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THE EPISCOPAL OFFICE AND UNITY IN

RECONCILED DIVERSITY

John M. Flynn

As heirs of the Reformation, Anglicans and Lutherans share a considerable common heritage, including a similar definition of the Church in their major confessional documents. In both traditions the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper were distinguished from other rites and ceremonies commonly called sacraments. Both acknowledged "The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith". Both traditions took the episcopal office seriously, but in so doing have markedly different histories: The Anglican Tradition has maintained in practice the necessity of episcopal ordination while that practice has been maintained only in parts of Lutheranism. As a consequence, despite a desire for closer fellowship, a mutual recognition of ministries has not been possible. In part this has been due to the frustrating inability of the Anglican Communion to formulate a theology of episcopacy acceptable to all of the theological viewpoints within it. Nevertheless, the Anglican theological current has flowed consistently in one direction which, in conjunction with the model for unity called "unity in reconciled diversity", provides a possible way forward. That current involves three elements: recognition of the ecclesial reality of non-episcopally ordered churches: the nature of apostolic succession; and the recognition of non-episcopal ministries as true and effective ministries of word and sacrament.

This paper shall explore some of the historical data on which I base my contention that there is a consistent direction to an Anglican theology of episcopacy, the nature of "unity in reconciled diversity," and its potential in Anglican-Lutheran relations.

HISTORICAL DATA

Although the Act of Uniformity of 1662 made episcopal ordination an indispensable prerequisite for ministry in the Church of England, this does not settle the theological question of whether or not episcopal ordination is always and everywhere absolutely necessary for valid ministry. The Church of England itself appears to have retained episcopacy because it inherited the institution from the medieval Church and this inheritance was itself possible because "the actual holders of episcopal office dur-

This opening clause of Article XX of the Thirty-Nine Articles is a direct quotation from The Confession of Wurtemburg.

ing the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth I either encouraged a Reformation according to the Word of God or did not render such a Reformation impossible," and because the episcopal form of government was found to be a tradition "agreeable to the Scriptures".²

The Sixteenth Century Anglicans were agreed that while there should be one type of polity in each national church that did not necessitate exactly the same polity in different national churches. Episcopacy was of apostolic institution but since it was a positive law it was changeable.

They favored episcopacy on historical rather than theological grounds. Never do they claim episcopacy was retained because without it the ministry would be rendered invalid — this was the Roman position. For the Elizabethan divines apostolic succession was a succession in truth. The faith was essential but one particular type of ministerial structure was not. Order was essential but order was not on the same level as faith. A ministry was essential but one type was not pronounced to be binding always and everywhere. Where there was no ministry there was no church, but this is a radically different assertion than the statement that where there were no bishops there was no church. On this question the Caroline divines were at one with their Elizabethan predecessors.³

The defense of episcopacy under the Stuarts became more emphatic and confident. The general apologetic maintained that episcopacy, if not instituted by the Lord Jesus — and this opinion carried great weight — was of apostolic designation. Even so it generally stopped short of unchurching the foreign reformed churches and of denying validity of their ministry and sacraments. Jeremy Taylor, who had no liking for the plea of necessity as justifying non-episcopal churches, still shrank from unchurching these same churches. And Hall would make episcopacy necessary for the perfection of the Church but not necessary for its essence.

It is important to note that the Anglican divines recognized the principle of necessity only with regard to foreign churches. Thus it was that in 1610 when three Scottish Presbyterian ministers came to England to be consecrated bishops (an attempt was being made to graft episcopacy onto the Presbyterian system) Andrewes raised the question of the validity of their orders. Bancroft, then Archbishop of Canterbury, replied that in foreign territories where bishops could not be had presbyterian ordinations were valid. As this condition was verified in the case of Scotland, the Scottish bishops were consecrated without reordination.⁵

Despite this, it should be stressed that this favorable Anglican attitude toward the continental Reformation was not the product of a systematic theology. Rather it

R.P.C. Hanson, "The Nature of the Anglican Episcopate", Lambeth Essays on Ministry (London S.P.C.K., 1969), p. 79

^{3.} George Tavard, The Quest for Catholicity (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), pp. 44-68. Cf. also H.F. Woodhouse, The Doctrine of the Church in Anglican Theology 1547 - 1603 (London: S.P.C.K., 1954)

^{4.} Norman Sykes, Old Priest and New Presbyter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 76. Though many Anglicans disagree with the specific thesis of this book, Sykes does clearly demonstrate the existence of a strong tradition among early Anglican divines affirming the ecclesial reality of the continental bodies which lacked episcopacy.

