

The organizational basis of the Anglican Communion: a theological consideration

Ephraim Radner, Wycliffe College

The proposed covenanting of Anglican churches that is embodied in the Covenant “process” now before the Anglican Communion has brought to the fore an important question: what is the appropriate “church” body to adopt the Covenant? Is it a province or a diocese? The question has already stirred acrimony in debate, because it is seen to touch at least two current sore spots in the Communion’s life: that is, the status of churches who a.) have left TEC and the Anglican Church of Canada, gone “under” the temporary jurisdiction of non-North American provinces, and are now forming a “new” North American province (ACNA), and b.) those dioceses within TEC whose bishops would like, if necessary, to covenant directly with other Anglican churches around the world, independently of their province’s decision on the matter. The issue of ecclesial status within the Communion raised by these cases is potentially fraught with legal and property implications, and therefore the theological issues behind it have been only partially examined in their own right. Yet the theological aspects are wide-reaching, touching not only on local and Communion ecclesial ordering, but on the character and shape of ecumenical vocation.

It was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who personally pointed to the theological matter. In a letter of October 14, 2007 to Bishop John Howe of Central Florida, designed to be made public, the Archbishop made a more political point regarding the need for congregations to remain bound to their diocese. But he upheld this advice with an ecclesiological claim: “The organ of union with the wider Church is the Bishop and the Diocese rather than the Provincial structure as such...[there is a ...] need to regard the Bishop and the Diocese as the primary locus of ecclesial identity rather than the abstract reality of the 'national church'.” Here the Archbishop makes several important assertions: first, ecclesial unity is given directly through a bishop and diocese, not a province; second, by consequence, provincial “structures” are not organs of unity “as such”; thirdly, “national churches” are somehow equivalent in this regard to “provinces”; and fourthly, the “abstraction” of a national church may even therefore apply, in its lack of ecclesiological concreteness, to provinces.

What are we to make of these assertions, not so much in the context of current Anglican debate, but “in themselves”, as it were, as theological claims? What follows is an attempt to lay out these theological issues in just such a way as to avoid, for the present, the political issues of the moment. It is not possible, however, to do this without at least noting some of the historical realities that have shaped the theological vision involved.

What is a province?

Let us begin with perhaps the easiest issue, since it represents mostly a descriptive matter: what is a “province”? The fact that Abp. Williams speaks ecclesologically of a province in terms of “structure” and even “abstraction” indicates that a “provincial church” may be a problematic category on a purely *theological* level. And so the category’s historical emergence demonstrates. For all the retrospective attempts to link provincial, and in particular those provincial structures associated with well known “patriarchal sees” in the early Church, to theological claims of

special apostolicity, historians today are loathe to attribute the provincial organization of the Constantinian church to anything but primarily political and administrative expedience. De Vries speaks of the “political principle” as the fundamental one in organizing the newly expanded church within the Christian “empire” along the lines of the Empire’s already established provincial system (in which, under Diocletian, even the secular political unit of the “diocese” preceded that term’s application to ecclesial units). Key urban centers within the civil sphere accrued, quite pragmatically, organizational status.¹ That this development might also be “providential” no one doubted, although just what Providence had in mind and why is another question.²

Already by the 3rd c. (cf. Cyprian, Letter 19), we are told that bishops gathered in council from local “provinces”, in this case referring to geographical extent according to civil nomenclature, without any formal ecclesiastical structure implied. But the established order of civil administration *was* the *de facto* basis for the Church’s new formal political structuring in the 4th century, and one that made pragmatic and unquestioned sense. The Nicene claim to grant particular authority to the “patriarchates” of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem (along with Rome and the “new Rome” of Constantinople) was a matter of political reality, and generally accepted as such at the time, while the notion that these areas had a special apostolic origin was virtually unmentioned for centuries (cf. the Council of Nicea, Canons 6 and 7). To be sure, “custom” was cited as a reason for the respect, and thereby authority, to be accorded these sees, but nothing is said that explains this tradition in a theological way.

The notion of “primacy”, which is eventually bound up with the emergence of “metropolitan” and patriarchal sees, is one that, again, was only gradually articulated in a theological manner. Obviously, this development centered on the Bishop of Rome and his own primacy. And even today – e.g. in the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) document *Gift of Authority* (45) – it is the Pope’s argued role as a “universal” primate that informs the notion of primacy among other churches, including Anglicanism. But here as well, it should also be argued historically, the administrative ordering precedes the theological speculation, and the latter, frankly, lags the former by centuries and, in some cases, millennia. At best, one can argue for an emergent respect for episcopal “seniority” in consecration in certain regions before the 4th century. Still, the consistent ordering of primatial powers along these lines is clouded and disputed, sometimes following the demarcations of civil administration, sometimes of exemplary life.

¹ Wilhelm de Vries, S. J., “The Origin of the Eastern Patriarchates and their Relationship to the Power of the Pope”, in Thomas E. Bird and Eva Piddubcheshen (eds.), *Archeiscopal and Patriarchal Autonomy* (New York: Fordham University, 1972), p. 15f., 24. No one doubts, of course, that an evolution in this direction had already taken place before Nicea, particularly given the missionary ordering of the Church often according to major cities. But this seems to have happened without theological method. See also Abp. Peter L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood [NY]: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), pp. 36-40. The development was uneven in different parts of the empire, and not always clearly motivated. See Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Chapter Five, pp. 118-144. More generally, for a comparative overview of the early Church’s provincial and conciliar development with Europe and especially Britain’s later ecclesial ordering in this regard, see Eric Waldram Kemp, *Counsel and Consent: Aspects of the Government of the Church as exemplified in the history of the English Provincial Synods* (London: SPCK, 1961).

² Such was William Reed Huntington’s view. See below.

By the time that the Pope saw fit to establish “patriarchates” and archiepiscopates in areas already served by existing patriarchs (e.g. in the 16th and 17th centuries, not to mention the earlier imposition of a Latin episcopal system onto the Greek Church in the 13th century), the theological claim had ironically outstripped even the most realistic administrative facts. (Theological reasoning *did*, however, manage to provide a new basis for political expedience [e.g. in allowing the Catholic bishop with charge over British Catholics in the 17th century to carry the title of Archbishop of Chalcedon]). It is only recently that Catholic ecclesiology has sought to free the character of primacy from this seemingly ineluctable political current, and in so doing open up a path for ecumenical discussions around ecclesial authority. Thus, a normative statement of papal primacy – e.g. “the Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter’s successor, ‘is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 882) – will make use of notions of “unity”, episcopacy, and the people of God in a way that is not immediately bound to political structures.

In short, if the notion of “primacy” is to have any theological weight, it will come from its elucidation of the apostolicity of the Church, not from its association with provincial and administrative structures. This has been the only real theological container in which responsible Anglican claims to Canterbury’s particular “primatial” role can have any ballast, although it is one that thereby lays that claim open to potential questioning at various times. It is, likewise, the only basis upon which the archiepiscopal ordering of Anglicanism can have any theological integrity, again providing the basis for that ordering’s potential relativizing. Of course, to press the argument in the direction of apostolicity is to press it back “down”, in terms of structure, to the level of the episcopate itself (see below).

Before doing so, however, it will be helpful to address the question of the meaning of a “diocese” and “parish”. In fact, these two terms also derive from secular administrative units initially as well, with little theological content. In Roman civil law, a “diocese” (a Latin transliteration of the Greek term for a household unit) evolved from indicating local political entities within provinces, to larger divisions of the empire (under Diocletian) within which provinces were located. Before Nicea, bishops were usually spoken of as overseeing a “church” (*ecclesia*), and the civil terms were not applied. By the time of Nicea, however, the term used for a bishop’s territory of jurisdiction was “parish”, the *paroikia* or literally “neighborhood”, while the term “diocese” was reserved for the larger patriarchal areas of oversight (see e.g. Nicea, Canon 26). This distinction remained in use in the East, and, for a much lesser period, in the West where, over time, the term “diocese” supplanted “parish” as the designation for the area of specifically episcopal jurisdiction – although well into the Middle Ages one sees confusion of these categories in their application.

In any case, dioceses in the West seem to have followed the “political principle” as much as in the East. In Gaul, Britain, Wales later, as well as elsewhere, we see that diocesan ordering generally followed first Roman, then non-Roman political boundaries of local kingdoms and fiefdoms, or later (as in 1111 in Ireland) were determined naturally by geographic markers like rivers and mountains.

Without over-extrapolating meaning from these kinds of historical observations, it is possible to conclude the following: the key issue in defining geographical ecclesial units once this became desirable at the time of the “Church’s imperial reorganization”, eventually lay in the reality of episcopal oversight, to which political and civil terms ready at hand were appropriated. As with provincial ordering, practical expedience – including elements of travel and clarity of natural boundary -- seems to have had the greatest role in the geographic ordering of the Church. The fact that “parish” proved to be the primary usage in this regard at first, however, indicates the continued pull of local conceptualities on this matter, borrowing a term with connotations of personal relationship and residential proximity and hospitality.

The rise of the parochial subdivision of dioceses (in what became the normal Western usage) also follows a relatively straightforward development of administration as the church itself spread across rural areas especially that required regular local pastoral oversight. Even here, as we see in the case of England, there are the clear traces of various older civil orders that lie behind the parochial system, determined by taxation/tithe purposes, and often bounded by the borders settled through the local proprietorship of larger landowners and their tenants. Significant differences in these secular systems account for what eventually proved to be the highly diverse forms of parish organization in northern and southern England. Nor were these secular templates merely vestiges of the distant past: in the 19th-century, the “civil parish” unit of secular government was based, in many areas, on 13th c. village boundaries of the north, and was often irregularly linked to church parishes that had their own earlier origins.³ Obviously, with non-established churches in areas of newer civil invention, like the United States, these kinds of historical arrangements did not obtain. But even in the Episcopal Church, early canons dictated that parish “boundaries”, unless otherwise stipulated, coincide with the civil limits of “villages, towns, townships, boroughs, cities, or such divisions of a city or town” as might be expressly noted (I.vi.2 of 1875).

If there is a theological meaning to the “parish”, it also emerges only long after the organizational unit itself was adapted. Among churches of catholic self-understanding – as opposed to the Congregationalist ecclesiology developed in some forms of 17th-century Protestantism – such a meaning is completely dependent upon the theological significance of episcopally-ordered communities, at best an extension of this reality. To be sure, congregationalism has often culturally influenced many Western catholic churches, but that practical reality has rarely been directly acknowledged let alone affirmed. Most fully, the parish is usually understood as the local embodiment of the diocesan community, eucharistically ordered. The notion of a “particular Church” in Roman Catholic ecclesiology lies at the heart of this.⁴

What is a bishop?

We shall return to these categories of ecclesial organization later within the context of Anglican life today. But the theological thread to follow seems inevitably to lead us back to the episcopal

³See Angus J. L. Winchester, *Discovering parish boundaries*, Edition 2 (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2000).

⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion* (1992), 7.

ordering of the early Church which runs as a constant integrating aspect to the theological definition of the Church as this is expressed through the various civil forms of its practical life.

a. historical development

There is now a general consensus over the broad shape characterizing the historical emergence of episcopal direction of the Church. One can see a simple summary of this consensus in the recent Cyprus Agreed Statement (2006) of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue (par. 3-12): the New Testament, according to this common view, does not provide a systematic structure of ministerial order; for some decades into the 2nd century, the ministry of elders (presbyters) and bishops (overseers) appears under fluid or interchangeable terms; but eventually (although perhaps at different points depending on region) a distinct three-fold order of deacon, elder, and bishop is in place, with the bishop representing the Eucharistic and pastoral center of the local church. While there may be some differences among scholars regarding the dating of these developments, most agree that the fundamental motive in this evolution was determined by a clear desire to maintain continuity of apostolic witness within the Church, both in terms of teaching and discipline.⁵

Precisely what the nature of this apostolicity may have been, however, is by no means well defined in terms of its shaping influence on the actual form of ministerial oversight. And here we see that modern arguments derive from differences in interpretation. For instance, Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians will press the claim that the bishop emerged as a “representative” or “icon” of Christ, especially within the context of Eucharistic presidency (on the model of Ignatius of Antioch’s letters); Anglican and Lutheran theologians have been more likely to stress the Clementine and Irenaean model in which apostolic continuity from Christ’s original teaching is given in terms of witness and teaching through historical tradition and faithfulness, passed on from apostle to successor (I Clement 42;1-4; 43:1-3; Irenaeus *Against the Heresies*, III.1, 2; IV.26.2, etc..)

In both cases, the central work of the bishop as the guarantor and representative of the Church’s unity has been emphasized, a unity that both derives from and points to the oneness of the Son with the Father and, in his own prayer, of the apostolic Church’s missionary and historical witness within the truth of the Word. A common ecumenical statement like *Baptism, Ministry and Eucharist* (36) sums up this developing theological meaning this way: “Under the particular historical circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed. This succession was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion”.⁶

The notion of the bishop acting *in persona Christi* may be right enough; but I would argue that it has been wrongly taken up in a structurally-founded fashion, one that has exposed and

⁵Francis A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001). For an earlier, but influential summary, see Dom Bernard Botte, “La Collégialité dans le Nouveau Testament et chez les Pères apostoliques”, in *Le Concile et les Conciles: Contribution à la Vie Conciliaire de l’Église* (Gembloux: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1960), pp. 1-18.

⁶*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (1982).

continues to expose itself to the contradictions pointed to by those, like Gregory of Nazianzus, who viewed the unchristian behavior of bishops both individually and at council as blasphemous.⁷ If the ministry of oversight is to be formally and politically structured in an authoritative way according to its historical extension of Jesus' own person, one risks ensconcing the image of Christ within its political contradiction.

b. The New Testament

To see what is at stake here, let us turn to the New Testament itself, seeing how the early Church exposit – rather than develops – the vision of oversight. And in this regard, it is fair to say that at the center of its vision is the reality of the specifically “pastoral” role, that is the work of the “shepherd”. We see this from the original figure of Jesus, through the actual description of the ministerial role, and finally to the post-apostolic settling of the image upon the Church’s organization as “flock-with-shepherd” in 1 Clement. This terminology becomes standard for the entire subsequent Church’s history. All Anglican ordinals refer to bishops as the “chief-pastor”⁸, and the original 1550 Ordinal founds the episcopal calling upon this pastoral form.⁹ Obviously, the meaning of the pastoral figure is primarily informed by the Old Testament’s usage, in which God’s shepherding of Israel (Ps. 23:1; 80:1) is both the model of and judging contrast to the human leaders of the people. The famous Chapter 34 of Ezekiel (see also Jer. 23:1-6) lays out this model and contrastive judgment clearly: the pastors of Israel are responsible for their flock’s misfortune at the hands of ravenous enemies (v.7), and in their place the Lord himself takes on the role of shepherd (v. 11). This does not, however, preclude the work of a renewed human pastorate in the form of David (v. 23). It is this work that displays the content of the true pastor’s vocation: not only to protect and “feed” the people, but to ensure that they “walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them” (v. 24).

The Messianic orientations of these prophecies, as is well-known, are taken up in the Jesus’ own self-definition, e.g. in John 10. But now this is explicated in terms of the Son’s own mission of self-giving that finally moves to the Cross and beyond. Not only does the good Shepherd “lay down his life” for his sheep (Jn. 10:11) but this sacrifice is offered for the fullness of the flock’s life and extending abundance (10:16-18). Jesus’ use of a shepherd in his parable of God’s love for the lost sinner (e.g. Lk. 15:4-7) plays upon this paradigmatic character of divine pastoral care as it is exposed in the mission of the Son: going to the farthest distance of place and expended effort for the sake of even one sheep. The early Church’s adoption of this figure in its own primordial iconography as a Christological symbol points to its essential explanatory force for the Church’s own inner life.¹⁰

⁷ See below [current Note 54]

⁸ Richard Jeffrey Leggett, “Anglican Ordinals”, in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (eds.), *Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 228-237.

⁹ E.g., the Gospel is John 21:15b-17; the charge, with the giving of the Bible: “Be to the flocke of Christ a shepeheard, not a wolfe: feede them, devoure them not”, etc..

¹⁰This is by far the most common image in the Catacombs, with well over three hundred examples. See Paul Styger, *Die altchristliche Grabeskunst : ein Versuch der einheitlichen Auslegung* (München : Kösel [und] Pustet, 1927), p. 7.

And it becomes the figure of Church's life, already from the lips of Jesus as recorded in John's version of the resurrected Jesus' conferral of vocation upon Peter (Jn. 21:17): "He said to him the third time, Simon, [son] of Jonas, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep." Yet this vocation is made one with the goal of Peter's life – the death he would die for the sake of his Lord – given in the single calling to all Christian disciples, "Follow me!" (Jn. 21:18-19). The shepherd *is* the disciple in his or her fullness and extent.

The unity of the divine Shepherd's own work with the Christian disciple's, and finally with the particular task of the Church's leaders is already well-defined in the New Testament's description of specifically "pastoral" ministry. For 1 Peter, as elsewhere (cf. Heb. 13:20-21), Jesus is the Great Shepherd; but now this role is further described precisely in the Pauline figure of the *episkopos*, the overseer or supervisor: "For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). The "elders" of the churches (and Peter here also names himself such, in 5:1) are later appropriated into this figure directly: "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers [*episkopoi*] not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve" (5:2). As embodiments precisely of Jesus' *pastoral* form – laying down his life of his own accord -- they are to be "examples" to the "flock" (5:3), not "lords" over them, the language here directly taken from the dominical descriptions of sacrificial service (cf. Mk. 10:41-45; Lk. 22:27; Jn. 15:15) in which the pastor's life is given away literally as a slave for one greater. So, in 1 Peter the discussion of the pastoral leader follows directly on the discussion of the Christian disciple's joyous "communion" in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-19). Just as the Christian disciple will rejoice in the coming of Christ in glory (4:13), so the suffering pastor will also receive the "crown of glory" when the "chief Shepherd shall appear" (5:4).

The intersection of apostolicity, in the early Church's sense, with just this particular pastoral vocation is exemplified in Acts' description of Paul's commission of the Ephesian church's leaders. Paul has gathered the church's "elders" in Miletus, and as the special apostle of Christ he confers upon them their vocation in the shadow of his own discipleship towards death in the service of his Lord and the Gospel (Acts 20:22-24). Just as the Holy Spirit has "bound" him for this service, towards whose end of "tribulation" he now moves, the same Spirit establishes these elders as the pastoral bishops of their church: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopoi*]. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (20:28). Their own future will demand that they, like Jesus and his apostles, enter into the midst of "wolves" where life is laid down for the sheep (Jn. 20:29-31; Mt. 10:16). Paul's citation, to end his discourse, of Jesus' otherwise unrecorded words, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (20:35) clearly refers to more than the financial aid of the poor he commends, but to its source within the work of the slave who offers his life and "blood" as a "ransom" for all, and, in whose wake the service of the Gospel becomes itself a sacrificial offering (cf. Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:2; Rom. 15:16), not for sin itself, but nonetheless in the form of self-giving.

The apostolic order of episcopal ministry *in persona Christi* is bound most tightly to this specifically pastoral vocation that is the slave's. The depth and extent of this service, in its

embodied reality, remains lodged in the Old Testament's prophetic description of the bounds of common life both held in mind and put at stake in pastoral ministry, that is, the very survival of Israel in her palpable history. (This is given in God's repeated judgment upon the "bad" pastor, e.g. in Is. 56:11; Jer. 10:21; 12:10; 23:1 esp., etc.). The Shepherd's service stands always as the figure that takes in, assumes and transfigures the actual pastoral *failures* of the Israel's leaders and their fruit and consequence: Israel's historical devastation at the hands of the nations and the beasts of the land: "The cries and wailing of the pastors and shepherds of the flock: for the LORD has destroyed their fields...." (Jer. 25:36-38). The Good Shepherd, and hence the apostolic ministry of the bishop, is always threatened by and willing to take up and suffer the failures, through the disciple's self-sacrifice, of the history of the evil pastor. The greed, selfishness, indulgence, and idolatry of Israel's shepherds become the contrastive logic of the Church's apostolic order.

It should come as no surprise, then, that in fact the early Church's, indeed the Church's larger developed tradition's theological discussion of apostolic episcopacy, stands generally to the side of discussions of jurisdiction, territorial boundaries, and placement within the interrelated network of ecclesial structures. It is instead almost exclusively concerned with the sanctity associated with dominical *self-expenditure*, in the service of God's life and word.

