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# Of Faithful Men

Edward J Malcolm

The question of the role of the bishop, or Ordinary, in the life of the church is a vexed one. Anglicanism has always maintained the three-fold ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Yet the church also includes another, larger, contingent, the laity. For in practice, the bishops are taken from among the presbyters, who are themselves taken from among the deacons, who are themselves taken from among the laity generally. Thus there can be no consideration of the relationship of bishop to presbyter that does not include that of bishop and presbyter to the laity. The first relationship is established, so far as Anglicans are concerned, in the Ordinal. The second is established, among other places, in the rubrics that precede the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper. These must be considered in connection with Canon law and the Thirty-nine Articles.

## 1. The Prelate and the Pestilent Priest

Ordination services are conducted by bishops, and without a bishop there is no ordination in the Church of England. The examination of each candidate for both the diaconate and the presbyterate is carried out in the service by the bishop. However, there is already to have been an examination of the candidates carried out by the archdeacon. He is to enquire of them and also examine them, to ensure that they 'be apt and meet for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their ministry duly, to the honour of God, and the edifying of his Church'. Thus this examination is not to be a perfunctory matter, but ought rather to be a serious and rigorous process. The examination by the bishop in the course of the ordination service is then able to be given as a series of preset questions and answers, because it serves as much as anything as a public confirmation of what has already been established. This form of wording was set down in the 1549 Ordinal, and remains almost unaltered, and thus can be said to represent truly the mind of the Reformers.

Article XIX tells us that 'The church is a congregation of faithful men...'. In a recent number of Churchman, Donald Allister went on from here to examine the nature of that congregation concluding, rightly, that this is a reference to the national or universal church rather than the local church or parish. The Reformers favoured this translation of *ekklesia* because it

underlined the continuity of the Christian church with the 'congregation' of Israel. However, in the light of the submission by deacons and priests to their Ordinary and chief ministers of the church, it is also necessary to examine the latter part of the clause, and enquire into the nature of 'faithful men'. In the usage of the Articles and Prayer Book, this means 'believers'. For there can be no church, local, connexional or national, that demands submission to any whose authority is used to impose conscientiously and scripturally objectionable doctrines and practices. Thus the qualification given in the Ordinal, namely that the presbyter or deacon submits to 'godly admonition' and 'godly judgment' cannot be overlooked.

If one asks, "By what standard can we measure the godliness or otherwise of any admonition or judgment?", the answer must be given that it is to be measured against the Articles and the Prayer Book. Some will cry, "Why not Scripture?". Because we believe that, just as the three Creeds may be proved by most certain warrant of Holy Scripture, so the Articles and Prayer Book are not in any way contrary to the same, but rather are themselves distilled from biblical truth. It is surely of significance that, at the time of Archdeacon Blackburne's petition to do away with subscription to the Articles, it was stated in Parliament that 'Subscription to Scripture alone...will amount to no subscription at all'. Thus true Anglicanism is inseparable from the Articles, and those who embrace it will, as Allister has indicated, readily accept the major part of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

So one is, sadly, left with the fact that there is all too often a gap between the godly admonitions and godly judgments which the clergy and laity of the Anglican church are told to expect, and the fudged and frequently heterodox pronouncements of Synod, of the House of Bishops, of diocesans and of suffragans. In practice many clergy who are seen to be of the reformed, conservative or classical persuasion find that they do not have the full support of their Ordinary, but rather are treated with some hostility. One has only to consider the recent events at St. John's Kidderminster, and the actions of Bishop Selby, for a case in point. Allister calls on us to 'repent of those attitudes [the viewing of the diocese as no more than a para-church organisation, the side-lining of Synod, and so on], however much we...abhor the errors against which they are an over-reaction'. But should we? Has not the church and diocese, in such cases, squandered its right to authority over the clergy? Is it an over-reaction to say, with Peter and John, 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye' (Acts 4:19). Since, as part of his ordination, the candidate for either office

is to affirm his certainty that he has been duly called, both inwardly and outwardly, and that he believes the Bible to be sufficient for all doctrine, he cannot then give up that sense of calling to the consciences of men whose doctrinal views may be very far removed from his own and from Scripture. Further, since the Priest is to ‘banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God’s Word’, he surely cannot be expected to submit to the authority of one who is actually promoting those very things! To do so is to join in the spreading of that error.

