

After General Synod November 2010: reporting back

The General Synod website has the full transcript of the speeches at the November Synod and the motions passed:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1178990/november%202010.pdf>

On the Big Society:

- I voted to "take note" of the Report on the Big Society. This was for the reasons set out in my comments on the paper before the meeting (see below link). The motion was passed.
- I voted for the following motion to "...undertake a feasibility study with benefactor funding...[to] prepare business templates for various options which could be used by dioceses and others who choose to make such partnerships a reality in their local area..." This was because a study that will cost the Church nothing, that could bring new ideas for local partnerships as part of the 'Big Society' idea, can't be bad. The motion was passed.

On the Anglican Covenant:

- I voted "That the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant be considered." This was for the reasons set out in my comments on the paper before the meeting (see below link). The motion was passed.
- I voted against amendments which would have changed the text of the Covenant. This is because after several revisions, the text is now in its final form and all Anglican Provinces are asked to either adopt it or not - it is too late to monkey around with the text. The amendments were lost.
- I voted against the amendment which would have delayed sending the document to Dioceses for debate. This was for the reasons set out in my comments on the paper before the meeting - that I feel the Covenant probably already comes too late, so further delay will only make things worse. The amendment was lost.
- The result is that the text of the Anglican Covenant is going to Dioceses for debate, and if approved by them, it will then come back to General Synod for final approval.

On the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2010 (GS 1806).

On the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Order 2010(GS 1807).

- These were technical legal matters which are explained in the explanatory memorandums on the Church of England website. I voted for them and they were passed.

On the Draft Church of England Marriage (Amendment) Measure (GS 1805)

- These were essentially a legal tidying-up exercise. I voted in favour and they were approved for the next stage, which is consideration by a Revision Committee.

Before General Synod November 2010: inviting your views

The papers to be debated at the November meeting of the General Synod have been published on the Church of England website:
<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/november-2010-group-of-sessions.aspx>

The two main debates will be on "The Big Society" and on the Anglican Covenant.

Attached are my comments on the Big Society paper.

Attached are my comments on The Anglican Covenant.

I welcome anyone to send me their views on any of the subjects to be debated, so that I can consider them before I vote.

The Big Society

Comments by Adrian Vincent 7 Nov 2010

The first debate at the November General Synod will be on a report on, *The Big Society: Report by the Mission and Public Affairs Council (GS 1804)*.
<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1150450/gs1804.pdf>

The Synod isn't being asked to decide on anything, just to talk about and "take note of" the Report. Hopefully this won't be another General Synod talking shop example. It could be a worthwhile debate if we get out of it practical examples of what the Church of England can do to work with the new Government initiatives.

The Report is a helpful briefing on the Government's Big Society idea and the implications. It reports (paragraph 42) that Church House staff in the Mission and Public Affairs division have been "in discussion with Ministers about practical partnerships for building social cohesion." The report concludes (paragraph 78) "The church needs to be prepared, at diocesan and parish level, as well as nationally, to respond constructively but wisely to a new phase in the relationship between government, church and community."

The Report includes as an Annex the Executive Summary of a submission that was made to the Government by the Church of England for a grant of £5 million for a project called, *Near Neighbours: by faithful interaction*. Again, there is nothing for the Synod to decide about this – the submission has already been made. The use that the Church is asking the money for would be very good, it would fund local projects, administered by the Church Urban Fund, to increase dialogue between people of different faiths, and fund other local initiatives that would benefit local communities. That said even the Executive Summary of the Church of England submission to the Government is a heavy read. It is full of repetition, buzzwords (e.g. "release energies" and "working at the 'nano level'") and using ten words when two would do. I suppose it was thought that submitting lots of paperwork which uses all the Government jargon would increase our chances of getting a grant.

Even the short report to Synod 1804A

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1150516/gs1804a.pdf> doesn't do well in terms of plain English (e.g. we are told "the church should be promoting synergy" to "shift the dominant narrative").

The Anglican Covenant

Comments by Adrian Vincent 11 Nov 2010

At the November 2010 General Synod we will be asked to vote "That the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Covenant be considered." The draft Act of Synod itself, GS 1809, <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1150766/gs1809.pdf> is a one page document in which the General Synod would pass a resolution that: "The Church of England hereby enters into and adopts the Anglican Communion Covenant as set out in Annex 1 to GS Misc 966..."