As noted above, the apostolic sacrifice is not the same as a sacrifice "for sin", and generally the words used by Paul for this defining vocation of the apostle refer to the Old Testament sacrifices of thanksgiving through drink offerings (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6) rather than through blood. For all that, they represent the giving up of life itself to God, and the language remains engaged in bodily gifts, even in suffering (cf. Col. 1:24). The apostolic sacrifice embraces two areas at least: internal expenditure, understood in terms of the suffering of love and marked more formally by the nature of holiness; and external expenditure, understood in terms of relational vocation in teaching, mission, and discipline within the community of the Church. When it comes to most contemporary discussions of the episcopacy, it is this latter area that tends to predominate, largely perhaps because in the present era most interest in the episcopacy centers on jurisdictional questions, and in relation to these, on the functional tasks of bishops within the scope of such jurisdictional authority. In fact, though, the external expenditure of the bishop, within an apostolic understanding of the office, cannot be separated from the internal expenditure of episcopal holiness. Indeed, the Church's theological tradition on episcopacy almost always subordinates external function to internal holiness. And, as we will see, that internal self-expenditure moves inexorably outwards towards the self-submitting engagement of the bishop in the widest synods possible.

c. the shape of a bishop's life

The tradition is so consistent in this regard until the present day that there is little point in arguing it. From the discussions of the Eastern and Western fathers regarding the priesthood and the episcopacy (Athanasius, Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom et al.) this point is made clearly: to serve God's Church in the wake of the apostles is to submit oneself to the life and judgment of holiness itself. And it is to this life and judgment that the more jurisdictionally

characterized canons of the Church touching upon the episcopacy are literally ordered.¹¹ The very structure of Gregory the Great's famous *Pastoral Rule* follows this ordering. The book is about the nature of episcopacy, and from the start this is explained in terms of the "pastor's" role. This role, in Gregory's argument (and following what is now a well-established claim from the Fathers) is to be *avoided*, until it is clear that submission to God demands its reception. All of Books I and II are devoted to an understanding of the Pastor's heavy burden: humility before God, and just this submission to the demands of God's infinite holiness. This requirement is intricately elaborated in terms of personal ethics, prayer, and study of the Scriptures, as well as a conformance to the loving self-expenditure of the apostles and their Lord. In a famous text in I.10, Gregory summarizes the form of who those alone ought to submit to the calling of "pastoral rule":

That man, therefore, ought by all means to be drawn with cords to be an example of good living who already lives spiritually, dying to all passions of the flesh; who disregards worldly prosperity; who is afraid of no adversity; who desires only inward wealth; whose intention the body, in good accord with it, thwarts not at all by its frailness, nor the spirit greatly by its disdain: one who is not led to covet the things of others, but gives freely of his own; who through the bowels of compassion is quickly moved to pardon, yet is never bent down from the fortress of rectitude by pardoning more than is meet; who perpetrates no unlawful deeds, yet deplures those perpetrated by others as though they were his own; who out of affection of heart sympathizes with another's infirmity, and so rejoices in the good of his neighbour as though it were his own advantage; who so insinuates himself as an example to others in all he does that among them he has nothing, at any rate of his own past deeds, to blush for; who studies so to live that he may be able to water even dry hearts with the streams of doctrine; who has already learned by the use and trial of prayer that he can obtain what he has requested from the Lord, having had already said to him, as it were, through the voice of experience, *While you are yet speaking, I will say, Here am I.*¹²

Only with Book III, having established the central principle that the bishop can truly be a bishop only as he has given himself wholly to the life of exemplifying apostolic virtue, does Gregory turn to the actual tasks of the Pastor. These are now viewed mainly in terms of teaching and discipline, and outlined according to a full range of the Church's members' own character. The external expenditure of teaching and discipline remains central; but its shape and force flow only from the bishop's internal integrity. Thus, in concluding the book Gregory returns to his main point: woe to the pastor who is not able to live in such a way and give in such a fashion! So David writes, when he had "become aware how great was [his] infirmity [...] *I have sworn and am steadfastly purposed to keep the judgments of your righteousness* (Ps. 119:106). But, because it was beyond his powers to continue the keeping which he swore, straightway, being troubled, he found his weakness. Whence also he all at once betook himself to the aid of prayer, saying, *I am humbled all together; quicken me, O Lord, according to Your word* (Ps. 119:107)." Hence, pray for the bishop before God!

¹¹See my essay "To Desire Rightly: The Force of the Creed in its Canonical Context" in Christopher Seitz (ed.), *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), pp. 222-226 especially.

¹²*The Book of Pastoral Rule*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2.12, p.7 trans. James Barmby (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, reprint 1995)

To be sure, Gregory maintains a vision of order in which subjection to the authority of bishops however unworthy, as social superiors, is demanded even apart from their holiness, and so, in some sense, inheres in their office.¹³ But this represents a socially established hierarchy of subordination that, in a way, is given within the order of creation rather than primarily within the Church: if a bishop is indeed “unworthy”, like Saul, he will be replaced eventually through the hand of God. “Worthiness”, then, will finally mold even the external contours of historical life. And the jurisdictional element of episcopal office is itself shaped according to and within this historical arena, where the politics of the Church hold sway in providential terms.

Gregory’s vision, in this regard, has remained standard for Western Catholic Christianity until only recently. Even in contexts where jurisdictional questions were pressed and contested, such as 17th and 18th-century France, the Gregorian perspective laid the foundation for discussions of episcopal function. Jacques-Joseph Duguet, for instance, in his immensely popular *Traité des devoirs d’un évêque* (1710)¹⁴, follows Gregory’s principles with a relentless focus especially on the self-humbling aspects of ecclesial “rule”, and thereby only ratchets up the tension in which this places his own Jansenist desire for episcopal discipline to be imposed sternly. Even he recognizes that the latter will inevitably be reshaped by the former. In any case, the Gallican instincts he bore towards metropolitanical power, especially that held by the Pope, continually were defined, not by political concerns, but exactly by his sense of authority as ultimately given in apostolic holiness.

It needs to be said that, from an Anglican perspective, this catholic reading maintained its determining hold on the theology of the episcopacy. From one perspective, episcopacy was attacked by some Protestants mainly on the grounds of its political canonization of morally fallen individuals within the Church. For Milton, famously, “prelatory” as a political sin determined the failure of episcopal forms of ministry. But this sin was specifically a sin against *apostolic* self-expenditure. Taking as his guide the Bible alone on the basis, not of “law” and precedence, but of Christ himself, Milton argued that the Old Testament could be but a useless “model” to imitate in matters of ministry, because its own “prelates” (e.g. the Aaronic Ananias) were moral and political “dunces”. The theological claim that bishops were necessary as both instruments and symbols of unity was belied by the facts: bishops are, Milton asserted, the greatest cause of schism, oppression, and violence in the Church’s history, including especially now in his own day. Of Anglican bishops he writes:

“schism and combustion be the very issue of your bodies, your first born; and set your country a bleeding in a prelatical mutiny, to fight for your pomp, and that ill-favoured weed of temporal honour, that sits dishonorouably upon your laic shoulders; that ye may be fat and fleshy, swoln and with high thoughts and big with mischievous designs, when God comes to visit upon you all this fourscore years’ vexation of his church under your Egyptian tyranny. For certainly of all those blessed souls which you have persecuted and those miserable ones which you have lost, the just vengeance does not sleep”¹⁵ (I.vi).

¹³Cf. *Pastoral Rule*, III.4; cf. also his Epistle (17) to Felix of Messana.

¹⁴“The first duty of a bishop is to be holy” (II.1). Duguet was read and commended by Protestants (e.g. Vinet) as much as by Catholics. On the French tradition here see Alison Forrester. *Fathers, Pastors, and Kings: Visions of Episcopacy in Seventeenth-Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ John Milton, *The Reason for Church Government Urged Against Prelatory* (1642), I.vi.

But the real purpose of the Gospel, Milton writes, is to bring the foolishness of the cross to bear upon Church and world, that its minister might be a servant and slave, and take the “form of the servant” who is Christ (II.i.). In all of this, Milton was a child of the Catholic tradition, now lodged within a changing social context where the necessary subordination of individual liberties to political hierarchy could and indeed should not any longer be taken for granted, a late medieval Tyndale transformed for his times.

And it is in the same vein that Anglican Episcopalians argued *for* their frame of church government. The indefatigable and politically savvy Gilbert Burnet, pressing the episcopacy in the face of both papal claims and Protestant indifference or opposition, recognizes that the greatest danger to a bishop’s now almost wholly circumscribed jurisdiction (so far did he believe the State to have improperly extended its power) is the evil witness of their unholy habits: luxury, gluttony, worldliness, all of which feed into the selfish laziness that undercuts the external tasks of preaching and forming the flock.¹⁶ Instead, Burnet argues in his classic 1692 *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, taking up the single tradition of “pastoral” ministry from the Fathers, the proper description of and model for a bishop is given by Gregory of Nazianzus in his Second Oration, and by John Chrysostom in his treatise on the Priesthood. Here Burnet lifts up St. Paul as the pattern of self-expenditure, suffering, toil, and integrity (ch. 4). But Burnet is already fighting against a massive cultural shift in power, and turning back again to a different era.

So, John Potter, later Archbishop of Canterbury, in his 1719 Charge to the Diocese of Oxford, speaks to his new clergy as a strong High Church establishmentarian, while urging them to work tirelessly on behalf of the apostolic tradition against the forces of infidelity rampant in their modern age. Yet, in the end of his argument, he is pressed to fall back on the nature of the pattern of Christ and Paul as the best anti-heretical vision for clergy and bishop both: the presuppositions of subjection to *political* demand have been weakened and finally understood to be powerless tools on behalf of the Gospel’s survival and propagation. Neither State nor ecclesiastical organization can hold back unbelief and sin; only the disciplined pastor can do so.¹⁷

Anglicanism, furthermore, was bequeathed (like Roman Catholic Jansenism) a renewal of this episcopal notion of apostolic expenditure through the experience of persecution, in their case of Non-juring bishops whose ministry came to be viewed in terms of explicit suffering, now joined to the Episcopalian burdens of the earlier Civil War. By the 19th-century, both in England and America, a central spiritual tradition of clerical apostolic service, predating the Tractarian movement by many decades, had been established within Anglican circles that drew on a particular line of holy exemplars – from Herbert and Jeremy Taylor to George Bull and Thomas Wilson (Keble’s hero). *The clergyman’s Instructor, or, A collection of tracts on the ministerial*

¹⁶ See the various discussions of bishops and clergy in his “Seasonable Advice, to People of All Ranks”, which was appended to his posthumous *History of My Own Time*, and later published separately.

¹⁷ These were, of course, ideals, and how far they informed actual practice is debated. Indeed, as pointedly enunciated ideals, they tend to indicate a rather large gap with practice altogether. On this matter, from a more general standpoint, see Patrick Collinson, “Shepherds, Sheepdogs, and Hirelings: the Pastoral Ministry in Post-Reformation England”, in his *Cranmer to Sancroft* (London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), pp. 45-74.

*duties*¹⁸, was an anthology of just these kinds of writings, popular on both sides of the Atlantic and that went through several prestigious editions in the course of the 19th-century.

There is an irony to be noted around this attitude, however, with respect to the rise of Anglican ecumenism. For as outreach to other Christian traditions increased, so it seems did the sense of the episcopate's essential pastoral character decrease. At the least, this pastorate came to be articulated more specifically in terms of teaching authority and integrity. Teaching was, of course, always at the center of episcopal duty. Rather, it seems that growing ecumenical interests altered the proportion of interest. This was perhaps inevitable, as attempts to forge acceptable continuities with separated churches were supported by greater emphasis upon the recognizable doctrinal features of apostolicity that could provide the means of bridging previously antagonistic definitions of the faith. So, for instance, the Church of England's 1994 paper on *Apostolicity and Succession*, from the House of Bishops, although it mentions the *vita apostolica* in passing (par. 26), is more concerned with the teaching aspect of *episkope*, held in common with e.g. the Lutheran tradition, that might permit mutual recognition of apostolic orders, in the manner of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*'s general outlook (Chapter III). The reduction of the episcopacy to doctrinal fidelity is itself a central feature of a divided Church in search of stability of witness.

What is a Synod¹⁹?

