

Theological resources for Anglican ‘communion’ issues

Three documents produced at the recent meeting of the Inter-Anglican Doctrinal and Theological Commission (ACNS 4189, 15 September, 2006) have been commended by the Archbishop of Canterbury for study throughout the Anglican Communion.

In common with other commissions and networks, the IATDC considered the proposal of the Windsor Report for the creation of an Anglican covenant which could express the way in which Anglicans in different parts of the world live together. ‘Responding to the Proposal of a Covenant’ reflects on the biblical and ecclesiological background to the idea of covenant, and observes ways in which the concept of covenanting may be fruitfully employed to demonstrate a way in which Anglicans seek to stay together in times of controversy.

The Archbishop had invited the Commission to give attention to the particular role of bishops in maintaining the unity of the church. The equipping of bishops for their work and ministry is expected to be an important element in the next Lambeth Conference (2008), and the Commission has offered a number of theses as a theological and doctrinal under-girding for that process.

The ongoing work of the IATDC, a study of ‘the nature and maintenance of communion, and especially the Anglican Communion’ was resumed, and a ‘Summary Argument from the “Communion Study”’ incorporates insights gained from the most recent, third round of conversations with Anglican bishops and theological teachers which the Commission has been facilitating.

The Chair of the IATDC, the Rt Rev Professor Stephen Sykes, commented: "The meeting in Kenya was very good indeed, and I think we are developing a really positive assessment of things which hold Anglicans together today. The three papers that were produced indicate something of our understanding so far, and I hope they may prove to be useful as the Anglican Communion continues to explore its identity as a world-wide Christian community".

The Archbishop has remitted all three papers to the St Augustine’s Seminar (4 to 11 November 2006) which will be undertaking preparatory work on the Lambeth Conference agenda. The theses on the Episcopal office will also be offered to the Theological Education for the Anglican Communion (TEAC) training programme, and responses to the idea of an Anglican covenant forwarded to the Covenant Design Group.

The IATDC expects to meet in Kuala Lumpur next year in order to complete and develop the overall Communion Study.

Responding to a proposal of a covenant

1. A theology for the life of a covenanted community

- 1.1 Everything about being Christian – worship, prayer, mission, fellowship, holiness, works of mercy and justice – is rooted in the basic belief that the one God who made the world has acted in sovereign love to call out a people for himself, a people through whom he is already at work to anticipate his final purpose of reconciling all things to himself, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1.10). This is what the creator God has done, climactically and decisively, in and through Jesus Christ, and is now implementing through the Holy Spirit. But this notion of God calling a people to be his own, a people through whom he will advance his ultimate purposes for the world, did not begin with Jesus. Jesus himself speaks of the time being fulfilled, and his message and ministry look back, as does the whole of earliest Christianity, to the purposes of God in, through and for his people Israel. The Gospels tell the story of Jesus as the story of how God's purposes for Israel and the world reach their intended goal. Paul writes of the gospel of Jesus being 'promised beforehand through God's prophets in the holy scriptures', and argues that what has been accomplished in Jesus Christ is what God always had in mind when he called Abraham (Galatians 3; Romans 4). The earliest Christian writers, in their different ways, all bear witness to this belief: that those who follow Jesus, those who trust in his saving death and believe in his resurrection, are carrying forward the purposes for which God called Abraham and his family long before. And those purposes are not for God's people only: they are for the whole world. God calls a people so that through this people – or, better, through the unique work of Jesus Christ which is put into effect in and through this people in the power of the Spirit – the whole world may be reconciled to its creator.
- 1.2 A key term which emerges from much Jewish and Christian writings and which brings into sharp focus this whole understanding of God and God's purposes is *covenant*. The word has various uses in today's world (in relation, for instance, to financial matters, or to marriage), but its widespread biblical use goes way beyond such analogies. God established a covenant (*berit*) with Abraham (Genesis 15), and the writer(s) or at least redactor(s) of Genesis, in the way they tell that story, indicate clearly enough that God's call of Abraham, and the covenant established with him, was intended to be the means whereby God would address the problem of the human race and so of the entire created order. Genesis 12, 15 and the whole story address the problem set out in Genesis 3-11: the problem, that is, of human rebellion and death and the consequent apparent thwarting of the creator's plan for his human creatures and the whole of creation (Genesis 1-2). And these texts claim – this claim is echoed right across the Old Testament – that God has in principle solved that problem with the establishment of this covenant. Already the story offers itself as the story of God's uncaused, gracious and generous *love*: God is under no obligation to rescue humans, and the world, from their plight, but chooses to do so and takes the initiative to bring it about. As the story develops throughout the Old Testament this *covenant love* is referred to in various terms, e.g. *hesed*.

- 1.3 The covenant with Abraham is then dramatically developed as God fulfils a promise made in Genesis 15, namely that he would rescue Abraham's family from slavery in Egypt. The story of the Exodus, with God bringing the Israelites through the Red Sea and pointing them towards their promised land, reaches a climax when they arrive at Mount Sinai and are given the Law (*Torah*) as the covenant charter, prefaced by God's declaration that Israel is to be his holy people, a nation of priests chosen out of and on behalf of the whole world (Exodus 19). The Law is meant to sustain Israel as the *covenant community*, the people who are bound to the creator God as in a solemn marriage vow (as in Hosea), and to one another as God's people, and through whom God's purposes are to be extended in the world. This vocation and intention is sorely tested as Israel repeatedly rebels against God, and the covenant is repeatedly renewed (Deuteronomy 31; Joshua 9, 24; 2 Kings 11.17; some have suggested that the Psalms provide evidence of frequent, perhaps annual, 'covenant renewal'). The prophets regularly call Israel back to the obligations of the covenant, obligations both to God and to one another. But Israel, the bearer of God's covenant promises which ultimately embrace the whole world, proves unfaithful, and is driven into exile – which the prophets interpret in terms of the covenant, understanding exile as covenantal punishment for covenantal disobedience. This is the more striking in that the covenant always envisaged Israel's being given the promised land, and the land being blessed when Israel is obedient to the covenant (see Deuteronomy, and e.g. Psalm 67).
- 1.4 It is at this point that there emerges the promise of a *new covenant*, through which (this is the point) God will at last do in and through Israel what the earlier covenants intended but did not bring about. Jeremiah 31 (similarly, Ezekiel 36) speaks both of the forgiveness of the sins which had brought the earlier plans to ruin and also of a new knowledge of God which will come to characterise God's people. It is this ancient promise which the earliest Christians saw as having been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus himself, indeed, spoke at the Last Supper of his forthcoming death as establishing the new, sin-forgiving covenant, and of the bread and the wine as somehow symbolizing that event, with that significance – and thus also effectively symbolizing the way in which his followers could find new life, together as a community and as individuals, through feeding on him and his saving death. From that moment on, believing in Jesus, following him, seeking to live out his accomplishment through mission in God's world (bringing it to new fruitfulness and justice, as Israel's obedience was to bring blessing to the land), take place within what can with deep appropriateness be described as the *new covenant community*, constituted and reconstituted as such again and again not least precisely through sharing (*koinonia*, 'communion' or 'fellowship') at his table. According to Paul, all those who believe in Jesus belong at this table, no matter what their personal, moral, ethnic or other background, and are thereby to be renewed in faith and holiness and energised for God's mission in the world. Baptism, the sign of entry into the renewed covenant, marks out not just individuals but the whole community of the baptized. To live as God's covenant people is thus the basic call of Christians, of the church of God. To speak of being in covenant with God and with one another is nothing new for Christians. Indeed, not to do so – even by implication – is to call into question the classic model of Christian faith and life.

