EPISCOPACY

Views from the Antipodes

Essays on Episcopal Ministry presented to the Primate, Archbishop Keith Ragner, on the 25th anniversary of his consecration as bishop.

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CHAPTER
TWENTY

Are Bishops an Ecumenical Problem?
Episcopacy and Episcopate in Two Bilateral Conversations

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Even in so-called non-episcopal churches, there is often a recognition of the value of a leadership that is personalised — as it is in an episcopal ministry — rather than a leadership located entirely in the processes of committees and synods. Beside this theoretical acknowledgment, however, there is also the awareness of the dangers inherent in episcopal leadership in practice. This essay examines the discussion of episcopate and episcopacy in recent conversations in Australia between Anglicans and representatives of the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church. These discussions highlight the responsibility of the Anglican Church (together with other episcopally ordered churches) to provide in practice a model of episcopate that consciously conforms itself to the example of Jesus.
The 1987 Niagara Consultation between Luthers and Anglicans recognised *episcopate* (generally translated as "overseers") as the chief obstacle to full communion between their two communions. The obstacle becomes most apparent in what the Report diplomatically calls "the practice of *episcopate*," that is, the question as to whether *episcopate* must be located in a particular person, the bishop, as it is in Anglican polity, or whether it can be located more generally in church committees, councils, synods and assemblies. It is not simply a question as to whether the Church may locate its *episcopate* personally, but whether it must do so in order to be Church. The various Lutheran national churches follow a number of different practices. Some, like the Church of Sweden, have what Anglicans have traditionally recognised as "apostolic succession," namely a succession of episcopal ordinations through prayer and the laying of hands that reaches back to the early Church. This succession is regarded as being in principle unbroken by the Reformation conflict with Rome. The succession— at least in Anglicanism— is thus not undisputed by other episcopal churches, but it makes sense within the context of Anglican self-understanding, and can be recognised in other churches that are not necessarily in communion with Rome. Other churches in the Lutheran tradition, for example the German Evangelical Churches, have officials who are called bishops, but do not claim to represent an unbroken "apostolic succession," while others, like the Lutheran Church of Australia, give higher authority to some pastors without claiming for them any episcopal title. Clearly, the Lutheran communion does not see personal *episcopate* as being of the essence of the Church in the way Anglicans have tended to see it, though neither Anglicanism nor Lutheranm may be as uniform on this matter as it sometimes appears.

In this paper I would like to look at the question of *episcopate* and especially its role in recent ecumenical discussions in Australia, especially the bilateral talks between Anglicans and the Uniting Church and between Anglicans and Lutherans. I hope then to distil some of the issues surrounding this question, and suggest ways in which Anglicans, without compromising their own tradition, might, from their side, work towards overcoming this "chief obstacle" to full communion with people of non-episcopal churches.

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2 Ibid. para. 3.
3 Ibid. 66–7.
4 Most of the 16th century Anglican apologists, for example, did not regard episcopacy as an essential element of the church, and episcopal ordination became mandatory in the Church of England only at the Restoration. See P. Aviss Anglicanism and the Christian Church (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989) 33–35.

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**UNITING CHURCH—ANGLICAN CONVERSATIONS**

Conversations between the Uniting and Anglican Churches in Australia began in May 1979. The Joint Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Rev'd Dr. Alan Crawford (UCA) and the late Bishop Graham Delbridge (Anglican), met regularly in Melbourne until December 1992. The Committee quickly came to significant agreement on mutual recognition as members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church; mutual acceptance of ministries as real ministries of word and sacraments; and common baptism. Agreement on the eucharist and a range of other questions followed.

The work of the Joint Committee received the qualified affirmation of both churches. The Anglican General Synod received, without officially approving, the Committee's "Report and Proposal" of December 1979 at its meeting in October 1980, and in 1981 reaffirmed its commitment to ecumenical conversations. The Uniting Church National Assembly, meeting in May 1982, accepted the mutual recognition proposal by the Committee and reaffirmed the Uniting Church's constitutional commitment to work towards "the ultimate goal of organic union."

Despite the optimistic beginnings, as early as September 1981 Bishop Heyward noted that, in his opinion, the essential problem was one of orders. The Joint Committee turned to focus on the question of episcopal ministry and its ecumenical implications. It was a question that had already been raised in the discussions leading to the formation of the Uniting Church, and which was to be debated again within the synods of that church in the second half of the decade. This internal Uniting Church discussion of episcopacy ran parallel to and contributed to the bilateral Uniting Church—Anglican discussions.

