

“The Anglican-Methodist Dialogue – a discovery of consonance or a challenge to reform?”

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Introduction

*And are we yet alive,
and see each other's face?
Glory and thanks to Jesus give
for His almighty grace!*

*What troubles have we seen,
what mighty conflicts past,
fightings without, and fears within,
since we assembled last!*

*But out of all the Lord
hath brought us by His love;
and still He doth His help afford,
and hides our life above.¹*

In a hymn popularly sung at Methodist conferences, Charles Wesley's hymnody asks, "And are we yet alive, and see each other's face?" An ecumenical response offered to this question might be, "Unity comes alive as we learn to live in one another's traditions".²

The invitation is to consider and address the challenges within our own tradition through learning from other traditions; and further, learning more about ourselves through listening to others. This involves grappling with how to remain true to one's own traditions, whilst cultivating an openness to the reception of others views that do not reflect one's own – to see each other's face.

In ecumenical dialogue, this gives resonance to revival and renewal of self-understanding – reform within; alongside inviting the same effect on our dialogue partners. Such is the outcome of an ecumenical pilgrimage and 'embrace' within the wider catholic body of Christ.

¹ Verses 1, 3 and 4 from Charles' Wesley's hymn.

² Cited from the 'Statement of the 1987 Nottingham Conference – Not Strangers but Pilgrims Progress', British Council of Churches, Para 2. In D Carter, 'Methodists and the Ecumenical Task' in *The unity we have & the unity we seek: ecumenical prospects for the third millennium*, Jeremy Morris, Nicholes Sagovsky (eds), T&T Clark, 2003. 53-76

The ecclesiology of the Methodist/Wesleyan family of churches contains a medley of traditions; John Wesley was an eclectic theologian who wove threads from diverse sources of Christian tradition, into the tapestry that is 'Methodism'. In many ways the tapestry did not have neatly edged completeness, but contained loose ends that enabled an ongoing borrowing, adapting and sharing of theology, ecclesiology and liturgical gifts. Methodism also has offered to other churches its insights and traditions. This may well explain Methodism's general willingness towards ecumenical pilgrimage, and its contribution of ecumenical leaders over the century or so of the modern ecumenical movement.

The Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity and Mission ('AMICUM') in its 2014 report *Into All The World: Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches* ('IATW') explores an ecumenical reflection on mutual discovery, affirmation and recovery of apostolicity as a contribution to bringing full communion closer:

Both our traditions recognize that our separation has diminished each of us, and that there are memories over generations to be healed and forgiven. A change of attitude will be needed on both sides, reaching deeply into each of us, nothing less than a true metanoia, a penitent change of direction, away from sinful suspicion and prejudice, towards the forgiving Christ. By this small but costly step, the world will be helped to believe. We give thanks that God is already bringing our communions to just such metanoia, and we gratefully present what we have learned about the ways in which the Holy Spirit is working through our dialogues with one another to heal the wounds of division.³

The focus of this paper is on recent Anglican-Methodist dialogues; in particular of the ecumenical pilgrimages of Ireland, New Zealand and Britain. I suggest the dialogues offer examples of renewal and reform that engage respective ecumenical barriers and boundaries, through grace that restores and revives.

Episcopacy in Anglican-Methodist Dialogues

Many Anglican-Methodist dialogues (at national and international levels) already reflect the existing mutual affirmations on matters of faith, doctrine and the life of Christ (common boundaries):

- Common profession and heritage of the one apostolic faith,
- The sharing of the sacraments of one Baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist,
- A common ministry of word and sacrament.⁴

³ Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission, *Into All The World: Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches*. Anglican Consultative Council, London; 2014. §127.

⁴ Miriam Haar, 'Apostolicity: Unresolved Issues in Anglican-Methodist Dialogue, in *Ecclesiology*, Vol 9, 2013; 39-65. 43

Indeed, Anglican-Methodist dialogues show a tendency to affirm that there are no substantive, church-dividing theological issues between the two churches; even if there is not complete unity of thought.⁵

However, there is one particular challenge that remains a barrier: the interchangeability of ordained ministry. As observed in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*:

*Ecumenical dialogue has repeatedly shown that issues relating to ordained ministry constitute challenging obstacles on the path to unity. If differences such as those relating to the priesthood of the ordained prohibit full unity, it must continue to be an urgent priority for the churches to discover how they can be overcome.*⁶

A significant component of many national and international ecumenical dialogues has been the distinctive understandings and expressions of episcopacy, including *episcopate* and episcopal ministry. As commented by one observer, “For many years, a difficult search has gone on for a way forward to find what one ecumenical theologian has called the ‘holy grail’ of interchangeability [of ordained ministries].”⁷ This has been important particularly for dialogues between churches who have a threefold ministry including that of bishops expressing historic succession, and those churches who shape their ministry differently or make no such claim of historic succession.

