APOSTLE IN OUR MIDST

THE OFFICE OF BISHOP

DAVID B. JOSLIN

About the author:

The Reverend David B. Joslin was educated at Drew University and the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. He has served in the dioceses of Newark and Delaware and is currently Rector of Christ Church, Westerly, Rhode Island.

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Preface

What is a bishop? What special kind of ministry do bishops bring to the Church? What kinds of roles are assigned to them in the Christian community? What does this ministry mean to the "ordinary" Christian in the pew?

The word "bishop" is very much a part of our 20th century experience. We encounter bishops in movies, popular novels, in chess, on TV and frequently in the news. For some Christians (especially in churches that do not have them) the word "bishop" may suggest a variety of undesirable images, including religious corruption, inordinate power and opposition to the free worship of the Holy Spirit. By contrast, Christians in churches which do have bishops encounter them in parish visitations and Confirmation and some know only that bishops are important in the "higher" levels of ecclesiastical organization.

It is true that few of us really know very much about bishops. This can become embarrassingly evident when a diocese sets forth to elect a new bishop or when someone from a church without bishops asks us to answer questions about them. Less embarrassing but of equal importance is the fact that if we knew more about the role of bishops we could use their ministry more effectively, with benefit to ourselves and to the mission of the Church.

This essay is an attempt to explain some aspects of the ministry of bishops and to initiate discussion among parish clergy and lay people. It doesn't come

close to saying all there is to say on the subject and doubtless there will be points in it with which you, the reader, will disagree. In fact, it is hoped that the remarks will be sufficiently provocative to raise questions and to motivate people to learn more from other sources about the subject.

The discussion is organized around certain words and phrases in the American Book of Common Prayer. Most of these words and phrases are found in the service for the Ordination of a Bishop. Readers from other churches in the Anglican Communion will find comparable material in the equivalent section of their Prayer Books.

A glossary of some terms used in connection with bishops and their ministry and some suggestions for further reading are included at the end of the discussion.

Introduction, "A Bishop Is Called"

". . . A bishop in God's holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

"You are called to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant; to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.

"With your fellow bishops you will share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world. Your heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope. Your joy will be to follow him who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."

From the Examination of the Bishop-elect
Book of Common Prayer

The above is a condensed theological description of a bishop's role in the Church, what is sometimes called *"episcope,"* the special ministry of bishops. Our English word "bishop" is dervied (through several steps) from the Greek word *"episcopos"* which means "overseer" or "supervisor." This fact is

the starting place for understanding the ministry of bishops. The bishop is an overseer or supervisor of the life and ministry of the Church. What this role means in its various aspects will be the subject of this discussion.

Before moving on, however, I'd like to mention three things to be kept in mind about bishops and their ministry. First, while overseer or supervisor is the central role of the bishop's ministry, that does not mean he is merely an organizational executive of an ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Instead his administration is intertwined with his preaching, teaching, sacramental and liturgical roles in such a way that it is all of a piece. We might say that he is an "apostolic supervisor" who oversees in a way not unlike the role of St. Paul in New Testament times.

Secondly, the ministry of the bishop needs to be seen in the context of the ministry of the whole Christian community and in relation to other special ministries of laypeople and clergymen. The ministry of Jesus is not committed to ordained ministers alone. In Baptism we are commissioned for ministry. Within the ministry of Christ in his Church there are specialized ministries of bishop, priest and deacon. However, these particular ministries overlap one another and have real connections with the ministry we all share. Thus lay people share in the priestly ministry as they hold up the world before God at the Holy Eucharist. A lay person chairing a certain parish committee is exercising something of the overseeing ministry. Conversely, a bishop may engage in some act of Christian service that is really very like the ministry of lay people. What I am trying

to suggest is that, while the ministries of bishop, priest and deacon are clearly distinct entities in the Church, the other side of the coin suggests that these distinctive ministries are really intensifications or focusings of the ministry of Christ that is in the whole Church. The bishop's ministry is thus *both* boldly unique and at the same time organically related to the ministry of each layman in the Church and in the world.

Thirdly, it is important to remember that all kinds of ministry are really service, service to one's fellow Christians, service to the world God loves and especially service to God in Christ. In the exercise of apostolic supervision, the bishop is really serving Jesus and his ministry in the Church. In that sense his call and ours are the same.

"One With the Apostles"

The Meaning of Apostolic Ministry

In one sense the apostolic commission described in Matthew's Gospel rests upon all Christians and upon the Church as the corporate people of God. But in another sense the apostolic ministry has come to inhere particularly in the office of the bishop. Thus we say that bishops today are called to be modern day apostles and that through their office the apostolic ministry is present to and in the church in a special way.

What is an Apostle? What is apostolic ministry?

In New Testament times "apostles" were fairly common in secular business and legal affairs. An apostle was a person sent to represent another person with special authority. The apostle possessed power of attorney from his sender and was empowered to bind the sender in business contracts. With clear authority he represented the one who had sent him. Our concept of an ambassador is close to this ancient meaning of "apostle."

Commonly such an apostle in New Testament times also possessed the authority to designate a second "apostle" to represent him in representing the original sender. Thus, Mr. Jones would designate Mr. Smith to be his apostle. If, for some reason, Mr. Smith were unable to complete his assignment personally, he might appoint Mr. Brown to represent Smith in representing Jones. Thus, even though Brown and Jones might never have had any personal contact, Brown would be in effect an apostle of Jones.

This quality of apostolic delegation is important for understanding the day by day work of the bishop. In the context of the whole church, the office of bishop includes the fullness of ministry. But the bishop does not do all the ministries, even those especially associated with his office. Instead he delegates to lay and clergy alike various aspects of ministry or sees to it that the church is delegating those aspects in some form.