The episcopacy, however, is not nor was it ever, as we saw, a matter only of bishop and local church. Apostolic expenditure is given in the service of the Church and her Gospel, and in Jesus' own terms, this means that the apostle's life is for the sheep present and the sheep still to be sought out from afar. Apostolic "mission", in its broadest sense, flows from this service, and it is from this service as it moves outward that jurisdiction, whether "earned" through the respect for holiness or not, emerges. Traditionally, two elements inform this: first, eucharistic gathering and its representative character of the divine sacrifice, and second, the character of the gathered people themselves as they are joined one to another. Both elements represent the "body", in Pauline and later Augustinian terms. Where modern theologies of the episcopacy have been elaborated, it is usually, and rightly, in these terms. But their sacrificial meaning cannot be overlept in so doing, something that has also proved too common. Apostolicity is given in the first sacrifice of Christ eucharistically represented; it is taken up in the apostolic conformance through time by which this is conveyed and historically transfigured.

The apostolic "succession" was first bound to the calling and gathering of the Twelve, in this case, as the framers of a people, and it is this people that is eucharistically ordered and served by the bishop. The place where this is amply displayed is precisely at the Last Supper. Hence, in Luke's version, Jesus is driven by his "desire" to eat with the Twelve (Luke 22:15) who are gathered around him. And the meal, with all of its significance as marking the sacrifice of his

¹⁸Edited by J. Randolph, 1807.

¹⁹ For one of the fullest overviews of the topic, mostly but not exclusively Roman Catholic, see the large collection of essays in Alberto Melloni and Silvia Scatena (eds.), *Synod and Synodality: Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in new contact* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2005). "Synodality" and "conciliarity" are often used synonymously. In the present context, however, we are examining in particular the relationship of synodality to episcopacy, and leave the broader question of ecclesial conciliarity to the side, though it is obviously essentially related.

own body and blood, is shared with those whose continuity in this meal is laid up towards the heavenly banquet of the Kingdom where they will “judge the twelve tribes of Israel” (22:30). But what is this apostolic judging? It is the “lordship” of the “servant” (22:27), who “suffers” (22:15). It is his “trials” that the apostles share (22:28). Indeed, the entire apostolic significance is bound up with this particular mission that draws Israel as a whole towards and into the “form of the Servant” (Phil. 2:7), the great vision of Isaiah (52:12, 13; 53:11) that Jesus quotes of himself at this point in Luke (22:37). “Apostleship” in this sense is bound up with the vocation of *Israel* as servant now borne wholly in Jesus’ form. And the succession of such apostleship (*apostole*) is servanthood (*diakonia*) through the “accompanying” movement of his people with Jesus’ own bodily “coming and going” through the world (Acts 1:25, 21).

Ignatius of Antioch’s discussion of episcopal “hierarchy” makes little Scriptural sense apart from seeing the larger context and flow of his arguments in this light of Lordship as the Form of the Servant²⁰ (much as Lionel Thornton so forcefully argued²¹). The “greatest” becomes the “least”, in this ladder of witness, as Ignatius’ own body is taken up in a movement towards death in Rome, into which he representatively draws both his immediate flock and those to whom he writes as Israel’s destiny. The bishop in apostolic succession “continues” with Jesus through His trials, goes in and out with him through the world, is driven to his knees both in service and in the agony of prayer, shares in the body and blood poured out for the world, and is only in this lifted up to the place where Israel is governed in her entirety as a people *thus* drawn together. It is “succession” in the sense of “tradition”, a passing along or moving along or finally, in the double-meaning so well pressed by Thornton, in a “delivering” (*paradosis*), which reflects both aspects of apostolic self-expenditure given in Jesus, the teaching (1 Cor. 15:3) and the betrayal to death in a passion (1 Cor. 11:23). And when the apostolic self expenditure fails in its integrity, the double outcome emerges into view as well, as bishop (in the ministerial sense) becomes the Apostle Judas, “guilty” of the Lord’s body and blood” (1 Cor. 11:26,27).²² The full body – Israel – is given in the unity that is Christ’s full yet *apostolic* body, ordered with and through the bishop’s integral witness.²³

It is just in this apostolic character of the *paradosis* in Christ as the Servant Israel that we see the synodal press of the episcopacy. If the local church or *ecclesia* stands as the center of episcopal ministry, there is nonetheless no congregationalist focus or limitation to the ecclesial shape of the apostolic mission. The Twelve found the Heavenly City (Rev. 21:14) as a numerical set, so that it is always the whole people they represent. Yet they represent it by giving themselves away. Fullness is always *centripetal*, even as it is aimed completely individually. Hence, we can appreciate the manner in which an Anglican like F. J. A. Hort tried to describe the nature of the

²⁰ Ignatius, *Letter to the Trallians*, 7; *Letter to the Romans*, esp. cc. 4-6.

²¹ Lionel Thornton, *The Form of the Servant*, vol. 3, “Christ and the Church” (London: Dacre Press, 1956).

²² Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, 3rd Edition (London: Dacre, 1950), pp. 339-342. See also “The Body of Christ in the New Testament” in K. E. Kirk (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), pp. 53-111.

²³ Even in those Anglican circles where sacramental Eucharistic authority is the main category through which episcopal meaning is invested, it is difficult to escape the Israel-ordered character of apostolicity. Cf. Henry Hobart who (“Saturday Morning” in *A Companion to the Altar*, 1804), in the midst of Protestant pluralist attacks, tends to focus solely on the issue of the “apostolic” authority that is essentially given to the episcopate, which he interprets in terms of the sacramental validity of e.g. the Eucharist. This is what we would expect of such a High Churchman. Still, the goal for Hobart is the joining of all to the one Body, that is, in his words, the “tribes that go up” to Jerusalem. The Eucharist is Israel gathered.

“one” church in Ephesians, the whole of which is greater than the local yet is also given fully *in* the local church without some kind of “mediation”. “The members which make up the One Ecclesia are not communities but individual men [...] its relations to them all are direct, not mediate.”²⁴ It was a notion that exercised more structurally-oriented ecclesiologists like Moberly²⁵, but it is also a notion that has been reaffirmed in e.g. the Cyprus Statement of agreement among Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox.²⁶ The Good Shepherd lays down his life, not for a supra-individual organism or structure, but for his friends, who are chosen and named and sent. Yet in this “naming” of “each” (Jn. 10:3), which is tied to the self-expenditure of the shepherd as a singular body and person, the whole people are gathered, fed, transformed, and set before God in friendship and adoration. (This was Irenaeus’ great vision.) The Church is the gathering of the disciples in each of their self-giving forms; but to give is also always to gather; and to give more is to gather more. Only the Good Shepherd can give himself so singularly to each person and for each, that all are “drawn” to Him (Jn. 12:32). The apostolic ministry, while limited in this capacity on its own, is nonetheless granted the gift of participating in this unmediated yet-ingathering relation of individual to whole.

Synodality has been taken up as a central aspect of the episcopal function, and rightly so, but only in this originating sense of particular self-giving for the gathering of the whole. Much has been made of the word’s etymology – a “way together”, in which “the Way” that is the Christian faith and life (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9; 24:14, 22; but also 18:25 etc., as in the Gospels) is joined as a common responsibility and commitment.²⁷ In fact, however, the use of the term “synod” to describe ecclesial gatherings, of bishops or otherwise, was relatively late, and may owe as much to Eusebius’ usage as anyone’s. The word’s secular application was wide-ranging – from the conjunction of planets to sexual intercourse to tax revenue, as well as referring to formal assemblies; and the Fathers tend to apply the word in this varying way – including that of “fellow-traveler” (e.g. Ignatius, *Ephesians* 9:2). Church gatherings and councils are earlier referred to in a diverse ways, and in the famous gathering in Acts 15, the “coming together” of the “whole church” is described in terms of a *synagogue*. Thus, it is the broader scriptural character, not the technical term, that provides the meaning of synodality, and here the pastoral impetus of centripetal self-expenditure seems to be key: the “pastor” gives himself away to and for the sake of the whole flock; and this giving draws him and them together into the One Flock

²⁴ F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian ecclesia: a course of lectures on the early history and early conceptions of the ecclesia, and four sermons* (London: Macmillan, 1897), p. 168.

²⁵ See R. C. Moberly, *The Ministerial Priesthood*, 2nd Edition (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1920), p. 26.

²⁶ Cyprus Statement, V.8: “The association of episcopate with the local church and with the Eucharist implied that whenever the local community gathered to celebrate the Eucharist, the eschatological community was present in its fullness”. See also V: 10,15, 20 on the “primary” foundation of the local church with bishop as an unmediated instantiation of the church. See the succinct remarks contrasting “universal” and “local” or “particular” ecclesiologies by Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh, in his essay “Will the Ecclesiology of Cardinal Ratzinger Influence the Pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI?”, in William G. Rusch (ed.), *The Pontificate of Benedict XVI: Its Premises and Promises* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 80-86. Whether the contrast between “universal” (Roman Catholic) and “eschatological” (Orthodox) is useful is another matter. Cf. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Church Understood as Communion* (1992), issued under Ratzinger’s name: “In this sense, without impinging on the necessary regulations regarding juridical dependence, whoever belongs to one particular Church belongs to all the Churches; since belonging to the *Communion*, like belonging to the Church, is never simply particular, but by its very nature is always universal” (10).

²⁷ ARCIC “Authority in the Church III: The Gift of Authority”, 34.

and the One Shepherd (Jn. 10:16). The “whole Church” gathers in just *this* way and not in some other.

To be sure, the formal means of gathering are not haphazard as they have developed, nor does their meaning reside only in this singular pastoral mode. One can approach this issue in terms of the bishop’s own “office”: what is its “power”, in terms of authority or jurisdiction, and from where does it arise? Is it given in ordination understood as a sacramentally establishing action? Is this provided through the Church as a whole or through a particular ministry (e.g. even the Pope’s)? Is the bishop’s power given first as he is a member of the synodical reality of the Church – a “college” -- or through his relationship to a local church? Answers to these kinds of questions have determined ecclesiological debates over the centuries, pitting Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and various strands of Protestantism against each other, and laying out competing categories such as “hierarchy” and “communion” and “freedom”. In the context of the present discussion, however, it is probably better to see synods as the ecclesial *mirror and sustaining context* of the episcopal pastorate, rather than seeing the two in some kind of order of priority: the apostle is bound to the “tribes” of Israel, whose breadth will include the nations. The pastorate is both driven towards synodal life but also held accountable through it. Bishop and synod cannot be decoupled, although the material aspects of each can be described differently: the one is driven by the Spirit of the Shepherd’s self-expenditure, the other by the receipt, sustenance, and discernment of that apostolate, thereby becoming even the arena of its exercise. The one is marked by a relatively consistent pastoral character of *episcopate*, while the other has had its ordering life determined by *procedure* as it brings into view before the Church and world the form of Christ in recognizable ways. The one has seen that character promoted with little variation, while the other has had its procedural thrust inescapably determined, positively and negatively, by historical constraints that have varied enormously over time and place, and in so doing has provided diverse takes on the issues of primacy, hierarchy, and structure.

