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# Episcopal Ministry

TIM BRADSHAW

## Introduction

Cultured, erudite, long and at times repetitive, this report by the Archbishop's Group on the Episcopate<sup>1</sup> offers us much substance along with some superb delicacies and occasional relish. One of its most interesting features is its character as a diary of events. The group began work in January 1986, well in time, it had hoped, to produce a report for the Lambeth Conference of 1988. It was set up in particular to examine the issue of ordination of women to the episcopate, and one of its members was Dr Gareth Bennett. The report has something of an anguished tone as it becomes plain that the group is deeply divided. It does not produce a report in time for Lambeth. One of its members commits suicide, perhaps over the very issue it is discussing. The Eames Commission comes into existence to cope with the questions under discussion. A memorandum emerges to go to the House of Bishops under an individual's name, that of Dr Carey, printed as an appendix, because the group cannot even agree to a document detailing its disagreements.

The document therefore has a dramatic background, and all these events are among the *dramatis personae* of the text. A wonderfully elegant historical hand also comes into the document from time to time, as if a master has entered the stage to give us some real pearls of great price and these sections are superb. For example we have some cameos of lives of bishops since the Reformation, to give us a feel of their burdens<sup>2</sup> from their perspective and context. Also we are treated to a rare and valuable excursus on the nature of the transfer of civil and religious papal authority to the civil and religious authorities in England at the Reformation and their developing relationship since then, through the thought of generations of theologians. These and other such sections are gems and worth reading on their own account.

Another highly useful and interesting feature is the volume of ecumenical material packed into the report. We are given summaries of the several official dialogues between Anglicans and others and also the formal ecclesiastical or canonical positions of churches seeking closer ties with Anglicanism. The bibliography given will also be especially useful in

<sup>1</sup> GS 944, Church House Publishing, London 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp 109-117.

this respect. Again, the reader has something of a sense that the report was written in the midst of changes and challenges of many kinds, and by a group of people with great learning at their disposal, particularly historical learning.

### The central rationale for Anglican Episcopacy

Having suggested some of the flavours and delicacies of the report, let us set to work at the substantial main course itself, which is a determined argument stating the nature of episcopacy in the Church of England. It set out to do this hoping to reach agreement over the question of women in the episcopate, and while it failed to achieve agreement in that, it did produce a weighty doctrine of episcopacy, including a proposed rationale for suffragan and assistant bishops. This report will set a vital ecclesiological agenda in itself and certainly demands our careful attention.

### Organising concepts

The report uses a schema throughout of three planes of episcopal ministry all of which coincide in the person of the bishop. There is the local plane of ministry in the bishop's community; there is the wider or universal plane, referring to the bishop's role in relating his community to the whole church; and finally the trans-historical plane speaks of the transmission of the faith and ministry from generation to generation. This organising principle gives the report an a priori base from which to operate.

*The trinitarian koinonia* of God is used as the initial theological background to the consideration of the episcopal ministry in the church. Just as there is differentiation and order in the triune God, so in the Church. The Church lives this divine life of mutuality in human historical conditions, and we glimpse in the trinitarian distinctions and order 'ground for believing that, at our creaturely level, distinction of function and differentiation of relationship are proper and necessary in the ministerial order of the Church'.<sup>3</sup> The ministry of the Church of God is to be co-operative, and in particular, 'the bishop is focus of unity in Christ and at the same time in the sparkling diversity offered by the gifts of the Spirit. The bishop is the *polupletheia* (the multitude) in his person, the many in the one.'<sup>4</sup> This use of the trinitarian analogy sets the tone for a remarkably high and constitutive doctrine of the episcopate. Closely linked with this throughout the report is a clear influence of modern Orthodox doctrinal thinking, in which ecclesiology is constitutively determined by the Trinity, even in structural, institutional, aspects. As the report tells us of the Church, 'Its institutional framework is an incarnational expression of that communion, and in this way too the Church is called to be an

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

image of the Trinitarian God.<sup>5</sup> But the image of Christ the shepherd also, happily, complements that of the bishop as the one and the many in his own person.