^{5.} Ibid., p. 101

developed in response to the needs of the moment and always tended to be more favorable to the Swedish Lutherans, who had bishops, than to any other group. Hence there is no Anglican school of ecclesiology, merely tendencies in various directions. "Of these one can isolate (a) the concept of a National Church with the Prince as the Summus Episcopus: (b) Aristotelian picture of the Church as consisting of matter and form, separable in fact but ordained to exist together; and (c) a general assumption that there are exceptions to everything, even to matters of divine institution. The first ensured the idea of a Visible Church, but proved inadequate for assessing reformed churches which were not established; the second made episcopacy mandatory, but not necessary to the being of the church; the third reinforced the second, disposed of the idea of unconvenanted grace, but made it possible to justify the Anglican schism from Rome without condoning schisms from Anglicanism". 6

The violence of the Civil War and Commonwealth led Anglican divines to close all loopholes whereby non-conformist ministers had been allowed to exercise office in the Church of England. As a result of the Act of Uniformity of 1662 episcopal ordination was a sine-qua-non for holding office in the Anglican Church. Yet the ecclesial reality of foreign non-episcopal churches was still not denied. During the Eighteenth Century Archbishop Wake (primate from 1716) advised Anglicans when abroad to communicate in the local reformed church. For nearly 100 years the S.P.C.K. (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) made use of Lutheran ministers in its India Mission. The Society preferred episcopal orders. Yet this consistent use of men in Lutheran orders leads one to conclude that while the Society regarded Lutheran orders as irregular it also regarded them as valid. Furthermore, Heber, the Bishop of Calcutta who set in motion the Anglicanization of the India Mission by reordaining three Lutheran pastors in 1825, appears to have regarded episcopacy as belonging to the bene or melius esse of the Church rather than its esse — thereby representing the traditional pre-Tractarian High Church position.

In 1920 the Lambeth Conference accepted the report of the Commission on Relations with the Church of Sweden. Among the conclusions accepted were that "no particular organization of the church and of its ministry is instituted jure divino, not even the order and discipline and state of things recorded in the New Testament; (and that) the object of any organization and of the whole ministry being included in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments . . . our church can not recognize any essential difference jure divino of aim and authority between the two or three Orders into which the ministry of grace may have been divided jure humano for the benefit and convenience of the church". At the same time the con-

^{6.} John E. Pinnington, "Anglican Openness to Foreign Protestant Churches in the Eighteenth Century", Anglican Theological Review, LVI, n. 2 (April, 1969), 134-135. In a footnote (n. 3) to page 134 Pinnington further observes that this secondary tendency means "a 'true' church is not necessarily one which possesses the true doctrine, but one which possesses the minimum without which it could not exist. Hence many churches, such as the Roman, are 'true' while exhibiting every evidence of antichrist."

The story of the Indian missions is found in Sykes, op. cit., pp. 154-167, and Stephen Neill, Anglicanism (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 3rd ed., 1965), pp. 211-16

^{8.} Sykes, op. cit. p. 166. Cf. also Stephen Neill, The Church and Christian Union (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 263, n. 1

^{9.} Sykes, op. cit. p. 242

ference acknowledged that non-episcopal ministries "have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace" while urging that the episcopate was "the best instrument for maintaining the unity and continuity of the Church".¹⁰

The 1948 Lambeth Conference moved a step beyond this affirmation. Whereas in 1920 non-episcopal ministries had been acknowledged as "owned and blessed" by the Holy Spirit, the 1948 Conference declared that non-episcopal ministries are "true ministries and their sacraments . . . true sacraments". ¹¹ At the same time the Conference noted that any reunion scheme involving Anglicans would have to take note of and be acceptable to the varying interpretations of episcopacy found within the Anglican Communion.