Two important papers were presented at the meeting of the Joint Committee in February 1982. Professor Harry Wardlaw outlined a series of five "Stages of Recognition." The first four represented, in summary, stages of agreement that the Committee had already reached. The final stage looked forward to a mutual recognition in which "each community recognises the other as a community appropriately ordered in its life and discipline to sustain its faithfulness to, and continuity with [the] witness..."
[of the New Testament] and [the tradition of the Church]." The significance of this final stage was that each church should recognize the legitimacy for the other of the other's traditional form of polity, whether episcopal or non-episcopal. It would be agreed that one sort of polity is not somehow better than the other, and that recognition of the other's order did not imply some deficiency in one's own order. The Committee's Progress Report of 1983 notes that the question of order, and specifically the question of the necessity of the "historic episcopate," had proved to be the stumbling block to complete mutual recognition.

The Uniting Church is unable to affirm the necessity of the historic episcopate since to do so would be to deny that in the past God has blessed ministry within its constituent traditions and also to deny present blessings. On the other hand, the Anglican Church is bound by one of its Fundamental Declarations to preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons, and also constrained by the Chicago—Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 to recognise the Historic Episcopate as one of the four bases (the others being Scriptures, Creeds and the Sacraments of Christ) 'on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards Home Reunions'.

The second paper presented in February 1982 was a major discussion of the theology and practice of episcopal ministry in the Anglican Church of Australia. The argument of this paper by the Rev'd Keith Chittlesborough was that since the introduction of synodical government beginning in the mid 19th century, episcopacy in the Anglican Church has been a rather different phenomenon from its dictionary definition: it is not simply a matter of "church government by bishops." The result was rather a dispersal of authority between bishop and synod. The relationship between bishop and synod is, according to Chittlesborough, "a complex one which springs from a combination of theological principles held in balance." It is important to notice that the primary elements to be held in balance are not, in modern political constitutions, areas of power, but rather theological principles. Chittlesborough goes on to examine these principles, referring to the 1948 Lambeth Conference Report (84-86):

(a) The Lordship of Christ, who is both personal and corporate, means that the church should locate authority for itself in a
dialectic of personal oversight and corporate responsibility, bearing in mind that "responsibility" has to do with responding, answering, to the incarnate Christ. The bishop embodies the personal element, while the responding is shared corporately by the people of God (including the bishop) acting together.

(b) The Holy Spirit given to the whole Church means that each Christian receives and is expected to exercise certain authority in relation to other Christians. There is a ministry of mutual encouragement and correction, which is also to be exercised in relation to the whole body of Christ. In practice this means a dialectic between a simultaneous exercise of power by those set apart to minister and the necessity of open criticism of that power.

(c) Episcopate is to be understood as a function of the whole church. This follows from what has already been said: episcopate, i.e. oversight or visitation, inheres in the whole body of Christ, but is personalised in the bishop. For this reason the bishop's role is not primarily an administrative one. It is a ministry — a servitude if you like — that is exercised collegially on several levels with other bishops to be sure, but also with the synod.

(d) The sacramentality of episcopal order means that the bishop is in some sense a "sacramental person." By virtue of consecration the bishop "has responsibilities which do not derive from (the) Synod, nor can these inherent episcopal powers be delegated to (the) Synod." Understood politically, in terms of power, these responsibilities include such things as power to ordain, to licence ministries, and to resolve questions of conscience within the church (the example given is the remarriage of divorced persons). But sacramentality is not to be understood primarily as a matter of power in this way. Rather it is a mediation, "by persons who are called and commissioned by God through the Church to represent both the transcendent and the immanent elements of Christ's authority." In other words, this sacramentality is based in vocation, which has itself the dual quality of believing oneself to be called to a particular ministry and receiving the affirmation of that belief by the church as a whole. Nor does it depend, as Chittlesborough points out, on a once-off act of ordination, but on the "subsequent life and work" that follows that act of ordination. The sacramentality of the bishop's life must, like all sacramental symbols, have both a transcendent and an immanent aspect: it is, on the one hand, an ordinary human life with various ordinary

