The Covenant Conundrum: How Affirming an Eschatological Ecclesiology Could Help the Anglican Communion

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This article argues that it is insufficient to ask merely whether the proposed Anglican Covenant is confessional, contractual, conservative, centralizing, or punitive, the themes currently to the fore in the covenant debate. Instead, the Communion must ask what quality of intra- and inter-ecclesial relationality is appropriate for Christian community and measure the covenant against it. An ecclesiology founded upon an anticipated eschatology, an approach familiar to Anglican theology and practice, provides a framework for this assessment. Five characteristics of eschatological ecclesiology and the quality of relationality it promotes are advanced. Aided by the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission’s report Communion, Conflict and Hope and the work of Bruce Kaye, it is shown that the ecclesiological values of the Windsor Report and its resultant covenant are at odds with those that arise from an eschatological ecclesiology, providing an opening for the Communion to resolve its “covenant conundrum.”

Being a global family of autonomous churches, not a worldwide church itself, the Anglican Communion does not have a central figure or body that makes decisions or promulgates doctrine for all Anglican churches. It is not hierarchical authority that unifies the Anglican Communion, but “bonds of affection” that derive from a shared history and identity and that grow from inter-ecclesial fellowship and partnerships, common life and witness, and Communion-wide gatherings, formal and informal, on multiple levels. Recent events in the Communion stemming from fierce disagreements over the role of

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same-gender sexuality in determining eligibility for ordination have greatly strained those bonds of affection, raising issues of provincial autonomy and interdependence, the proper exercise of theological and ecclesial authority, and appropriate levels of diversity within the Communion. Central to each of these issues is the question of relationship. The present crisis is fundamentally about how the relational bonds of affection uniting the churches of the Anglican Communion are to be understood and lived.

Perceiving this, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, convened the Lambeth Commission on Communion in 2003 and charged it with reporting back to him on “the canonical understandings of communion, impaired and broken communion, and the ways in which provinces of the Anglican Communion may relate to one another in situations where the ecclesiastical authorities of one province feel unable to maintain the fullness of communion with another part of the Anglican Communion.”1 The result was the Windsor Report, and one of its key practical recommendations was the development of an Anglican Communion covenant that would outline Anglican identity and “make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion.”2 Championed by the Archbishop, a Communion-wide covenant process was launched,3 producing a series of draft covenants and extensive debate about them in provincial and Communion bodies, parish and diocesan meetings, journal articles and books, and the Anglican blogosphere.

As a relational response to a relational crisis, it is not surprising that supporters and opponents of the version of the covenant now before the member churches of the Communion for adoption tend to debate the advisability of endorsing it in relational terms.4 Thematically, five broad questions with relational implications appear

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3 A history of this process is available on the Anglican Communion website at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/index.cfm.
to dominate discourse around the covenant: the extent to which it is confessional, contractual, conservative, centralizing, and punitive. An honest appraisal reveals a degree of truth on both sides of each question: the covenant is and is not confessional, contractual, conservative, centralizing, and punitive. This ambivalence means that answering these extremely important questions cannot be the decisive test for whether to adopt the covenant. Moreover, these five questions and the tenor of the debate around them emerge from the same fears and anxieties that caused the upheaval in the Communion and led to the proposition of the covenant in the first place. For these reasons, addressing these themes alone has provided an insufficient analysis of the covenant proposal and no solution to the covenant conundrum.

The five overarching questions that characterize much of the covenant debate emerge from competing visions of the normative quality or nature of relationships that covenant supporters and opponents believe ought to obtain within and between Anglican churches, the quality of relationships each thinks the covenant itself seeks to effect, and the extent to which the covenant could bring about either the one or the other. The contrasting ecclesiological perspectives around normative relational quality within the church that stand behind the arguments on both sides of the covenant debate often remain implicit. But, given that answering the questions that arise out of them cannot decisively determine the best course of action pertaining to adopting the covenant, it is precisely at this level that the covenant debate will need to take place. Making explicit the implicit ecclesiological viewpoints concerning the quality of normative ecclesial relationality that ought to characterize Communion life and the extent to which the covenant furthers or inhibits it may be the only way to resolve the issue.

