

DIOCESE AND COVENANT:

Reflections on Dallas, its History and Future

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“Every Diocese is an independent and sovereign state, held in the unity of the Catholic Church by its Episcopate, according to the rule of St. Cyprian.” With these words, Bishop Alexander Charles Garrett – our first Bishop and, be it noted, once the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church - addressed the organizing Convention of the Diocese of Dallas in 1895. “The Diocese thus becomes the ecclesiastical unit, a full and perfect integer sufficient of itself for all purposes of growth and development.”

It was for the privilege of so organizing and of taking the key next step, that of a selection of Bishop, that the body was convened, he said.

Bishop Garrett looked back on the twenty-one years of the existence of the then Missionary District of North Texas, and the principles upon which he had led them. And then he turned to look at the state of the Church as it then existed so that the future could be embraced and the people of the new Diocese would understand what opportunities and challenges awaited them. Thus they stood at a crossroads.

The business of that organizing Convention, the Primary Convention as it is called in the Journal, lasted through two very long days and nights. The business was restricted. The Convention sat, almost through the whole of it, as a Committee of the Whole. And the business that was done centered on the writing of a Constitution. The members of Convention spoke to each other directly – lay and clergy alike. The work of various other committees was submitted to them and they debated and discussed the drafts of the Constitution. But this was no pro-forma exercise. There were 22 lay delegates and twenty clergy in attendance. This afforded each the opportunity to be heard and to have input into the final product of that Convention.

I wonder if that relatively small group could have anticipated that their labors would grow as they have. The Missionary District of Northern Texas, which was created by the General Convention in 1874, included all of the territory that now comprises three distinct dioceses: our own, the Diocese of Northwest Texas (organized in 1958), and the Diocese of Fort Worth (which was organized in 1982), and parts of a fourth, the Diocese of Oklahoma. Bishop Garrett reported to that Convention that there were 2123 communicants in 13 parishes and 28 organized missions, with 1297 Sunday school children and 180 teachers. The Endowment fund for the support of the Episcopate totaled \$37,800. How things have changed.

I recall this first Convention to your attention for two reasons, both of them relevant to our meeting here.

I.

First, that first convention serves as a model for us. I have this year yearned for the opportunity for you as the leaders of your congregations and this Diocese as a whole to be able, like our forebears, to speak to one another. Three years ago, I travelled with some assistants, to every parish and mission and mission station to ask you some questions and to hear where you are. I came away with a renewed affection and respect for the work each of you is doing in your different contexts. How transforming it might be, I thought, if this could be done on a larger scale – if there were the time and space for permitting us to speak to one another about our challenges, our joys, our disappointments, our values. With the completion of the last General Convention, it seemed to me to be useful for this idea to be given concrete shape.

I have already been called upon to visit with a number of Vestries, and to hear from them their concerns over the actions of that Convention. Some of our parishes have lost members because of those actions. On the other hand, some of our congregations – some of you – will have rejoiced at the very actions that have offended or dismayed others. We are not a monochrome Diocese.

At the same time, we have been fairly clear over the last many years, indeed since before I came to be your Bishop some 17 years ago, that we take seriously our apostolic tradition and communion and that we value our place among Anglicans worldwide. We have affirmed, for example, various statements and resolutions emanating from the Irenaeus Fellowship of Bishops, the Lambeth Conferences, the Primates Meetings, the Windsor Report, and so forth. We have cherished our missionary engagement in various places around the world and have welcomed numerous bishops and archbishops from abroad who have come to share their work in our world. I believe many of us have been longing for and waiting patiently, I might add, for the development of the Anglican Covenant we have heard so much about.

So, it seemed to me, the time for suspending “business as usual” and spending some time in conversation about where we are and how we see our future would be especially helpful. It is to that work I call you at this Convention.

We have planned this Convention around a series of three talks concerned with the Anglican Covenant. I ask you to sit, not with the delegates of your parish, but at tables with those of other congregations. I ask you to listen to the talks, and then to speak to one another about what you have heard and what it means or might mean to you and the brothers and sisters in Christ whom you represent.

