

Catholicity in the Anglican communion (and in the whole Body of Christ)

The Articles of Religion (Article 34 *Of the Traditions of the Church*) make it clear that:

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Things may be done differently in different contexts. What is the norm in the Diocese of Jerusalem might be different from what is the norm in the Diocese of Sydney.

Local context, language, the political situation, freedom of association, indigenous ministry, and many other factors all play a part in what happens on the ground.

For instance, the partner Church to St. Paul's, Burwood, is St. Matthew's in Zababdeh in the West Bank and the language used in worship at St. Matthew's is Arabic.

Diversity in the Body of Christ is normative.

Furthermore, no assessment of catholicity in the Church can ignore the contribution made by Avery Dulles in his seminal work *Models of the Church* (1978, 1987).

Dulles has various takes on how to define Church. For instance:

The Church as Institution

The Church as Mystical Communion

The Church as Sacrament

The Church as Herald

The Church as Servant

Dulles concludes that, with particular reference to the Church being a community of disciples (being somewhat synonymous with being ‘gospel partners’):

I repeat, however, that the community of disciples is only one perspective on the Church. Other images and models, such as servant, sacrament, mystical body, and institution, are needed to remind us that the Church is an organic and juridically organized community established by the Lord and animated by his Spirit. Through reflection on these other models, we can continually enrich our understanding of discipleship itself. (p. 226)

By focussing on one aspect of catholicity within the Anglican communion alone, for instance being a ‘gospel partner,’ we miss the nuances necessary to have a whole or complete understanding of catholicity which, of course, is what the word catholicity itself means – whole, complete.

Thankfully the Body of Christ is not an exclusive club where a few decide on who is able to join. We are made whole as the Body of Christ only when each member of the Body is affirmed and valued.

Biology helps us to understand that those species which lack genetic diversity tend to die out and eventually become extinct. Diversity strengthens us rather than weakens us. So too in the Body of Christ – we who are many are one.

Further to such functional matters, Ordination as a Priest or as a Presbyter, as is the case in the Diocese of Sydney, is Ordination as a minister of Word and Sacrament.

The Anglican Church honours both the Word spoken and the Word broken.

Honouring both Word and Sacrament moves us beyond accidents of history, being such functional expressions bound by the particularity of time and context, to more universal factors that help us to understand more fully what catholicity in the Anglican communion might truly be.

The Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral which was framed in Chicago in 1886 and adopted at the Lambeth Conference in 1888 has four ‘instruments of communion:’

The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments,

The Creeds, both Nicene and Apostles, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith,

The Dominical Sacraments, both Baptism and Eucharist (or Holy Communion), and

The Historic Episcopacy, locally adapted, and the Ordination of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops.

These four instruments of communion provide an overarching frame of reference for how catholicity in the Anglican communion might properly be conceived of and understood.

Furthermore, such an understanding links us to the Church Universal which, with minor variations that can be understood in terms of the particularities of time and context, also holds on to these four instruments of Communion as defining catholicity within the whole Body of Christ.

No understanding of catholicity in the Anglican Communion is complete without taking into account what the Biblical witness has to say on the matter.

In John 17 Jesus speaks of the ontological unity that exists in the Body of Christ – that we might be one as God is one – mirroring the unity that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus prays:

20 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they

may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Our witness and mission to the world are thwarted to the degree that we fail to be one as Jesus prayed.

In Romans 12 we read that the Body of Christ is made up of many members but is one body in Christ.

⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

In I Corinthians 12 we read that no one part of the Body of Christ can say to the rest of the Body, “I have no need of you.”

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I

do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in

tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Of course, the more excellent way is the way of love – that Christ-like love that seeks only the well-being of the other.

Breaking with this understanding of the catholicity of the Anglican communion and the communion of the whole Body of Christ, where we are bound together by love, might be contrary to the Articles of Religion for, in the words of Article 34:

Whosoever..., doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, ..., ... offendeth against the common order of the Church, ..., and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.

Finally, from a Semiotic understanding, the phrase ‘gospel partner’ is either meaningless (meaning all things to all Christians – for surely we are all gospel partners?) or, paradoxically, too full of meaning (meaning precisely only what a select few choose it to mean).

In other words, it is a shibboleth, a code, that allows those in the know of the secret meaning of the term to set themselves apart from those who aren’t in the know.

As such it is gnostic and runs contrary to the very gospel it purports to represent and to uphold.

This use of this code language serves as a Procrustean Bed to either lop that which exceeds the meaning of the secret code or to stretch that which means too little. The outcome of which would be to make the phrase ‘gospel partner,’ as being the sole determining factor in catholicity in the Anglican communion, a violation of the unity that exists in the Body of Christ.