

CROSSING A DIFFICULT BRIDGE.

It is well known that one of the most difficult issues facing churches seeking greater unity is that of the recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries. The problems are usually greatest where churches which lack a ministry with episcopacy in historic succession are involved in talks with churches that have such a ministry. There are, of course, also problems between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, who both claim an historic episcopal succession, with Catholics continuing to hold officially that, at the Reformation, the Anglicans changed their understanding of priesthood and episcopacy and thus lost the original succession¹.

In general, Protestant churches have no difficulty in recognising the orders of other churches who hold the basics of the apostolic faith as summarised in the historic creeds. My own church, the British Methodist Church does not re-ordain presbyters or ministers of word and sacrament who wish to enter our ministry. They have to be received into full connection at our annual conference, but, unlike probationer ministers, this is not followed by ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands.

Where Protestants usually have the greatest difficulties is in their discussions with Anglicans, unity with Roman Catholics and Orthodox still being seen as a more distant goal and thus the question of recognition/reconciliation as not an immediate one. Anglicans have preserved and cherished an episcopal succession going back to the earliest generations of the Church. Generally, they regard it as important for full unity and intercommunion. They have differed across the last couple of centuries as to how far they see it as absolutely necessary to churchly reality, the position of many anglo-catholics since 1833, and how far they see it more as desirable and of the *bene esse* or well-being of the Church but its absence as not implying that churches without it cannot be true churches with true ministries.

Some important developments over the last century have helped Anglicans to nuance their position. In 1920, the famous Lambeth Conference declaration accepted that the non-episcopal free churches had true and effective ministries that had been greatly used by God². At the same time, they offered episcopacy as a bond of unity which, if adopted by all would make all ministries mutually acceptable. The degree of recognition offered by the Conference to non-episcopal ministries did not result in their being fully accepted as equal

¹ As defined in the decree *Apostolicae Curae* (1996) of Pope Leo XIII where Anglican orders were defined as absolutely null and utterly void. Note, however, the milder language used at Vatican II of the eucharists administered by Anglican and Protestant ministers. There are simply said to lack the 'genuine and total' reality of the eucharist whilst at the same time professing that it signifies life in communion with Christ.

² 'it is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of those ministries which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary, we thankfully acknowledge that those ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace.' Cited in Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement* (1997), p. 82.

to episcopally derived ministries or in any Anglican province dropping the rule that such ministers must receive episcopal ordination before ministering amongst them.

Most Protestant churches welcomed this Lambeth initiative though early talks in England failed to settle the question of whether the existing free church ministries could be accepted without some sort of additional or conditional ordination.

The question of whether non-episcopally ordained ministers could be accepted by Anglicans remained an issue for both sides, anglo-catholics fearing it would undermine their own claims in the eyes particularly of the Roman Catholic Church whilst free churchmen feared anything that might render their previous ordination questionable.

In 1947, a major breakthrough came with the union of the Anglican dioceses of South India with the Methodists and reformed in the same area. All the existing ministers of word and sacrament were accepted as presbyters in the new church without any further rite implying re- or conditional ordination. Anglican bishops and senior ministers of the other two churches ordained several bishops from the two non-episcopal traditions and the new Church thereafter was to be an episcopal church but with presbyteral and congregational elements in its overall polity.

Many hoped that such a polity could be established elsewhere but that was not to be. Various reasons explain the unique achievement in South India, amongst them the fact that the three participant churches were broadly evangelical in nature. The one anglo-catholic bishop involved, Palmer of Bombay, so far from objecting to the scheme supported it firmly, arguing that the missionary success of the non-episcopal churches showed that their ministries had been duly blessed by the Holy Spirit in the work of the gospel and that they should be recognised as such.³

In 1971, the churches of North India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were established on a wider basis but involving an act of reconciliation of ministries in which Anglican bishops laid hands on non-episcopally ordained ministers, an act understood by some as a form of conditional ordination. The proposed service of reconciliation, advocated in proposals for unity between the Church of England and British Methodism in the 1960's, involved similar action, which led to controversy and opposition within both churches and to the newly established Anglican General Synod failing narrowly to ratify the plans, which thereby failed.

