Leadership and Oversight
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Leadership and Oversight

NEW MODELS FOR EPISCOPAL MINISTRY

Malcolm Grundy
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would not have been possible to produce this book without the immense contribution made by those I discuss these issues with in the many seminars and meetings that continue to fill my life. Without the opinions and experience of clergy, paid and unpaid, and lay people of all kinds my ideas would not have been stimulated and then sharpened. I hope that many friends and colleagues will see their concerns expressed and explored here. In my life as a consultant and mentor it has been the greatest privilege to be able to share in the experiences of many senior leaders. I am grateful to have the knowledge given by so many confidences. The frustrations about life in the church shared with me by senior leaders have energized and confirmed my determination to develop the perhaps rather too strident ideas and opinions contained in some parts of this book.

In particular members of staff at York St John University, in the city where I live, have been of the greatest help and encouragement. Professor Sebastian Kim has encouraged and ordered my thoughts on numerous occasions. The Rev Dr Andrew Village has been
rigorous in getting me to clarify the questions I need to ask. The Rev Dr Gary Wilton, while at York and subsequently as the Church of England’s representative to the European Union first felt that I should reflect in this way using the experiences of my own ministry as a springboard.

It is a great privilege to have a preface contributed by The Rt Rev John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford. I am also indebted to Bishop Lars-Göran Lönnemark, former Bishop of Skara, for research information about life and work in the Church of Sweden. By appointing me as their first Director, the Trustees of the Foundation for Church Leadership enabled me to enter into the concerns of senior church leaders in a very privileged way. I will always be grateful to them.

It has been a great joy to have had the encouragement of the editorial team at Continuum from the time when this book began as an idea in my mind to its professionally guided publication. There will be inaccuracies and probable distortions in some parts of this book and for all of these I take sole responsibility.

Malcolm Grundy
Michaelmas 2010
The deep public divisions in episcopal churches are there for all to see. In this book the reasons for those divisions are analyzed in some detail. Ways to resolve this all-consuming situation are essential for the members, clergy and leaders of those churches. This book begins with a description of the many places where episcopal churches have become dysfunctional. It then sets out to bring into the centre of ‘the memory’ of these churches that they are episcopal which means that their reason for existence is to give and receive oversight in a mutually beneficial way.

In order that such oversight can be owned by all those concerned, the history of the development of episcopally led churches is traced as are the appointment methods in some of the principal western episcopal churches. Ecumenical agreements regarding the centrality of episcopacy in the leadership and oversight of many denominations strengthen the argument for rediscovering the memory of this, the earliest form of church organization.
Understandings and expectations of leadership and networked oversight from within and outside the churches is charted and analyzed. Significant, clear and accessible models for the future governance of episcopal churches emerge from these detailed descriptions. The method adopted in each chapter is one of studied theological, historical and political mapping which lead to strident conclusions followed by practical descriptions of ways forward.

This is a book which dwells on one subject solely in order to offer a new understanding of what it is which can give an underlying unity to episcopally led churches. Those in these churches who can assent to a renewed and developed understanding of leadership and oversight can address their differences from a common understanding and starting-point. Others who represent division and difference will be challenged about their motivation and their understanding of the nature of the church within which they have accepted the call to be a leader.

Church leaders and congregations with their clergy are invited to share in a journey. It is one which will bring a renewed commitment to a church which through the centuries has been loyal to its heritage and story. Again and again it has been able to renew itself in the service of the Gospel. The challenges facing today’s church and its leaders require that those who too easily have learned to be adversaries discover a new way to walk together. This book offers that new way.
FOREWORD

The Rt Rev John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford

It’s obvious that there are few parts of our national life or social experience which are not in flux at present. The only constant is change. In the 1960’s (is that really fifty years ago?) Alvin Toffler was warning us in Future Shock that we were bumping into the future faster than we could assimilate it. What was true then is even more true today.

Unsurprisingly religious life is caught up in this ferment, not least the episcopal churches of the West, and in this book Malcolm Grundy addresses the leadership dilemmas of such churches. He puts a major challenge to those churches to recapture what he calls the ‘jewel’ of episkope before it is finally eroded by what he sees as the present vacuum in oversight and leadership, a vacuum which infects all parts of the Church’s life.
I’m reminded of the observation supposedly made by Patrick Rodger, a predecessor of mine as Bishop of Oxford, who, standing in the lavatory at our Diocesan Church House, said to his neighbour, ‘You know, this is about the only time in my life when I feel I really know what I’m doing, and have a pretty good chance of finishing the job.’ Many bishops, in the middle of the night or in the midst of a debate in General Synod (are those the same thing?), might identify with Bishop Rodger’s observation.

Malcolm Grundy argues that a rediscovery of episcope and a deeper understanding of what it means to belong to an episcopal family could release the church from its current mistrust and factionalism to find mutually owned solutions and new energy in following God into mission. He works carefully through different perspectives on leadership and oversight as seen from the pew, the market place and the churches, and arrives at a description of the DNA of a more fully episcopal church. I agree with so much of what he says. He puts a significant challenge to the prevailing and somewhat despairing ‘but what can we do?’ attitude demonstrated by so many in today’s complex church life.

