

Interpreting the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia in the light of a Christ-centred disposition.

An exploratory paper

A contribution to **conversations** on *Ecumenism*

By John Littleton 4/11/2018

Nineth Draft

Introductory summary

The Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia has three sections: the Fundamental Declarations; the Ruling Principles; and the Government of the Church, as well as the various alterations to the Constitution listed in the Canons. As required by their leadership position, Church leaders often make decisions about inter-church relationships based on the Constitution. Bishops, advised by Canon Law lawyers, have, for example, decided not to license an ordained member of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), because, on their interpretation of the Constitution, the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) is not in communion with the UCA.

This paper argues that such church leaders have placed too much emphasis on the Ruling Principles and Governance and too little emphasis on the Fundamental Declarations of the Constitution. The third Fundamental Declaration opens with the primary conviction that “This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ...”, and the second states that “This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith.” It is the contention of this paper that the Fundamental Declarations contain sufficient doctrinal, biblical and sacramental information for Anglican leaders and Synods to decide that the ACA can be a Church in communion with the UCA. To support that view biblical, ecumenical, educational and theological arguments and reflections are presented.

The conclusion reached recommends that the Constitution, when inter-church matters are considered, needs to be interpreted in the light of the “words of Christ” in the Gospel according to St John 17:21, “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me”. These words should be honoured by a church whose Fundamental Declarations include the undertaking that “This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ.”

The basic position articulated in this paper is that those Anglican Church leaders in the past who have used the Constitution as grounds for not recognising the ordination of members of the UCA, have over reached by placing too strong an emphasis on the Ruling Principles and Governance and under achieved by placing too little emphasis on the Christ-centred disposition promised in the Fundamental Declarations of the Constitution of The Anglican Church of Australia.

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BACKGROUND SCENARIO

The Three Fundamental Declarations of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) in the Constitution

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church of Christ from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.
2. This Church receives all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.
3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

Documents arising from Anglican-Uniting Church dialogue

The fruits of the Anglican-Uniting Church Dialogue over the past three decades are expressed in a number of publications including the following three documents which are available on the website for the Anglican Church of Australia.
<https://www.anglican.org.au/uniting-church-conversation>

1. *For the Sake of the Gospel: Mutual recognition of Ordained Ministries in the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia*, 2001.
2. *An Anglican-Uniting Church Covenant of Association: Anglican Church of Australia-Uniting Church in Australia Joint Working Group*, 2010.
General Synod 2010 welcomed the report of the working group, but did not endorse the Covenant of Association.
3. *Weaving a New Cloth: Anglican and Uniting Churches Working Together*, 2014.
This document outlined a framework for local cooperation between Anglican and Uniting churches throughout Australia. At the Sixteenth Session of Anglican National General Synod in 2014, the following resolution was passed:
That the General Synod:
 1. receives the Report "Weaving a New Cloth: Anglican and Uniting Churches Working Together";
 2. commends the Report to Dioceses for their further action; and
 3. encourages local agreements to be made in the context of this framework.The possibilities outlined in this document, approved by the two churches at a national level, are significant steps for Anglican and Uniting parishes and congregations to consider taking together in their local worship, education and mission.

Commonalities

The six Theological Affirmations approved in “Weaving a New Cloth” summarise the outcomes of years of dialogue and represent ACA and UCA understandings in relation to the two churches:

1. Each of our churches stands in the continuity of the apostolic faith, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.
2. Each of our churches is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Acknowledging our failure to enact fully our calling, both our churches witness faithfully to the gospel and seek to be more fully engaged in God’s mission in the world.
3. In each of our churches the Holy Spirit gives to the whole people of God gifts for the upbuilding of the church and for its continuation in the mission of Jesus Christ.
4. The ordained ministry in both our churches is given by God as an instrument of grace, notwithstanding our different understandings of it. By this ministry, the people of God are called to faith, strengthened to witness to the gospel and empowered to serve in hope and love.
5. In each of our churches the word of God is faithfully preached and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are duly administered in accordance with each church’s tradition.
6. Personal, communal and collegial oversight (episcopate) is exercised in both our churches, albeit in different forms, to serve the church’s unity and its faithfulness to the gospel.

Summary

The relevant documentation has been presented. That the two Churches have a great deal in common has been recognised. The current disposition of the ACA towards the UCA has been mentioned. The main concern is that the ACA does not consider itself able to be in full communion with the UCA.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Membership, the ACA Constitution and Discipleship

In the ACA Constitution membership is defined: **"Member of this Church" means a baptised person who attends the public worship of this Church and who declares that he is a member of this Church and of no church which is not in communion with this Church.**

To be a Diocesan Synod parish lay representative, people are required to sign a document, the Fifth Schedule (Section 13(2) of the Constitution) declaring,

“ That I am a member of The Anglican Church of Australia and that I am a communicant of the said Church; 2. That I belong to no other religious denomination; 3. That I have received the Holy Communion not less than three times during the past twelve months; 4. That I have attained the age of 18 years; 5. That I submit to and agree to be bound by the Constitution of the Diocese of Adelaide and every Ordinance from time to time in force; 6. That I hereby accept the office of lay member of the Synod and any other office to which I may be elected or appointed pursuant to the said Constitution and Ordinances and promise to perform the duties thereof honestly, impartially, faithfully and to the best of my judgement and ability and in accordance with and subject to the said Constitution and Ordinances.

