Whatever words or ideas each local expression of our Church uses, MISSIO hopes that they will be informed by three convictions:

- We are united by our commitment to serving the transforming mission of God.
- Mission is the bedrock of all we are, do and say as the people of God.
- Our faithfulness in mission will be expressed in a great diversity of mission models, strategies and practices.”³

Several years later, in preparation for the 2005 meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC-13), the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism⁴ (IAS-COME) developed the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* to build on the Five Marks of Mission. The covenant was commended to the provinces and churches of the Anglican Communion by the Anglican Consultative Council at its meeting⁵.

The text of the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* is printed below in bold with IAS-COME's commentary in plain text.

A COVENANT FOR COMMUNION IN MISSION⁶

This Covenant signifies our common call to share in God's healing and reconciling mission for our blessed but broken and hurting world.

In our relationships as Anglican sisters and brothers in Christ, we live in the hope of the unity that God has brought about through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The preamble recognises that the world is one that has been graced by God but that God's work through Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to seek to heal its hurts and reconcile its brokenness. The preamble reminds us that as Christians we are called to share our relationships in the mission of God to the wider world, bearing witness to the kingdom of love, justice and joy that Jesus inaugurated.

The nine points of the covenant are predicated on Scripture and the Sacraments providing the nourishment, guidance and strength for the journey of the covenant partners together.

Nourished by Scripture and Sacrament, we pledge ourselves to:

1) Recognise Jesus in each other's contexts and lives

The nine points begin with Jesus Christ, the source and inspiration of our faith and calls for those covenanting for mission to look for, recognise, learn from and rejoice in the presence of Christ at work in the lives and situations of the other.

2) Support one another in our participation in God's mission

Point two acknowledges that we cannot serve God's mission in isolation and calls for mutual support and encouragement in our efforts.

3) Encourage expressions of our new life in Christ

Point three asks those who enter into the

covenant to encourage one another as we develop new understandings of our identities in Christ.

4) Meet to share common purpose and explore differences and disagreements

Point four provides for face-to-face meetings at which insights and learnings can be shared and difficulties worked through.

5) Be willing to change in response to critique and challenge from others

Point five recognises that as challenges arise changes will be needed as discipleship in Christ is deepened as a result of both experience in mission and encounters with those with whom we are in covenant.

6) Celebrate our strengths and mourn over our failures

Point six calls for honouring and celebrating our successes and acknowledging and naming our sadness and failures in the hopes of restitution and reconciliation.

7) Share equitably our God-given resources

Point seven emphasizes that there are resources to share – not just money and people, but ideas, prayers, excitement, challenge, enthusiasm. It calls for a move to an equitable sharing of such resources particularly when one participant in the covenant has more than the other.

8) Work together for the sustainability of God's creation

Point eight underscores that God's concern is for the whole of life – not just people, but the whole created order – and so we are called to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

9) Live into the promise of God's recon-

ciliation for ourselves and for the world

This last point speaks of the future hope towards which we are living, the hope of a reconciled universe – in which 'God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven' for which Jesus taught us to pray.

We make this covenant in the promise of our mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ.

The conclusion provides a strong reminder that we need each other. We are responsible for each other and we are mutually interdependent in the Body of Christ.

Thus, the five marks are not intended to be static, but rather to provide each church of the Anglican Communion with a framework for "developing or revising its own understanding of mission which is faithful to Scripture."⁷

In keeping with the *Covenant for Communion in Mission*, The Anglican Church of Canada did a masterful job in using the Five Marks of Mission as the foundation for its church wide strategic plan, *Dream the Church Vision 2019: A Plan for the Anglican Church of Canada*. The Most Rev. Fredrick J. Hiltz, Archbishop and Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, stated "These marks speak to our true vocation as evangelists, storytellers, caregivers, advocates for peace and justice, and good stewards of God's creation."⁸

The Anglican Church of Canada's explanation of the marks is found in its entirety at the end of this essay, and is offered as an example of how to use the Five Marks of Mission as a framework for understanding mission that is informed both by the Anglican Communion's common understanding and the cultural context of a particular church and its people. Congregations, dioceses and provinces can particularly profit from the way in which the Canadian church customized the marks to define mission in a way that encompasses evangelism and service, as well as work for systemic social justice and environmental sustainability.

