

An Anglican Covenant - Commentary to the Ridley Cambridge Draft

The Ridley Cambridge Report of the Covenant Design Group

The Covenant Design Group (CDG) met under the chairmanship of the Most Revd Drexel Gomez, former Primate of the Church in the Province of the West Indies, between 29th March and 2nd April, 2009, in Ridley Hall, Cambridge, at the invitation of the Principal, the Revd Canon Andrew Norman, former Representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Covenant Design Group. We are grateful for the warm welcome received.

The main work of the group was to prepare a revised draft for the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant which could be presented to the fourteenth Meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, and commended to the Provinces for adoption. The CDG now presents the third "Ridley Cambridge" draft for the Anglican Communion Covenant.

This text has been developed in the light of responses received in the twelve month consultation period requested by the Joint Standing Committee since the production of the Saint Andrew's Draft in February 2008. The CDG has worked with the twenty or so Provincial responses which have been received to the St Andrew's Draft, and which are listed in *Appendix One* of this Report. We also received a large number of responses from individuals, diocesan synods and other institutions, including ecumenical partners, which were also circulated among the group. All these responses are in the process of being published now on the Anglican Communion website.

The Ridley Cambridge Draft (RCD) of the Covenant text follows the pattern established in the St. Andrew's Draft, of an Introduction, a Preamble, three Sections (to which a fourth is now added), and a Declaration. "We recognise the importance of renewing in a solemn way our commitment to one another, and to the common understanding of faith and order we have received, so that the bonds of affection which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified."[\[1\]](#)

Introduction to the Anglican Communion Covenant.

The CDG sees the Introduction as an invitation to readers to set the Covenant text within an understanding of the purpose of the Covenant and its theological foundations.

Questions were raised by some Provinces and bishops at the Lambeth Conference regarding the status of the Introduction: is it to be considered an inherent part of the Covenant itself? What status ought it to be accorded? Those requesting that it be included with the status of the Covenant argued that the Introduction provides a theological foundation for the Covenant. On the other hand, the text is

discursive in nature, rather than the propositional form of the Covenant itself, and may provide challenges to some in the formal adoption or ratification processes. Within the RCD, section 4.4.1 clearly delineates what constitutes "The Anglican Communion Covenant," stating, in particular, that "the Introduction to the Covenant text, which all always be annexed to the Covenant text, is not part of the Covenant, but shall be accorded authority in understanding the purpose of the Covenant."

The Introduction to the St Andrew's Draft has been revised only slightly to take account of comments submitted. Closer connections has been drawn among worship, humble service, mutual self-giving, and mission that are at the heart of the divine life into which we have been called.

The Preamble

The Preamble describes the spirit of our Covenant affirmations and commitments. The Preamble of the St Andrew's Draft is substantially unchanged.

Section One: Our Inheritance of Faith

This section describes how "our faith embodies a coherent testimony to what we have received from God's Word and the Church's long-standing witness."[\[2\]](#) Everything which is contained in this Section is drawn from established Anglican texts and thinking.

The Affirmations and Commitments of each section have been refined, and, as each Church makes its commitments, it acknowledges its reliance on the Holy Spirit. Scriptural citations and allusions, when made directly, are not footnoted, but referenced within the body of the text. Footnotes, which are intended only to indicate source material, are given either for direct citations (as in the quotation of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral) or for further reference (as in "Cf. The Preface to the Declaration of Assent...").

1.1.2. "historic formularies." The St Andrew's Text conflated texts from the Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Declaration of Assent of the Church of England. We have separated these texts out in the RCD for greater clarity. Reference is given to the historic formularies of the Church of England and their particular context, and new weight is given to the fact that the Book of Common Prayer 1662, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Ordinal have been appropriated - that is, adapted, inculturated and treated - in different ways across the historical development of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. Nevertheless, their authentic witness in the context of their original authorship and their guiding authority through history is acknowledged. The various ways in which authentic liturgical renewal and development of polity have related to their sources are also noted.

1.1.3- 1.1.6. Scripture, creeds, sacraments and the episcopate. The Lambeth Quadrilateral is now included here in full.

