

2002

Moderating and Discerning the Leadership of Christ

Paul Anderson

Moderating and Discerning the Leadership of Christ

Paul Anderson

(Workshop for the National Presbyterian Moderators' Conference, 11/12/02)

Why do we make decisions corporately?

- We believe Christ is Lord of the Church and desires to lead us
- No one has sole access to Christ's leading
- No one is deprived of access
- The business of our common lives gives us the occasion to seek the mind of Christ
- A meeting for worship in which business is conducted
- Community is created in corporate discernment

What is the Current Process?

- Strengths?
- Weaknesses?

Robert's Rules of Order-Strengths:

- The process is structured and orderly
- The result is clear and apparent to all, allowing majority rule and minority consideration
- The discussion is kept on the subject
- It protects against "vituperative" personalities (Jeremy Bentham)
- It allows due process, including dissention
- It expedites things along

Robert's Rules of Order-Weaknesses:

- The process is often complex and confusing
- Producing winners and losers diminishes community
- Discussion becomes competitive rather than discerning
- Creativity and spontaneity are stifled
- Dissention lingers, creating new problems
- Ownership and implementation suffer

Questions...

- Did Christ lead us before we received Robert's Rules of Order?
- Might there be something in the Presbyterian conviction that Christ leads through the mature and the community-attested leaders of the church that is applicable for today?
- See the two issues on discernment in Hungry Hearts, 2002
- Is Christ still leading the church if we attend?

Background on Henry M. Roberts

- Lived 1837-1923
- Was an army engineer and parliamentarian
- At the age of 25 was asked to convene a church business meeting, and he found no procedural helps available
- He saw to a change to that (1867) and produced a pocket manual of rules of order
- Based on a congressional model
- Major revisions in 1915 and 1971

The Rules of Robert, or the Ruling of Christ?

- Christ may lead through a system, but Christ's leading will always transcend such
- The calling of the church is not to be orderly, but to be ordered by Christ
- Effective Christian leadership facilitates attending, discerning, and minding the present leadership of the resurrected Lord
- As the Body is to the Head, so the Church should be to its Lord-receptive and responsive

Common Fallacy: "Don't waste time talking about things, make a decision and get on with it!"

- effectiveness involves ownership
- efficiency extends to implementation
- it is far more cumbersome to go back and revisit the general direction once the boat has left the dock
- talking about things WILL happen; it's best to have it all on the table

Is God doing something new in our day?

- The Uniting Church in Australia
-

- The World Council of Churches votes not to vote, see Gen 4.1-4
-
- Bixby United Methodist Church
-
- Yachats City Government
-
- Wisdom from Vicky Curtiss
<http://www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/finalreport/discernment.pdf>
-
- Friendly ways forward
-
- Biblical precedents for discerning work

A. The Uniting Church in Australia

- In 1995 the UCA moves to a consensus model of Church governance
- An issue is discussed, seeking input and information
- Clarification is sought, including a diversity of perspectives
- A motion emerges from the discussion, containing aspects of concerns raised
- Either there is general agreement or not

B. The WCC votes not to vote?

A discernment process would...

- enhance the participation of all members in the various meetings;
- preserve the rights of all churches, regions and groupings, especially those which hold a minority opinion;
- provide a more collaborative and harmonious context for the making of decisions;
- enable representatives to have more "space" to discern the will of God for the churches, the WCC and the wider human family.

Consensus is reached when...

- all are in agreement (unanimity);
- most are in agreement and those who disagree are content that the discussion has been both full and fair and that the proposal expresses the general "mind of the meeting;" the minority therefore gives consent;
- the meeting acknowledges that there are various opinions, and it is agreed that these be recorded in the body of the proposal (not just in the Minutes);

- it is agreed that the matter be postponed;
- it is agreed that no decision can be reached.

C. Bixby United Methodist Church (on its website, Pastor Jessica Moffatt outlines three books that are recommended)

I) How do we do the work of discernment together?