The point of these times together is not to decide anything. I have asked that we hold all resolutions of any substance to another time when we can engage in our customary format of debate. For this time we have together, we are to share with one another our thoughts, questions, feelings as appropriate, and concerns. We are not here to argue or to persuade. If anything, we are here to appreciate: literally, as the dictionary puts it, “to grasp the nature, worth, quality, or significance of something; to recognize with gratitude; to judge with heightened perception or understanding.” In our case, I would hope that we grasp the nature, worth and significance of who we are, who we are to one another and where we stand; that we recognize with gratitude the ministry we share together; and that

we grow in the perception and understanding of the character of our Diocese and the proposed Anglican Covenant.

Again, we are not here to do something in particular, to take some proposed action. In this connection, during your conversations, I would hope that you stick with “I” statements: that you speak with one another about your own perceptions, feelings, and reflections on what we discuss. I ask you to listen respectfully to what others say, and respond both honestly and respectfully as well. As St. Paul exhorts us, “Speak the truth in love.” (Eph 4.15) Or again, “love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor.” (Rom 12.10)

There will be three talks. I will give you some light on how this Diocese came to be organized, and what at that time and since has been the classic understanding of the polity of the Episcopal Church and the place of the Diocese. Mr. Mark McCall will again address some of the specific issues of Episcopal Polity and how we might approach the Anglican Covenant if and when that is our desire. The Rev. Dr. Philip Turner will give you some understanding of the shaping of the proposed Anglican Covenant and its theological underpinnings, and its relation and possible effects in the Anglican Communion.

Admittedly, our Diocesan Convention is a good deal larger than that first organizing Convention. The size complicates our ability to converse with each other, offering us some difficulties they did not have to deal with. But I believe we can overcome those difficulties and make fruitful use of this time if we truly desire to do so and determine to offer ourselves fully to this process. It is my fervent prayer that we will go away from this time with new insights into one another, our diocese, and the possibilities of a meaningful Covenant that will renew and strengthen our life and that of the Anglican Communion as a whole.

II.

I mentioned two reasons for recalling Bishop Garrett’s words at the first Convention. Let me now turn to the second reason. That second reason has to do with the very nature and character of Dioceses in the Episcopal Church, and our Diocese in particular.

We have heard a great deal about our unique polity in the Episcopal Church over the last several years. Polity is just a fancy word for how we do things – what rules and principles govern our corporate actions, and what structures are involved in governing. Perhaps more pointedly, the Greek word from which we get our English term connotes the rights and obligations inherent in being part of a larger body. St. Paul uses this very term when he describes the Gentile Christians. Once, he said, we were excluded from citizenship (*politeia*) in Israel, excluded from the covenants of promise which God had made to them. But now, in Christ, we are made fellow citizens (*sumpolitai*), fellow members of God’s household.

So what characterizes this “unique polity”? Bishop Garrett understood this polity, this citizenship, in a particular way. “Every Diocese is an independent and sovereign state.”

It is evident that Bishop Garrett did not see this striking statement as something new. Indeed, he looked back to the founding of the Church by her Lord and its spread as the basis for the statement. "Responsibility," he said, "involves power." It would have been a vain thing if Jesus had commanded his Apostles to go into all the world and to proclaim the Gospel, if at the same time he did not commit to them the necessary authority to do so. He gave them the right and the power "to teach, ordain, confirm, place, support and [discipline]" within their places of responsibility. This was the mode of operations in the earliest Church – a community of men and women carrying out the work of their Lord in each location, but joined in their common sense of mission.

Sovereignty, the power or authority to work and order a common life in a territory, was based both upon the mission of the Church and in turn the practical necessities of the Church. The mission was to proclaim Christ and to make his saving work known. This precious, life-giving task required a common message, a common language, and an authoritative center. That center was found "in the Apostles, and after them the Bishops," wrote Garrett. The practical necessity of growth in and toward the Lord was provided by the laity and clergy in union with their bishop. We catch this dual sense in our own day when, at the ordination of Bishops we declare that the Bishop is to be one with the Apostles in proclaiming the resurrection and interpreting the Gospel; and in our baptism when we promise to "continue in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship".