One view of the normative quality of intra- and inter-ecclesial relationship that tends to be overlooked in this debate is that which emerges when Christian community is understood to be an eschatological reality. When the eschatological character of the vocation and practice of “church” is given careful consideration, a compelling framework for addressing the five themes running through the covenant debate, and the mistrust and concerns from which they emanate, becomes available. This essay will argue that understanding Christian community as the instantiation of an “anticipated eschatology,” a notion that is by no means alien to Anglican theology and tradition, offers a set of principles that, rendered in relational terms, provides a
vision of ecclesial relationality that can positively inform the covenant debate. While the notion that the church is an eschatological reality, and thus is a reality on the way, and therefore incomplete and partial, is likely to be uncontroversial, the implications of the eschatological mandate will certainly be contested and not universally convincing. However, this approach will at least address head-on the issue of what quality of ecclesial relationality it is we wish to profess and exhibit, and the degree to which this—or any—Anglican covenant can make the “bonds of affection” shaped by it “explicit and forceful.”

Living the Future Together: Christian Community as “Anticipated Eschatology”

All Christian community, each “church,” has its spiritual origin in the first Christian community that gathered to witness by its proclamation and the form of its corporate life to the crucified-yet-risen Jesus. As a response to the resurrection—the eschatological event par excellence—churches are communities preparing for, participating in, and prefiguring the new reality that Jesus proclaimed and embodied in his pre- and post-Easter life. Christian communities are agents of that new order, coworkers with God in the inaugurated-yet-ongoing process by which God’s future is drawing near for the transformation, renovation, or consummation of the world, to establish what Jesus called “the kingdom.” Jesus’ disclosure of this coming kingdom of God in his words and deeds revealed that God’s ultimate design for humanity and for the world included the perfection of fel-

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lowship between humanity and God and among human beings, the establishment of a new kind of relationality, in which the ruptures that arise from sin and brokenness are removed and authentic and perfect love and communion is possible and, ultimately, realized. Jesus’ earthly teachings and example required making oneself a servant of this still-emerging order, struggling within history to emulate and manifest God’s eschatological purposes to the fullest possible extent. For Christians, the vocation of individual believers and of the community as a whole is the continued proclamation and always imperfect exemplification of the coming kingdom.

While the church itself is not and can never be the kingdom it proclaims, guided by the presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit and animated by hope in God’s promise for relational perfection, the church seeks to prefigure it in a provisional way. As an “institution of the interim,” the church exists in a liminal space between the “now” and the “not yet,” sustained by faith-in-the-mode-of-hope-exercised-in-love that impels the church to *ecstasis*, a going out of itself, to service in and for the world on behalf of the dawning kingdom that funds its existence. Just as Jesus’ miracles both served the immediate needs of those in distress and functioned as signs of the coming reign of God, so too the church’s service to the world seeks peace and reconciliation both because a hurting world needs this and because its kingdom-oriented life and mission demands and gives rise to it.

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8 This is, for example, the argument that James Alison makes in offering his Girardian reading of the resurrection in his *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).


While Christian community is thus animated by an eschatological imagination that maintains it is possible to participate now in God’s promise to bring about an enhanced mode of relationality and fellowship, it is crucial, as Colin Gunton observes, for the church to guard against an overly realized eschatology that too readily dismisses the sin and finitude that occlude theological vision and that asserts (even if only implicitly) that this ultimate state can be both known and more or less fully instantiated in the present, particularly in and through the church itself, a deeply historical and contextual institution, no earthly expression of which could ever fully manifest the divine intention for human flourishing, including and especially its relational capacity. Instead, cognizant that the future in which it participates nevertheless always remains future, and so is always a mystery, knowable tentatively and impressionistically as the result of constructing an interpretive mosaic from the “pictures” of God’s future offered in Scripture, it is precisely in its risk-taking openness to the unknowability of the plenitude that only the fullness of time will bring, a willingness of its members to struggle forward together toward an intimated, not comprehended, future, that marks the church as eschatological. Gunton, instead of the typical distinction between “realized” and “future” eschatology, thinks the church is therefore properly characterized by an “anticipated” eschatology. That is, the church, in its unique manner of communal existence, is constituted by the Holy Spirit in such a way that it reveals proleptically something of the quality of eschatological relationality. For this to be possible, Gunton states, the church must be characterized by a particular and distinctive practice and polity, one that indicates the shape of the promised future: “The church is a social and political reality that does things differently from other institutions, because it is eschatologically dif-

18 James William McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 75–89.
ferent, which means that the basis of its being and authority are also radically different.”

The Anglican heritage affirms that the church has an eschatologically “radically different” way of doing things. As sixteenth-century Anglican ecclesiologists Richard Hooker and Richard Field understood very well, the “eschatological and dialectical” character of ecclesial and theological truth requires an always provisional, dialogical, and corporate approach to discernment, rooted in a dialectical relationship between Scripture, the traditional theology of the church, and historical exigency. Ecclesial communities are to maintain multiple perspectives in conversation with one another precisely because, this side of the eschaton, no full view or definitive formulation of the church or its theology is possible. The relational implications of this are evident: neither churches nor parts of churches can do without the others because none embodies the fullness of the church’s eschatological mission, perspective, or consummated relational capacity. On this account, Anglicanism’s theology and manner of life should, therefore, be eschatologically provisional and, accordingly, dynamically relational.