(From Bishop David Lawson's book *Discernment Steps: Toward a Vision of God's Will*)

1. Gather good data and basic factual information, identifying alternatives and possibilities.
2. Insist that all categories be kept "soft" in order that creativity may be present and contribute to the process.
3. Maintain a holy indifference to the outcome, laying aside all biases and prejudices. Be willing to leave the outcome to God's direction and to be obedient to the results.
4. Maintain a community and climate of worship.
5. Ask and respond to the question, "Where have we sensed God's affirmation in what we have been about?"
6. Spend time in reflection and prayer, listening to God's direction.
7. Share with the community what you have seen, heard and felt in your reflection time. Dialogue about it. At this stage there is no right or wrong, but rather a desire to hear God. Frequently, insight and wisdom come in the dialogue.
8. Humility is crucial. Each one must be constantly aware that God may have spoken through another person.
9. Wait for God's timing. Sometimes there is silence during the wait. Continue to ask God for direction during the wait.
10. Remember to keep a holy indifference to the outcome, willing to receive new ideas and to consider them.
11. When consensus begins to form, continue to offer all plans and commitments to God for reshaping.

II) How do we approach the work of discernment?

(From James C. Fenhagen, *Ministry and Solitude*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1981)

1. Enter into a time of meditation and prayer seeking openness to and guidance from the Spirit.
2. Share "cons," with each person reporting the reasons he or she discerns against moving in a particular direction.
3. Enter into a time of prayer, allowing time to reflect on the seriousness of the "cons" that have been shared.

4. Share "pros," with each person reporting his or her own personal discernment. If no clear consensus emerges, the process continues.
5. Enter into a time of prayer, allowing time for reflection upon the "pros."
6. Sort out and weigh the reasons behind the pros and cons, recording those reasons so that they are available to everyone to discern communally, in the light of what has been listed, the direction to which the community is called by God.
 7. "If the conditions of authentic communal discernment have been fulfilled (i.e., if there is genuine openness to the Spirit), the decision should be made clear, and confirmation should be experienced unanimously through shared deep peace... finding God together.." (John Futrell, S.J. "Communal Discernment: Reflection on Experience," *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* IV, no. 54 [November 1972]: 173).
8. Lift up a concluding prayer of thanksgiving and make a reaffirmation of corporate commitment to carrying out the decision.

III) Stages in the Discernment Process

(From *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* by Danny Morris and Charles Olsen)

1. Framing identifies the focus for discernment of God's will. The matters to be included are arranged into a unified whole. The focus of the exploration is briefly described.
2. Grounding in a guiding principle jump-starts the process of discernment. The guiding principle is informed by the values, beliefs, and purpose of the discerning community. Boundaries are set.
3. Shedding lays aside ego, preconceived notions, false assumptions, biases, and predetermined conclusions so that persons involved in discernment can openly consider the matter.
4. Rooting in the tradition connects religious and biblical stories, themes, and images with the situation at hand. The tradition may confront, confirm, nudge, or even transform the direction of the discernment process.
5. Listening enables hearing the promptings of the Spirit of God, the voices of all in the discerning community, and the needs of others who may be affected by our discernment.
6. Exploring frees our playful imaginations to identify possible options and paths that lie within the guiding principle.
7. Improving works in consultation and prayer to improve each option under consideration until it becomes the best that we can imagine it to be within the yearning of God.

8. Weighing sorts and tests the options or paths in response to the leading of God's Spirit.
9. Discerning brings the explorations to a conclusion, moving toward the selection of an option which is given weight by the Spirit of God and the process in which the community is engaged.
10. Resting tests the decision by allowing it to rest near the heart to determine whether it brings primarily feelings of consolation (a sense of peace and movement toward God) or desolation (distress and movement away from God).

D. Yachats City Government

- The City of Yachats has adopted Modern Parliamentary Procedure by Ray E. Keeseey (Barnes and Noble, 1984 edition) as its procedural guide for deliberation and decision making, subject to charter and ordinance provisions.
- Rules of Order-modified to distinguish

Ordinary And Special Motions procedure, discussion, etc.

General consent may be used for ordinary and special motions such as:

- to adjourn
- to recess
- to close deliberation
- to postpone
- to refer
- to withdraw, reconsider, or rescind

Main Motions policy changes, appointments, etc.