In the light of these meanings of the apostle of New Testament times, we can better understand the special role played by the original Apostles of Jesus in the first century Church. The original Apostles were mostly those specially associated with Jesus during his earthly ministry and all were witnesses to his resurrection. With that association, and all it entailed, the Apostles were seen in the majority of churches as the special ambassadors of Christ; witnessing to his resurrection in preaching, teaching, celebrating the eucharist, baptizing and in carrying out some kind of supervision or *episcope* over the churches. In effect, they were the first "bishops."

As death claimed the original Apostles, the young Church had to find ways to continue their ministry. Our very limited information about the period suggests that the Christians of the late first century began taking a number of sometimes unrelated but roughly simultaneous steps to do this. The teachings about Jesus which had been guided by the Apostles were now written down and gradually formed into our Gospels. The surviving letters of the Apostles were collected and preserved. Embryonic creedal statements were fashioned to continue apostolic

doctrine and first attempts were made to identify those documents which rightly belonged in the Bible. These early Christians, however, needed not only statements and documents; they also needed living persons to embody the overseeing role of the Apostles and to help keep the life of the Church both dynamic and true to itself. The evolution of the threefold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon was the answer to this need.

In all of these steps the evidence indicates there was considerable experimentation and time revealed that some experiments were inappropriate. Yet, we believe that the Church was guided by the Holy Spirit in its task of determining — sometimes through trial and error — the best ways of continuing the varied aspects of the Apostles' ministry. Indeed we may believe that the resulting New Testament, creed, and ministry were the fulfillment of God's will.

For this discussion, our special interest is in that aspect of this process pertaining to the living ministry. Our knowledge about this is as limited as our knowledge about the formation of the Gospels. It may have been that in some places Apostles directly appointed certain people to continue their supervising ministry thus initiating the ministry of bishops. In other places the supervisory role appears to have passed temporarily to other forms of ministry.

We do have clear evidence that in some churches, before the last books of the New Testament were written, the local bishop had emerged as the bearer of apostolic ministry. We also have clear evidence that by the end of the second century the Church universally saw bishops as the special agents of apostolic

ministry and that these bishops were seen as having derived their ministry from the original Apostles. We should understand this transition of living ministry from Apostles to bishops as part of the same process that resulted in the formation of the New Testament and the early beginnings of the creeds.

Today we say that the church continues in the teaching and fellowship of the Apostles. The episcopate is one of the means (along with the others mentioned) of maintaining that continuity. The apostolic ministry of bishops means that they are to continue the witness and role of the original Apostles in the life of the church, including their preaching and teaching and their liturgical and prophetic ministry. Bishops are called to be ambassadors of Christ in all the special meanings implied by the word apostle. With dramatic power, bishops are the image of the apostolicity of the whole Church and are reminders of the apostolate that is given to all Christians at Baptism.

"Preach the Gospel"

The Bishop and Mission

Central to the meaning of "apostle" and apostolicity is the notion of mission. The apostle Paul is our great example here. As an apostle sent by the risen Christ, he boldly preached the Gospel wherever he could and launched new churches to carry out that work.

This missionary quality still inheres in the office of bishop. Obviously it doesn't mean that all bishops

are to be missionary bishops in foreign lands or in isolated areas. What it does mean is that the mission of the Church is a primary concern to the bishop. The bishop is called to be on mission and to send, or see to it that the Church sends, others on mission both far and near. It is his duty to enlarge the vision of congregations, beyond their immediate locality and preoccupation with their own problems.

The bishop has certain special missionary opportunities that come with the job. As will be noted later, he frequently has access to the media and thus to the public in a way that other forms of ministry seldom do. This fact presents the bishop with an opportunity for mission — not in the sense that he will always be preaching an evangelistic sermon on TV — but in the sense that, as a public figure and recognized leader, he has an opportunity to proclaim something of the Christian mystery through his personal presence, words and deeds — and to encourage other Christians to do the same in their own spheres of responsibility.

As the leader of a diocese his understanding of the church's mission and his commitment to it (or lack of commitment) does much to set the tone for mission throughout his diocese and to encourage and guide the witness and service of all the baptized. There are few missionary minded dioceses without missionary minded bishops.

The bishop also has direct administrative responsibility for the "missions" of the diocese. In some dioceses the number of mission congregations and their clergy directly under his care is quite large. He may also be responsible for diocesan institutions and agencies engaged in wide range of services to meet

human needs. Accordingly, the amount of missionary time and effort spent by a bishop is considerable and the wisdom and power of his leadership can be very significant.

"In God's Holy Church"

The Constitutional Episcopate

In one sense (a functional one) the bishop is "over" the Church in the way a football coach is over his team. Indeed that kind of relationship is implicit in the words "overseer" and "supervisor" and it is a necessary relationship if the bishop is to perform his ministry well. However, it is also true that the bishop is not only "over" the team, he is also *in* the team or on it, part of the Church of Jesus Christ as are we all.

Keeping clear this second truth is enormously important not only as a protection against excessive episcopal power but also for the spiritual well being of the bishop himself. All of us, including bishops, are servants of the Church and our varied ministries are really different dimensions of the one ministry of Christ in his Church. Thus our ministries are interrelated and frequently overlap one another. Elements of supervision may be exercised by priests, deacons, or lay people and a bishop may be called to perform a ministry normally more characteristic of other orders. And there is a certain accountability that a bishop has, not only to his fellow bishops but to Christ in the whole Church. The bishop is a kind of player-coach.

This quality of the bishop being *in* the Church has been manifested in varied ways in different times and places in the long history of the Church. In the Episcopal Church one of the key ways of expressing it is in the concept of "constitutional episcopacy," as defined in the Church's Constitution and Canons.

Without becoming involved in the technicalities of canon law and church organization, "constitutional episcopacy" means that a bishop's authority is both limited and shared by counterbalancing offices and ministries. Thus the Diocesan Convention (chaired by the bishop and composed of the clergy and parish delegates of the diocese) determines the budget and many basic policies and programs of the diocese. Between sessions of Convention, the Diocesan Council (again chaired by the bishop and composed of clergy and laity elected by Convention,) acts as the agent of Convention. The Standing Committee of the Diocese (composed of clergy and laity elected by Convention) acts not only as council of advice to the bishop, but must also give approval for the ordination of persons to the ministry, and has other responsibilities of an overseeing nature in the life of the Church.

