

'The St Andrews Draft is the latest revision of An Anglican Covenant as proposed by the Windsor Report. It replaces, and significantly modifies the previous draft known as the Nassau Draft. The Theological Resource Group at GAFCON reviewed this latest draft and its suitability as an instrument to deal with the divisions within the Communion and the issues which had generated them.'

A RESPONSE of the GAFCON Theological Resource Team to the St Andrews Draft Text of *An Anglican Covenant*

Introduction

The idea of a Covenant as a way out of the difficulties in which the Anglican Communion finds itself has been proposed in several quarters. The St Andrews Draft Text of *An Anglican Covenant* is one such attempt. The GAFCON Theological Resource Team reviewed the St Andrews Draft Text during pre-conference preparations in Jerusalem on 20th and 21st June 2008.

An Anglican Covenant was intended as a response to a crisis in the Anglican Communion which has been accurately described as 'a rending of the Communion at the deepest level'. Determined departures from the teaching of Scripture on human sexuality by The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada are the immediate cause this situation. There appears no prospect of repentance from this repudiation of biblical authority on the part of either of these bodies (or from those elsewhere who have followed their lead in endorsing behaviour which Scripture explicitly forbids). Underlying these actions is a long history of marginalising, avoiding and at last rejecting the plain teaching of the Bible. In other words, the issue which we should expect this covenant to address is one of apostasy.

Many attempts have been made to address the breach of relationships caused by the setting aside of biblical teaching by some provinces, dioceses, and individual bishops, beginning at Kuala Lumpur in 1997, at the Lambeth Conference in 1998, and culminating recently, after consistent efforts in the intervening years, in the Primates' Meeting in Dar es Salaam in 2007.

Sadly this new draft of *An Anglican Covenant* is both seriously limited and severely flawed. Whether or not the tool of covenant is the right way to approach the crisis within the Communion, this document is defective and its defects cannot be corrected by piecemeal amendment because they are fundamental. The St. Andrews Draft is theologically incoherent and its proposals unworkable. It has no prospect of success since it fails to address the problems which have created the crisis and the new realities which have ensued.

This document falls in effect into two parts. Sections 1 and 2 mention some matters of faith, but section 3 is in fact the critical section of the document, because this introduces the thought of Churches as being 'autonomous-in-communion'. It is on this concept that the proposed resolution of Communion disputes rests.

Our response will confine itself to seven areas of theological concern and will briefly mention two other significant issues in its conclusion.

Serious Theological Flaws

1. A failure to address the issue

Any covenant document has to recognise fully the mischief it seeks to address. This document makes no mention of the crisis which has generated the call for such a remedy, which is a crisis of obedience to Scripture. Further, it fails to recognise that in the eyes of many the 'instruments of Communion' (3.1.4) are themselves part of the problem. This means that trying to use such failed instruments as arbiters of a future solution is problematic in the extreme. Put bluntly, this covenant will not allow the real issues to be addressed.

2. An illegitimate notion of autonomy

The understanding of the individual Churches of the Communion throughout this document is fatally ambiguous. The language of autonomy in communion is introduced in 3.1.2., but there has been no justification produced for this concept in the preceding sections. More seriously this language is unqualified and so fails to distinguish between matters on which Scripture is silent (and where there may be legitimate liberty and indeed diversity) and matters on which Scripture has spoken definitively (and where autonomy is therefore a euphemism for sin). Our obedience to Scripture and our responsibility to each other must significantly qualify all talk of 'autonomy' with reference to any congregation, diocese, province or, indeed, the Communion itself.

3. No biblical theology

The entire document, and particularly the statement concerning 'the inheritance of faith' in paragraph 1, is detached from the Scriptural narrative of salvation and redemption from sin, which Churches in the Communion have seen realised. The principal concerns of Scripture are ignored as the document concentrates on matters which are dependent and consequential upon those concerns. The unity of Christians flows out of the redeeming work of Christ and the incorporative ministry of the Spirit. Any attempt to generate or sustain such unity on our own terms and by our own institutional efforts without reference to this prior and determinative reality must be judged sub-biblical.

4. A faulty anthropology

An Anglican Covenant is primarily concerned with the doctrine of the church. However, any doctrine of the church presupposes a doctrine of humanity. The anthropology implicit in this document fails to capture the reality of any Christian's life in this world as this is explained by Scripture. Christians are those who are redeemed by Christ but who remain sinful until God's purposes are brought to their completion when Christ returns. This twofold reality has very significant implications for the life of the church. The reality of temptation and sin, a reality experienced by all no matter what their office in the church, needs to be taken seriously.

5. An absent eschatology

This document fails to adopt an appropriately biblical eschatological perspective. Its preoccupation with institutional processes is at the expense of a proper sense of our corporate and individual accountability to God on the Last Day for proper custodianship of the deposit of Faith. There is no reference to sin, judgement, 'the coming wrath' or to God's provision of a remedy in the cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins which attends faith and repentance.

6. Neglect of obedience

Throughout this document an attenuated view of biblical authority is presented. A critical element of the Christian response to God and his Word is missing. The Church is called not merely to treat God's Word respectfully (1.2.4.), but to obey it. The absence of the language of obedience to the Word of God throughout the document is one of its most serious flaws.

7. An isolated and vacuous appeal to unity

Throughout *An Anglican Covenant*, biblical values are not treated in their mutual relationship. In particular the biblical injunctions to unity are in effect disconnected from the equally serious injunctions of Scripture to preserve the truth given to us. Paragraph 3.2 deals almost exclusively with perceived threats to the unity of the Communion rather than moral and doctrinal error, once again ignoring that our current disunity is the result of departures from the truth taught in Scripture in both of these areas.

Conclusion

Given the profound and fatal difficulties identified in the draft covenant, the legal framework of the appendix will likewise be open to overwhelming objection. The proposed legal framework in any event exhibits the same flaws as the parent document, notably in the way unity is abstracted from biblical faithfulness and no account is taken of the possibility that the instruments of Communion themselves might be the focus of objection. Two other objections must be mentioned. First, the document describes four instruments of Communion, which it proposes will provide solutions to disputes. It fails to recognise the disproportionate influence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who invites to the Lambeth Conference, chairs the ACC and calls the Primates' Meeting. The problem of this undue influence is compounded by the lack of formal accountability on the part of the Archbishop and the prominence the document envisages for this Primate is frankly colonialist. Secondly, the prominence given to the Joint Standing Committee of the ACC and Primates raises problems in increasing further the ability of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the ACC to exercise disproportionate influence over the Primates, thereby tending in effect to silence dissentient primatial voices.

In the light of these considerations we find ourselves unable to endorse the St Andrews Draft of *An Anglican Covenant*.