

## The Church in Wales

### The Anglican Communion Covenant: A Briefing Paper

#### 1. What is a covenant?

The word ‘covenant’ translates the Hebrew *berith* and the Greek *diatheke*. In the Bible, these words refer to a solemn agreement or promise which binds two parties together. However, is there more to be said about the character of ‘covenant’? In his address to the Lambeth Conference in 2008, the Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, reminded us that a covenant is a kind of relationship.<sup>1</sup> Two relationships which dominate many of our lives concern our employers and the government. These are about wealth (earning money, working) and power (the government’s rule enforced through the law).

Rabbi Sacks suggested that a covenant is not about taking power or earning wealth. It is about sharing based on promises and commitment. In particular, it is about sharing life, love and friendship. We usually find this kind of relationship in a family. With our husband, wife, children and parents, we share life, love and friendship. The same could be said of the family of our local church where we share the life, love and friendship of Jesus Christ with our Christian brothers and sisters. All these relationships are based on promises and commitments made in baptism, at confirmation, in marriage or at ordination. The Chief Rabbi talked about ‘covenantal goods’ in this way:

The state is about power. The market is about wealth. And they are two ways of getting people to do what we want them to do. One of them is to force them to do it – the way of power. The other one is to pay them to – the way of wealth.

But there is a third way, and to see exactly what makes the third way different from the other two I just want to do a little elementary arithmetic with you because elementary arithmetic is about as much as I can do. Even my mobile phone gives me an inferiority complex so higher mathematics is not my style but here it is. Imagine, for a moment, you have total power, and then, in the fit of craziness you decide to share it with nine other people. How much power do you have left? You have 1/10 of what you began with. Supposing you have a thousand pounds, and you decide to share it with nine other people. How much do you have left? 1/10 of what you had when you began. But now supposing that you decide to share, not power or wealth, but love, or friendship, or influence, or even knowledge and you decided to share those, with nine others. How much would you have left? Would you have less than when you began? No, you would have more. Why? Because love, friendship and influence are things that only exist by virtue of sharing them with others. And those are the goods I call covenantal goods –

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, ‘The Relationship between People and God’, Lambeth Conference 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2008 available at: <http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/7/29/ACNS4484>

covenantal goods are the goods that, the more I share, the more I have. And that makes covenant different from wealth and power.

We learn about covenants in the Bible. The Old Testament uses the word 'covenant' more than 250 times. In the first two books of the Bible, we learn about three particularly important covenants between God and the world. First, we have God's covenant with the whole of creation in Genesis 9, immediately after the flood:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. (Genesis 9.8-13)

The second covenant we learn about is in Genesis 17 when God promises Abram that he will make of him a great nation which will become God's people:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.' Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. (Genesis 17.1-4)

Finally, in Exodus chapters 19 to 24 we learn about God's covenant with the Israelites: they will be God's people for the world, living under the law:

Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: 4You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.' (Exodus 19.1-6)

A covenant is a promise which binds creation to God so that we might share God's life, love and friendship through good times and bad. There are other covenants in the Bible, for example the promise of God to David and his royal dynasty in 2 Samuel 7.8-16. For Christians, God's promise to his people is expressed most fully in the new covenant in Jesus Christ. We find this new covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah and described throughout the New Testament, particularly in St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the letter to the Hebrews. God binds us so

closely to himself that God comes to dwell amongst us as one of us. It is through the new covenant in the person of Jesus that we share God's life, love and friendship.

As Christians, this is what we have received: a sharing in the life of God in Jesus Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is such a wonderful gift that we want to share it not only with those in our local church, but with our brothers and sisters all over the world. As God binds himself to us in the covenants of the Old Testament and the new covenant in Jesus Christ, so we want to bind ourselves to each other in his love as we share God's grace.

However, do covenants properly belong between God and people, rather than between peoples? Are covenants between peoples likely to fail because of our sin? In the Bible, we can find instances of covenants between peoples which are fruitful while others fail. Our Christian faith, however, gives us a particular perspective on the nature of covenant and human relations. We believe that our relationship with God has been healed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If God's covenant with us in Jesus heals our relationship with God, it also heals our relationships with each other. In the Lord's Prayer, for example, we pray 'forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us.*' When we place our life under God's care, sin no longer divides. Any covenant between peoples, such as that proposed in the Anglican Communion, is therefore best understood as a participation in the saving covenant of God in Jesus Christ. Our covenant with each other in the Christian family is not something of our own making. It looks always to God's covenant in Christ as its source of power and grace. There is, then, only one true covenant: that which we receive in Christ as God binds us to himself. Our covenant is a sharing in this one saving grace of God.