Sovereignty as Bishop Garrett uses it means being a "perfect integer" – the whole of the Church in a given place. His frequent references to the "primitive Church" reflects both the Catholic and the Anglican understanding that the diocese, not the parish, is the local Church, and that within its borders it is competent and equipped to do all that the risen Christ might ask of it. And, I think, this learned and eloquent shepherd had his perspective on the early Church right: when we look at, for example, the Acts of the Apostles, what we find are Christians carrying out their mission in each place with integrity and autonomy – in this sense sovereignty – but with a concern as well for the work of the whole. When the Gospel is first carried to Samaria, Jerusalem sends out no less than Peter and John to "inspect" the work begun there by Philip. But having done so, they leave that work to carry on. In Antioch, Christians first began to reach out to Gentiles in a systematic way. So great is the success of this witness, that Jerusalem again sends out an inspector, Barnabas. But he does not reign in these enthusiastic missionaries – rather, he supports them and calls upon Paul to assist him in that work. When controversies are introduced into the community, the community itself sends Paul and Barnabas to consult with Jerusalem. And the Church in Jerusalem confirms and upholds the work of mission among the Gentiles, addressing the Church there as "brothers."

These instances demonstrate what sovereignty means. In the customary understanding of "hierarchy," power flows from the top down. There is a supreme authority – be it a person or a curia or some combination of these – that exercises power over all subordinate units. In the New Testament, however, we do not see either James, the Lord's Brother, or the assembly of apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem acting as a pope and curia. What we see are communities acting with independence in their own spheres or territories, but with mutual concern and counsel over matters of larger than local concern. This is what Bishop Garrett calls "the confirmatory action of conciliar ratification."

And this, in turn, is how our first Bishop understood our polity in the Episcopal Church. The Diocese of Dallas was moving from being a creation of the General Convention – a Missionary District – into a new status – a sovereign Diocese of the Episcopal Church. It was a move from childhood to maturity as the Bishop saw it.

But the Bishop was not alone in this understanding. Hudson Stuck, the first Dean of our Cathedral, preached the sermon at that Primary Convention Eucharist. Stuck was a remarkable man of learning and spirituality in his own right. He was a clarion voice in calling the Church to address the needs of the community around it. He would go on to become an estimable missionary of extraordinary commitment and competence in Alaska, and in fact would be the first man to put together a successful assault on Mount Denali as he called it, Mount McKinley, the highest peak on the North American Continent.

But his sermon at that convention reached remarkable heights of its own. With a clarity of vision and a comprehensive grasp of Church history, he put our Diocese and its new status on the same foundation that Bishop Garrett had. “For consider that every organized diocese is essentially an independent autonomous portion of the church, having all that is necessary for a church,” Stuck declaimed. “By itself it may subsist and grow and flourish, self-governed and self-contained. The diocese is the true unit—complete, valid, authentic.” It was then an act of *self-creation* – the dignity and nobility of which was not lost on those who sat down to make a constitution and elect a bishop of their own choosing.

Once again, Stuck, like Garrett made it clear that autonomy – sovereignty in the sense they were using it – did not mean go-it-alone. The Lambeth Conference of Bishops was still relatively a new thing when this Diocese created itself. But the lessons of Church history were clear: “The fullness of the apostolic power, to which I have referred again and again as the great deposit of authority, resides not in each individual bishop, but in the complete apostolic college. It resides in the whole body of bishops.” Bishops were the focus of unity not only within the Diocese, but among the dioceses as well. This was the conciliar approach that Garrett had emphasized.

We hear much today about the “autonomy” of the provinces, and therefore also the necessary and rightful autonomy of the Episcopal Church. But within our own province, we hear a different sort of thought: that the province is the supreme authority over every diocese because dioceses are created by the General Church. Our own history shows this not to be the case, however.