This same kind of shared supervision is also found in the Episcopal Church's General Convention (our highest governing body) which includes not only a House of Bishops but also a House of Lay and Clerical Deputies. Thus at both the diocesan and national level, the ministry of the bishop (or bishops) is interwoven with the service of others in much the same way that the ministry of the rector of a local parish is interwoven with that of the vestry and various parish committees and organizations.

Because of this shared leadership, a bishop's authority is not only accountable to church canons but also in a special way to a whole web of interconnected ministries. Thus alongside all the immense authority involved in the apostolic ministry, there is also immense accountability to the Church as a whole and to the Church in the diocese.

Such shared leadership and decision making certainly does not make the bishop a mere figurehead. At its best, however, it does enable a creative sharing of ministry and service and in a democratic culture it helps to assure the Church's credibility. It is our church's way of enabling an episcopal ministry that is not merely *over* but *"in* God's holy Church."

"Guard The Faith"

The Bishop As Teacher

Included in the ministry of the Apostles was the very important function of teaching. That function continues today. The bishop individually and the bishops collectively are the official teachers of the Church. Obviously they are not the only teachers — all Christians share that responsibility in some sense or another and certainly scholarly theologians have a special role. But there is an authority that inheres uniquely in the teaching function of the episcopate.

In one sense this teaching function is protective, as the phrase "guard the faith" suggests. Bishops have a responsibility for seeing that the presentation of the Christian faith does not deviate in essence from

that of the Apostles. Thus there is a certain appropriateness in a bishop noting and examining what is taught in his diocese.

In another sense, the episcopal teaching role must be more than a defense of the Church's teaching from erroneous interpretation. Vital teaching cannot be simply a tape recording of past interpretations. Changing times and circumstances require that different aspects of the faith be emphasized and certainly old truths need to be recast in new figures in order to communicate the Gospel with power. Thus "guarding the faith" includes protection against the possibility of the faith's expression becoming stale and encouraging explorations of new insights into the revelation given in Christ.

To what extent the bishop personally teaches (in a formal sense) will depend on the gifts, circumstances and opportunities of the individual. In the exercise of his teaching office it is not necessary that he be a technical theologian, but he is called to teach as a pastor. In contrast to formal theological research pastoral teaching takes into account human contexts and places teaching within the more inclusive function of *episcope.* The manner in which St. Paul taught in some of his epistles is an illustration of this pastoral quality.

What is said here applies both to individual bishops and to bishops collectively, as in the House of Bishops or at the Lambeth Conference. In fact, one must admit that greater authority is found in collective or collegial episcopal teaching than in that of the lone bishop. Together they may articulate what is taught or understood as Chritian truth within the whole church.

In times of old, bishops sometimes distorted the teaching role into inquisitions. However, in our anti-authoritarian and perhaps anti-intellectual age, inquisitor bishops are not as great a danger as bishops who abdicate their responsibility to guard the faith and to teach it.

"Guard the Unity"

The Bishop as Unifier

Bishops are in the unity business. Unity can be seen in several dimensions. First, within the diocese the bishop is the catalyst for unity. He embodies the connection between the various parishes and between the many programs and institutions of the diocese. When he visits a parish, people see in him something of the Church beyond the local confines and through him (though not only through him) the local congregation is joined to the diocesan community and to each of its organic parts. Much of this unifying work inheres in his symbolic and sacramental role. However, the role has functional and pragmatic aspects as well. As supervisor or overseer, the bishop is the coordinator of all the congregations, programs, and institutions of the diocese — a role made dramatically visible as he presides at Diocesan Conventions and at synodical meetings. The unity of the Church is served by wise and skillful administration as much as by the exercise of other gifts of the Spirit.

The bishop is, secondly, the unifying link between the local Church and the Church at large. His

participation in both the formal and informal life of the House of Bishops and in the various agencies of the national Church is a vital communication link. Beyond the national Church, for example, through the Lambeth Conference, he unites the local Church to the Anglican Communion around the world. Through his ecumenical role, the bishop is a link to other branches of the Church.

Thirdly, the bishop is a unifying force not only in space but also in time. He links our present Christian life with the life of the church in ages past and in ages to come. This aspect of unity is seen in his liturgical and sacramental role, especially in Confirmation and Ordination, but it really belongs to his whole ministry. He is the sacramental person *par excellance* reflecting the presence of Christ in the whole Christian community (not merely in our own immediate experience). He is the apostle in our midst reflecting in our time the ministry of the original Apostles.

One of the signs of the power of this unifying role is the history of churches without bishops. Such denominations are far more prone to schism and they are more likely to lose continuity of faith and order with the Church universal. Without bishops, a community's memory of the Christian Tradition is more likely to dim.

"Guard the Discipline"

The Bishop as Authority

"Discipline" is a nasty word in our time. Once one recalls, however, the link between "discipline" and

"disciple," one realizes that discipline is one of the gifts of the Spirit to the Church. To be disciples is to be in the discipline of our Lord, to have the Spirit working in us for our sanctification and empowering us for service. Discipline thus may be thought of as the structure of life in grace that enables the Church and its members to remain in balance and function harmoniously as the body of Christ. Therefore, the discipline of the Church, far from enslaving us, is akin to the meaning of the phrase,... "whose service is perfect freedom." Discipline, properly conceived, liberates us to become in practice what we are by grace. If one thinks of the discipline of a football team, one realizes the link between discipline and *espirit de corps*. Likewise, discipline in the Church is linked to that vitality that comes with the Spirit.