Within the worldwide Christian community, we have long been members of the family known as the Anglican Communion. Our Anglican Covenant proposed for adoption is an expression of the faith we have received and the faith we share through good times and bad within that family. Our Covenant uses words from the Bible and our Church tradition. It is an expression of our relationship as Anglicans: sharing the life, love and friendship of Jesus Christ around the world.

## **2. How and why has the Anglican Communion Covenant been written?**

The election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 and the reaction to this election led to the formation of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, chaired by Archbishop Robin Eames. The Commission delivered the Windsor Report in 2004 which recommended the adoption of an 'Anglican Covenant' to rebuild trust at a time of great strain on the Anglican Communion worldwide. For almost five centuries Anglicanism has endeavoured to hold together diverse elements which, in other traditions, have failed to remain in unity. The Covenant can be seen as part of that process. As such, like the ancient and foundational Creeds of the Church which are striking in their brevity, the Covenant is not intended to be a detailed doctrinal confession. Neither is the objective to change current Anglican structures or to amend doctrine. Rather, the Covenant aims to restate long-established Anglican doctrinal norms by affirming what the 39 Provinces of the Communion have in common, and, therefore, to build a foundation for a future where the Churches live together in mutual care and affection as one Communion. Love, charity and unity form the basis of the Covenant (John 13:34-35; 17:21).

Thus, it is hoped that, at this point in time at least, the Covenant will allow the Communion to order its common life to witness first and foremost to the biblical commands of charity and unity. In the words of Archbishop Rowan in his 2009 reflections ‘Communion, Covenant and our Anglican Future’:

The Covenant proposals of recent years have been a serious attempt to do justice to that aspect of Anglican history that has resisted mere federation. They seek structures that will express the need for mutual recognisability, mutual consultation and some shared processes of decision-making. They are emphatically not about centralisation but about mutual responsibility. They look to the possibility of a freely chosen commitment to sharing discernment (and also to a mutual respect for the integrity of each province, which is the point of the current appeal for a moratorium on cross-provincial pastoral interventions). They remain the only proposals we are likely to see that address some of the risks and confusions already detailed, encouraging us to act and decide in ways that are not simply local.<sup>2</sup>

It should be mentioned that, while the issue of human sexuality brought tensions within the Communion into particular focus in 2003, other contentious issues have affected our common life in recent years, not least proposals for lay Presidency at the Eucharist and Provinces encroaching on the order of ministry and pastoral provision in other Provinces in the Communion. The Covenant is intended to express clearly the Communion’s form of life, and the formal and visible process which must be undertaken when disputes arise.

The text of the Covenant was formulated by the Covenant Design Group (CDG), chaired by Archbishop Drexel Gomez. The current Bishop of St. Asaph, then Deputy Secretary General at the Anglican Communion Office, was Secretary to the CDG. The Covenant went through three drafts and, at each stage, the draft was sent to Provinces for feedback and comment. In December 2009, the final text of the Anglican Covenant was agreed by the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council. The Secretary General of the Anglican Communion has sent the Covenant to the Churches of the Communion to be considered for adoption through their particular formal processes. The timescales and legal processes vary considerably amongst the Provinces of the Communion. The Provinces of Mexico and Myanmar have already adopted the Covenant. It is hoped that the vast majority of Provinces will have completed this process by the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in late 2012.

### **3. Is the Covenant ‘Anglican’?**

Of course, the Covenant is, in one sense, an innovation for Anglicans. However, it is also important to see the Covenant as part of developments in Anglicanism since the mid-nineteenth century. It is, in many ways, a further development of mutual recognition and deepening communion.

The first Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops was called in 1867. Needless to say, it was provoked by dispute: the Canadian Bishops objected both to the liberal tendencies in biblical exegesis demonstrated by the Bishop of Natal, John Colenso, and to the chaos that ensued when

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2502>

Colenso was deposed by the Archbishop of Cape Town. Only 76 of the 145 bishops who were invited attended. The Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Durham declined to become part of what they viewed as a new and dangerous innovation. This first Lambeth Conference sought to bring some clarity to the relationships and authority structures within the Anglican Communion. It strongly resisted suggestions that the title of Patriarch be conferred upon the Archbishop of Canterbury. It asked questions about communication within the Anglican Communion, considered questions of recognition of new dioceses and of emerging Provinces and discussed the balance between autonomy and interdependence across the Communion. Similar questions have been on the agenda and feature in the Resolutions of almost every Lambeth Conference.