Such seems to be the case. Deploying its eschatological hermeneutic, Anglicanism understands the form of its churches—and indeed of all Christian community—in the words of a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, to be “radically provisional,” never finished or definitive. All forms of “church” require the insights of the others, across both space and time, and only deep engagement with one another honors the eschatological vocation of Christian ecclesial life. The theological perspective of any given individual or group is likewise held to be partial and incomplete. Anglican theology is therefore resistant to systematic treatments, as these appear to claim too much certainty this side of “achieving eschatological wholeness.” This eschatological insight into ecclesial and theological partialness and provisionality is the immediate background to Anglicanism’s pronounced ecumenical impulse and its noted theological comprehensiveness.

20 Gunton, “‘Until He Comes,’” 191–192.
23 Thomas, “Doctrine of the Church,” 261.
As might be expected, it also informs the polity of Anglican churches. Part of the eschatologically radically different way Anglicanism does things (unlike most secular modes of even democratic social organizations, and unlike some other ecclesial groupings) is in its profound commitment to synodality. The synodality of Anglicanism is a thoroughgoing value, seen in the polities of Anglican dioceses, the provincial churches, and the Communion itself, all of which are maintained by deeply conciliar processes. Instead of legislation, centralized authority, or even majoritarian decision-making, Anglicans speak of “bonds of affection” as the relational sinews of the Anglican Communion. The circulation of “gifts and differences” forms a more authentic koinonia (communion) among the member churches than a centralized authority, confession, or political structure alone could offer. The synodal life of the Communion is intentionally designed “to establish a broad consensus, to lay down general guidelines, to be sensitive to the difficulties of practical implementation, and not to shut down debate or to preclude . . . development.” The eschatological imagination of the Communion has affirmed a conciliar approach to organization because this is consistent with the ecclesial plurality that results from the church’s varied socio-historical emplacements prior to the eschaton, but also because such a deeply relational approach to polity attempts to signal and provisionally instantiate the perfected relationality promised by the coming reign of God.

This brief reflection on important dimensions of an eschatological ecclesiology provides the basis for specifying a set of five marks that characterize anticipated eschatology, demonstrating how they each show up in an eschatological ecclesiology, and suggesting how they are to be understood qualitatively in a relational mode.

First, anticipated eschatology exhibits a dynamic tensiveness between the “now” and the “not yet” (1 Cor. 13:12), between past, present, and future. It positions Christian community within the ongoing narrative of God’s work in the world, from creation to consummation, a story in which the past informs action in the present and visions for the future, and in which God’s promises for the future help us reinterpret the past and act differently in the present. Anticipation

of the final goal of creation and the realization of God's purpose for it illuminates all of history as purposive, as much more than a random sequence of events. Ecclesiologically, this tensiveness leads to the awareness that Christian community is an agent of God's ongoing redeeming work in the world and to the avoidance of dualisms (temporal, ethical, ontological, hierarchical, sexual, and so on) that posit the church is either this or that, rather than both this and yet somehow still that, just as the kingdom is somehow both “now” and “not yet.” Eschatological tensiveness rules out all dualisms that would have us imagine the church in fixed and rigid terms, as being not a pointer toward a coming kingdom but as the kingdom itself, present and full, standing outside socio-historical processes and concrete contexts, rather than as being deeply embedded within them. Relationally, this tensiveness affirms the narrative shape of individual human lives and, because it eschews dualism, it maintains that human beings cannot be authentically divided into classes, camps, or groups. Reality this side of eschatological wholeness is infinitely more complex and the various intersecting narratives of history and individual lives more densely interwoven than a strictly linear view of time or a dualistic understanding of creation affords. The complexity that springs from this radical pluralism and diversity is not an unfortunate by-product of finitude to be overcome but a relational reality to be embraced, as authentic relationship can emerge only from an encounter between the dissimilar, not the homogenizing melding of like with like, which is not relational at all but an absorption of one thing into another or the erasure of one entity by another.