### *The New Testament and Early Church*

In order to understand this trinitarian ecclesiology better, the report now turns to Scripture and Part 1: Our Heritage. The report works from this trinitarian base to the New Testament, omitting any reference to the Old Testament and its understanding of the shepherds of Israel as precursors of Jesus the good shepherd, pointed out by the late Robin Nixon in his fine essay on episcopacy.<sup>6</sup> From Acts the report deduces that founders of local churches kept in touch with each other, and that local churches themselves kept in contact through these founding fathers, for instance Paul. These leaders continued to exercise oversight (*episcopo*) through letters, sending messengers, and eliciting collections. The Pastoral Epistles show a great concern for guarding the faith and teaching by the overseer of the gospel, the *episcopos*.

The report envisages different developing patterns of episcopo in different churches in the apostolic era. James in Jerusalem seems to have been a ruling presbyteral figure among his council of presbyters or elders in the synagogue pattern and he would be a prototype of the future bishop exercising apostolic oversight, as were Timothy and Titus apostolic delegates similarly overseeing churches. Here is evidence of an original monarchical episcopacy from earliest years. In Ephesus the leadership appears to have been more corporate, under the overall authority of an apostle. In the Pastoral Epistles presbyters are generally in the plural, bishops in the singular, suggesting an evolving presidency role. In some churches a single bishop would have emerged from among the presbyters, in others he became joined in authority by a group.

As to the function and character of the ministry of oversight in the New Testament, it is no mere human development but a gift from God to the Church, of guardianship and order, enabling the Church to be the Church. It is a ministry shepherding the flock, of union and communion. Although we cannot now say clearly that the threefold order existed in the days of the apostles, we can say confidently that a ministry of personal oversight emerged very early. This soon becomes monarchical episcopacy in the sub-apostolic church and from Ignatius of Antioch, (c 35-107), we learn the slogan 'no bishop, no church', and the principle that the bishop must be the normal eucharistic president. In terms of the first of the three planes, the bishop has these duties and also that of vital teacher of the faith, in the face of the syncretism of the early centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> 'Oversight and Bishops', R.E. Nixon, in *All in Each Place*, ed J.I. Packer, Marcham Manor Press, Abingdon 1965.

He is therefore the primary minister of the word locally. He also ministers confirmation, sealing the membership of the local flock in his personal act of laying on hands, declaring that the baptised is a member of the local church of Christ.

The bishop among his presbyters shared a parity in terms of sacramental power, but had a jurisdictional superiority. Yet to leave the distinction between presbyters and bishops here is not sufficient for the report, which says that 'the episcopal office rests on something mystically far more profound than juridical foundations.'<sup>7</sup> The gospel pointed the church to the need for a personal chief pastor to act and speak in Christ's name. The distinction between the presbyteral and episcopal orders is taken as established by a spiritual congruence with the gospel in the Church locally. The two-tiered ministry of bishop-priest and deacon of the sub-apostolic generation passed into the three-tiered ministry to meet practical needs, with the presiding bishops representing apostolicity.<sup>8</sup> That is how episcopacy was given by God to the Church through historical development, in relation to the first plane, that of local ministry.

As to the second plane, that of universality, the conciliar meetings of bishops developed into the method by which local churches related to one another. The episcopate became a single entity in which each individual bishop possesses the episcopate in its fulness.<sup>9</sup> With this development came the importance attached to particular historic sees which could look back to foundation by apostles, notably that of Rome.

The third plane, through time, concerns the episcopal role in handing on the apostolic faith. The succession of bishops was a visible succession of ministry instituted by Christ; it preserved the Church's identity and guarded it from pluralistic heresy. Here the report strikes another very Orthodox note and says that episcopal apostolic succession cannot be separated from community succession: 'The bishop was successor to the Apostles by virtue of his being head of a particular church, president of a local eucharistic assembly. Apostolic succession inheres, not in the person of a bishop alone, but in the Church as a whole.'<sup>10</sup> In performing ordinations to perpetuate the ministry in the Church, the bishop needed to act as the figure representing the Church universal and trans-historical, but the community too needed to pray for the Holy Spirit: both bishop and people were inseparably required. Likewise the bishop commissioned, and the people needed to receive, the pastorate.

