

GENERAL SYNOD

Private Member's Motion: Senior Church Leadership

A Background Paper from the Revd. Canon Simon Killwick

"That this Synod do take note of the report of the Faith and Order Commission 'Senior Church Leadership: a resource for reflection.'"

Synod asks for a report

1. The FAOC Report was commissioned by General Synod in an amendment to a diocesan synod motion passed in July 2009 which requested 'the Faith and Order Advisory Group (or its successor body) to present to this Synod early in the next quinquennium a report:
 - i. bringing together existing material in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion relating to the exercise of senior leadership in the Church; and
 - ii. setting out biblical and theological perspectives to inform the Church's developing patterns of senior leadership.'
2. The amendment was moved by the Revd. Jonathan Clark (London), with the support of the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, and the then-Chairman of the Faith and Order Advisory Group. Jonathan Clark said in his speech moving the amendment, 'What I am inviting Synod to agree is not a purely theoretical piece of work but something that I hope will give us better resources within the Church to think theologically about the practical decisions we make, so that the senior leadership we have can help us better to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.'
3. Archbishop Rowan Williams said of the amendment, 'thinking properly about the theology of the episcopate is also thinking properly about the whole range of ministry, the theology of ministry. This amendment has given us a very good opportunity for looking at that broader question specifically in connection with what is absolutely essential about episcopal identity, what is theologically crucial, as opposed to what is merely culturally customary, which is why I support this.'

Into the long grass?

4. Opposing the amendment, Prebendary Stephen Lynas said he was troubled that it was a recipe for 'long-grass treatment ... It just seems that to go with the Clark amendment is to take a rather interesting cricket-ball and to throw it somewhere away beyond the boundary, and it will take a long time to find it again.'
5. The amendment was carried, but Prebendary Lynas's words were prophetic: the report took five years to complete ('long-grass'), and when it appeared, the Standing Committee of the House of Bishops decided that it should not be presented to Synod, according the Bishop of Coventry (it was thrown 'somewhere away beyond the boundary'). I am grateful to all those who signed my Private Member's Motion, meaning that it has not taken too long find this 'rather interesting cricket ball' again.

6. In defence of the House of Bishops Standing Committee, it might be considered that the FAOC report had been superseded by the Green report 'Talent Management for Future Leaders and Leadership Development for Bishops and Deans' (included in GS 1982). However that report was prepared to support an application for additional funding from the Church Commissioners, and is therefore focussed more on process than content.
7. The Bishop of Ely, Chair of the Development and Appointments Group, wrote in paragraph 4 of GS 1982 that 'the FAOC report is a timely and valuable contribution that will inform and shape the evolving content of the programme and its emerging design.' There is therefore a proper concern that the theological issues in the FAOC report should be reflected on and debated by the Synod. This concern is strengthened by the fact the Green process (and the funding for it), is to run until the end of 2016, when it will be subject to review.

Leadership language and the New Testament

8. The FAOC report begins with charting the rise of the language of leadership in the Church. People often express a desire for leadership, though they sometimes only want to see leadership being given in the direction they themselves favour. The language of leadership has been helpful in ecumenical conversations, because it is not loaded with denominational or historical baggage. Leadership is clearly needed where there is a lack of co-ordination between various Church bodies (one can think of the 'Working as One Body' report, and the establishment of the Archbishops' Council). More recently, research into Church growth has shown the importance of clear leadership for growth.
9. The language of leadership 'is not going to go away any time soon.' (FAOC para. 10) However, we need to be cautious in our use of leadership language: it is not particularly biblical; 'it is a telling fact that the New Testament authors seem consciously to have avoided the most obvious words for 'leader' in their culture, presumably because they wanted to avoid buying in to the kinds of behaviour and organisation that were associated with that language.' (ibid. para. 34) FAOC asks 'Has the appropriation of leadership language from secular sources been sufficiently critical?' (para. 37) Have we started at the wrong end, 'have we ended up *starting* with the specific activities of the leader, or with the specific demands of efficient management, and rearranging our understanding of ministry and mission around them?' (para. 41)
10. The report then goes on to look at leadership in the New Testament, stating first that it would be wrong to look there for a blueprint for Church leadership for all time, though we must of course assess the language and practice of leadership against these scriptural roots. One of the most interesting insights of the FAOC report is that of a 'triangular model of leadership' (ibid. 3.1) Theologies of Church leadership either start with 'every-member ministry' and then struggle to give a proper account of ordained ministry, or they start with ordained ministry, and then struggle to give a proper account of the ministry of the people of God.
11. The solution is to start with the action of God, both in calling a people to himself, and in calling individuals to leadership within his people. God called the people of Israel to himself, and within that people he called Moses and others to leadership. Jesus called people to follow him, and had a larger number of followers than the twelve disciples, though he called the twelve to a particular role within his followers. The gifts of the Spirit are given to the whole Church, but individual gifts of leadership are given within the Church. (para. 55) This leads to the drawing of a leadership triangle with God, People and Leaders at three points of the triangle (para. 58), which 'offers a simple but fruitful template for analysing the grammar of ministry and leadership in the New Testament.' (para. 59)