As insights from the physical sciences make quite plain, such complexity and diversity are required in order for anything authentically new to emerge within creation.26 Openness to the emergence of the new is the second mark of anticipated eschatology. While God has a purpose for creation, how this promise will be actualized is open and undetermined. The definite timing and shape of the ultimate end is unknown, even to the Son of God (Matt. 24:36, Mark 13:32), but the tensiveness of eschatological thinking, which provides history and creation with its teleology, orients us theologically in the proper

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general direction: peace, justice, wholeness, flourishing, right relationship. Openness to God’s future as it emerges is crucial for anticipated eschatology. Each new emergence will be both continuous and discontinuous with what came before, and it must therefore be tested in light of God’s relational design in order to discern its consonance or dissonance with divine purpose and, accordingly, whether it should be embraced or rejected. Without openness to what is new, such a discernment is impossible and so, therefore, is movement toward God’s kingdom. Ecclesiologically, this means Christian communities must always be watching for the creative work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about the new (new possibilities, new insights, new opportunities to carry forward God’s mission), particularly in areas and in ways such a thing might be considered impossible. Relationally, it means remaining open to the possibility of finding the Holy Spirit to be at work in people and in modes that are surprising and challenging. Being open to the emergence of the new often places us in tremendously uncomfortable positions. It means constantly reassessing what we think we know about God, ourselves, and others. It does not mean throwing those perspectives overboard, but it might mean revising them in light of new emergences that strike us as being consonant with God’s larger purposes, no matter how painful that might be for us individually or collectively.

Vulnerability to the discomfort that comes with openness to the new is the risk that is the third mark of anticipated eschatology. Being open to the new means risking being wrong, being hurt, being turned upside-down. But this should be expected, since it is precisely what Jesus said that repentance, (re-)orientation toward the kingdom, is like. At the same time, taking this risk also opens the possibility of tremendous joy, of tasting a bit of the eschatological fullness or plenitude promised in the images of the great wedding banquet (Matt. 22:1–14) and the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Taking this risk, therefore, is required for catching a glimpse of the coming kingdom and for provisionally and partially experiencing it now. Ecclesiologically, this affirms the fact that the church, despite being led by the Holy Spirit, must take the risk of being wrong as it discerns and undertakes its work in the world. Moreover, it must expect, as a human and historical institution, that it always has only a partial and incomplete view of truth, that it will inevitably fall into error, that ongoing ecclesial repentance is necessary, and that continual development and change,
though these are difficult, are part and parcel of living out and into God's purposes. It is also to be expected that this risk opens the church to the possibility of experiencing great joy in its corporate life, often in unexpected and undreamed of ways. Relationally, this risk means acting with boldness in our personal interactions, but never in so self-assured a manner that we forget that we need the viewpoints of others, that we may be wrong, that we might cause our neighbor pain, that we might need to do things differently than the way we “always have” or in ways so deeply traditional that their correctness appears self-evident. This side of the eschaton, the circulation of injury and forgiveness will never end. But each admission of the partialness of our own perspectives, each confession of wrongdoing, each step toward change, each pledge to remain vulnerable and open to the new and to the other, despite the risks, is also an anticipation of and an opening for eschatological plenitude and joy.

Maintaining such an attitude is a sign of trust, the fourth mark of anticipated eschatology. Such a perspective affirms that the promises of God to bring creation to its ultimate fulfillment are dependable, despite the fact that we cannot begin to conceive adequately what this might mean in concrete terms. This trust is, before all else, trust in God to do what God has said God will do. We believe in the God whose name is “I Will Be What I Will Be” (Exod. 3:14), the God who leads us out of sin and death into newness of life, not only through baptism and incorporation into the salvific body of Christ, but as unique participants in the ongoing drama of a creation that God loves and will bring to perfection. Trust in the promises of such a God grounds other forms of trust. Ecclesiologically, this means that the church can risk being wrong because, ultimately, God's loving purpose will prevail. We do not have to be anxious about the future because it is a good future (Matt. 6:31–33), though this does not at all imply what we do is inconsequential. Quite the contrary, human beings can either enter into and work as agents of God's purpose and so participate in building up the kingdom and the joy that comes with it, or human beings can turn away from this and reject the fullness of life that God offers. The corporate decisions we make as Christian communities (churches) reflect this choice. Each decision we make is either a sign that we trust in the ultimate goodness of the character and purpose of God or that we do not. Relationally, the same is true. We can choose to trust that God is at work in the lives of others and so take the risk
of trusting in our fellow human beings, by always looking at them in the most positive possible light, interacting with them as full equals, worthy of love and respect, despite our differences, and lovingly serving them in the church and in the world, or we can consign ourselves to the darkness of strife, bitterness, and enmity with others. This is not only an existential decision. It is an eschatological one.