I undertake to complete Level 2 Screening in the Safer Ministry Programme.

This amounts to a requirement for closed membership and constitutional thinking. Officially and formally Anglicans in Australia are not allowed by the church constitution to be dual citizens or have dual passports. Whether dual citizenship happens in practice is another matter. Membership of the ACA is, according to the constitution, a closed membership.

Discipleship

A discussion about membership of the Christian Church must make reference to the importance of the word “disciple” in the Christian faith. People who are Christian are followers or disciples of Jesus Christ. The word “disciple” has its origin in the Latin word *discere* (to learn). A disciple is a follower of Jesus’ teachings and way of life. The Greek word for disciple *mathetes* means learner or apprentice. Christian disciples are learners in the Christian faith and life. Faith learning involves change in individuals or groups through the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills in terms of the Christian faith. The Gospels refer to the followers of Jesus as *disciples*.

Simon Oxley considered that learning is “of the essence of the Christian faith” (Oxley 2002, 54, 69). He continued “It is possible to see the business of learning as that to which Christians are called. Whatever our status within the church as baptised, confirmed, commissioned or ordained, we are called to be learners. I believe that whenever we think that we know all there is to know about the Christian faith and that we have no more to learn we are profoundly mistaken. The end of a journey is the kingdom of God, which, according to the images presented by Jesus in the parables, is itself a dynamic rather than a static state. Signs of the kingdom that are realised within the lives of individuals or communities in the process of learning are encouragements to move on” (Oxley 2002, 69).

Members of the Anglican Church are first and foremost disciples of Jesus Christ, and secondly Anglicans. However, the Christian discipleship of an Anglican is lived out positively through membership of the Anglican Church, which has an essential role in God’s purposes as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in and for the world.

Such discipleship is dynamic and moves forward. It is not a state of fixed and static membership defined only by a constitution for example. William Barclay, when

commenting on those twelve Jesus appointed as disciples (Mt 10:1-4) wrote, “The word disciple means a learner. The men (and women) whom Christ needs and desires are the men (and women) who are willing to learn. The shut mind cannot serve Jesus Christ” (Barclay 1956, 370). As evidenced during his encounter with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28), reported in Matthew, Jesus learned that his mission was not just to the Jewish people but also to the Gentiles. Jesus was inclusive rather than exclusive in responding to a person of faith in need. Jesus displayed an open-minded approach when he moved out of his comfort zone and ministered in Gentile territory.

During September 2017, when I began to work on this paper, the Sunday Gospel readings were taken from the Gospel according to Matthew. In Matthew 21-22 we read three parables, the two sons, the vineyard and the royal wedding banquet. In those parables the essential criterion for discipleship was openness for *metanoia*, to repent (in Greek *metanoein*); openness towards the realm of God’s presence.

Michael Trainor writes “*Metanoia* literally means to change one’s attitude or thinking. This requires a preparedness to change; rather than rigidity and dogmatic certainty, the one who seeks out Jesus must be open, even flexible” (Trainor 1992, 23). Christians of Matthew’s community in their first century context were advised to be on guard against complacency and not to presume that discipleship was based on “ethnic pedigree, religious heritage or economic security” (Trainor 1992, 116-121). A proper relationship before God and Jesus enabled discipleship – “one which is not status-seeking, that does not operate from a power structure of hierarchy and allows them to be apprentices always (Mt 23:8-10) (Trainor 1992, 116). The commandment to love (Mt 22:37-40) informs discipleship.

An open mind rather than a closed and shut mind is a discipleship attribute. All of the foregoing says clearly that in Christ, Anglican disciples are invited to move on and be open to the *possibility* that they are in communion with another Christian Church, like the UCA, a Church which also belongs to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of God.

Discipleship and Canon Law

In 2016, Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, recognised the important issue of the relationship between canon law and Christian discernment. On 8 April 2016, he addressed members of the International Anglican Consultative Council in Holy Cross Cathedral, Lusaka, Zambia. Speaking into the tensions across the worldwide Anglican Communion consisting of 38 interdependent Anglican Provinces, he reported on the January 2016 meeting of the Anglican Primates, the senior Archbishops representing Anglican Provinces across the world. The Archbishop reported that the Primates had decided to walk together rather than apart, despite the very real differences, “as a deep expression of our unity in the body of Christ.”

He emphasised that Anglican Communion network works through discernment of the Spirit and relationships. “The Anglican Communion finds its decisions through spiritual discernment in relationship, not through canons and procedures. Primates’

Meetings, Lambeth Conferences and Anglican Consultative Councils are not a question of winning and losing, but of discerning together in love. ... As Anglicans we are called to be something special, a people of reconciliation, finding authority through relationships, transcending the complexity and difference, relishing diversity, loving each other” (Welby 2016).

In 2018, Justin Welby, again commented on the limitations that church legal structures place on ecumenism. In his address at the World Council of Churches 70th Anniversary in Geneva, The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke about an “Ecumenical Spring: From Negotiated Frontiers to Open Borders” (Welby 2018). He said, “The effort of recognising that the Spirit of God is at work equally among others is hard to assimilate. Within churches our legal structures preclude the support of other churches across the frontier. If an English bishop in the Church of England sees that there is a church of another denomination doing wonderful work, it is immensely complicated to bless that work by supporting that church, licensing its pastor and enabling it to work with us and us with them. The paper work is that thick, and ends with the word “No.” We tie ourselves down through our inability to imagine who we really are. The beloved people of God” (Welby 2018, 7).