The *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* study process of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches issued its final report in 1982, containing both important advances in the understanding of the apostolicity of the Church and proposals that episcopal churches should recognise the apostolic content of the life and witness of the

³ Palmer also adduced some ingenious supporting arguments. He saw the non-episcopal ministers as analagous to the prophets of the sub-apostolic age who had administered the eucharist. His argument aroused the wrath of English anglo-catholics who accused Palmer of 'authorising lay celebration'. See my *One in Christ* article 'Bishop Palmer of Bombay-A Forgotten Pioneer' (1998, pp. 50-59).

non-episcopal churches and their ministries, whilst calling on the latter to acknowledge the claims of the traditional three-fold ministry as particularly celebrating the continuity of the Church across the ages⁴.

Particularly important was the stress on apostolicity as having several strands of which continuity in ministry was certainly one but not the exclusively most important. Continuity in the apostolic preaching and gospel was basic but other strands included service, mission, ministry and the life of fellowship.

This work had profound effect on Anglican approaches to unity. It helped led to agreements with churches lacking the historical episcopate, first in Germany, then in France in which the Church of England accepted the apostolicity of those churches and their ministries whilst continuing to insist that an agreement on episcopal ministry would be needed for full communion and inter-changeability of ministry⁵. A few years after the Meissen Agreement it led to a further advance in relations with the Nordic and Baltic Lutherans⁶. These churches had all maintained episcopacy, though, in the case of three of them, with a break in the episcopal succession at the Reformation. Under the Porvoo Agreement of 1992, the Anglicans accepted that the break in the episcopal succession in the three churches had not betokened a complete repudiation of episcopacy, which had thereafter been maintained. The Anglicans recognised that there had been succession within the historic sees, despite a break in the laying on of episcopal hands due to the refusal of the bishops in Denmark and Norway to accept the Lutheran Reformation.

At the turn of the millennium, the Episcopal Church in USA entered into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church which had bishops, though not in the historic succession. The Lutherans agreed, however, that all future consecrations of their bishops should involve participation of bishops in the historic succession, whether Anglican or from other churches⁷.

Up to this point full communion and inter-changeability of ministry, outside of the Indian sub-continent, still eluded Anglicans and Methodists elsewhere. However, in 2002-3, both the Church of England and the Church of Ireland established Covenants with the relevant Methodist Conferences. These covenants established mutual churchly recognition, including that of the ministries and sacraments involved. They called for co-operation in mission at the local level and for work towards full inter-changeability of ministry on the basis of a common acceptance of episcopacy. On the other side of the Atlantic, unity negotiations

⁴ Paras 34-39.

⁵ The Meissen Agreement with the Evangelical Church of Germany (1983) and the Reuilly Agreement with French Reformed and Lutherans (1999).

⁶ *Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common Statement with essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe* (1993)

⁷ This agreement needed a second vote to obtain a full enough majority for the Lutherans (1999). There was strong opposition to the accord from Lutherans in the Word Alone Movement who felt that acquiring the apostolic succession would somehow sully their reliance on faith alone.

between Anglicans and Methodists had long been carried out through the *Consultation on Church Unity*, also involving some churches in the reformed tradition. However, from 2002 an episcopal-Methodist dialogue was developed with important results.

The second decade of this century has seen very significant developments in Anglican-Methodist relationships in four countries, Britain, USA, Ireland and New Zealand, bolstered by the publication in 2014 of the second report of the international Anglican-Methodist dialogue report, *Into All the World-Being and becoming Apostolic Churches*. This recommended that that the two communions come together 'under the sign of the historic episcopate, for that represents the larger history of transmission of which Methodist churches are already a part'. It also referred to 'repeated Anglican assurances...of full respect for Methodist ordained ministries' which had been made in earlier conversations on both sides of the Atlantic⁸.

In the case of Ireland a major breakthrough has been made involving full inter-changeability of presbyteral ministry. In the case of Britain and the US important proposals have been made for fuller communion which still await full debate and official ratification. I believe that these three sets of proposals have lessons for Anglicans and other Protestant traditions in their search for fuller and unity and I will now look at the context of the proposals, followed by their specific detail.