In 1874, about 100,000 square miles of north Texas (and including a little bit of the Oklahoma territory) was split off from the Diocese of Texas and made a Missionary District, as we have seen. In the Canons, this was called an “unorganized” territory. A Missionary Bishop was assigned to this “unorganized” territory. Under the Constitution of the Episcopal Church, the *organization of a Diocese* originates with a Convocation of Clergy and Laity called together by the designated bishop “for that purpose.” (Art V, Sec 1) The writing of a Constitution and Canons is the sign and instrument of organization. It is this event that creates the legal entity.ⁱ The Constitution of the Episcopal Church requires that an “unqualified accession” be made by the new Diocese. When that is done, the

General Convention gives its consent, a certified copy of the Diocesan Constitution and Canons is given to the Secretary of the General Convention, and the Executive Council gives its approval. Thereupon the Diocese is “admitted” to union with the General Convention. (See also Title I, Canon 10.4)

Precisely this process was followed when this Diocese organized itself. Nothing in the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church speaks of General Convention creating or erecting dioceses. Furthermore, where they speak, they make clear that the organization and integrity of the Diocese is a purely local matter, aside, of course, from the act of admission. That is to say, the Diocese organizes itself and sets out for itself the procedures which will carry out its work – including, most notably, the process by which it elects its bishops. This approach was true for the organization of dioceses back in 1895 and continues, for the most part unchanged, up to this present day.

In fact, it was characteristic of the founding principles laid down for the Episcopal Church by the Rev. William White, who later became one of our first bishops. In a booklet issued in August of 1782, entitled *The Case for the Episcopal Church in the United States Considered*, he advocated for a course of action by the churches that traced their heritage to the Church of England just weeks after the war for Independence had been, to all intents and purposes, won.ⁱⁱ He believed that immediate and decisive action by these churches would be the only thing that would preserve them in the tradition of their worship and spiritual mission.

White sketched a framework in which the continuation of the life of the Church could be assured: that the churches organize themselves into a voluntary association, that the local churches would be equal, that they would be represented in small districts (he did not yet use the word diocese), which in turn would send representatives to larger bodies. The underlying principle of these larger bodies was that they would only decide on matters, for example Canons and Prayer Book, which served to make the communion one and which, significantly, could not be effected at the lowest possible level. As he put it: “One natural consequence of this distinction, will be to retain in each church every power that need not be delegated for the good of the whole.” With respect to what would come to be called the General Convention, he wrote: “The use of this and the preceding representative bodies is to make such regulations, and receive appeals in such matters only, as shall be judged necessary for their continuing one religious communion.”

In fact, the organization of “districts” or dioceses preceded the formation of the General Convention. From the 1760s, local gatherings of clergy and often laity, called either convocations or conventions, developed. One such convention in Maryland in 1780 provides us with the first clear instance of the use of The Protestant Episcopal Church as the name that would be eventually adopted for our branch of the Church. White himself called for and presided over a meeting of state representatives in May 1784 to consider what his plan set forth. A Convention of as many states as possible was set for October. In the latter part of that same month, White presided over a Convention of the churches in Pennsylvania. That Convention adopted the following principles:

1. The Church is independent of all foreign or domestic civil authority.

2. The Church is competent to regulate its own affairs.
3. The Church's liturgy should conform as close as possible to that of England.
4. Ministry should consist of three orders: Bishops, priests, deacons.
5. Canons should be made by both clergy and laity.
6. No powers should be delegated to a general ecclesiastical government except such as could not be conveniently exercised by State conventions.

The larger Convention planned in May did indeed take place in October. That Convention ratified the principles adopted by Pennsylvania as their own, and then planned the First General Convention for September 1785.