The trust that we place in God and that flows into our trust of others issues in profound eschatological hope, the fifth mark of anticipated eschatology. This hope takes the form of an expectation—or anticipation—of the fulfillment of God’s promise to deliver a creation straining toward its consummation (Rom. 8:22–25). It is a joy that not only arises from anticipating the (nearly) unimaginably good end of the narrative of creation, sin, redemption, and salvation, but it is a joy that is itself a proleptic foretaste, an anticipation, of that final fulfillment. If the risk (indeed, the certainty) of present failure can be roughly correlated to the “not yet” of the eschatological tension between the present and the future, our joyful hope in expecting the fulfillment of divine promise is connected to its “now.” Ecclesiologically, this joy erupts into Christian communities whenever the Holy Spirit moves to effect peace, justice, and authentic resurrection life within the church. It further manifests itself whenever that joy erupts out of the boundaries of Christian communities themselves, to flow powerfully into the world, bringing to it healing, peace, reconciliation, and a happiness rooted in lives lived in accordance with humanity’s created purpose (Rev. 22:1–2), just as the eschatologically significant healings Jesus performed brought the kingdom of God joyfully and powerfully to the spiritually and physically blind, lame, deaf, and mute (Luke 7:22). Relationally, hope and joy are intrinsically unifying. They are conditions to be shared, conditions that lead to and flow from interpersonal communion and interrelatedness. Expectation, closely linked to trust, requires searching out the unrepeatable and unique beauty of others and allowing them to search out ours, sharing their burdens and letting them shoulder some of ours. It means being aware that we are not now what we will be, but are joyfully living into the expectation that, in some way we cannot fathom, transformation is in the offing, a transformation in which the whole of creation is involved, held as it is, mysteriously, within the ultimately irresistible purposes of God. For those who live an anticipated eschatology, this hope is therefore a source of a deep, and deeply invigorating, joy.
Essentially, then, anticipated eschatology signifies a theological and practical commitment to living into and out of a vision of divinely perfected relationality. It is a tensive stance that affirms that, while the kingdom is not realized, it is nevertheless possible to proleptically and provisionally instantiate it now by maintaining an openness to the new that requires the risk of a vulnerability to being wrong and needing to change that we nevertheless are empowered to undertake because of the trust we have in a good God who promises to fulfill certain purposes for creation, a trust that takes the form of joyful hope in a plenitudinous future that, in our expectation of its coming, our ecclesial and personal acts anticipate and prefigure. The quality of relationality that springs from such an approach to communal and individual life is precisely what sin inhibits, what the kingdom that Jesus came preaching and manifesting reveals and makes possible, what the Holy Spirit impels and empowers us to achieve, and what Christian community is called to embody.

Resolving the Conundrum: The Anglican Covenant in Light of Eschatological Ecclesiology

Does the proposed Anglican Covenant promote the quality of intra- and inter-ecclesial relationality that emerges from an ecclesiology rooted in anticipated eschatology? More basically, does it even seek to do this? In 2008, the third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) issued a report, Communion, Conflict and Hope, that questions on eschatological grounds the ecclesiology of the Windsor Report, the document that most directly initiated the covenant process. Bruce Kaye, a member of the IATDC, maintains that CCH implicitly and diplomatically critiques Windsor’s ecclesiology for embodying an impulse (the genealogy of which he traces through recent IATDC reports) to theologically justify ridding the Communion of conflict through “unity” and “containment,” an impulse expressed concretely in the covenant proposal.

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28 CCH, 8, 16.
29 Bruce Kaye, “The Role of Eschatology in Recent Anglican Ecclesiology: A Study of Three Recent International Doctrine Commission Reports,” conference paper,
an eschatological hermeneutic steeped in Scripture, theological tradition, and historical context, CCH provides a subtle and nuanced ecclesiological perspective that can be used to suggest—in a direct fashion that CCH itself does not—how Windsor, while appearing to place a premium on ecclesial mutuality and interdependence, gave in to anxiety in the face of conflict by recommending strengthening the Communion's “bonds of affection” through enhanced centralized structures, an emphasis on uniformity, and instruments designed to “enforce” rather than fertilize ecclesial relationality. By contrast, CCH posits that true communion requires interaction despite and amid conflict and difference, not definitions or sanctions such as those on offer in the covenant. Communion is an eschatological context, an arena in which a fallible church struggles through the growth pains of a “dynamic catholicity” that keeps Christian community bonded yet always transforming. Communion is the space within which conflict is addressed. It is not a state characterized by the absence of contention, nor the result of agreement. Neither increased centralization nor coercion can effect it. Instead, communion affirms plurality and dispersed authority so that relationships forged in common hope, not structures, guide its corporate life and shape its kingdom-oriented mission.30

The IATDC, in writing its report, demonstrated practically the character of this eschatological ecclesiology based on relationship. The commission circulated widely a slate of theological questions about the Communion to which laity and clergy, parishes, dioceses and national churches, seminaries, think tanks, and other entities responded. Those responses became the basis of a report that led to a subsequent set of questions, likewise sent out for response. The IATDC did this three times before drafting CCH.31 Thus, the commission enacted its recommendation that the Communion remember that authority, which derives not from the church but from a lived and relational witness to the gospel in multiple contexts, is not centralized

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30 CCH, 5–6, 16, 26–27, 50–51.
31 CCH, 31–33.
but dispersed throughout its member churches, ascertainable only by discerning the *consensus fidelium* of the Communion.