This perspective does not resolve the issue of episcopal “office”, but places it more squarely within the category of description adopted by the broader ecumenical consensus represented by *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM). When the Anglican Moberly argued against Protestant dismissals of ministerial form, bound to such historical constraints as noted above, he did so because the (Protestant) bias towards idealism and invisibility in fact leads to a dangerous form of ministerial functionalism, where “jobs” are performed on the basis ultimately of individual *power*. Ministerial form is “essential”, but not the “essence”, Moberly argued, precisely because it can, has, and must vary in accordance with the pastoral demands of time and place.²⁸ Yet, these demands nonetheless press towards the resemblance, indeed, the commonality of form, as BEM indicated in its landmark agreement in 1980: *episcopate* presses within the world towards certain forms of pastoral relationship that carry with them procedural constraint:

23. The Church as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God is constituted by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. Among these gifts a ministry of *episkopé* is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the Church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the Kingdom.

²⁸ Moberly, pp. 58-60.

26. Three considerations are important in this respect. The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.

The “personal, collegial and communal” forms of *episkope* cannot be arbitrarily conceived and ordered, but nor are they necessarily given in an historically and socially static shape. What BEM's clear implications point to is precisely the synodical character of the episcopate whose dynamic is built into the apostolic ministry.

Pastoral Synodality

“Pastoral synodality” expresses this binding of character and procedure, however varied in its details, in a consistent fashion across the Church. “Pastoral synodality” describes conjunction with an inherent tension historically, but a conjunction that has not yet broken at least in its apprehension. The fact that, for instance, the Church has, as a whole, accepted the demand for “residency” by bishops (and presbyters) with their flock demonstrates one aspect of the conjunction's real impress: the bishop and people go *together* through self-expenditure; and this leads to yet a fuller and wider life together.

And it is just the navigation of this conjunction that is marked by that energy that motivates the synodal life the Church in an *ongoing* fashion, never coming to a place of rest in temporal terms. Pastoral synodality is persistently “circular”, in that it drives the episcopal office into repeated reorderings of self-expenditure within constantly rearranged, and hopefully broader and broader realms of gathering.²⁹ The fact that there are always “new names” to be given, called, and sought after, means that the pastorate itself is always being pressed into new material forms of corporate engagement. The historical resolutions that *do* emerge in this ongoing process are spoken in terms of “reception”; but their real foundation lies in fact that pastoral synodality is, by definition, constantly reformed by the realities of Scripture, Gospel, testimony, and apostolicity as these disclose the grace of God at work among His creatures in an expanding and fecund embrace.

In any case, synods both recognize a genuine pastorate, and become the place where pastorates lead. They constitute the place where the whole people gather -- a flock sought out, and a flock seeking – and hence embody the *episcopate* that is the Church herself as the Pastor's Body. Pastoral synodality is what bishops, in their particular office, press towards and are discerned within; but “in synod” the whole people exercise *episcopate*, and “all the Lord's people are prophets” (Num. 11:29), though prophets not as Lords over others, but as Jerusalem's own victims (Mt. 23:27), mocked and beaten by their very people (Lk. 22:64), and their reign from a

²⁹ Cf. Giuseppe Alberigo, “Ecclesiology and Democracy: Convergences and Divergences”, in James Provost and Kunt Walf (eds.), *The Tabu of Democracy Within the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1992), *Concilium* 1992/5, pp. 20, 23).

tree thereby exclusively reveals the Kingdom of God. The movement of Christ to Bishop to People to Church is one of Gift given, received, given again, and distributed to all and to the world (Mk. 6:37-44).³⁰ This larger movement is what sustains the traditional role of popular “election” or “consent” more broadly, that is traditionally involved in the choice of episcopal candidates.³¹ Even as one is “taken where one does not wish to go” (Jn. 21:18), that life is nonetheless laid down “willingly” (Jn. 10:17-18), or literally, “on one’s own authority”. And the self-expenditure, internal and external, on behalf of others that constitutes the pastoral work of *episcopus*, just as it moves from Jesus to the apostles, must work outward from bishop towards an act inclusive of the entire people, as the Servant Israel. The actual political character of popular franchise is secondary to the divine reality that has taken ecclesial form. Arguments regarding “democracy” in the church are misplaced unless their meaning is transmuted by this form, something uncommon in the present era. The people of the church are called to elect – exercise their “authority” in choosing and submitting to -- their bishops because of the character of divine love of willing self-sacrifice assumed in baptism, not because of the political rights claimed through the title of baptism.

Indeed, the distinctions of ecclesiastical roles as they developed in the Church – bishop, presbyter, deacon, minor orders, laity, all in their various guises within especially the later Western traditions – are ones whose contours, as Anglicans at any rate have always claimed, are not specifically given in the apostolic form itself. But the functional aspects of these roles are accountable to that form and, at least normatively, can evolve no further (or should not) than that form permits. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the *lack* of clarity over the exact relationship of presbyteral to episcopal ministry. Just how this relationship should be defined has been a matter of debate over the centuries, as is well-known. Jerome, for instance, recognized that the “superiority” of the bishop to the presbyter was a matter of “custom”, rather than “the truth of the Lord’s direction” (*veritatem dominicae dispositionis*).³² The original ordering of the Church, according to Jerome, was presbyterial council, the fundamental dynamic of ecclesial synodality, disrupted, he says, by the kind of factionalism noted by Paul in 1 Corinthians. It was only this practical reality that led the Church to solidify its unity through the specifically unifying oversight of bishops.³³ The bishop, he goes on, was still chosen from among the council of the presbyters in some places. In this sense, the bishop is an extension of the presbyterate, which is the more original of the apostolic titles (quoting 1 Peter 5:1ff., and the openings to 2 and 3 John). Aquinas, on the other hand, saw the presbyteral ministry as an extension of the bishop’s, the former acting as the latter’s vicar within local congregations of the larger diocesan body, and so, as it were, the limited expression of the episcopal life in particular areas.³⁴

³⁰ Cf. Risto Saarinen’s *God and the Gift: An Ecumenical Theology of Giving* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), esp. Chapter 5, and p. 119.

³¹ Jean Gaudemet, *Les Élections dans l’Église Latine des Origines au XVIe Siècle* (Paris: Éditions Fernand Lanore, 1979), pp. 13-48; Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections, 250-600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), c. esp. 2, pp. 18-51; Cf. also Abp. Peter L’Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (Crestwood [NY]: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), pp. 40-41

³² Jerome, Commentary on Titus, 1.5 (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, v. 26.563C)

³³ Jerome, Epistle 146. The letter is controversial, in that, along with equating the presbyterate and episcopate theologically, Jerome seems to relativize severely the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De Perfectione vitae spirituali*, II in his *Opuscula*. An English translation is given by John Proctor in *The Religious State: The Episcopate and the Priestly Office* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1950), esp. c. 25.

Anglicans have had the tendency to lump bishop and priests together in terms of their specific duties and the nature of their pastorate. So, for instance, popular intercession, as in the much-used volume of prayers by Benjamin Jenks, considers both bishops and priests under the common heading of “pastor”, and makes no distinction in the character of their respective “offices”. Together, they are prayed for in the terms of pastoral self-expenditure that we have already noted as being consistent in the description of specifically apostolic life. They are both indiscriminately to be “examples”, “ensamples”, “patterns”, “demonstrations” and “commendations” to the “flock”, “overseeing” its life in the Word and in “holiness” of “love”.³⁵ Even a staunch Non-juror like John Kettlewell, whose views of the episcopacy were deeply etched by a high understanding of the bishop’s role in guaranteeing unity, nonetheless saw bishop and priest as basically one in their common pastoral vocation, especially in the face of persecution and division. Here he takes up the Old Testament descriptions of “pastor” and applies them to both orders equally.³⁶ Gilbert Burnet, while accepting the Thomistic notion of a priestly vicariate – the presbyterate’s subordination to the episcopacy was so “absolute” that the former took no vows of their own! -- notes that the historical failure of bishops to live their apostolate with integrity simply led to the legal separation of the two offices, such that each acts in ways almost independent of the other, yet with an equal (theological) accountability to the duties of the *pastorate*.³⁷

What appears in this blurring of theological lines between presbyter and bishop is the more fundamental character of the apostolic pastorate that informs both. And if so, the character of pastoral synodality rightly shapes the practical realities of both forms of office and their practical exercise and accountability. Each represents, in these material ways, the local extension of the Church’s synodal ministry, that is in fact given its form in the pastorate, and that includes, after all, the disciplined life of “all Israel”. And if this is so, the conclusion we can draw is that both diocese and parish, as we assume these orderings, are not *geographical* per se, but pragmatic units of synodality. Such a conclusion cannot dismiss the material and geographical forms that have developed in this or that place and tradition. But it does point to how such particular traditions should not become theologically canonized: ecclesial synodality must continue to press these forms outward, through the pastoral reality of apostolic life given in the pastor’s body, to greater and greater spheres of expenditure wherein synodality takes historical shape.

And here we come to a key practical resolution of a problem that has beset ecclesial multiplication, expansion, and division for centuries, that is, the existence of diverse local *ecclesiae* within shared geographical spheres. The “problem” is not, in this light, “overlapping” boundaries, but hostile or hermetic synods, figurative walls that constrain the outward press of pastoral self-expenditure. Concretely, it is the fact that diverse churches do not share common

³⁵ Jenks’ prayers were taken up by both High Churchmen and Evangelicals, and to this degree display a broadly accepted set of attitudes. I have consulted a later edition of his *1697 Prayers and Offices of Devotion for Families and for Particular Persons upon Most Occasions* (London: 1803), which was published in numerous editions through the latter 19th-century.

³⁶ cf. John Kettlewell, *Of Christian communion to be kept on in the unity of Christs church and among the professors of truth and holiness : and of the obligations, both of faithful pastors to administer orthodox and holy offices, and of faithful people to communicate in the same : fitted for persecuted or divided or corrupt states of churches when they are either born down by secular persecutions or broken with schisms or defiled with sinful offices and ministrations* [London : s.n.,1693], Pt. I., chapters 5 and 6 especially.

³⁷ Gilbert Burnet, *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, 4 ed. (London: J. Walthoe, 1736), pp. 93-96.

council, in its extended theological sense, that represents Christian scandal and schism; it is not the fact of diversity itself. This conclusion is coherent with contemporary ecclesiological arguments concerning “diversity-in-communion”, but only to the degree that “communion” itself is understood in terms of explicitly *pastoral* synodality. The test of the Church’s integrity is given in the aspects described in Acts 2:44-47, which probably would, *but might not necessarily*, engage a unified structural network of leadership according to a single hierarchical model.