1.1.7.-1.1.8. Common prayer and liturgy, mission. The life of common worship is here given its proper emphasis in shaping our common life, alongside the affirmations of the Quadrilateral, all of which serve God's mission into which the whole people of God are called.

1.2 Scripture, theology, teaching, discipleship. The St. Andrew's Draft has been reworked to give clarity and to allow for a fuller treatment of Christian responsibility in relation to the Scriptures and the catholic tradition. This section addresses the roles of the whole people of God in Bible study, the work of scholars, and the teachings of bishops and synods. The guidance of the Holy Spirit has been emphasized in the discernment of truth. The contextual grounding, and the missional and transformative purpose of our engagement with Scripture has been emphasized. The imperative to nurture and sustain eucharistic communion extends into our ecumenical vocation.

Section Two: The Life We Share with Others: Our Anglican Vocation

This section elaborates the purpose of our communion together as being for God's mission in the world. It locates our Anglican inheritance and faith, traced back to the apostolic Church, reshaped by the Reformation and continually being renewed by the Holy Spirit. It enumerates the consequences of our missionary life, which although not perfect, have contributed significantly to the emergence of a diverse worldwide family of Churches and which continue to be shaped by different cultures and languages.

The CDG notes the comments that the St Andrew's Draft's treatment of Mission was lighter than the treatment of other sections, and sought to give the section greater weight and substance in the RCD.

The RCD includes a new section 2.1.3 which recognizes the need for humility and repentance where the actions of churches have undermined the credibility of the Church's mission and the integrity of the gospel.

The Five Marks of Mission, originally set out by ACC 6 and 8 and developed in the 1999 Missio Report, are elaborated in the RCD to acknowledge the transformative role of the Holy Spirit in initiating and sustaining the Great Commission.

New sections 2.2.3-2.2.4 incorporate the collective vocation to mission of the whole people of God and the need for humility and accountability in all these endeavours. 2.2.5 locates the Church's mission in its joyful and reverent worship of God and the vision for the unity of all God's people.

Section 3: Our Unity and Common Life

Section 3 of the RCD has been substantially modified as a result of further deliberation concerning suggestions received from the Provinces and the Lambeth Conference. The affirmations are intended to set out the elements of the life of our Churches which relate to the interdependence generated by communion. The commitments have been reworked to emphasise the mutual obligations which arise from communion, while respecting the autonomy of individual Churches. The CDG commend a helpful summary here: "The Communion guides, each Churches decides."

3.1.1 has not been changed.

3.1.2. The phrase "episcopally led and synodically governed" has been replaced with "with its bishops in synod" for the sake of accuracy. The phrase "autonomous in communion" (from the Windsor Report, para.76) has been replaced with "in communion with autonomy and accountability" from "*A Letter from Alexandria*", the message from the Primates' Meeting in March 2009. This phrase adopts suggestions from the Windsor Continuation Group Report (Paragraphs 2 and 55), which were specifically noted by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his Press Briefing on behalf of the Primates at the conclusion of their meeting. The order of the last two sentences has been reversed for greater clarity.

3.1.3. The phrase "and the local Churches to one another" has been added to describe a deeper unity and catholicity signified by the bishops.

3.1.4 A new sentence has been added in the opening paragraph to locate the work of the Instruments of Communion within the larger apostolic authority of the whole people of God as it continually interprets and articulates the Christian faith. Following the descriptions of the Instruments of Communion, a final sentence has been appended, drawing on language from the IATDC's Report "*Communion, Conflict, and Hope*" (paragraph 113), to clarify the relationship of the Instruments to one another.

The descriptions of the Instruments of Communion have also been modified in some cases. With respect to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the RCD clarifies his significance "as the bishop of the See of Canterbury, with which Anglicans have historically been in communion." The Lambeth Conference description has been slightly revised for the sake of accuracy. The description of the Anglican Consultative Council is unchanged in this draft. A sentence has been added to the description of the Primates' Meeting to clarify the phrase "with its bishops in synod" used in 3.1.2 and elsewhere in the RCD.

3.2.1 The paragraph has been modified to express more clearly the support offered by the Churches for the Instruments of Communion and the reception of their work.

3.2.2 and **3.2.3** are substantially unchanged in this draft.

