

## TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF EPISCOPE AMONGST BAPTISTS \*

This study originates in three groups of concerns amongst Baptists over recent years. The first comes from the ecumenical scene. In November 1977 the Baptist Union Council issued its definitive response to the Ten Propositions of the Churches' Unity Commission. In explaining why Baptists could not accept either of the two methods proposed for the mutual recognition of ministries, the report argued:

Caring oversight of the People of God must find proper expression. A focus of continuity is important. Yet exactly at this point Baptists will see the realities of episcopacy manifested in corporate fashion in church meeting, associations and councils, and focussed for particular purposes in an honoured presbyteral ministry of word, sacraments and pastoral care.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this section ended with a challenge to Baptists:

We have to ask ourselves what, in the purpose of God, will best serve 'life and mission' in the coming days. We have to discern whether or not we are being called to pioneer from and within our Association life a distinguishable form of episcopal ministry which the existing 'episcopal' Churches would be able to recognise as such yet which, at the same time, would both contribute to the health of Christ's People and serve their missionary calling.<sup>2</sup>

As part of this process the Baptist Union Council in March 1980 welcomed and commended for discussion a paper entitled *A Baptist View of Church, Ministry and Episcopacy*.<sup>3</sup> This particular subject remains on the agenda of the Advisory Committee for Church Relations. Despite the collapse of the Covenant Proposals in July 1982 the issue is still a live one,<sup>4</sup> and is currently relevant through the decision of the Council to invite as wide a discussion as possible in preparing the Baptist response to the report of the World Council of Churches *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile at the local level over the past fifteen years many experiments have been taking place in ecumenical oversight, and one of these included proposals for an ecumenical bishop.<sup>6</sup>

The past decade has also seen this subject discussed in various forms within the denomination with regard to internal structures as well as external relationships. In November 1978 the Working Group on the Superintendency presented its report to the Council, and the decisions ultimately made included the acceptance of more detailed guidelines for the role of the General Superintendent, the replacement of Area Committees by Area Pastoral Committees, the alteration of the provision

\* This is the first part of an article which will continue in the next issue

for the appointment and re-appointment of Superintendents to give more weight to the Associations over against the Baptist Union and the creation of one new Area. The report was criticised at the time for not including any theology of the Superintendency, and discussion has continued in various parts of the country over the decision not to recommend the creation of more than one new Area. In the meantime a new type of wider ministry has started to appear amongst Baptists, and a Working Group in the Department of Ministry is currently looking at the role of Association Ministers. There are now five of these, recently joined by one full-time and one part-time Association Missioner. Members of the 1964 Commission on the Associations will ruefully point out that, although the denomination failed to implement their majority recommendation that there should be twenty General Superintendents,<sup>7</sup> each having the pastoral care of about a hundred churches, there is now in the denomination more than that number of full-time General Superintendents, Association Secretaries and Association Ministers!<sup>8</sup> As far as pastoral care of the local church is concerned the Working Group on the Care of Small Churches in November 1983 presented its report to the Council *Half the Denomination*. This pointed out that about half of all English Baptist churches have less than fifty members, and three-quarters less than a hundred. The report pleaded for a new model for the small church instead of a scaled down version of the ideal for a larger church, and in particular for a new model of leadership:

Though many small churches believe that the solution of their problem is an omniscient Lay Pastor, this certainly is not the only nor necessarily the best solution to the leadership-needs of the small church. The concept of a plurality in ministerial leadership offers a better solution for the churches.<sup>9</sup>

On this subject also members of an earlier Working Group could comment 'we told you this years ago'. Certainly some of these points were made in the report *Ministry Tomorrow* (1969)<sup>10</sup> which advocated the recruitment, training and ordination of a large number of Supplementary Ministers, but critics of that report can argue that its prophecies of a much smaller number of full-time ministers have not been fulfilled.

The third factor which has centred interest upon the nature of *episcopate* at both the local and wider levels is the influence of what is commonly called 'the charismatic movement'. In its practice and in its theology this movement is challenging many of the traditional assumptions of every denomination. This challenge has focussed for Baptists on the implications of spiritual gifts for the ministry of the whole body, on the role of elders in the local church and of apostles in the wider fellowship, and on the nature of authority and of submission. The Baptist Union Council received a Report on this subject in March 1978, and this was later published with an extended theological commentary by Dr Paul Fiddes as *Charismatic Renewal*:

*a Baptist View*.<sup>11</sup> A recent popular account of the charismatic movement as reflected in the pages of the magazine *Renewal* refers to a series of meetings in 1979 between the Fountain Trust and the Department of Ecumenical Affairs of the British Council of Churches, and to Dr David Russell's summary of these discussions in the form of 'five blunt guidelines'. The fifth of these reads:

Try to show the difference between an authority rightly conferred and received, and an authoritarianism wrongly assumed.