The formation of the Episcopal Church is striking. It appears that the only model for such a process as was in fact followed was that presented by the recent history of the colonies themselves. It was John Adams who, in the spring of 1776, had suggested that the "The Colonies should all assume the Powers of Government in all its branches first."ⁱⁱⁱ Then they should confederate with each other and "define the Powers of Congress next." Only after all the pieces of government were in place, Adams argued, should Independence be declared. The assembly of the colonial representatives in fact adopted a resolution calling for the creation by each colony of its own constitution. This was the only part of Adams' plan that was carried out before Independence was declared. But it worked.

White's proposals seemed to follow that example. We often hear it said that the framers of our Church Constitution were the same people who in large part framed the Constitution of the United States. But that is simply not true. In fact, before the tumultuous events that led to the framing of a Constitutional government for the United States in 1787 and 1788, the Episcopal Church was already coming together. Its framework reflected rather the Confederation of the States than what would become the United States. And the notion of a centralized authority was clearly unwanted and unneeded in both confederations.

As White wrote in his *Case*, "On the subject of government, whether civil or ecclesiastical, there is great truth and beauty in the following observation of the present Bishop of St. Asaph, 'The great art of governing consists in not governing too much.'"

That was then, as the saying goes, this is now. But it is important to understand that the principle that "No powers should be delegated to a general ecclesiastical government except such as could not be conveniently exercised by State [or diocesan] conventions" has been a part of our basic self-understanding from the very beginning.

In the 1950s a number of books called the Church's Teaching Series were published by the Episcopal Church. Powell Mills Dawley, an eminent Church historian at the time wrote about *The Episcopal Church and Its Work*. Recalling the organization of the Episcopal Church, he wrote, "The first dioceses existed separately from each other before they agreed to the union in 1789 into a national church. That union,

like the original federation of our states, was one in which each diocese retained a large amount of autonomy, and today the dioceses still possess an independence far greater than that characteristic in most other Churches with episcopal polity.” Dawley then goes on to say, “Diocesan participation in any national program or effort, for example, must be voluntarily given; it cannot be forced. Again, while the bishop’s exercise of independent power within the diocese is restricted by the share in church government possessed by the Diocesan Convention and the Standing Committee, his independence in respect to the rest of the Church is almost complete.”^{iv}

The latest revision of the authoritative commentary on the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, by Whyte and Dykman, describes the earliest history of our Church in these words: “At the close of the American Revolution, the leaders of the former Church of England in the colonies . . . organized the separate and scattered Anglican parishes into independent Churches in each of the new states.” It repeats this understanding when describing the Churches as “completely independent.” It then describes the national structure they created in Convention as “a federation of equal and independent Churches in the several states.”

And to conclude this review, as late as 1987, in an official document filed with the Internal Revenue Service, the then Treasurer of the Episcopal Church wrote, “The Episcopal Church is comprised of 117 autonomous dioceses, 98 of which are domestic and 19 foreign.”^v

The words independent, sovereign and autonomous as applied to dioceses seems strange to our modern, corporate ears. And yet, these are the precise words used to describe our “unique polity” since the beginning. And the reason is easy to find. William White, again in his *Case for the Episcopal Churches*, drew attention to the differences between the organization of the Church of England and the situation in the States. In the mother country, dioceses were preeminent and formed congregations. Here the very opposite situation existed. The congregations who formed dioceses cherished their independence and demanded that their dioceses be largely self-governing. Arguing that the Episcopate would be both desirable and traditional among the former Anglicans, he nevertheless took pains to assure his readers that “this government will not be attended with the danger of tyranny, either temporal or spiritual.” Speaking again of tyranny, he opined that had the Church at Rome been ruled by a presbytery instead of a pope, given its riches and sense of “dominion,” this corporate body would have been as powerful as any single individual. What would White think today of his Episcopal Church, where the claim is made that the General Convention is the “supreme” authority in this Church?

What are we to make of this review?

There is a dignity to being a Diocese of this Church. The word “integer” used by both Bishop Garrett and Dean Stuck means “whole.” The Diocese is the whole Church gathered in a given location. This does not mean that it is ALL of the Church, for surely that is not true. But it is whole in that it possesses the fullest expression of the ministry possible – laity, bishops, priests and deacons gathered for the worship of God and the proclamation of the Gospel. We are not, as I have said in many places over the last few years, merely the local franchise of a great American Corporation. That

was not how our forebears thought of themselves. It is not how we should think of ourselves here, today, either.