Trans-local catholicity

12. It is possible to distinguish in the New Testament between local leadership and trans-local leadership. Local leadership would include the elders in particular local Churches; trans-local leadership would include travelling apostles like Peter and Paul. A second leadership triangle can be drawn with God, Local and Trans-Local at three points of the triangle (para. 62) This is not simply a relabelling of the first triangle, but an attempt to justice to the complexity of the growing Church. Trans-local leadership is vital to the catholicity of the Church, giving the connectedness between local Churches.
13. Equally fascinating is the report's assessment of the language used for leadership in the New Testament. Generally speaking, the New Testament writers avoid the obvious or usual words for leadership. In one of the very few passages to use such a word, it is radically redefined: when the disciples quarrel after the Last Supper over who should be the greatest, Jesus says 'the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the one who leads (*ho hegoumenos*) like the one who serves (*ho diakonon*).' (Luke 22.26) It is reminiscent of Jesus' caution with the word 'Messiah', because he was a very different kind of Messiah from the one people were generally expecting.
14. Instead of the contemporary secular language of leadership, the New Testament employs a variety of terms, such as elders, apostles, deacons, bishops. Paul describes himself as a steward, ambassador architect or gardener. FAOC say 'What is striking about many of these terms is that they draw attention to an essential aspect of the self-understanding of Christian leaders in the New Testament. They are used to distance the authority of the leader from any sense of ownership or mastery, and to deflect attention back to the Lord of the church, who is the real source of the leader's authority. They reflect what we may call a *refracted* authority, seen through a triangular prism that resists the construction of top-down management structures.' (para. 70)
15. The catholicity of the Church is right there from the start in the New Testament: '... there is no place for the go-it-alone church: **catholicity**, connectedness ... is a dimension of the church ... which belongs to its essence ... that is to say its unity in the truth through space and time. This dimension of catholicity is given with the Gospel itself...' (para. 83)
16. Leadership is service (*diakonia*). (para. 113) Leadership involves real authority, to give order and focus. Nonetheless, leadership (*episcopo*) is consensual, 'accorded by mutual recognition rather than imposed by external authority'. 'Effective leadership depends on co-operation between leaders and led.' (para. 114)

Faithful improvisation

17. As someone who has long been fascinated with the French school of organist-improvisers, I particularly enjoyed the account of 'faithful improvisation' in the FAOC report. The report applies the concept both to the emergence of leadership in the New Testament and beyond (paras. 119 ff.), and to the exercise of leadership itself (paras. 196 ff.) Improvisation doesn't mean just making it up as you go along, or an aimless meander. In terms of the emergence of leadership, it means being grounded in an evolving tradition, seeking to articulate the dynamic of the Gospel and to carry forward the Church's mission. This involves taking language and concepts from other sources, both sacred and secular, and adapting and redefining it for the purposes of the Gospel. It also involves reacting to contemporary situations, and developing new patterns where necessary, but always remaining faithful to the developing tradition.

18. In terms of the exercise of leadership, faithful improvisation means being deeply trained in the tradition, so as to be able to react appropriately to new situations and contents. As the report says, 'Successful musical improvisation depends on deep training in the musical tradition – an intimate knowledge of the possibilities of scales and harmonies, of rhythms and melodies.' (para. 196) We could also add that successful improvisation requires great technical skill in musical performance – it demands real skill and training.
19. FAOC go on to trace the development of leadership from the New Testament onwards, saying that all they have space for is a 'few unevenly scattered snapshots' (para. 124), in sections which appear to have been written by individual members of the Commission, each having been assigned particular periods to consider. While this part of the report remains interesting, it becomes more descriptive, and lacks the rigour and discussion of the earlier sections.
20. A description is given of the emergence of the three-fold order of bishops, priests and deacons. The role of bishops came particularly to the fore after the death of the apostles. Bishops provide both a local leadership in a local Church, and a trans-local leadership connecting each local Church with the rest of the Church. Bishops are a key part of the catholicity of the Church, keeping individual Churches connected to one another. It would have been good to have some reflection on the way that the trans-local leadership of itinerant apostles became the trans-local leadership of geographically-fixed bishops. This could also have included reflection on the trans-local leadership of itinerant missionary bishops in the Celtic Churches. The question could then have been asked as to whether geographically-fixed bishops are the only model which faithfulness to the tradition permits?
21. Similarly, the involvement of bishops with positions of secular power at various times in history is described, but there is no evaluation as to what extent this was faithful to the tradition. Was the rise of the ascetic desert tradition a reaction against the increasingly worldliness of the Church's leadership? Similarly, to what extent was the rejection of episcopacy at the Reformation, not so much a rejection of episcopacy *per se*, as of the contemporary worldly practice of episcopacy? Are we in danger now of replacing medieval prince-bishops with 21st. century CEO-bishops?
22. Frustratingly the report avoids critical evaluation of current practice of episcopacy, or giving guidance for the future, referring instead 'a tradition of experimentation in multiple contexts and to continue it faithfully requires that we continue that experimentation in our own contexts.' Equally frustrating is the absence of consideration of ecumenical perspectives – Canon Simon Butler tried to amend the amendment in the July 2009 debate to introduce ecumenical perspectives, but was not allowed by the Chair, who said that those who needed to hear, would have heard the point. Given that we are hoping that the Methodist Church will take on board episcopacy, the question of what kind of bishops we have is not an exclusively Anglican concern.
23. It would be good to have a follow-up report to evaluate the current practice of episcopacy in the light of the tradition, together with proposals for the future.

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June 2015