A disposition of discernment in the Spirit of Christ through respectful relationships could suggest that the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) might be interpreted in an inclusive, outward thinking way, in the spirit of the fundamental declarations of the constitution, in accord with the Spirit of Christ, to honour John 17:21 and develop “open borders”. **An alternative ACA membership clause might read: member of this church or a church recognised as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic worldwide church.**

The tension that exists between discipleship and canon law needs to be explored further. Sometimes a decision made by a disciple may conflict with a ruling from canon law based on the constitution of the ACA. That constitution was written around 1962 in the Christendom era of Church life when the church and state worked more closely together. The Church applied the principles of the Gospels and canon law to society through a variety of prescriptions (Rahner 1964, 13-41). In the Christendom era the church fostered “a civilisation where the structures, institutions and culture were all supposed to reflect the Christian nature of society.” Church leadership and ruling elites were closely connected (McEvoy 2014, xi-xii).

Biblical scholarship on discipleship and church life has moved on since then, leaving Christendom for good and moving into a different context of the 21st century when the Church represents the Christian worldview as one among other worldviews in a secular society in Australia. James McEvoy argues that the Church has left the Christendom era and must now practise a dialogical view of the Church “a vision of the church in dialogue with the world” based on listening to modern culture and discerning through theological reflection an authentic Gospel response (McEvoy 2014, xii, 157, 173-175). In a secular society the Church and State are separate and yet the Constitution of the ACA is enshrined in an Act of Parliament, the New South Wales Parliament Act No. 16, 1961. The ACA Constitution was written in the Christendom context. It was written from an institutional perspective rather than from a missional imperative.

The issue of the relationship between canon law and discipleship/mission remains. To what extent does or should canon law influence, determine or shackle decisions made on the basis of discipleship? Or, is canon law part and parcel of discipleship and not considered separate from being a disciple? What happens when canon law and discipleship clash? Clearly the church has to be organized and discipleship has to take into account the organization of the church. However, when some disciples argue for a new attitude and approach, church authorities may be tempted to oppose or extinguish the new way. On the other hand church leaders may have the courage to listen and receive a new spirit (Rahner 1964, 82-83). Maybe that is when the constitution needs to be changed or interpreted according to the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. A key principle of Canon Law is that the “Law exists to assist a church in its mission and witness to Jesus Christ” (The Principles of Canon Law 2008, 19). A Canon to alter the ACA Constitution is available to use (Constitution Chapter XI, 65-67). For example, an alteration was made in Rule XXIII under the Admission to Holy Communion Canon 1973. This canon admitted members of the Lutheran Church of Australia to receive Holy Communion in the ACA.

The matter of canonical obedience brings into full view this tension between discipleship and canon law. On consecration a Bishop is required to declare, in accordance with the law of the Church, assent to the Constitution and Canons of this Church and to take the Oath of Canonical Obedience (APBA1995, 800-801).

A Bishop-elect uses these words.

“I do solemnly and sincerely declare my assent to be bound by the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia [and the Constitution of the Province of...] and of this diocese and by the canons, statutes, ordinances and rules, however described, from time to time of the synod of this diocese and of the General Synod [and of the Provincial Synod] which have force in this diocese.

I do swear that I will pay due and canonical obedience to DD, and all successors of that bishop in all things lawful and honest. So help me God!” (APBA 1995, 801)

In this discussion about the interface between discipleship and the Constitution of the ACA, it may be the case (and I may be wrong and called a bush lawyer) that Anglican Episcopal and other licensed leaders are constrained in their discipleship (disciples are learners) by the laws, rules of the Constitution of the ACA. On consecration Bishops promise to abide by the constitution. When ordained, priests promise to obey their bishop and other ministers given authority over them, “gladly and willingly following their godly and lawful directions”. (APBA 1995, 795) When a discipleship issue like Christian unity is presented as of the “*esse*” of the Church (John 17), Anglican leaders may be limited in their response and not allowed to act unless and until the Constitution is altered. For example, an Anglican Bishop is constrained to re-ordain an ordained minister in the UCA because the ACA is not in full communion with that Church. A minister of the UCA is not considered to be validly ordained according to the ACA.

Even when the ACA Constitution claims that the ACA “will ever obey the commands of Christ” Anglican Episcopal leaders, despite the expectation that disciples follow Jesus Christ, must abide by the rules they promised to keep. Otherwise a bishop may

be taken to a legal tribunal and his or her ministry threatened or concluded. Are Anglican episcopal disciples placed in a bind and constrained by canon law?

That question requires further exploration. One answer may well be that those in such a bind might be motivated to change or alter the Constitution of the ACA, so as to manage the difficulties involved and be more in tune with the express desire of Jesus Christ, that unity is of the “*esse*” of the Church.