10 Ibid. 14.
11 Ibid. 15. "Home Reunion" refers to the 19th movement for Anglican - Methodist reunion in Britain.
13 For the historical background, see F.J. Whitington (Ed.) Augustus Short, First Bishop of Adelaide: a Chapter in Colonial Church History (Adelaide: E.S. Wigg, & Son, 1887) chap. 6; and H. Lowther Clarke Constitutional Church Government in the dominions beyond the sea and in other parts of the Anglican Communion (London: SPCK, 1924) 83ff.
14 Chittlesborough 2.
16 Chittlesborough 5.
17 Ibid. quoting Lambeth 1948.
human strengths and weaknesses; it can, on the other hand, point beyond itself to mediate something of Christ's presence. This capacity to mediate is a matter of great sensitivity, and I do not intend to explore here the "how" of this capacity. But it is a claim that Anglicans tend to make for the historic episcopate, and it raises the whole question of sacramental theology.

(e) The authority of the bishop as a "sacramental person" is balanced by the authority of the consensus fidetium. The bishop must be accepted by the people of God in order to be a bishop; his or her authority is exercised in relation to the people who make up the church, and is subject to their correction in the way suggested above. Formally this correction is exercised through synods, though Chittilceborough is careful to distinguish the notion of consensus from simple majority rule. "Rather than truth or wisdom being 'democratically' determined by majority vote, consensus government emerges with time, patience and often costly love which is willing to defer to the common mind even when it has not yet emerged, and when it is 'genuinely free.'"18

Underlying all of these points - within each of the first three, and between points (d) and (e) - there is the dialectical tension that marks the Anglican middle way at its best: truth is not to be found in the "middle," in the sense of an easy compromise position; nor in the choice between one extreme or the other. Rather, truth is to be found on both sides of the equation, at both extremes19: in Christ both as personal and as corporate; in the Holy Spirit who both gives particular charisms to particular members of the church and who also indwells the church as a whole; in the episcopate of both the person of the bishop and also the whole Church; in both the sacramentality of the episcopal ministry and the sacramentality of the body of baptised people. Chittilceborough's paper argues that these are the principles underlying Anglican synodical government. Even when they are not articulated, or worse still, forgotten, it is still possible to appeal to them. Although synodical government has developed in a rather haphazard way since 1654, province by province and diocese by diocese, there is implicit within it a coherent ecclesiology that finds acceptance throughout the Anglican Communion. Furthermore, according to Chittilceborough, it is flexible enough - not only in theory but also in practice - to accommodate the theological truths implicit in presbyterial and congregational church polities.20

Later in 1982, the Rev'd Dr. Stuart Murray read a paper entitled "Episcopacy through the Presbytery." This paper sought to "explain the way episcopacy can be exercised corporately by a presbytery," and also to give the background to current Uniting Church practice in regard to episcopacy. This paper drew attention to the 1964 Proposed Basis of Union which anticipated the appointment of bishops to a separate function within the one order of ministry in the future Uniting Church. The bishop would be appointed for life, and was to be charged with a role and a range of responsibilities very similar to those of an Anglican bishop. Presbytery and bishops of the Church of South India were to be invited to take part in consecration of the first Uniting Church bishops, thus in effect ensuring the "apostolic succession" as understood by Anglicans. The proposal to introduce episcopacy was opposed by some representatives of the three negotiating churches. After considerable debate within these churches, the proposal was defeated from the 1971 Basis of Union.21 The question was not so much resolved as postponed till after Church union, an event which took place in 1977. The 1971 Basis of Union located episcopacy as a corporate function of the local presbytery. Even so, it is not a matter of majority decision, for all episcopacy is regarded as belonging to Christ before it can be mediated through the councils of the church. The presbytery may in fact call one of its members to exercise its "corporate episcopal function." Each presbytery has considerable freedom to make its own rules here, but many presbyteries do in fact appoint a full-time presbytery officer to exercise a degree of personal episcopacy.22 Stuart Murray's paper insists that this role has no more than "very muted episcopal overtones." He laments the lack of "an effective means for maintaining the purity of the faith," a role traditionally entrusted, in episcopal churches, to the bishop. The paper points towards the renewed discussion of episcopacy in the Uniting Church in the late 'eighties.23

The other very valuable element in this paper is its reflection on the word episcopacy itself. Murray points out that the primary meaning in the Septuagint is that of "visitation," and this theme is taken further in a number of significant New Testament passages where episcopacy and etymologically related words are applied to Christ's coming. To think in these terms of episcopacy, both that of Christ and within Christ's church, provides a useful counter-weight to the more authoritarian tones of episcopacy as "oversight." This idea is not developed in Murray's paper, but could certainly help to dispel the not entirely unfounded fears of past abuses of "government by bishops."