It is in relation to this ecumenical challenge IATW dialogues the aspect of ministry, and the distinctive understandings and expressions of *episcopate* and episcopal ministry for the Anglican and Methodist traditions. Yet the AMICUM report reflects that broad consensus is already shared on the apostolic tradition, and the oversight and orderly transmission of ministry, concluding that:

*Both our traditions have understood that oversight (episcopate) is required to preserve and transmit the apostolic faith, and each can recognize in the other the way that episcopate has functioned to help the church in its faithfulness. Local adaptation has historically been necessary for the churches to have the oversight they needed for this task.*⁸

⁵ Thomas Ferguson, “Caught in the Parent Trap: Anglicans and Methodists in the USA”, in: C Franklin Brookhart and Gregory V Palmer (eds.), *That They May Be One?: The Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue*, (New York: Seabury Books, 2014), 28.

⁶ World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), §45 commentary.

⁷ Harold Miller, ‘Interchangeability of Ministries between Methodists and Anglicans in Ireland: a wider perspective’, in *One in Christ*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2014. 166.

⁸ *Into All The World*, §122.

Anglican perspectives

Of importance for Anglican self-understanding in ecumenical dialogues is the *Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral* (originally formulated in 1888) which outlines four elements that together are deemed necessary for unity within an apostolic church, and the interconnectedness between provinces in the Anglican Communion. Lambeth Conference 1998 affirmed these further as the basis on which Anglicans would be barriers for negotiations with other churches for the eventual visible unity of the Church worldwide. The four elements are: the Scriptures, the Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the historic episcopate.

The historic episcopate is often the key contention in ecumenical dialogues as a non-negotiable Anglican position for unity; even though there is qualification for local adaptation in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church. The Anglican Communion's body for ecumenical dialogue affirms:

For Anglicans, interchangeability of ministries has always been seen as requiring reconciliation of episcopal ministries. In other words, it is only possible with partner churches who are already ordered in the historic episcopate, or who take steps to receive, the sign of the historic episcopate. Interchangeability of presbyters/priests can only come about when there is also interchangeability of episcopal ministers.⁹

Though this places the expectation on other churches to make changes in their ecclesiology, nonetheless the Church of England's House of Bishops has observed:

... representatives of a number of traditions have come to recognise on the one hand that the apostolicity of the Church is wider than the historic Episcopal succession and on the other hand that integral to the ministry of oversight is the service of helping to maintain the church in the faith of the apostles and that orderly continuity of ministry of oversight is one of the means given by God for maintaining the Church in the faith of the apostles.¹⁰

They conclude with the discernment "that even seemingly insurmountable questions may find resolution if we are faithful to our calling and open to receive God's gift of unity."¹¹

Can ecumenical models of ecumenical discernment, such as in the developing field of Receptive Ecumenism, create a space for Anglicans to embrace 'bearable anomalies' of episcopacy and apostolic succession without historic succession, which nevertheless allows for advancing visible unity even where the Quadrilateral is not fully satisfied?

⁹ Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO), *Interchangeability of ministries and (Full) Communion in Anglican Understanding*, 2014. 1. (Unpublished report).

¹⁰ House of Bishops Occasional Paper, *Apostolicity and Succession*, (The Church of England, 1997), 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Methodist perspectives

Within the breadth of world-wide Methodism, whilst largely maintaining the centrality of corporate *episcopate* through Conference and connexionalism, there is tendency of two streams of expression: one following the tradition of Presidents exercising leadership (such as Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa), the other following the model of Bishops though not in the historic succession (such as in the United States). For both streams the Conference remains a central aspect to the life and *episcopate* of Methodist Churches.

Broad brush-stroke observations indicate that Methodists:

- Argue that the apostles were left free to adapt and develop according to the exigencies of mission. That does not imply, however that it sees all systems of church government as equally appropriate.¹²
- Methodist churches have sought to ensure in their own succession of ministries collegial and communal decisions and government, prayer and laying on of hands as the normal sign for maintaining a faithful ministry.¹³ Methodism has sustained a commitment to expressing its apostolic continuity as a church through the distinctive role of the Conference and the Connexion; so that the orderly transmission of ordained ministry takes place under this discipline.
- The value of the 'Connexional principle' may become increasingly ecumenically relevant as a pattern for mutual accountability.¹⁴
- Nevertheless, Methodism has never repudiated the idea of episcopacy.¹⁵

When responding to the convergence document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* ('BEM') regarding historic episcopacy, the Methodist Church of New Zealand reflected:

*We are also challenged to look closely at our understanding of ordination and ministry, and of the way episcopal oversight is exercised. We must also be open to the different styles and emphases in ministry.*¹⁶

Further, the British Methodist Church reflects whether Methodism:

*... regard[s] episcopacy as a gift which other churches can confer on her and which makes up some lack in Methodist church life, or does Methodism regard episcopacy as a feature of Methodism already which simply needs to be overtly expressed and ordered in a way that episcopal churches recognize?*¹⁷

¹² David Carter, 'Methodist and the Ecumenical Task', in Jeremy Morris & Nicholas Sagovsky (eds.) *The Unity We Have & the Unity We Seek: Ecumenical prospects for the third millennium*. (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 53-76. 64

¹³ Haar, 54

¹⁴ Carter, 65

¹⁵ Carter, 67

¹⁶ Max Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, Vol. 1, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 80.

¹⁷ British Methodist Conference, "Methodism and Episcopacy," in: *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order 1933-1983*, (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 202.

Ecumenical discernment challenges Methodists towards self-recognition of the possibility that it already conveys episcopal models (even within the Presidency stream); and consider how to give this visible expression that provides a means for episcopal churches to appreciate this ecumenical affirmation and convergence. Can there be reform and renewal, whilst retaining a distinctly Methodist tradition?

