

# THE OFFICE OF BISHOP: AN ANGLICAN UNDERSTANDING

- I. Introduction
  - A. Historical development and importance in the Great Tradition
  - B. Spiritual role of the bishop
- II. Historical development and importance
  - A. Historical development
    - 1. New Testament
      - a. Three key terms
        - 1) Overseer (Greek: *episkopos* □ English: *bishop*)
        - 2) Elder (Greek: *presbyteros* □ English: *presbyter/priest*)
        - 3) Servant (Greek; *diakonos* □ English: *deacon*)
      - b. Terms *overseer* and *elder* used more or less interchangeably in New Testament, possibility of multiple *overseers* in a single Church.
        - 1) Paul's farewell to the leadership at Ephesus
          - a) *Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them... Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God (Acts 20:17-28)*
    - 2. Early church – Ignatius of Antioch (died 107 AD)
      - a. Letters to various churches reveal clear unity of practice:
        - 1) Trifold ordained ministry:
          - a) A single bishop for each Church
          - b) College of presbyters/priests
          - c) Deacons

*It is necessary, therefore,--and such is your practice,--that you do nothing without the bishop, and that you be subject also the presbytery, as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom we shall be found, if we live in Him. It is necessary also that the deacons, the dispensers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, be in every way pleasing to all men. For they are not the deacons of food and drink, but servants of the church of God. They must, therefore, guard against blame as against fire. (Trallians 2.1)*

*In like manner let everyone respect the deacons as they would respect Jesus Christ, and just as they respect the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and college of Apostles. Without these, it cannot be called a Church. (Trallians 3.1)*

*He that is within the sanctuary is pure; but he that is outside the sanctuary is not pure. In other words, anyone who acts without the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons does not have a clean conscience. (Trallians 7.2)*

*You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. (Smyrnaeans 8.1)*

- B. Importance (Irenaeus of Lyons, died 202 AD)
  - 1. Witness to the unity of the Church and of the true apostolic character of the faith it proclaims
    - a. Across time
    - b. Across space

### III. Spiritual role of the bishop in the Anglican Tradition

- A. How do we know what to look for in a bishop? As Anglicans
  - 1. We read scripture together (*sola scriptura*)
  - 2. We pray that common understanding (*lex orandi*)
    - a. Our special charism as Anglicans (Book of Common Prayer)
      - 1) Deeply rooted in the life and experience of the Western Church
- B. What does our history of praying together that tell us about the office of bishop?
  - 1. The bishop is “priest of his priests”
    - a. Should be a model of the three gifts of priestly ministry (to the Church)
    - b. Three “gifts” (*tria munera*) of priestly ministry
      - 1) Teach (*docere*)
        - a) “Minister doctrine...” (BCP)
      - 2) Sanctify (*sanctificare*)
        - a) “Minister the sacraments...” (BCP)
      - 3) Exercise authority/guide/direct (*regere*)
        - a) “Guide...” (BCP)

*Give grace to all Bishops, the Pastors of your Church, that they may diligently preach your Word, duly administer your Sacraments, and provide godly Discipline. (BCP)*

- 2. Roots of three gifts
  - a. Great Commission
    - 1) *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)*
  - b. Share in Christ’s own anointing as prophet, priest, and king
    - 1) Prophet = teach
    - 2) Priest = sanctify
    - 3) King = exercise authority

#### C. Teach

- 1. Two aspects:
  - a. To *promulgate* = preach (Latin = set forth for the people = publish)
    - 1) *...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2)*
  - b. To *profess* (Latin = set forth) = define (cf. *doctor* – teacher vs. *magister* - instructor)
    - 1) *...contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)*

*Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away from the Body of Christ all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God’s Word...? (BCP)*

- 2. Special emphasis for bishop
    - a. Defining and defending the faith
      - 1) Within the Church
      - 2) To those outside (by life witness/example)
- D. Sanctify
- 1. Two aspects:
    - a. Word of God – infused by the power of the Holy Spirit
    - b. Sacraments
      - 1) *...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish* (Ephesians 5:27).
  - 2. Special emphasis for bishop
    - a. Integrity of ordained ministry
      - 1) *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands* (1 Timothy 5:22)
    - b. Release of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the fostering of those gifts
      - 1) Confirmation
- E. Exercise authority/guide/direct:
- 1. Two aspects
    - a. Encourage
    - b. Correct/rebuke
      - 1) *Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Timothy 4:2)

*Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, ...to admonish and exhort, both publicly and privately, the weak and the strong within your charge, as need may require, and occasion be given?*  
(BCP)