When writing about a new passion for mission, then Bishop, now Archbishop Geoff Smith acknowledged the difficulty involved in working with the ACA Constitution. He recognized that Bishops, like everyone else, “are in a tricky situation”, when trying to hold in tension a commitment to the ACA Constitution and the task of mission. He wrote “The exhortation within the service for the Ordination of Bishops makes it clear that a bishop is to promote the mission of the church, but there is also an expectation that a bishop will guard the faith, unity and discipline of the church and adhere to the constitution and canons of the church. Discovering the balance between encouraging and allowing changes that are necessary for the church to engage with the community in a contemporary way, and guarding the necessary practices and disciplines of the church is not easy, but it is vital. It is easy for bishops to be ‘blockers’, however the role needs to be one of appropriate permission-giving to allow change and development to take place” (Smith 2009, 200-201).

The ordained ministry

The ACA Constitution is a foundational, defining and important document. However, some may consider that it is sometimes interpreted in an exclusive, inward-thinking way; that is, by the letter of the constitution, in accord with the clause: member of this church or a church in communion with this church. A point of difference between the ACA and the UCA arises in the matter of the ordained ministry. In the ACA-UCA documents cited above these statements need to be noted:

“The ordained ministry in both our churches is given by God as an instrument of grace, notwithstanding our different understandings of it. By this ministry, the people of God are called to faith, strengthened to witness to the gospel and empowered to serve in hope and love,”

and “Personal, communal and collegial oversight (episcopate) is exercised in both our churches, albeit in different forms, to serve the church’s unity and its faithfulness to the gospel.”

Also, both Churches have rigorous theological education, ministerial formation and safer ministry regimes in place for those entering the ordained ministry.

The Anglican Church relates with other churches on the basis of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of Scripture, Creeds, Sacraments and the Historic Episcopate. Church leaders understand that the ACA is bound by its constitution to “preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry,” and rightly so. The constitution is a defining document.

The UCA has the ordained ministries of Ministers of the Word and Deacons. The minister of the Word relates primarily to the gathered church. The ministry of deacon

relates primarily to a dispersed community of marginalized people. The Presbytery exercises the ministry of ‘episcopate’ corporately in the UCA – a kind of “collective bishop”. This is something inherited from Methodism, where the annual Conference exercised the episcopal functions, and from Presbyterianism, where the Presbytery exercised the episcopal functions. UCA decided not to have bishops. Andrew Dutney explains the UCA understanding of episcopate as corporate. “Oversight (episcopate) has always been important in the organisation of the Christian movement. In Christian history episcopate came to carry a sense of supervision from a position of superiority. But the term is better understood as conveying a sense of focussed, directed, sustained attention coupled with responsibility for care; the kind of attention that a shepherd gives to a flock (1 Peter 5:1-4). It doesn’t imply status so much as focus. This oversight has both personal and corporate dimensions, but in the government of the church episcopate is always corporate” (Dutney 2017, 5-7).

In the UCA the Presbytery is the ordaining body and ordains a person for ministry on behalf of the whole church of God. The electing, appointing and commissioning of lay leaders to the leadership ministry of Moderator or President for a limited period of time happens from time to time in the UCA. The commissioning of a Moderator or President lies within the prerogative of the episcopal role given to a Presbytery or the National Assembly of the UCA.

These matters of difference in relation to the ordained ministries of the UCA and the ACA are well rehearsed in many documents and mentioned in church debates at Anglican General and Diocesan Synods. However, ACA leadership appears to recognise and work with UCA ordained ministers in practical ministry situations like schools, hospitals, inter-church councils, aged care, universities, local ministry fellowships, ecumenical seminars and workshops, co-operating parishes and Councils of Churches, for example. But officially, according to an interpretation of the constitution, ACA is not in communion with UCA and ACA leadership does not formally accept UCA ordination.

Co-operating parishes exist in a number of places: for example, in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn; the Anglican Diocese of Gippsland in Victoria (Churchill and Cann River); the Anglican Diocese of Willochra, South Australia (the covenant relationship between Anglican, Lutheran and Uniting Church in Wudinna, Streaky Bay and Ceduna). From 1974-1977 I worked in an ecumenical team ministry within the Co-operating Churches of Weston Creek in Canberra; under a covenant agreement.

In some of the debates about the differences between the ACA and the UCA, Scott Cowdell and Andrew McGowan, two Anglican theologians, pointed out the particular issues that divide. In relation to episcopate a distinction was made between personal and corporate episcopate. In relation to the ordained ministry, distinctions were made between Catholic and Protestant understandings of the term priest or presbyter. The validity of the Eucharist in the UCA was questioned. However, these two Anglican theologians also recognised that both churches practised episcopate, ordained ministers and administered the eucharist/holy communion; very real agreement existed between ACA and UCA (Cowdell and McGowan 2010, 1-2).

Similar differences coexist in the Anglican Church, which combines the Catholic and Reformed Church traditions. These traditions in the 23 Dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia sometimes coexist with ease and sometimes with difficulty, yet the various parts of the Anglican Church remain in full communion. Co-operation and co-existence could likewise exist between the different traditions of the UCA and ACA and the two churches could establish full communion across those differences. Christ does not discriminate across the Catholic or Reformed traditions. Christ it seems, does not discriminate across denominational boundaries either. From this perspective, full communion, based on deep understanding and respectful conversation is achievable in and through Jesus Christ who “is all and in all” (Balabanski 2017). Full communion does not require sameness or uniformity in every detail, especially as the commonalities between the UCA and ACA are so strong (see the excerpts from “Weaving a New Cloth” at page 4 above). Each church has its charism or gift as a part of the ‘body of Christ’ world-wide. Christ is head of that body, the church (Col 1:18; Eph 4: 15-16).