Referencing the Anglican-Methodist dialogue with BEM

IATW offers a gift to the wider ecumenical milieu, and links to a dialogue methodology as mooted in BEM.

BEM commends the apostolic tradition as reflecting continuity with the characteristics of the Church of the apostles.¹⁸ The question of maintaining succession to the apostolic tradition, with or without episcopacy in historic succession, is where further dialogue is required; nevertheless affirming that the ministry of *episcopate* “is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of [the Church]”.¹⁹

Whilst BEM points to the historic episcopate as aspirational BEM also suggests that rather than establishing a common form of episcopacy (unity by uniformity), might the ecumenical pilgrimage explore a way to recognise and reconcile episcopacy without calling into question the authenticity of each other’s ordination and *episcopate* (unity in diversity). The core challenge to churches is therefore:

Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession are asked to recognise the apostolicity of ordained ministry in those churches which have not, as well as their inherent episcopate;

*Whereas churches without the episcopal succession might recognise that though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, episcopal succession may commend itself to them as a strong sign for deepening unity.*²⁰

This commends both traditions towards both self-recognition and mutual-recognition of legitimate diversity in expressing *episcopate*. A key question is raised: for those churches that have maintained episcopal succession, how can it be fully developed for the effective witness of the Church; for those haven’t maintained the pattern are asked to consider whether it holds a powerful claim to be accepted.

Miriam Haar suggests a “slipperiness regarding apostolicity in BEM shows not only a compromise between the position of episcopally and non-episcopally ordered churches, but also leaves questions open.”²¹ Rather than seen as a weakness, I suggest it presents a potential opportunity for exploring the ecumenical *koinonia* of unity-in-diversity. Thus, BEM

¹⁸ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982 (2007)), §34-38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §25 and 53.

²¹ Haar, 64

might challenge traditions towards both self-recognition and mutual-recognition of legitimate diversity through expressing episcopacy in non-binary terms (rather than the binaries of episcopal/non-episcopal, for example).

This task of discernment has indeed been further engaged within and between churches; sometimes including fresh approaches to difficult conversations of episcopacy and mutual recognition of ordained ministry.²² More recently, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* ('TC') acknowledges this project remains as ongoing, and requiring further reflection on convergence. TC affirms legitimate diversity, and cautions when churches consider their expression being the only authentic one, or seek to impose their model on others.²³

Such is the challenge engaged in the 1996 international Anglican-Methodist report document *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*:

*This growing convergence means, amongst other things, that old contrasts between episcopal churches, themselves with different understandings of episcopacy, and churches with non-episcopal polities, might be viewed in a broader perspective, namely, the perspective of common loyalty to the apostolic faith, and obedience to and trust in the faithfulness of God who does not leave the world without witnesses.*²⁴

Further, it outlines that:

*... whatever the exigencies of history, departure from a threefold or personal-episcopal form of ministry did not imply any less a commitment to the provision of faithful episcopate for the congregations of Christ's people. Whether a church claims an episcopal succession from apostolic times, or whether a church has formed a new pattern for itself out of its experience and particular need, its intention, we believe, has been to safeguard the faithful witness to the Gospel, of which Jesus Christ is the foundation and to which prophets and apostles bore the same witness in their day. We recognise in each other's Churches, within the Anglican and Methodist families, that intention being faithfully carried out in the faith and life and work of each Church. At the same time we acknowledge that, in both families, we have fallen short of the apostolic charge laid upon the people of God.*²⁵

Reflecting on three examples of Anglican-Methodist dialogue

The pressing concern for progressing the ecumenical pilgrimage of Methodist and Anglican churches is affirmed by the international Anglican-Methodist dialogue:

We believe, then, that nothing further needs to be said in terms of our common apostolic faith. What remains is to explore the ways in which each tradition has

²² Jaakko Rusama, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in Bilateral Dialogues," in: Thomas F Best and Tamara Grdzeldze (eds.), *BEM at 25: Critical insights into a continuing legacy*, Faith and Order Paper No. 205, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 245-246.

²³ World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), §28.

²⁴ Anglican-Methodist International Commission, "Sharing in the Apostolic Communion," (1996), §62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, §48.

*transmitted the apostolic faith, in order to discern how we may express our unity in Christ for the sake of our common mission. The issue is one of a mutually acceptable apostolic ministry.*²⁶

The challenge is to find a path to recognise and reconcile episcopacy without calling into question the authenticity of each Church's ordination and *episcopate*. Contemporary dialogues yearn to offer a way for the Methodist Church to receive the historic episcopate as a sign of its apostolicity (that is to say, its continuity in the apostolic tradition) without compromising its polity and ecclesiology.²⁷ And likewise for a broader understanding of 'bearable anomalies' in Anglican perspectives.

I will explore the particular context of Ireland, New Zealand and Britain; as Conferences following the stream of Methodist tradition of President and Conference, and having some commonality in dialogue with Anglican partners. Each though have their own contextual elements too.