- 1.4.1 [We recognise that this early Christian understanding of the new covenant community raises sharply the question of the relationship between the emerging Christian family – most of whom, in the early period, were of course themselves Jewish – and the continuing community of those Jews who did not recognise Jesus as Messiah and Lord; and, today, the question of the relationship between Christians and Jews. This is not the place to discuss this complex issue, but it would be inappropriate not to mention it.]
- 1.5 There are indications that the earliest Christians drew on existing models within Judaism of what a ‘new covenant community’ might look like. In a way markedly similar to what we find in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the early Jerusalem Church held their possessions in common, and those in any individual family who were in need were the responsibility of all (hence the problems about widows in e.g. Acts 6 and 1 Timothy). Though a strict sharing of everything was not followed in the Pauline churches, we should not underplay the practical meaning of *agape*, ‘love’, in Paul, but rather give it its full meaning of mutual practical support (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4.9-12). Paul chooses a special term (‘*koinonia*’) that has both commercial and social implications to describe his covenant friendship with the Philippians. They were in ‘partnership’ together for the spreading of the gospel and the mission of the church to the Gentiles in God’s name. Although Paul and the Philippians are in different locations doing different tasks, they are nevertheless partners ‘in Christ’, sharing the risks as well as celebrating the successes of the gospel. The point is that Christians are to think of themselves as *a single family*, in a world where ‘family’ means a good deal more in terms of mutual obligations and expectations than in many parts of today’s Western world at least. The community of the new covenant thus quickly came to see itself – and to be seen by the watching, puzzled and often hostile world – as marked out from all other social, cultural and religious groupings, with the marking-out being primarily its devotion and loyalty to Jesus as Lord and its belief that the one God of Abraham had, by raising Jesus from the dead, fulfilled his ancient promises and launched the final stage of his world-transforming purpose. The new covenant community thus exists to set forward the mission of God in the power of the Spirit, and is therefore called to a shared, common life of holiness and reconciliation. The message of forgiveness and healing for the world must be enacted and embodied by the community that bears the message.
- 1.6 From the beginning, this vocation constituted a severe challenge for Jesus’ followers, and there never was a time when they met it perfectly. The early church proceeded by a series of puzzles, mistakes, infidelities, quarrels, disputes, personality clashes and a host of other unfortunate events as well as by faithful witness, martyrdom, generous love, notable holiness (remarked on with great surprise by some pagan observers, who didn’t know such lifestyles were possible), and a genuine openness and obedience to God’s often surprising and dangerous call. Since (in other words) being an early Christian seems to have been no less challenging and often perplexing than being a modern one, it is no surprise that the early Christians quickly developed a sense of how God guided his people and enabled them to discern the way forward both in new mission initiatives and in matters of dispute within their common life. Central to it all

was the sense of the presence of the risen Jesus Christ in their midst ('where two or three are gathered in his name', as Jesus himself puts it in Matthew 18), so that the covenant community is not a mere human institution following an agenda but a fellowship of disciples together seeking to know, listen to, worship, love and serve their Lord. In particular, the community we see in Acts, the Epistles and the writings of the second century was constantly concerned to invoke, celebrate and be deeply sensitive to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. Repeatedly this involved fresh searchings of scripture (for the earliest Christians, the Old Testament; for the next generation, the apostolic traditions as well) and serious prayer and fasting, waiting for a common mind to emerge.

- 1.7 In and through it all the *unity* of the church – unity both within local churches and between different churches – emerges as a vital strand, not least as persecution mounts and the church finds itself under dire threat. Indeed, the *koinonia* of the new covenant community, as the people who give allegiance to Jesus as 'Lord' in a world where there were many 'Lords', notably the Roman emperor, meant that from the beginning there was a necessary (and dangerous) political implication to the founding and maintaining of a trans-ethnic and trans-national covenant community. All kinds of attempts were made to fracture this unity, and many early writers devote attention to maintaining it, to guarding it, and to re-establishing it when broken. It is at that point (for instance) that Paul works out his position about 'things indifferent' (those aspects of common life about which the community should be able to tolerate different practice), as well as his position about those things (e.g. incest) which the community should not tolerate at any price (1 Corinthians 5, 8). The vital unity of the covenant community needs the careful and prayerful use of quite sophisticated tools of discernment, tools that were already developed in the earliest church and are needed still.
- 1.8 It is this complex yet essentially simple vision of the people of God which is invoked when the church today thinks of itself as a 'covenant community'. That is not to say that all uses of the word 'covenant' in today's discussions necessarily imply that the 'covenants' we enter into (for instance, those between different Christian denominations) are somehow the *same* as the fundamental biblical covenant between God and his people. But the use of the word in today's church carries, and honours, the memory of the biblical covenant(s). It seeks to invoke and be faithful to the themes we have explored above: the sovereign call of God to belong to him and to work in the power of his Spirit for his purposes in the world, and the consequent call to the unity, reconciliation, and holiness which serve that mission.
- 1.9 There is no sense, of course, that introducing the notion of 'covenant' into talk of mutual relationships between Christians implies the establishment of a *further* 'new covenant' over and above *the* 'new covenant' inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Rather, all use of covenantal language in relation to the church today must be seen as a proposal for a specific kind of recommitment within that same covenant, in particular situations and in relation to particular communities. And, once we start talking of being in covenant with one another, we are immediately reminded of our participation in the covenant which God has made with us in Jesus Christ. The horizontal relationship with one another is dependent,

theologically and practically, on the vertical relationship with the creating, loving and reconciling God we know in Jesus and by the Spirit.

- 1.10 The notion of ‘covenant’ has not been prominent to date within Anglican traditions of polity and organisation (‘covenantal’ language has, of course, been familiar from teachings on, for instance, baptism and marriage). But the picture of the church developed by the sixteenth-century Reformers, by great theoreticians like Hooker (who explored the notion of ‘contract’), and by many subsequent writers, sets out models of church life for which ‘covenant’, with the biblical overtones explored briefly above, may serve as a convenient, accurate and evocative shorthand. Recent discussions of Anglican identity, addressing the uncertainty as to how Anglicans are bound together around the world, have explored the notion of ‘bonds of affection’, the powerful though elusive ties that hold us together in friendship and fellowship. This kind of *relational* bonding, we believe, remains central to any appropriate understanding of our shared communion.
- 1.11 It is out of that relational understanding of worldwide Anglicanism that the proposal for a ‘covenant’ has now grown, and it is in that sense that the proposal is to be understood. The IATDC, the Windsor Report, and the Primates, have all suggested that we seek to work towards a more explicit ‘Anglican Covenant’, not in order to bind us to new, strange and unhelpful obligations, but rather to set us free both from disputes which become damaging and dishonouring and from the distraction which comes about when, lacking an agreed method, we flail around in awkward attempts to resolve them. This is not seeking to introduce an alien notion into an Anglicanism which has never thought like this before. Rather, it seeks to draw from the deep scriptural roots in which Anglicanism has always rejoiced, and from the more recent awareness of ‘bonds of affection’, a more explicit awareness of those covenantal beliefs and practices which resonate deeply with many aspects of Anglican tradition and which urgently need to be refreshed and clarified if the church is to serve God’s mission in coming generations. To the suggestion that such a new move appears to be restrictive or cumbersome, there is an easy reply. When the ground is soft and easy, we can walk on it with light or flimsy shoes. When it gets stony, muddy or steep we put on walking boots, not because we don’t want to be free to walk but because we do.

2. Reflections on some models of covenants for today

- 2.1 Since the idea of ‘covenant’ has a long and powerful biblical tradition, it is filled with possibilities for the ordering of our life together as Anglican Christians. Discussions about entering into a possible covenant by member churches of the Anglican Communion raise urgent questions about how we can move forward together and what we ought to do. What sort of covenant might help to order our life together in fruitful ways? Because it is used primarily to define the relationship between God and Israel, the term ‘covenant’ has an overwhelmingly positive sense in scripture, as we have seen. At the same time, the term ‘covenant’ is ambiguous enough to require further clarification. Several models of covenant have been proposed and it is useful to tease out their strengths and weaknesses on the way to framing the covenant that will be most useful.

- 2.2 A ‘largely descriptive’ (WR62:118) covenant that simply reiterates ‘existing principles’ carefully worded to avoid any controversy or mention of the issues dividing us will probably not be of much use for overcoming those divisions. On the other hand, an overly specific and detailed covenant tied entirely to the present controversies may not be of much help in the future for the next set of issues that arises. A covenant that consists merely of conforming constitutions and canon law throughout the Anglican Communion, helpful as that would be, would not pick up on the inter-personal and relational issues so prominent within the biblical examples of covenant. Nor would it address the ‘bonds of affection’ that commit us to discovering together the truth to which the Spirit of God is leading us. Any ‘workable’ covenant must reflect carefully negotiated ‘content’ as well as ‘form’ or ‘methodology’. It should clarify and simplify, reflecting both ‘narrative’ and ‘visionary’ aspects of covenant. Narrative aspects of covenant recall the context and circumstances leading to the present moment, while visionary aspects of covenant point to the goals and future directions towards which we move in hope. A biblical example of a ‘covenant’ that combines narrative and visionary components is the Book of Deuteronomy. It has the typical ‘shape’ of a covenant in two parts: recitals (statements of past history, the present situation and the desired future) and commitments (binding agreements between the partners to the covenants).
- 2.3 A covenant for the Anglican Communion should reflect the memory of Anglican historical traditions and also summarise our present understanding of ‘the Anglican way’. In addition, it should provide a way forward, a way of re-committing to the whole project of an Anglican Communion understood as God’s gift and God’s commandment: a vocation to be realised rather than a fact already achieved. The covenant as a vision for mission both stresses the importance of the work to be done and binds its members to one another for greater effectiveness in accomplishing it.
- 2.4 Most importantly the covenant envisioned for the Anglican Communion is not static. Instead, it is a dynamic process like a marriage covenant. Just as the marriage partnership grows as it is tested by unforeseen circumstances and new situations, so the provinces of the Communion can expect to change and grow in ways they might never have expected. In a marriage, the partners grow together, walking alongside one another into the unknown future. So also in the Church ‘we walk by faith and not by sight’.
- 2.5 Two possible models of covenant have received considerable attention, both as to tone and content: The covenant draft included in Appendix Two of TWR has been described as ‘juridical’ in style: a ‘set of house rules’ designed to prevent misconduct and/or to specify procedures for dealing with it. By contrast the draft covenant produced by IASCOME is considered to be ‘motivational’ in form, providing a ‘vision for Anglican faithfulness’ to God’s mission in relational terms quite apart from a juridical context. Each of these has both strengths and weaknesses as suggested above. A covenant that is entirely ‘motivational’ may lack the ability to require serious commitments and thus achieve too little. On the other hand, a ‘juridical’ covenant may achieve too much, actually provoking the schism it intends to prevent, by its judgements separating ‘the wheat and the tares’ prematurely, which for now should be left to grow together (Matthew 13).