The author of the book comments:

When he sat down one of the members remarked that it was striking that such points still had to be made, since for the past ten years the Fountain Trust had been committed to precisely this approach.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that this debate on authority is as much within the charismatic movement as between it and the denominations can be further illustrated from the same book from the review in *Renewal of The Radical Christian*,<sup>13</sup> perhaps the fiercest attack to date on the institutional church from a leader of the house church movement. The reviewer, Clifford Fryer, a Baptist Minister, poses the question:

One confused young lady told me she no longer needed personal guidance from God. It all came through the elders. A pope at home for a pope in Rome? Any takers?<sup>14</sup>

This study is an attempt to consider the various questions concerning *episcopo* which have arisen from these three quarters - the ecumenical, the denominational and the charismatic. It uses this word *episcopo* in an attempt to avoid 'begging the question'. The most accurate English translation of this Greek word is 'oversight', but this could arouse the hackles of traditional Baptists, whilst 'episcopacy' would be regarded as too ecumenical and 'shepherding' as too charismatic! Moreover the study is concerned with both the local church and the wider fellowship, whether at the level of Association, Area or Union.

It is a study of *episcopo* 'amongst Baptists' and therefore the method chosen is to approach a theology of this from the basis of the first point in the Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland:

That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.

Christ Himself is the starting point. The Scriptures reveal him. The Spirit has guided local churches in the past in

interpreting and administering his laws, and is still guiding them in the present. There are therefore three points of reference under Christ. The first is the New Testament, because it is there pre-eminently that there can be seen both the model of *episcopate* exercised by Christ himself and the working out of that model in theology and in practice in the life of the early church. Secondly there is Baptist history, which reflects both the desire to rediscover the New Testament model and the inevitable, though not always recognised, adaptation of the New Testament pattern to meet the changing challenges and opportunities of successive generations. Thirdly there is the current situation. In addition to the factors already mentioned, there is the general mood of the denomination, which can be described as longing to move from maintenance to mission. Statistics suggest that, both at the national and Association levels, the numerical decline in membership may have reached its bottom point, but, more importantly, in churches of all sizes and of all theological viewpoints, there is a growing optimism, and a desire to move from maintenance to mission. If, however, for the past three-quarters of a century local churches, Associations and the Union have experienced, and therefore come to expect, decline, structures of *episcopate* have necessarily concentrated on survival. As the mood changes, so the understanding and pattern of *episcopate* may need to change. A questionnaire on *episcopate* was distributed to ministers at their annual conference in the Lancashire and Cheshire Association in February 1983. This was completed by 33 of those present, and an analysis of the results is given as an appendix to this paper. This reveals that the most popular word for defining *episcopate* is leadership.

THE FUNCTION OF *EPISCOPE* - enabling the church to be the body of Christ.

The New English Bible gives as a heading to the Epistle to the Ephesians the phrase 'The glory of Christ in the church'. Chapter 1 gives a picture of Christ as the Lord of the universe and ends with the words:

He put everything under his feet and appointed him, the head over all, to be head of the church. She is his body, full of him who fills all things totally.<sup>15</sup>

Chapter 2 describes Christ as 'our peace' who has reconciled Jew and Gentile in one body on the cross, and it concludes:

The whole construction, fitted together in him, grows in the Lord into a holy temple.<sup>16</sup>

In Chapter 3:

the manifold wisdom of God is now to be made known through the church to the governments and authorities in the heavens.<sup>17</sup>

In Chapter 4 it is the ascended Christ who gives gifts of ministry:

to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The church is growing up into Christ, he is the head of the body,

He is at work fitting and joining the whole body together. He provides sustenance to it through every contact according to the needs of each single part. He enables the body to make its own growth so that it builds itself up in love.<sup>19</sup>

In Chapter 5 the church is the bride of Christ:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it, to consecrate it, cleansing it by water and word, so that he might present the church to himself all glorious, with no stain or wrinkle or anything of the sort, but holy and without blemish.<sup>20</sup>

It is only when the purposes of God for the church in Christ begin to be appreciated that the task of *episcopo*e can begin to be perceived. It is to help the church to be the church, to enable it to be the body of Christ. This is the context of *episcopo*e. Although the word itself does not appear in Ephesians, the proper noun *episcopoi* occurs in that passage in Acts, where, according to Luke, Paul sends for the elders of the church at Ephesus and gives them his farewell charge:

I have disclosed to you the whole purpose of God. Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has given you charge, as shepherds of the church of the Lord, which he won for himself by his own blood.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, however, two questions have to be posed. The first is - where is the church over which *episcopo*e has to be exercised? Is it the local congregation, or some wider fellowship, or the universal church? Before there can be any discussion of patterns of *episcopo*e, it is necessary to consider its sphere. The 1980 paper *A Baptist View of Church, Ministry and Episcopacy* asked the question:

Baptists speak of the Church beyond the local church. Yet where for us (if anywhere) lies the visible institutionalised Church?<sup>22</sup>