This can't happen until 2012 at the earliest, because if the General Synod approves the motion in November, it will then go to the dioceses for approval before coming back to the General Synod for final approval.

The document that is worth reading is GS Misc 966, the briefing paper by the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission on The Anglican Covenant, particularly Annex 1 which is the text of the Covenant itself: <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1150796/gsmisc966.pdf>

This process began in 2003 after a bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada authorised a public Rite of Blessing for same sex unions; and The Episcopal Church (USA) consecrated as a bishop "a divorced man openly acknowledged to be living in a sexually active and committed same sex relationship" (*The Windsor Report 2004*, paragraph 27). Both these actions took place against the request and resolutions of what are called 'the four instruments of unity' of the Anglican Communion: the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates' Meeting, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Some traditionalist Provinces reacted to these actions of the liberal Provinces:

"...Some Archbishops from elsewhere in the Communion have...entered parts of the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada and exercised episcopal functions without the consent of the relevant diocesan bishop...all these developments have now contributed materially to a tit-for-tat stand-off in which, tragically in line with analogous political disasters in the wider world, each side now accuses the other of atrocities, and blames the other for the need to react further in turn." (*The Windsor Report 2004*, paragraphs 29-30).

The Anglican Church did what it always does in a crisis. It set up a committee to write a report. This was *The Windsor Report*, it is a good and

significant report that is well worth reading. It can be bought as a book (ISBN 6-00000005-7), and is also on-line:
<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/index.cfm>

The committee was called 'The Lambeth Commission' and they were asked, among other things,

"...to make recommendations to the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council, as to the exceptional circumstances and conditions under which, and the means by which, it would be appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury to exercise an extraordinary ministry of episcopate (pastoral oversight), support and reconciliation with regard to the internal affairs of a province other than his own for the sake of maintaining communion with the said province and between the said province and the rest of the Anglican Communion." (*The Windsor Report 2004*, paragraph 3).

The Commission were under massive pressure to report quickly, particularly by the Provinces of 'the Global South' who were fed up with what they considered to be being fobbed-off for years by new commissions and reports being written and no action ever being taken to discipline liberal provinces whom they considered had departed from Scripture. They said they weren't prepared to wait much longer

The Commission reported relatively quickly and recommended:

"...the adoption by the churches of the Communion of a common Anglican Covenant which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion. The Covenant could deal with: the acknowledgement of common identity; the relationships of communion; the commitments of communion; the exercise of autonomy in communion; and the management of communion affairs (including disputes). A possible draft appears in Appendix Two." (*The Windsor Report 2004*, paragraph 118).

When I read this paragraph in 2004 I wrote in the margin, "but what if they pass this document and then ignore it – taking unilateral action on communion wide issues. Is it enforceable? Later in the paragraph the answer is no – no binding authority, so is it worth the paper it's written on?"

Six years and several drafts later, we now have the final text of the Covenant which we are asked to approve. I can't help thinking that this is too little too late.

Too late, because in the last few years the breaches on both sides have

continued and the Provinces of the Global South have largely given up on the Anglican Communion ever taking effective action and have set up their own body "GAFCON" <http://www.gafcon.org/> a "fellowship of confessing Anglicans". More than 200 bishops chose not to attend the 2008 Lambeth Conference, and instead met in Jerusalem and produced their own statement of faith, "The Jerusalem Declaration"

http://fca.net/resources/the_jerusalem_declaration/

A parallel, traditionalist, Anglican Church in North America has also been formed <http://www.anglicanchurch.net/?/main/page/about#history>

Too little? Some actually say it is too much. For example, groups such as Inclusive Church and Modern Church (MCU) object to the Covenant, saying that it would make the Anglican Church more centralised, authoritarian, restrict diversity and stifle developments from the Holy Spirit.

<http://www.inclusivechurch2.net/Anglican-Covenant-and-Communion-755dd12>

I disagree, let's look at what the text of the Covenant actually says (Annex 1 of GS Misc 966)

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1150796/gsmisc966.pdf>

1.) It assumes a starting place where we are not at

Paragraph 5 says the purpose of the Covenant is "so that the bonds of affection which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified." Some (though I would completely disagree) consider The Episcopal Church (USA) has so far departed from Scripture that they are heretical and therefore 'true' Christians cannot be in communion with them at all. "Strengthening bonds of affection" assumes that there are existing bonds to strengthen.