The first Lambeth Conference was called on the understanding that it could not enact any canons or reach any decisions which were automatically binding on the Churches of the Anglican Communion. Resolutions and decisions had to be ratified by each member Church before becoming effective. This practice has continued with respect to the establishment of further bodies, such as the Anglican Consultative Council (established through acceptance of Resolution 69 of the 1968 Lambeth Conference by a two-thirds majority in the synodical processes of every member Church). In recent years there has been some lack of clarity as to the status of the Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference, and the clarification of the role of the Lambeth Conference in the text of the Covenant may help to address this.

There have now been fourteen Lambeth Conferences. They have brought together Bishops from across the Anglican Communion on average every ten years. After the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference is probably the best known of the Instruments of Communion. The Covenant affirms it as one of those Instruments.

The Lambeth Conference was originally served by a 'Continuation Committee' which was superseded when the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) was established in 1969. According to its constitution, and amongst other responsibilities, the ACC advises on inter-Anglican, Provincial, and diocesan relationships, including the division of Provinces, the formation of new Provinces and of regional councils, and the problems of extra-Provincial dioceses, on ecumenical relationships, and on problems of inter-Anglican communication. The ACC is made up of between one and three representatives from each member Church and, unlike the other Instruments, includes lay and clergy members. It meets every three years.

The Primates' Meeting was established in 1978 by Archbishop Donald Coggan as an opportunity for 'leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation' and has met regularly, also every two to three years, since then. Subsequent Lambeth Conferences encouraged it to take more significant roles including intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces and giving of guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity.

Elected members of the ACC and of the Primates' Meeting serve on the Standing Committee. The Covenant gives the Standing Committee the task of monitoring the functioning of the Covenant in the life of the Anglican Communion on behalf of the Instruments and of referring matters that arise to the Instruments of Communion.

The Covenant makes explicit appeal to all these Instruments (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting and the ACC), seeking to use them more effectively to deepen relationships across the Communion and to improve communication between member Churches. The Covenant should thus be understood as continuing and deepening the on-going process of defining the structures of the Anglican Communion. At the same time, supporting the Covenant does not involve giving an uncritical endorsement to the Instruments in their current form. The Instruments of Communion will continue to develop as they have in the past. The Covenant provides an agreed theological framework in the light of which this continuing development can be shaped.

#### 4. What does the Anglican Communion Covenant say?

The Covenant has an introduction which discusses the Scriptural understanding of 'covenant' and 'communion'. Although not formally part of the Covenant, the Introduction 'shall always be annexed to the Covenant text' and 'accorded authority in understanding the purpose of the Covenant' (§4.4.1). The introduction states that 'We recognise the wonder, beauty and challenge of maintaining communion in this family of Churches, and the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God's promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation' (Intro, §4).

The introduction begins with a crucial theological articulation of 'communion':

God has called us into communion in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1.9). This communion has been "revealed to us" by the Son as being the very divine life of God the Trinity. What is the life revealed to us? St John makes it clear that the communion of life in the Church participates in the communion which is the divine life itself, the life of the Trinity. This life is not a reality remote from us, but one that has been "seen" and "testified to" by the apostles and their followers: "for in the communion of the Church we share in the divine life".<sup>3</sup> This life of the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, shapes and displays itself through the very existence and ordering of the Church. (Intro, §1).

This unity of the Church is expressed in the New Testament through the image of the Church as the body of Christ. As St. Paul explains, the reality of the Church as the body of Christ means that we cannot say to another member of the body 'we have no need of you' (1 Cor 12).

Following the Introduction, the Covenant is divided into four sections. The first three sections take the form of an affirmation of our shared faith followed by a series of commitments.

##### *Section 1*

The first section is entitled '**Our Inheritance of Faith**'. It describes the nature of the Anglican Communion as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. This section also looks to the two founts of our Communion: the sharing of Word and Sacrament. We are asked to commit ourselves 'to teach and act in continuity and consonance with Scripture and the catholic apostolic faith, order and tradition.' (§1.2.2). There is a stress on the faithful, coherent and respectful

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<sup>3</sup> *The Church of the Triune God*, The Cyprus Statement of the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue, 2007, paragraph 1,2.

interpretation of Scripture. Similarly, we are asked to commit ourselves to nurture and sustain Eucharistic communion.