Historically, it is in this light probably necessary to look to the ante-Nicene conciliar period for models rather than to the Nicene and post-Nicene examples that have tended to dominate discussion of of episcopal synodality. It is precisely the diversity of ordering and conciliar movement that strikes the historian of the ante-Nicene era. In part this is because the documentation is thin and what we have is often retrospectively colored by the experience of later authors (e.g. Eusebius). But it is also the case that the Church herself in this earlier period had not chosen to order herself, nor did it prove practicable, according to a strictly unified structure of authority. Certainly we know that by the latter 2nd century, synods of laity and bishops together gathered for the purposes of dealing with e.g. the Montanist disturbances. By the end of the century, synods had been gathered, at the suggestion of Pope Victor, to deal with disagreements over the dating of Easter. By the middle of the next century, we know of synods e.g. in Africa, that gathered over the disputes arising from the *lapsi* during persecution, and we find our first surviving “minutes” from proceedings.³⁸ Synods took place through local demand or through the heeding of requests from abroad (e.g. with Victor or perhaps Cyprian). But however local in organization, they were viewed as bound to the life of the “whole world’s” Church (*totius orbis*, in Cyprian’s phrase), and quite explicitly touched on matters that extended beyond “provincial” pertinence.³⁹ On the one hand, particular locality set the practical limits to gathering; on the other, geography was explicitly *not* the test of synodality’s press, purpose, and authority. The local was a “microcosm” of the whole, to be sure, and in each bishop-in-synod lay the fullness of the Church as “one”; but only if each local realization of the Church, through its bishop, was opened to the larger realities of other localities each with its equal place in this dynamic. Hence, according to Marot, there *was* an inner current within ante-Nicene Christianity that drew the Church towards a quantifying accountability – the more bishops and more churches engaged, the better – that stood behind the developed notion of an “ecumenical council”.

There is no question but that geography is prudential to this reality. And there is furthermore no question but that the ordering of the Church according to provinces and dioceses and so on, even in conjunction with metropolitanical and primatial formats such as we see from Nicea on in a canonical fashion, was viewed as a necessary servant to the synodical character of the Church. But this service went only so far, and was in fact frequently abused. As de Vries and others have pointed out, the rapid transformation of geographical organization into political instruments of manipulation within the Church represented a detrimental evolution of ecclesial order.⁴⁰ Geography came to represent ideological and eventually ethnic identity, or to be construed along these lines and so applied, so that the 5th century councils gave rise to “national” or social

³⁸ See Dom Hilaire Marot, “Conciles anténicéens et conciles oecuméniques”, in *Le Concile et les Conciles* (Gembloux: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1960), pp. 19-43. For a more overtly Roman Catholic reading of this period – that is, oriented towards establishing the primacy of Rome even at this stage -- see Jean Colson, *L’Épiscopat catholique. Collégialité et Primauté dans les trois premiers siècles de l’Église* (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1963).

³⁹ Cf. Cyprian, Epistle 19.

⁴⁰ de Vries, pp. 27-28.

schisms whose theological meanings were often misunderstood (sometimes deliberately) as a result. The fracturing of the Near Eastern Christian Church on this basis lay the groundwork for Christianity's weakening long before the advent of Islam.

It is therefore disconcerting to see the geographical principle of ecclesial order still reasserted in a way that confines pastoral office, rather than the other way around, as in the recent Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue. Despite clear articulations of the character of ecclesial synodality, the presupposition of geographical order on the basis of *ethnos*, or nationality, remains theologically limiting:

A canon accepted in the East as in the West, expresses the relationship between the local Churches of a region: "The bishops of each province (*ethnos*) must recognize the one who is first (*protos*) amongst them, and consider him to be their head (*kephale*), and not do anything important without his consent (*gnome*); each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese (*paroikia*) and its dependent territories. But the first (*protos*) cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord (*homonoia*) will prevail, and God will be praised through the Lord in the Holy Spirit" (Apostolic Canon 34). [24] This norm, which re-emerges in several forms in canonical tradition, applies to all the relations between the bishops of a region, whether those of a province, a metropolitanate, or a patriarchate. Its practical application may be found in the synods or the councils of a province, region or patriarchate. The fact that the composition of a regional synod is always essentially episcopal, even when it includes other members of the Church, reveals the nature of synodal authority. Only bishops have a deliberative voice. The authority of a synod is based on the nature of the episcopal ministry itself, and manifests the collegial nature of the episcopate at the service of the communion of Churches. [25]⁴¹

The nature of episcopal synodality is now, in this agreement, defined in terms of the particular organizing office of the bishop within a defined geographical, and perforce "ethnically"-constrained provincial system. The result is a conciliar process – "deliberation" – whose accountability to the character of the pastorate has potentially disappeared.

Anglican Synodality

In this context, what are we to make of the controversial comments by Archbishop Williams regarding the local bishop and diocese? Insofar as he has defined bishop and diocese as "primary" with respect to ecclesial "identity" and insofar as he has identified them as the "organ of unity" as opposed to the "abstract structures" of the province, he is presenting a vision of the Church that at least fits within the general notion of pastoral synodality I have outlined above. But might he also be setting his vision in tension with actual Anglican practice? I would argue that he is in fact expressing a tension that Anglicanism itself is working to overcome *precisely by moving in the direction of the fundamental reality of pastoral synodality.*

⁴¹"Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority", Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Ravenna, 15 October 2007

There is no question but that Anglican churches have by and large functioned according to a post-Nicene set of structural assumptions. But that functioning has always been under question, and it is the rise of the Communion itself that has had the greatest role in setting up dynamics that have moved us towards a re-appropriation of the ante-Nicene understanding, not because it marks some Golden Age to be re-pristinated, but because it is in fact more properly expressive of the kind of missionary context in which Anglicanism herself has come to flourish. Once Anglican churches grew up within contexts in which they necessarily existed alongside other Christian churches, the Nicene model by definition was deprived of any even tenuous or imaginary theological rationale. The idea that geographical episcopal boundaries demand strict imposition when in fact multiple and often mutually non-communicating Christian churches exist within the same local area simply cannot be sustained with integrity. And even within the single tradition of Anglicanism, unless one views the world's political nations as the primary ordering of human life – a deeply problematic notion from a Christian perspective to say the least – the division of Anglican churches into national, regionally political, or ethnic groups whose boundaries prove more powerful and imposing than Christian communion itself can only end up by subordinating ecclesial reality to human political and cultural limitations. And it is these that the episcopal press for synodality properly ends by overcoming.

The first Lambeth Conference of 1867 was obviously aware of this tension already inherent in the expanding Anglican churches around the world.⁴² On the one hand, there was an explicit commitment to the faith, and practically speaking, the order of the “undisputed” General Councils (see the Preamble to the Resolutions). This meant that the formally received report (no. 6) on “Provincial subordination” described the necessary “federating” of dioceses within “territorial limits” – “ecclesiastical Provinces” – that are described as being not only in accordance with “ancient usage” but “essential to [the Christian Church’s] complete organization”. Yet on the other hand, there was also at work in the Conference’s resolutions a clear sense of the already concrete press towards relationships that went beyond these provincial federations. In the first place, the Communion’s churches are defined in their relation to the Church of England (not to the Archbishop of Canterbury as a primatial office); second, the Sixth Report itself recognizes the need for flexibility in the whole metropolitanical scheme; and most importantly, several official Resolutions make clear that the character of ecclesial relationship at its deepest – matters of faith itself – should be dealt with on a basis far broader than local provinces. So, for instance, with respect to the revision of local Prayer Books: while the resolution states that this should be the business of each Province, nonetheless “all such changes [should] be liable to revision by any synod of the Anglican Communion in which the said province shall be represented” (Resolution 8). What kind of synod might this be? Resolution 4 had already noted that “unity in faith and discipline will be best maintained among the several branches of the Anglican Communion by due and canonical subordination of the synods of the several branches to the higher authority of a synod or synods above them”, yet without defining what such “higher” councils might be. Resolution 9 recommended the consideration of a “voluntary spiritual tribunal” for the Communion, to which provincial questions would be submitted. The Conference is clearly aiming at some form of Communion-wide synodal life.

⁴² For the material discussed below on Lambeth 1867 and 1878, see Randall T. Davidson (ed.), *The Lambeth Conferences of 1867, 1878, and 1888 : With the Official Reports and Resolutions, Together with the Sermons Preached at the Conferences* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889).

The Fifth Report of the Conference addresses the matter of “higher” council directly, while also seeking to define the relationship of diocese to Province. The whole Report (rarely read, although accepted by the “adjourned” conference) is deeply instructive in that it lays out both questions and areas of dispute that are still working themselves out within the Anglican Communion, indeed, are currently at the center of our struggles. In the first place, the Report lays out the principle of conciliar subsidiarity clearly: each synod is to deal with the matters of its own sphere of service. Diocesan synods do indeed appear primary; but provincial federations, to which dioceses are either subject originally “by usage, law, or voluntarily”, hold synods for the purpose of “securing unity” among their member dioceses and for “forming links” with other Anglican churches around the world. In addition, matters of doctrine and clerical discipline are viewed as best dealt with at a provincial level. The practice of clerical and explicitly lay synodical representation, on both diocesan and provincial levels, is discussed and affirmed. But the explicit notion of a synod of “higher” status than the provincial is also dealt with by the Report. Here, the Lambeth Conference is viewed as a kind of model, although not the thing itself. Rather, what is proposed is a “council” or “congress”, with episcopal, clerical, and lay representation from the various churches of the Communion. The familiar distinction between such a council’s decisions holding “moral weight” rather than “binding” legislative authority is made, based primarily on the pragmatic fact that different “laws” govern the various national churches and simply cannot be imposed supranationally.

The Report provided only suggestions which, as it were, sketched possible future paths rather than clearly deciding a way forward. The second Lambeth Conference of 1878 stepped somewhat backwards from these open-ended reaches towards “higher” synodical life, instead reiterating in stronger terms the need for provincial organization within the Communion. The Conference now expressly rejected the notion of a Communion “tribunal” (see Recommendations 1, 2 and 8). Indeed, there are explicit assertions of what we now call “provincial autonomy” that are made in these recommendations. At the same time, there is the extraordinary recommendation (10) that all local revisions of the Book of Common Prayer be vetted by “boards” of British and American bishops and clergy (possibly laypeople in the case of America), these two sets of national churches now viewed as somehow “ruling” other areas of the Communion through their missionary and colonial outreach. The egregiously conflicting dynamics of these two directions of authority is never noted. The 1948 Lambeth Conference digs more deeply around these elements, as it presses for both “dispersed” authority in the Communion even while it lifts up the “submissive” character of the episcopal ministry that exists “under” the “authority” of God as “mediated” through the various councils of the Church.⁴³

Over one hundred years after the first Lambeth Conferences, the tensions at work in these descriptions were still apparent, and even more pronounced. The so-called Virginia Report of 1997⁴⁴, prepared on behalf of the Communion’s reflection through the Lambeth Conference

⁴³ See Stephen Sykes discussion of this in “Episcopacy, Communion, and Collegiality, in *Communion and Episcopacy: Essays to Mark the Centenary of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral* (Cambridge: Ripon College, 1988), pp. 42-56. Sykes does not deal directly with the question of bishops in their relation to provinces here, but he does go on to oppose the establishment of some “higher” council within the Communion.