Ireland and "the Irish Model"

For the Church of Ireland ('Col') and the Methodist Church in Ireland ('MCI'), a contextual element is that both churches are considered minority churches in the wider Irish scene, as compared to the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches. This helped to develop trust in their common experience of being on the 'ecclesiastical margins'. The agreement that was reached also built on a decade-long journey of strengthening relationships and working parties resulting from a bilateral Covenant created in 2002.

A fruitful way forward on the question of the interchangeability of ordained ministries emerged when discussion concentrated afresh on the concept of *episcopate*. Within this discussion MCI reflected on the reality of their structures of oversight; while the Col recognized that, even in the history of Anglicanism, there were various approaches to the way in which personal oversight might be exercised.²⁸

This resulted in a substantive proposal presented in 2010 (ratified in 2014), where the churches endorsed the following agreed principles on the interchangeability of ministry, which had been brought through their respective structures:²⁹

First there is mutual recognition:

We reaffirm that we discern personal, communal, and collegial episcopate in each of our denominations and that all three expressions of episcopate are essential to the polities of our traditions.

We have discerned consonance between the office and function of Presidents and Past Presidents of the Methodist Church in Ireland and in the office and function of

²⁶ *Into All The World*, §64.

²⁷ Church of England and Methodist Church in Great Britain, *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*. §24 & 26.

²⁸ Donald Ker, "Progress towards Interchangeability of Ministry", unpublished paper.

²⁹ Church of Ireland, 2010 report of the Standing Committee

Bishops in the Church of Ireland based on the current doctrinal understanding and ecclesiology of both Churches.

Then followed a proposal for an enactment (an embrace):

We affirm the collegial participation of at least three persons, who express the office and function of Episcopal ministry, in the act of dedication of a new President and in the consecration of a Bishop and the communal affirmation of the action by the People of God.

Common features of the act of dedication/consecration in the two Churches are prayer, the laying on of hands, the presentation of the Bible and vesting.

To enable us to recognize more fully the expression of episcopate in each of our Churches it is necessary to embrace the mutual participation of the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland or Past Presidents in the consecration of Bishops in the Church of Ireland and the participation of Bishops of the Church of Ireland in the installation and dedication of a President in the Methodist Church in Ireland.

The agreement included recognition of 'something that has always been', and not creating something new, by acknowledging the mutuality and interchangeability of existing and prior Presidents with Bishops, though now with strengthened 'signs'; and Presbyters with Priests.

What the 'Irish Model' (as I have chosen to term it) has shown is a discerned consonance between the office and function of Presidents and Bishops respectively, based on the current doctrinal understanding and ecclesiology of both Churches.³⁰ Though there was the adoption of the term 'Episcopal Minister' as part of the office and function of the President, this merely introduced language that was new, while affirming that the concept was not.³¹ This was clearly intended to be an affirmation of what was already present, but now self-recognised by MCI, and recognised by the Col in the MCI. Significantly, the adoption of the language of 'bishops' was not required or imposed on the MCI.

Whilst responding to a report from the New Zealand Anglican-Methodist Dialogue, the Anglican Communion's body for ecumenical dialogue affirmed in observing Ireland:

*... the precedent of the recent process followed by the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland for the reconciliation of ministries ... is a model that IASCUFO warmly comments, precisely because it entails the reconciliation of, and thus interchangeability between, episcopal ministers, commensurate with longstanding Anglican understanding."*³²

³⁰ Church of Ireland, 2010 report

³¹ The prayer over the new President includes these words, which is where 'episcopal minister' is invoked: "Almighty God, giver of all good things, by the Holy Spirit you have appointed different offices in your church. send your Holy Spirit upon this your servant (N) now called to be an episcopal minister in the office and ministry of the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland. ..."

³² Correspondence from Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO) to the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, 20 February 2015.

Such mutual recognition may be a stepping stone on the pilgrimage to institute a united ministry and mission, or Full Communion. And it may be a model to offer other dialogues. Bishop Harold Miller, who was involved both in the Irish dialogue and international dialogue, rightly asks what I would also affirm:

*Can what we have achieved [in Ireland] be an ecumenical model for other parts of the world in Anglican/Methodist relationships, and for other ecumenical dialogues?*³³

New Zealand

The contextual contours of the Anglican and Methodist churches in New Zealand reach back to their respective missionary endeavours in the nineteenth century. The activity gave rise to at times urgency and pragmatism that invoke the first witness to the journey of unity; such that the collegial relationships between Anglican and Methodist missionary workers in the early days has remained a thread of connectedness linking the Methodist Church of New Zealand ('MCNZ') and the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia ('ANZP'). Further, from this period of history is the relationship of Methodist and Anglican missionaries with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (the 'founding document' for New Zealand).

Though the 1960's and 70's there were hopes and disappointments of a Plan for Union in New Zealand. In 1967 an Act of Commitment by the five negotiating churches (including MCNZ and ANZP) symbolised a strong desire on the part of many towards being brought into one church, including the statement:

...with the obedience we offer, we acknowledge our obligation to receive new insights and now do together many of the things which in the past we have done separately.

Mutual mission has occurred through the shared life of Anglican-Methodist Cooperating Parishes (the first being formed in 1975), as well as the common location of the theological colleges since 1973.