In part, discipline in the Church means having its various ministries kept in balance. Theologians, moralists, reformers, pietists, change agents, conservators, etc., all perform valuable ministries to the Church when kept in proportion and balance. Discipline also means having individuals, groups and institutions live up to their responsibilities in the body of Christ. This means more than morality in the usual sense. Just as much, if not more, it refers to such things as stewardship of time, talent and treasure. It involves having goals and showing commitment to attain these goals. Likewise it involves placing people in ministries for which they have the necessary gifts — and intervening when necessary in situations of crisis or conflict.

The bishop does not manufacture discipline nor is he the sole source of it. Especially in the American Church, authority and discipline are dispersed. But

just as the bishop embodies all other ministries of the Church, so he embodies this one and has his special role to play in exercising it. He is to inspire it and to see to it that the various ministries of discipline in the Church are functioning well. He is to set the tone for all and in certain ways to administer the discipline directly and personally. Always it is to be pastoral and to grow out of the context of *episcope*.

Episcopal bishops have far less direct power and authority than their nearest equivalents in certain Protestant churches, or in the Roman Catholic Church. To what extent this hinders the bishop's ministry of guarding the discipline is a matter which deserves more discussion.

Ultimately, of course, this aspect of oversight requires a context of vital spirituality throughout the diocese, involving lay people and clergy as well as bishops and canon law. As the Church grows in its understanding of discipline as the structure of life in grace — as part of discipleship — then the bishop's discipline will be seen as a blessing and as a *charism* in the Church. It is within that context that he is "to guard the discipline."

"Celebrate The Sacraments"

The Bishop as Chief Priest

In the Consecration of the Bishop, the Presiding Bishop prays that God will fill the heart of the bishop-elect with such love of God and all the people that he may exercise "without reproach the high priesthood" to which God has called him. What is this :"high priesthood" of the bishop?

In the New Testament the ministers of the Church are never called "priests" (in the cultic sense of offering sacrifice and mediating between God and man). There Christ alone is our high priest and in an adjacent sense the whole Church is called a holy priesthood. However, since the Holy Eucharist is a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ and since the celebrant of the Eucharist is, in that sacramental action, a kind of representation of Christ at the Last Supper, Christians beginning after 200 A.D. began to apply priestly terminology to bishops who were the primary celebrants of the Eucharist. Thus the bishop became known as the Christian priest, not in a pagan sense, but in the sense that he reflected the one, unrepeatable priesthood of Christ. Later, as bishops delegated to presbyters, at different localities in the diocese the celebration of the Eucharist along with other aspects of ministry, this concept of reflected priesthood was attached to the presbyters as well. In fact, so common was that attachment that our English word "priest" (a shortened version of the word "presbyter") has come to mean as much the reflected priesthood of Christ as it means "presbyter," the second order of ministry. However, in the early Church it was the bishop who was first called "priest" and frequently he was distinguished from others as the "Christian high priest."

The important thing for our discussion here, however, is that priesthood (in the sense of reflecting Christ's priesthood) inheres first in the bishop and only in a subsidiary sense in the second order of ministry. Thus the bishop is really the chief priest, the chief minister of the sacraments and the chief liturgist of the diocese.

The new Prayer Book does much to enhance this old idea of the bishop as high priest of the diocese by encouraging the bishop to do far more than simply administer Confirmation. When he visits a parish he is to preside at the Eucharist and when possible administer Holy Baptism. Likewise, rubics refer to the holy oil of Baptism (chrism), which is blessed by the bishop and in innumerable ways encourage greater episcopal participation in the whole liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

Since the bishop is the chief priest of the diocese, its chief liturgical officer, he is given responsibility for interpreting the Church's teaching regarding worship and authorized to set diocesan policy regarding worship within the limits established by the rubrics of the Prayer Book and the Constitution and Canons of the Church. He is called to give godly counsel to the rectors of parishes in his diocese in matters of worship. This role places a great challenge before bishops. Not only are they responsible for good administration, they are also to set standards, through their own ministry, of rich and meaningful liturgy. In short as high priests they need to be good examples of liturgists for that portion of the Church under their supervision.

In a less tangible way the high priestly responsibility of the bishop refers to the spiritual role he is to play. Not merely an organization manager he is to be a person of prayer, a spiritual leader who reflects Christ's mediating work in his own life as he administers the full range of the sacramental life of the Church.

Here if we pursued theological concepts alone without taking into account such practical realities

as a twenty four hour day or the more subtle but just as real conflicts between various episcopal roles, we could romantically project a whole host of tasks for a bishop to do personally. Weekly he could lead retreats, personally visit each of his priests and deacons, give them spiritual counsel and direction and daily inspire the whole diocese with sublime uplifting liturgies. Then, in the second week of his episcopate we could celebrate his funeral!

In actual fact, while the bishop is *the* high priest of the diocese, he often fulfills this, and many other roles, through others. In thus seeing to it that the tasks are done, he is fulfilling his responsibility through apostolic delegation. Which specific tasks he retains for his own direct performance will depend on his own interests, abilities and the changing needs and resources of the diocese. But in a very real sense, through all the sacramental life of his diocese, the ministry of the bishop is always involved in "celebrating the sacraments."

"Ordain Priests And Deacons"

The Bishop and His Clergy

The bishop's role in ordaining priests and deacons is fairly clear. He is responsible not only for the actual service of ordination but also for all that precedes it by way of education and appropriate guidance and assistance. Here again, much of this ministry is performed by the bishop through the apostolic principle of delegation.

Theologically what all this means is that the single ministry of Christ in the Church embodied most fully in bishops is passed on by them to priests and deacons. In their liturgical and sacramental ministries, parish priests are in a very important sense the deputies and representatives of the bishop as well as representatives of the people of God embodied in the whole Church and in the local congregation. The priest is not a puppet, of course. He is a presbyter with a ministry of his own and rightfully shares with the bishop in the governing of the Church both in parish and diocese. Thus while in one sense the priest is always the bishop's representative, in another sense he is an elder (presbyter) in the Church and works with, as well as under, the bishop.