Context

First comes the specific Anglican-Methodist context. The two communions are aware of their common roots in the Anglican Reformation and of the fact that John Wesley never intended that his innovations in ministry, including the recruitment and sending out of laymen to preach, were never intended to lead to a breach with the Church of England, rather they were intended to act as an encouragement to provoke the Anglican clergy of the 18th century to greater missional activity. The split between the two communions was not based on a rejection of episcopacy per se, the legitimacy of which as a system of church government was never disputed. When Wesley wanted to suggest a way in which his few preachers in the newly independent colonies of America could establish a church where none had previously existed, he gave them a version of the Book of Common Prayer and recommended the ordination of superintendents, elders and deacons. The first Conference in 1784 changed the name of superintendent to its Greek equivalent bishop and the Church became known as the Methodist Episcopal Church.

⁸ Report, paras 124,126.

That church and the missions established later by it around the globe retained an episcopal system, albeit one at first not of a diocesan type of episcopacy but of a roving itinerant supervision of the elders, the preachers⁹.

British Methodism and its later daughter churches developed differently. There, Wesley had generally restrained the preachers from any claim to sacramental ministry, despite the desire of some of them and their congregations for them to exercise it. Some 'church' Methodists did not want any breach of Anglican discipline; others in the societies wanted their preachers to be seen as ministers and be empowered to give them the sacrament of holy communion. Out of a fear of loss of cohesion of the Movement after the death of Wesley, the Conference in 1795 issued a plan whereby in certain circumstances the travelling preachers could exercise such a ministry. This was a clear breach with Anglican discipline but did not betoken any change in the view that an episcopal system of church government was a legitimate, though not necessary, option. Many Methodists retained an affection for what they called 'the old Church'¹⁰.

The differences over ministerial structure between the British and American Conferences have never affected adversely their close communion. In both cases, the connexional principle of interdependence in the light of the exigencies of the one mission is accepted as ecclesiologicaly fundamental.

The first achievement of Anglican-Methodist unity came, as we have seen, in South India in the context of a unity also involving reformed of both Presbyterian and Congregationalist backgrounds. The other Indian united churches followed in 1971. The next major achievement was to be in Ireland in 2015.

Ireland.

The context for closer relationships between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church In Ireland was propitious. Both churches were minority churches in a largely Roman Catholic country. Both were similar in evangelical ethos and thus able to perceive the same essential faith in each other. There were few if any anglo-catholics to take a rigid view of the absolute indispensability of the historic episcopate. Establishment was not an issue, the Church of Ireland having been disestablished as far back as 1869.

The Irish Covenant Council, established to forward the aims of the agreement of 2002, began to study the issue of oversight, taking advantage both of work done by the Faith and Order department of the WCC and the stress in both ecclesiologies on the necessity of

⁹ See my article 'Episcopacy and Episkope in British and American Methodism' in *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* (2002), pp. 47-66.

¹⁰ It is quite common to read in early ministerial obituaries of ministers who were proud to produce sons who had followed them into not only the ministry of Methodism, but also that of the 'old church'. For a good account of the separation of English Methodism in 1790's see Turner, J.M. *Conflict and Reconciliation* (1985), esp . chs 2,5.

effective episcopate/oversight. In 2005, the Council produced its *Study of Episcopate* (oversight) which included three key statements. First that 'a three-fold statement of overseeing, leadership and service is accepted by both our churches.' The second was that 'a personal oversight exercised faithfully within the context of a communal and collegial oversight contributes significantly to the well being of the Church'. Finally came the acceptance that 'any episcopal ministry should always function within a team of presbyters'. This third point related back to a patristic principle enunciated by St Cyprian, but also related to the Methodist understanding of the communal responsibility of all the presbyters for oversight both of each other and of the Connexion.

Following these came the BEM based statement that 'any continuity of ministry and oversight is to be understood within the continuity of the apostolic life and mission of the whole Church'.