The report goes on to refer to the ambiguous position of General Superintendents:

The Superintendents have never been defined ecclesiologically and theologically. They are neither episcopally authorised by local churches together to minister in the context of these local churches, nor are they, nor can they be authorised by any wider fellowship which does not admit to any ecclesiological significance.<sup>23</sup>

The New Testament does not provide clear answers to this question. The article on *ekklesia* in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says:

the Church is not a great community made up of an accumulation of small communities, but is truly present in its wholeness in every company of believers, however small.<sup>24</sup>

James Dunn refers particularly to the evidence from Ephesians:

Whereas in the earlier Paul *ekklesia* almost always denotes all the Christians living or gathered in one place, in Ephesians *ekklesia* is used exclusively of the universal Church... Yet, on the other hand, there are strong parallels between the image of church order in Ephesians 4 and the body metaphor in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12. So we cannot be certain on internal evidence alone whether Ephesians is the work of Paul enlarging his vision of the local church as charismatic community to cosmic dimensions, or the work of a second generation disciple of Paul beginning to think of ministry in terms of offices valid throughout the universal Church.<sup>25</sup>

Here perhaps in these two quotations there is a clue to the answer to the question. The whole is present in each of its parts, the one metaphor of the body can be used both of the whole and of each of its parts. In I Corinthians Paul is emphasising that every Christian is a member of the body with a gift to be used, in Romans he is stressing that the members need to serve one another, whilst in Ephesians the gifts are given to help the body to grow up into Christ. Moreover, it is not only in Ephesians that wider ministries such as apostles and prophets are mentioned, they come also in Corinthians.

This clue can be traced through Baptist history. Article XLVII of the 1644 Confession of Particular Baptists reads:

And although the particular Congregations be distinct and several Bodies, every one a compact and knit Citie in itselfe; yet are they to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsell and help one of another in all needfull affaires of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their onely head.<sup>26</sup>

The Abingdon Association in 1652 was even more explicit in its use of the body metaphor:

Because in respect of union in Christ there is a like relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other, as there is betwixt particular members of one church. For the churches of Christ doe all make up but one bodye or church in generall under Christ their head... Wherefore we conclude that everie church ought to manifest its care over other churches as fellow members of the same body of Christ...<sup>27</sup>

Later Baptists have not always attempted such a theological justification of Associations. John Fawcett at the first meeting of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Association in 1787 wrote:

We do not mean by associating ourselves together to attempt any infringement on your liberties as voluntary societies possessed of full power to manage all your affairs within yourselves.<sup>28</sup>

William Steadman in the Circular Letter of the same Association in 1807 wrote on 'The Utility of Associations', but argued that this lay in

a principle common to mankind to associate together to unite their strength, not in any positive divine appointment nor sanctioned by scripture example.

In 1883, however, Principal E. Parker of Manchester College in his Moderator's address to the Association chose as his title 'Fidelity in Christian Associative life and work', and used Paul's metaphor of the body in I Corinthians 12 as a plea for co-operative activity both within the local church and within the Association. The 1948 Statement of the Baptist Union Council *The Baptist Doctrine of the Church*<sup>29</sup> said very little on this subject, but *Visible Unity in Life and Mission* wrestled with it in its final section headed 'The local and the universal':

Herein lies the clue to Baptist attitudes to wider conciliar forms. In their own limited and derivative sense they are precisely 'church meeting'. They are not some superior or more ultimate piece of decision-making machinery. They are means by which the oneness of the Body may find wider expression and prompt united action. In so far as they are truly subject to the Word and truly open to the Spirit they may become means by which the Lord of the Church speaks to the churches. It is however for the churches to recognise his voice. Any authority which the wider conciliar forms may possess is given to them by the Lord of the Church. Yet because it is his authority it cannot be imposed without in the end contradicting its own nature.<sup>30</sup>

The Associations and the Baptist Union can therefore be regarded as legitimate expressions of the body of Christ, provided that their member churches recognise each other as members one of another, and, when their representatives meet together to hear the Word and discern the Spirit, that they recognise in their decisions the voice of the Head of the Church. This matter of 'recognition' will appear again when the nature of *episcopo* is being considered.

The second question arising from the function of *episcopo* as seen in the epistle to the Ephesians concerns the nature of 'growth'. Parallel to the charismatic movement, and overlapping it at certain points but by no means at all, is the church growth movement. If the mood of the denomination is towards mission rather than maintenance, then it is bound to take church growth seriously. As expounded in the USA by Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner, church growth means primarily numerical growth. It is God's will and command that His Church should grow and that more and more churches should be planted:

What the fantastically mounting population of the world needs is fantastically multiplying churches.<sup>31</sup>

Is this what Ephesians 2 and 4 mean by growth?