Some might suggest that the covenant process, also intensely iterative and Communion-wide in scope, likewise exhibited this approach. But there are important differences. At no point were the provincial churches, dioceses, parishes, individuals, or allied institutions of the Communion as a whole asked for views on *Windsor* itself. (Those in charge of the “*Windsor* process” sought the perspectives of only the Communion’s primates and a limited number of individuals invited to make comment.) At no point was the Communion as a whole asked whether an Anglican covenant should be pursued. The Archbishop of Canterbury and high-ranking Communion officials treated both *Windsor* and its covenant idea as starting points for taking action, not as innovations in Anglican ecclesiology requiring careful consideration before receiving and implementing them. The institutional church proceeded as if it already knew what was best for the Communion by simply carrying forward the recommendations of the *Windsor Report*, including development and promulgation of an Anglican covenant. By contrast, the process that resulted in *CCH* began with virtually no unquestioned or unquestionable premises, and the IATDC embarked upon its journey without knowing where it would end. This process, the committee affirmed, was difficult, messy, and exasperating. Yet, quoting former Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey, it pointed out that because what is right may still be difficult, Anglicanism has always been “clumsy and untidy, it baffles neatness and logic.” This insight is affirmed by the tensive-ness, openness, risk, trust, and hope that characterize an anticipated eschatology, particularly as it was put into practice by the IATDC. The report that resulted from it is, accordingly, reflective of a commitment to those values, whereas *Windsor* and the covenant, markedly less shaped by such views, are not.

Eschatology does make a brief appearance in section two of the covenant, where member churches affirm “the imperative of God’s mission into which the Communion is called, a vocation and blessing in which each Church is joined with others in Christ in the work of establishing God’s reign.” Member churches must serve humanity,

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32 *CCH*, 15–16.
33 *CCH*, 28.
34 “The Anglican Communion Covenant,” 2.1.4.
“disclosing God’s reign through humble ministry to those most needy,” and must strive to bring justice to an unjust world “as the Church stands vigilantly with Christ proclaiming both judgment and salvation to the nations.” In tone and approach, this somewhat toothless eschatology derives directly from the insufficiently tensive treatment it receives in Windsor, which Kaye and CCH criticize. It is not an anticipated eschatology but a too-realized one that, as Gunton cautions, occurs in such instances; it betrays an ahistorical ecclesiology, an “ecclesiology from above,” one that, again, sees the institutional church as possessing all the answers, able to set the terms for every debate, and not requiring ongoing reformation.

Unlike the covenant and very much in keeping with Gunton’s recommendation, CCH advocates an ecclesiology marked by anticipated eschatology. As the report’s title indicates, it extols the virtue of maintaining relationship in and through conflict, struggling together toward an anticipated but unknown future, at great cost and risk, by joyfully trusting in the power of the Spirit, as the way to overcome the Communion’s relational crisis. Against Windsor’s “structuralist emphasis,” CCH takes a more “missional and relational approach” to communion that construes contention not negatively, as in Windsor, but as a divine gift providing an opportunity for Anglicans to grow together toward God’s promised future through their difficult relational work. In essence, CCH recommends that the Communion remind itself of and employ the resources granted to it by its history, character, and polity in order to be for itself and for the world the image of eschatologically shaped relationality it has the potential and calling to be. CCH theologically and practically demonstrates the value of Anglicanism’s “radically different” eschatological way of doing things.

35 “The Anglican Communion Covenant,” 2.2.2.c–d.
36 CCH, 23; and Kaye, “The Role of Eschatology in Recent Anglican Ecclesiology,” 7, 11.
38 Andrew Goddard, “Unity and Diversity, Communion and Covenant: Theological, Ecclesiological, Political and Missional Challenges for Anglicanism,” in Mark D. Chapman, ed., The Anglican Covenant: Unity and Diversity in the Anglican Communion (London: Mowbray, 2008), 58. Goddard does not claim the covenant shows evidence of this, as his essay predates the current version. But he does maintain that a covenant stemming from an overly realized eschatology would display these characteristics, as this one does.
One might ask why *Windsor* has been widely cited throughout the Communion while *CCH* has not. The covenant text itself refers to *CCH* in section 3.1.4, but only to support its own assertion that the authoritative “instruments” of the Communion have the responsibility to “consult with, respond to, and support” one another. However, the section of *CCH* the covenant cites (para. 113) is actually making the somewhat different point that such consultation, response, and support must be personal and collegial, that is, relational, rather than simply structural. Jeffrey Driver is exceptional in making much of *CCH*. But perhaps this is because his work, equally exceptionally, questions the covenant on the grounds of relational quality. Perhaps *Windsor* is influential because it seems to offer clear and definite solutions while *CCH*’s eschatologically open recommendations are considered too uncertain, risky, and demanding.