The next and key stage came with the examination of the role of the annually elected President of the Methodist Church In Ireland in which it was claimed that 'we have discerned consonance between the office and function of Presidents and past-Presidents of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the office and function of Bishops in the Church of Ireland based on the current doctrinal understanding and ecclesiology of both churches'¹¹.

As a result of this it was agreed that 'we affirm the participation of at least three people, who express the office and function of episcopal ministry, in the act of dedication of a new President and in the consecration of Bishops and the communal affirmation of the action by the people of God.'

In 2014, the Irish General Synod and the Irish Methodist Conference agreed to establish mutual inter-changeability of presbyteral ministry, this applying to all such ministers, whether ordained by a bishop or not before 2014. The President of Conference was henceforth to be styled an episcopal minister and the agreement was to come into force after the first participation of such a President in an Irish episcopal consecration. This duly occurred in January 2015.

Britain.

From both the Anglican and Methodist sides, the situation was to prove more difficult and progress slower than in Ireland. The English Covenant included an undertaking to work towards a mutually acceptable form of episcopacy. In 2006 the Methodist Conference issued a report *What Sort of Bishops?* outlining various possibilities for ways in which episcopacy might be taken into the Methodist system. People were reminded that Methodists had twice voted positively for unity schemes that involved the reception of the

¹¹ For a fuller account of the Irish process in toto see Kingston, G. *Names and Sects and parties Fall. A Methodist Contribution to reconciliation and ecumenism in Ireland* (2015), *The Covenant between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland in One in Christ* (2014) also Miller, H. *Inter-changeability of Ministries between Methodists and Anglicans in Ireland: A wider perspective* (One in Christ, 2014).

historic episcopate in the 1960's and in 1982. The Methodist official response to BEM had included the statement that 'we await the moment for the recovery of the episcopal succession'. Nevertheless, the report did not attract much positive support. The reasons for this included befuddlement as a result of the complexity of the several alternatives put forward but also continuing previous scepticism about unity with the Church of England and prejudices against episcopacy which largely reflected practice of a bygone era in the Church of England rather than current reality in 2006-7.

The two churches involved did not have the similarity of ethos that characterised their Irish sister churches. Both have a much wider spectrum of churchmanship. Progress towards much closer grassroots co-operation in mission had been relatively slow and patchy under the English Covenant. Nevertheless, the Joint Implementation Commission for the Covenant stuck purposefully to its work of advocacy. Its report of 2013 was realistic, yet theologically profound. It recognised the asymmetry of the Anglican-Methodist relationship in England, with the Church of England being bigger both in numbers and in public profile and prestige, a situation that led some Methodists to fear that they would simply be 'taken over' and swallowed in a closer relationship. It recognised how alien the culture of each church could seem to the other, stressing that 'as we grow closer, we find that we are so very much alike, but also so very different'. The Commission called for empathy 'getting inside each others' skin, coming to understand the elements of the ecclesiology of the other that it finds inalienable, treasures that cannot be abandoned'.

The Commission thus called for a profound process of mutual reception which is still far from complete across the two churches, even though there are remarkable signs from a few quarters. Very recently I met a distant relative by marriage who is also a 'flying bishop' in the Church of England, that is to say he is one of two specially appointed bishops who have pastoral care of those parishes that cannot accept the ministry of women priests, and, in some cases feel they can't accept that of bishops who ordain women priests. We were able to have a brief conversation about the latest proposals for Anglican-Methodist reconciliation (which I will shortly detail). In the course of our conversation, he expressed great appreciation of Methodist connexionalism and the way in which it engenders a spirit of unity and loyalty to the teaching and discipline of the Church in a way that is not always emulated within Anglican parochial and diocesan belonging at least within the Church of England.

The report of the Joint Implementation Committee, entitled *The Challenge of the Covenant. Uniting in Mission and Holiness* (2013) deserves to be known and pondered by all involved in conversations leading to closer unity since it advocates a spirituality of mutual discovery and reception¹². It is a matter of partner churches expecting mutual transformation as 'each church *responds* to the other in ways which involve *real changes in both as we receive from each other*'. It is a matter of having to 'trust each other, honour each other and take a good

¹² The report is available on the British Methodist website.

deal of care of each other.¹³ Receptive ecumenism, so rightly stressed in recent years also requires *empathetic* ecumenism as we come to wrestle with the truths others hold dear. In terms of the recent Anglican-Methodist dialogue through the JIC this has meant Anglicans coming to understand the tradition of conferencing in Methodism and Methodists coming to understand the value of the historic episcopate for Anglicans.