In 2008 an Anglican-Methodist Covenant was agreed to build on this longstanding relationship, to affirm seeking a visible unity that receives and cherishes all the gifts, insights, and treasures of the respective churches, and holds them together in a creative way that serves God's mission in the world. Rt Rev John Bluck shared in his sermon at the service to mark the signing of the Covenant in 2009:

Will the new ecumenical space this covenant creates help us to listen more carefully and respectfully to each other and the communities we serve? Will it help us to get out of the house for a while, our church houses, and into places where New Zealand values and directions are being shaped? ... Who knows, this covenant might take us all out of ourselves, out of our own Anglican and Methodist importance and closer to

³³ Miller, 178.

*the heart of the living God, the God who waits for all his different people to realize they are one in Jesus Christ.*³⁴

This resonates with the statement *To be Methodist is to be Ecumenical*, adopted by MCNZ Conference in 2004, which includes the affirmations:

Methodism has always seen itself as part of a greater whole. In our history, concern for unity has seldom been absent.

*Through ecumenical encounter we have come to cherish our roots and our distinctive way of being church. Participation in ecumenical bodies and dialogue with sister communions has immensely enriched the life of our Church. We have not yet received all that is offered. Nor have we exhausted what we have to give from our tradition. ... We declare our resolve to reform our common life and structures to allow sister communions to see more clearly the apostolic faith and mission among us.*³⁵

A 2015 Conference report on the Anglican-Methodist Dialogue continues this thread,

We note and celebrate that deep ecumenical dialogue shows each partner something of itself. We affirm the challenge of dialogue in prompting us to re-frame and tell something of our story in new ways which recognise the deep Christian witness of the other party and respond to its challenges to us. As Methodists we honour and acknowledge steps taken in Anglican ecclesial theology to affirm the authentic faith, authority and true ministry of other churches.

...

*What can we learn, receive and address, with integrity, from dialogue with other church traditions? What more do we need to discern of each other, and of ourselves, that can move us towards the prayer of Jesus? [referencing John 17:20-21].*³⁶

In asking and acting upon these questions, the invitation was made to MCNZ to move in ways that could open up new possibilities in relation to unity in Christ with questions to consider and address the challenges within one's own traditions through learning from other traditions; and learning more about self through listening to others.

Following the 'Irish Model', the New Zealand dialogue invites Methodists to consider the expansion and enrichment of the episcopal space and visibility of *episcopate* in the Presidential Team (MCNZ has effected a strong understanding of partnership of the presbyter and lay person working as a team, though still designated President and Vice President; either of which might be lay or ordained). For Methodists the proposal is of an awareness and affirmation of episcopal ministry exercised corporately by Conference, and collegially and personally through the ordained presbyter in the Presidential Team. Such a recognition is

³⁴ Terry Wall, 'The Anglican Methodist Covenant in New Zealand', in Wesley Historical Society *Journal*, Vol 96 (December 2013). 40.

³⁵ See http://www.methodist.org.nz/mission_and_ecumenical/to_be_methodist_is_to_be_ecumenical (cited 28 July 2018).

³⁶ Tony Franklin-Ross and David Poultney, "The Interchangeability of Ordained Ministries and Receptive Episcopacy", report of Anglican-Methodist Dialogue, supplement to the Faith & Order Conference Report, Methodist Church of New Zealand, 2015.

intended not only in relationship to the Anglican church in New Zealand, but also with sister-Methodist churches internationally (the clear majority of whom invoke the office of bishop though in various ways and forms).

For Anglicans, the question will be whether they can recognize an episcopal ministry in the ordained presbyter in the Presidential team – as an authentic episcopate. Further, could Methodism offer towards a conciliar understanding of episcopacy the affirmation of *episcopus* being reflected in a lay-ordained partnership, as expressed in the Presidential Team?

As the churches are invited to respond to these questions, no one church should feel compromised or subsumed into another church's model, but both sense an enrichment. Like the 'Irish Model', the question is asked whether episcopacy is sufficiently a feature of Methodist *episcopus* which simply needs to be overtly expressed and ordered in a way that episcopal churches recognize? Is the term 'Episcopal Minister' seen as a sufficient title, rather than 'Bishop'?

Recently, in 2018, the ANZP General Synod / Te Hinotu Whanui, resolved that it:

- 1 *Reaffirms its recognition that episcopacy is exercised within the Methodist Church of New Zealand through the office of the President.*
- 2 *Reaffirms the covenantal hope to work towards a united and interchangeable ministry between the Anglican and the Methodist churches.*
3. *Invites the Methodist Conference to consider how it might give more explicit expression to the personal and enduring nature of episcopal ministry on those who are set aside for this task.*
4. *Commits to responding in an open and generous way to the Methodist Conference should they be able to give effect to such an expression of episcopal ministry.*

A discussion paper circulated to MCNZ Synods and Hui Poari in response to these resolutions observed:

Sometimes when Methodists talk about the possibilities of deepening our relationship with the Anglican Church there is a wariness [by Methodists]. This is expressed succinctly in the question "Why is it always us who have to change?" The memory of the failure of the Anglican Church to accept the Plan for Union, a plan which involved establishing episcopal ministry in those partner churches which didn't have it – a plan supported by 86% of Methodists at the time, can still hurt and there is sometimes a sense amongst Methodists that steps towards a deeper relationship with the Anglican Church imply a deficit on our part which they would seek to correct to make us acceptable. In truth the ecumenical journey, the journey towards Christian unity, demands change of us all.³⁷

This ecumenical pilgrimage of renewal and reform together is continuing, and hopeful.