Allister reminds us that bishops are still presbyters, and that they may need to be told this from time to time. However, to go on from there to argue that, having done so, and having said ‘our piece’ we should ‘eventually...submit to the authority of those over us in the Lord’ is surely to make all such statements and objections nothing more than conscience-salving tokens that absolve us from the greater duty of standing fast. When the Articles are being effectively overthrown because the Church of England has set itself a new agenda through the ARCIC documents and the like, when certain bishops are pursuing a liberal agenda that has nothing to do with the Bible or historic Anglicanism, and when the witness of the church is being rendered less effective by the public casting of doubt upon the great tenets of the Christian faith, the time has to come when faithful men say enough is enough. Augustine wrote—

Before all things I ask your pious wisdom to take into consideration that, on the one hand, if the duties of the office of a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, be discharged in a perfunctory and time-serving manner, no work can be in this life more easy, agreeable, and likely to secure the favour of men, especially in our day, but none at the same time more miserable, deplorable, and worthy of condemnation in the sight of God; and, on the other hand, that if in the office of bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, the orders of the Captain of our salvation be observed, there is no work in this life more difficult, toilsome, and hazardous, especially in our day, but none at the same time more blessed in the sight of God.

Now is not the time for ease, nor for the soothing of consciences that are evading their duty.

## 2. Them and Us

Not only is the presbyter under the authority of bishops and other chief Ministers of the church, but he is also responsible for the laity in his charge.

This is made clear at the ordination service when the presbyter is called on to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine. His mandate is local, and so his responsibility is local also. How is he to do this?

Allister quotes from the rubric on discipline that precedes the Holy Communion service. However, the version he quotes is not that which the Reformers themselves bequeathed to the Church, but is rather a late alteration, first introduced under the Prayer Book Miscellaneous Provisions Measure, in 1965. A comparison of the rubric as it appears in modern printings of the Book of Common Prayer and as it appeared in the Edwardian liturgy is instructive. In short, there is no reference to the role of the Ordinary in 1552. He has no part or place ascribed to him in that rubric. The words, 'Provided that every Minister so repelling any, as is specified in this, or the next precedent Paragraph of this Rubrick, shall be obliged to give an account of the same to the Ordinary within fourteen days after at the farthest. And the Ordinary shall proceed against the offending person according to the Canon' are not present in the 1552 Prayer Book, but were added in 1662. Are they significant, and if so, how?

Their significance lies, it would seem, in that they are closely related to the Canons of 1603. These are the Canons referred to in the 1662 version of the rubric. Wheatly notes this connection, though fails to draw adequate conclusions. The relevant Canons are given by Srawley as 26, 109, and 113. Each of these bears a common theme, that the role of maintaining discipline in the parish belongs properly to the church-wardens, sidesmen, and quest-men. Indeed, in line with Matthew 18: 15-17, the manner of disciplining offenders is to seek to bring them to repentance by their own voluntary admission of guilt. Presenting them to the Ordinary is a sign that they have refused to repent, and must thus be brought to book. The pattern established by the Canons of 1603 is that such members of the laity who have responsibility for discipline are to initiate the process between themselves and the offender. The minister is involved when the wardens inform him of the intractability of the offender. The Ordinary is involved when the minister has failed to make an impression, and it becomes clear that action is required on a more formal level. This is hierarchical, but it begins at the bottom and works up, rather than coming down from on high. Canon B 16 of the Revised Canons of 1969, following the 1965 Measure, makes no provision for the role of the wardens in particular or of the laity in general in the matter of discipline,

and little provision for the work of the parish priest who refers all decision-making to the bishop. Instead we are given the rather vague wording, 'If a minister be persuaded that anyone in his cure...ought not to be admitted...'. The remaining Canons pertaining to church-wardens, E1 and E2, correspond to the old Canons 89 and 90. Those mentioned above have no part in the modern Church of England.

Thus the relationship between presbyter and laity, and bishop and laity, is not perhaps so hierarchical as Allister asserts. He says, of the modern rendering of the rubric, 'Note well that the minister is not to make the decision [to discipline] himself, or to refer it to his wardens or leadership team'. No indeed, the decision, historically, lies with the wardens. It is they who initiate the process, and they who bear responsibility for discipline. We need a return to historic Anglicanism.