3.2.4 has been reworded and combined with earlier language (3.2.5.a of the St Andrew's Draft) to increase its accuracy and to clarify, by restating in other words, some of the terms which appeared unclear in the St Andrew's Draft.

3.2.5 was reworked substantially. In its present form, it is meant to provide a standard or test by which a Church could anticipate when it ought to act with caution, or avoid taking any action, in "gracious restraint" (*cf Primates, Alexandria, 2009*).

3.2.6 improves 3.2.5.c of the St Andrew's Draft by calling attention to the usefulness of mediated conversations, listing the basic components of effective mediation, and requiring Churches in situations of conflict to address one another directly.

3.2.7 is substantially unchanged from the older 3.2.6. It is placed last to emphasize the goal set out in the 1988 Lambeth Conference - "the highest degree of communion possible" as the aspiration that motivates all the commitments preceding it.

Section Four: Our Covenanted Life Together

This is a completely new section for the covenant text addressing the matter of joining, participating in and leaving the covenant, and resolving matters of dispute. The Nassau Draft provided that the Primates' Meeting should act as a body which could respond to controversy in the Communion. Matters of serious dispute could be submitted to them, and they would give guidance and direction (6.5). A provision was included that in extreme circumstances Churches would be recognised as having "relinquished for themselves the force and meaning of the Covenant's purpose" (6.6), in a way which implied that such a relinquishment would be understood as fracturing or impairing communion, and leading into a period which would have to seek "restoration and renewal". The provisions of these sections were an attempt to describe how the Communion was actually living its life at the time, rather than to invent new ways forward, knowing that the draft would be tested in consultation.

These proposals in the Nassau Draft were widely criticised. There were two grounds. First, many responses indicated that there was great unhappiness with the idea that the Primates' Meeting should become formally the body within the Communion which could give final direction on a matter. The proposals appeared to create a centralised authority located with the Primates, which overrode Provincial autonomy, a much cherished concept. Secondly, it was felt to be too punitive in its construction, in that the provisions were oriented towards possible exclusion.

A further criticism was also voiced. It was felt that the procedures set out in Section 6 of the Nassau Draft were not sufficiently clear. Since any elaboration of principles would be likely to be lengthy and complicated, it was also felt that such language might be incompatible with the aspirational and

relational language of the Covenant. It was therefore proposed (in the Primates' Meeting in Dar es Salaam) that it might be appropriate to develop a more detailed set of procedures in an appendix to the Covenant.

In the St. Andrew's Draft, there was an attempt to develop a more balanced and therefore complicated procedure. The relational processes of arbitration in the Nassau draft were repeated (3.2.1-3.2.5.c), but now the autonomy of the Churches was more explicitly respected. The Instruments of Communion could not give "direction", but they could make a "request". A refusal to accept the request might be understood, but not necessarily so, as a "relinquishment" of the Covenant. The CDG also developed an initial draft for an Appendix. This set out lengthy procedures for the handling of disputes, and, mindful of the criticism of the Nassau Draft that placed the Primates' Meeting in the role of arbitrator, the Appendix placed much more emphasis on the work of the Anglican Consultative Council. The Appendix sought to incorporate established principles of natural justice into the process.

The general feeling was that the St Andrew's Draft was an improvement. However, it still drew substantial criticism, both from Provincial responses, and at the Lambeth Conference. If the role of the Primates' Meeting in the Nassau Draft has been criticised as too curial, then the role now given to the ACC was considered beyond their capacity as a consultative body. The detailed rules of the Appendix were felt to be too juridical and complex in their approach. Within the St Andrew's Text, the concept of "relinquishment" and what it might mean was felt to be too unclear, and still too oriented towards punishment. The status of the Appendix was felt to be uncertain, and its relationship to the Covenant text unclear.

In the Lambeth Commentary, we set out some of our thinking in response to these criticisms. In the first place, we indicated that the CDG was inclined towards the development of a new Section Four of the Covenant which would include the sort of material needed. It would address questions of how to join as well as how to leave the Covenant. It could offer a system of dispute resolution, which respected the autonomy of the Churches. It could indicate who would be responsible for the maintenance of the Covenant, and even floated the idea of a "Covenant Commission" in the life of the Communion.