³⁷ "Considering Episcopacy as a Sign of Continuity and Unity", combined report of Faith & Order and Mission & Ecumenical to Synods and Hui Poari, Methodist Church of New Zealand, 2018.

Britain

In some respects, the ecumenical pilgrimage in Britain resonates with New Zealand – attempts at organic union, with more recently entering into ecumenical Covenant. But there are some contextual differences, and the proposed move forward has a different outcome to that of New Zealand, and the ‘Irish Model’.

A further context of Britain is the history giving rise to the milieu of an ‘established church’ in the Church of England (‘CoE’), and of other churches considered to be ‘non-conformist’ (which included Methodism). These are distinctions that did not get translated to the then colony of New Zealand, for example – at least officially, though the caricature of such has remnant traces in some discourse. The original division between Methodism and Anglicanism is also closer to the hearts and institutional memory of the respective churches.

The background to the current phase of ecumenical pilgrimage in Britain, over many decades, is well encapsulated by John Turner in *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740-1982*.³⁸ It recounts the many dialogues, reports and consideration towards unity, which have explored variations on adopting a model of episcopacy in the Methodist Church in Great Britain (‘MCB’) through an office of bishops. (In New Zealand, after the Plan for Union failed, there was no further dialogue within MCNZ towards episcopal ministry; whilst in Britain this exploration was continued.) The ecumenical journey continued with the signing of a Covenant between MCB and CoE in 2003.

These contexts combine to give the basis of current proposals presented in *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* (a combined report of the respective denominational Faith and Order bodies). This substantive report and its proposals were considered and affirmed at the CoE General Synod and MCB Conference respectively in 2018. The hope now is for the churches to effect and enable the intent of the proposals.

The report seeks both to articulate common ground and to honour differences; involving conversations that help to deepen understanding of why Methodists and Anglicans cherish their respective traditions. The proposed new relationship is not intending that each partner becomes more like the other, but discernment and discovering ways of being in a closer relationship with integrity, grace and generosity. *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* seeks to offer a way of enabling this relationship in a manner that is congruent with the teaching and polity of both churches.³⁹

The key proposal it contains is:

For Methodists, the challenge to “consider afresh expressing the Conference’s ministry of oversight in a personal form of connexional, episcopal ministry” is one that

³⁸ John Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740-1982*, (London: Epworth Press, 1985).

³⁹ “The Mission and Ministry in Covenant Proposals”, Faith and Order Committee Report, Methodist Church of Britain, Conference 2018. §2.9.

the church has wrestled with for a number of years and it is a subject on which there is a variety of deeply held views. If the proposals were to be adopted, then it would mean a permanent change in our formal doctrine of ministry to include bishops as well as presbyters and deacons as ordained ministers: the ordaining of the presbyteral President of the Conference as a bishop by bishops recognised by the Church of England (and at least some other episcopally ordered churches) as belonging in the historic episcopate; and the reception by the whole church of the episcopal ministry of Presidents and, in due course, past-Presidents.⁴⁰

There is a particular identification that this proposal involves a 'doctrinal change' for the MCB,⁴¹ which is distinct to the Irish and New Zealand journey; adopting the title of 'President-bishop'. The report suggests:

By receiving the sign of the historic episcopate, the Methodist Church would not be committing itself to having bishops that will exercise an episcopal ministry in exactly the same way as bishops in the Church of England. Reflection on the experience and practice of episcopacy in other parts of world Methodism reveals a variety of expressions of episcopal ministry. Many, but not all, Methodist churches express this ministry primarily through their bishops, although the office is understood and functions differently in the different branches of Methodism. Nor is it necessary for Methodists to subscribe to a particular theology of the episcopate. The proposed office of President-bishop is a means of receiving the historic episcopate and exercising an episcopal ministry in a way that is compatible with Methodist theology and polity.⁴²

Barriers and Boundaries: language, embrace and catholicity

I wish to explore a theological excursion to some touchstones which underlie, I believe, the ecumenical pilgrimages I have described above. These touchstones respond to a comment made at the 2018 MCB Conference regarding the proposals contained in *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, by The Rt Revd Anne Hollinghurst (Anglican bishop of Aston):

I believe the proposals would take down barriers between us without weakening the boundaries that give our two Churches their distinctive shape, and their distinctive life in the family of faith.⁴³

Resonating with this, Walter Kasper in *Spirit Acting in the World* suggests that on all sides we are surrounded by frontiers and gulfs.⁴⁴ Frontiers create conflicts and provoke frustrations, isolate and prevent community and sympathy with one another. Kasper also sees an eschatological hope to overcoming this reality; but that the Spirit is God's creative power in

⁴⁰ Ibid. §4.4.

⁴¹ Ibid., §4.1

⁴² Ibid., §4.4.

⁴³ *Conference Business Digest*, Conference 2018, Methodist Church in Britain. 1.