18 Ibid. 6.
19 A classic example of this understanding of the Anglican "middle way" is to be found in the final chapter of F.D. Maurice, The Kingdom of Christ (London: Macmillan & Co., 1891, 4th ed.) 410ff., where Maurice assesses in turn the "value and truth" of the "liberal, evangelical and catholic principles".
20 Ibid. 7.
21 Melbourne: Christian Unity Committee, 1964) 64.
22 (Melbourne: Aldersgate Press, 1971.)
23 This discussion was requested by the Victorian Synod in 1982 and the Assembly in 1985. The issue was shelved again in 1991.
By the end of 1983, members of the Joint Uniting Church – Anglican Steering Committee had agreed that for their respective churches the question of bishops was indeed the ecumenical problem. “The question which has proved a stumbling block to mutual recognition has been this: the historic episcopate — necessary or not?”24 The way forward was seen to be in further discussion of the concept of episcopacy, steering away from the more emotionally-charged notion of episcopacy.

During this period of the mid-1980s, the Joint Committee heard three further papers: two shorter presentations by Oliver Heyward on “Episcopacy and Ecclesiastical Oversight” and “Authority in the Anglican Church,” and a longer paper on “The Threefold Ministry of Christ and Church Order,” by Harry Wardlaw. Heyward’s earlier paper opens with the statement that “Anglicanism has never questioned the theological validity of episcopacy,” and goes on to argue that for Anglicanism, contrary to the model suggested in the 1964 Proposed Basis of Union, “episcopacy is an order and not an office.” After this apparently uncompromising opening, a number of concessions are offered. The English Reformers never claimed episcopacy was necessary from the New Testament point of view, rather that it was “not repugnant to the Word of God.” This means it could be considered as adiaphoric: permitted but not required by scripture. Heyward also concedes that the romantic notion of an “unbroken lattice succession of laying-on-of-hands” from the time of the apostles was no longer tenable, and that legal power, at least in the Australian Anglican Church, resides not in the bishops but in the synods.

The bishop’s authority is not even that of an executive of synod, but rather that of a representative of the church and ultimately of Christ: “Behind (the bishop’s) authority lies that of Christ himself in the Church. The bishops as an order are not independent of the rest of the church, yet within the church express its life and actions representatively.” Heyward is suggesting a very similar idea here to Chittleborough’s notion of the bishop as a “sacramental person.”

Heyward develops this notion of representative authority in his second paper. The dispersed authority to which Chittleborough refers is “shared between the bishops whose power is spiritual and synods whose power is legal.” Referring specifically to the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, he notes that “the authority of the General Synod is plenary in matters of order and government, but it only ‘may make statements’ on matters spiritual.” In other words, “the spiritual authority seems to remain implicitly with the bishops, though no corporate authority is anywhere attributed to them.” This is to say, although there is a collegial relationship between diocesan bishops, there is no institutional “college” of bishops which might hold legislative power. “The Australian Bishops’ Conference meets every year, but like the

24 Progress Report, op. cit. 15.

Lambeth Conference, is merely a consultative body making no claim to authority over its members or the church as a whole. In this, it is markedly different from the Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church.”25 The paper concludes: “The authority of the bishop is ancient, traditional and ill-defined. The authority of the synod is relatively recent ... It is clearly and legally defined and limited. The two strands of authority are illustrative of the nature of Anglicanism itself — catholic and reformed. As such it is difficult to understand in theory, though its working in practice is usually relatively simple.”26

The final major contribution to the Uniting Church – Anglican discussions on episcopacy was the paper by Harry Wardlaw. In this paper he drew a parallel between Calvin’s characterisation of Christ’s ministry in terms of the offices of king, priest and prophet, and the traditional three-fold ordering of the ministries of bishop, priest and deacon. Wardlaw argues that Christ both transforms and reconciles the diverse elements of these Old Testament offices. Christ’s prophetic ministry reconciles the judgement and the mercy of God; Christ’s priesthood reconciles the sacred and the profane; Christ’s kingship reconciles the unequal relationship of master and slave. More importantly, Christ’s ministry reconciles these often mutually antagonistic offices to one another: “The prophets are forever challenging the religious conservatism of priests or the overbearing arrogance of kings, while kings in their turn challenge the religious pretensions of priests and the social irresponsibility of prophets. And Christians are often challenged to take sides in these disputes ... But I wonder whether the great confrontations in the New Testament, Jesus and John the Baptist, Jesus and Caiaphas, Jesus and Pilate or Herod, might not be seen in quite a different way. Is it not perhaps a case of the true priest confronting the shadow priest, the true prophet confronting the shadow prophet, the true king confronting the shadow king? John the Baptist seemed to understand something of that and perhaps there were glimmerings of such understanding even in Pilate.”27