### 3. The Man of God

It is the role of the laity, through their representatives the wardens, to administer discipline. They are to seek out those who are guilty of moral crimes, listed as 'adultery, whoredom, incest, or drunkenness,...swearing, ribaldry, usury, and any other uncleanness and wickedness of life....' How is the warden or sidesman to manage to discipline any such person?

It is worth mentioning at this point the opinion of Neil and Willoughby that no attempt at such ecclesiastical discipline will have any success. They cite two reasons. The first is that, since uniformity is no longer a legal requirement, any such person would simply refrain from presenting themselves for Communion, thus removing the opportunity for the formalisation of the process. The second is that, since 'Canon Law is abrogated by desuetude, and that this form of exercising 'the Canon' has certainly not been used for some time, the Ordinary cannot fulfil this rubric'. Thus the whole question of ecclesiastical discipline according to the Anglican Reformers' model may be academic anyway.

Having said that, we do maintain the need for a godly discipline in the church, as the Communion service indicates. How then, to repeat the question, are those charged with the maintaining of discipline to manage to discipline any obstinate sinners in the church?

We have already referred in passing to Matthew 18:15-17. Other passages could be adduced. Since, historically, it is the laity who discipline, it is

necessary that the laity be familiar with the source of their authority, the Bible. Thus it is quite a surprise to read a comment by Allister that ‘2 Timothy 3: 16-17...is not referring to Scripture as something which all must read in order to be useful for God, but as something preachers must handle aright if they are to be useful in applying God’s word to people’s lives’. This sounds like priestcraft. Dare we argue this point? Yes we dare because we must. Allister says that private reading and studying of the Bible ‘is only fully available to the educated...’. To what education does he refer? If he argues that a knowledge of the original languages is required, we answer that millions have been converted by reading portions translated into their own languages. If he argues this then he should argue that we must cease supporting Bible societies (of whatever Trinitarian view), in favour of teaching people to be competent in Hebrew and Greek. If, on the other hand, he means that only the theologically educated can read the Bible for themselves, then he restricts the availability of the Word of life to those few who are called to the ordained ministry, or who can afford the luxury of a private theological education. To what purpose did Henry VIII order that a Bible be purchased at the expense of every parish, and be set up on public display for all to have access to? We read of men and women who went out of their way to learn to read in order to read the Scriptures, in spite of sometimes fierce opposition. William Tyndale said famously, ‘If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of the scripture than thou dost’.

To be fair to Allister, his point is that this text must not be used to force the unable to attempt the unattainable, namely to pressurise the less academically able into reading what they do not understand. He advocates the place of preaching, and we concur fully in this. Preaching will educate, especially when handled aright. However, we do maintain the duty of all Christian believers to read for themselves. How else are they to know what they should and should not do? How else are those charged with the exercise of discipline both to know when a person is in need of discipline, and how to apply it? Aquila and Priscilla showed Apollos ‘the way of God more perfectly’ (Acts 18:26). The Berean band ‘searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so’ (Acts 17:11). Jeremiah foresaw the day when ‘they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD’ (Jer. 31:34). That is a reference to the Gospel age, the age in which we live.

Allister does see a potential danger, where private reading could replace preaching. This is a real concern. It is far more comfortable to sit at home and open the Bible than have to sit through a service where a man—and possibly a woman today—will get up and hold forth in a dull and meaningless fashion or, more likely, say things we do not approve. The corrective is not to discourage private reading, but rather to enforce that form of examination known to the Reformers and alluded to in the Ordinal, so that such preachers never actually get into a pulpit or to a lectern, or get pinned to a radio microphone. Allister reminds us that we need to heed Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. If those who are in the preaching office have come to that understanding of the Scriptures that is required of them, they will preach the Word. Since the laity are required to send up candidates for the diaconate from which the presbyterate will be drawn, it is incumbent upon the laity to seek that understanding of Scripture which will qualify them. Let not ministers of any rank fear educated laymen. Rather, let us seek the education of the laity, so that they can handle the Word of God aright.

