

## Becoming a Bishop: A Theological Handbook of Episcopal Ministry

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Paul Avis wrote *Becoming a Bishop* under a commission from the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. By the time of publication, Kenneth Kearnon had become Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe and admits benefiting from its wisdom and insight. It is intended as a vade mecum for new bishops or bishops-elect but would be a good refresher for jaded bishops or even those in retirement. Avis consulted a number of bishops in different parts of the Anglican Communion, giving his book much wider reference than England. In his Preface he refers to the quotation by another bishop of Gregory the Great's *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*; I would have wished for more on this as I and a number of bishops I am aware of read Gregory's *Pastoral Care* before their episcopal ordination and continue to do so. Alfred the Great translated it and sent it to each of his bishops.

Avis begins with the process of appointment, radically different in different parts of the Communion and ecumenically. We are offered an excellent quotation from Gladstone as to the qualities he looked for in the episcopate, including an 'equitable spirit' and the 'faculty of working with his brother bishops'. Hooker is quoted and readers of this *Journal* will be pleased to know there is relevant quotation from *The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion* written by the Anglican Communion Legal Advisers Network, the convenor of which is our vice-chairman.<sup>5</sup> Avis also gives us a sensitive and concise history of episcopacy, concluding with the words on Bishop Lancelot Andrewes' episcopal seal: 'Our sufficiency is of God' (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Avis continues with an exploration of the bishop as chief pastor and minister of word and sacrament. A bishop is essentially a pastor rather than a chief executive officer. He rightly comments that bishops struggle hard not to get sucked into such a role, some perhaps not hard enough when our synodical culture extols management models. He balances well the bishop's personal theological views – or doubts – with the task of being the guardian of the Churches' doctrine. He stresses apologetics and the bishop as a focus and sign of unity, quoting both the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission and the *Common Worship* ordinal. After a good section on the bishops' essential and exclusive role in ordination, Avis helpfully begins to expound a theology of

5 On which see the favourable comment of the ELS Working Party, C Hill, 'Ecclesiological and canonical observations on *The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion*', (2012) 14 *Ecc LJ* 400–407.

episcopacy in terms of teaching, sanctifying and governing. This exposition is an important part of his argument and, though briefly, he shows these interrelated themes to be patristic (Irenaeus, Ignatius and Cyprian), expounded by both Calvin and Newman. From the latter the three gifts came into the Canon of Vatican II and are thus irreproachably ecumenical.

There is a subtle exploration of the bishop's authority and significant quotes from Rowan Williams. Conflict and unity are sensibly explored, including some quite practical advice about conflict management. It would have been useful here or later for there to have been some discussion about the bishop's role in discipline cases and the necessity of avoiding being conflicted by failure to delegate his or her pastoral role when a disciplinary question arises on the horizon: 'bishop's mitre or judge's wig'.<sup>6</sup> Avis, a distinguished Anglican ecclesiologist, then explores three constitutional principles: conciliarity, representation and consent. These have much wider application than simply to the episcopate. How many members of Anglican synods have any clear *theology* of the synod?

Avis returns to tilt at management in exploring the leadership of the bishop. He reminds us that in the New Testament (and still in southern Europe and the Middle East) shepherds *lead* their flocks rather than drive them with dogs and there is a useful theological analysis of the word 'leader' in the New Testament and the Church Fathers. We are (rightly) given a whole chapter on collaborative ministry. In my episcopal experience most clergy, in interview for appointment, repeat the mantra of collaboration but not a few evince little evidence of either understanding it or practising it. Appropriately, Avis then explores episcopal collegiality – Gladstone's desiderata are apposite. There is a good section on the bishop's staff meeting. If a staff meeting flourishes, 'the diocese' will be effective; if dysfunctional, it will suffer. I note that some bishop's staff meetings usually or from time to time include senior diocesan staff, while others only the diocesan hierarchy. I suspect the former to be the more effective.

Avis here has a helpful section on the bishop's household, his or her *familia*. Bishops in the Anglican Communion follow, with helpful material on the ecclesiology of the Anglican Communion. Once again, reference is made to the *Principles of Canon Law*. He explores the 'Instruments' of Communion: the Lambeth Conference, the Primates meeting, the Anglican Consultative Council and the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Ecumenical comparisons – Rome and Orthodoxy – are made in an irenic manner. He does not avoid the contemporary question of when communion should be severed. The Corinthian and Galatian churches are cited as examples where deep conflict did not in fact break communion for St Paul, but also the Johannine churches, where the break was by reason of denial of the incarnation.

6 See C Hill, 'Clergy discipline and pastoral care: bishop's mitre or judge's wig?', (2010) 113:874 *Theology* 254–259.

Next comes an ecumenical chapter, including a passionate defence of the Anglican aspiration for full *visible* unity. This is followed by an apologia for the ‘historic episcopate’ as a necessary though not sufficient condition for visible unity. Avis is a stout defender of the territorial integrity of the geographical diocese; he does not explore other forms of episcopal care such as cultural episcopacy for mission or unity. Surprisingly, Rome has a variety of models for this (some better than others). Suffragan bishops have their origins in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), where episcopal chaplaincy in different languages was authorised for displaced groups from the Middle East in consequence of the Muslim conquests of the Holy Land and North Africa. There are examples of ‘cultural episcopal jurisdictions’ in several churches of the Anglican Communion. The arrangements for suffragan bishops to care for those dissenting from the ordination of women to the episcopate in the Church of England come – at a stretch – into such a category and English bishops ought to be aware of their rationale, whether enthusiastic or otherwise.

Avis has some important things to say in a section on the bishop as scholar and theologian, not least on nourishing the imagination. More might have been said on the bishop in the public square, not least because in England, at least, all doors are still opened for a bishop. Nevertheless, he is good on resisting the consequences of the privatisation of religion and the logic of secularisation.

Avis gives us an *admirable* chapter on the bishop and liturgy. This is especially worth commending to all bishops and even more to clergy who sometimes seem to think of the bishop to be welcomed as a ‘guest’ rather than as Father (or Mother) in God of them and their parish. There is a useful section on the ministry of healing. It would have been good to see a discussion of the ministry of absolution, which can be the occasion for the bishop to be ‘conflicted’ if he or she hears the confession of one of their own clergy.

Readers of this *Journal* will miss an extended section on the bishop and law, though there are a number of legal references throughout the book. Above all, the bishop needs to know and work well with his or her registry and chancellor. Perhaps the final section could also have included something more about the ‘learning’ and ‘praying’ bishop – an epilogue to the next edition?

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