⁴⁴ *The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 1997)

and Anglican Consultative Council, summarized the situation in the following way, repeating themes from the very first Lambeth gathering:

In the development of the Anglican Communion there is no legislative authority above the Provincial level. (How far this is a result of the Royal Supremacy in the Church of England is a matter for reflection. Other historical factors in other Provinces have also affected the question of autonomy and interdependence.) There has been an insistence upon the autonomy of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. However, while autonomy entails the legal and juridical right of each Province to govern its way of life, in practice autonomy has never been the sole criterion for understanding the relation of Provinces to one another. There has generally been an implicit understanding of belonging together and interdependence. The life of the Communion is held together in the creative tension of Provincial autonomy and interdependence. There are some signs that the Provinces are coming to a greater realisation that they need each other's spiritual, intellectual and material resources in order to fulfill their task of mission.

Each Province has something distinctive to offer the others, and needs them in turn to be able to witness to Christ effectively in its own context. Questions are asked about whether we can go on as a world Communion with morally authoritative, but not juridically binding, decision-making structures at the international level. A further question is the relationship between the autonomy of a Province and the theological importance of a diocese which is reckoned to be the basic unit of Anglicanism. (*Virginia Report*, 3.28)

At this point, “creative tension” had given rise to “questions” of how Anglican churches can “go on” in the present mode – a mode now as I write, ten years after the Report, that has almost ceased to function coherently at all. The diocese as the “basic unit of Anglicanism” is affirmed “theologically”, yet placed within a context of a now mutedly disputed relationship with Provinces. From these now more pressing questions, Abp. Williams’ comments flow.

Can we summarize the direction of this current that clearly takes in its sweep the first Lambeth Conferences to the present? Obviously, a major factor has been quite literally the purely “political principle” (in de Vries’ sense) of Anglicanism’s expansion, which has demanded (and often outstripped) the orchestration of administrative prudence in ordering. The first Lambeth Conferences were explicitly concerned to meet this demand, as national and legal differentiation among missionary churches (e.g. in South Africa) had already led to conflicts requiring sorting out. The provincial system inherited from Nicea, however anachronistic, was ready at hand; and furthermore, commended itself to the Anglican leaders of the time because of their own desire to stake their churches’ form upon “primitive” ecumenical traditions of conciliarity. The imperial self-consciousness of both British and American churches, furthermore, made a Nicene and post-Nicene ecclesiology culturally attractive, just as the early Church “fathers” were explicitly supplemented by the “Fathers of the English Reformation”, whose general Erastian orientation is well-known.

But synodality itself was only barely reasserting itself as an Anglican character at this time. This is important to realize. However much Parliament had assumed an odd kind of representative conciliar governance for the Church of England⁴⁵ the fact is that, among other things, there were

⁴⁵Cf. the Virginia Report’s not unusual claim to this effect, 3.25.

severe constraints placed on episcopal synodality by the English crown, and finally the complete loss of Convocation in the early 18th century. All this seriously undermined a pastoral episcopacy, with a government establishment that actually laid the groundwork for non-residency. It was only the *missionary* invigoration of Anglicanism that led to the reinvigoration of both the Anglican episcopacy and its press to synodality, a fact of enormous historical and *theological* significance. The advent of the explicitly missionary bishop outside England was directly tied to the recapturing of a vision of pastoral self-expenditure (not that it was ever wholly lacking in Britain!), the enlarging of synodal reach, and, in the US, the reestablishment of synodal life more structurally. From the late 18th-century on, in North America, and then in Africa, India, and Asia, the missionary reordering of the pastorate had the effect of revitalizing a scriptural notion of episcopacy, in a way that fed back into some of the other theological and pastoral movements that spread throughout the church in the 19th century. The grasping after new forms of provincial synodality (as well as developing notions of subsidiarity that provincial councils provided) was only, then, the *first stage* of this transformation, and its elementary development by 1867, and even 1997, represents the prudential, but highly limited, character of its forms. The missionary outreach of Anglicanism is renewing *and must continue to renew* the ordering of our churches according to the form of Christ!

Indeed, by the mid-20th-century, some of these limitations are beginning to be felt.

“Regionalism” within missionary expansion and its churches had become something of a radical argument, beginning with Henry Venn’s famous Three-Self model⁴⁶, and including the press among high-church visionaries for a more locally sensitive missionary church, as argued for by e.g. Abp. Benson in his work with the SPG, based on the proper appreciation of “regional” cultures and attitudes.⁴⁷ This vision is still current, and undergirds some of the ecclesiologies of diversity and autonomy we continue to see among Anglican theologians.⁴⁸ The request for and in some cases actual establishment of “cultural episcopacies” – bishops for particular ethnic or cultural groups *within* a larger nation (e.g. aboriginal peoples) – remains an extension of this view, though it is one that, jurisdictionally, can also sometimes come into conflict with stricter post-Nicene geographical organizational forms.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Cf. Henry Venn, “The Native Pastorate and Organisation of Churches”, Papers 1, 2 and 3 (1851, 1861 and 1866), in William Knight, *The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn, B.D.* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880) pp. 305-321. Venn was the Church Missionary Society’s leader during the crucial years of 1841 to 1873, and one of the first to articulate the notion that missionary churches should be “self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-extending”, a vision that took some time in being embraced practically, but that remains now the fundamental touchstone of modern mission. Perhaps, however, the time of its own reformulation has come. On the context and history of this vision, see C. Peter Williams, *The Ideal of the Self-governing Church : A Study in Victorian Missionary Strategy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).

⁴⁷ See Arthur Christopher Benson, *The Life of Edward White Benson, Sometime Archbishop of Canterbury*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1899), ch. 9, esp. pp. 456-464.

⁴⁸ cf. Bruce Kaye, *An Introduction to World Anglicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ch. 13, pp. 210-231. Kaye sees provinces as the (currently) necessary expression and protector of local and diverse churches within the Communion.

⁴⁹ Cf. Allen Brent, *Cultural Episcopacy and Ecumenism: Representative Ministry in Church History from the Age of Ignatius of Antioch to the Reformation With Special Reference to Contemporary Ecumenism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992). Brent’s is a complex argument, making use of the historical analysis of pre-Nicene episcopacy, Durkheimian theory, and adjustments to contemporary ecumenical ecclesial overlap to argue for the place of “cultural” oversight among Australasian and New Zealand Anglicans. Some of his arguments cut in both directions with respect to the present paper, relativizing geographical jurisdiction but for the sake of more defined cultural (“representative”) jurisdiction.

But worries about the potentially anti-Christian character of nationalism and local or cultural chauvinism were already voiced by the end of the 19th century in some quarters, especially in the face of rising nationalistic belligerence. William Reed Huntington, a more subtle thinker than is sometimes remembered, understood and appreciated the Post-Vatican I Catholic argument, as he describes it:

“[...] it is urged, and with much show of reason, that it will not do to entrust the Christian religion to the nations in severalty, since there is a danger, if we do so, that the substance of the faith may suffer wrong, may be depraved in quality or impoverished in quantity. The argument by aid of which the Roman Church defends its continued use of the Latin tongue for the purposes of worship is this, that there would be danger of the liturgy's becoming corrupt were it to be translated into the various languages of the modern world. The Mass, it is urged, might under such circumstances grow to mean one thing to one people and another to another. If this reasoning holds good with respect to the liturgy, with tenfold force must it apply to dogma. "What guarantee have we," asks the Ultramontanist, "that the very essence of the faith itself may not be at any moment put in jeopardy, if each national Church is to be allowed to frame its own doctrinal system, lengthen or shorten its creed at will?"⁵⁰

Like ecumenical dialogues 100 years later, Huntington considered the office of the bishop to be most obviously given in a twofold fashion, relating to the local church and relating that church to the catholic body of the whole.⁵¹ But he insisted nonetheless that there needed to be the mediating organizational reality of the historic – “providential” in his terms – forms of regional jurisdiction. Huntington himself argued for an “American” national church, not for its own sake (although he was not without his rather deep-seated chauvinism), but for the sake of enabling true “ecumenical” counsel, with a view to a General Council of all Christians finally being convened – Huntington was above all a conciliarist, and for him this was the very means and embodiment of “diversity-in-unity” through common and participatory “consent”.

But the more immediate dangers of local or cultural captivity became especially apparent, through much greater retrospective data, after the Second World War⁵², and the Virginia Report itself lays these out:

⁵⁰William Reed Huntington, *A National Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), pp. 15-16.

⁵¹ Cf. the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission's agreed statement on “Authority in the Church, I”, par. 10: “every bishop receives at ordination both responsibility for his local Church and the obligation to maintain it in living awareness and practical service of the other Churches. The Church of God is found in them and in each of them and in their *Koinonia*”.

⁵² Cf. the early Church of South Indian leader E. Sambayya's oft-cited essay on “The Genius of the Anglican Communion”, in E. R. Morgan and Roger Lloyd, eds. *The Mission of the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK and SPG, 1948), pp. 29-30, where he discusses the looming dangers of “nationalism” in the Communion and takes the Anglican Church to task for e.g. not confronting this danger in India. In 1957, Anglicanism's premier missiologist of his generation, Max Warren, listed nationalism as one of the three major “determining factors” affecting the Communion's expansion and “the most dramatic event of our time”. Warren sees the growth of national ecclesiastical provinces, led by indigenous bishops, as an inevitable reality to be faced. But he is far from certain as to the promise of this outcome. See Warren's *Missionary Commitments of the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1957), a report commissioned for the 1958 Lambeth Conference.

The proclamation of the gospel to all humanity must embody its universal coherence. Care needs to be taken to prevent a Province from becoming bound by its culture. The corrosive effects of particular environments are often not perceptible to those who are immersed in them. The principle articulated here of a relationship between Provinces and the worldwide Communion applies at other levels also. At each interface the aim is to free the people of God to use their God-given gifts responsibly and cooperatively, in every way compatible with the gospel and its effective proclamation in word and deed (4.14).

The problem identified here is tied to synodal life itself, of course. Thus, de Vries notes that the rise of *local* politics as the synodical motivator, from an episcopal point of view, lies directly behind the divisive devolution of the Eastern Church in the 5th century.⁵³ As the Church is divided into *ethnoi* that are politically and culturally determined, the press for synodality is undercut by the demands of local allegiance and power.⁵⁴ Here it is instructive to note how more recent scholarship on the Church's conciliar life has brought into profile the inherent dangers precisely of the Nicene and post-Nicene models of episcopal orderings on the basis of a determining administrative – political structure.⁵⁵ With whatever caveats as to generalization (and we have examples, perhaps, from pre-Nicene councils as well⁵⁶), MacMullen's description of post-Nicene conciliar life in terms of the manipulation of *kratos*, or political power, needs to be taken very seriously. The rise of “bloc” voting, with its implicit and often explicit violence and coercion, of course predates the organization of the church according to regions. But it was obviously and directly encouraged by the submission of the pastoral episcopate to regional administration understood according to political needs. Gregory of Nazianzus is famous for his criticism of the corrupted means by which the election of bishops and their ministries had been infected through the insinuations of local power, setting up a genre of ecclesiastical lament that has remained in use through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and Anglicanism especially, to the present. His disdain over this debased structure goes so far as to tar the very synodical orientation of the episcopacy, such that he deems “assemblies of bishops” to be of “no use” because of their tendency to organized conflict and self-promotion, and their similarity to the

⁵³ De Vries, pp. 27-28. De Vries actually suggests that Antioch's acquisition of a “patriarchal” status encouraged the development of an eventually divisive “nationalistic” spirit.