Wardlaw goes on to argue that, if Christ’s ministry has these three dimensions, so should all Christian ministry, but that because different people have different personal gifts, one dimension will inevitably come to the fore and other dimensions, while not disappearing, will fall into the background. Implicit in this argument seems to be the notion of one order of ministry within which there may be different roles or functions — that is to say, if such a distinction between “order” and “function” is to be

26 Ibid. 3.
27 H. Wardlaw “The Threefold Ministry of Christ and Church Order” 3 (Joint Standing Committee archives).
made. “There are, we might say, different ways of focussing ministry. It may seem at first sight that the difference of the charge given to the bishop and the priest is simply a difference of the sphere in which ministry is exercised ... This observation hardly does justice to the different character of the two offices however.” 28 Thus, it seems to me Wardlaw wants to modify the theoretical distinction between “order” and “function.”

The paper then turns to the possibility of a parallel between the offices (or orders) of king, priest and prophet and those of bishop, priest and deacon. For present purposes, we focus on the parallel between Christ’s kingship and the ministry of bishop. Here Wardlaw’s argument about Christ’s reconciliation of divergent tendencies comes into its own. If Christ’s kingship reconciles the monarchical and the pastoral, the elements of authority and servitude, then any contrast between these in christian episcopacy is a betrayal of “the true nature of episcopacy.” 29 If authority is an authority of service, then the next question, according to Wardlaw, is: What distinguishes the ministry of bishop from the ministry of deacon? This question is followed by some reflection on the diocesan ministry. The overall conclusion is that there is indeed a parallel between the threefold ministry of Christ as king, priest and prophet on the one hand and the traditional threefold ordering of ministry. In this, and in downplaying the distinction between “order” and “office,” the paper goes quite some way towards finding common ground between presbyterian and episcopal polities.

Between 1988 and 1991 the United Church – Anglican discussions ran parallel to the renewed internal discussion of episcopacy within the Uniting Church. Several Uniting Church members of the Joint Committee contributed to this debate, arguing for the introduction of episcopacy. Stuart Murray and Alan Crawford were both members of a committee that produced the major discussion paper Bishops in the Uniting Church 20. Stuart Murray was also involved in a further group called to analyse responses to the discussion. This latter group presented its report to the Sixth Assembly in 1991. In the light of the overwhelming feeling against the proposed introduction of episcopacy, the Assembly decided, “without prejudice to any decisions in future Assemblies,” not to proceed with the proposal. In December 1992 the Joint Uniting Church – Anglican group that had met in Melbourne since 1979 was disbanded, and a new group established to meet in Sydney. The implicit agreement was that the question of episcopacy should be, for the time being, shelved in the bilateral conversations as it had been the previous year within the Uniting Church. Despite real progress made towards finding common ground, the question of episcopacy continued to be an ecumenical problem.

THE LUTHERAN – ANGLICAN CONVERSATIONS

The Lutheran – Anglican Conversations in Australia began formally in 1972, meeting in Adelaide. By the end of the following year, the dialogue group was able to publish a combined statement of the eucharist. In 1975, a combined statement on ministry followed. This statement concluded by pinpointing the question of episcopacy.

While acknowledging that there is apostolic Ministry of Word and Sacrament in both our communions, we admit that the following differences exist with respect to the question of Church Unity:

1. For Anglicans, the acceptance of episcopacy as part of the life of the Church (and of episcopal ordination as a rule of the Church) is a prerequisite for the formation of a united church with Anglican participation.
2. For Lutherans there is no higher unity beyond the unity of faith. Organic union may or may not follow from the unity of faith and confession and belongs to the realm of external human ordering. Thus it is only the insistence on a particular form of ‘episcopacy’ that causes difficulty for Lutherans.”