Three basic approaches can be identified. The Tractarian position saw the episcopate as of the esse of the Church — episcopacy is necessary for the very existence of the Church and those communities lacking episcopacy could make no claim to being the Church Catholic (which does not appear tenable in its full rigor on the basis of the evidence). The Evangelical viewpoint saw episcopacy as of the bene esse of the Church — simply an historical expression of the Church order which could be freely dispensed with (which does not do justice to scripture or Christian tradition on this matter). The approach of the Elizabeth and Caroline divines saw episcopacy as of the plene esse of the Church, that is, the episcopate is expressive of Christ's full activity in the Church but not in such a manner that non-episcopal churches are not churches.

Such a delicate balancing of all positions could not long survive in the face of practical questions on how to unify episcopal and non-episcopal ministries. For if it were legitimate for Anglicans to speak of non-episcopal ministries as "true ministries", on what grounds could Anglicans require non-episcopally ordained clergy to submit to a service which could be construed as episcopal ordination without thereby implying that episcopacy was in fact of the esse of the Church? On the other hand, would not any reunion scheme which did not in some way involve at least the implicit episcopal ordination of non-episcopal clergy truly rule out the esse theory as a legitimate Anglican position? To compound matters even further, the recognition of non-episcopal ministries as true ministries and their sacraments as true sacraments is not the same thing as saying that these ministries are identical with episcopal ministries and their sacraments identical with episcopal sacraments. Thus it is possible to acknowledge the true ministerial reality of non-episcopal ministries while denying that they are fully constituted ministries in the Mystical Body of Christ.

If discussion on the nature of the Church and its ministry has revealed the inability of the Anglican Communion to formulate a theology of episcopacy acceptable to all, it has also revealed that the Anglican theological current has flowed consistently in one direction. The recognition of an ecclesial reality of non-episcopally ordered communities, an insight only recently officially accepted in Roman Catholic theology, has

^{10.} The Lambeth Conference, 1867-1948, (London: S.P.C.K., 1948) p. 39

^{11.} The Lambeth Conference 1948, (London: S.P.C.K., 1948), II, p. 50

^{12.} In its full rigor, this position fails to account for several cases in the Middle Ages in which the Pope allowed abbots who were simple presbyters to ordain to the diaconate and even to the presbyterate itself.

been a dynamic principle slowly modifying the Anglican concept of episcopacy. Even theologians who hold to the esse theory are forced to modify it, in some way, to accommodate this insight. Yet the steady modification of the Anglican theology of episcopacy has not yielded an agreed upon consensus due in part to the tendency to view episcopacy apart from its organic context in the Church. At the same time modifications in the theology of episcopacy have not always been accompanied by modifications in basic ecclesiology.

As a result the Anglican approach to episcopacy stretches all the way from viewing episcopacy as a sine qua non of the Church to viewing it as an historically well established but theologically optional reality. This diversity within Anglicanism has immensely complicated its task in the formulation of reunion schemes.

While Anglicans have been successful in achieving corporate union with non-episcopally structured churches on the Indian sub-continent, the list of failures far outweighs the successes. In Canada, Nigeria and New Zealand initially promising discussions have been broken off. The Episcopal Church in the United States remains involved in a multilateral effort known as the Consultation on Church Union but after twenty years that proposal is of questionable vitality. The Church of England itself has twice rejected significant proposals, once with the Methodists in 1972 and in 1982 with Methodist Church, the Moravian Church and the United Reformed Church. In all cases the major difficulty is the historic episcopate. Since Anglicans "cannot foresee full integration of ministries (full communion) apart from the historic episcopate" and since no method universally acceptable to all Anglicans has yet been devised to bridge the gap between the historic three-fold ministry and non-episcopally ordered ministries it would seem that the Anglican role in the quest for the restoration of Christian unity in the west has come to an end.¹³

I do not believe that to be true. There is hope but it lies in a different model of unity than that of organic unity.