- 2. Special emphasis for bishop
    - a. Encouragement and correction of his own household of presbyters and deacons
    - b. Encouragement = fostering hope by setting forth a clear vision
      - 1) Bishop = “over seer”
- F. Conclusion
- 1. Bishop is a living sacrament of unity
    - a. Christ is the sacrament of the Father
    - b. The Church is the sacrament of Christ
    - c. The bishop is the sacrament of the Church
  - 2. The bishop is a shepherd (crozier) who models that one great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:20), who cares profoundly both for
    - a. The sheep of his fold (edification) and
    - b. The “other sheep, that are not of this fold” (evangelism)
      - 1) *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.* (John 10:16)

3. What does that require? – to be willing to love the sheep as Jesus loves them – surrendering himself to be led to where he “does not want to go” = way of the cross (ring)
- a. <sup>15</sup> *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”* <sup>16</sup> *He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”* <sup>17</sup> *He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”* <sup>18</sup> *Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”* <sup>19</sup> *(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”* (John 21)

## Letter from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (c. 105)

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Polycarp, who is bishop of the church of the Smyrneans, or rather who has God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as his bishop, heartiest greetings.

1. I was struck by the godliness of your mind — anchored, it seems, on immovable rock — and I rejoice that it was granted me to see your blameless face (may God give me joy of it). I exhort you to press forward on your journey in the grace with which you have been clothed; and you should exhort all men to gain salvation. Perform your office with all diligence of body and spirit. Strive for unity, for there is nothing better. Help all men, as the Lord also helps you; suffer all men in love (indeed, you are doing this). Pray unceasingly. Beg for wisdom greater than you already have, be watchful and keep the spirit from slumbering. Speak to each person individually, just like God himself, and like a perfect champion bear the infirmities of all. The greater the toil, the greater the gain.

2. It is no credit to you if you simply love the good among your disciples; seek also to tame the more troublesome by your gentleness. Remember that not all wounds are healed in the same way — where the pain is acute, apply soothing poultices. Be as shrewd as a snake in all circumstances, yet always innocent as a dove.<sup>1</sup> This is why you are both body and spirit — so that you can deal tenderly with the things which appear visibly and pray that the invisible things may be revealed to you. Thus you will lack nothing and abound in every gift. These critical times have need of you, as a ship needs a helmsman and the storm-tossed sailor needs a harbour. Be strict with yourself, like a good athlete of God. The prize is immortality and eternal life, as you know. I offer myself up as a sacrifice on your behalf — myself and these chains which you yourself have kissed.<sup>2</sup>

3. Do not be caught off balance by those who plausibly teach perverse doctrines. Stand firm as an anvil under the blows. The task of great athletes is to suffer punishment and yet conquer. But especially must we endure all things for the sake of God, that he also may endure us. Increase your efforts and watch for opportunities. Look out for the one who is above time and has no need for opportunities: the Invisible who became visible for us, the Intangible who is above suffering and yet suffered for us, for our sake endured in every way.<sup>3</sup>

4. Make sure that the widows are not neglected. Make yourself their protector, deferring only to the Lord. Let nothing be done without your approval, and continue to do nothing yourself without God. Be steadfast. Hold services more frequently and call everyone to them by name. Do not be haughty to slaves, either men or women but do not let them be proud; instead, let them serve all the more faithfully to the glory of God, that they may obtain from God a better freedom. Let them not enslave themselves to their own longings and demand to be set free at the church's expense.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:16

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius was writing as a chained prisoner being escorted by armed guards to Rome, where he was to be martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ. Polycarp had visited Ignatius when he and those with him were passing through the western part of Asia Minor on their way to Rome.

<sup>3</sup> The rhythmical nature of this passage has led some commentators to see it as an excerpt from an early Christian hymn.

<sup>4</sup> According to the *Apostolic Constitutions* (4<sup>th</sup> century) one of the purposes for which church funds might be used was to purchase the emancipation of Christian slaves.

5. Flee from wicked practices; better yet, preach sermons about them. Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands physically and spiritually. In the same way command my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives, as the Lord loves the church. If anyone is able to remain chaste to the honor of the flesh of the Lord, let him so remain without boasting. It is proper for men and women who marry to be united with the consent of the bishop<sup>5</sup>, that the marriage may be in accordance with the Lord and not due to lustful passions. Let all things be done for the honor of God.

6. Pay attention to the bishop<sup>6</sup>, in order that God may pay attention to you. I am a ransom on behalf of those who are obedient to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons; may it be granted to me to have a place among them in the presence of God. Train together with one another: struggle together, run together, suffer together, rest together, get up together, as God's managers, assistants and servants. Please him whom you serve as soldiers, from whom you receive your wages. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism serve as a shield, faith as a helmet, love as a spear, endurance as armor.<sup>7</sup> Let your deeds be your deposits, in order that you may eventually receive the savings that are due you.<sup>8</sup> Be therefore, patient and gentle with one another, as God is with you. May I always have joy in you.