There seem to me to be a number of key elements in an effective, collaborative episcope.

1 There is no leadership in the Church without spiritual leadership. Unless the Church’s leaders are passionate about the blazing reality of God, why should anyone else be interested? If God is our magnificent obsession, society will at least know what platform we speak from, and if our lives reflect that central commitment then people have the chance to be inquisitive, or even to be attracted to the revealed mystery of God. Without that, we may just be playing religious games. In Christian leadership, God matters most.

2 Oversight requires vision. The task of episcopal leadership is to gather, shape and articulate a vision which most will own because they recognize it as containing their voice. This process necessitates listening which is both broad and deep – listening both to
the people of God and to the Christian tradition, in the context of listening to our particular cultural setting. The resulting vision will then be both focused and exciting.

3 Within that clear vision, episcopal leadership needs to respect diversity and adopt a permissive style of implementation. One way of imagining how that might work is to think of the vision offering a palette of colours which parishes can use as they like to paint the particular works of art which are appropriate to the context, gifts, enthusiasms and stage of development of those churches. We don’t need painting by numbers but a gallery of unique works of art.

4 A ministry of oversight requires attention to relationship even more than to organization. The latter is important; the former is essential. It comes out of a concern for the well-being of clergy and lay leaders, and a genuine desire that they should flourish. We cannot be happy when a letter in a church newspaper refers to someone retiring early on health grounds as ‘lucky so-and-so’. Relationships of trust and affection can move mountains.

5 Leadership and oversight presume a shared understanding of the gift which *episcopacy* offers to the Church and its mission. We have to work for a situation where clergy and laity find their Christian identity within a lively episcopal ecclesiology rather than within external associations, no matter how additionally helpful they may be. In a Church where many seem determined to emphasise distinctive differences, this foundational task promises to be a long haul.

If I was to sum up these characteristics of episcopal leadership and oversight I would say that what matters most is not competence but character. What we need isn’t so much good strategies as good people, and such people glow in the dark. There is no getting away from the fundamental truth that the lives of leaders are their best and worst adverts. That’s why Jesus constantly probed the issue of people’s inner character rather than their outward observance.
Malcolm Grundy’s book is a timely stimulus to a vital area of work – the rediscovery of a theology and practice of *episcope* which bishops, clergy and laity will gladly embrace as offering coherence and missional energy to the Church. We need to build a Church where trust and accountability are given and received openly and hopefully. And it starts with the bishops themselves.

Writing in the 1830s another Bishop of Oxford, Francis Paget, wrote: ‘I took this diocese solely because of its smallness, quietness and the little anxiety it need give one.’ I don’t recognize Oxford or any other diocese in that description today, but I’m sure that Malcolm Grundy’s careful thought and acute challenges could help me make a better fist of exercising oversight in a diverse, modern diocese.

There’s everything to play for.
+John Oxon
The book which I have been able to produce has come about through the convergence of two streams of thought and experience. The first is my involvement in supporting clergy and lay people in their ministries for more than 30 years. The second is that of promoting over the same timespan ideas about how to enable change using collaborative methods of ministry with clergy, in congregations and in community projects. Both have led me to explore in some detail the problems and opportunities of being committed to a life of faith and membership in a church with a long history and well-established methods of authority and governance. These experiences of my working life merge when, with many others, I have tried to devise solutions to the questions that arise from leading churches and holding together their divided groups. Many of the old answers and solutions with their diverse justifications simply do not work any more. When they do not then they reveal gaps in our thinking.

The whole subject of the nature of oversight in episcopal churches appears to deepen rather than move towards comprehensive
resolution. The debates in the Anglican Communion and elsewhere about whether or not women could be bishops, or indeed leaders at all, and about the appointment of bishops who are in stable same-sex relationships have provoked important debates about the gender of our bishops and their lifestyle. Discussion on these matters is heated and likely to continue. These controversies have obscured a more important exploration for the future of all episcopal churches. It is an exploration which needs to take place before these topical issues can ever be capable of resolution. This concerns what it is that holds together churches with episcopacy as a defining concept. More important than debating the gender and lifestyle of a bishop is the question of what bishops are for in a church whose members have come to expect participative governance and corporate leadership. This primary or fundamental exploration that I want to undertake is about how episcopal churches can explore their differences by discovering that they have an indissoluble unity through being a part of an episcopal family. That unity has to be expressed in new ways. It has to be a unity which learns how to offer the many facets and models of oversight required to lead and unify a fragmented church. Men and women, people of all races and from many cultural backgrounds have everything to offer in this reshaping of the development and oversight of our churches. How we learn to do this reshaping together will in itself be a great piece of learning about the application of leadership and oversight.