The combined statement was revised in 1984, with a significant change to the wording in point one, which now read: “For Anglicans, the acceptance of episcopacy as part of the life of the Church (and of episcopal ordination as the rule of the Church) is at present a prerequisite for the formation of a fully united Church with Anglican participation.”

Anglican participants had apparently moved to a slightly more flexible position in the intervening years. The 1984 Revision makes a difference in terminology in regard to ministry:

1. Anglicans speak of three Orders of Ministry, or of Holy Orders, thus reflecting that there are three offices, bishop, priest and deacon, in the Church.
2. Lutherans, by contrast, speak of The Office of the Ministry, thus reflecting their belief that there is one essential public Office in the Church.

This is an interesting clarification, in that it distinguishes between a three-fold order (Anglican) and a single office of ministry (Lutheran) in a

28 Ibid. 4.
29 Ibid. 5.
30 S. Murray, A. Crawford, D. Merritt, E. Mitchell, G. Watson and N. Young Bishops in the Uniting Church? Sydney: Assembly Communication, 1988. See also the earlier Report to Assembly Standing Committee by Stuart Murray “A Proposal to Introduce Episcopacy into the Uniting Church”.
32 Ibid., 219: my italics.
33 Ibid. 216.
similar way to the Uniting Church emphasis on a single "order" of ministry. However, the terms order and office also appear to be equated here, so there is a contrast to the Uniting Church - Anglican documents where "office" seems to be equated with "function." The advantage of looking at three differing uses of terminology in the context of different bilateral conversations is that the distinctions between these terms may turn out to be not quite as watertight as had been thought.

An even more interesting point in the 1984 revision is the recognition of differences of opinion among Anglicans themselves on the nature of apostolic succession. First there is an agreement that apostolicity consists "in the continuation and proclamation of the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, and the administration of the Sacraments." Within this common understanding, there is a difference between, on the one hand, "many Anglicans" who see apostolicity located in the historic episcopate, and on the other hand, "Lutherans and some Anglicans" who locate apostolicity in the "continued proclamation of the apostolic teaching." Here, while the episcopate may be seen as "desirable for the good ordering of the Church," it is not regarded "as part of the Church's apostolicity."

The Combined Statement goes on to note a difference in the exercise of episcopate in the two churches. Anglican practice is to reserve episcopate as the personal prerogative of the bishop. Lutheran practice is to locate episcopate in the calling of the individual pastor. There may be a bishop or president set over a number of pastors, but his or her role is not given "by virtue of a divinely-ordained office." This stands in contrast to the Uniting Church documents, where episcopate is seen to reside corporately in the synod or assembly. The Lutheran position appears, by contrast, to locate episcopate personally in the figure of the pastor. "who has a divine command to exercise episcopate over the flock of Christ to which he has been called." It is also interesting to notice how the process of these two bilateral conversations has prompted Anglicans to seek to define the episcopal role which had hitherto, in Oliver Heywood's words, been ill-defined.

The question of episcopate for Lutheran - Anglican Dialogue in Australia was given further impetus from being the central question for the 1987 international meeting between Lutherans and Anglicans at Niagara Falls. Keith Chittleborough was a participant in this Consultation. The Report from the Consultation identifies episcopate (especially the practice of episcopate) as the "chief obstacle to full communion" and sets out on the assumption that episcopate is not to be treated in isolation but rather in relation to the mission of the Church. The document assumes the necessity of episcopate, and having both temporal and spatial dimensions. Both "historic episcopate" and "apostolic succession" are defined in terms that should be acceptable both to Lutherans and Anglicans. Apostolicity is not simply a matter of continuity, but is dependent upon a range of criteria, with mission as the essential starting point. One theme in the Niagara Report to which the Lutheran participants in the Australian discussions were to give considerable and consistent prominence was the relationship between episcopate and the gospel. It is, as Erich Renner was later to put it, "for the sake of the good news of redemption that episcopate is instituted, and for no other reason."