In 2017, after extensive consultations between the faith and order committees of the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Great Britain, the report *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* was issued suggested a way in which the two churches could undertake two formal commitments beyond those made in 2003, first, 'to share the ministry of the historic episcopate as a sign of the apostolicity of the Church of God', secondly, 'to welcome presbyters/priests serving in either church as eligible to serve in both churches.'

The way forward for fulfilling the first undertaking would be for the President of the Conference at the time of final ratification of the agreement to be consecrated as a bishop, being recognised as such by the Church of England and styled as President-Bishop. All successors to that President would in their turn be consecrated as bishops with their predecessors and other bishops in the succession being involved in such later consecrations. At the time of ratification, the Church of England would suspend its previously unalterable rule requiring episcopal ordination of all clergy in favour of those Methodists already previously non-episcopally ordained. Each partner church would make a concession, albeit, we may note, not one without any precedent in its previous tradition. Methodists would accept a third order of ministry, the episcopal in addition to their two existing orders of presbyter and deacon. Such action would accord with earlier Methodist agreements to accept episcopacy in pursuit of wider unity¹⁴. English Anglicans would accept the suspension of the 1662 rule which had already been accepted by partner churches in South India and North America¹⁵. They would justify this by the concept of *tolerable anomaly* on the way to unity that had emerged, particularly within the context of their relationships with Lutherans.

Evidence has emerged since the production of the report that some Methodists are not entirely happy with the expression 'tolerable anomaly' which seems to them patronising. One wonders whether it would have been better to use such a phrase as 'divergence from the traditional Anglican norm of practice.'

¹³ *Report*, paras 4,5.

¹⁴ Methodists had done so during the original Conversations of the 1960's and the Conference had achieved a sufficient majority for this to happen provided the Anglicans were also able to agree. In 1982, the Conference achieved a sufficient majority to ratify the Covenanting proposals of that year, which would also have involved Methodists adopting episcopacy. In 1985, in their official response to the Baptism, Eucharist ministry document of 1982, British Methodists said that they 'awaited the moment for the recovery of the sign of the episcopal succession'. In 2000, in the official Conference document *Episkope and Episcopacy*, the Conference once again affirmed its preparedness to adopt episcopacy.

¹⁵ In North America, in terms of the US and Canadian Anglican-Lutheran accords.

A key feature of the recommendations is the desire to respect the ecclesiologies of both churches. In the case of Methodism this has meant finding a way in which the traditional supreme oversight of the Conference, a body of representative ministers and layfolk, can be expressed in the context of 'a personal form of connexional, episcopal ministry', which the Church of England could also recognise as a 'sign of unity in faith, worship and mission in a church that is in the apostolic succession'.

It is pointed out that, already, the annually elected Presidents of the Conference (who are always presbyters) preside at its presbyteral session and ordain those recommended for ordination. Together with the vice-president, they preside over the representative sessions of the Conference. They 'play a significant part in the oversight of the Church, developing prophetic vision, offering encouragement and support and strengthening the Connexion through their ministry of visitation.' The President also has the right, if requested, 'to visit any circuit, inquire into its affairs and take any steps judged to be beneficial.'¹⁶ All these powers can certainly be seen (to use the Irish phrase referred to above) as consonant with those exercised by a bishop in the historic succession.

On the question of the historic episcopate, three things are stressed, that it is personal, 'there being no substitute for person to person ministry-with all its risks and vulnerability', that it is historic 'an expression of the visible historical continuity of the Church today with the church of the apostles' and that it is received', one might add as a gift¹⁷. Great stress is also placed on the fact that British Methodism has repeatedly stated its preparedness 'to recover the sign of the episcopal succession' and that it rules out nothing in the search for greater unity¹⁸.

