

Bunch of Grapes or Bag of Marbles?

**Address at Salisbury Diocesan Synod 18 February 2012
proposing the Anglican Communion Covenant**
by Dr Graham Kings, Bishop of Sherborne

Introduction

Next Tuesday is Shrove Tuesday. I love the story of a mother preparing pancakes for her two young sons, John and Mark. They were arguing about who should have the first pancake. She said, 'What would Jesus do? I think he would say, 'you have the first pancake'. Quick as a flash in the pan, John said to Mark, 'Hey, Mark. You be Jesus.'

Disagreements in the family, in the Church family of this Diocese of Salisbury and in the Anglican Communion are not unfamiliar. We know they happen and they are part of being a family. In John 17: 20-21, the night before he died, Jesus prays:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The communion between the Father and the Son – and it is a communion, not a federation - has been intimate since before the foundation of the world. It is this communion which is to be reflected in the way we behave towards each other, and it has huge mission implications. The world and the media are watching us.

I believe it is vitally important for our mission that both 'Women in the Episcopate' and the 'Anglican Communion Covenant' are discussed at General Synod this July. 'Women in the Episcopate' will be, that is clear. But if less than half of the Dioceses vote for the Anglican Communion Covenant, it will not be allowed to be discussed at General Synod. That would be tragic, for that is the forum for our final decisions.

So far, 11 dioceses have voted: 5 for and 6 against. So our vote today is very significant as to whether it will be allowed to be discussed in General Synod in July. In our Deanery Synod debates, 11 voted for and 8 against. As with 'Women in the Episcopate', we need to heed our Deanery Synods. In the Provinces of the Communion the voting so far is 6 for 1 against. We are in danger of being out of step with the Communion.

The Anglican Communion Covenant – and the full title is very important for 'Communion' is at its centre – is the proposal backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council. This is considerable backing and should not be dismissed today 'unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly', to use words from the Book of Common Prayer Marriage service. Sadly, some of the dismissal of it has been along those lines. I suggest it should be accepted 'reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God'.

The choice before us today is between an Anglican Communion Covenant and a No Anglican Covenant Federation. You have had two briefing papers: one from Fulcrum, with which, as you know, I am involved and one from the No Anglican Covenant Coalition. In their response to Fulcrum's ten points, the Coalition made it clear that it thinks 'autonomy' and 'accountability' are incompatible in our Anglican Communion. I don't believe they are. It also openly wrote about considering the advantages of Federation over Communion.

Let me focus now on answering two charges against the Covenant, and proposing one question, before reiterating the reasons for voting positively:

A. Charges Against the Covenant

1. Women's ordination to the priesthood and to the episcopate would have not have happened if the Covenant had been in place.

To set out another view, I draw on the wisdom of Colin Craston, who was on the Anglican Consultative Council for 15 years, six of them as chair. In his article, ['Women Bishops and the Anglican Communion Process'](#), he writes:

At the next meeting of the ACC in 1973, by an overwhelming majority, it was agreed that ordaining women priests should not cause any break in communion in the Anglican family...(54 in favour, 1 against).

Craston goes on to show that, concerning women bishops, there was a similar flexibility for Provinces to act, without causing a break in communion:

At the 1988 Lambeth Conference, with ECUSA likely to appoint a woman bishop, it was [resolved](#) "That each Province respect the decision and attitudes of other Provinces in the ordination or consecration of women in the episcopate, without such respect necessarily indicating acceptance of the principles involved, maintaining the highest possible degree of communion with the Provinces that differ" (423 in favour, 28 against, 19 abstentions).

With those overwhelming majorities in favour of flexibility in 1973 and in 1988, it seems to me exceeding unlikely that had the Covenant been in place, it would have hampered this wonderful development in ministry.

2. The Covenant is not recognisably Anglican

Well, I submit that it is. It draws in particular on the Declaration of Assent, that wonderful 1975 Church of England summary of belief. In my [Guardian article](#) of November 2010, I argued that the Covenant could be viewed as an internationalisation of that elegant middle way forward.