The Niagara Report provides a valuable position paper for further discussion, as well as pointing to some practical reforms that the participants saw to be needed. In addition to ongoing reassessment of the practice of oversight and management in both churches, Anglicans were asked to make three specific changes to current practice:

1. Anglican Churches should make the necessary canonical revisions so that they can acknowledge and recognize the full authenticity of existing ministries of Lutheran Churches. The basis for such a change was seen in the renewed understanding of apostolic succession, no longer as "primarily an unbroken chain of those ordaining to those ordained," but rather "in a succession in the presiding ministry of a church, which stands in the continuity of the apostolic faith." (Para 94)

2. Anglican Churches and bishops should establish structures for "collegial and periodic review" of the bishop's ministry. The phrasing of this paragraph is fairly loose, but it seems to be calling for a review not only of episcopal ministry in general, but for a degree of accountability built in to the ministry of each particular bishop in his/her exercise of episcopal authority. (Para 95)

3. "Lutheran Churches should regularly invite Lutheran bishops to participate in the laying on of hands at the consecration and installation of Anglican bishops." This was seen as a necessary symbol of real mutual consultation and interaction in the exercise of episcopate. (Para 96)

The Australian Lutheran - Anglican Conversations have, over recent years, devoted their energies to studying the Niagara Report and seeking to apply it to the Australian context. The group was able to issue joint

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34 Ibid. 217.
35 Ibid. 218.
36 Ibid.
37 The Niagara Report: op. cit.
38 Ibid. para. 2-3.
39 Ibid. para. 6.
40 Ibid. paras. 7 & 52.
41 Ibid. 2.
42 Ibid. paras. 6 & 54.
43 Ibid. paras. 20 & 21.
44 E. Renner "The Gospel and Episcopate" para. 11.
45 The Niagara Report op. cit. paras. 88-150.
statements on "Episcopacy and Unity" in June 1993, though the practical implications of mutual recognition of episcopacy are yet to be addressed.

CONCLUSIONS

Are bishops an ecumenical problem? On the face of it, the answer seems to be "yes". Episcopacy has been an ecumenical problem in the English-speaking world ever since 1662, the year that gave us not only the definitive Book of Common Prayer but also, less happily, the definitive Act of Uniformity. Anglicans should not be naive about the negative emotional charge that the word "bishop" carries for many people from non-episcopal backgrounds. The Report to the 1991 Uniting Church Assembly\(^6\) should be evidence enough of this factor. In this context "the very word bishop," as Stuart Murray puts it, "is difficult because of the history of the office."\(^6\) There may be a related historical-cultural difficulty with episcopate suggested by Harry Wardlaw when he draws a parallel between the Old Testament office of king and the ecclesiastical office of bishop: "Our distrust of kingship goes too deep. Most of us are ready and more than ready to heed the warnings of Samuel..."\(^8\) If there is a theological link between monarchy and episcopacy (and there is certainly a historical link, at least in British history) — and even if the true kingship of Christ transforms (and in this sense, redeems) monarchy as Wardlaw suggests — perhaps Australian Christians would be well advised to sheve some ecumenical discussion of episcopal church polity until after our secular republican debate is resolved. We need at least to be aware of the danger of ecclesiastical and secular politics becoming confused here.

There do seem to be a number of areas, however, where positive action can be taken by Australian Anglicans towards making episcopacy less of an ecumenical problem.

1. We can explore the notion of episcopacy as "visitation" rather than primarily as "oversight." Australian anti-authoritarianism tends to reject the notion of oversight out of hand. We don't take easily to the idea of being checked up on, far less to the idea of being controlled. The idea of visitation can admittedly, especially in a biblical context, carry some ambiguity, but on the whole it suggests a giving and receiving of hospitality, and a mutual sharing of existential concerns. These are advantages, but the real basis for an exploration of this understanding of episcopacy in ecumenical discussion is that it may be closer to what the New Testament intends. It certainly points to a more pastoral, less managerial, image of the diocesan bishop's role.\(^*\) Such an exploration of episcopal leadership could be given a practical slant if lay people and clergy could bring themselves to change their expectations of bishops (do bishops have to be on virtually every diocesan committee, for example?), and if bishops themselves could be more assertive about the priority of their being pastoral "visitors," rather than "oversers." Some of the trappings of authority — especially those of associated secular\(^*\) "monarchical" authority (thrones and enforcements, for example) — could be dispensed with in the process. In these ways the practice of episcopacy might become a clearer expression of the evangelium-episcopate that our Lutheran dialogue partners so strongly and justifiably advocate.