2.) It is likely to be ignored

Section 1 sets out the traditional basis of faith of the Anglican Communion that all signatory Churches are to affirm. It is a good summary based on the foundation documents of the Anglican Church. However, in the absence of specific reference to sexual ethics or the crossing of diocesan boundaries, signatory Churches who go against traditional Anglican beliefs and practices in these areas are likely to argue that they haven't broken the faith basis of the Covenant. They are also likely to argue that they have not broken the 'communion' basis of the Covenant either.

Section 3.2.4-7 says that signatory Churches should:

"seek a shared mind with other Churches, through the Communion's councils ... [and]... undertake wide consultation with the other Churches of the Anglican Communion and with the Instruments and Commissions of the Communion. ...in situations of conflict, to

participate in mediated conversations, which involve face to face meetings, agreed parameters and a willingness to see such processes through. ...to have in mind that our bonds of affection and the love of Christ compel us always to uphold the highest degree of communion possible."

No doubt signatories will say they have gone through all that consultation process and at the end of the process have concluded that it is still right to ordain practising gay bishops or cross diocesan boundaries etc.

3.) **Discipline is not likely to happen**

The Covenant says:

"4.1.3. Such mutual commitment does not represent submission to any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Nothing in this Covenant of itself shall be deemed to alter any provision of the Constitution and Canons of any Church of the Communion, or to limit its autonomy of governance. The Covenant does not grant to any one Church or any agency of the Communion control or direction over any Church of the Anglican Communion."

"4.2.2. The Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting, shall monitor the functioning of the Covenant in the life of the Anglican Communion on behalf of the Instruments."

"4.2.5. The Standing Committee may request a Church to defer a controversial action. If a Church declines to defer such action, the Standing Committee may recommend to any Instrument of Communion relational consequences which may specify a provisional limitation of participation in, or suspension from, that Instrument until the completion of the process set out below."

4.2.6. On the basis of advice received from the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting, the Standing Committee may make a declaration that an action or decision is or would be "incompatible with the Covenant".

4.2.7. On the basis of the advice received, the Standing Committee shall make recommendations as to relational consequences which flow from an action incompatible with the Covenant. These recommendations may be addressed to the Churches of the Anglican Communion or to the Instruments of the Communion and address the extent to which the decision of any covenanting Church impairs or limits the communion between that Church and the other Churches of

the Communion, and the practical consequences of such impairment or limitation. Each Church or each Instrument shall determine whether or not to accept such recommendations.”

So, who are the members of the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion (SCAC), the body charged with recommending “relational consequences” to a Church that has ignored the rest of the Communion and gone its own way?

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/scac/q_and_a.cfm

Well, the SCAC includes the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church (USA). She is hardly likely to judge that her Province has broken the Covenant. I cannot see the Presiding Bishop finding herself guilty of ignoring the 1998 Lambeth Conference (Resolution 1:10)

<http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm> and rejecting the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2650?q=glasspool> when this year she consecrated as a bishop another priest in a committed same sex relationship

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79425_122244_ENG_HTM.htm

As to the traditionalist members of the SCAC, four of them have already resigned. On 5 February 2010, the *Church Times* reported

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=88843> that the Bishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East, the Most Revd Mouner Anis had resigned from SCAC.

His letter of resignation stated the Committee had not applied the recommendations of the Windsor Report or Primates meetings and had “marginalised, disregarded or suppressed” all ‘orthodox’ voices. On 2 July, the *Church Times* reported <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=96982> that the Bishop of Iran had resigned from the SCAC. On 9 July the *Church Times* reported <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=97385> that the Archbishop of Uganda and his alternate had also resigned from the SCAC.

The SCAC appears to be a busted flush. Attempts can be made to bring more balance to the membership, but would it ever recommend “relational consequences” to one of its members? And even if it did, this would then have to be approved by all the other Churches. And even if they did, these unspecified “relational consequences” probably wouldn’t amount to much anyway.