The purpose of *episcopate* is 'to equip God's people for work in his service'<sup>32</sup> and the Greek word here is *diakonia*: Its purpose is also 'to the building up of the body of Christ'.<sup>33</sup> How this is done is defined a few verses later - 'let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ'<sup>34</sup> and 'he enables the body to make its own growth so that it builds itself up in love'.<sup>35</sup> Growth is by service in love, by what the New Testament calls *diakonia*. Kittel's *Dictionary* points out that:

Jesus' attitude to service is completely new as compared with the Greek understanding. The decisive point is that he sees in it the thing which makes a man his disciple.<sup>36</sup>

The article goes on to point out that *diakonia* includes waiting at table,<sup>37</sup> any service in love,<sup>38</sup> the preaching of the Gospel,<sup>39</sup> and the collection for the saints at Jerusalem.<sup>40</sup>

This indivisible link between *episcopate* and *diakonia* is described as 'apostolic order' by Neville Clark in *The Pattern of the Church*:

It is thus that we must understand the christological articulation of order and ministry. To speak of presbyters, elders, bishops, office and status all too easily conceals the realities with which we have to reckon. Rather must our thinking begin from and ever return to the categories of *episcopate*, of *diakonia*, of *leitourgia*, of *oikonomia*. For what is important is not he who ministers, but that which is ministered. The primacy of the Gospel remains.<sup>41</sup>

What is true of the local church is true also of the wider church. The 1964 *Report of the Commission on the Associations* entitled its second chapter 'Towards a strengthening of confidence', quoted the New English Bible translation of II Corinthians 1.24 'we are working with you for your happiness', and pleaded for 'mutual encouragement, mutual love and mutual service'.<sup>42</sup>

Such a wider interpretation of church growth is in fact given by many proponents of the church growth movement in Britain. Roy Pointer, church growth consultant for the Bible Society, writes of its four dimensions:

- a) conceptual growth - growth in Christian maturity, in understanding of the faith
- b) organic growth - the growing together of the community of God's people in the local church
- c) incarnational growth - the ability of the local church to develop its service and witness in its locality
- d) numerical growth - the recruitment of individuals to active membership.<sup>43</sup>



This then is the function of *episcopo* at each level of the Church's life - to enable the church as the body of Christ to grow in *diakonia*.

THE PATTERN OF *EPISCOPE* - corporate collegial and personal.

As far as discerning a pattern of *episcopo* in the New Testament is concerned, diversity would seem to be the key word. James Dunn points out how from early days there were two diverging patterns - a more conservative church order based on the Jewish synagogue and Paul's

much freer vision of charismatic community, where unity and maturity grew out of the living interplay of gifts and ministries without dependence on any office or hierarchy.<sup>44</sup>

In the next period a certain intermingling of these two strands (seen for example in the Pastoral epistles) was accompanied in other places by a reaction against rigid order which can be illustrated in different ways from the Johannine literature, from Hebrews and from Revelation. As a result E. Käsemann can claim:

the New Testament canon as such does not constitute the foundation of the unity of the Church. On the contrary as such... it provides the basis for the multiplicity of the confessions.<sup>45</sup>

The WCC document recognises this fact as far as patterns of ministry are concerned, and acknowledges that it was not until the second and third centuries that a more uniform three-fold pattern was adopted.<sup>46</sup> Other writers have stressed the distinction between the itinerant ministry of apostles and prophets, and the localised ministry of bishops/elders and deacons.<sup>47</sup>

Within this diversity, however, the various patterns reflect three elements in *episcopo* - the corporate, the collegial and the personal. Both Dunn and Käsemann in their accounts of the development of the early church stress the corporate nature of both *episcopo* and *diakonia*, especially in the Pauline communities,<sup>48</sup> and Markus Barth in his commentary on Ephesians 4 has an extended Comment headed 'The Church without Laymen and Priests', in which he gives a detailed exposition of verse 12, and points out that although the ministries mentioned in verse 11 are given in order to equip the saints for *diakonia*, verses 15 and 16 show

that Paul does not attribute to some members of the body a role essentially distinct from that of all members.<sup>49</sup>

S. F. Winward has made explicit the corporate element in *episcopo* in the New Testament:<sup>50</sup>

But as the whole Church is *diakonia*, so all mature Christians have 'the shepherd's heart' ... All believers are responsible for the ministry of the

word, all are to exercise the ministry of encouragement.<sup>51</sup> All are responsible for bringing back the brother who has strayed, or for helping the one who has fallen...<sup>52</sup> The true task of the shepherd is to turn the sheep into shepherds!