So, if the Anglican Communion already has a covenant, what are the differences between the existing *Covenant for Communion in Mission* and the proposed Anglican Covenant currently circulating among the various provinces and churches? First, while the proposed Anglican Covenant has an internal focus, the Covenant for Communion in Mission looks outward to the world:

“We believe that a Covenant enshrining the values of common mission that could be used as a basis for outward-looking relationships among the churches, mission organizations and societies, and networks of the Communion would provide a significant focus of unity in mission for the Anglican Communion.”⁹

Second, the Covenant for Communion in Mission is based in mutual relationships. In developing the covenant, IASCOME spent significant time deliberating about the nature and characteristics of covenants and contracts. When introducing the covenant, the committee wrote:

IASCOME considered in depth the nature of covenant. We recognised that within our cultures a covenant is a serious and significant agreement. Covenants are fundamentally about relationships to which one gives oneself voluntarily, while contracts can be seen as a legally binding document under a body of governing principle. Covenants are free-will voluntary offerings from one to another while contracts are binding entities whose locus of authority is external to oneself. Covenants are relational: relational between those who are making the covenant and relational with and before God.¹⁰

Indeed, IASCOME was bold enough to say, “We believe the Covenant for Communion in Mission can provide a focus for binding the Communion together in a way rather different from that envisaged by the Windsor Report.”¹¹

While the proposed Anglican Covenant formalizes relationships among Anglican

provinces according to tiers of membership and consequences for deviating from rules, the Covenant for Communion in Mission urges Anglican provinces to form relationships through mission partnerships and collaborations. This covenant calls provinces and churches to be equal covenant partners and to have their common life in Christ shaped by joint participation in God’s mission. By recognizing that God’s work in one province may be radically different from God’s work in another, this covenant honors new understandings of our lives in Christ. Most importantly, the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* eschews uniformity, punitive action and centralized authority in favor of our love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and belief that we are all called to do God’s work in the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

The Rev. Jennings invites us to consider that the *Covenant for a Communion in Mission* in its elaboration of the Five Marks of Mission constitutes an already accomplished covenant for the Anglican Communion. How do you think the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* might contribute to a covenantal relationship among the churches of the Communion?

What is the significance of approaching a covenant from the perspective of mission? How might a mission-oriented conversation influence our relationships within the Anglican Communion? In what ways is the proposed Anglican Covenant a mission-oriented document? Are there parts of the proposed Anglican Covenant that do not seem mission driven?

The Rev. Jennings says: “While the proposed Anglican Covenant formalizes relationships among Anglican provinces according to tiers of membership and consequences for deviating from rules, the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* urges Anglican provinces to form relationships through missional partnerships and collabora-

tions.” How would you describe the relative strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches?

What do you think of the Anglican Church of Canada’s use of the Five Marks of Mission and the *Covenant for a Communion in Mission*? How did the Canadian church express its particular cultural context in its statement? How might you imagine other churches in the Anglican Communion developing a similar statement? What might that process contribute to the whole Communion?

The Rev. Jennings says that the *Covenant for a Communion in Mission* “looks outward to the world” while proposed Anglican Covenant has an internal focus. Do you agree? What is the significance of her statement?

The Rev. Jennings says that the *Covenant for a Communion in Mission* “eschews uniformity, punitive action, and centralized authority.” How might you imagine churches in the Anglican Communion being in relationship without uniformity, punitive action, and centralized authority?

APPENDIX A

Dream the Church Vision 2019: A Plan for the Anglican Church of Canada, p. 5

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

God calls the church, the Body of Christ, to proclaim what Jesus proclaimed: the Kingdom of God characterized by justice, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and hospitality. We do this in the context of a post-Christian culture where the church needs to engage in primary evangelism—sharing the good news and inviting a response.

2. To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers

In this post-Christian culture, the church is called again into the work of evangelism—making new believers. In baptism, new believers take up citizenship in the Kingdom and membership in the Body of Christ. The church is responsible for shaping our common life in such a way as to nourish each person’s awareness of the mission of God and to strengthen our capacity to participate in that mission.

3. To respond to human need by loving service

In three gospels, the evangelists’ account of the Last Supper focuses on the bread and wine, inviting us to know that as we take, bless, break and share bread, we find ourselves in the presence of Jesus. In the fourth, the focus shifts to the basin and towel—and Jesus’ challenge to his disciples and to us to kneel with him in serving.

