

**DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK**

**ANGLICAN COMMUNION COVENANT**

**DEANERY CONSULTATIONS**

**PERSONAL STATEMENTS  
FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE WORKING PARTY**

April Alexander

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Giles Goddard

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## **APRIL ALEXANDER**

Godstone Deanery; Member, General Synod

**The Covenant: a curate's egg. Good in some parts and very bad in others!**

### **Sections 1, 2 and 3 (the good bits)**

We spend very little time really thinking about who we are and whom we serve and these sections give an opportunity for clergy and laity to engage on big questions:

- What does it mean to be a Christian today?
- How far are we members of a global society or of a particular local culture?
- For local mission do we need central regulation or trust between churches?

### **Section 4 (the bad part)**

This section raises different issues which are much more challenging for the CofE

- Are the Instruments of Communion working? How would the Covenant be better?
- How can legal engineering achieve unity? Do we need unity more than diversity?
- Is the Church a spiritual society, or is it humanity, fully redeemed in Christ?
- How will the Communion live with those who “withdraw” from the Covenant?

For the Church of England there are particular unanswered questions including:

- When would we refer an action to The Standing Committee?
- How many years will it take to receive an answer? (Note: 12 years so far on women bishops)
- Suppose, as the Established Church, we have gone through the legal processes and an action is now part of the law of the land in England, Instruments reject it. What then?
- The operation of the Covenant will be centralisation and, inevitably, rule from above; are we content to disempower our clergy and laity in this way?
- What are the implications for Establishment?

Broader issues

- From the reformation, the CofE has always had to be a “broad church”; the Communion has been the same. Church leaders elsewhere have been open about their intention now to decree doctrine and to forbid dissent
- This will involve, for the first time, a mechanism to “expel” a Province with whom others might disagree: this feels like a deeply retrograde step
- It only takes one other Province to object to “any action” in another; not since Henry VIII, has the CofE been subject to an outside international authority
- Eight “hard line” Primates (rather than their Synods) who originated the idea of the Covenant, say they will reject it because it does not demonstrate a strong enough discipline; can it be viable without the originators of the concept?

**Because of the uncertainty, the disempowerment of laity and clergy and the threat to the autonomy of the Church of England, I shall vote against. I invite you to join me!**

## **VASANTHA GNANADOSS**

Battersea Deanery; Member, General Synod

I believe it is right that the Church of England should enter into and adopt the Anglican Communion Covenant. I say this as one of the many members of the Church of England who have roots in other parts of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Communion grew out of the Church of England mainly in association with British commercial and political imperialism. Despite these unpromising origins, we have reason to believe that God in his redemptive grace has called out the Anglican Communion to be a distinctive component of the Church of Jesus Christ. When we realise how many links we in Southwark have with other parts of the Communion, we get a sense of excitement and hopefulness. We then experience the Communion as a source of blessings that we would be very unwise not to protect as strongly as we can.

The development of a global Communion has been accompanied by the pragmatic evolution of the structures that we call the Instruments of Communion, responding to changes in the church and in the world. I believe the Covenant to be an authentic further development of the structures of the Communion.

The introduction of the Covenant may from time to time lead to constraints being placed on the pace of developments in some parts of the Communion. But this is nothing new. Constraints arising from imbalances of economic and political power have long been the experience of many. As we become more and more aware that actions and decisions in one part of the Communion can have serious repercussions elsewhere, it is surely right that we put in place an orderly system to ensure that changes are made with sensitivity to the widely differing circumstances in different Provinces.

The Covenant states clearly that it does not seek to override the autonomy of member provinces. That autonomy of course has to take account of the particular legal context in which a province exists. For example, the Church of England is currently working out the implications of the Equalities Act 2010 in relation to the appointment of gay bishops.

So autonomy is unaffected but by choosing the Covenant we promise to consult and to follow orderly procedures if disagreements persist. That seems to me to be a mature approach to potentially difficult situations and an approach that deserves support.

## **GILES GODDARD**

Priest in Charge - St John's Waterloo; Member, General Synod

**I'm a fan of the Anglican Communion. I think it's a very important part of global Christianity, and the relationships the Church of England has with other provinces are vital to our life. But I don't support the Covenant because I think it won't assist those relationships. I think it's unnecessary, unhelpful and out of date.**

**Unnecessary:** The Anglican Communion has developed four "Instruments of Communion" which enable all the provinces to work together<sup>1</sup>. These Instruments of Communion have worked. Yes, we have disagreements between us, but recent meetings of the Lambeth Conference in 2008 and of the Primates in Dromantine last year were very positive. Some may say that they were positive because the most conservative bishops and primates stayed away. BUT the most conservative primates have already said that they will not sign the Covenant. Our shared history means that links between provinces are very strong and will continue to be - for instance between Southwark and Zimbabwe, despite the fact that there are issues on which we disagree. So the Covenant is an unnecessary addition to Anglican life.

**Unhelpful:** Anglicanism is constantly developing and changing. It always has, and always will. Different provinces have different ways of doing things, and that's good. But the Covenant will make it more difficult for provinces to live out new ways to which the Spirit is calling them. It will be easy for those who oppose a change - whatever it is, whether it's about relationships, worship, justice or anything else - to say "That proposal must be referred to the Standing Committee." Or for another province to say "We think that proposal must be referred to the Standing Committee." Then the proposed change will, effectively, be kicked into touch. We already have comprehensive checks and balances. Within provinces there are very well established synodical structures, and between provinces we have the Instruments of Communion. Do we really need another?

**Out of date:** The Covenant was proposed as a way to ensure that the very conservative primates and provinces - mainly in Africa - were held into Anglican structures. BUT nine primates of those provinces have already said that they will not sign it, and they have already withdrawn from the Lambeth Conference and the Primates' Meeting. While I deeply regret that, it's a fact on the ground. So the Covenant will not achieve what it was set up to do. In fact it may make them harder as there will now be provinces which are "in" and provinces which are "out". It's clear that much of the support for the Covenant is tied up with support for the Archbishop of Canterbury. But now it's clear that it won't do what it was supposed to do, shouldn't it be quietly dropped?

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<sup>1</sup> They are - The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference of all Anglican bishops (which meets every ten years), the Anglican Consultative Council of bishops, clergy and laity (which meets every three years) and the meeting of all Primates which meets approx every two years.

## **GARY JENKINS**

Vicar of Redhill, Holy Trinity; Member, General Synod

### **Why I support the Covenant**

The Anglican Covenant is an attempt to square a circle and it just about succeeds,

It recognises and respects the principle of provincial autonomy, yet it asks provinces to exercise their autonomy in such a way that they take into account the effect their decisions may have on other provinces.

In particular it encourages national churches to consider the *relational consequences* in the worldwide Anglican Communion of decisions they make. In this way it gives real cash value to the very concept of communion. It recognises that we belong to one another as part of the body of Christ. It recognises that when one part of the body is hurt, we all share the pain. It recognises that no national church is an island.

It recognises that provincial autonomy must always be exercised in the context of a communion of churches. It recognises that concern for the whole body of Christ may affect the decisions that we make in our local churches.

That is really what Communion is all about. Autonomy says you can do whatever you like. Communion says you may choose not to do it, for the sake of others.

In the covenant document itself in 3.2.2., we read that the covenant is designed to respect the constitutional autonomy of all the Churches of the Anglican Communion, while upholding our mutual responsibility and independence in the Body of Christ, and the responsibility of each part of the Communion to the whole.

In respecting the principle of autonomy, but asking Churches to exercise their autonomy with a responsible concern for the whole Communion, the covenant, I believe is a very Anglican covenant and deserves our support.