On its day of organization, Bishop Garrett brimmed with excitement and bright hope. He said that the people of this newly formed Diocese were the equals of any in the Church and across the nation. They had the vitality, the intelligence, the grit and the faithfulness to carry forward the mission of God. “For all these reasons, and many others which might be mentioned, I was anxious that you should have full right” of a Diocese, he proclaimed.

Dean Stuck virtually sang in the poetry of his sermon: “no wonder that we who are assembled here today, with joy and gladness and thankful hearts, to put once for all our ecclesiastical government in the old mold in the ancient diocesan form . . . Now shall we take rank with Antioch and Jerusalem and Rome and Canterbury, as autonomous, as complete, as self-governing; in the ancient mold and form of the original spiritual principalities of the church.”

These are not the voices of either subservience or party spirit. They see the link that united them with their spiritual forebears, just as we should. And they were ready to undertake all that it meant to be the Church in their situation, just as we should.

This leads me to my next point. The emphasis on both the dignity and autonomy of the Diocese was firmly rooted in a sense of mission. From the outset, William White understood as urgent the need to get on with the mission of the Church – in his terms, “that the worship of God and the instruction and reformation of the people are the principal objects of ecclesiastical discipline.” This sense of mission underlay his proposal for the structure of the Episcopal Church as a whole. It also underlay the creation of this Diocese.

All mission is ultimately local. This is so even when we reach out from where we live to places in the farthest parts of the world. The Church’s mission can be put in no better terms, I think, than that of Archbishop William Temple: “Evangelism is the presentation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in such ways that persons may be led to believe in him as Savior and follow him as Lord within the fellowship of his Church.” It is always persons engaging persons, disciples making disciples – or at least opening the way to discipleship. And the larger dimension of this mission embraces not just individuals, but communities, societies and the world as a whole. Christians have always seen that, as William Reed Huntington put it, “this single Gospel has a two-fold outlook”, namely the transformation of individuals and society as a whole.^{vi} But the first impulse is not out there, but right here, in the place where God has put us.

From the time of the apostles, communities were formed to work together in reaching out to their neighbors. I think this basic mode of operation can be traced back to the rudimentary form of organization which Jesus himself instituted among his followers. At any rate, it came to form the basic structure of the Church that has persisted throughout the centuries. The frontline of the work of the Church is the Diocese and always has been – a community fully equipped to support and extend its work of proclaiming the Gospel in the particularities of the culture in which it lives.

The danger, of course, is that the diocese, like the parishes that make it up, can forget that while it is autonomous and fully able to carry the whole of the Gospel into action in its context, it may also lose touch with the fullness of the message and the largeness of the purpose for which it was sent. Dioceses must, as we have already seen, act in conciliar ways. The Diocese reminds all its parts- clergy and congregations - that they do not exist for themselves. So the dioceses together serve the same function for each diocese. We cannot go-it-alone. The mission of the Church is too compelling, too urgent for a go-it-alone mentality. This conciliar mode is the genius, I think, of the Anglican Way.

And that brings me to the third thing I think we can learn from our past.

The very nature of the Church is covenantal. We should know this without having to make it explicit. Everytime we celebrate the Eucharist, we hear the words of our Lord, “take, drink, this is my blood of the new covenant.” Indeed, the calling of the People of Israel and the calling of the Body of Christ represent God’s gracious gift of a covenantal relationship that supports and steers and saves us.

A covenant is something higher and better than a code. It was a significant accomplishment for the founders of the Episcopal Church in these States to forge a Constitution and Prayer Book and preserve their heritage by these means for future generations – including us. But it was even more significant that they were able to establish trust and commitment and carry out this work on the basis of a covenant that respected the differences, the dignities and the missional imperatives of one another.