The questions most often put to the covenant can now be re-framed in terms of the values espoused by an ecclesiology rooted in anticipated eschatology, and the covenant conundrum can now be better assessed. The question of confessionalism, for example, takes on a somewhat different cast when it is recalled that such confessions were rejected by Anglicans at the time of the Reformation—when many churches were adopting them—as unduly restrictive and insufficiently comprehensive. For Anglicans, the preservation of ecclesial unity has depended not on subscription to a confession but precisely on not requiring such a subscription, and therefore allowing multiple viewpoints to remain in communion with one another. The tensive eschatological imagination of Anglicanism recognizes the need to risk remaining open to a range of ways of understanding God’s truth, confidently hoping in the well-placed trust in one’s co-religionists and in God’s plan for creation and the church’s role within it, and perceives clearly that the relational costs of confessionalism outweigh the short-term clarity and cleaniness that a statement of Anglican identity might seem to provide.

Likewise, the question of contractualism shifts when viewed from the perspective of an eschatological ecclesiology. Renowned canon-law expert Norman Doe makes clear that “covenants are not


contracts, but they have a contractual dimension, sharing fundamental similarities with contracts; they are juridical vehicles for spiritual relationships.”42 A covenant, then, cannot but have a contractual facet, even if it is not technically a contract, and there is no question that an ecclesiology that employs an exchange approach to relationality, no matter how subtle, has missed something essential in what it means to be “church.” The reason for this is not simply the mismatch between evangelical and secular models of political organization, though this is not inconsequential, but the relational impacts that this has on the actors involved. Ecclesial relationships are not based on reciprocation and exchange, on the supposed sureties of transactions defined by procedures and rules, but on costly love and a striving forward together in openness, trust, and hope toward a future in which an economy of reciprocation and exchange is obviated.43 Ecclesial relationality effected by recourse to a mechanism that defines Communion relationships in (even quasi-)contractual terms is eschatologically suspect.

Similarly, attempts to arrive at unity through the creation of an Anglican orthodoxy (even if a de facto one resulting from the cumulative unfolding of covenant processes rather than a de jure one stemming from an articulation of acceptable beliefs), inhibit the pursuit of the Communion’s eschatological vocation.44 There is no question that the Communion should always be working toward ever greater theological consensus. This is important for an ecclesial body’s sense of itself, its relations with its ecumenical partners, and its deep desire to live into its best understanding of the truth (as CCH makes plain). But agreement cannot be pursued instrumentally nor imposed externally. It is an organic outgrowth of dynamic relationship. It is open to finding God at work in the church and in the world in new and surprising (and challenging) ways, and affirms the radical plurality and historicity of creation. It is always partial and provisional (tensive), which is precisely why comprehensiveness and latitude have been valued over systematic theologies in the Anglican tradition, and why doctrinal

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43 See, for example, Kathryn Tanner, Economy of Grace (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005).
development and contextualization have been consistently affirmed over a conservative traditionalism.

The question of centralization essentially concerns replacing dispersed relational authority among the Communion’s member churches with a small committee responsible for assessing those churches’ theological and practical actions for consonance with the covenant’s terms. How can such an arrangement “be reconciled with an institution that understands itself to be led by the Spirit and not by political expediency”?\(^{45}\) Adopting the tactics of power politics is hardly appropriate for the eschatological church, which, as Gunton says, “does things differently from other institutions,” and this mechanism would almost certainly strain relations further rather than repair them. Provinces at odds with others would inevitably attempt to leverage this centralized power to have another church’s views or actions effectively anathematized by the imposition of what the covenant calls “relational consequences.” Paul Bagshaw goes even further:

> Leaving all theology aside there’s a simple matter of group psychology. Say Province A is convinced that Province Z has stepped beyond the bounds of orthodoxy. It asks a court—or Covenant mechanism—to determine that Province Z is heterodox. The process decides Province Z is not unorthodox. Result: Province A is livid, they refuse to accept the finding, and instead attack the whole process. In effect Province A cedes authority over doctrine to the central mechanism only when it supports their own \textit{a priori} convictions, never when it finds against them.\(^{46}\)