⁵⁴ One could fruitfully enter into the larger philosophical debate over modernity at this point, looking at the contrasting arguments of Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor over “ethnocentrism” and “tribalism”. Nonetheless, raising the question here in the context of the Church's polity also points out that the problem is perhaps not modernity at all, but something more fundamentally tied to the human ordering of common life. Taylor's own view of the “vertical” character of episcopal hierarchy – ill-fitting and indeed nonsensical to modern secular perspectives – is precisely one that is perhaps theologically inapt. See his *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 238ff.

⁵⁵Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, chapters 4, 8, and 9; Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), ch. 8 on synods, pp. 283-322: “The rule of the emperor in the church was far less dangerous than the rule of a bishop who tried to act like an emperor” (p. 322); Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), esp. cc. 2 and 5, on “democratic” *kratos* and the *kratos* of violence at councils.

⁵⁶E.g. the ecclesial dynamics surrounding Paul of Samosata's synodical condemnation (268), bound up with the political influence of and conflict between Palmyra and Rome. See Georg Kretschmar, “The Councils of the Ancient Church”, in Hans Jochen Margull (ed.), *The Councils of the Church: History and Analysis* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 21-23.

factionalizing of “races”, “theater”, and “warfare”.⁵⁷ In the wake of Nicea, according to Gregory, human *kratos* – and *kratos* is the power directly reserved for God in the New Testament, not humans at all -- becomes the lens through which synodal life is now judged, rather than the *exousia* of the slave (Mark 10:42-44).

What we see, then, is the development of the Communion as a reality that was birthed by a post-Nicene Anglicanism, but whose very character has opened that Anglicanism to renewed demand for a church whose synodal life reflects a pastoral *episcopate* more in tune with the Church’s origins. The movement of Providence is not uniform in its disclosing of the value of particular human social structures. It is interesting to see how, in addressing the challenges of the Communion’s life from a theological perspective, the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) turned its attention to the episcopal ministry in just such a context.⁵⁸ The special charism of the pastorate – not quite seen in terms of the outline given in this paper, but more so than in many earlier documents --- is explained by the Commission as one of teaching and witness, described explicitly in terms of self-expenditure (see “Thesis 3”). But it is also now viewed as given for the purpose of *koinonia* in its rich and broad character on behalf of and with the people of the Church. This is defined in terms directly related to synodality. And most importantly in the context of the present discussion, all this is spoken of in terms that completely bypass structures beyond the diocese as it is linked in a communion of dioceses. For instance, in Thesis 1, the IATDC writes:

The bishop is the focal person who links parishes within a diocese not only to one another but also the diocese to the wider church within the Communion and ecumenically. This fundamental theological truth challenges all parochial conceptions of the episcopate that fail to transcend ethnic, social, and cultural realities in which the episcopate is, by nature, necessarily embedded.

The tensions between local and regional accountability and adaptability on the one hand and the “catholic” orientation of *episcopate* on the other, are noted here. In the context of its discussion, however, the Commission clearly comes out on the side of catholicity as bound to the “evangelical” character of the bishop’s ministry (cf. Thesis 3 and 8).⁵⁹ When “provinces” *per se* are finally (and solely) mentioned in Thesis 9 on the topic of “collegiality”, it is in terms of the *problems* of provincial synodality as they affect the larger Communion, rather than in any straightforwardly normative structural fashion. In many ways, there is a parallel vision presented

⁵⁷Cf. his celebrated Epistle 130/55.; Oration 42:22. MacMullen, p. 82 quotes a passage from Gregory describing the bishops’ “savage rage” against each other while gathering, from his poem *De Vita Sua*, lines 1546ff., and places this within the context of a much more widespread set of perceptions at the time regarding the character of church synods. The full texts can be found in *Gregory of Nazianzus, autobiographical poems*. trans. and ed. by Carolinne White (Cambridge/New York : Cambridge University Press, 1996). Gregory speaks of these matters in various places. See John McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) , pp. 371-398.

⁵⁸ “Communion, Conflict, and Hope: The Kuala Lumpur Report” (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2008), Appendix Two: “The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church”.

⁵⁹“Catholicity also means that the decisions that come from any local place are not simply ‘local’ decisions, but affect all. Bishops have a particular responsibility to bring the church catholic into local processes of discerning the apostolic faith. They also have a responsibility to represent their diocese to the rest of the church, to interpret to the Communion the realities of their local place. This means explaining not simply the end results of decisions reached, but being able to give theological explanation of the discernment of the Gospel in the culture, and of the catholicity of such decisions. Bishops need the courage and wisdom to be able to hear the voice of others whether within or outside their contexts” (Thesis 8).

here to Ratzinger's notion that "whoever belongs to one particular Church belongs to all the Churches; since belonging to the *Communion*, like belonging to the Church, is never simply particular, but by its very nature is always universal". Although the concept of "universality" is not mentioned by the IATDC, nor could it be by an Anglican in any clear sense comparable to a Roman Catholic, the thrust is similar.⁶⁰

Indeed, Abp. Williams' comments about the unmediated priority of bishop and diocese appear to lie in the service of just such a common vision.⁶¹ Yet, as we know, it also flies in the face of Anglican – and practical catholic – ecclesial experience in a post-Nicene age. Furthermore, the vision makes sense most clearly within a context of episcopal renewal that is inextricably tied to the renewal of synodal life as a whole. If ecclesial councils require "sanctification" in a new way, as I have argued in the past⁶², it can happen only as the episcopal pastorate is also re-sanctified in such a fashion that its intrinsic synodal press can be grasped and realized. Anglicanism's emergent synodality, that is, is bound to an episcopal reality that is being exposed in its incapacity by the temptations to episcopal profanity. The pragmatic question is how to pursue a renewal of episcopal integrity inwardly, including within dioceses, and also outwardly, through an expanding current of synodal energies, freed from the constrictions of the past. It is a question that does not demand that we reject the "post-Nicene" structures of the Church as a kind of whole-cloth corruption, since these had their practical and perhaps even providential usages. But it *is* a question that demands that we pursue a deliberate effort in disentangling these structures from some kind of assumed value and ever search out the promises and forms of pastoral synodality with as much freedom as responsibility provides.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study, however, is not to propose such a pragmatic solution. [See, however, Philip Turner's "Concluding Postscript" to this paper.] Rather it is to distinguish properly the theological from the pragmatic altogether. One of the major concerns voiced over Abp. Williams' comments on the priority of the local bishop and diocese was precisely the threat this seemed to pose to current provincial structures of authority and thereby of autonomy. What I have attempted to bring to the surface is that just such a threat is *properly* raised in the face of ecclesial structures that do not and perhaps cannot engage the true character of the bishop's pastoral synodality. It is the latter that must prove the touchstone for any structural cohesion within the Church and, in Anglicanism's more limited case, within the Communion.

This is not to say that there is some alternative structure awaiting implementation – that would be both naïve and dangerously asserted and prosecuted. But it *is* to say that worries over Anglicanism's future ministry are misplaced if they are lodged primarily within the structural framework of a post-Nicene church that not only has little theological rationale in a divided and plural Christian world, but that has within it, arguably, corruptive elements of a significant order.

⁶⁰*Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Church Understood as Communion* (1992), par. 10.

⁶¹ It needs to be said, however, that Archbishop Williams' own ecclesiology is probably more informed by Eastern Orthodox versions of this theological history than by the Western and Anglican trajectory I have outlined. They are, however, ones that coincide in many important ways, as common ecumenical statements have demonstrated.

⁶² Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), pp. 276-297.

If we are worried, for instance, over the ecclesially destructive character of “cross boundary” episcopal oversight or overlapping jurisdictions, as in the steps now leading to the creation of an alternative “province” in North America, it cannot simply be on basis of provincial realities, or of the integrity of geographical boundaries. For it is not as if the canons of Nicea definitively, let alone properly, represent the shape of a Christian pastorate exercised for all people. The issue of these canons’ theological meaning, even at Nicea very formally and explicitly, is tied to the *apostolic* witness of the *episcopus* understood very much in Pauline terms.⁶³ That is the scandal: not overlapping geography, but failure to order life outside adversarial and angry confrontations, and in conformance with the Great Shepherd of the sheep. It is, furthermore, a failure that confronts all “sides” of Anglicanism’s current struggle. Thus, the *formation* of a new “province”, such as ACNA (The Anglican Church in North America) is now pursuing, appears to be setting out on a path already well trod, pitted, and precipitous. It is made only more so when the definition of episcopal oversight is potentially tied to what are called “affinity-based” groups (“dioceses, clusters, or networks”) rather than simple “churches”.⁶⁴ For at that moment when we determine that “affinity” outside Jesus Christ’s single and singularly ordering pastoral life exists as a basis for the *Church*’s ordering, we have turned that ecclesial order on its head.

If Archbishop Williams’ comments on the episcopacy and diocese point pragmatically anywhere, they do so in the direction of the currently discussed Anglican Covenant, not generally, but quite particularly with respect to the ways that pastoral synodality can indeed be renewed, now within the context of the Communion that has grown among Anglicans around the world. I would even venture to say that they point quite concretely in the direction, feared by some, of allowing and indeed of encouraging where necessary single bishops and their dioceses to join in the covenanting work directly with one another. They do so only, however, to the degree that such covenanting is properly understood as being both an expression and at the service of the press for synodal life that pastoral self-expenditure embodies and impels. And if such a prospect engenders fear, it should be a holy fear surely, shared even by our Lord in the Garden, though faced into with a freedom that, in His facing, makes us free. And we should note here, quite clearly if only in passing, that the Archbishop’s comments imply his own facing up to the relativizing of his own “primacy”. For that, both pragmatically and certainly in case of pastoral calling, is not something one must count as “worthy to be gasped”. Let me end with Archbishop William’s words from the letter with which we began:

“The organ of union with the wider Church is the Bishop and the Diocese rather than the Provincial structure as such. Those who are rushing into separatist solutions are, I think, weakening that basic conviction of Catholic theology and in a sense treating the provincial structure of The Episcopal Church as if it were the most important thing - which is why I continue to hope and pray for the strengthening of the bonds of mutual support among those Episcopal Church Bishops who want to be clearly loyal to Windsor. Action that fragments their Dioceses will not help the consolidation of that all-important critical mass of ordinary faithful Anglicans in The Episcopal Church for whose nurture I am so much concerned.”

⁶³Ephraim Radner, “To Desire Rightly: The Force of the Creed in its Canonical Context”, in Christopher Seitz (ed.), *Nicene Christianity and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), pp. 226-228.

⁶⁴The Constitution of the Anglican Church in North America, e.g. Article II.2