2. Secondly, it is important for Anglicans, not least in confirmation classes, to demystify the notion of apostolic succession. If, as Oliver Heyward's paper and the Niagara Report agree, it is no longer possible to hold a view of unbroken mesne succession of laying on of hands from the time of the apostles, then Anglicans should be made aware of this and encouraged to think more creatively and more generously in terms of a continuity (in space as well as in time) of apostolic faith. The apostolic succession must come to be popularly understood in terms of an unbroken "wider fellowship."\(^*\) When we look at the fourth article of the Chicago - Lambeth Quadrilateral, the article concerned with the "historic episcopate," we should acknowledge honestly that of

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\(^*\) I have to say here that in my own experience of working as a parish priest, the ministry of the bishops under/with whom I have worked has invariably been pastorally supportive. At times this has been a matter of some surprise because of its contrast to my previous work experience as a school-teacher, in situations where one, as a matter of course, was far more likely to receive both sympathetic hearing and practical support from the union rep. than from the "overser", the school principal.

\(^*\) It is worth remembering that the authority of the mediaval episcopal, from which we still derive most of these episcopal trappings, was essentially a secular authority. See G.V. Bernet "Religious and ecclesiastical factors that have shaped episcopacy" in Today's Church and Today's World: Lambeth Conference 1978 Preparatory Articles (CIO Publishing, London, 1977) 222.

the four articles, this one "has generated the most controversy" and has been subject to the widest divergences of understanding by Anglicans themselves. This is to say nothing of attempts to come to a common mind with other episcopal churches. We need to see the historic episcopate as an expression of episcopacy, but not the only possible expression.

3. There are several areas in which Anglicans could usefully clarify their use of terminology. In particular we need to decide whether there is a difference between order and function. It may be well to point out that Anglicans find it just as difficult to agree among themselves on this matter as it is for their representatives to agree with their dialogue partners from non-episcopal churches. We may even discover that agreement on this is not essential. A similar matter of terminology is to determine the nature of the basic ecclesiastical unit. The Anglican Report sees the bishop's office in the early church as embodying "the tension between locality and universality." Subsequent differences have developed, however, as to what contemporary office corresponds to the ancient episcopal office, specifically that of the pastor of the congregation or that of the diocesan bishop. Anglicans generally are committed to a geographical understanding of the parish and the diocese, with the diocese as the basic ecclesiastical unit. The Uniting Church understands parish as the gathered congregation with episcopacy vested corporately in the presbytery. For Lutherans, episcopacy is vested primarily in the local pastor, though with bishops or presidents sharing some wider powers with synods. There are ecclesiastical and sociological issues here that will determine the practice of episcopacy. Such discussion will need to consider what is meant by sacramentality, especially in relation to persons. In what sense is the bishop a "sacramental person"?

4. It is important that episcopacy and more specifically, episcopal ministry, be considered not in isolation, but in connection with other ministries within the church, and ultimately in relation to the ministry of Christ. Such an approach may allow us to see that the eccumenical problem of episcopacy is not so much about bishops as the significance of ordination. William Countryman argues that "Christians share a common concern — sometimes relatively inarticulate — with orders... orders are bound up with the communal identities that particularly divide us from one another here and now." Patterns of ordained ministry are important insofar as they give a sense of identity to particular Christian communities. The threefold ordering of ministry is a part of Anglican identity. But the ministry of bishops must be considered in connection with the ministries of priests and deacons — none is to be taken in isolation. The nature and purpose of these offices or orders of ministry need to be explored in relation to one another, and to the overall mission of the church.

Ecumenical discussion has tended to centre on the problem of recognition of ministries, and in particular, on how to safeguard the traditions we have inherited without denying the riches held in other traditions. This is a difficult task for us all. Yet let us remember that traditions are not simply treasures to be guarded and handed on unchanged. A living tradition is able to adapt. Churches may be called to give up, in an act of Christlike self-emptying, something precious that has been received. It is not necessarily the most obvious — in this case, the historic episcopate with its claim to unbroken continuity through time — that must be given up. It may be the administrative authority we tend to invest in bishops, which frequently stands in the way of their exploring the diaconal elements of their own Christian episcopacy. It is certainly the tunnel-vision that has prevented us in the past from seeing genuine episcopacy manifested in non-episcopal churches.

55 Ibid. 3.
56 Personal awareness of the tradition and understanding of ministry on the basis of the three aspects of mission: koinonia, kerygma and diaconia, outlined in C. Bonn in "The Theology of Mission" in International Review of Missions 77 (July 1987) esp. 390-392. Such a discussion would require another paper, however.
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