"UNITY IN RECONCILED DIVERSITY"14

Thus far efforts at recovering church unity have focused almost exclusively on the model of "organic union" in which all Christians in one place would constitute a single church. Certainly this model contains "essential elements which are generally recognized today as indispensable for any form of church unity. These include the common confession of the Apostolic faith and, with this, mutual recognition of the Apostolicity and Catholicity of the other churches, mutual recognition of each other's members, sacraments and ministries, fellowship in the Lord's Supper, in mission and service in the world and the achievement of mutual fellowship also in conciliar meetings and decisions." (11) Yet it can be questioned whether this model takes the existence of world-wide confessional families with sufficient seriousness and whether

Quotation from Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations (London: S.P.C.K., 1973), para.
 p. 20

^{14.} This section is based on a draft document "Concepts of Unity (Text II)" circulated at the 1982 Vancouver meeting of The Lutheran World Federation Executive Committee. All quotations in this section, are from this draft and references in brackets () are to the paragraph numbers of this draft.

it does, as a matter of fact, sufficiently appreciate the nature of human diversity.

The advent of the Roman Catholic Church on the ecumenical scene has focused attention on another form of ecumenical endeavor, the bilateral dialogue. "The goal of these dialogues is to achieve a theological agreement which, while not necessarily eliminating all the differences between the churches and confessions, nevertheless overcomes existing differences sufficiently for these to lose their divisive character and consequently for full fellowship to become possible." (16) These dialogues are occurring at both a regional and an inter-national level. Some have uncovered, with surprising speed, an impressive level of fundamental agreement on issues hitherto deemed intractable. How one moves to implement at the level of church fellowship this theological convergence becomes an inescapable issue. Because the bilaterals grant to confessional structures, traditions and identities an importance which "organic union" often does not, the question of a complementary model of unity must also be faced.

As a model, "unity in reconciled diversity" obviates the need for uniformity of structure and procedure. Precisely because it is reconciled diversity there must be "a. agreement in respect of 'The centre of the Christian faith'; b. recognition of the distinctiveness of the other confession 'as a legitimate form of Christian existence' and therefore no longer a divisive difference to be condemned; c. fellowship in baptism and eucharist and the mutual recognition of church ministries; d. the 'binding common purpose of witness and service'." (41) Reconciliation will mean changes but not absorption into one monolithic structure. It does not remove all diversity precisely because diversity is rooted in the human phenomenon itself. But because it is reconciled that diversity loses its divisive quality.

As a model for unity complementary to "organic union", "unity in reconciled diversity" has the advantage of being polyvalent, i.e., it may be used to describe both the long-term goal and the intermediate steps necessary to achieve that goal. It differs from uniatism, which the Roman Catholic Benedictine scholar Emmanuel Lanne describes as "the introduction of the liturgical and canonical rites of one Church into the communion of another Church which undertakes to respect those rites in return for allegiance to its theological typology" by the maintenance of a plurality of theological typologies.¹⁷ It suggests in a way that "organic unity" does not, that the

^{15.} Quoted in One in Christ, vol. 7, n.1 (1971), 118-119

^{16.} Ibid., 119

^{17.} Emmanuel Lanne, "Pluralism and Unity: The Possibility of a Variety of Typologies within the same Ecclesial Allegiance" One in Christ, vol. 6, 443.

shape of the goal is not foreknown in all its details. A fortiori, if the shape of the goal can not be foreseen in all its details, neither can the nature of all the intermediate steps be foreseen. This suggests that the process of reconciling two or more of the great confessional families may well be accomplished in stages rather than in one grand gesture. And this brings us to our final consideration.