A serious question has framed our preliminary discussions of these matters: would a covenant create more divisions or fewer divisions among us?

3. The issue of persistent conflict in relation to a covenant and its operation

- 3.1 The power of the gospel as it intersects with new cultural and linguistic situations, unanticipated circumstances, and the complexities of an incarnated Christian existence produces both surprises and conflicts on a regular basis. Because the gospel has been both relational and incarnational from the start, it is entirely predictable that from the start Christians have been arguing about what it meant in the new cultural contexts in which they found themselves. The gospel was proclaimed to Gentiles as well as to Jews; it travelled from Jerusalem, Judaea, and Samaria to the ends of the earth; it became written as well as oral; it was translated into a variety of languages; it travelled by land and sea accompanying monastics and pilgrims, monarchs and military operations, explorations and empires. Moreover, the gospel continues to expand and develop, assuming ever new forms as it intersects with new questions and new cultural contexts. There never has been a time when the church did not experience conflicting interpretations of the gospel and the need to renegotiate its life together by some form of covenant renewal or ecclesiastical settlement.
- 3.2 Over time, the Church has learned that not all conflicts are on the same level of importance. Some differences of opinion are minor or matters of temporary or local significance. Other have lasting effects, involve large numbers of people, affect multiple situations, and treat issues of great weight and substance. The principle of 'subsidiarity' suggests that disputes of local importance can most efficiently be decided at the local level; on the other hand 'what pertains to all ought to be decided by all'. In discerning whether a conflict should be addressed at the local level, the universal level, or at some level in-between, the three criteria of 'intensity, extent and substance', as proposed in our report of 2003 commend themselves. If a conflict has become intense, it is less likely to be resolved easily at the local level; if its scope is extensive, involving many people in multiple locations, a universal solution is probably required; if the matter is substantial rather than trivial or peripheral, a larger structural resolution seems indicated.
- 3.3 These observations suggest an important corollary to the concept of covenant-making: any covenant requires an instrument to interpret it. There is no such thing as a self-interpreting covenant any more than there are self-interpreting scriptures. A covenant implies an interpretive body to decide on what level of polity it is best addressed and whether or to what extent it has been breached. This result is more than a curiosity in a tradition such as Anglicanism where authority is dispersed rather than centralised in a pope and/or magisterium. The subtle interplay between persuasion and coercion characteristic of the Anglican way complicates any simplistic attempt to resolve conflicts by appealing them to one figure or body. Nevertheless, issues of intensity, extent, and substance require a solution in a way that will be satisfactory to the great majority. Otherwise resentment grows and mistrust materialises in ways harmful to the spread of the gospel, the mission of the church to anticipate the reign of God.

4. Staging a covenantal response to conflict

- 4.1 The proposal for a covenant from the Windsor Report is an attempt to find a way for Anglicans to walk together with love and openness. As a pilgrim community Anglicans have often explored institutional possibilities. Just as Paul had his 'ways' in order to serve the churches (1 Corinthians 4.17), so Anglicans have sought to find 'ways' of serving the gospel. By stepping out in faith Paul began his mission to the gentiles, and in a further step went to Macedonia (Acts 16.9). Some centuries later, Theodore (Archbishop of Canterbury 668-690) sought to reform and renew the life of the church through the instrument of synods. The church has regularly approached new situations by living faithfully one step at a time.
- 4.2 The present proposals for a covenant will inevitably take time to emerge, since the covenant is recognised as a significant institutional development. These proposals are an attempt to discern the will of God for the life of the Anglican churches around the world.
- 4.3 Anglicans now face the challenge of dealing with an acute conflict. Some churches in the Communion have acted in a way which other churches find contrary to Christian belief and practice. This is a conflict over an element of the faith within the church. For the Anglican Communion this is complicated by the fact that the conflict is among churches within the Communion as well as within individual churches. It is not just a question of how to deal with an individual person within a parish. It involves relations between institutions, between churches with their constitutions and organisations; their polities, by which they have agreed to walk together in obedience to the will of God.
- 4.4 In order to maintain unity and meet new challenges, Anglicans have in the past developed new institutional arrangements, such as the informal gathering of bishops at Lambeth. We have created Networks to listen to each other and Commissions to serve the churches of the Communion in various aspects of their life and mission. Just as the Lambeth Conference has evolved its modes of operating, so perceptions of the role of the Lambeth Conference have changed over the years. The development of appropriate institutions is part of a pilgrimage of discernment as Anglican churches seek to walk together with love and openness in the service of Christ.
- 4.5 The present crisis is now urgent, substantial and a source of conflict and pain for many Anglicans across the world. Responding to conflict is never easy. We recoil from the hurt it brings and shudder at the implications of failure which it seems to have for our fellowship and witness to the love of Christ. But conflict should prompt us to greater contact not less, to more intense commitment to love each other and to understand the forces at play in our own faltering pilgrimage.
- 4.6 Love binds us together and provides the basis for honesty with each other especially where there is profound disagreement and division. In such a situation Anglicans will again return to the scriptures. There are many examples of conflict in the churches of the New Testament. Matthew reports on a way of dealing with conflict in stages (Matthew 18.15). Paul often had to deal with conflict. Acts 15 reports conflict in the early church over the circumcision of

gentile Christians. This conflict did not lead the protagonists to distance themselves from each other. On the contrary they came together openly to lay before each other their differences. They testified to their experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and by the same Spirit sought to live together in openness and love.

- 4.7 Lobby groups are a natural form of persuasion in any large community. However, this process is open to corruption when persuasion and influence are exercised in private. Such a tendency can have the effect of corroding the trust and openness which is vital to our walking together. It may be that there should be some code of ethics among us in regard to private lobbying activities. Such a code would inform our common understanding and fellowship.
- 4.8 The faith which we bring as Anglicans to any encounter will include our essential commitment to listen to scripture together, to be aware that in our pilgrimage we walk by faith a step at a time in humility. We will be aware that our tradition of dispersed authority emphasises the priority of loving persuasion and we will be conscious that we are part of the One Holy Catholic Church of Christ and stand in the shadow of the saints of God who have gone before us. We live out the catholic faith in engagement with each other in the wider fellowship of Anglican churches. The test in what we do will be that given by Jesus himself; 'by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13.35).

5. Bringing theology to bear in situations of conflict

- 5.1 The covenanting process is about how the churches of the Anglican Communion relate to each other in their common vocation. Conflict often arises because of different theological perceptions on matters in the life of the Communion. This is true whether or not the issue at stake in a conflict is located in the ethical part of the theological spectrum. The life of the Anglican Communion would be enhanced by the contribution of a serious theological consideration of the subject of any conflict of sufficient 'intensity, extent and substance'. A body which was able to provide such a contribution would greatly assist in clarifying the theological issues at stake.
- 5.2 Such a body would be concerned with doctrine because it would address matters of truth about the faith we share. It would therefore be made up of the best of our theologians, people whose competence and wisdom as theologians was recognised and respected by all. The body should have the power to co-opt consultants to advise them on any specific aspects of any question they were considering.
- 5.3 The task of this body would be to clarify the issues at stake, to identify the agreements and disagreements and to shape a view of these things in the light of the Anglican heritage of scriptural faith.
- 5.4 It should report publicly and its report should go to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates Meeting and the Lambeth Conference. The effect of such a sequence of reports would be to

introduce into the sensibilities of the common life of the Anglican Communion a growing corpus of wisdom on the nature of Anglican faith in relation to matters drawn out of the actual life of the churches. That wisdom would be available to any of the institutions of the Communion.

- 5.5 Such a body could be created very quickly. In the present circumstances this would greatly encourage many that there is a forum which directly addresses the issue in conflict at a significant level of recognition in the Communion.