4. To seek to transform the unjust structures of society

Throughout scripture, and particularly in the prophetic tradition, God’s transformative purpose is not limited to changing individual lives. God acts to change the conditions that constrain, distort, and oppress the lives of persons and communities. Through the prophets we hear that God is attentive to structures—the royal court, the temple, and the marketplace among them—that contradict God’s compassion and distribute God’s abundance unjustly. As a people following Jesus in mission in our age, God invites us to work with him to bring about change in such structures.

5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

In Vision 2019 we witness a new appreciation of the vital connection between the place where we live and the embodiment of our faith. The church is being awakened to the gift of the land and

our God-given living relationship with the earth. Assisted by the prophetic values and ideals of our Indigenous members, we recognize and affirm the compelling, urgent, and absolute character of our moral obligation to live in right relationship with God's creation. This will be, in the time between now and 2019, a defining issue for the authenticity of our faith and practice.

APPENDIX B

ACC-13 (Nottingham, England in 2005) adopted the following resolution commending the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* to the churches of the Anglican Communion:

Resolution 27: The Covenant for Communion in Mission

This Anglican Consultative Council:

- a. commends the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* to the churches of the Anglican Communion for study and application as a vision for Anglican faithfulness to the mission of God.
- b. forwards the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* to those bodies of the Anglican Communion tasked to consider an Anglican Covenant as commended by the Windsor Report and the Statement of the February 2005 Primates' Meeting
- c. requests the next Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism to monitor responses to the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* and evaluate its effectiveness across the Communion.¹²

the Anglican Consultative Council. IASCOME is accountable to the ACC or its Standing Committee.

⁵ ACC 13 met June 19-28, 2005 in Nottingham, England. See the end of this essay for the text of the ACC Resolution commending the *Covenant for Communion in Mission* to the worldwide Anglican Communion.

⁶ http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/commissions/iascome/covenant/covenant_english.cfm

⁷ *Anglicans In Mission* (MISSIO report 1999).

⁸ *Dream the Church Vision 2019: A Plan for the Anglican Church of Canada*, p. 1.

⁹ http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/commissions/iascome/covenant/covenant_english.cfm

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/meetings/acc13/resolutions.cfm#s27>

Notes

¹ http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/view_leg_detail.aspx?id=981&type=Final

² *Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6 p.49 and Mission in a Broken World-1990 ACC-8 p.101.*

³ *Anglicans In Mission* (MISSIO report 1999).

⁴ The members of IASCOME are appointed by

THE COVENANT WE HAVE BEEN OFFERED IS NOT THE COVENANT WE NEED



Winnie Varghese

I believe in a high, expansive and dreamy ecclesiology. We Anglicans are nothing less than the church of God in the tradition of the ancient Celts and Syrians, less dreamily but importantly—the fragments of the British Empire and all of the continuing national churches in their local expression of God among us. The church stands on earth as a holding place of a glimpse of the eternal city. The institution should be magnificent, egalitarian, lavish with care and justice, sweet smelling, enlivening to the senses, proving to every mortal who encounters it that the kingdom of God is for her or him. Our communion should be the statements of our most extravagant dreams of the holy city and nothing less, this generation’s attempt at building cathedrals. The gift of communion to us is relationships, across borders we might not otherwise cross: I believe that it is in these holy places of unexpected, unnecessary, frivolous, ambitious—difficult to believe we have anything real to offer but awe—conversations that God at work in us, locally, begins to be God at work in the world, globally.

A few years ago, while serving as chaplain at Columbia University, I was asked to entertain the bishop of Madras of the Church of South India (CSI) one Monday morning. I showed the bishop around campus, Union Seminary and Morningside Heights. Over lunch he asked who would be coming to their diocesan convention the following year from New York. He asked because he said he was interested in how we in the Episcopal Church in New York

worked with young people to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. He thought we might send some people to offer trainings for teachers at the diocesan schools in Madras. There are wonderful educators in India, but he was interested in bringing people in from far away, people who had no pre-conceived notions about the “place” or opportunities available to certain children, and who therefore might be able to generate a different kind of conversation altogether.