A reader of the letter to the Colossians (written c. 62 CE) is informed that holding to Christ is the central attribute for discipleship. Disciples and congregations are formed in Christ and transformed through Christ. Knowing and following Christ is primary. All else is secondary. Some things may need to be discontinued (Col 2:6-10; 2: 20-22). Fidelity to Christ is essential for the Church (Col 3:11). Christ is ‘head’ of the church (Col 1: 18; 2:19). There is a new life in Christ. The virtues of those who belong to Christ are to be lived (Col 3: 11-17). Christian identity is Christ-centred. Christ is the highest common denominator (SACC 2018).

The priority issue is now one of acceptance and trust, the one of the other in Christ. In church history a distinction is made between the ‘*esse*’ of the church and the ‘*bene esse*’ of the church; the ‘essential’ as distinct from ‘the good but not essential.’ Good order is required in the church. But is the good order of the ordained ministry of the ‘*esse*’ of the church? Scripture and the Creeds are essential. Many churches worldwide indicate that the position of bishop is of the ‘*esse*’ of the church; Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran.

With integrity UCA decided the form ordained ministry and the form ‘episcopate’ would take within its own tradition. UCA has ‘episcopate’, albeit in a different form to the ACA. ACA expresses ‘episcopate’ through the role of a ‘bishop’ and does not formally recognise ministers ordained within the Uniting Church. “The Uniting Church also has processes to recognise and receive ministers ordained by other denominations to serve within the UCA. This has been an important expression of the unity of the church across denominational and cultural barriers and a valuable form of partnership between denominations - especially in Asia and the Pacific” (Dutney 2008, 23).

This issue of the ordained ministry is the one matter that has stopped and still stops the Anglican Church in Australia being in communion with the Uniting Church in Australia. Can a case be made that the form of ordained ministry is a ‘*bene esse*’ issue rather than an ‘*esse*’ issue? Could Anglicans in Australia so respect the integrity of the ordering of ministry in the UCA as to put it aside as a hindrance to being in communion with that church? Under the principle of unity-in-diversity, in recognition of the many essential commonalities mentioned in “Weaving a New Cloth” on page 4

above, and through discernment in the Spirit, ACA can decide to walk together with UCA rather than apart, despite some differences about the ordained ministry, walk together “as a deep expression of our unity in the body of Christ” (Welby 2016). Speaking in the manner of Archbishop Welby, disciples in the ACA might decide to make a decision on this issue through spiritual discernment in relationship rather than through appeal to canons and procedures. Olav Tveit wrote that the work of the Holy Spirit maintains catholicity. Catholicity means “No person or institution is absolutely right in any spiritual issue due to its own ministry or position” (Tveit 2016, 321).

The Rev’d. Dr Denis Edwards of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide has suggested the following criteria for receiving into one’s own church the institutional gift of the Spirit, of charism, that we see exemplified in another church.

1. It can be recognized by the receiving church as an authentic expression of biblical and apostolic faith.
2. The proposed institutional charism leads to Christ, and to authentic discipleship.
3. It is not opposed to the deepest self-understanding of the receiving church.
4. It can be seen as an organic development of the faith of the receiving church.
5. It brings to the receiving church a renewed energy and life.
6. It is accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” Gal 5:22 (SACC 2014, 2).

No 3. above may be of some concern to some Anglicans and raise the issue of bishops and the ordained ministry. We need however to recognise that the statement from the ACA/UCA dialogues is significant. “Personal, communal and collegial oversight (episcopate) is exercised in both our churches, albeit in different forms, to serve the church’s unity and its faithfulness to the gospel.”

Summary

- The interface between discipleship and canon law has been exposed and explored.
- Discipleship and canon law are meant to co-exist easily rather than with difficulty.
- Currently, for the ACA leadership, canon law seems to be of primary importance when decisions are made about the ACA’s relationship with the UCA.
- Followers of Jesus Christ are called to focus on discipleship and obey the commands of Christ.
- Canon Law derives from that commitment.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is providing leadership in seeking to focus on walking together in the name of Christ rather than apart because of differences that exist within the People of God.
- Such a ‘walking together rather than apart’ applies to the issue of the ACA decisions about the UCA ordained ministry.

DISCUSSION POINTS SUPPORTING THE ARGUMENT

Bible study

1. Bible Study on John 17:20-21 by The Rev Dr Vicky Balabanski, biblical scholar and Minister of the Word in the UCA (Balabanski 2013)

In her published essay on the biblical passage Chapter 17:20-21, from the Gospel according to John, Vicky Balabanski acknowledged the impact that this great Johannine prayer of Jesus had on the decisions of 20th century Christian councils “as it gave inspiration to the ecumenical movement and church unions in many parts of the world.” Balabanski referred to the formation of the Church of South India and mentioned the Uniting Church in Australia as examples of church unions.

During the essay she reaffirmed that these verses reflected the actual concerns and actions of Jesus, corroborated historical evidence from the synoptic tradition for the portrayal of oneness in the relationship between Jesus and God, and legitimized the theme of unity proclaimed in this Gospel according to John.