6. The covenant proposal and the vocation of Anglicans to communion in a fallen world

- 6.1 The communion that Anglicans share is a precious gift. The present crisis in the Anglican Communion constitutes an opportunity to re-commit ourselves to one another in renewed obedience to God's call. A covenant which expressed that commitment would not be something entirely *de novo* but rather a development of the 'bonds of affection' which bind us to one another. In making such a covenant at the present time we would be acknowledging that in specific situations, especially situations of conflict, threat or opportunity, God calls his people to discern his will afresh and to re-commit themselves to him and to one another. There is much we can learn here from the annual Methodist Covenant Service as it has been incorporated into the Church of North India.

- 6.2 In a situation of conflict the discernment of God's will for his people is not an easy task. It demands fresh study of scripture, the careful presentation of arguments, patient listening to one another and preparedness to wait in uncertainty and hope until a clearer understanding of the truth emerges. All of this will, for God's people, be grounded in love for one another, trust that we are together committed to seeking God's way, and hope that the Holy Spirit will indeed lead us into all truth (John 16.13). This need for patience with some person, or with an entire body, that expresses contrary views is expressed very clearly by Augustine, when he says,

Let him, again, who says, when he reads my book, 'Certainly I understand what is said, but it is not true', assert, if he pleases, his own opinion, and refute mine if he is able. And if he do this with charity and truth, and take the pains to make it known to me (if I am still alive), I shall then receive the most abundant fruit of this my labour. ... Yet, for my part, 'I meditate in the law of the Lord' (Psalm 1:2) ... hoping by the mercy of God that he will make me hold steadfastly all truths of which I feel certain; 'but if in anything I be otherwise minded, that he will himself reveal even this to me' (Philippians 3:15), whether through secret inspiration and admonition, or through his own plain utterances, or through the reasonings of my brethren. This I pray for ... (*De Trinitate* 1.1.5, translated by A W Haddan, revised by W G T Shedd, ed. P Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, vol. III, Edinburgh: T and T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted, 1993).

Augustine speaks of a commitment to truth that entails dialogue with the other – who is my sister or my brother in Christ. He speaks of an increasing understanding of truth within the Body of Christ and of the human grasp on truth

as corporate and fallible. Within the communion of the Church he looks to the other as someone through whom he may grow in knowledge of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- 6.3 In the same Spirit, Anglicans, bound together in communion, need each other in order to grow in faith, knowledge and love (cf. 2 Peter 1.5-7). We are committed to encouraging one another and to learning from one another's experience of discipleship in particular situations. Since we are weak, fallible and living in a fallen world, there is always the need for humility and mutual forgiveness. Anglicans, like all Christians, have to face honestly the ways in which hurt has been given within the Body of Christ, for example, through colonialism, patriarchy and other mechanisms of exclusion. We know that truly to discover the mind of Christ we have to go by the way of self-emptying, humility and obedience which is also the way of the cross (Philippians 2.5-11). A re-affirmation of our commitment to one another in covenant would thereby become a re-commitment in hope of the reconciliation of all things in Christ, who has established our peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1.20).

The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church

Preamble:

At this time in the life of the global Anglican Communion tensions and rifts between Provinces – and bishops -- have seriously impaired the fellowship (koinonia) of the baptised. The reasons for these difficulties are complex and no one would imagine that it is an easy matter to restore fellowship across the churches of the Communion. In such circumstances we can forget that our life together is a gracious gift bestowed by the Lord. It is a gift that serves the mission of God in the world and directly impacts on the integrity and power of our witness to the gospel.

How can we proclaim one Lord, one faith and one baptism when the gift of koinonia seems to be so easily set aside for a supposedly greater goal? What can be more fundamental to our life on earth than our essential interconnectedness with others and the world.¹ This koinonia or oneness is given by God in creation and renewed in Christ and the Spirit. It is a gift which subsists in the whole body of Christ prior to its embodiment in an ‘instrument of unity’ or particular ecclesial office. Furthermore, like all gifts of God, it can only be a blessing as it is faithfully received and shared by all. It is critical for this truth to be grasped by an often anxious and fearful Church that seeks heroes and leaders to heal its inner life.

Bishops bear a particular responsibility for the maintenance and nurture of koinonia. Their actions impact upon the whole body of the faithful for we are all ‘members one of another’ (Romans 12:5). The ordinal is clear that bishops of the Church have a great and grave responsibility to the Lord of the Church for the fellowship of all the baptised. Accordingly we offer these ten theses on the role and responsibilities of bishops for the well-being of the communion of the whole church. In the theses that follow it should be abundantly clear that the maintenance of koinonia is not an optional extra or luxury for the episcopate. Rather, at this time in our history the furtherance of koinonia bears directly on the peace and freedom of the baptised. It is they who have been called by God to bear witness to the glorious gospel of Christ in a broken and violent world hungry for peace, freedom and healing.

The following theses identify the bishop’s ministry in relation to the gifts and responsibilities that nurture and grow communion. Thesis One sets the episcopate within the life of the whole church. Theses two to seven identify aspects of the **office** of bishop. Theses eight to ten focus on the **place** of the episcopate in the life of the Church. Our overall concern is the significance of the episcopate for the maintenance of communion in global Anglicanism. However, we also deal with local, diocesan concerns, recognizing that the way a bishop fosters communion at the micro level has

¹ The terms ‘koinonia’ and ‘communion’ can become so much a part of the discourse of a fractured and divided church that they lose their force and significance. Koinonia has to do with a fundamental connectivity between God, the world, and all living things, including of course human life. The African word ‘ubuntu’ captures something of this primary oneness. In the Genesis story human beings are called ‘earthlings’ or ‘groundlings’ (Genesis 2). This underscores the fact that we are ‘of the earth’ and are intrinsically related to other living things, the whole created environment and God. Such koinonia is encoded into the very being of creation. The story of redemption is a story of Christ rejoining people, races and the rest of creation. This is the good news which overcomes sin and broken bonds. There is no other community on the earth with a mandate to bear witness to the remarkable miracle of our oneness in the triune God. What is even more remarkable is that God invites the body of Christ to become the new experiment in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Bishops serve this koinonia which is nothing less than the way of creation, salvation and the life of the world to come.

implications for the way a bishop contributes to the fellowship of the baptised at the macro level. It will be clear from the theses that follow that the deeper issue concerns not only what a bishop does but who a bishop is for Christ and the people. The significance of the episcopate for the renewal of koinonia and mission is directly related to how a bishop bears witness in life and service to the holy and triune God.

Thesis One: The Bishop serves the koinonia of the gospel into which the baptised are incorporated by God the Holy Spirit

Through the gospel God calls all people into relationship and establishes a covenant of love, mercy and justice. By baptism the people of God become participants in the visible body of Jesus Christ. The bishop is called to serve this new fellowship by actively fostering the koinonia of the Body of Christ. Just as the eucharist is the focal event which connects communities of faith together so the bishop is the focal person who links communities of faith not only to one another but to the wider Church. As a result the bishop has a universal and ecumenical role. This fundamental theological truth challenges all parochial conceptions of the episcopate that fail to transcend ethnic, social, and cultural realities in which the episcopate is, by nature, necessarily embedded.

Bishops of the Anglican Communion have primary responsibility for Anglicans. However, the nature of the episcopal office means that bishops are called to lead the Church towards a deeper koinonia amongst all God's people, and in so doing represent the wider Christian community to the diocese. This universal and ecumenical ministry belongs to the bishop's role as a symbol of unity. Yet this symbol is ambiguous because the Church is divided and torn. In this context the bishop is a sign of a broken Church looking to its Lord for healing and hope through the power of the Spirit.

Thesis Two: The bishop's evangelical office of proclamation and witness is a fundamental means by which those who hear the call of God become one in Christ

Bishops in the Anglican Communion are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and provide oversight for the witness and the mission of the Church in all its aspects. This evangelical office of the bishop is founded upon the good news (*evangelion*). The bishop encourages all God's people to be bearers of the good news of Jesus and practice personal evangelism through words and actions. This evangelical office includes a prophetic element through which the bishop gives voice to the concerns of a world that seeks justice and a creation that needs care and renewal.

The bishop is called to cherish and nurture the evangelical office always bearing in mind 'how beautiful are the feet of the one who brings good news' (Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7). At the heart of this witness is a threefold injunction: to know Christ; to know the power of his resurrection; and to enter into the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings (Philippians 3:10). This dimension of the office gives a fundamental unity to all mission. It is symbolised in the eucharist where the bishop gathers and sends the people to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Through this office the kingdom of God expands and people discover their oneness in Christ the Lord and Saviour. Given its centrality for the establishment of communion for all peoples it is clear that the nature and character of the bishop's evangelical office will occupy a significant part of the collegial life of the episcopate.