### *The Church of England since the Reformation*

Following a thorough review of *episcopate* as practised in other traditions,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p 30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p 34.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p 37.

including non-episcopalian denominations with congregational polities and 'from below' views of wider oversight, the report turns its attention to the Church of England, which, it avers, is 'Catholic and Reformed' and maintained the episcopal line of ministry intentionally at the break with Rome. Anglican bishops remain bishops for life and episcopacy has divine sanction, as Ussher argued against the Presbyterians. The question as to episcopacy being of the '*esse*', '*bene esse*' or '*plene esse*' of the Church is discussed and the report tells us that, notwithstanding the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888, 'the Church of England as a whole has never committed itself to the view that the episcopate is of the *esse* of the Church.'<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the key claim made in the report is that the Anglican tradition views the diocese as the fundamental normal unit of the Church, with the bishop as its pastor and personal leader. The bishop has the whole power of the ministry of Word and Sacraments in the diocese and the presbyters may not exercise any ordinary ministrations without licence from the bishop.<sup>12</sup> The diocese is the single local eucharistic community, pastored by the bishop who delegates his ministry to his presbyters and others. The bishop's local ministry of teaching should, the report insists, avoid disturbing the faith of people who have no means of assessing apparently negative implications of critical scholarship. The sacramental ministry includes that of the eucharist, confirmation, and the ministry of absolution. Confirmation by the bishop is an interesting example of the three planes intersecting, since it signifies that the candidate is a member not merely of the local congregation or denomination, but of the universal Church across space and through time. For this reason Anglicans have kept episcopal confirmation, despite pressure of time on bishops. The bishop is the focus of local unity, exercising pastoral discipline with authority from Christ and from the people.

In terms of the second plane, the report gives a very useful review of the evolution of General Synod from the Convocations, and National Assembly, including some theological argument protesting against an incipient movement of democratic egalitarianism undermining apostolic episcopal rule in the church.<sup>13</sup> The House of Bishops retains a seniority in General Synod, since matters of key import have to be submitted to it before final approval can be given. The report points to a discrepancy between the nature of the representation in the two lower houses and that of the body of bishops since 'the bishop at his ordination is called to be a chief pastor sharing with his fellow bishops a special responsibility' which is not answerable to the other houses by the counting of votes. Here the report isolates the hybrid character of the Church of England.

Discussion of the third plane entails the historic succession through

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p 87.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p 88.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p 102.

Matthew Parker and the strong affirmation that the Church of England never intended to break with the theology and practice in episcopal succession down the generations.

### *Episcopacy in the Anglican Communion*

Episcopacy in the other churches of the Anglican Communion is not uniform and bishops are chosen differently in different churches. The Anglican episcopal family is not held together by ties of law but the common desire to hold together, even in the face of major disagreements. Lambeth Conferences are specifically not 'Councils' and do not produce legislation binding on the participating dioceses. The Archbishop of Canterbury exercises a purely moral authority in the Communion as a whole. The Anglican Consultative Council likewise has no 'teeth' and there is some uncertainty as to the nature of its authority. The Church of England, with its established character, is quite different from the rest of the Anglican Communion. One is an ancient organic church, the other is a loose federation, and the two hold together out of charitable mutual desire to do so.

Lambeth Conferences have affirmed the historic episcopate, not merely the role of episcopacy as a form of *episcopate*, as crucially important; at the same time it held that this does not deny the spiritual reality of the ministries of communions without this historic episcopate. This ambivalent attitude remains the core stance of Anglican ecumenism, insisting on all three planes of the definition of *episcopate* being found in the personal succession of bishops. The paradox is that the Churches with the historic episcopate oppose the consecration of women as bishops, while many Anglican episcopal Churches do not. The report in fact raps the knuckles of such Anglican Churches in a long footnote, saying that 'The Lambeth Conference's treatment of this question has created a new and perplexing situation for the members of the Second Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission.... It would seem that the discussion of women's ordination in the Anglican Communion has not taken sufficiently into account the ecumenical and ecclesiological dimensions of the question.'<sup>14</sup> The tone of this remark conflicts somewhat with remarks at the end of the report, and illustrates the sense of real tension and *Angst* which occasionally breaks surface in the text.

### **Ways forward suggested by the report**

#### *The diocesan bishop as primary local pastor and missionary*

The report tends to repeat itself: as it moves to 'Part Two, Looking Forward' (at page 157), it looks back to reiterate its central controlling claim that the bishop in his diocese is the local pastor who exercises the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp 153-4.

*episcopus* of the apostles over the Church, at local and universal level, and also across the generations. The bishop acts through his presbyters, delegating to them a share in his pastoral care of his locality. In this the bishop is personal and yet is a 'corporate person' since he is never independent of his people. He is the focus of their corporate sacramental life.<sup>15</sup> This ministry comes 'from above' as well as being related to the people 'from below', in union and differentiation.