Nevertheless, the New Testament clearly shows certain members being given gifts by the Spirit and being appointed by the whole body to exercise certain functions, indeed, it is probably true to say that in the New Testament it is the collegial aspect of *episcopo*, rather than the corporate or the personal, which is pre-eminent. That does not mean, however, that there is a clear picture of the role played by particular groups. It is necessary at this point to look at certain of the terms used in the New Testament for those exercising various forms of *episcopo*:

a) APOSTLES These are placed first in Paul's lists of gifts in I Corinthians 12<sup>53</sup> and Ephesians 4.<sup>54</sup> The term is used in three main senses in the New Testament - of the Twelve;<sup>55</sup> of Paul and Barnabas, the leaders of the Gentile Mission;<sup>56</sup> and of others who were 'sent' on various missions such as Epaphroditus.<sup>57</sup> It is not clear into which category Andronicus and Junias (or Junia)<sup>58</sup> fit, or whether Timothy and Titus should be regarded as apostles. The first two senses of the term definitely denote those who founded churches and as such claimed a certain authority over them under Christ, the third use seems to mean little more than 'messenger' or 'representative'. Those who want to use the title today in its New Testament meaning would seem to be only justified in applying it to those who are pioneer missionaries, church planters.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, it is always used in the plural, in a collegial sense, except where Paul is defending his own personal claim to apostleship.

b) PROPHETS These come second in Paul's lists,<sup>60</sup> and from the evidence of the New Testament would seem primarily to have exercised a ministry of encouragement and exhortation, and only secondly to have foretold the future.<sup>61</sup> It is, therefore, not easy to see in what precise ways their ministry differed from certain aspects of what later ages termed 'preaching'.<sup>62</sup> This point underlines the one already made about apostles, that it is difficult, and indeed dangerous, to seek to apply directly today gifts and offices from the early church without a careful consideration of developments in the course of church history and of the very different cultures of the first and twentieth centuries. This is surely why Baptists stress the need for the guidance of the Holy Spirit 'to interpret and administer His Laws'. Two positive guidelines can, however, be given from the New Testament on this subject. The first is that discernment is required by the whole community regarding the reception and recognition of prophecy (or preaching).<sup>63</sup> The second is that although apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers may not appear as separate orders in later ages, whilst pastors have continued, the elements of apostolic order, prophetic word, evangelistic zeal, and the teaching role must at all times, along with pastoral care,

form part of *episcopo*. Again this spotlights the collegial aspect, because very few individuals possess all these gifts.<sup>64</sup>

c) BISHOPS/ELDERS The two are considered together because in the New Testament the two terms seem to be interchangeable.<sup>65</sup> As far as their origin is concerned, elders came from the practice of the Jewish synagogue, where they exercised a collegial function (there is no evidence of a presiding elder) in ruling the congregation, but without responsibility for worship.<sup>66</sup> It is less certain from which source Gentile Christians derived *episcopoi* since the word was used in many different contexts,<sup>67</sup> but Beyer makes the point in Kittel's *Dictionary* that:

the evidence of the New Testament is clearly to the effect that originally several *episcopoi* took charge of the communities in brotherly comity. It is also plain that the point of the office was service, and service alone.<sup>68</sup>

The collegial aspect is accepted by most scholars, how soon the later monarchical type of bishop developed, and whether Timothy and Titus are proto-types of him are questions still being discussed.<sup>69</sup>

d) DEACONS/DEACONESSES/WIDOWS Although the ministry of these in the New Testament is primarily that of *diakonia*, it touches on *episcopo* at two points. At least two of those ordained in Acts 6 also preached the word,<sup>70</sup> and one interpretation of I Timothy 3.13 is that a deacon might later become an elder.<sup>71</sup> Whilst scholars disagree as to whether verse 11 of that same chapter refers to 'wives of deacons' or to 'deaconesses', most agree that there was a definite order of 'widows' in the early church, and Titus 2.4-5 suggests that these had a pastoral role over younger women.

As far as personal *episcopo* in the New Testament is concerned, James appears to have become the leading elder in Jerusalem,<sup>72</sup> and Paul naturally claims apostolic authority over those churches he founded. Timothy and Titus have some kind of personal authority, and Titus is told to ordain elders.<sup>73</sup> There is, however, also the rebuke of Diotrophes.<sup>74</sup> Luke's account of the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 contains all three aspects of *episcopo* - James 'summed up', but the decisions were made by 'the apostles and elders, with the agreement of the whole church'.<sup>75</sup>

If diversity is the word to describe the pattern of *episcopo* in the New Testament, then flexibility is its keyword with regard to Baptist history. Seventeenth century Baptists tried to reproduce the New Testament pattern, but there wasn't always agreement on what that was.<sup>76</sup> General Baptists for instance gradually developed a third order of 'messengers' in addition to elders and deacons.<sup>77</sup> Thomas Grantham regarded these as successors of the apostles in planting churches, in setting in order such churches, and in assisting faithful pastors or churches against usurpers.<sup>78</sup> He used the term 'bishop' for the elders of a local church, 'they are to be as

eyes to the church, to oversee or provide'.<sup>79</sup> The 1678 Orthodox Creed of General Baptists, however, described the three orders as Bishops or Messengers (these 'have the government of those churches that had suffrage in their election, and not other ordinarily'); Elders or Pastors ('the elder, so ordained, is to watch over that particular church'); Deacons or Overseers of the poor.<sup>80</sup> Particular Baptists rejected a third order, and although both groups in theory spoke of elders in the plural, in practice they soon had to accept one in most cases. The 1677 Particular Baptist Confession talked of the 'church power' given to each congregation 'for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline',<sup>81</sup> elders and deacons are to be 'chosen by the common suffrage of the Church',<sup>82</sup> and, although differences should be taken to an assembly of messengers from all the churches, this has no 'church-power properly so-called'.<sup>83</sup>