⁴⁴ For the following summary see Walter Kasper, "The Spirit Acting in the World to Demolish Frontiers and Create the Future," *Lumen Vitae* 34, no. 1 (1979).

the world that will bring about the radical change in our way of seeing and acting. He says that as Jesus challenged society, so too the Spirit continues this activity today. The Spirit demolishes frontiers, and creates the future of new possibilities. Through the Spirit there is hope of a “real way of escaping from the ghetto”, not so as to conform to the world around us, but to “offer it our witness to a lived, radiant hope.”⁴⁵

In a journey of dismantling of frontiers and barriers, there is equally a reminder and affirmation of the appropriate respecting and valuing of boundaries. Boundaries in this case are those elements of ethos, theology and polity that produce a healthy particularity of denominational identity.

In a critique and warning of missing this distinction, Martyn Percy reflects the risk of British Methodism’s identifying boundaries being blurred towards monochrome homogeneity. He warns outcomes include: global ministry and mission that evolves into an industry of ecclesial civil service; a risk of morphing into a ‘proto-retro-socialist organisation’; a struggle for local church self-identity; a collapse of theological confidence; and a struggle for particularity. The double-edged effect of ecumenical drawing together is the obviating of particularities towards homogeneity.⁴⁶

Language

Barriers sometimes are inadvertently created, where ecumenical reports are crafted to identify and respond to real or imaginary points of difference, and the extent of genuine and profound overlap and family resemblance is masked or undervalued. Our diverse language can further hide where the same concept is in fact being articulated, but conveyed contextually. Linguistic studies, such as when overlapped with queer theory, point to language being self-appropriated by a group in order to create boundaries for distinctive and affirming claims of self-identity; but the language is not understood by others of another group/context.

On this aspect of language, David Chapman observes:

... two parties to a conversation may conclude that they are saying exactly the same thing, albeit in different ways and using different words. But can they be confident they actually ‘agree’ unless one is willing to adopt precisely the same language as the other so that no difference remain? So far as inter-church dialogue is concerned, however, it is usually difficult for one ecclesial community to adopt the vocabulary, language and interpretative framework of another since these have generally been refined in the fires of controversy. ... Finding a third way in the shape of new and comprehensive ecumenical language is attractive but it may be overly optimistic ... an ecumenical

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 98-99.

⁴⁶ Martyn Percy, “Back to the Future: a search for a thoroughly modern Methodist ecclesiology” in Clive March, Brian Beck, Angela Shier-Jones and Helen Wareing (eds.), *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, (London, Continuum, 2004), 204-210.

*Esperanto cannot possibly convey the subtlety and richness of ideas that arise out of the spiritual experience of a particular ecclesial community.*⁴⁷

In ecumenical dialogue, churches have in some cases endeavoured towards a single common language as a basis of agreement; particularly, for example, through the language used in BEM to obtain commonality. Roger Walton observes,

*As a way of searching for visible unity, it has served the churches well but its cost may be the limiting of internal theological reflection which necessarily needs to draw deeply on an individual denomination's own history, charisms and language. There are hints that we are entering a new era or phase of dialogue where internal coherence and external connectivity may need to be related but may be cast in different vocabulary.*⁴⁸

Walton further reflects on the Anglican-Methodist dialogue in Britain, where episcopate and apostolicity have been exclusive to each other throughout its history to date. But now in being pursued together, how might the respective churches models remain as 'complementary and mutually releasing of each other while guarding the internal integrity of each tradition.'⁴⁹

In Britain the proposal is for the title 'bishop' to be added to the title of President ('President-bishop') and a house of bishops enacted. Whereas the Irish discerned 'consonance' between bishops and presidents that honoured different naming and language, yet affirming the underlying ecclesiology and ethos by retaining 'President' and adding 'episcopal minister' to the words of consecration (as also proposed in New Zealand).

Embrace

Another touchstone to that of language, is embrace. The wider ecumenical search for rediscovering and expressing our Christian identity and mission in common, causes reflection that no particular church or Christian tradition is able to justify living, reflecting and acting in isolation from the others. Ecumenical ethos undergirds a transcending of our own particular embodiment of Christianity, by stretching out an act of 'embrace' – which interrelates the particular and contextual, with the universal. The great ecumenical potential therein is of space created, a 'third space' between the two contextual spaces of the dialoguing partners, wherein is opened up the potential to enrich and renew the other, and oneself – as much for the sake of one's own identity and vitality.

A useful exploration of embrace is shared by Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Volf explores the nature of exclusion, and in response develops a theology of embrace that has a relational understanding of the Trinity as a cornerstone.

⁴⁷ David M Chapman, "Consensus and Difference: the elusive nature of ecumenical agreement". *Ecclesiology* 8 (2012), 54-70. 56-57.

⁴⁸ Roger L Walton, "A discipleship movement shaped for mission: forming a new ecclesial identity for British Methodism?", *Holliness* Vol 1, no. 1 (2015), 55-77. 72.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 72.

Volf suggests four structural elements of embrace: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms, and opening them again.⁵⁰ All four must be present for an integrated movement of embrace to happen: they are inseparable from each other. Essentially, expressing grace has primacy.