#### *Suffragan Bishops as episcopal vicars*

The issue of suffragan bishops receives an important treatment. Again the historical detail is fascinating, but the essence of the report's finding is that the proliferation of suffragans as a pragmatic method of enabling diocesan bishops to cope with all their burdens needs to be given a rationale. The current position of the suffragan conflicts with the central rationale of 'one locality, one bishop' repeatedly stated by the report. Area bishops appear to diminish the direct pastoral care of the diocesan bishop, for example. What is recommended is a doctrine of delegation by the diocesan to the suffragan, or rather of vicarial episcopacy whereby the suffragan acts as the diocesan: the diocesan exercises his will through the suffragan vicarially. Just as the archdeacon acts for the bishop in things legal, so in things pastoral and sacramental would the suffragan be deemed to be acting. The person of the diocesan bishop would presence itself through the suffragan in the diocese.

The report cautions against the idea of episcopal collegiality at local diocesan level, since this would reduce the personal, single episcopal pastorate in the locality. Further, the idea of a suffragan attending synods of bishops, at the second plane level, is problematic since the diocesan bishop would be in attendance with his representatives also presenting themselves - or his corporate self - with him.<sup>16</sup>

There is a case for creating some new dioceses to help ameliorate the problem of over-burdened diocesan bishops, but only a few lest the diocesan bishop become too small a figure nationally. There is a problem over the selection of suffragans: this should be by the diocesan, since the suffragan is his commissary, but what happens when a new diocesan comes onto the scene? A suffragan's lot is not a happy one, it seems! The reader is informed here that the Church needs to stress the importance of the suffragan, his genuine episcopal office, and even that it is 'a ministry to which the Church may well feel that a bishop will often have a permanent calling!'<sup>17</sup> The ascetic tradition is not dead in the Church of England.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p 163.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p 200.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p 202.

*Women in the episcopate*

Here the group plainly reached utter deadlock. One principle was agreed, that the argument could not turn on the usages of today's social cultural usages alone. Otherwise the issue of interpretation of headship in Scripture divided them, as did the issue of the representative character of the bishop as including both maleness and femaleness. The report also agrees that there are no arguments against women bishops which are not also applicable to women presbyters. The report here shows a shift of tone in listing the arguments and counter arguments of proceeding to admit women to the episcopate. One argument used is that in a divided Church all ministry lacks fullness anyway.<sup>18</sup> quite a contrast to the grave warning issued in the footnote cited earlier.<sup>19</sup>

The report now tells us its inner history: Lambeth came and went, the Grindrod report was injected into its deliberations, then the Eames commission, then Larnaca at which the Anglican primates rejected the idea that a male bishop should attend any ordinations conducted by a woman bishop.

The way forward in this matter rests with time and reception by the faithful,<sup>20</sup> and the hope of development. The point is made that a mistake here could not be reversed, as could doctrinal errors; nor can the church ordain women with the proviso that things may not work out after all.

An appendix to the report, originally intended as the group's recommendation to the House of Bishops, emerges as an individual contribution, that of Dr Carey, then Bishop of Bath and Wells. It seems very strange that the group could not even agree a common statement which contained their disagreements, as this appendix does, but the report ends on the note of irreconcilable difference of opinion over the ordination of women.

### **Appraisal of the report**

*The single bishop as the local pastor*

The basic postulate of the whole theology of episcopacy given by the report is that the diocese is the local church with the bishop the pastor who inherits apostolic oversight. This postulate, drawing on Ignatius particularly, grounds the highly developed role and status of the bishop found in the report and is interpreted in terms of a strong concept of the bishop alone as pastorally responsible in a personal way. This pastoral oversight, furthermore, stands in the line of the apostles: it is not just 'apostolic' but is the ministry of the apostles here and now. Episcopal ministry is not only presbyteral: it is a different realm of the gifts of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p 245.

<sup>19</sup> See above, footnote 12.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p 254.

Spirit, to use ARCIC terminology.

More subtle than the mainline Tractarian theory, it insists that the bishop has to exercise his ministry in a community; and, on the other hand, a community has to have a bishop in the historic episcopate if it is to know the fulness of church life.