Thesis Three: The bishop is a teacher and defender of the apostolic faith that binds believers into one body

Bishops vow to guard the apostolic faith. The historic succession in the episcopate is a sign of communion with the apostolic Church through time and space. As witnesses to the 'faith once delivered to the saints', bishops are expected to be more than guardians intent on preserving orthodoxy; they are looked upon to be teachers who are able to bring the Scriptures and the creeds of the Church to life in the present day. Their effectiveness as teachers will depend upon the strength of their own educational formation and upon their openness to the questions and concerns of their contemporaries. Very often it is when the Christian tradition interacts with new ways of thinking that previously forgotten or unexplored aspects of Christian truth are disclosed. Growth in theological understanding thus requires a lively memory of the Christian inheritance and capacity to use this to interpret new facts and fresh experiences. In this interaction new insights arise for faith. A bishop's vocation as a teacher is intertwined in a life of prayer and spiritual discipline. This is the crucible in which wisdom is formed and courage found to apply it to everyday life.

Bishops have a special responsibility to encourage attempts to translate the historic faith into the language, ideas and stories of the people. The aim of this is to foster a genuine inculturation that produces both worship and theology that are accessible to the people. Unless this happens the gospel is not understood, the Church does not put down deep roots, and communion is weakened as apostolic teaching is misunderstood and distorted. When it does happen, the flourishing of true faith fosters genuine communion across cultures.

In licensing clergy and lay workers, bishops signify that those whom they license are faithful ministers of the Word that gathers and sends the people of God. This means that they must be well equipped theologically for this ministry and mission. The bishop must ensure appropriate theological education and ministerial formation for the diocese. Bishops do well to raise up and support the work of theologians within their dioceses, and to make continuing theological education a high priority for their clergy and lay leaders. A scripture-formed people needs teachers and theologians to help build up the faith of the community and provide resources for the discernment of the Spirit in times of confusion and spiritual hunger.

Thesis Four: The Bishop has oversight (episcopate) of the household of God for the good order of the Church

Bishops are commissioned and sent to be stewards or overseers of God's household within their jurisdiction. They call the people of God into the full expression of the diverse gifts and ministries given by the Holy Spirit. They oversee processes of discernment and selection of candidates for holy orders, ensuring they are well prepared for their ministries, supporting them pastorally and practically, and providing for the good order of ministry in the diocese.

Oversight includes sharing of responsibilities among clergy and lay people. This involves mutual accountability, good communication and willingness to learn from one another. This reciprocity between bishop and people is reflected in the decision making processes of synodical life. This pattern of working together is empowering for all and is a gift to be nurtured at all levels of the life of the Church.

The bishop has to ensure the well-being (e.g., spiritual, social, economic) of the diocese in service of its mission. Harnessing resources, fund-raising and financial management of diocesan affairs involves complexities of oversight requiring specialized ministries. Providing episcopate in this area highlights the administrative and managerial character of the work of a bishop, somewhat akin to a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of a large organisation. Bishops ought not to underestimate the distorting effects on their oversight of management models associated with the global market economy. This can lead to a management ethos focussed on strategic plans, goal setting, tasks, competition and successful outcomes. This is appealing because it seems to offer clarity and control but the price is often loss of the personal and relational dimension of ecclesial life. The bishop who manages well is one who is aware of the danger of management becoming the basic lens through which episcopate is practised. This issue raises a question of how bishops handle matters across diocesan and provincial boundaries. At these levels even koinonia may become a thing to be ‘managed’ at a distance (i.e., avoiding face-to-face relations) rather than resolutely pursued together with patience.

Thesis Five: The bishop is called to coordinate the gifts of the people of God for the building up of the faithful for the furtherance of God’s mission

The bishop has the duty of coordinating and encouraging the gifts and talents of all the baptised. The Spirit gives varieties of gifts to all God’s people to build up the church for mission. In the secular context of many cultures, success in life is mostly determined against a background of ruthless competition and individualism. In the church ‘we are all members one of another’ (Romans 12:5), and gifts are not the property of any one person but reside in the whole body for the purpose of strengthening the Church to serve God’s mission.

Sometimes bishops – like all people -- are threatened by the gifts of their brothers and sisters in Christ. They can become jealous, guarding all power and responsibility to themselves, and thereby thwarting the work of the Holy Spirit. Personal prayer and discernment of one’s own gifts, however, turns one to the nurture of the gifts of others. When a bishop’s life is marked by joy in the ministry of others that bishop will be able to share in ministry with other bishops in a non-competitive and generous manner. This is a key to the building of koinonia beyond the local diocese. Specialized training in team building and collaborative leadership is critical.

Thesis Six: The bishop serves the koinonia of the gospel through care, encouragement and discipline of the pastors of the Church

To facilitate care of the people of God is fundamental to the episcopal office. To do this the bishop has to know and be known by all. Face-to-face relationships of generosity and graciousness are vital for this is where trust is nurtured. Communion in Christ involves sharing in holy friendship, in counsel, prayer and guidance as well as visitation of parishes on special occasions, such as confirmation.

It is clearly not feasible for a bishop to be able to get to know everyone. However, the bishop has a special responsibility to care for the pastors who share in the bishop’s episcopate. Caring for the pastors includes attention to their welfare including practicalities of life as well as their spiritual and vocational health, ensuring continuing ministerial and theological education and ongoing formation. One of the most important ways in which the bishop cares for the pastors is by being an example in the

development of habits of self-care and attention to the spiritual disciplines. Such a witness draws people together and raises their sights to new possibilities for freedom in the Spirit.

A bishop's responsibility for the encouragement and discipline of clergy is built upon an exchange of trusts that only comes through patient companionship with others. This is the context in which the bishop can offer guidance and admonition, and call the pastors to honesty, care and mutual accountability. What is true in diocesan life is true at the level of the Communion. Mutual accountability at the international level is the result of a genuinely shared episcopate, exchange of trusts and mutual accountability at the diocesan level.

Thesis Seven: The bishop serves the koinonia of the gospel through a ministry of mediation to recall the broken and conflicted body of Christ to its reconciled life in him

Dealing with conflict is a significant feature of a bishop's work. Most obviously the Church is made up of frail and foolish people. The upward call of Christ presumes we are sinners in need of God's grace, forgiveness and mercy. In this context, koinonia is necessarily a partial and vulnerable reality. A bishop's vocation involves tending this koinonia through the wise handling of conflict. A ministry of mediation in situations of conflict is relevant at local and wider levels of the church's life. The challenge for bishops is how to harness conflicts so that through this process a deeper koinonia in the gospel emerges. Learning to be a reconciler is a life-long task and bishop's may benefit greatly from special training in mediation.

Thesis Eight: The catholicity of the episcopal office connects the baptised across boundaries of culture, class, gender, race and lands and enables the church to realise its oneness in Christ

Catholicity means that the apostolic faith is expressed in the diverse contexts of the world. The gift of God in Christ is for all people, and the Trinitarian faith expressed in the doctrine and worship of a particular church is to be that of the whole church. The bishop embodies this catholic character of the gospel. This means that a bishop has particular responsibility to strive for a reality in which the eucharist in a diocese is one celebrated by and for the whole church. It is ironic and a cause of sorrow that the sacrament of unity is an occasion of division.

The catholicity of the office means the bishop is an agent of the fullness of the one faith expressed through myriad local forms. Inculturation that is authentic plumbs the heart of the Christian faith. This requires active engagement with the local cultures so that any stumbling blocks to the hearing, receiving and enacting of the Gospel be removed. When this occurs the gifts of the people are harnessed for authentic mission in that time and place. A bishop must truly know the local cultures and values of the people that the bishop has been called to serve and lead. This can be a real challenge, for the bishop is chief pastor within and across particular ethnic, racial, and cultural contexts. Yet in this role the bishop has to ensure that the one catholic faith finds expression through these particular identities without becoming subsumed by them. The catholicity of the office requires a way of life that is constantly in dialogue with others (especially including other bishops) across many boundaries.

Catholicity also means that the decisions that come from any local place are not simply 'local' decisions, but affect all. Bishops have a particular responsibility to bring the church catholic into local processes of discerning the apostolic faith. They also have a responsibility to represent their diocese to the rest of the church, to interpret to the Communion the realities of their local place. This means explaining not simply the end results of decisions reached, but being able to give theological explanation of the discernment of the Gospel in the culture, and of the catholicity of such decisions. Bishops need the courage and wisdom to be able to hear the voice of others whether within or outside their contexts.