The young people that the bishop was talking about were Dalits, children from what used to be known as the untouchable community, who despite some opportunities for education and economic mobility, still found, particularly in rural communities, that they were subject to prejudice, abuse and violence. The bishop said rates of unemployment, alcoholism and suicide remained high in these areas. Children coming to diocesan schools still lived in a society in which their lives had little or no value to those outside of their own communities. These schools gave special priority to educating Dalit children. In some cases, they were the best schools available, and because Dalit students were admitted, those from other groups who enrolled their children were making a public commitment to equality. It sounded quite revolutionary and prophetic to me. Of course, we in New York would be radically changed ourselves if we were able to participate in such a process.

My parents are from South India, far from Madras, yet from a similar kind of commu-

nity, so this issue had special resonance for me. Madras is a diocese known for stepping boldly forward in support of Dalit people. It has its troubles like any diocese, but, just as the Church in South Africa became known for its leadership in the anti-apartheid movement even without the support of its entire membership, so the Diocese of Madras is famous in India for electing the first Dalit bishop and for its outspoken advocacy for Dalit education and equality. As with race in the U.S., some in India would say it's an old-fashioned issue, one resolved decades ago, and that in speaking of prejudice against Dalits, one is speaking to old stereotypes of India. That has not been my experience.

For me, conversations such as the one the bishop and I were having that morning are at the heart of what we mean when we speak of an Anglican Communion. The only reason the bishop and I were in conversation was that I was a chaplain at a university under the authority of the Episcopal Bishop of New York, who is the obvious primary relationship in New York for the bishop of Madras of the Church of South India. The conversation would not have happened otherwise.

As the bishop and I had been talking that morning, I remembered that one of the horrors of caste prejudice was that a person who is a Dalit would have no reason to believe that another Indian would not hold caste prejudices. I have friends who have told me stories of being asked to drink water outside, or eat on disposable plates away from the central table in "mixed" company—even in church settings. The bishop had taken a risk, or might have been watching to see what I as a clueless Indian American would do as we came to the time for tea and lunch. I invited him and the priest with him to my apartment for tea; that was when he invited us to Madras. I was granted the privilege of treating my brothers in Christ with dignity, casually, and in doing so illustrated a way of being that the bishop thought might be illustrative in his diocese.

Later that morning, I asked the bishop what he thought of Gene Robinson's consecration, what the implications had been in Tamil Nadu. I found it hard to ask. I did not want to offend him. Maybe I was inviting him to treat me with the same dignity I was trying to offer him. Even though we were just talking, and he had only been gracious, I was scared.

I must have looked nervous, because he smiled and asked me what I thought. I said that I thought it was a step towards greater justice in the church. He smiled and said, "Why should it matter what I think about how the church in America selects its leaders?"

The conversation in my apartment that morning supported my belief that there is unrealized potential in transformative relationships within our Anglican Communion. It would be quite something if we generated a document that strengthened or organized some of that potential, but I don't think we've seen that document yet.

The proposed covenant we have in front of us does seek to be a foundational document for Anglicans across national borders, specifically the British Commonwealth and the Episcopal Churches in the Americas and Europe. The timing of the covenant project is in conjunction with the Windsor Process and the election and consent to the election of Bishop Robinson in New Hampshire. The idea of a covenant has been around for awhile, but the document we have was created in response to these specific tensions. It has been clear for some time that as the new, primarily nationally defined, churches of the former British Empire come into their own, the diversity of practice and polity raised the question of what we hold in common.

In some provinces the Anglican church is the national church, in others it essentially a Protestant denomination or a part of an ecumenical national church. The church in the United States is one of the most developed for the simple reason that the Revolution happened in 1776 and most of the other churches achieved autonomy in relation to independence movements in

the 20th Century. In some nations, the Anglican church is a serious player in national politics and holds significant property: schools and hospitals as well as historic buildings, in some places it is associated with those who might claim to miss the good old days of Empire, in some places it is a tiny community of ex pats, in others it is a haven for unmarried mothers, indigenous persons, refugees and others rejected by the Catholic and Evangelical churches. It is this diversity we are attempting to define in the proposed covenant.

