

THE CHURCH OF IRELAND RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT ANGLICAN COVENANT

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

This Church of Ireland response to the Anglican Draft Covenant was prepared by a small drafting group comprised of those who were, or had been, elected members of ACC and those who had been much involved in ecumenical affairs on behalf of the Church of Ireland. The preliminary discussion centred on whether the idea of a Covenant was to be supported, or whether something much simpler was required, such as a common statement. Two previous Church of Ireland responses within the Windsor process had shown somewhat different emphases in relation to this issue. However it soon emerged that there was within the drafting group, a general willingness to support the Covenant concept.

The drafting group decided that rather than make a line by line response to the Draft Covenant, it would use it as a basis for the construction of what it was felt would be an acceptable form of Covenant. A new drafting for a Covenant was then discussed at a full meeting of the drafting group and the Bishops of the Church of Ireland. It received a very positive response with a few minor suggestions which were easily incorporated. The Standing Committee of the General Synod, representative of the clergy and laity of every diocese then passed the response.

The thinking behind the Church of Ireland re-drafting could be listed as threefold:

1. A Covenant should express very clearly the themes of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence within the Body of Christ;
2. A Covenant should aim, insofar as possible, to be inclusive;
3. Whilst perhaps not solving the present crisis a Covenant should, by emphasising what is implied by mutual responsibility, go some way to prevent similar crises in the future.

The methodology of the redrafting included the following:

- To reduce discursive material;
- To remove elements of legislative structure;
- To recognise that the present Instruments of Communion should not be “set in stone”; in a Covenant, as these have evolved in the past and will do so in the future;
- To sharpen a sense of common identity and inter-dependence;
- To retain an emphasis on provincial autonomy;
- To emphasize responsibility to consult and listen in the context of mutual commitment.

In discussion it became clear that, though procedures were felt to be inappropriate within the context of a Covenant, the Anglican Communion would have to put in place procedures, in keeping with the Covenant, to deal with crises which might develop.

The redrafting of the Covenant as attached here is offered in the sincere conviction that the Church of Ireland has a real contribution to make. This response is representative of work undertaken together by those of a wide variety of views in relation to both churchmanship and issues of human sexuality. It reflects a determination to stay together in the face of the current difficulties. This redrafting is offered as a suggestion as to a possible Covenant which might be agreed on the one hand by those who emphasized the need for a greater sense of communion and all that this implied, and on the other by those who stressed the need for the recognition that provincial autonomy must remain paramount.

PART TWO

PROPOSED RE-DRAFT OF THE DRAFT ANGLICAN COVENANT

1 Preamble

We, the Churches of the Anglican Communion, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, solemnly covenant together in these articles, in order to proclaim more effectively through our communion in our different contexts the grace of God revealed in the Gospel, to offer God's love in responding to the needs of the world, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to grow together in our commitment to communion in the full stature of Christ.

2 Each member Church affirms

- 2.1 that it is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, worshipping the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
- 2.2 that it professes the faith which is uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith, and which is set forth in the catholic creeds;
- 2.3 that it holds and duly administers the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's Words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him;
- 2.4 that it participates in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God;
- 2.5 that its mission is shared with other Churches and traditions not party to this covenant;
- 2.6 that, led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons;
- 2.7 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 and the central role of bishops as custodians of the faith, leaders in mission, and as a visible sign of unity.

3 Each Church commits itself

- 3.1 To answering God's call to share in his healing and reconciling mission for our blessed but broken, hurting and fallen world, and, with mutual accountability, to share its God-given spiritual and material resources in this task.
- 3.2 In matters of common concern, to have regard to the common good of the Communion in the exercise of its autonomy, and to support the work of the Communion with the spiritual and material resources available to it.
- 3.3 To spend time with openness and patience in matters of theological debate and enquiry, listening to and studying with one another, in order to discern the will of God.
- 3.4 To ensure that biblical texts are handled faithfully, believing that scriptural revelation must continue to illuminate, challenge and transform all cultures, structures and ways of thinking.
- 3.5 To seek with other members, through the shared councils of the Communion, a common mind about matters of concern, consistent with the Scriptures, common standards of faith and the canon law of the Churches.
- 3.6 To acknowledge a moral authority in the current Instruments of Communion, while recognizing that they have no juridical, legislative or executive authority in the respective provinces.
- 3.7 To seek guidance from the Instruments of Communion where there are matters in serious dispute among Churches that cannot be resolved by mutual admonition and counsel.
- 3.8 To take heed of the Instruments of Communion in matters which may threaten the unity of the Communion and the effectiveness of our mission.
- 3.9 To acknowledge that in the most extreme circumstances, where member churches choose not to fulfill the substance of the covenant, such churches will have relinquished for themselves the force and meaning of the covenant's purpose.

4 Declaration

With joy and with firm resolve, we declare our Churches to be partners in this Anglican Covenant, releasing ourselves for fruitful service and binding ourselves more closely in the truth and love of Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever. Amen.

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