In Section Four of the RCD we have attempted to meet these criteria. However, there is one criterion which is even more fundamental. It is clear that one of the main fears attached to the idea of a Covenant is that it would limit Provincial autonomy. In the responses, this fear worked itself out in two directions. In the first place, there was substantial resistance to the idea that there should be any development of a body which could be seen to be exercising universal jurisdiction in Anglican polity. Anglicans wished to keep the autonomy of their Churches. Secondly, it became clear that the processes of adoption of the Covenant would be immensely complicated if the Covenant were seen to

interfere with or to necessitate a change to the Constitution and Canons of any Province. The surrender of any legislative autonomy would in itself prove a stumbling block to the implementation of Covenant.

Section Four of the RCD is therefore constructed on the fundamental principle of the constitutional autonomy of each Church. The Covenant of itself cannot amend or override the Constitution and Canons of any Province. The Instruments of Communion cannot intervene in any jurisdictional way in the internal life of any of the Anglican Churches. The Covenant can only speak to the relationship between the Churches, and of the relational consequences of internal autonomous actions by a Church.

The draft text of Section Four therefore explicitly reaffirms that the Covenant and the Instruments of Communion of themselves do not impose or have any jurisdiction or authority to alter the internal governance of any Church of the Communion. Such a limitation on the Covenant undertakings is repeated in the latter parts of 4.1.1, 4.1.3 and 4.1.4. The Covenant is not intended to alter the Constitution and Canons of any of the Churches; it does not give any power to any Communion body to intervene in a Church's life.

However, the RCD also acknowledges that if any Church of the Communion chooses to exercise its autonomy in a way which lessens the basis on which communion is built - mutual recognition of faith and order, of vocation and a readiness to live in interdependence - then other Churches may wish to respond in a way which demonstrates how the bonds of affection and communion have been diminished by that action.

Section Four seeks to provide a way in which the response of the Communion may be evaluated, harmonised and regulated. It does not provide a system which undermines the autonomy of the Churches. There is no power to direct, either on the matter which may be causing offence, nor the nature of the response - that is left firmly within the sphere of a Church's autonomy. It does however provide a mechanism by which the response of the Communion to a controversial action may be considered, moderated, co-ordinated and handled with patience and care. Since there were objections to the Primates' Meeting and the ACC exercising this sort of role independently, the RCD gives it to them both, with the Joint Standing Committee acting in the role of co-ordinator, and as the body which is charged with overseeing the maintenance of covenanted life.

The concept of "relinquishment" has been replaced with the possibility of a determination that a controverted action is "incompatible with the Covenant". Both this determination and the recommendation of how this action may impair or limit the expression of communion and entail relational consequences is referred back to the Churches, or to any Instrument, so that it can make its own decision.

By offering this Section, the CDG seeks to address the responses which wished to preserve the autonomy of the Churches, and yet give real substance to the nature of the commitments made in the Covenant. Section Four explicitly leaves the Constitutions and Canons of the Provinces untouched, and acknowledges the autonomy of the Churches to govern the internal affairs of the Province. But while it respects the juridical category of "autonomy", it also emphasises the relational and theological category of "communion". It provides a robust system by which an action can be determined to have a destructive impact on the common life and witness of the Communion, and an ordered way to assess the relational consequences which such an action may have.

The CDG notes that there is a potential problem as the life of covenanting Churches develops, as more Churches adopt the Covenant. 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. A short clause (4.2.7) limits participation in the arbitration processes of the Covenant to representatives of Churches who have either adopted or who are in the process of adopting the Covenant, but 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. At the moment, the Covenant text provides that these matters are uncoupled (see 4.1.5 and 4.3.1), but the CDG note that such matters may become the subject of agreed conventions alongside the Covenant.

Finally, the section also makes provision for the amendment of the Covenant. We felt that a fairly high threshold (the consent of three quarters of covenanting Churches) was required for any change, given the profoundly important nature of the affirmations and commitments involved.

Conclusion

The CDG are pleased to be able to commend their work to the Communion. We have laboured to produce the best possible draft which we can commend together to serve the needs of the Communion at this juncture in its life. We offer this work in the hope that it will strengthen the interdependent life of the Churches of the Communion, freeing them for more effective mission and witness to the gift of Christ in the gospel.

The Covenant Design Group

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