"UNITY IN RECONCILED DIVERSITY" AS A STRATEGY IN ANGLICAN/LUTHERAN RAPPROCHEMENT

As the first round of Anglican/Lutheran International Conversations revealed, there is a considerable amount of "agreement in respect of 'the centre of the Christian faith'" between the two confessional families. Both sides have acknowledged a willingness to recognize each other as "a true communion of Christ's Body, possessing a truly apostolic ministry". **Nevertheless, Anglicans "cannot foresee full integration of ministries . . . apart from the historic episcopate" while Lutherans feel "the historic episcopate should not become a necessary condition for inter-church relations or church union". **It is clear, then, that we have not yet met the condition for fulfilling "unity in reconciled diversity", namely: "mutual recognition of church ministries".

On the other hand, in September 1982 the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church in America, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the American Lutheran Church, authorized interim sharing of the Eucharist. These actions, commended by the Lutheran World Federation Executive Committee, indicate that a significant degree of rapprochement has occurred between the two confessional families to justify concrete steps embodying that rapprochement.

Thus, "unity in reconciled diversity" is a process as well as a goal, a process which equally respects the multi-valent nature of diversity, some of which may be truly divisive, and the reality of reconciliation. To the degree the diversities have not been reconciled they forbid us to act as though full reconciliation has been achieved. To the degree that our diversities have been truly reconciled they forbid us to act as though we are completely estranged.

The action of the Episcopal Church in recognizing the three Lutheran bodies as "Churches in which the Gospel is preached and taught" marks the first time such a recognition has been officially accorded to any Church, "save for those already in full communion".²⁰ This marks a development in the general Anglican tradition with regard to the ecclesial reality of the Churches of the Continental Reformation. By this action the Episcopal Church has given concrete expression to the broadened context which contemporary theology has recovered for the principle of apostolicity.²¹ In addition the four churches pledge themselves to encourage: "a. Mutual prayer and mutual support, including parochial/congregational and diocesan/synodical covenants or agreements; b. Common study of the Holy Scriptures, the histories and

^{18.} Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations, op. cit., p. 20 paragraphs 85 and 90

^{19.} Ibid., paragraphs 87 and 89

^{20.} Paragraph 2 of the commentary accompanying the resolution presented to the 1982 General Convention of the Episcopal Church

^{21.} Cf. J. Robert Wright (ed.) A Communion of Communions: One Eucharistic Fellowship (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) pp. 16-17

theological tradition of each Church . . .; c. Joint programs of religious education, theological discussion, mission, evangelism, and social action; d. Joint use of physical facilities."²² Significantly, the action "constitutes a mutual recognition of eucharistic teaching" while declaring that it does not "signify that final recognition of each other's eucharists or ministries has yet been achieved".²³ It also authorizes a third series of Anglican/Lutheran Dialogues to deal with such questions as "the historic episcopate, and ordering of ministry (bishops, priests, and deacons) in the total context of apostolicity."²⁴

The four American churches, I suggest, have adopted "unity in reconciled diversity" as a strategy for achieving full union. They have engaged in significant theological dialogue which has uncovered substantial common ground, so much so that they do not feel able to remain in the position of *status quo ante*. But neither have they sought to make more of their agreement than it actually is. Questions remain.

Precisely because one of the issues needing further resolution is the historic episcopate and the ordering of ministry. Anglican/Lutheran discussions are heavily influenced by the pace of both of our discussions with the Roman Catholic Church. As earlier indicated, while there is a theological stance on this question which could be called peculiarly Anglican, not all Anglicans subscribe to it. For the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission to acknowledge that the formation of the "threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon required a longer period than the apostolic age" even though "this threefold structure became universal in the Church" is not without its effect on Anglican perceptions of Lutheran ministry. 25 For the Roman Catholic-Lutheran World Federation Dialogue to suggest "that it will only be possible to reach mutual recognition (of ministries) 'gradually'" is also not without its effects on Anglican perceptions.²⁶ And when that same group suggests that the way forward is multi-staged involving "mutual respect for each other's ministries; then practical co-operation; and lastly the mutual acknowledgement of the fact that 'the ministry in the other Church performs essential functions of the mission which Jesus Christ entrusted to his Church, and which is held to be wholly attained in one's own Church' a powerful impetus is supplied in the direction of using "unity in reconciled diversity" as a strategy for achieving full union.²⁷