There are strong echoes of other important Anglican documents in this section, notably the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral<sup>4</sup> (§1.1.1-1.1.6) and the Church of England's Declaration of Assent which is similar to the Church in Wales' ordinal (§1.1.2).

### *Section 2*

The second section, entitled '**The Life We Share with Others: Our Anglican Vocation**', is particularly concerned with the mission of the Churches of the Anglican Communion. This is a sharing in God's mission in Christ "to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God" and to bring all to repentance and faith' (§2.2.2.a). This section also refers to our own 'ongoing conversion' as we deepen our life in Christ.

The emphasis on mission in the Covenant is a helpful corrective for the 'old' Anglican Provinces where there has arguably been relatively little emphasis on Christ's Great Commission (Matthew 28.18-20). Logically, one might surely specify the role of the Church in proclaiming the good news of Jesus as its first task. This is how Luke portrays it in his summary description of the earliest community. First he describes the people receiving the apostles' word, then baptism, then the cluster of activity which sustains the life of the Church: apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2.41-2).

The incorporation of the five marks of mission into the text (§2.2.2, as formulated by the Anglican Consultative Council in the late 1980s and developed in the 1999 *Missio* Report)<sup>5</sup> is a reminder that contemporary Anglicanism has gone a long way to remedy the lack of emphasis on mission which is very evident in our historic formularies, as well as in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.

### *Section 3*

The third section is entitled '**Our Unity and Common Life**'. It asks the question 'what is the source of our unity?' The immediate answer is 'our participation in Baptism and Eucharist' by which we are incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church. The gift of Christ in the Eucharist, and Baptism as the gateway to that Eucharistic life, is the crucial source of our unity as we receive 'the Bread of Life' and share Christ's risen life. This section of the Covenant

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<sup>4</sup> The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is a four-point expression of Anglican identity passed by the House of Bishops of the American Episcopal Church in 1886 and, in slightly amended form, at the third Lambeth Conference in 1888. It was written at a time of rapid expansion for the Anglican churches. This Lambeth version reads as follows: That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following Articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunion: (a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith (b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith (c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord — ministered with unailing use of Christ's Words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him (d) 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.

<sup>5</sup> The five marks of mission are: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptise 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.

stresses the importance of bishops as guardians and teachers of the faith who are visible signs of unity, joining the local Church to the universal Church. The four 'Instruments of Communion' which facilitate our common life are also described: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting.

Importantly, section three of the Covenant stresses the juridical autonomy of each particular Church of the Communion. This is a very important aspect of the Anglican Communion; we do not have a centralized legislative or executive authority. However, because the Anglican Communion is ordered through the historic Episcopate and a shared Eucharist, neither is the Communion a 'federation'. Concern has been expressed regarding the possible centralization of power following the adoption of the Covenant. It must be stressed that the Covenant repeatedly emphasises the autonomy of the Communion's Provinces. However, the Covenant also affirms the importance of our interdependence and mutual responsibility. A common life means that each Church of the Communion should be mindful that its life and decisions impact positively and negatively on the lives of other Churches. Therefore, this section of the Covenant commits us 'to have regard for the common good of the Communion in the exercise of autonomy' while 'upholding our mutual responsibility and interdependence.' (§3.2.2).

Some may perceive a weakness in this section of the Covenant, namely its failure to highlight the importance of common patterns of liturgy which can sustain and nurture our life together. The ideal of Common Prayer was a bedrock of the identity of Anglicanism: one of the first actions of the Elizabethan Church was to pass an Act of Uniformity and publish a Prayer Book (both 1559), well before it published its Articles (1563). Arguably, the Book of Common Prayer enabled theological variety to flourish within the Church of England. Parishes might be High or Low in their approach to worship, Evangelical or Broad Church in their theology. But a common liturgy provided a shared loyalty which kept disparate groups together. Greater collaboration and co-operation in liturgical revision might help us work our way towards deeper communion and more visible unity.

#### *Section 4*

The fourth section, entitled '**Our Covenanted Life Together**', deals with practical matters. It describes how the Covenant may be adopted by a particular Church. It also deals with how the functioning of the Covenant will be overseen and what happens if a particular Church is deemed to have broken the Covenant. This process is described in the answer to question 6 below.