The rationale from the New Testament and Early Church is disappointingly traditional, imprinting a reading of Ignatius back on the biblical data, in effect using the hermeneutic of what the Church came to believe later to organise the earlier facts. As seems to have happened in the FOAG Report on the *Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry*, there is little serious attention to biblical scholarly opinion. Eduard Schweizer's *Church Order in the New Testament*,<sup>21</sup> for example, does not even appear in the bibliography. The powerful tradition of charismatic prophetic ministry is mentioned in passing, and the assumption is that the apostolic ministry, in the sense of a continuance of the actual ministry played by the apostles themselves, became local rather than roving, a view which has been questioned in scholarly debate.

It might be more apt, in terms of the New Testament, to regard the apostolic ministry as itinerant and missionary, not local at all. In any event, there is a serious discussion to be had over this issue which we do not get. The scholarship of the report is at its best in straight church history, not in biblical theology. The fact that a major radical work like that of Schillebeeckx's *Ministry*<sup>22</sup> cannot find any place in the deliberations is also strange. Schillebeeckx disagrees with the theory that there is really only one ministry, that of bishop, with all other ministries 'participating functions of this.'<sup>23</sup> This seems to Schillebeeckx 'to be a speculative possibility rather than to have a historical foundation in the facts presented by the New Testament.'<sup>24</sup> Rather, flying in the face of the report, Schillebeeckx concludes that 'ministry in the church is essentially collegiality, i.e. solidarity of Christians equipped with different charismata of ministry.'<sup>25</sup>

### *Episcopal absorption of pastorate*

The obvious ecclesiological problem posed by the fundamental definition in the report of the bishop as the local pastor has its effect on other ministries, notably the presbyteral. Episcopacy derived from the presbyterate and somehow also from the apostolate, by analogy and providence. From the presbyteral level has been abstracted the notion of personal pastorate, which has been sublimated into the single person, a corporate person, the bishop. This episcopal person is then equated with the apostolic ministry, i.e. the ministry of the apostles, which came from

<sup>21</sup> SCM, London 1961.

<sup>22</sup> SCM, London 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., p 46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

above. The bishop then, like the cuckoo growing fat in the nest, seems to push aside the presbyters or, better, to absorb that ministry from which he sprang. The bishop becomes a representation, a real representative, of all pastorate and indeed comes to be constitutive of it. The ontology of ministry is in the bishop, its delegated function is through the presbyters and also other diocesan officials.

The genuinely local ministry, that conducted by the presbyter as the co-ordinating pastor-teacher in the parish, seems to be minimised to a high degree. The presbyteral minister has become a functionary of the bishop and not a fellow pastor authorised by his senior to labour in the harvest. The tradition expressed by Lightfoot<sup>26</sup> would regard the bishop as a senior presbyter in origin, whose role evolved into a wider office but fundamentally of the same status. The exaltation of the bishop as a corporate person who can be presenced in the diocese vicarially by other officers seems strange and idealised. The artificiality of the base concept really discloses itself in the discussion of the suffragan, whose lot is to be enhyposatished by the diocesan. The suffragan as vicarial *episcopos* becomes a cypher for the diocesan, an office holder in the sense of an official whose own personality and gifts of the Spirit are discounted.

The episcopal pastorate is defined as personal, and yet it can only be non-relational given the great numbers of people in even a small modern diocese. The bishop is defined as personal in a kind of sacramental way, but such 'personal' ministry cannot provide the primary model of pastoral ministry for the church, which must entail 'real relations' in the Spirit between pastor and flock. A diocesan bishop plainly can only be a pastor in the sense of a leading figurehead. The concept of the personal presence of the arch-pastor being mediated through presbyters, and even suffragans, seems almost to parallel the bishop with the Paraclete himself.

To argue that the bishop in his corporate person contains *episcopo* which he then delegates in many and various ways, simply will not do. He has due authority to ensure that the ministry of the church is carried out, not that his ministry is carried out through everyone else commissioned for service in his diocese. He ends up without an authentic local ministry of his own, or else he absorbs all ministry to himself in order to exercise it vicarially. The absorption of pastorate into the person of the bishop radically damages the presbyterate theologically, and if current talk of regulating the presbyteral role by fixed term contracts is meaningful, then an immense centripetal shift of power will take place and will make real the purely functional status and dispensability of the presbyter, implied in the report

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<sup>26</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, 'The Christian Ministry', Macmillan, London 1892.