Thesis Nine: The bishop serves the collegial life of the Church through the nurture of strong bonds with bishops of the Anglican Communion and those who share episcopate in other Christian churches

The episcopate is by nature and calling collegial. An Anglican bishop participates in an episcopate shared with all other bishops. In the first instance this occurs between the bishops in a diocese (i.e., diocesan bishop, assistant and suffragan bishops). Therefore all are called into open relationship with each other in the Communion and with those called to exercise episcopate in the wider church. Collegiality means more than working with those with whom one has an affinity. Rather it involves seeing one's ministry not as one's own but as shared with others. At a Provincial level, collegiality involves many practical aspects of cooperative work, study and prayer, and shared responsibility with Synods in Provincial governance. It has particular importance in contexts where the Christian church is in a minority or in a multi-faith context. The patterns of local collegiality-in-communion are a gift to the wider Anglican Communion.

As bishops seek counsel, journey with each other, and pray with and for each other, real relationships grow. But such solidarity is a costly gift. Real relationships are fragile and tainted by sin. If relationships amongst some bishops within a Province are fraught with tensions, refusals of dialogue or other patterns of manipulation undermine collegiality. It is no surprise that these weaknesses show up at the international level. Yet it is of the essence of the episcopate that bishops give themselves over to collegial mutuality in the service of communion. Given the present state of the Anglican Communion it is the special collegial responsibility of the bishop to be at prayer for and with fellow colleagues. This is particularly relevant for those bishops who are in conflict with one another. Their failure to attend fervently to this ordinal vow weakens the body of Christ for which they have responsibility. This in turn weakens the bonds all the baptised share with one another.

Thesis Ten: A diocesan bishop is given responsibility for episcopate in the particular place where the bishop is principal Pastor

It is important for the coherence of the mission of the Church that in one place there should be only one principal or chief Pastor. Within particular and complex circumstances (for example, where indigenous people have been subjugated), it may be necessary, with the consent of the chief Pastor, to provide a specific pastoral ministry of support to a section of a population. However, sight should never be lost of the desirability that a Christian church in a particular place should be a single assembly of people of all kinds.

There are occasions when a church falls out of sympathy with its bishop on a matter of doctrine or conduct. It must not be the case that the mere fact of ease of modern communication and travel becomes the excuse for choosing a leader in another territory to be one's chief Pastor. In the case of serious and extensive conflict, it becomes the duty of a diocesan bishop to provide pastoral support in particular congregations. When a diocesan bishop fails to undertake this duty the matter becomes a provincial responsibility.

Conclusion

The theses outlined above cover the broad range of episcopal responsibilities. There will undoubtedly be matters that have not been dealt with that are significant for bishops in the exercise of their daily office. The intention throughout has been to reflect on the nature of the episcopate in relation to the issue of communion. This focus has been explored at the diocesan level and in relation to the Communion. We are convinced that how a bishop handles the complex and delicate issues surrounding the koinonia of the Church at the local level of the diocese will influence the way a bishop nurtures communion beyond the diocese.

We have tried to offer a brief outline for a theology of the episcopate that is grounded in the received wisdom from scripture and tradition and also alive to the realities that bishops face as they serve the Church's koinonia in the gospel. The theses are incomplete and are currently being developed more intentionally in relation to the scripture tradition and the ordinal. Where relevant we have also tried to indicate areas that might become subject of training and professional development for bishops. More detailed work is currently being conducted in this area by other bodies in the Communion.

We offer this present document as a work in progress. We hope that we have provided a small resource to promote discussion and learning concerning the character of the episcopate. Throughout the diversity of episcopal practices, attitudes and ways of leadership we wonder if there might be room for reflection on the idea of an 'episcopal character' along similar lines to what has been referred to as the 'baptismal character'? We hope and pray that the bishops of the Anglican Communion may find it useful in their difficult but sacred calling to serve the Lord of the Church who desires that all may be one in Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY ARGUMENT FROM THE IATDC's 'COMMUNION STUDY'

(October, 2006)

Anglicans value being part of a world Communion, but successive controversies have made it increasingly unclear what it is that they have in common. The contention of this document is that Anglican 'communion' will be maintained and nurtured, not just by preserving existing ecclesiastical structures but through a renewal of the theological tradition which brought the Communion into being.

To speak in this way of 'renewal' does not mean just a reinforcement of that tradition. As will be seen as the argument progresses, Anglicanism has developed by way of faithful responses to the gospel by churches facing concrete challenges in particular circumstances. At critical moments in their history they have been inspired to draw resources from their theological and spiritual inheritance which enabled them to address seemingly new situations in new ways. Such moments of renewal were eventually judged to be consistent with the tradition from which it was drawn, and generally won recognition and support from others who shared its patrimony. It is that sort of response which is required by the Anglican Communion at the present point of its history, as it faces circumstances threatening to disrupt its life and call into question the tradition itself.

A theological crisis

Previous Doctrine Commissions have begun this task. *The Virginia Report* (1998) especially developed the notion of *koinonia* as an analogy of the Trinity. For various reasons the argument which TVR presented has not yet been absorbed into the way members of the Anglican Communion think about their relationships with each other. Further consideration needs to be given to two key points of the case which was made: the adequacy of the theological analogy itself, and its connection to the treatment of Anglican institutional order which it presented.

Regrettably, it has been the second of these, the institutional section of the report, detailing processes by which 'instruments of communion' could address disagreements and articulate consensus, which has been given most attention so far. Since then, the seeming inability of those instruments' to deal with disputes over homosexuality (among other things), means that confidence in such institutional arrangements needs further underpinning. Theology, not just organisational considerations, must guide responses to this changing situation.

The argument which is being developed by the present Commission now supplements the Trinitarian model of communion with increased attention to how actual experience of 'communion' is grounded in the promise of covenant-love reiterated throughout the Hebrew/Christian scriptures. Ecclesialogically, this offers a description of the church more ready to cope with the realities of struggle and growth, conflict and change, in the life of the people of God. It was pointed out by the authors of *To Mend the Net* – among others – that too close an identification of the doctrine of the church with that of God in Trinity idealises institutional decisions made by particular ecclesial bodies. It runs the danger of confusing a theological *is* with an empirical *ought*. There is always a tendency for history to get lost in ideology, especially at times when the interpretation of a historical tradition is disputed.

As was asserted in the above introduction, Anglican ecclesiology has always been delineated in response to specific contingencies of history. It describes the self-understanding of a theologically identifiable group of particular, regional churches which embody reformed, catholic faith, and trace their original existence and inspiration to the mission or ministry of the Church of England, or churches closely associated with it. The Anglican Communion developed as a fellowship of churches which recognised themselves in that description.

The diversity of cultures in which these churches are now found, and their remoteness from the historical circumstances in which their fellowship was originally grounded, means that the tradition which drew them together in the first place is under severe strain. At some points it shows signs of breaking up. This situation is not only a result of particular ethical or doctrinal disputes; it also reflects major realignments which have taken place within world Christianity during the last decades of the twentieth century. The IATDC is undertaking a serious reflection on central elements of the Anglican tradition and the polarisation of opinion over key features within it. It has been drawn into consideration of the way in which the terminology of ‘covenanting’ is being utilised in current Anglican debate. It is especially aware of changes which are taking place as a result of the shifting ‘centre of gravity’ in the Christian movement towards the global south. It has also been conscious of the way in which, in a fragmented world, it is not only the church which longs for a deeper sense of *koinonia*. The scope of God’s covenant love embraces the whole of his creation.

The renewal of Anglican tradition

At its inception the Commission determined to undertake the Communion Study, with which it was mandated, through active conversation with the churches of the Anglican Communion. Its progress has been marked by the circulation of Four Key Questions to every diocese and theological centre in the Communion, and an ensuing debate on Six Propositions which developed from them. This process revealed deep divisions in approaches to many of the features which have traditionally held Anglicans together. A third round of questions sought clarification of that situation, and a consideration of some of the proposals made in the Windsor Report (2004) for resolving conflict and maintaining unity in times of dispute.

The major areas of discussion in the Study concerned:

- **The centrality of Scripture** – the controlling place of scripture in the reasoned development of Anglican tradition is generally acknowledged, but the role of the Bible in determining the outcome of specific controversies is unclear. Through the twentieth century processes of rapid social change from pre- to post-modernity have meant that Christians in the same church now find they are living in different cultural worlds, and the ways in which scripture is utilised in each of them appears to be different as well. Yet during the last decade a renewed emphasis on the unity as well as the diversity of scripture means that listening to the Bible together can be a restorative as well as disturbing experience for the Christian community. Reading ‘in communion’ is not simply a matter of sharing a common lectionary! Cranmer’s conviction that hearing scripture in the context of ordered worship permits (and indeed creates) an acceptable degree of diversity in the church is something that needs to be rediscovered at just the time when it is recognised that no contemporary ‘Act of Uniformity’ can achieve that end. Corporate reception of scripture is actually the way in which communion will be nurtured and sustained in the church, as well as described or defined as a theological concept.