It can be plausibly argued that something like the scenario Bagshaw describes was enacted when the Global South primates, initially supportive of the covenant idea and of centralizing authority not in the Standing Committee, as prescribed by the current covenant, but in the primates themselves as a body, as \textit{Windsor} recommended, withdrew their support for the covenant and in some cases resigned their membership on the Standing Committee in protest when, during the covenant drafting process, the final text failed to take a sufficiently


confessional form and when “covenant monitoring” was moved from the primates to the Standing Committee. Because they disliked how it turned out, they turned against the process. This hardly bodes well for the ability of structures and processes to maintain good interprovincial relations when they are conscripted into political battles. Moreover, lodging in a Communion body the power to impose “relational consequences” upon member churches will forestall any need for parties in disagreement to engage lovingly and directly with each other about their differences. They will simply refer the problem to the central committee for “arbitration.” In all these instances, a centralized structure insulates those in conflict from one another and therefore forecloses on any need for those in conflict to actually listen to and bear with each other, stunting their mutual growth. It also increases the possibility of each demonizing the other, a destructive situation that direct, face-to-face dialogue often minimizes, and one that contravenes the values of an eschatological ecclesiology based on openness, mutual trust, and joy, even—and especially—in the face of adversity.

Related to this, one must question whether the threat of sanctions is proper to the maintenance of a healthy Anglican Communion. How can a covenant that aims to effect relationship through the imposition of punishments or the threat of punishment when disagreements arise, therefore effectively closing down debate, reflect the fellowship the Communion ought to exhibit? If the account in CCH is to be trusted, and if it is true that the Anglican Communion has a vocation for living out and into an eschatological ecclesiology marked by a certain mode of relationality, then the covenant, in its threats of sanction rather than facilitation of dialogue, is deeply, and perhaps irredeemably, problematic.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has expressed frustration that the covenant has not gained more widespread support, stating that the covenant “does not invent a new orthodoxy or a new system of doctrinal policing or a centralised authority, quite explicitly declaring that it does not seek to override any province’s canonical autonomy. After such a number of discussions and revisions, it is dispiriting to see the Covenant still being represented as a tool of exclusion and tyranny.”

However, the reason so many are still uneasy about the covenant may
be that they have questions about the covenant they are not asking directly and that the Archbishop and other covenant supporters do not appear to be hearing beneath the questions that are being asked. It may be that covenant critics, despite not always using this language, have perceived the true “relational consequences” that adoption of the covenant might effect: a reduction rather than a strengthening of precisely the quality of relationship that defines an authentically communal and eschatological ecclesiology.

John Saxbee, Bishop of Lincoln, has observed that the Anglican Communion does not need a covenant because the Anglican Communion is a covenant. It is a mode of common life that carries the covenantal promise of God’s future within it. Relationship is its medium. Perhaps this is why Mark Chapman concludes that a written covenant may, in the end, fall short of what its advocates hope, that what is needed is more life together rather than the false security of a covenant. “There is no substitute,” he writes, “for worshipping, studying, learning, and eating together. Indeed, it may be that companionship is a better way forward than [a] Covenant, and will lead to a far deeper sense of communion.” For precisely this reason, interpersonal and inter-ecclesial efforts such as the Communion’s Continuing Indaba Project seem more promising for fostering communion than the covenant, and far more in keeping with the character of Christian community informed by an anticipated eschatology.

Can a written covenant effect “unity, reconciliation, recommitment, trust, identity, clarity, understanding, order, stability, mission and witness” better than lived covenantal communion? Can a covenant make the bonds of affection “explicit and forceful” better than a common life lived relationally, in eschatological hope? Can a covenant nurture such relationship or does it rather inhibit it by placing too much confidence in definitions (that turn out to be too limited and ill-defined), clear processes (that turn out to be somewhat less than

51 Norman Doe contends these are the goals of a covenant. Doe, An Anglican Covenant, 53, 182.
52 Clatworthy, “No Covenant Please.”
clear), and procedural structures (that turn out to be incapable of delivering the stability they promise)—none of which appear to be appropriate ecclesiologically in the first place? The best approach for the Anglican Communion is not a written covenant but rediscovering and recommitting to the hard relational work that the Anglican Communion as a covenant has historically demanded and that is still its vocation: the arduous task of engaging in the untidy, contentious, and costly—yet open, trusting, and joyful—relationality that is the hallmark and gift of Anglican Communion ecclesiology, and of any ecclesiology that imagines Christian community from the standpoint of eschatological hope.