Balabanski stated “We have examined John 17:20-21 carefully and critically for resonance with the historical Jesus’ actual concerns and actions ... and conclude that the 20th century impulse to take them as an inspiration to unity has not been misguided.”

The Church of South India (CSI), inaugurated 27/9/1947, was a union of episcopal and non-episcopal churches and called “the great adventure in obedience” by Lesslie Newbigin. “The idea of the union of churches in South India was championed by early 20th century missionaries who found themselves working in one mission field, but in a state of competition with each other.” “The CSI *Basis of Union* claims the prayer John 17:21 as a mandate for union and as naming what is the essential purpose and nature of the Church” (Balabanski 2013, 646-649).

The essay concluded “I have argued that a plausible case can be made that John 17:20-21 has Jesuanic resonance and refracts certain aspects of the historical Jesus’ actual concerns and actions. What the account of the CSI union shows is that these verses have served as an inspiration to unity, when historical and political circumstances have emboldened Christians to make them their own. Where the Church consciously acts on these words as the Body of Christ, prompted by the Spirit, it *makes* these words the words of Christ” (Balabanski 2013, 649).

John 17:20-21 NRSV. Jesus prayed for His Disciples then and now.

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

2. Bible Study by William Temple

In his seminal work (1939) on the Gospel according to St John, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, when writing on Chapter 17, commented that just as God glorifies and honours the Son and the Son glorifies and honours God, so, as disciples we glorify and honour God in so far as we are one; and we do not honour God in Christ, “in so far as we are not one, we are not yet in Him” (Temple 1961, 295). Temple also wrote “But till the disciples are perfected into one the world cannot be penetrated by the Gospel” (Temple 302). If the original small group of disciples were not united Jesus’ cause would have been lost. “Division at that stage would have been fatal; it has been sufficiently disastrous coming later, as it did” (Temple 1961, 304). “The unity of the Church is something much more than unity of ecclesiastical structure, though it cannot be complete without this. It is the love of God in Christ possessing the hearts of men (and women) so as to unite them in itself ... The unity which the Lord prays that his disciples may enjoy is that which is eternally characteristic of the Tri-une God” (Temple 1961, 305).

Temple commented, “The prayer is that *they may be in us*. If we are in the Father and the Son, we certainly shall be one, and our unity will increase our effective influence in the world ... When all believers are truly ‘in Christ’, then their witness will have its destined effect that the world may believe that God sent Jesus the Christ ... It is the manifestation of God’s love toward us in our mutual love which shall at last convert the world” (Temple 1961, 312-313).

In summary, Christ’s mission is hindered, limited and endangered if the church is not united. Mission and unity are the two sides of a single coin! As Temple described “our little experience of unity and fellowship” in our inter-church friendships, activities and conferences, as “beautiful” as these are in comparison to the tensions and protocols, which separate us, appear “poor and petty” in the light of the Lord’s longing (Temple 1961, 305). A clear message emerges: modify and reform our church structures and protocols where necessary to express our unity, so to glorify and honour God in Christ.

Seventy-nine years on from Temple, in 2018, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby also pointed out that our habits of division in the churches put people off Christianity. Even with an appeal to the life, work and message of Jesus Christ, those outside the churches think that the Gospel divides Christians and is the cause of division even if that gospel is based on love rather than the law! Welby wrote “The problem with our divisions, to put it in simplest terms, is that they say to the world that Christ is divided (Welby 2018, 5).” We divert attention away from Jesus Christ and point to ourselves in disunity. Welby argued that it is time for “ecumenism of action theologically underpinned” (Welby 2018).

Reflection on Family Likeness

Simon Barrington-Ward, later to become the Bishop of Coventry in England, led the British Church Missionary Society (CMS) from 1975-1985. In his travels across the world as an Anglican missionary leader he identified what he called a “family likeness” (Barrington Ward 1988, 61). By “family likeness” he meant the surprise of “those startling moments of recognition” in many places and cultures of “the same immediately familiar ‘*relatio*’, the interrelation of heaven and earth, the divine and human, the authentic reflection of the glory of God in Christ, in a human face, ‘Christ in ten thousand places’.” The many personal accounts he gave of such experiences all witnessed to “an amazingly similar process of growth into Christ today.” The groups and communities he described “knew more than any of us the secret of the gospel” (Barrington-Ward 1988, 43). Barrington-Ward’s book *Love Will Out* provides examples of his experience of the gift of sheer grace, when the Spirit flowed and we learnt to live by grace. This way of spontaneous communication “speaks in the one universal language of a genuinely humane, disinterested and humble love, which transcends all barriers, and attracts all creatures (Barrington-Ward 1988, 38). It was “The Christ-like face of those living the gospel in community that transformed Barrington-Ward’s faith” (Lord 2017, 2).

Two accounts of the experience of “family likeness” across Christian communities are now described. These two 2017 accounts are examples of the "family likeness" from South Australian churches as they experienced and witnessed the Christ-like face of those living the Gospel in community.