Flexibility in *episcopate* can be illustrated from the Circular Letters and Yearbooks of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association of Baptist Churches.<sup>84</sup> Its County Home Mission was responsible for the planting of many churches during the nineteenth century, and for much of this time a condition of membership of the Association was an annual contribution to the Home Mission as a sign of corporate responsibility. Attendance at Association Assemblies rarely fell below 90% of member churches, in the last decade it has rarely been above 50%! When an 'agent' (note this term which a retired General Superintendent says Dr E. A. Payne used to use of the Superintendents) of the County Home Mission left pastoral charge of a church, the committee appointed a group of two or three members to oversight until a new agent was appointed. In 1864 a committee of five persons plus the Moderator and the Secretary was established 'to act as advisers and referees to ministers and churches seeking their aid' (the three ministers chosen to serve were Alexander MacLaren, Stowell Brown and Charles Williams - all future Presidents of the Baptist Union), and in 1871 the phrase 'to ministers and churches seeking their aid' was omitted. In 1872 District Committees were appointed to replace the Home Mission sub-committees, and in 1880 a Council of Reference was established of a minister and layman from each District. Dr Parker in his Moderator's Address in 1883 devoted a whole section to this Council and concluded:

The character of our associational polity has sufficient elasticity to accommodate itself to the necessities of the times, without any sacrifice of denominational principle.

Personal *episcopate* in the Association was primarily exercised through the Secretary (Charles Williams held that post 1871-9), and in 1899 this became a full-time post with H. V. Thomas occupying it until 1924. In 1916 he became also General Superintendent, but the term does not appear in any Association Report until his successor came into office! J. D. M. Robertson at once appealed to the District Secretaries to share the burden of administration with him, but the nature of

his personal *episcopa* can perhaps be seen from the fact that when he died suddenly in 1933, two major initiatives he had taken soon collapsed. Nevertheless, he had tried hard to develop a corporate sense of responsibility, and in 1930 had written in his annual report:

For the third year many churches have received visits from deputations in the interest of Spiritual Welfare, and there is reason to believe that the organisation of an annual visitation of the churches by ministers and other messengers will be a permanent part of the work of the Association.

The collegial aspect was also present in this same report:

The Superintendent most gratefully acknowledges the loyal and whole-hearted co-operation of the Area Committee under whose direction his work is done.

Personal acquaintance with one local church and with one Association over a quarter of a century suggests that at both levels flexibility can be seen within *episcopa* in the balance between the corporate, collegial and personal elements, depending upon personalities and issues.

The same three elements in *episcopa* can be seen in the life of the Union. In 1915 the Sustentation Scheme was introduced to provide greater security for ministers and better pastoral oversight for churches.<sup>85</sup> This was primarily an exercise in corporate *episcopa* - the Union seeking to accept greater responsibility for its member churches and ministers. All recognised, however, that the successful passing of the Scheme - which had first been introduced at the 1909 Assembly - was due primarily to the vision and patience of one man, the General Secretary, Dr J. H. Shakespeare. Yet the practical implementation of it fell upon a group of men, the nine General Superintendents,<sup>86</sup> of whom six were also Association Secretaries.<sup>87</sup> The same is true today of the *episcopa* exercised by the Baptist Union. There is the personal ministry of the General Secretary and of Heads of Departments in their respective spheres. There is the collegial work of the whole team at Church House and of the Superintendents' Board. The corporate element is represented by the Council and its Committees, such as Ministerial Recognition which has the important responsibility of recommending who should or should not be recognised as an accredited Baptist minister. The element of flexibility in changing patterns of ministry to adapt to changes in society can be illustrated from the abolition of the Order of Deaconesses in 1975 and the introduction of Supplementary Ministry in 1973.

What is the theological significance of this diversity and flexibility in patterns of *episcopa*? The word charismatic in its derivation provides the answer.<sup>88</sup> All *episcopa* stems from the free gift of God's grace in Christ through the Spirit. The whole history of the people of God shows that this cannot be bound by human order. The charismatic nature of *episcopa*

can be traced from the prophets of the Old Testament<sup>89</sup> to the present day, and can be illustrated by such non-conformists as the apostle Paul who affirmed that his apostleship was from God and not from man,<sup>90</sup> and C. H. Spurgeon who refused to be ordained for the same reason.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, local churches had to recognise Paul's authority for his ministry to be effective within them, and Spurgeon regarded recognition by his church as the only human authorisation necessary.