In the third round of discussion, the question of how the Bible could be read ‘together’ by the whole church was highlighted. Major differences emerged between those who thought that in principle the ‘perspicuity of Scripture’ meant that a common mind could be reached about the meaning and implications of a passage, and others who felt that cultural differences between readers – as well as between readers and the text – meant that any such unanimity would be impossible to achieve. Current hermeneutical studies suggest that such pessimism is unwarranted and that the ideal of a church whose thoughts and actions are moulded by a habitual response to the message of the Bible is worth pursuing. However any expectation that interpretations of the scripture will ever be unanimous or

uncontested is discounted by the experience of history if not the very character of the Bible itself. Knowledge of God's purposes in scripture will always be partial in the church, yet sufficient for the patient pursuit of truth and holiness if there is a corporate willingness to respond to what is understood in particular circumstances. For this reason methods of cross-cultural and trans-generational reading of the Bible are worth promoting.

- **Moral Theology** – Anglicans have repeatedly sought to link personal beliefs with public outcomes. Ongoing conversation (not always amicable) between church and state has been a feature of Anglican order from the earliest period of Christian faith and practice in Britain, but was exemplified in the seventeenth century by the way Richard Hooker sought to integrate the continuity of God's purposes with radically changed intellectual, social and political circumstances. The Anglican tradition has always seen theology as an agent of moral transformation, and ethical assertions as requiring theological validation. The Christian message is not understood merely as religious ideology but, most directly, by the way it confronts the reality of personal and corporate sin. The gospel is addressed to a world which both fails to recognise and refuses to acknowledge the goodness and justice of God. Anglican history shows many examples of the conviction that situations of evil are not just to be confronted but redeemed.

This tradition continues today with important Anglican contributions to thinking about international debt, justice and peace issues, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. There is no reason why similar attention should not be given to issues of human sexuality, including homosexuality (issues which are intellectual, social and political as much as personal in origin) under the present circumstances in which the Communion finds itself. This will involve more than theoretical considerations. A holistic Anglican tradition will seek to combine the best elements of traditional moral philosophy with the practice of theological ethics, involving spiritual issues of vocation and discernment. This will need first, an appreciation of the interdependence of 'command ethics' and 'human flourishing' (the debate between so-called deontologists and consequentialists). Secondly, attention must be extended to the way in which innovations in Christian belief and practice can be understood, evaluated and judged within an Anglican fellowship. What is not possible is that the discussion of belief and practice, doctrine and ethics, should be carried on independently of each other.

- **Context and culture** – the historicity and particularity of Anglican understandings of the church means that it takes questions of context seriously. At its best – as in the 1978 Lambeth Conference treatment of 'inculturation' – context and culture are considered within the framework of catholicity. It involves a two-fold encounter, during which the church discovers something about its own inner reality as a community of the resurrection, and also discovers resources for attending to the needs of the world. Consequently Anglicans are always open to the possibilities of a 'local option' in the way they fulfil their calling, but will insist that the 'local' is held in a dialectic tension with 'universal' opinion, as far as that can be ascertained. This interplay between the one and the many follows directly from the theological model outlined earlier. Without it there is a further danger of confusing 'is' and 'ought'. It emphasises the way in which the grace of the covenant is constant, yet renewed, restored and realised throughout the pilgrimage of God's people as they move towards its completion. The once-for-all character of Christ's coming must be appropriated by succeeding generations in each and every place. On this understanding the dominant theme of inculturation is not the *incarnation* (as is often assumed) but an implication of the *Pentecost* experience – hearing about the scandalously particular works of God in the mother tongue of new converts, who are thereby incorporated into membership of a single multi-cultural and cross-generational community. On that basis it might be argued that the Anglican experience of companionship links, partnerships in mission, inter-Anglican networks, mission societies

and religious orders (not to mention the availability of cheap air travel and the Internet) can all act as significant ‘instruments of communion’, almost irrespective of more formal ecclesial structures. These partnerships take on increasing importance, theological as well as practical, at a time of temporary disruption in the relationship between different parts of the Anglican world. Reflection on these relationship may begin to provide theological articulation to new dimensions of *koinonia* which are emerging in the new world- (and church-) order.

- **Limits of diversity** — the existence of covenantal religion requires decision-making. Throughout the biblical narrative and the history of the church, decisive choices have been made about significant issues of Christian faith, order and practice. Such a demand means that there is always a possibility of serious disagreement in the church. Some disputes are peripheral, and differences of opinion about them can be accepted relatively easily, but some are crucial – and must in due course be decided upon, if the church is to retain its unity, holiness and claim of catholicity. In times of controversy, vital questions arise about how to tell the difference between peripheral or local disputes, and those which are crucial, normative and universal?

In the present debate on human sexuality many participants are looking for a list of fundamental doctrines which guarantee Anglican identity, or a catalogue of acceptable practices, ‘lines in the sand’, which define the limits of Anglican fellowship.

- The Commission is persuaded that the while numerous attempts have been made by Anglican theologians to identify core doctrines or fundamental articles, that quest has never been settled beyond dispute. In the present intellectual climate it is even clearer that such a strategy will conceal even more foundational problems of authority. Who decides the content and extent of such doctrines? And how could they be used to resolve contentious issues in the life of the Communion? One suggestive analogy has been offered: the Anglican understanding of the church is not that it is like a balloon which deflate (or explodes) once its fabric is in any way punctured, it is more like a bird’s nest – which can consist of different numbers or arrangements of ecclesiological ‘twigs’ and still be fit for its purpose.
- The latter quest, for beliefs or practices that can be excluded by definition from Anglican fellowship, appears to contradict the unconditional nature of the covenant. It is not possible to exclude any area of human life or behaviour from theological scrutiny: any issue can become crucial for the maintenance of the church’s faithfulness. The example of flags being displayed in the sanctuary of a church is an instructive case which has been considered by the Commission. In some situations that would be regarded as a peripheral issue (*adiaphora*) – until, for instance, such a time when the flags bore a swastika and the churches concerned were in Nazi Germany. Some members have pointed to other situations when a flag can represent the threat of ‘unopposed Empire’ or xenophobic nationalism. Such examples illustrate the way in which previously unconsidered things, in a changed context, can present vital challenges to Christian confession. Key questions for the church’s faithfulness today have to do with human sexual activity, that of hetero- as well as homosexual orientation.
- The theology of the covenant, in which the *koinonia* of God is expressed and a communal response invited (the new covenant instituted through the blood of Christ (Mt 26.26), pointing towards the obligations of a ‘new commandment’ (Jn 13.34) or ‘communion’ in the new wine of the kingdom (Mt 26.29)) could be used as a warrant for the central proposal of the Windsor Report – an Anglican covenant which can be used motivationally, not just juridically as a way of testing the limits of diversity.
- While a consideration of what could comprise an ‘Anglican’ covenant should concentrate attention on the nature of Anglican identity, it is unlikely to provide a simple answer to questions about Anglican comprehensiveness. No Covenant will be

able to define conditions upon which all unforeseen controversies could be settled in the future, and it is difficult to envisage how an Anglican instrument for authoritative interpretation of, or compliance with a Covenant could be fashioned in the present climate of suspicion in the Communion. What current discussion about an Anglican Covenant could achieve is a renewed attention to the theological tradition which creates Anglican unity, and to demonstrate how, at the deepest level of covenanting, the way our trusts – a key element of *koinonia* – are formed and will endure. As one of our correspondents put it, covenant religion spells out the possibility of ‘*assurance of faith without presumption*’.

Despite its reluctance, *a priori*, to exclude any opinion or practice, Anglicanism is not in principle unable or unwilling to make costly decisions. Indeed decisive points in the establishment of Anglican ‘communion’ presume that the discernment of God’s will and purposes is a constant and ongoing process. Thus the historic standards of Anglicanism (39 Articles, BCP and Ordinal) can be seen as a covenantal expression of the way in which English Christians established their own identity among the controversies of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Lambeth Quadrilateral does not (as it is sometimes erroneously supposed) define the boundaries of Anglican fellowship, but it did commit Anglicanism in the 19th century to a series of normative practices whereby the wider unity of the church might be furthered: scripture is *read*, tradition *received*, sacramental worship is *offered*, and the historic character of apostolic leadership is *retained*. From this interplay the Anglican community is nurtured and sustained. It can be argued that the proposal for an Anglican covenant extends that process as a way of enriching the sense of an Anglican identity and vocation amid the tensions and disputes that arise from being part of a global community. A covenant, which rehearses the theological tradition from which Anglicanism has developed, and establishes clear commitments for the way it can maintain its cohesiveness, seems the most likely way to secure its communion for the foreseeable future. The one thing that Anglicans cannot permit at this time is for disputants to refuse to allow their opinion to be submitted to theological scrutiny. Those involved in disputes must not only listen to each other, but also attend to the wisdom of the wider Christian community.