Many thinkers have recently expressed concern about the ministry of the deacon. Often deacons are really only candidates in training for priestly ordination and, apart from a few liturgical distinctions, have not played the unique and vital role of the ancient and classic diaconate. In recent years the resoration of the permanent diaconate has attempted to address this discrepancy but much still needs to be done.

Clasically the deacon was the bishop's servant and had great responsibilities for church administration and welfare work as well as specific liturgical duties. In such a role, he often worked more intimately on a day by day basis with the bishop than the presbyter. Thus while more directly subordinate to the bishop than the presbyter, he sometimes exercised more power. How the Church should use deacons today is one of the challenges before us.

In any event theology presents us with an image of

laity, bishops, priests and deacons functioning closely together in the ministry of Christ in his Church. Thus clergy rightfully look to their bishops for pastoral supervision and pastoral care. The bishop is to see to it that his clergy receive ministry, either from himself directly or through others.

"Ordaining Other Bishops"

The Succession of Bishops

Ordaining other bishops is part of the work of a bishop. This ministry brings us to the complex subject of the succession of bishops (sometimes called the apostolic succession). As noted before, the ministry of Christ is shared by all Christians and certainly it is true that all members of the church are called to share in his apostolate. But within the context of that ministry inhering in the whole Church, the ministry of bishops has a special role and that ministry is passed on in the succession of bishops. In the Church's life and thought, this "apostolic succession" has meant at least three things.

First, in its most commonly known form, this succession means that a bishop is ordained by bishops who have been ordained by other bishops who have been ordained by other bishops . . . all the way back to New Testament times. Thus a kind of bond (though not a precisely rigid tactile chain) is established connecting bishops of all times and places and embodying in our presence the ongoing

ministry of Christ in his Church. The very few anomalies in this "chain" stretching over nearly two thousand years of Church history do not diminish its importance. The requirement that each bishop be consecrated by at least three bishops is a safeguard against breaks in the succession of doctrine. Through it the apostolic ministry of Christ in the Church is brought to us in a special way and by it we are, in a special way, bound to Christ and the Church of all times.

There is, however, a depth in this meaning that is sometimes overlooked. The succession of bishops is not primarily a linear chain but a true succession of lived faith and teaching based on the witness of the Apostles and handed on by those whom the Church has believed to be their successors. Indeed one could even argue that in churches where the "chain" has been broken but apostolic faith and teaching has been maintained, something of this apostolic succession, (this apostolicity) is still present. By contrast, a completely unbroken chain that did not also have succession in faith, teaching, and a continuity in Christian community would be something less than full "apostolic" succession.

The importance of this depth of meaning is made especially clear in the old saying, "the most important apostolic succession isn't that of the bishops, but the lives of the saints in generation after generation," people who take to heart the apostolic call and show it forth with brilliant clarity in their lives. Lived faith, apostolic teaching, the practice of love — these too are signs of apostolicity. We who belong to a church in which the historic episcopate has been preserved need always to remember that not all

apostolic "success" is limited to those in the "apostolic succession!"

If, in the first sense, succession refers to the passing on from bishop to bishop of the apostolic ministry, it means in the second (and at least as important) sense the continuing, single *college* or corporate unity of bishops. The episcopate is a corporate structure within the Church and the essence of a bishop's being as a bishop lies as much in his belonging to that college as it does in the linear succession described above. Christ's ministry was given to the apostles corporately as much as to them individually. The Church believes that this ministry has continued in that corporate unity from that time to the present. Thus one might say that apostolicity has a "vertical" direction stretching back to the time of Christ and the Apostles as well as a "horizontal" direction that encompasses all bishops.

Obviously there is a tension here. In a representative sense we may speak, as many have, of a bishop as an embodiment of apostolic ministry in one person. But in another sense he is bishop because his ordination has admitted him to the college of bishops. In this latter sense, the succession of bishops really means the ongoing single college of bishops continuing through time and across all lands and cultures.

Episcopal succession, as the continuing college of bishops, means that all bishops have some share in overseeing the life of the whole Church. The great Ecumenical Councils like that of Nicea were based on this truth. So are the American House of Bishops and the Lambeth Conference. Bishops rightly respect the boundaries of each jurisdiction but together they bear responsibility for the whole Church.

Apostolic succession through the college of bishops also means that a bishop is an apostle *of* the college of bishops *to* his diocese. Through his participation in that college (however manifest), he has access to a more comprehensive view of the whole Church; he is the central living witness in his diocese of the lived faith of the whole, and through him the Church at large can speak to the diocese. Sometimes this witness may involve very practical matters of methods and diocesan programs. At other times it involves theological concerns and forms of piety.

The third sense of episcopal succession has to do with the succession of the episcopal see — the local bishopric. The bishop not only succeeds those who ordain him and not only participates in the continuing college of bishops; he also succeeds his predecessors in his own *cathedra,* or official seat of ministry. (This is why nearly every diocese has a *cathedral* church which contains the bishop's chair and is the symbolic center of Christian teaching and ministry.) A quick glance at dioceses all over the world reveals an enormous variation from one to the other in the historic significance of the succession of the see. Some, like Rome, Corinth or Ephesus claim a foundation by one of the original Apostles (now that's a succession!). Others, like those in America, just can't compete in such a league.

Understandably, the succession of the see has meant most to those Christians whose bishoprics were founded by Apostles or other great figures and least to American Christians. But while our *cathedras* lack the romantic grandeur of a Rome, an Ephesus, or even a Canterbury or a York, there is important meaning for us in the succession of the

see. Different dioceses develop their own coloration of lived faith. Within the broad boundaries of orthodoxy (which are really much broader than many people realize) there are legitimate and beneficial variations in emphasis and in the understanding of the meaning of faith. Consequently each diocese tends to develop its own unique tradition. In former times, when different shades of churchmanship were more easily identified than today, part of a diocese's tradition was its prevailing churchmanship.

Today, a diocese's tradition may be more commonly expressed in renewal movements, mission emphases, social concerns, organizational innovations, or theological and ethical concerns. Just as there is a movement from the college of bishops to the diocese through the bishop, so it is also true that there is a movement from the diocese to the college of bishops through its bishop.