*Collegial leadership in the church*

The report finds a great problem with the notion of collegial leadership locally, hence the vicarial status suggested for suffragans, for example. But is corporate leadership not a typically biblical model of oversight? Would not a more corporate model also assist in addressing the issue of women's ministry, given that all sides on the the 'headship' debate uphold the covenantal complementarity of humanity, male and female? It could be argued by both sides that without women on a leadership team, the pastoral ministry is incomplete. This seems the truer relevance of the triune life of God to ministry, appealed to by the report at its start and finish. The report, however, has no time whatsoever for corporate pastoral leadership in any real relational sense.

This point also might modify the assertion, of both sides over the women issue, that exactly the same points must apply to the ordination of women to the presbyterate as to the episcopate: one might, with Michael Green,<sup>27</sup> argue the appropriateness of the former but have doubt about the latter, that is, given that the presbyterate becomes more corporate in character.

*Ecumenism and the episcopate*

Another work missing from the bibliography of the report and its consideration is Newbiggin's *The Reunion of the Church*<sup>28</sup> which, written from the mission context of South India, still has a real relevance today. In it Newbiggin defends the new united Church of South India from the rejection by Tractarian Anglicans on the grounds that not all its ministers would have been necessarily grafted into the historic episcopate, notwithstanding the fact of episcopacy being adopted by the Church. Newbiggin shows that the Tractarian theory of episcopacy fails to escape the charge that it causes the episcopate to define the Church.

The report's findings repeat the Anglican claim that the episcopate brings the full-orbed apostolicity to the Church, and that Lutherans, for example, although they may have bishops, need to adopt them as permanent, rather than as temporary and perhaps contractual, functionaries and to ensure their ingrafting into the historic succession. At the same time the assurance is given that Anglicans do not doubt that the Holy Spirit is at work in all the churches without the historic episcopate. This is precisely the position so devastatingly criticised by Newbiggin, and it should have been wrestled with more fully by the report, which does however seem to contain ambivalence on the issue. The glaring problem of overlapping 'historic episcopates', Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, all in one geographical area, needed to be addressed, particularly given the report's basic premise of one bishop, one community.

<sup>27</sup> *Freed to Serve*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1986, p 94.

<sup>28</sup> SCM, London 1948.

Newbigin affirms the episcopate as a means of promoting unification of the churches, but with his eyes fixed ahead, to increasing unity and the episcopate as an instrument for this, yet one which also points us back to the apostolic past whence we came. It is an instrument which should be available for all churches, not a legalism which excludes, akin to 'the Law' for the Gentile Christians.<sup>29</sup>

*Conclusion: a traditional report*

The report looks backwards and affirms what it takes as the fundamental structure of episcopacy, reading scripture in that light and seeking to clarify and conserve the principle of one bishop in one local diocese. Women's ordination is only considered in this framework. The only way the rightness of a change in this direction will be tested is by the test of time, although mere contemporary cultural mores is no criterion. The Spirit may speak to the church as presently constituted.

The report seems to me to override the tradition of Hooker, Field and Jewel on episcopacy, more recently stated by Lightfoot and Green, in favour of the Anglo-Catholic reading of the Anglican tradition. But perhaps the main frustration concerns the challenges of the future in relation to the New Testament principles. Surely issues of mission and apostolicity are vital to grasp now: why does not the itinerant New Testament apostolic tradition receive a new hearing and why are we so obsessed with the fixed and local that we fail to see society as mobile and needing also other forms of apostolic mission? The new question of 'church planting' might even cease to be such a problem if the episcopal ministry developed a mission dimension actively, so that 'plants' were directed and fostered episcopally?

The bookends of the report are the record of the great disagreement. Between these is much extremely valuable material and elegant scholarship. But a dominating sense of the unreal, of symbolic language about personal pastoral local leadership, takes us out of the real problems of Church and into the realm of fascinating ecclesiological algebra. The threefold order has indeed proved of immense value, but its precise form, with Hooker, must be worked out in the light of history and the Spirit's guidance in ordering the structures to meet contemporary needs and challenges, always under gospel imperatives. The report looks to the past as a fixed blueprint of this form, whereas maybe we need to be rather more flexible and radical?

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<sup>29</sup> I seek to set out an evangelical Anglican view of ecclesiology, including episcopacy, in *The Olive Branch*, Paternoster Press, Exeter 1991 (in press), chapter 4, along with wider Anglican ecclesiological discussion.