In the Diocese of Salisbury, we rightly celebrate two of Anglicanism's greatest writers: Richard Hooker, at Boscombe (1591-95), wrote in prose; and George Herbert, at Fuggleston with Bemerton (1630-33), wrote in both prose and poetry.

Hooker was defending the middle way between Roman Catholicism and Puritanism. From my study of his writings, it seems to me clear that he would have approved of the middle way of the Anglican Communion Covenant, between the Curia of the Roman Catholic Church and the Federation of both the contemporary puritan and the radically liberal movements.

Gene Edward Veith, in an article in the George Herbert journal in 1988, wrote:

the...via media was not in Herbert's day a mere compromise, a golden mean. Rather, it was a balance and an integration, an affirmation of the best of both traditions. In the sense that it was Catholic - in its sacramentalism, its liturgical worship, and in its continuity with the past - it was very Catholic. In the sense that it was Reformed - in its focus on the grace of God, in its Biblicalism, in its evangelical liberty - it was very Reformed.

So I believe that the Anglican Communion Covenant is thoroughly Anglican, and would be recognized as 'Catholic and Reformed' by both Hooker and Herbert.

B. My question is: Who knows the Anglican Communion best and has the most up to date information concerning the consequences of the failure of the Covenant?

Is it Jonathan Clatworthy, who has prepared the No Anglican Covenant Coalition paper, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is strongly proposing the Covenant?

Lambeth Palace, and the Anglican Communion Office, are in direct contact with all the 38 Provinces and the various groups in the Communion.

In synods, groups and on the web, in discussions with friends who are against the Covenant, I have found that some deny that a 'no vote' will lead to a disintegration of the Communion. The implication is: 'we are doing well at the moment and the Dublin Primates' Meeting in 2011 went very well'. But they forget to mention that, unprecedentedly, out of 38 Primates, only 22 attended. Those who did not attend, worryingly included moderate Global South Anglican leaders, like John Chew, as well as the more conservative GAFCON Primates. Indeed, we have a crisis and voting for doing nothing is like burying our heads in the sands of Sandbanks.

C. The Summary of my reasons for voting positively today

These are set out more fully in the Fulcrum briefing paper and include:

1. The Covenant has been consistently supported by the Church of England.
2. It is faithful to Anglican tradition
3. It sets out a middle way
4. It enables Anglicanism to be recognised in a short text
5. It provides a clear framework for debate.
6. It facilitates changes in continuity with tradition.
7. It preserves provincial autonomy with interdependence.
8. It offers the only way to prevent further fragmentation.
9. It provides ways for addressing innovations.
10. The Archbishop of Canterbury has asked the Church of England to support him. In his 2011 Advent Letter to the Primates of the Anglican Communion, he stated:

It does not create some unaccountable and remote new authority but seeks to identify a representative group that might exercise a crucial advisory function. I continue to ask what alternatives there are if we want to agree on ways of limiting damage, managing conflict and facing with honesty the actual effects of greater disunity. In the absence of such alternatives, I must continue to commend the Covenant as strongly as I can to all who are considering its future.

Conclusion

I believe that, like the Declaration of Assent, the Anglican Communion Covenant is a text of breadth and concord. Our vote today concerns unity. A vote against the Covenant is a vote to do nothing. I do not believe it is helpful or Anglican to imply: 'let's leave things as they are - we are divided, so let's stay divided'.

This would result in our organic Communion being downgraded into a disparate Federation: from 'autonomy-in-communion' to mere 'independent autonomies'.

Do we wish to continue to have an organic Communion, like a bunch of grapes, or a disconnected Federation, like a bag of marbles?

Do we consider each other and decide we belong together, or do we do our own thing and hang apart? What we cannot do is to stand still.

A vote for the Anglican Communion Covenant is a vote for the intensifying of our relationships across the world, to realise more fully the unity for which Christ prayed.

<http://www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/bishops/the-bishop-of-sherborne/sermons-and-press-articles/bishop-of-sherbornes-address-to-salisbury-deanery-synod-18-february-2012>