The whole scheme is well grounded in the wider ecumenical movement. Reference is made to the dialogue of both churches with Rome and to the fact that nothing in the scheme contradicts any of the commitments made in either dialogue. It is hoped its adoption will spur Anglican-Methodist rapprochement elsewhere and indeed encourage wider unity beyond the two communions. It must be stressed that it is not a scheme for full organic unity but for reconciliation of presbyteral ministries in the interest of wider co-operation in mission. Some matters remain to be dealt with later e.g. reconciliation of diaconal ministries. Nor does the scheme rule out the possibility of a future one for complete organic unity should it be felt within the two churches that the time has come for that.

As I write, the Church of England General Synod has just debated the report and given the green light, by very comfortable majorities, for its further development. The Methodist Conference will also consider it in July 2018.

¹⁶ *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, para 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, para 23.

¹⁸ *Called to Love and Praise* (Conference statement on ecclesiology, 1999), p. 50.

America.

The most recent proposals for full communion between the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church were also issued in 2017¹⁹. They represent fifteen years of work which included both an interim agreement on eucharistic sharing and the 2010 document *A Theological Foundation for Full Communion* which argued that it saw no church dividing issues between the two churches. The dialogue acknowledged its debt to the theological statement of the first international Anglican-Methodist dialogue, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* which had recorded that Anglicans and Methodists globally agreed on the 'core doctrines' of the faith and needed 'no further doctrinal assurances' from each other.

At the very beginning of the 2017 document a key introductory paragraph sets out the understanding of the full communion relationship as follows

'Full communion is understood as a relationship between two distinct ecclesiastical bodies in which each maintains its own autonomy while recognising the catholicity and apostolicity of the other, and believing the other to hold the essentials of the Christian faith. In such a relationship, communicant members of each would be freely able to communicate at the altar of the other, and ordained ministers may officiate sacramentally in either church.'

It argues that full communion involves more than simple mutual eucharistic hospitality and inter-changeability of ministry. It also involves 'mutual enrichment by one another's traditions of hymnody and patterns of liturgy...structures for consultation to express, strengthen and enable our common life, witness and service, to the glory of God and the salvation of the world'. It thus sets the relationship within the total context of God's assigned role for the Church in the total act of redemption.. A later section of the report, entitled 'Foundational Principles', reinforces this with the grounding of unity in Christ's prayer and our common baptismal life.

Reference is then made to the four points of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, traditionally seen by Anglicans everywhere as the sole sufficient basis of for unity. The first three on the scriptures, creeds and the two gospel sacraments have never been a subject of difference. The fourth, on episcopacy has simultaneously been both problematic and yet helpful, problematic in its insistence on episcopacy since Methodism has always insisted that there no one system of church order mandated in Scripture, helpful in its reference local adaptability of the historic episcopate, particularly in the American context.

One of the big differences between US and British Methodism, though never church dividing, has been the structure of ordained ministry. In 1784, Wesley, knowing that the USA was now independent of Britain, believed that it was his duty to give his preachers in

¹⁹ *A Gift to the World: Co-Laborers for the Healing of Brokenness. The Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church. A Proposal for Full Communion.* (revisions to November 21 2017)

America some guidance as to how to run a church now of necessity separate, though thereafter to 'leave them to the scriptures and the (example of) the primitive Church. He gave them a revised version of the Book of Common Prayer and ordained Thomas Coke as superintendent for America. Coke duly departed, a conference was assembled which decided to adopt the term bishop rather than superintendent and appointed both Coke and Francis Asbury as bishops. Coke in fact soon departed leaving Asbury to be the American Wesleyan itinerant superintendent, travelling incessantly to found new societies and station the preachers needed to sustain them.

Thus, from the beginning US Methodism had a three-fold ministry of bishops, elders and deacons. The bishops claimed to be doing apostolic work, though not in the apostolic succession as Anglicans understood it; rather, they saw bishops as elders with additional responsibilities. Later, the bishops were to become more like Anglican bishops.