## NOTES

- 1 'Visible Unity in Life and Mission', in *Baptist Union Documents 1948-1977* ed. R. Hayden, London, 1980, p.197.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.198.
- 3 In W. M. S. West and M. J. Quicke, *Church, Ministry and Baptism: two essays on current questions*, London, 1981.
- 4 See for instance, Clinton Bennett, 'Baptists, Bishops and the Sacerdotal Ministry' in *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol.XXIX, no.8, October 1982, pp. 374-378, and Roger Hayden, 'Still at the Crossroads? - Revd J. H. Shakespeare and Ecumenism' in *Baptists in the Twentieth Century: Papers presented at a Summer School, July 1982* ed. K. W. Clements, London 1983. Note especially Hayden's comment on p.31: '... our present Baptist polity will be seriously misunderstood if the ecumenical vision with which Shakespeare lived, as he restructured the Baptist Union, is ignored'.
- 5 Faith and Order Paper No.111, Geneva, 1982.
- 6 The Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England (CCLEPE), The British Council of Churches, 2 Eaton Gate, London, SW1W 9BL publishes about every two years a Report to the Churches on significant developments and issues with LEPs. Nos. 3 and 4 mention the proposals for an ecumenical bishop for Swindon: *Third Report* p.4, para 11; *Fourth Report*, p.6, paras.22-3, p.10, para 33.
- 7 *The Report of the Commission on the Associations 1964*, London, 1964, p.35.
- 8 At the time of writing (July 1983) there are 11 General Superintendents, 5 Association Ministers (Berks., Herts., Kent, Lancs. and Cheshire, Northern), 1 full-time Association Missioner (Yorks.) and 1 part-time (W. Midlands) and 6 full-time Association Secretaries (Bristol, Devon and Cornwall, East Midlands, London, West Midlands, Yorkshire).
- 9 p.26.
- 10 In *Baptist Union Documents 1948-1977*, pp.97-112.
- 11 London, 1980.
- 12 Edward England, *The Spirit of Renewal: an open window on the charismatic movement*, Eastbourne, 1982, p.144.
- 13 Arthur Wallis, Eastbourne, 1981.
- 14 *Op.cit.*, p.150.
- 15 Ephesians 1.22-3, translation by Markus Barth in *Ephesians 1-3*, New York, 1974, p.xxvii.
- 16 Ephesians 2.21 (Barth).

- 17 Ephesians 3.10 (Barth).
- 18 Ephesians 4.12 (NEB).
- 19 Ephesians 4.16 (Barth).
- 20 Ephesians 5.25-27 (NEB).
- 21 Acts 20.27-28 (NEB).
- 22 Op.cit., p.6.
- 23 Ibid., p.9.
- 24 K. L. Schmidt, *The Church*, London, 1950, p.10.
- 25 *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, London, 1977, pp.351f.
- 26 W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, London, 1908, pp.186f., quoted in B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the 17th Century*, London, 1983, p.65.
- 27 *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660*, ed. B. R. White, London, n.d., Part 3, p.128, quoted in B. R. White, *English Baptists*, p.69.
- 28 The Circular Letters of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Association 1787-1837, and of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association 1838 to the present (now called the Yearbook) are bound together in volumes of about ten years each, and are stored at the Association Office, Glodwick Baptist Church, Pitt Street East, Oldham.
- 29 In *Baptist Union Documents*, pp.4-11.
- 30 Ibid., p.201.
- 31 *International Review of Missions*, October 1965, pp.451-461.
- 32 Ephesians 4.12.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ephesians 4.15 (NEB).
- 35 Ephesians 4.16 (Barth).
- 36 H. W. Beyer in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, English trans., Vol.II, Michigan, 1964, p.84.
- 37 Luke 10.40, Acts 6.1.
- 38 Romans 12.7, I Corinthians 12.4, 16.15, Colossians 4.17, II Timothy 4.5,11.
- 39 Acts 6.4, II Corinthians 5.18.
- 40 Acts 11.29, 12.25, Romans 15.31, II Corinthians 8.4, 9.1,12,13.
- 41 Ed. A. Gilmore, London 1963, pp.103 f.
- 42 Op.cit., pp.16f., also in *Baptist Union Documents* pp.126f.
- 43 In the *Baptist Times*, 8 October 1981.
- 44 Op.cit., pp.121f.
- 45 *Essays on New Testament Themes*, London, 1964, p.103.
- 46 Op.cit., p.24.
- 47 See for example S. F. Winward in *The Pattern of the Church* p.73; B.E.M. p.25, Commentary (27) and the interesting thesis proposed by Gerd

Theissen that the division at Corinth arose partly from the tension between Jewish itinerant charismatics from rural Palestine and 'the community organisers' like Paul who recognised the need for a different approach in urban society - *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Edinburgh, 1982.