The South Australian Council of Churches 70th Birthday Celebration with the Theme: “An Exchange of Gifts on the Journey towards Unity” was held on Saturday 29 April 2017, 10am-3.30pm, over 100 people participating. SACC had invited the communities of four city churches – Pilgrim (Uniting), St Francis Xavier (Roman Catholic), St Mary Magdalene’s (Anglican) and St Stephen’s (Lutheran) – to host a pilgrimage to enable the General Council and people from across the churches to gather and celebrate these seventy years. This Pilgrimage experience of walking, conversing, eating and worshipping together was impressive, positive and inspirationally grounded in the Presence of Christ evident amongst the participants and in the four Church communities visited.

Stephan Clark gave this account of his ecumenical joy in experiencing the Coptic Liturgy on 22/7/17. He was writing to members of the Adelaide Diocesan Anglican Ecumenical Network. “Members may be pleased to know that the wonderful Adelaide Coptic Community gave a great Ecumenical gift to the Anglican Church on St Mary Magdalene’s Day (22nd July). They filled our church from 8 a.m. For four hours. With great singing...the Psalms in Coptic/Arabic...many deacons present ...but more importantly kids and families. Fr Philippos invited me to administer the precious chalice ...I was deeply moved...

There is an interesting ecumenical mystery here....ecumenism is being borne in the Eastern Churches. Particularly our lovely sisters and brothers. I would want to say seldom have I experienced such wonderful Spirit-filled worship ... and our parishioners who shared felt the same.

Our beloved God bends us in glorious ways, to challenge our narrow spiritualities."

This family likeness recognised across Christian communities reveals evidence of our unity in Christ within the Church the “body of Christ”.

Membership of the “body of Christ” brings mutual recognition, one member church in communion with the other; a mutual accountability between churches as defined by Tveit:

Mutual accountability comprehends reliability, faithfulness, trustfulness solidarity, openness, ability to give and take constructive critique and receptivity. These elements are interrelated and to some extent integrated (Tveit 2016, 333).

Ordinary ecumenical learning

In the manner of Jeff Astley I refer to “ordinary ecumenical learning.” Astley defined “ordinary theology” as “the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the (reflective) God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education” (Astley, 2002, 1; Astley and Francis 2013, 1). Helen Savage reported her empirical research about “Ordinary Learning” based on a receptive ecumenism survey of adult learning and formation in north-east England between 2009 and 2011, sponsored from Durham University (Astley and Francis 2013,199-208). Ordinary theologians from a variety of denominational groups were the participants in this empirical study on ordinary learning in an ecumenical context. Savage’s research findings “found that, in the context of church learning groups, ordinary learning is founded on conversation and the quality of relationships” (Astley and Francis 2013, 210).

The study of ordinary learning in a local ecumenical context prompted me to use the term “ordinary ecumenical learning.” Perhaps the time is ripe for an empirical study on ordinary ecumenical learning in an Australia inter-church context. If such studies already exist they need to be referenced and explored.

Over the years many Anglicans have spoken or written about their “family likeness” experiences through events in, amongst and across the various Christian traditions and churches. The Barrington-Ward and SACC examples cited above are only two of many case studies.

The time may have come to not only tell others about the joy of those individual ecumenical experiences, but to also bring together and compile those multiple individually reported experiences into a body of evidence, and then to reflect theologically and collectively on its meaning and implications. What might such communal and collective learning of ordinary disciples imply about the formal relations between churches, for example, the formal relations between the ACA and the UCA? What would such communal learning imply about the way that the nature of those inter-church relations are decided by an appeal mainly to governance regulations in the constitution of the ACA? The body of evidence from ordinary ecumenical learners about family likeness encounters may (or may not) suggest different decision-making outcomes for inter-church relations. A research study based on this body of evidence about ordinary ecumenical learning might be revelatory!

Receptive Ecumenism

Those involved in the Receptive Ecumenism movement recognise the gifts, which one church tradition can learn and receive, with integrity, from other Christian traditions (SACC 2014, 1). The question proposed by receptive ecumenism leadership introduces the possibility of a different context and culture of learning for inter-church conversations. All the various Christian traditions are part of the “body of Christ,” to be respected and acknowledged as Christian learning communities walking together and learning from God in Christ through the Spirit.

The question is *What can we – and what do we need to – learn and receive, with integrity, from the other Christian traditions?* The question invites those who seek to answer it to be accepting of and learn from other Christian traditions rather than being closed and closely defining of their own Christian tradition to the exclusion of the other; to listen and be open to difference and diversity rather than assume that the correctness and teaching of our own Christian tradition provides the definitive and uniform answer for the Church of God in Christ; to participate in knowledge learning with others rather than mainly transmitting knowledge to others; to recognise that in faith learning, process is as important as content, that the Church, the “body of Christ” is a learning community as well as a teaching community; to act on research, which shows that a Receptive Ecumenism approach together with learning community strategies leads to deeper ecumenical learning outcomes in church and inter-church activities; to acknowledge the hurt felt by other disciples caught up in the stress of the church’s divisions.

Paul Murray states that Receptive Ecumenism provides an appropriate organising principle for contemporary ecumenism. “This is the principle that considerable further progress is indeed possible, but only if each of the traditions, both singly and jointly, make a clear, programmatic shift from prioritising the question “What do our various others first need to learn from us?” to asking instead, “What is that we need to learn and can learn, or receive, with integrity from our others?” (Murray 2014, 91).