- **Accountability and competence** – but who are the scrutineers? The Commission has already advocated the importance of mutual accountability (*paraklesis*) for the maintenance of communion in the church. This involves comfort, encouragement, exhortation and direction, as well as the word into which it is usually translated, ‘admonition’. It is something which should function at every level of church life, and there seems no reason why, in a fellowship of autonomous churches, such accountability should not be exercised between as well as within each of them. The problem that has become clear during current controversies is that it is uncertain where responsibility for *paraklesis* within the world-wide Communion lies, or when it appropriate for such an exercise to be undertaken.

To clarify *when* some communion-wide decision is to be made, we have introduced the criteria of intensity, substance and extent: the more these characteristics feature in a controversy, the wider the scope for a ministry of mutual admonition. As to *where* that decision should be made, it is held that the current dispute deserves consideration at the level of a relationship between Provinces, at present embodied in the Primates’ Meeting. The Primates have been reluctant to accept the ‘enhanced’ role that successive Lambeth Conferences have urged upon them, but in October 2003 they indicated that they were looking for an appropriate mechanism to fulfil that sort of role. The existence of a Covenant may provide the setting in which all the instruments of communion, acting together, can make binding judgments to under gird and secure the unity of the churches and enrich their communion of service and love. It must be clear that this should not be seen as a bureaucratic or merely organisational response to resolving disputes. A decision

by the Primates should not be reduced to the outcome of a majority vote of the personal opinions – for the time being – of those present. The process is one of theological discernment throughout, and ‘admonition’ should not be seen as a matter of institutional censure, but corporate submission to the gospel, in the pursuit of a common mind.

For various reasons, some participants in the present debates seem intent on reducing the Communion into something more like a confederation – becoming ‘cousins, not brothers and sisters’ in Christ. Others have suggested that a constructive way forward may be to allow a sort of associate status within the communion for those who are unable or unwilling to adopt the theological and doctrinal stance implied by the Covenant. Politically, this appears to amount to a refusal to accept the possibility of external criticism; theologically, it dilutes Anglican fellowship from something grounded in covenant love, to a matter of administrative convenience.

- **Structures for communion** – for Anglican unity to be maintained in this way, it will be necessary to overcome deep seated suspicions about centralising power in the Communion. *The Virginia Report* pointed to the need for greater clarity in the relationship between the instruments of communion. This can be achieved by clearly differentiating the roles of Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council and Primates’ Meeting as aspects of (respectively) collegial, communal and personal authority in the church. The Archbishop of Canterbury, now identified as a ‘focus of unity’ holds the unique office of gathering the Communion in its representative parts, and speaking for it while consensus is achieved. If it is agreed that an ‘enhanced role’ should be adopted by the Primates (a proposal which the IATDC has supported under certain circumstances, as indicated above) then this must be paralleled in additional responsibilities undertaken by each of the other instruments as well. What is essential is that the different charisms of guidance and discernment exercised by each of the instruments must deliberately and consistently act together. Too often meetings of the decision-making bodies appear, to outsiders, to be pre-occupied with their own, apparently unrelated, programme objectives; at worst, they may seem intent on merely winning time, in the hope that seemingly intractable problems will go away. Mutual accountability and communication are needed for communion to function. A personal, and even more, a theological vocabulary of disagreement is necessary in order to allow communication to continue across frontiers of disagreement. A key to this will be found by establishing a common language of collegiality to unite the episcopate, along with an agreed understanding of what is implied when that collegiality is broken or impaired. The working of the whole body must amount to more than the sum of its separate parts. The purpose of ‘dispersed authority’ is to draw to itself the *consensus fidelium*.

Changing patterns of *koinonia*

The Windsor Report has pointed towards institutional or canonical ways to hold the Communion together at this time. If that is possible, the future stability of such agreements will depend even more on a deepened sense of commonality, and this can only come from a theological renewal of the Anglican tradition, associated with the elements outlined above. More so, the proposals it contains envisage not just the possibility of maintaining communion across divisions of opinion, but enriching it by resolving such divisions through a continuing process of drawing on and drawing out the implications of a vision of faithful response to the gospel to which the Anglican tradition aspires.

Part of the difficulty in sustaining that vision is derived from hierarchical views of power and authority, so prominent in social, managerial and political life, which are pressed on the decision-making bodies – both by an uncomprehending media, and by knowing manipulators of arguments within the church itself. An emphasis on covenant, Christology and the work of the Spirit seeks a different frame of reference. Attention is drawn to the classic discussions of

the Anglican Communion at the 1920 and 1930 Lambeth Conferences. In the second of these, two prevailing types of ecclesiastical organisation were described: ‘that of centralised government, and that of regional autonomy within one fellowship’. It is the latter form which Anglicans share with Orthodox Churches and others. Self-governing churches of the Communion grew up ‘freely, in their own soil’. Even then the term ‘Anglican’ did not hold racial or geographical connections but was grounded in ‘the doctrines and ideals for which the Church of England has always stood’. The radical implications of this self-understanding need to be re-appropriated as an affirmation of Catholicity (and the claim to catholicity by a sub-tradition of Christianity) in the post-modern dilemma in which Anglicanism now finds itself.

It is for historical reasons (the formative experiences of the Church of England), rather than institutional order that ‘communion with the See of Canterbury’ is significant for Anglican provinces today. Attention to this history, with its associated doctrines and ideals, along with a re-consideration of the comparison drawn from Orthodox ideas of autocephalicity and communion, informs the IATDC’s thinking at this stage of its study. Orthodoxy offers a way of deepening understanding of what Anglicans have learned to call, somewhat unsatisfactorily, ‘impaired communion’. Theological tradition, ‘Orthodoxy’, not any form of institutional unity is what gives the Eastern churches their identity. Orthodox churches can be notably contentious. Severed relationships and even an excommunication of the Oecumenical Patriarch – Orthodoxy’s first among equals – have all been known in recent years. Yet the impulse towards unity within the tradition also holds out the possibility of the restoration of communion after a period in which it has been breached. It is the existence or non-existence of communion which is crucial for Anglicans. More is involved than establishing minimal conditions for a fraternal relationship.

‘The highest possible degree of communion’?

The rhetoric of schism must be avoided during the present time of uncertainty. Yet the possibility of serious disruption to the Anglican Communion has to be contemplated. The question must be asked whether existing ‘instruments of unity’ are capable of theological (not just managerial) development in such a way that they can utilise the possibilities opened up by the Windsor process to address questions about legitimate diversity. If there is not the time or will to achieve this, it appears that Anglicans will become increasingly marginalised and fragmented as a movement within world-Christianity.

Even if the worst fears of Anglicans who value their fellowship and solidarity are realised, the Anglican tradition will not disappear. Communion functions at a number of different levels. The IATDC has identified theology, canon law, history and culture, communication, and voluntary commitment rather than coercion, as essential aspects of communion. Yet real communion can exist in many of the elements separately. The Commission is persuaded that ‘thick’ ecclesiology, concrete experience of the reconciling and healing work of God in Christ, should take priority over ‘thin’, abstract and idealised descriptions of the church. Communion ‘from below’, is real communion – arguably the most vital aspect of *koinonia* with God and neighbour., and it is from ‘below’ that the Commission has worked in its conversations with the churches, and in the theological construction it is developing now.

What is needed next is a clearer understanding of how these different aspects of communion exist at different levels or horizons of the church’s experience. The obligation to seek ‘the highest degree of communion possible’ within the Church is a laudable ambition, a vocation even. Yet without specifying what sort of communion is anticipated for congregational, local, regional or global fellowship, the terminology can be used merely to justify higher level organisational arrangements without ever analysing how they contribute to communion itself. It may well be that communion at a local or congregational level (‘where two or three are

gathered together...') may theologically represent a 'higher' communion than an ideal expressed in merely institutional, canonical or juridical terms. At the same time it must be insisted that the experience and commitments of local communities will be enlarged and maintained by participation in wider expressions of fellowship (which the parallel work of this Commission on 'The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church' advances) just as the life of dioceses, Provinces and the Anglican Communion itself pursues its fullness as a part of the *koinonia* of the People of God.

If Anglican fellowship at the level of shared doctrines and ideals or common participation in mission is unable to sustain the support of coherent, structural communion 'from above', then it will be a weaker and more fragile thing as a global fellowship than might otherwise have been the case. In the light of the gospel weak and fragile things are not to be despised. But the Anglican theological tradition cannot be content with any claim to communion which separates the gospel of Christ from the reality of his Church.