- After a motion has been made the presiding officer:
- Asks for a consensus of the motion (to see if the motion is understood by the entire Council).
- Invites discussion (from the Council).
- Restates the motion in its final form (the minutes taker can repeat the motion).
- Asks for the affirmative vote followed by the negative vote.
- Announces the result of the voting and adds any necessary information to interpret or to effect the decision.

E. Wisdom from Vicky Curtiss ("Discernment and Decision-Making")

Discernment helps us...

- recognize and acknowledge what God is doing and what God desires;
- see a situation from God's perspective;
- uncover, rather than make, a decision;
- listen to the Holy Spirit, who prays within and among us.

Communal Discernment Models can be helpful when...

- dealing with significant matters that affect the whole body
- a sizable minority or range of views is present
- more voices or ideas need to be included
- time can be taken to explore more options and build consensus
- a diversity of cultural backgrounds is present
- persistent and substantial division exists

Parliamentary procedure can be useful when...

- dealing with routine organizational business
- an issue has near or full consensus
- clear alternatives have been identified and further discussion is not likely to surface more options
- delaying a decision is not an option
- participants are comfortable with parliamentary procedure
- the group is willing to accept majority rule when a common solution cannot be found

F. Friendly considerations:

"The primary theological doctrine and spiritual experience of Friends is that the living Christ is present to teach us Himself. No priestly intermediary is necessary for Divine access, for "there is One, Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition." Rooted in such texts as John's prologue, Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is given in some measure to all people. This experience of the immediate presence of Christ, both personally and corporately, implies that we may be led by the Inward Teacher. Since Christ is not divided, the nearer we come to Him, the nearer we will be to one another. Thus the sense of being led into Unity with one another becomes a fundamental mark of the Divine work in

the world."

Eden Grace, "An Introduction to Quaker Business Practice"

"Hearing the voice of the Shepherd is not easy. It is soft and indistinct until we become familiar with it. Thought it often uses no words, we can understand it clearly. It only comes to us when we recognize a deep need of it within ourselves, and when we are willing to devote time to listen to it."

John Punshon, *Testimony and Tradition* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1990)

"With Christ in Decision Making" (Paul Anderson)

- The interest is living under the dynamic leadership of the Resurrected Lord
- This involves individual aspects of discernment
- This involves corporate aspects of discernment
- Leadership (moderating and clerking) should facilitate Christ's leadership

Questions for Personal Discernment

- "Is this leading in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures?" The Spirit who inspired the Scriptures will not contradict the truths contained in the Bible.
- "Are there examples from the past that may provide direction for the present?" Because the church is the body of Christ, his leadership can often be evaluated more clearly by hindsight, and former parallels inform present issues.
- "Is a leading self-serving, or is it motivated by one's love for God and others?" The will of Christ is always perceived more clearly from the foot of the cross; as we release our needs to God we find that God is also freed to meet them in ways pleasing to him.
- "Does it matter who gets the credit?" The Kingdom God is the issue; not human platforms or programs.
- "Is the ministry of Jesus being continued in what we do?" Partnership with Christ is key. (John 15:12-16)

Questions for Corporate Discernment

1. "Does this matter belong to a congregational meeting for discernment, or should it be decided within a working committee or by an individual?"

2.
 - Matters of community maintenance deserve to be relegated to working groups.
 - Only matters that concern the direction of the entire community deserve the searching of all, although clearness for the concerns of individuals is also appropriately sought in the gathered meeting for worship.
3. "Are we asking the right questions?"
 4.
 - The meeting for business is first and foremost a meeting for worship.
 - In such a meeting the central question is neither "What is expedient?" nor "What is the group consensus?" but "What is the leading of Christ in our midst?"
 - Prepare accordingly and allow times of prayer and quiet searching within the meeting itself.
5. "Have all shared their sense of the truth, and have they also released it to the rest of the meeting?"
 6.
 - All members who have something to say have the responsibility to do so clearly, but having done so, to release their contributions to the larger sense of the meeting and leading of the Spirit.
 - No individual possesses all of God's truth, and the contribution of each who has something to say is essential.
 - To withhold one's truth is a "high crime" against the meeting and an affront to the Lord. It may have been the very piece needed to complete the puzzle.
 - The clerk or moderator should invite insight from all perspectives possible in order for the issue and its implications to be understood clearly.
7. "If there is disagreement, are we able to distinguish between preference and conscience?"
 8.
 - Where there is a conflict of perspective the issue must be sorted until the genuine issue(s) of disagreement is (are) clarified.
 - Then, those who hold opposing views are called to distinguish between preference and conscience. If it is a matter of preference, release it to the meeting and do not stand in its way.
 - If it is a matter of conscience, hold to your conviction as long as it holds you.
 - The prophetic voice often sings a solo, at least for a while.
9. "If we have been led together in unity, can we also carry out the decision in unity, in partnership with Christ and with one another?"
 - 10.