A careful comparison of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission's *The Final Report* with the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission's *The Ministry in the Church* reveal important convergences between the two dialogues on the ordained ministry in the Church. Of equal importance is the existence of a common set of questions between Anglicans-Lutherans on one hand and Lutherans-Roman Catholics on the other with regard to the problem of apostolic succession and the recognition of Lutheran ministries where apostolic succession in the episcopate is

^{22.} Paragraph 3 of the resolution presented to the 1982 General Convention of the Episcopal Church

^{23.} Ibid., paragraphs 4 and 4a

^{24.} Ibid., paragraph 5

Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, The Final Report (London: S.P.C.K., 1982), "Ministry and Ordination", paragraph 6, p. 32

Aloys Klein, "Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation", One in Christ vol. XVIII, N. 3 (1982), 209

^{27.} Ibid., 209

lacking. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics are prepared to admit Lutheran reservations "when they say, for example, that recognition of apostolic succession of the episcopate should not be an isolated act, but has meaning only in relation with the unity in faith of the Church itself . . . "28 And while the broad Anglican position that episcopal succession belongs only to the fulness of ministry and does not rule out the possibility of an authentic ministry where the episcopate no longer exists is not accepted by all Anglicans, it is proposed by many Roman Catholics. Perhaps most significant here is they were the episcopate no longer exists is not accepted by all Anglicans, it is proposed by many Roman Catholics. Perhaps most significant here is they were they see apostolic succession, in the sense of transmission of ministry, as the sign and guarantee of the faith of the Church, and believe that it is precisely the faith of the Church that affirms this. Likewise, the caveats appended to the so-called "Malta Report" by Professor H. Schurrman and Professor D.H. Conzelmann, that there is no common understanding "within the Lutheran churches on the doctrine of the ministry" raises difficulties for both Anglicans and Roman Catholics. "1

In view of the above, two suggestions may be in order. First of all, since public opinion within both Lutheranism and Anglicanism appears to give the highest priority to union with the Roman Catholic Church and since the theological issues which separate Anglicans and Lutherans in the area of apostolicity and episcopal succession are closely bound up with the issues which separate both these bodies from the Roman Catholic Church, at least one of the regional dialogues should be expanded to include the third party so that Anglicans, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics would be engaged in a common search to resolve the differences clustered around the historic episcopate and the ordering of ministry in the total context of apostolicity. Secondly, since Lutherans and Anglicans can already point to significant agreement in respect to "the centre of the Christian faith" and to a recognition of the other confession as a Church "in which the Gospel is preached and taught", Anglicans and Lutherans in Canada should give serious consideration to whether they can enter into a relationship of interim sharing of the Eucharist, such as has been entered into by the two confessional families in the U.S.A., while seeking the resolution of still outstanding issues thus giving concrete recognition to the principle that to the degree our diversities have not been reconciled they forbid us to act as though full reconciliation has been achieved but to the degree our diversities have been truly reconciled they forbid us to act as though we are completely estranged.

^{28.} J. Lecuyer, "Observations on the Document" 'Ministry in the Church' by the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission"

Edward Schillebeeckx, Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ (New York: Cross-road Publishing Co., 1981); Cyrille Vogel, Ordinations Inconsistantes et Caractere Inadmissible Turin: Bottega D'Erasmo, 1978); Frans van Beeck, "Towards an Ecumenical Understanding of the Sacraments", Journal of Ecumenical Studies 3 (1966), 57-112; George Tavard, "The Function of the Minister in the Eucharistic Celebration", Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 4 (1967), 629-649, "Roman Catholic Theology and 'Recognition of Ministry', Ibid, 6 (1969), 623-628, "Does the Protestant Ministry Have Sacramental Significance?", Continuum 6 (1968, 260-268)

^{30.} Cf. Ministry in the Church, para. 77 and Lecuyer's article referred to above, chapter 4 and 5

 [&]quot;Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on 'The Gospel and the Church'" Worship, vol. 46, N. 6 (June July 1972), pp. 350-351