



The proposed Covenant for the Anglican Communion

WATCH believes that the debate about the proposed Covenant has been too narrowly focussed on the apparent presenting issues (human sexuality and border crossings) to the exclusion of wider concerns that will endure long after these presenting issues have been forgotten. We believe that there are serious questions to be asked, and we would value contributions to the debate that reflect on the effect of the proposed Covenant on the role and participation of women in the church.

In particular, within the Church of England, the progress in the 20th Century from the Church Assembly to the current form of Synodical Government reflected a commitment to local decision-making with significant lay involvement. For the first time large numbers of women became involved in the official decision-making of the Church. The proposed Covenant, by contrast, is about power politics and puts more decision-making in the hands of an elite and predominantly male group of those who are ordained or professionally involved in the central structures of the Church worldwide.

Even before the Covenant has been signed, it is a woman (the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church in the United States) who has already been excluded from the senior councils of the Anglican Communion.

The Church of England and the Anglican Communion have long been characterised by a spirit of open thoughtfulness (under the banner of 'reason' in relation to scripture and tradition). This is what has enabled the Church to hear God calling women to ordained ministry. It seems to us that the apparent conservative nature of the proposed Covenant may inhibit the Church from hearing God speaking with a fresh voice, especially through those women who are now taking a full place within its ordained ministry.

In that spirit of open thoughtfulness, we need to ask three serious questions:

- (i) Should power be centralised, clericalised and professionalised in this way – is that healthy? Does it exclude the prophetic?
- (ii) Local lay involvement has done much to empower women - what will the proposed Covenant do to that dynamic?
- (iii) Is the trajectory of the proposed Covenant too much towards a two-tier church, in which those churches which most affirm the gifts and callings of women are in the second tier?

WATCH has no official position on the proposed Covenant – but we do have these questions which reflect our concern. For debate on the Covenant we recommend the Thinking Anglicans Website, which has regular updates (and comments for and against – contribute your own). For a pro-covenant view look at what Fulcrum have to say (comments likewise vary). Opposing views can be found via Modern Church.

<http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/>
<http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/>
<http://www.modernchurch.org.uk/>

But if you want to answer our questions, you can contribute to the discussion as part of our Facebook group.

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