History shows us the importance of the education of the laity. Anglicanism is an historical expression of the church, and must never forget history. The Dutch church at the turn of the sixteenth century was Calvinistic and reformed in its doctrine. There was in those days a generally high standard of education among the Protestant clergy across Europe. This was not limited to them, but was present in large measure in their congregations. So, when the students of James Arminius began to enter the ministry as ordained men, and began to undertake pastoral work and preaching, the members of their various congregations noted the change in doctrine emanating from the pulpits these men occupied. They did not like it or agree with it. Because the exercising of discipline was in their hands they brought the matter to the general attention of the church. The outcome, as it well known, was the Synod of Dort of 1618, to which the Church of England sent delegates.

One might speculate about the present doctrinal state of the Church of England if the laity of previous generations had been as educated as those in Holland. Or would the very British characteristic of suffering in silence have undone us anyway?

This touches on the matter of private judgment, which is itself a Reformation principle. The Apostle John says, 'If there come any unto you, and bring not



this doctrine, receive him not into your house' (2 John 10). How will any know what this doctrine is if they are ignorant of Scripture? No preacher has the time these days to expound his text fully, and certainly not to apply it closely. Now, more than ever, the laity need to be strongly encouraged to read for themselves. They also need to be taught how to read with profit. Thus an examination of Allister's claim for 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is necessary.

The expression 'man of God' appears only twice in the New Testament, the other occurrence being 1 Timothy 6:11. The translation 'man of God', where 'man' is generic, is the same in each case. We do not think that any would argue that the first occurrence would be applied only to Timothy, for it is surely the duty of all Christians, all men or people of God, to flee 'these things'. On 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Knight comments, 'The sense of the passage is that scripture is given to enable any "person of God" to meet the demands that God places on that person and in particular to equip Timothy the Christian leader for the particular demands made on him (cf. 4:2)'. In other words, it is only when Timothy the babe has read the Scriptures and had them interpreted to him by Paul, (v. 14), that he finds them to be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. The 'man of God' is the one who hears the voice of God. It is, of course, an Old Testament term, used of prophets and spiritual leaders. What makes them men of God is not their ability to interpret the word but their submission to it. This is open to all believers, and is indeed a requirement for all believers. In his sermon on this text, Calvin says, '...the worde of God deserveth such reverence, yt every one of us ought to submitt our selves to it, and give quiet eare unto it without all thwarting or gainsaying'. All who, like Timothy, have been instructed by the Scriptures are men of God by virtue of their having received instruction. If we take John Murray's description of the man of God then we are left with the fact that it is not the educated we should be concerned with, but the humble, submissive believer, who is wholly possessed by God, and who 'lives for God, who speaks for God, who speaks of God'. It is by being a 'man of God' through hearing and believing the Scriptures that Timothy is able to teach.

### Conclusion

Whenever a business or sports team is faring badly it is inevitably the management who come in for the sternest criticism, especially by those who feel they have been let down. Thus some might feel that the office of a bishop is a most unenviable position to occupy. Yet it is not management that

bishops are to supply, but oversight, spiritual leadership, godly admonition and judgment. If that was what the church could expect today, much of Allister's criticism of ecclesiological weakness among Evangelicals would stand. But it cannot expect this, for the doctrinal state of the episcopate is finally an expression of the doctrinal state of the laity who themselves have mostly ceased informal theological education of any sort, which is itself an expression of the spiritual malaise so widespread in the church whereby true godliness is neither liked nor encouraged. This is not to try to claim that our churches are just full of unconverted hypocrites, but it is to say that the laity are so often quietly encouraged by their ministers to settle for a lower level of spiritual life than is good either for them or for the denomination. If we would see a return to a truly episcopal and hierarchical Anglicanism that does not simply impose the will of the powerful minority onto the powerless majority, we need to seek a return to a level of desire for godliness not seen generally for some generations. That is far more important than 'education'. If the congregation, and thus the church as a whole, was made up of such, then the diaconate, the presbyterate, and the episcopate would all be enriched. Then the dissatisfaction felt by those clergy and congregations who find it convenient to sit loose to the denomination would be dispelled, and they would have every incentive to join in fully. There can be no 'repentance' for lack of submission to those in authority until those in authority are truly accountable to, and honest about, historic Anglicanism themselves.

EDWARD J MALCOLM is minister of St Mary's, Castle Street, Reading.