This section of the Covenant has been perhaps the most controversial because it deals with the consequences of a perceived fracture in the Communion. When commenting on earlier drafts, some Provinces expressed concern about the possible advent of a centralised, juridical authority which polices the Covenant. It is therefore worth quoting an important paragraph which, once again, emphasises Provincial autonomy and goes a long way towards assuaging this concern:

Such mutual commitment does not represent submission to any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Nothing in this Covenant of itself shall be deemed to alter any provision of the Constitution and Canons of any Church of the Communion, or to limit its autonomy of governance. The Covenant does not grant to any one Church or any agency of the Communion control or direction over any Church of the Anglican Communion. (§4.1.3)

## **5. How will the Covenant deepen our Communion?**

Catholic and Orthodox Christians often point out that, at moments of tension or division, Protestant denominations tend to state their doctrine in the form of textual statements of faith (for example, the Westminster Confession, the Augsburg Confession or the Thirty-Nine articles) which move well beyond the deliberately laconic Creeds of the ancient Church. The interpretation or ‘adoption’ of those texts then becomes a matter of further division. It is important that the Anglican Communion Covenant is not a doctrinal ‘statement of faith’ of this kind. It is better understood as a description of a form of life rather than a series of propositions. As we have already seen, the Anglican Communion is more than a federation of Churches. It is a ‘Communion’ with a shared *life*, not only a shared set of beliefs. The Anglican Communion Covenant therefore reminds us of the *practice* of Christian life in the form of certain virtues and disciplines (openness and patience; prayer, study and debate – §3.2.3). We are also reminded of the need for mediated conversations in times of conflict (§3.2.6). These aspects of our shared Christian life reflect the lives of the earliest Christians described in the book of Acts who ‘shared all things in common’ and ‘devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.’ (Acts 2.42, 44).

The Covenant may deepen our Communion by providing a constant reminder of our shared life and mutual responsibilities while renewing our commitment to the mission of the Church in the world. Nevertheless, just as in the early Church, disputes arise amongst Christians. This has particularly been the case within the Anglican Communion in recent years. The early Christians would meet together to discuss their disputes and, guided by the Holy Spirit, find a measure of peace and resolution as they journeyed together (Acts 15). In times of turmoil, the shared life of the early Christians described in the Bible had to be ordered and prayerful. In many of his letters, St. Paul describes to his readers in various churches the way in which they are to behave towards each other in times of tension and conflict. The Anglican Communion Covenant seeks to provide an order to our Communion by describing how our disputes are to be dealt with patiently, prayerfully and collectively, thereby deepening our shared life and mutual commitment. It does this at the prompting of Scripture and through faith in the guiding power of the Spirit.

## **6. What will happen if the Covenant is broken?**

Section Four of the Covenant describes what happens if a Church is deemed to have broken the Covenant. The responsibility for monitoring the functioning of the Covenant belongs to the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion *on behalf of* the Instruments of Communion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Standing Committee, of which the Archbishop of Wales is currently a member, is a 14-member group (15, if the Archbishop of Canterbury is present, as he is an *ex officio* member, as well as being its President). Seven of its members are elected by the members of the Anglican Consultative Council, and five are members of the Primates' Standing Committee. The other two members are the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Anglican Consultative Council, elected by the members in plenary session. Their function is together to assist the Churches of the Anglican Communion in advancing the work of their mission worldwide.

When a question arises concerning fidelity to the Covenant, section 4 immediately calls the Churches of the Communion to the form of life described in section 3.2: to have regard for our common life; to spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and reflection; to listen, pray and study with one another in order to discern the will of God; to seek a shared mind with other Churches, through the Communion's councils, about matters of common concern; to act with diligence, care and caution in respect of any action which may provoke controversy; in situations of conflict, to participate in mediated conversations, which involve face to face meetings, agreed parameters and a willingness to see such processes through.

If agreement concerning a particular dispute is not reached, the matter is referred to the Standing Committee which may request a Church to defer any controversial action. If that request is ignored, the Standing Committee may *recommend* to any Instrument of Communion (for example, the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Primates' Meeting) the relational consequences of that action.