The succession of the see means that a bishop represents a continuity with his predecessors and comes to embody the tradition of lived faith prevailing in his diocese. As such an embodiment he becomes, in a sense, an apostle of it to the college of bishops and through that body to the Church at large.

Thus in at least three senses the bishop participates in apostolic succession. He succeeds to and represents the ministry given to the original Apostles vouchsafed to him through the succession of bishops. He becomes part of the ongoing college of bishops and represents the universal Church to his diocese. And he succeeds his predecessors in his own *cathedra* and represents the tradition of his diocese to the Church at large. All these meanings of the succession of the

bishops become visible when bishops gather for the purpose of "ordaining other bishops."

"Faithful Pastor"

The Bishop as Shepherd and Supervisor

In one sense a bishop fulfills his role as pastor in exercising each of the component parts of *episcope* or apostolic supervision. He is a pastor in proclaiming the Gospel, guarding the faith, unity and discipline of the Church, celebrating the sacraments, ordaining clergy, leading in the Church throughout the world, — and all the rest. All aspects are pastoral by nature. If one thinks of the varied roles played by a Biblical shepherd in overseeing the lives of his flock, this truth becomes clear. Not only did he cuddle the sick lamb, he also found good grazing land, moved the flock along, and yanked sheep back from danger.

Yet in another sense, the word pastor also connotes the warmth of personal touch. Our image of the Biblical shepherd includes not only his protection of the flock, his searching for good grazing land, his overseeing; it also includes his knowing his sheep intimately, his leaving the many to search for the lone, lost sheep, his carrying a lamb in his arms. Thus we look to a bishop not only to fulfill his pastoral role in supervision but also to show forth something of the Good Shepherd with all the personal warmth that image connotes.

For modern bishops, whose flocks include many congregations, many clergy, and tens of thousands of lay people, this pastoral dimension of *episcope*

poses special problems. Perhaps it was easier in the early days of the Church when the bishop was the pastor of a local church of about the size of our parishes. Now when things are quite different, the intimate, personal kind of pastoral care must be expressed in other ways. Several of them are as follows:

First, following the apostolic principle of delegation, the bishop's pastoral ministry is conducted through those whom he sends, or sees to it that the church sends — clergy and specially qualified lay people to whom certain ministries are delegated. Even though expressed through others, the bishop's ministry is active in such cases and the Church needs to be aware of that.

Secondly, the bishop has a special responsibility as pastor to his clergy. This doesn't mean that he will personally and directly meet all their pastoral needs — he couldn't. But it does mean that he should see to it that they are met, if not by himself, then by others. For example, the limits of time and (just as important) conflicts of roles may prevent a bishop from being both a father-confessor and a supervisor to some clergy. Yet if the bishop provides that persons are available as father-confessors, counselors and advisors, the pastoral task is being accomplished. At other times opportunities will arise for a bishop to play the pastoral role directly and personally. In any case the point is clear — the bishop has a special pastoral responsibility for his clergy. Just as Jesus focused his ministry on the twelve in order that they might minister to others; so a bishop who is a good pastor to his clergy enables them to be better pastors to others.

Thirdly, the bishop has a pastoral role with the

entire flock — laity as well as clergy. While much of this ministry will of necessity be done through others, bishops also have certain opportunities for pastoral ministry to the public that are usually unavailable to parish clergy. As chief pastors in the Church bishops have special access to the news media and are often prominant in major public events. One thinks of Richard Cardinal Cushing at the graveside of the slain John Kennedy or of Pope John Paul II "wooing" American young people at Yankee Stadium as macro examples of such pastoral ministry. Such examples are rare and depend on complex circumstances seldom duplicated. However, on a much more common scale, when a diocesan bishop goes on television, appears in a newspaper, speaks at a large religious or secular occasion, or makes a parish visitation, he is exercising a pastoral ministry of similar quality. There is a mystique in the office which, acting like a loudspeaker, enables the bishop to communicate something of the warmth of the Good Shepherd with a special force.

"The Church Throughout The World"

The Bishop and Ecumenism

"With your fellow bishops you will share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world." This part of the Presiding Bishop's charge to the Bishop-elect refers most directly to the Anglican

Communion around the world. However, it is not stretching things too far to let these words also point to the ecumenical Church beyond the Anglican Communion. Our claim, as Anglicans, is that our bishops are in the *apostolic,* not merely the Anglican succession and that fact inevitably points to the one holy catholic and apostolic Church in all times and places — in other words, to the ecumenical Christian community.

Obviously there are limits to the fulfillment of such a role imposed by the condition of a divided Church. However, just as obvious are the increasing variety of ways in which our bishops' ecumenical role is growing. In the light of all that has been said about the college of bishops and the nature of the apostolic commission itself, it becomes clear that the ecumenical theatre of ministry is not a peripheral one but is a natural development of what has been implicit in all the rest.

Frequently a bishop has opportunities for a close working relationship with Council of Churches executives, and with local Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox bishops. Additionally, a bishop may have opportunities for working together with his nearest counterparts in non-episcopal churches which frequently have some kind of "middle judicatory (or denominational) executive." These associations of bishops and executives can be enormously fruitful in coordinating certain aspects of Christian witness in the geographic area roughly corresponding to that of the diocese. Certainly at minimum, a sharing of fellowship and information can help bind Christians together and clarify, if not actually strengthen, the witness of churches regarding pertinent issues of public concern.

The bishop may also be called to engage in more formal ecumenical dialogue locally, nationally, or internationally. The Consultation on Church Union, the Anglican-Roman Catholic and the Anglican-Orthodox discussions are three well known examples. Growing in number are "Covenant Relationships" between Episcopal and Roman Catholic dioceses and between their respective parishes — relationships which help build bridges of understanding. Obviously, these opportunities are more available to some than to others. However, the indication is that the number of such ecumenical endeavors will grow throughout the foreseeable future.