A good reason to have a covenant would be to define our communion as something other than the church that trailed the British East India Company's engorgement of the Queen's purse. We are, of course, much more than that. The Church in Southern Africa models for the rest of us civic engagement and social transformation from a place of profound spirituality and conviction. The churches in the Americas raise the voice of indigenous people and refugees. The Church in India stands with Dalits, slum dwellers and indigenous people. The churches in Africa raise the spectre of national indebtedness, the under-valuing and stripping of national resources, the implications of international aid tied to transnational corporations and the faces and families of those dying of hunger, thirst and disease as the cost of corporate profit. The church throughout the world, at times, stands with the poorest, those dispossessed of land or identity. The poorest of the poor. I think it is exactly this standing on the side of the least, everywhere, that leads us to the breaking point. But these conflicts are the essence of who we are. They call us to greater honesty and compassion in our personal living. We need a covenant that helps us to stand in those places in which it costs us personally to hear our brothers and sisters and guides us through ways to understand one another.

I have a lot of respect for the difficulty of the task of those who had to generate this document, but I think it has failed to capture, honestly or aspirationally, who we are or hope to

become. As troubling as some of our origins are, I don't think we can afford to lie about them.

Truth telling would be step one in creating real relationships. The covenant glosses the truth in claiming that "we claim our heritage" in the UK and Ireland, acknowledging our origins honestly and creating language that moves us towards covenanted relationships could be quite powerful. The Anglican Communion is a legacy of imperialism that decimated the natural resources of a significant portion of what is now the third world where people remain mired in economic slavery to London and New York (and increasingly China) until Jesus returns. A covenant that acknowledged these international realities and worked to generate relationships or structures to overcome, not ignore, these histories would be a document radical and gospel-truth-telling enough to be worthy of calling a covenant.

On the other hand, things being what they are, those living in extreme poverty directly related to patterns of theft and aid are very often served by the local church. As self-serving as it sometimes seems, this is what we often call mission. It would be the work of God to begin to understand that most of our "mission" is about restorative justice. That kind of work would require covenanted relationship.

Standing alongside the poor on the Indian subcontinent or in Africa a good Christian must wonder how and why such profound suffering exists in a world where so many—such as us—live so well. The history of how this came to be is fairly straightforward. The crippling international order of debt, aid and relief remain rooted in the fallacy that developing countries must pay for their freedom from empire. Haiti is a prime example. Haiti's independence treaty was written as a loss of "property" from France, a property loss the Haitians have been forced to repay. The legacy of empire—our legacy as the Anglican Communion—is filled with contracts like that, private and public that have crippled church, state and civil society internationally creating dependencies through which we can both

pity the weakness and corruption of the developing state and build enormous agencies to placate the most pressing current need. Yes, there has always been disparity and suffering on this planet, but isn't one of our gifts as a communion to open eyes to the effects of historic bigotry, now that we have the distance to consider it as the legacy of a generation past? That seems difficult and worthy enough to require a covenant.

But such a covenant is not on the table.

The Anglican Church in those countries in which the church is closely allied with government wishes for a powerful, testosterone-addled ecclesiology that can compete with Rome or the megachurch movements. The church in those places where it is in opposition to government or is sidelined or insignificant and stands with the poor couldn't be bothered with this business and seems to sign whatever document appears, assuming the best and understanding the utter impossibility of enforcement locally. We in the U.S. are indignant that anyone would try to tell us what to do, and the chiefs of the Church in England fail to understand that we in the U.S. experience their preferred mode of governance as hypocritical. To most of us, this covenant appears to be an obvious attempt to appease those who see how weak our system is. It is weak. Nostalgia is not holding us together. Yet, those who are attempting to strengthen it by this document, I think, will destroy what little is left in their attempt to create a conformity and a unity where there is none.

We must be very careful. In the North and West we support institutions that crush our brothers and sisters in the South. Some of the corporations that employ our faithful members are stripping away local autonomy and resources in other parts of the world. The list is almost every corporation you can name: Nestle, big oil, Cargill, Monsanto, Dow. We make our money as hard-working Americans and keep our endowments in good shape as faithful vestry and board members in the U.S., but these same corporations are the agents of the defeat of local

economies around the world, driving people to refugee camps and urban slums, where we might create an outreach program to serve them or send our children on a mission trip. What the covenant process gets very right is that we are already living in these webs of relationship internationally, and it would be great to figure out how to do it as Jesus might.