- 48 See for example Dunn, *op.cit.*, pp.111,113, and Käsemann, *op.cit.*, p.80 and *New Testament Questions of Today*, London, 1969, pp.245f.
- 49 *Ephesians 4-6*, New York, 1974, pp.477-484.
- 50 *Op.cit.*, pp.58f.
- 51 Colossians 3.16, I Thessalonians 5.11,14, Hebrews 10.24-25.
- 52 Galatians 6.1-2, James 5.19.
- 53 Verse 28
- 54 Verse 11.
- 55 Luke 6.13, Acts 1.15-26, 8.14, 15.2.
- 56 Acts 14.14, Galatians 1.1, I Thessalonians 2.6, I Timothy 2.7.
- 57 II Corinthians 8.23, Philippians 2.25.
- 58 Romans 16.7.
- 59 Michael Griffiths, *Cinderella's Betrothal Gifts*, Sevenoaks, 1978, p.24.
- 60 I Corinthians 12.28, Ephesians 4.11.
- 61 For the first see Acts 15.32, I Corinthians 14.3, 24,29-33; for the second Acts 11.27-28, 21. 10-11.
- 62 Michael Griffiths, *op.cit.*, pp.20-22, 35 uses the spectrum analogy on this point.
- 63 *Ibid.*, pp.30 ff., and I Corinthians 14.29, I Thessalonians 5.20-1.
- 64 Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Ministries*, London 1974, p.93 comments: 'Though the ministries for the whole church are as significant as ever for the Christian church, it becomes more and more questionable whether they can still be performed by individual persons. Many problems today can best be dealt with and solved by teams. Perhaps this is why the representatives of the ministries for the whole church today are not primarily individuals, but ecumenical groups and brotherhoods with an apostolic or prophetic task; missionary societies and boards with an evangelistic task; retreat houses that perform all sorts of pastoral or shepherd ministries; and seminaries and other institutions of learning in which Christian teaching is carried on.'
- 65 Acts 20.18, 28, I Timothy 3.1, 5.17, Titus 1.5,7.
- 66 B. S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles*, London, 1948, pp.188-196.
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp.221-228.
- 68 *Op.cit.*, p.617.
- 69 See for example Dunn, *op.cit.*, p.352, and Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, pp.86f.
- 70 Stephen and Philip - chapters 7 and 8.
- 71 Easton, *op.cit.*, p.134.
- 72 Acts 15.13, 21.18.



- 73 Titus 1.5.
- 74 III John 9 - NEB footnote reads 'who enjoys being their leader'.
- 75 Acts 15.13,22 (NEB).
- 76 J. F. V. Nicholson, *The Ministry: A Baptist View*, London 1976, pp.6,13.
- 77 J. F. V. Nicholson, 'The Office of Messenger amongst British Baptists in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *The Baptist Quarterly*, XVII, No.5 (January 1958), pp.206ff.
- 78 *Christianismus Primitivus*, 1678, pp.164 ff.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p.122.
- 80 McGlothlin, *op.cit.*, pp.146f., Article XXXI.
- 81 *Ibid.*, p.266, chapter XXVI.7.
- 82 *Ibid.*, XXVI.9.
- 83 *Ibid.*, p.268, XXVI.15.
- 84 See note 28.
- 85 *The Baptist Handbook 1915*, London, pp.213ff., 261f.
- 86 The original scheme re Ministerial Settlement, Sustentation and Collegiate Training, introduced by J. H. Shakespeare in 1909, virtually ignored the Associations, but was twice amended to give more place to them. The 1915 Scheme setting up the Areas described the General Superintendent as 'the representative of the Baptist Union (a) in all matters pertaining to Ministerial Settlement and Removal in his area... (b) for the Sustentation Fund for the Area for which he is engaged...'. The Assembly expressed the hope that the Superintendents would be enabled 'to exercise a spiritual ministry in the Churches of the area', (*The Baptist Handbook*, 1916, London, pp.277f.). The way in which this aspect has triumphed and the Superintendency has won general acceptance throughout the denomination is narrated in *The Baptist Quarterly*: Henry Bonser, 'The Work of a General Superintendent', Vol.II, 1925, pp.315ff., Henry Bonser, 'Recollections of a General Superintendent', Vol.XIII, 1950, pp.172ff., H. L. Watson, 'The General Superintendents', Vol.XXV, 1973, pp.146ff.
- 87 Lancashire and Cheshire; Yorkshire; East Midlands; West Midlands; Devon and Cornwall; London already had full-time Association Secretaries.
- 88 *Fiddes*, *op.cit.*, p.10.
- 89 Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, Edinburgh, 1978, p.105, in a section headed 'Charismata of leadership and instruction' writes: 'The nature of prophecy is maintained in purity by a refusal to set it within the limits of any type of office guaranteed by human invention. There is no line of succession, no pedigree that can guarantee Israel prophecy. It is guaranteed solely by the promise of Yahweh, who will never leave his people without his direct instruction'.
- 90 Galatians 1.11-12.
- 91 A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, London, 1947, p.224.