Related to these ecumenical ministries, and often the product of them, is the fact that increasingly our bishops (and the bishops and executives of other churches) find that they have roles as religious leaders in the public community beyond the members of their own churches. Very often our cathedral and diocesan headquarters are located in state capitals or in key cities which have a special role in the region's social, political, and economic life. As a publically recognized religious leader, located in a key city, a bishop's constituency frequently includes members of other churches and even people with no strong church identification. To such people, the bishop often has a pastoral ministry which can't be conducted as effectively by other kinds of ministers. I have already noted previously that a bishop has a platform from which to address the public and that kind of ministry is part of a bishop's ecumenical role.

Thus a bishop's ministry is never only to his own "household of faith." Instead he has a ministry to the national Church, to the Anglican Communion, to his

counterparts in other local churches through various ecumenical activities, to other churches through national and international ecumenical bodies, and to the people in his diocese who are not Episcopalians. In short he has a responsibility to share in the leadership of the "Church throughout the world."

"Remember That You Are Dust, And To Dust You Shall Return"

The Humanity of the Bishop

The above words come not from the Ordination of a Bishop but from the liturgy of Ash Wednesday. Yet they seem particularly appropriate in theological reflections on the episcopate in the Church. "You are dust and to dust you shall return" is a reminder of our humanity and the limits and frailties thereof.

This subject is included less as a warning to bishops than as a reminder to the Church served by bishops. The diocese is more likely than the bishop to forget his humanity.

Long ago the danger in forgetting a bishop's humanity was that he would acquire too much worldly power and reduce the ministries of the priests, deacons, and laymen to that of puppets. Today, the danger in forgetting a bishop's humanity is that we may expect far more from him than any human being can produce. We live in an age which is very suspicious of central authority figures. Yet side by side with our wariness of the power of leaders (in Church, academia, business or civil affairs), there exists (often unconsciously) an illusion that they possess all the power necessary to correct every

conceivable evil — if only they would.

Most bishops have an IQ of less than 150, possess less than 300 pounds of energetic protoplasm, have less than a hundred years of experience, and live in days of only 24 hours. They do have egos, feelings, usually families, and hopes and dreams. They are subject to illness and fatigue, often are lonely and sometimes make serious mistakes. And they are sinners. In other words, they look amazingly like the persons most of us see when we brush our teeth. Such a person in the grace of God, by the power of the Spirit, is made a bishop!

Remembering the humanity of a bishop should remind a diocese of the ministry it has to its bishop. That a diocese has such a ministry in no way contradicts what has been said about the awesome apostolate of the bishop. Even Jesus, Himself, was the recipient of ministry as the Gospels attest.

A diocese ministers to a bishop and his family through its temporal support of him, including pay, continuing education, sabbaticals, etc. It also ministers to him, his spouse and his family in more personal ways. Prayer, sincere compliments and loyalty are part of this ministry. In their context, at times, frank yet respectful feedback is also part of such ministry.

Another way of ministering to the humanity of a bishop is for a diocese to work out with him some reasonably clear understanding of what is expected and needed from him and listening respectfully to what he needs from it. Just as a bishop should take heed to fulfill his calling in ministering to the diocese, so should a diocese take heed to fulfill its ministry to its bishop. He is only dust — as are we all.

Are Bishops Essential to the Church?

The Holy Scriptures and ancient Christian writers make it clear that from the apostles' time there have been different ministries within the Church. In particular, since the time of the New Testament, three distinct orders of ordained ministers have been characteristic of Christ's holy catholic Church. First there is the order of bishops who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising and uniting the Church . . .

From the Preface to the Ordination Rites
in the Book of Common Prayer

Are bishops essential to the Church, the body of Christ? Was the episcopate instituted by Christ as part of His plan for the Church? Are churches without bishops part of the true Church; are their ministers authorized representatives of Christ and are their sacraments valid?

These questions have plagued and divided Christians since the time of the Reformation. Until Vatican II Roman Catholics answered the first two questions with an unambiguous yes and the third with an unambiguous no. By contrast the Protestant world answered the first two questions with an unambiguous no and the third question with an unambiguous yes.

Anglicans (surprise!) have taken a third position: avoiding extreme claims and denials, our official teaching in the Prayer Book is summarized in the above Preface. The historic episcopate has existed from the New Testament times, has been part of the whole Church ever since (except in some post Reformation Churches), has demonstrated its value and will be maintained uninterrupted in our portion of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Contained within such understated teaching is such a firm conviction that the episcopate has provided the name for churches of the Anglican Communion in the United States and certain other countries.

Within the broad context of this official doctrine, Anglicans classically have held two divergent theories regarding the necessity of bishops in the true Church of Christ. More recently a third theory has been gaining popularity. For convenience, these theories are labeled here by their traditional names, *bene esse, esse* and *plene esse.*

According to the *bene esse* theory, bishops in the Apostolic Succession are *not essential* to the being of the true Church, and mainline churches without them are manifestations of the true Church with real ministers and real sacraments. The episcopate serves for the *well being,* the *bene esse,* of the Church and may be the best form of organization but it is not essential.

At the opposite pole is the *esse* theory. According to this view, the episcopate was instituted by Christ (directly or indirectly) and is essential to the Church in the same way that Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist are. Thus bishops in the apostlic succession

are of the *essence* or esse of the Church. Churches lacking this ministry may have members who are holy and who are participants in salvation but such denominations are not true manifestations of the Church, their ministers are not real ministers (in the Catholic sense) and their sacraments are not valid.

In the last several decades, however, a third theory has been gaining ground among Anglicans and more and more among Roman Catholics and Protestants. This newer theory is consistent with much contemporary New Testament and church history scholarship and promises to have profound ecumenical consequences.

Called *plene esse* (of the fullness of the being of the Church), this theory claims the episcopate is far more important than the *bene esse* theory allows. Yet it also affirms that non-episcopal churches may also manifest the true Church and have real sacraments and real ministers.