A covenant is nothing other than the expression of the expectations as well as the obligations that people have of each other. How odd to hear some people protest that we do not need a covenant now – that indeed, a covenant is unAnglican. For over a generation, several Archbishops of Canterbury have asked Anglicans what it means to be a communion, and have done more than ask – have urged Anglican leaders to give serious consideration and careful reflection to how we live with each other. Serious efforts have been made in the series of Lambeth Conferences and meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council to do this. Fundamental to these efforts is the recognition that we do indeed have a covenantal relationship. The question is not whether we need a covenant, but what the nature of the covenant is that we already have – that already in some sense underlies being an Anglican.

And this question has become more urgent precisely because the bonds of communion have been stretched to the breaking point. It might be all well and good to live in a covenant that never needs to be made clear. But in times of crisis, where trust is strained, where expectations and obligations go unmet, where in fact actions are taken that adversely affect one’s brothers and sisters in covenant, then it is time to look carefully to the ties that bind us and ask what they are and what they require of us.

This is why we are dealing with the proposed Anglican Covenant here. The proposed covenant is not something external to us – something being imposed upon us – something foreign to being an Anglican, or an Episcopalian within the the Anglican Communion. Far from it. It is simply the attempt in this time of crisis to spell out in frank terms what the ground of our communion, our fellowship,

our being related to one another is. The question before this body is really pretty simple: is what you read in the covenant an expression of the faith and commitment you hold?

Another odd thing I hear has to do with autonomy. There are voices who fireceley champion the autonomy of the Episcopal Church with respect to the rest of the Communion. By “autonomy” they mean, it appears, “no one can tell us what to do.” At the same time, however, these same voices will tell us that only the Provinces can adopt or ratify the covenant, and that dioceses cannot. But in our peculiar polity, as we have seen, dioceses have the same if not even a greater claim to autonomy than our particular province. In fact, I have seen time and time again bishops and dioceses rise up to declare that they will not be bound by resolutions of the General Convention that did not go their way. (Just think back to the so-called “moratoria” voted on in the Convention of 2006!)

If the resolutions of General Convention cannot bind the dioceses to certain terms of communion life, they certainly cannot deter dioceses from committing to them.

But all of this begins to look like the squabbles children have with each other from time to time. Autonomy means simply “you’re not the boss of me!” But there is a grown-up world out there that demands a deeper and more thoughtful kind of engagement. What does it mean to be the Church of Christ? What is entailed in being an Anglican Christian?

We in the Diocese of Dallas *are* the Church. We have a goodly heritage that is at one and the same time Anglican, Episcopalian, and Texan. We have an urgent mission to fulfill. And we are doing this while responding to and working with other Christians in our communities, in our nation, in our denomination and in our world. We do not seek to divide or separate, but we seek greater unity and clarity and commitment in the cause of Christ.

We possess, furthermore, not only the authority to consider and respond to the proposed Anglican Covenant, but the moral and spiritual imperative to do so. For this covenant concerns us, individually and corporately, and it concerns our future.

ⁱ This matter is covered more extensively in a document entitled Bishops’ Statement on the Polity of the Episcopal Church, available at <http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2009/04/bishops-statement-on-the-polity-of-the-episcopal-church/>.

ⁱⁱ The British at Yorktown, Virginia, under the command of Gen. Charles Cornwallis, surrendered on Oct 17, 1781. On Feb 27, 1782, the House of Commons voted against pursuing the war in America. King George was subsequently given authority to negotiate a peace. Peace talks began on April 12, 1782. The last engagement between American and British troops took place on August 27, 1782, in South Carolina.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ellis, *American Creation*, p. 49 f.

^{iv} Dawley, *The Episcopal Church and Its Work*, p.115 f.

^v In a letter dated July 15, 1987; signed by Ellen F. Cooke; cited in legal briefing at:
<http://www.fwepiscopal.org/downloads/091509AnswerstoQuestionsoftheCourt.pdf>

^{vi} Huntington, The Church Idea, p. 3.