- Friends must agree to wait until there is clarity of leading and then support the decisions made in unity.
- When this happens, meetings begin to experience the exciting reality of Christ's present leadership, and the meeting is energized to move forward in the strength of unity.
- Speaking with a united voice depends on waiting long enough to receive a common sense of leading.
- Not only do we seek Christ's leading, but the Spirit of Christ also seeks to lead us into truth.

Suggestions and possible ways forward:

- Be totally given, unreservedly and completely, to Christ, willing to follow his leading whatever it may be
- Continue to consider what decisions need to be made by which persons/groups and by what process
- Build the spiritual priority of discernment into every phase of Church decisional work
- Learn all that can be learned on a subject
- Rather than beginning with a motion, begin with a concern
- Listen to all aspects and sides of the issue
- Understand not simply what divergent views are, but why people hold them
- Attempt to weigh the issues in the light of Scripture, tradition, conscience, and reason
- Distinguish between preference and conscience
- In all things seek to be led by and responsive to Christ

Biblical Bases for Developing the Practice of Discernment

Theocratic Ideals and Realities in Hebrew Scripture

- Numbers 11:29, Moses and the mark of authentic leadership
- Deuteronomy 18:15-22, the agency of the authentic prophet
- I Samuel 8, authentic Theocracy and its imitations
- Isaiah 54:13, your children will be taught of the Lord
- Jeremiah 31:31-34, the transformation from stone to heart
- Joel 2:28-32, the expansion to include young and old, male and female

Jesus Institutes the Immediacy of God's Dynamic Reign

- The Immanuel Presence of God in the ministry of Jesus

- The proliferating of divine access-John's real ministry
- Jesus' teachings about the immanence of the Reign of God
- Jesus' actions, demonstrating God's presence in provocative ways
- Pentecost as fulfilling and expanding the ministry of Jesus

New Testament Approaches to Christocracy

- The assigning of roles and appointing of deacons and elders
- The emergence of James as a leader and brother of the Lord
- The work of Paul as a charismatic apostle and effective missionary
- The role of Peter as a bridge, and the organizing function of his continuing memory
- The Johannine contribution as a reminder of the Holy Spirit's work

Structure and Charisma-Petrine and Johannine views on Christocracy

- After the death of Peter, Kingdom "Keys" were given to those following in his wake
- Where official leadership operated with grace, things went smoothly, but not always
- Apparently, Diotrephes who "loved to be first" was exerting authority uncharitably
- The Johannine Elder (III Jn.) confronted him and the Church
- The Elder finalized and circulated the testimony of the Beloved Disciple as the will and testament for the Church-emphasizing the primary issue: Christocracy
- Thus, Christocracy happens in structural and charismatic ways-the dialogue lives

Acts 15 as a Case Study in Corporate Discernment

- Around a difficult issue, Christian leaders came together, in one place, at one time
- Input was gathered from all sides of the debate
- Having heard the input, the issues were sorted and weighed prayerfully
- Discernment involved distinguishing the substantive issues from the others
- Agreement was achieved, and the unitive conviction was conveyed to others
- This is a case study for attending, discerning, and minding the leadership of Christ

Now, as in the days of the early Church...

- If Christ desires to lead, his will can be known
- If Christ's will can be known, it should be sought and attended
- If Christ's will can be sought it, energy should be devoted to its discernment
- If Christ's will can be discerned, it should be obeyed-for his glory and for the healing of the world