So, how do we do this? I've missed every deadline on this essay, because I don't have an alternative proposal, but I can say that I don't think the answer lies in stating the obvious: the creeds, scripture, the approved interpretation of texts, and governance. We already have these things in place, all of us. These are our least common denominators. If you divide us by them, you'll get a whole number, we all already agree upon, and it does not make any difference to where we find ourselves today. While essential, these structures and documents offer a definition of communion so minimal as to be almost cynical. They accomplish the purpose of unity, while all but encouraging provinces to seek discipline against one another when they take a prophetic stance on behalf of the least among us. For example, under this covenant, the Episcopal Church could argue for discipline of the Church in Nigeria because Texaco is a well-respected and essential institution in the U.S., and protests by Nigerian Anglicans in response to Texaco oil spills contaminating their rivers and destroying their livelihood is an improperly political use of church authority that threatens the stability of an important U.S.-based institution.

I thought, when I began this essay, that I was going to write something about prayer as the thing that holds us together, but in my experience we actually pray very differently and often mean very different things, even when our words are the same. Prayer, like everything else is local. Though tied to the same foundational texts and creeds, prayer is a profoundly local experience influenced by local imagination, local history, the memory of ancient religious practices and the nuances of language. In prayer I

am an American person. The breviary of Episcopal monastic communities does it for me. I was raised on the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, and I love it enough to enjoy experimenting with it to further its imaginative possibilities, but I do not think that it is what holds us together, even in the United States.

The gospels are about so much more than nostalgia and familiarity. I believe the hope in us that these sort of “common” experiences of prayer develop is realized when we stand with the least among us—whether least is defined by mental illness, addiction, poverty, race, hunger, accent, sexual orientation, thoughtfulness, or immigration status. It is in opposing whatever sort of oppression flourishes in our local context, that we are most truly the church in the world. This work unavoidably brings us into conflict with those who believe that the marginalized and their ways of being are not the ways of God. That is the nature of the gospel. The good news, especially when it is good news for those who need a word of liberation, will not be such good news to those who hadn’t yet thought those people should be free. If standing in the place in the world that our prayer calls us to stand as witnesses to God at work among us is a punishable offense by Section Four of the Anglican covenant, I suspect this covenant gets something wrong. And I can guarantee, that we will all find ourselves there, camped out in Section Four, as long as the Spirit is alive in the church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The Rev. Varghese begins her essay like this: “I believe in a high, expansive and dreamy ecclesiology.... Our communion should be statements of our most extravagant dreams of the holy city and nothing less, this generation’s attempt at building cathedrals. The gift of communion to us is relationships, across borders we might not otherwise cross.” How does the proposed Anglican Covenant embody or not embody her hopes?

How does the Rev. Varghese’s conversation with the bishop from Madras in South India speak to the heart of what the Anglican Communion means? What did you think about the bishop’s response, “Why should it matter what I think about how the church in America selects its leaders?”

The Rev. Varghese believes “that there is unrealized potential in transformative relationships within our Anglican Communion.” She longs for “a document that strengthened or organized some of that potential,” but doesn’t think she has seen that yet. What would such a document look like?

The Rev. Varghese says that the proposed covenant “was created in response to...specific tensions,” relating to the consent to the ordination of Bishop Gene Robinson. How has that concern shaped the emphasis of the document? How might the covenant have been written if its primary focus were the mission of “restorative justice”?

What differences are there between the mother Church of England, the Episcopal Church that formed in the 18th century, and the churches that “achieved autonomy in relation to independence movements in the 20th century”? How do those differences impact relationships in the Anglican Communion?

The Rev. Varghese says, “The Anglican Communion is a legacy of imperialism that decimated the natural resources of a significant portion of what is now the third world where people remain mired in economic slavery to London and New York (and increasingly China) until Jesus returns. A covenant that acknowledged these international realities and worked to generate relationships or structures to overcome, not ignore, these histories would be a document...worthy of calling a covenant.” How might you imagine such a document?

The Rev. Varghese worries that the proposed covenant might “encourage provinces to seek discipline against one another when they take a prophetic stance on behalf of the least among us.” Do you agree or disagree with her statement?

What do you think of her illustration about a Texaco oil spill in Nigeria? Can you think of various ways one member of the Anglican Communion might seek discipline against another member?

NOTES