The big question for the dialogue was how far could the two episcopates be linked in communion with each other? Certainly, Anglicans could see that the special circumstances of post-revolution America, with the beginning of the period of moving west into new areas of settlement, had made the Methodist model and practice of episcopacy particularly relevant for those times.

In looking for a solution the US dialogue was helped both by the BEM definition of apostolicity with apostolic succession being seen primarily in terms of faith and life and the historic episcopate then being seen as one way of expressing , a true sign but not a complete guarantee.

They were also helped by the fact that the Episcopal Church had already made intercommunion agreements with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Moravian Church, both of them episcopal churches but at the time concerned not with bishops directly in the historic episcopate. The full communion agreement with both involved the future participation of a bishop in the historic succession, Anglican or otherwise in future episcopal ordinations in those churches plus future ordinations being invariably carried out by bishops (which had not always been the case amongst the Lutherans). The Anglican rule that only those episcopally ordained could minister amongst them was suspended in favour of existing ministers who had not been so ordained.

In a list of joint affirmations, the Episcopalians and Methodists included the following.

'Our churches affirm the role of bishops as leaders of the life, work and mission of the Church, as symbols of unity, and as guiding and maintaining the church's apostolic faith and work'.

An interesting joint pledge on the diaconate, seen up till the 1990's as simply a transitional ministry for a future presbyter, is added.

‘Our churches have worked in the last half-century to restore the office of deacon as a permanent order for servant ministry in the life of the Church’.

It is however stated that, though Methodists have already abandoned the transitional diaconate, Anglicans will continue to have it alongside a permanent one.

The final agreement is that upon the ratification of the overall agreement by both the General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Conference, ordinations of bishops in both churches from 2022 will include the participation of at least one bishop from the partner church and up to three bishops from their full communion partner churches, the Lutherans and Moravians in both cases. The ratification will also establish full inter-changeability of both deacons and presbyters and complete sacramental hospitality for members of each partner church in the other.

It is hoped final ratification will take place by 2021.

Lessons for other churches.

At the beginning, I hinted that there were lessons for future rapprochement between Anglicans and other Protestant churches that lack the historic episcopate.

Some of these churches do have supervising ministers styled bishop. Such is the case in the Reformed Church in Hungary, in the Landeskirchen of the Evangelical Church of Germany (some Lutheran, some Reformed, some united) and in some former British Methodist missions which now have their own autonomous conferences which have decided to name regionally responsible ministers as bishops).

In each case, Anglicans will wish to consider how far the functions of these bishops are consonant with their understanding of a bishop in the historic succession and how far they can be seen as having ‘locally adapted’ their particular ministry. If they feel they can give positive answers then the North American precedent for the integration of episcopal ministries, both those in the historic succession and those not may prove relevant in those situations.

Yet other churches have no senior supervisory ministers styled bishop, yet they do have Moderators (a common term amongst the reformed) who exercise much of the pastoral and guiding role for local presbyters that Anglicans recognise as the duty of diocesan bishops. Would it be possible, as in the Irish agreement for such people to be recognised as episcopal ministers and to be installed both by their denominational equals and by local Anglican bishops?

One of the great advantages of such agreements is that they would enable the churches concerned (as in Ireland and under the English suggestions) to feel that their ecclesiologies had been properly respected and affirmed. The adoption of the historic episcopate would not involve any denial of their previous heritage and apostolicity but would become an

additional sign of such apostolicity to be welcomed as part of the wider search for universal unity.

The reception of the historic episcopate by churches previously lacking it would signify willingness on the part of those churches to enter into the full heritage of the riches of the communion from which they receive it and more widely into the heritage of the Church across all the ages. The willingness of the episcopal church concerned to make the gift to churches that preserve and affirm the apostolic content and nature of their previous heritage will indicate their willingness to learn from the riches of God's grace as given within the life and structures of communion of that church. Both the episcopal and non-episcopal partner will be signifying their willingness to journey together into a heritage broader and richer than either previous one. Though in one sense, it is more blessed to give than to receive, it is also important to receive gifts from others humbly and graciously. That is of the essence of true communion.

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This article was originally published in *Ecumenical Trends*, vol 47, no11, Dec 2018, pp. 8-16.