Questions can lead to the exploration of deeper and seemingly more intractable problems or they can present a range of avenues for opportunity and exploration. It seems right in introducing this book to say that I have felt the need to begin with airing some wide-ranging problems or issues in church life and only then to go on to explore the opportunities which addressing them can present. Most of the questions and issues I will explore have come to me from the many consultations and pieces of work supervision I have done. Others have come through my own experience as a church leader and as a member of local and national synods.
I will focus on one opportunity for renewal that I think is the most undervalued – that of how we can understand and use the word which gives our family of churches their name – *episkope*. The word means ‘oversight’ and is the first concept used by the congregations in the early church to describe the work of their leaders. From then until now it has been used for the way in which leaders in churches care for and develop their people. Its specific use in episcopal churches embraces a particular and invigorating interplay between leadership and oversight. I have become convinced that its rediscovery and consequent development could provide if not a ‘catch-all’ solution then at least a coherent way in which we can address our problems and explore our opportunities together.

Part of my own experience as a leader and as a consultant or mentor is that when the two streams of sensitive oversight and collaborative working methods do not come together, unfortunate patterns of behaviour result. This is understandable and able to be explained but not justified. The gaining of extra responsibility and the achievement of high office can change a person’s behaviour. Many senior leaders begin to wonder who they are and ask how much the job is changing them. In a parallel way, their friends and former associates sometimes express bewilderment at a distinct change of approach and a more distanced or independent stance by a former colleague. A particularly difficult consequence for senior leaders who are unsure of their role is that internal staff relationships are affected and team thinking and joint activity become impaired. This changed behaviour may not all be ‘true colours being revealed at last’ but the result of a combination of an unreflective copying of a leadership model from another walk of life combined with the lack of a full enough understanding of the nature and procedures of the kind of leadership and oversight which is expected.

It is not without some trepidation that have I tiptoed into the province of church governance. In a search for literature to describe how churches with a hierarchy of bishops and archbishops are constructed, I became surprised by how little has been written in
recent times. There are, of course, very many biographies and autobiographies about the lives of bishops. These describe their upbringing, their training and their networks of friends and colleagues. All talk about the work which bishops have done and many quote extensively from their writings. It has been interesting, and for my study illuminating, to see that there is very little reflection by the authors of these books or by the bishops themselves about what it actually means to become a bishop – or a church leader as archdeacon or cathedral dean – in an episcopal church.

In a similar way I looked for theological and ecclesiological contributions to our understanding of how episcopal churches work and the particular role of bishops and other senior leaders. There were many pieces on the practicalities of what church leaders are expected to do. There are controversies throughout history about the place of bishops in the wider societies of many countries and some of them are well documented. These were more about their interventions in the politics of their day or their work for justice and on behalf of the underprivileged than about the nature of the office and work itself. The thinking about church structures and senior responsibilities can be found as guidance notes in letters between bishops and archbishops in the early church, and latterly in discussions between denominations as they considered relationships with one another. Theology and ‘job descriptions’ are contained in the words used in the ordinals when priests are ordained and when bishops are consecrated. These give a liturgical and a theological foundation but leave all to be worked out in practice.

The discovery of this absence of writing about the role and work of a senior church leader led me to look at many of the recently published reviews of appointment systems and support mechanisms for those who are called to these offices of responsibility. As might be expected, there is much history in them and significant quarrying of the writings about bishops and theologians from the early church to the present day. While appointment systems have been put under the microscope, no-one has gone behind these to explore what the
work of a senior church leader needs to look like in the modern world.

The serious ‘corporate’ consequence following from a lack of understanding about what is needed from those who are our leaders is that a whole raft of different ideas, expectations and projections come to the surface. The result is that there is far more disagreement than focus about what bishops and other senior staff are for, and how best they support and enable the mission and ministry of the churches. When there is no mutually understood view about the nature of a leadership, then fragmentation begins to appear and power groups from inside and outside the structures of a church can become inappropriately dominant.

In the chapters of this book I have set out my thinking by first describing some of the vacuums in leadership and oversight in our churches as I have experienced them in the various aspects of my work. I go on to ask why episkope could be a particularly important part of any solution. After that I look at the origins of episcopal ministry and at the history and theology which explain its development. Following on from those initial pieces of deep digging I have tried to describe how episcopally structured churches can be viewed ‘from the pew’ and then to see how ministries of oversight can be exercised ‘in the market place’. Most exhilarating has been the discovery that a renewed understanding of episkope can be evidenced and justified through a surprisingly coherent series of ecumenical agreements over the past 50 years. Essential has been an examination of the temptations which come with power, and a brief look at the spiritualities which can combat them. I conclude with my own perhaps all too strident view of what steps episcopal churches need to take for the future.

My trepidation in undertaking this writing is about venturing into territory which so few have reflected on before. I may well be guilty of the accusation that ‘fools rush in where angels fear to tread’ and on occasions of making unverified assumptions. Nevertheless, even if much of what I say is more challenging than informative, I hope