In over-simplified form the *plene esse* theory can be explained as follows: Jesus certainly did commission the Apostles as his special representatives. Contained within this commission was the principle of *episcope,* or supervision in some form. Thus the apostles functioned as bishops or overseers in the first generation Church. Then as the Apostles began to die, the Church had to face the question of how this *episcope* would be embodied for the future.

At the time the Church possessed a variety of ministerial offices to assist the Apostles and among them were presbyters and bishops. Which of all these various offices would be the most adequate embodiment of *episcope?* Apparently the answer was not universally obvious at the time.

The transition from Apostle to bishop is not described in the New Testament or elsewhere and scholars must rely on hints and mere scraps of information. But it appears to many, if not most, contemporary scholars, that while in some Churches Apostles did ordain (or directed others to ordain) *episcopoi* to continue the apostolic ministry, in other Churches there was a period of what in retrospect we might call experimentation, using other forms of ministry to exercise *episcope.* The Church in Corinth may well have followed this route. Some scholars even speculate that for a time around 100 A.D. the Church of Rome may have been administered by a senate of presbyter-bishops rather than by a single bishop. During this period our Lord the Spirit was at work urging and guiding the Church as it sought the most appropriate embodiment of *episcope.*

Gradually the office of bishop (as we know it,) emerged, in some Churches by the very early second century, and slowly commended itself to all. By 200 A.D. the bishop had become the chief minister of *episcope* universally. The concept of *episcope* embodied first in the Apostles had passed from them (sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through experiments with other forms of ministry) to its eventual embodiment in bishops.

If the analysis sketched here of the transfer of *episcope* is correct, then several basic assumptions of the *plene esse* theory gain credibility. (1) In the sense that Christ instituted the principle of *episcope* or supervision in the commissioning of the Apostles, it can be said that he instituted the episcopal ministry. (2) In the sense that the ultimate universal selection of bishops as the appropriate form of this overseeing

ministry came only after considerable struggle and experimentation, the episcopate can be said to be the creation of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church. (3) The dynamic evolution of the orders of ministry in the Church in the later first century and opening years of the second, can be seen as the unfolding of the Church and its ministry toward full manifestation of what was already implicitly there. (Such an unfolding, incidentally, parallels the Church's evolving understanding of the meaning of the incarnation and the formation of the New Testament.)

The fact that some early Churches in post-Apostolic days were for a time without bishops is an indication that the episcopate is not absolutely essential for a Christian community to be the Church. Thus the *plene esse* theory holds that while the ministry of non-episcopal churches is not "fully" developed, yet such a church may still have real sacraments and ministers who do represent Christ. Such a church may be considered part of the true Church in a way analogous to that of Corinth.

Indeed, if you look carefully at non-episcopal churches (advocates of the *plene esse* theory urge) you can often see the principle of *episcope* struggling toward an embodiment that looks something like a bishop. Such persons as stated clerks, synod presidents, conference executives and district superintendents may be seen as partial "incarnations" of *episcope*. Obviously there is a significant gap between a Presbyterian stated clerk and an Episcopal bishop, and we Anglicans, of course, would hope that the "bishop" as the fuller embodiment of the historic episcopate would commend itself to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps the gap is not as large as

we once thought and our recognition of that fact may help to close it. Indeed it may well be that future evolution of the office of bishop will benefit from the work of the Spirit through the witness of non-episcopal churches. We have much to learn from such churches even as they can learn from us.

As the first episcopal churches of the late first and early second century commended their embodiment of *episcope* to non-episcopal churches, so should we commend bishops today — not because other denominations must have them to be part of the Church, but because, we believe, they are a *fuller,* more adequate expression of that *episcope* already present in their midst.

Thus the *plene esse* theory sees the episcopate as far more than merely a good organizational device for the Church. It is the Spirit's choice vessel for expressing the *episcope* implicit in the Good Shepherd himself, and in his Apostles. The episcopate is a divine gift to the Church to be humbly used for the building up of the body of Christ and the blessing of the world. It is, we are confident, part of the fullness of that one great Church to which we believe, hope, and pray all churches are moving.

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Glossary of Technical Terms

1. Bishop Coadjutor: A bishop elected to assist the Diocesan Bishop and who will succeed the Diocesan Bishop on his retirement or death.

2. *Cathedra:* Official seat or chair of the bishop, symbol of his office. A cathedral is any church in which the *cathedra* is located.

3. Deacon: From the Greek *diakonos* meaning servant or waiter at table. The third order of ordained ministers.

4. *Episcope:* Principle or function of overseeing or superintending ministry, the essence of the bishop's function; from the Greek, *episcopos,* an overseer.

5. Ordinary: As a noun, means the bishop in charge of a diocese, the diocesan.

6. *Presbyter:* Greek for *elder.* In New Testament days, a senate or board of presbyters functioned as senior officers in the Church much as similar elders had functioned in the synagogue. In post New Testament days the presbyters continued this function assisting the bishop in his pastoral oversight of the Church. Gradually as the Church grew, individual presbyters functioned more and more as representatives of the bishop in liturgical and pastoral duties. Gradually presbyters became ministers in charge of parishes.

7. Priest: Literally a shortened word for presbyter. However, when presbyters began acting as ministers in charge of local congregations in the third century, the bishop's sacerdotal functions and aura were ascribed to the presbyters. Consequently "priest" denotes both the meaning of "elder" and that of "sacerdos."

8. *Sacerdos:* Latin word meaning the one who offers sacrifice and mediates between God and man. Closest English word is priest. Greek equivalent word is *hiereus.*
   In the New Testament the word *hiereus* is applied to the Church as a whole, "You are a holy priesthood . . ." After New Testament times it was applied to the bishop who personified the Church and as apostle represented Christ in and to the Church.

9. See: The jurisdiction of a bishop, a diocese.

10. Suffragan bishop: A bishop elected to assist the Diocesan without right of succession.