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<sup>5</sup> (note from Mason and Robinson) This is the first reference in Christian literature to the involvement of church officials in Christian marriages.

<sup>6</sup> Ignatius addresses these final words to the church gathered around Polycarp in Smyrna.

<sup>7</sup> (note from Mason and Robinson) *Shield...helmet...spear...armor* identify the equipment of a foot soldier. See Ephesians 6:13-17 for a similar use of military vocabulary.

<sup>8</sup> Donatives, prize money and other items amounting to half of a soldier's regular pay were deposited in his name in the regimental savings bank, and handed to him at the conclusion of his service.

Irenaeus of Lyons -- Unity of the Church Through Her Bishops (*Against Heresies*, c. 185)

**I.10.1** The Church, dispersed throughout the world to the ends of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty...

**I.10.2** The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, as we have just said, though dispersed in the whole world, diligently guards them as living in one house, believes them as having one soul and one heart (Acts 4:32), and consistently preaches, teaches and hands them down as having one mouth. For, if the languages in the world are dissimilar, the power of the apostolic tradition is one and the same. The churches founded in Germany believe and hand down no differently – nor do those among the Iberians, among the Celts, in the Orient, in Egypt or in Libya, or those established in the middle of the world....

**III.1.1** The Lord gave his apostles the power of the Gospel, and by them we have known the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God. To them the Lord said, "He who hears you hears me, and he who despises you despises me and him who sent me" (Luke 10:16) For we have known the "economy" of our salvation only through those through whom the Gospel came to us; and what they then first preached they later, by God's will, transmitted to us in the scriptures so that would be the foundation and pillar of our faith (1 Tim. 3:15)... For after our Lord arose from the dead and they were clad with power from on high (Luke 24:40) by the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), they were filled concerning everything and had perfect knowledge. They went forth to the ends of the earth, proclaiming the news of the good gifts to us from God and announcing heavenly peace to men (Luke 2:13-14). Collectively and individually they had the Gospel of God.

**III.3.1** Thus the tradition of the apostles, manifest in the whole world, is present in every church to be perceived by all who wish to see the truth. We can enumerate those who were appointed by the apostles as bishops in the churches as their successors even to our time....

**III.3.2** But since it would be too long, in a work like this, to list the successions in all the churches, we shall take only one of them, the church that is greatest, most ancient and known to all, founded and set up by the two most glorious apostles Peter and Paul at Rome, while showing that the tradition and the faith it proclaims to men comes down through the successions of bishops even to us....

**III.3.3** After founding and building up the church, the blessed apostles delivered the ministry of the episcopate to Linus; Paul mentions this Linus in the letters to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:21). Anacletus succeeded him, and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement received the lot of the episcopate; he had seen the apostles and met with them and still had the apostolic preaching in his ears and the tradition before his eyes. He was not alone, for many were then still alive who had been taught by the apostles....

Evaristus succeeded this Clement; Alexander, Evaristus; then Xystus was appointed, sixth from the apostles; from him, Telesphorus, who achieved martyrdom most gloriously; then Hyginus; then Pius, whose successor was Anicetus. After Soter succeeded Anicetus, now in the twelfth place from the apostles, Eleutherus holds the episcopate. With the same sequence and doctrine, the tradition from the apostles in the Church and the preaching of truth has come down to us. This is a complete proof that the life-giving faith is one and the same, preserved and transmitted in truth in the Church from the apostles up till now.

**III.3.4** And there is Polycarp, who not only was taught by the apostles and conversed with many who had seen the Lord, but also was established by apostles in Asia at the church in Smyrna. We ourselves saw him in our early youth, for he lived long and was in extreme old age when he left this life in a most glorious and most noble martyrdom. He always taught the doctrine he had learned from the apostles, which he delivered to the church, and it alone is true. All the churches of Asia bear witness to this as well as the successors of Polycarp to this day, and he was a witness to the truth of much greater authority and more reliable than Valentinus and Marcion and the others with false opinions. For when he stayed in Rome under Anicetus, he turned many away from the heretics we have mentioned and brought them back to the church of God by proclaiming that from the apostles he had received this one and only truth transmitted by the Church.

**IV.26.2** This is why one must hear the presbyters who are in the church, whose who have the succession from the apostles, as we have shown, and with the succession in the episcopate have received the sure spiritual gift of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father....

**IV.33.8** This is true Gnosis: the teaching of the apostles, and the ancient institution of the Church, spread throughout the entire world, and the distinctive mark of the body of Christ in accordance with the succession of bishops, to whom the apostles entrusted each local church, and the unfeigned preservation, coming down to us, of the scriptures, with a complete collection, allowing for neither addition nor subtraction; a reading without falsification and, in conformity with the scriptures, an interpretation that is legitimate, careful, without danger or blasphemy. Above all there is the special gift of love, more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, pre-eminent among all the gifts of grace.