In this paper I encourage the ACA to make that *programmatic shift*, to be open to learn even more about UCA in Christ, and recognise that in Christ ACA and UCA are in communion. From that recognition of communion ACA leadership may then alter ACA protocols to acknowledge, respect and receive as gift the ordering of the ordained ministry of another church, namely the UCA; thus “making the Communion of God more visible” (Carnley 2017).

As disciples walking together into unity, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:2- 6).

Mission-shaped Church

The underlying purpose of the church is missional. The church is to be Mission-Shaped; an active participant in God's mission, the '*missio dei*' (Nichols 2006, 1); the mission of the Triune God; a "sending Triune God" (Gelder and Zscheile 2011, 25-7).

As disciples we participate in God's mission activity in and through Jesus Christ. God's nature is missionary, sending, participating and guiding the church in the world, relating to the Kingdom or realm of God. The church is an instrument of that mission. That mission is the '*esse*' or the essential of the church's life. The church has the task in mission of "finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in" (Kim 2009, 1).

The task is to be "God and world focused" rather than only "church and task focused," wrote Rosemary Dewerse. In the same article Dewerse mentioned a common saying about mission: "[i]t's not that the church of God has a mission but that the God of mission has a church" (Dewerse 2012-2013, 12-13). That church is a missional church initiated and guided by God's mission in Jesus the Christ.

This missional understanding of the church is being articulated through an intentional missional theology (Gelder and Zscheile 2011, 3-4). That teaching is put into practice by the church in society, creating environments for disciples to join with God's activity in local faith community contexts, across many church traditions and congregations, within traditional as well as new or fresh expressions of church.

As many more Anglican church leaders and communities recognise that they have a common mission under '*missio Dei*' and teach missional theology, as other Christian churches do, the Anglican church may move even more towards expressing unity in Christ in practical and hospitable protocol arrangements with other Christian denominations and communities, including the UCA. This focus on the '*missio Dei*' may create missional ecumenical activity and bring unity to the church as Christ prayed in John 17. In other words, the recognised, articulated and practised common mission of all Christian communities will prompt and promote the ecumenical question.

An Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue Group statement on "Perspectives on Mission" made this statement about mission and the goal of ecumenical relationships.

Full unity and communion is not the ecumenical goal in and of itself. It is a spiritual reality already established in Christ. Our mandate by God's grace, is to most effectively participate in the mission of God, and *koinonia* in mission serves that end as a sign, foretaste and instrument of that mission, the full realisation of the kingdom of God (Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue 2018, 5).

Intentional fellowship in mission may prove to be a way that unity in Christ is revealed in the life, ministry, governance and inter-church protocols of the ACA and its constitution. Missional theology and practice might suggest an update for the ACA Constitution. A new constitution might be written!

Missional theology and the practice of the '*missio Dei*' in church life across a variety of church communities in Australia has the possibility of drawing people together as they share the same mission; churches united with Christ in practice as well as in theology; in word and action. Missional churches aspire to reveal their unity in Christ through conversation, theology, discernment and practice. A missional church is an ecumenical church. The missional practice of discipleship "is following Christ into participation in God's mission in the world in the power of the Spirit" (Gelder and Zscheile 2011, 148).

Summary

Reflection on the Bible Studies, the topics of "Family Likeness", "Ordinary Ecumenical Learning", "Receptive Ecumenism" and "Mission-shaped Church" indicate that a body of evidence exists, which encourages and invites the Anglican Church of Australia to authentically reconsider issues of difference with the UCA and remove such issues as a hindrance to unity and full communion with UCA. The ACA could have a more "open border" with the UCA.

CONCLUSION: Recommendation

I recommend that the ACA Constitution, when inter-church matters are considered, be interpreted in the light of the reported "words of Christ" in the Gospel according to St John 17:20-21. Those words provide a biblical foundation from which to view the constitutional statement that "This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ." ACA can and must learn from the words of Christ, and learn through the presence of Christ in other Christian communities with a family likeness, to make the change to be in communion with the UCA, also a member of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. If the "programmatically shift" to a more "open borders" approach by the ACA towards the UCA recommended in this paper requires an alteration or amendment to the Constitution of the ACA, so be it! If conversations on receptive learning and the missional imperative of the church point to a need to write a new constitution for the Anglican Church of Australia, so be it!

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Conversation starters for personal and group use

Questions:

Having read the paper "What do you think or feel?"

Which section(s) of the paper really caught your attention?

What action steps (if any) would you suggest?

How might the ACA work with the Constitution in relation to ecumenism and the UCA?

Is a "programmatic shift" by ACA to a more "open borders" approach with the UCA desirable and workable?

Other comments.....

John Littleton 4/11/2018

The Reverend Dr John Littleton is a retired Anglican minister in the Diocese of Adelaide. He has 46 years' experience as an Anglican priest serving three parishes and ministering as a Consultant in Education within four Australian Anglican Dioceses. John is a member of the Anglican Ecumenical Network (AEN) in the Diocese of Adelaide. He is a member (Anglican appointee) of the South Australian Council of Churches (SACC) Community for Ecumenical Learning and SACC President (October 2017-October 2018). He is author of the book *Enhance Learning in Parishes: A Learning Community Approach for Church Congregations*. Unley, Adelaide: MediaCom Education Inc, 2017.

www.tjhlittleton.com.au

20 Douglas Street,
Magill, Adelaide, 5072.

jlittleton1941@gmail.com
08 84315457