It is important to stress that there are already 'relational consequences' of certain decisions made by particular Provinces of the Anglican Communion. Those consequences are frequently chaotic in nature. At the very least, the Covenant provides a description of the form of life by which the Church has historically dealt with its disputes (namely, through theological Councils) and a flexible structure for collectively recognising and facing shared tensions and difficulties. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has said:

The last bit of the Covenant text is the one that's perhaps been the most controversial, because that's where we spell out what happens if relationships fail or break down. It doesn't set out, as I've already said, a procedure for punishments and sanctions. It does try and sort out how we will discern the nature of our disagreement, how important is it? How divisive does it have to be? Is it a Communion breaking issue that's in question – or is it something we can learn to live with? And so in these sections of the Covenant what we're trying to do is simply to give a practical, sensible and Christian way of dealing with our conflicts, recognising that they're always going to be there.<sup>7</sup>

## **7. Does the adoption of the Covenant make a particular Church or ecclesial body 'Anglican'?**

In short, no. It is important to note that 'adoption of this Covenant does not confer any right of recognition by, or membership of, the Instruments of Communion, which shall be decided by those Instruments themselves' (§4.1.5). There may therefore be other Churches not currently in the Communion, or individual dioceses within existing provinces or local churches, which wish to affirm the Covenant, and which could be invited by the Instruments of Communion to adopt it formally. Currently, only those Churches which are members of the Anglican Communion (i.e. those on the Schedule of Membership of the Anglican Consultative Council) are being invited to adopt the Covenant. The procedure by which Churches will sign the Covenant will vary according to their Canon law. Consequently, for some years to come, there will be a developing and potentially complex situation.

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<sup>7</sup> Message, 17 December 2009; at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2687>.

There is the possibility that some Churches of the Communion will choose not to adopt the Covenant. However, these Churches will not thereby be excluded from the Communion. The Covenant itself does not address this possible outcome, although the Commentary to the final draft (the so-called Ridley Draft) noted:

There may be members of the Instruments of Communion who represent a Church that has not adopted the Covenant, and there would be an increasingly anomalous situation as the Covenant becomes active and forceful in the life of the Churches which have adopted it...There will in time be a question of how both Covenanting and non-Covenanting Churches participate together in the life of the Instruments of Communion...such matters may become the subject of agreed conventions alongside the Covenant.

Similarly, the Commentary on the final text of section 4 suggests: 'there should be flexibility for the Instruments of Communion to determine an appropriate response in the evolving situation that would accompany a process of reception and adoption of the Covenant.' Therefore, as the Archbishop of Canterbury has observed, 'we could arrive at a situation where there were 'constituent' Churches in the Anglican Communion and other 'churches in association', which were bound by historic and perhaps personal links, fed from many of the same sources but not bound in a single and unrestricted sacramental communion and not sharing the same constitutional structures.'

It is thus conceivable – although most would agree that it would be deeply regrettable – that different parts of the Anglican family will, while retaining the kind of mutual sacramental recognition that exists between the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Churches or between the British provinces and the Porvoo Churches, work within different structures whose interrelations would need to be carefully worked out. All this is inevitably speculative and uncertain. Nonetheless, it is important to see the Covenant as a positive means of handling our diversity, not a tool for either control or forced division.

## **Conclusion**

The Doctrinal Commission of the Church in Wales commends the Anglican Communion Covenant to the Governing Body of the Church in Wales. We regard it as a theologically coherent description of the nature of the Church and the form of the Christian life as expressed in Scripture and Church tradition. The Covenant falls within a discernable trajectory in the development of Anglican identity.

The Doctrinal Commission has two ecumenical observers from the Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church. They welcome the Covenant as an important initiative in the continuing attempt to preserve and enhance the unity of the Anglican Communion. They regard the Covenant as a helpful means of dealing with tensions which have serious implications for ecumenical relations beyond the Communion. Also, the Covenant can be regarded as a model for promoting unity between Churches without emphasising a juridical and centralised authority such as one finds in the modern Roman Catholic Church. The successful adoption and operation

of the Covenant could therefore provide a very positive example of Church governance for our ecumenical partners.

Most members of the Commission welcome the Covenant, regarding it as an opportunity to deal more clearly with the many tensions that have beset the Anglican Communion in recent years. Some would rather the Covenant were clearer concerning the consequences of fractured relations. Other members of the Commission express some reservations concerning the Covenant, pointing out that, of itself, it solves none of our difficulties. Much depends on the way in which the Covenant is received and lived. Properly used, the processes outlined in the Covenant should assist this process of discerning the work of the Spirit within the Anglican Communion. However, this will only be possible if a conscious effort is made to foster proper lines of communication and deeper bonds of friendship across the Communion. However, the Covenant is an attempt to describe and clarify the nature of our mutual commitments and the form of life required to begin the process of discernment towards deeper communion and a more intense participation in the life of God made known in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.