- ❖ Act one is the opening of the arms. Open arms are a gesture of the body reaching for the other. It is a code for desire of the other – I do not want to be myself only; I want the other to be a part of who I am; and I want to be part of the other. In opening my arms the self makes room for the other and encourages the other to reciprocate.
- ❖ Act two is the waiting. The open arms reach out but stop before touching the other. I have initiated the movement towards the other; but I must wait for desire to arise in the other, and for the arms of the other to open. This is what distinguishes an embrace from grasping for the other.
- ❖ Act three is closing the arms. This is the goal of the embrace, the embrace proper – unthinkable if there is no reciprocation. Each is holding the other both as active and passive, as host and guest, at the same moment. Free and mutual giving takes place; without holding the other too tightly so as to crush, or to assimilate like a ‘bear hug’.
- ❖ Act four is the opening of the arms again. Embrace is not making two bodies into one. The other must be let go to preserve their genuine identity. The self must take back itself, yet its own identity is now enriched by the traces of the presence of the other.

An embrace is a gamble. The act of opening our arms may be misunderstood, and the reaction may not be appreciated. However it creates a moment where exclusion is overcome, and two become mutually respectful of each other. This invokes redemptive potential and possibility. The most basic thought that is expressed is “the will to give of ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgement about others, except that of identifying with them in their humanity”.⁵¹ Embrace is indiscriminate and therefore is not selective of who to embrace; and it is immutable in that once performed one can not want to undo its effect. Here the moral mapping of the world into binaries is transcended.

Embrace may require finding a ‘third space’ which creates a distance from that which defines one’s culture and identity, without erasing the particularities: a transcending action that allows universality to be affirmed in line with Paul’s image of the universal Body of Christ. This may even allow reformation of self identity to occur, which enables a celebrating of the self without requiring the exclusion of the other.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 140-147. The following summary summarises this section of Volf’s book. My summary also draws on further articles by Volf. (See also: Miroslav Volf, "A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict," *Ecumenical Review* 47, no. 7 (1995). Miroslav Volf, "Living with The "Other", " *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 39, no. 1-2 (2002).)

⁵¹ Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 29.

For Volf, successful embrace has the following features:

- A fluidity of identities (one's identity is influenced by contacts with other identities and contexts);
- A non-symmetry of relationship (the relationship may not always be balanced and of equals, for example between friend and enemy, master and slave, divine and non-divine);
- A non-determination of the outcome (no outcome can be pre-programmed – other than that both will not be completely unchanged by the embrace); and,
- There is a risk to embrace (indeed, grace is a risk).⁵²

Catholicity

A key to Volf's theology of embrace is learning to value our own and others' identities and relate across the differences in a way that embodies embrace. Volf describes this as gaining a 'catholic personality'.⁵³ This he explores in *A Vision of Embrace*.

Distance *and* belonging are both important for Volf's catholic personality. The converse is that: belonging without distance destroys; distance without belonging isolates.⁵⁴ To adopt a catholic personality is, for Volf, part of becoming a Christian: we become in Christ a new creation in which there is space through the Spirit to receive 'the other'; indeed a catholic personality is one which is enriched by otherness and only is catholic by virtue of the multiple 'others' that become reflected in it. The Spirit breaks through the barriers and self-enclosed worlds that we inhabit and calls us to come to God; and re-creates us and sets us on a path of continued sanctification – towards becoming a catholic personality.

Volf continues to suggest an ecclesiological implication of this: a catholic person requires a 'catholic community'.⁵⁵ As a church among churches, Volf accommodates multiple churches as reflecting that the church universal has taken root in many cultures, yet are all part of the one. Therefore, reflecting a catholic spirit of embrace, every church must be open to all other churches, and that all of them help shape identity (each church needs the others in order to properly be itself, reflecting the sense of catholic personality on a communal level).

Such a theology of embrace links strongly to the great Methodist touchstone: John Wesley's Sermon 'The Catholic Spirit'. This is well placed for speaking into this ecumenical tension with an ethos of 'diversity in unity' and 'bearable anomalies'; of bringing together, in an embrace, nuanced and implicit expressions of *episcope*.

Whereas Methodism found itself on a trajectory of barriers being formed between what would become the Methodist church separate from the Church of England, John and Charles Wesley valiantly sought to remain within Anglican boundaries. The ethos for a Methodist

⁵² Ibid., 145.

⁵³ Volf, "A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict," 199.

⁵⁴ Ibid.: 198.

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 199.

response to boundaries and dividing barriers was laid within its 'DNA' through Wesley's sermon.

Wesley reflects on the command to 'love your neighbour as yourself' as a calling for universal love, but with a special affection for fellow Christians. However, we recognise that in our daily experience we are different; this is because Christians cannot all think alike and in consequence do not always act alike. This is a hindrance to practicing the intent of the command to love.

For Wesley there is a hope that all the children of God may unite despite differences between them. While Wesley affirms that we have different groups of denominations and churches, he does not advocate creating a uniform expression of Christianity. Therefore, to ask to 'give me your hand' does not mean 'agree with me on everything'; rather let us respect our different opinions and not try to convert each other: "Don't speak about our different opinions; just give me your hand."⁵⁶ This is an act of intentional willingness to embrace.

John Salmon drew on the Catholic Spirit when reflecting on differences experienced within Methodism, yet is also applicable to Methodists in dialogue.⁵⁷ He suggested that it is difficult to pin down any one perspective or identity as identifiably 'Methodist', without leaving someone out – in a sense, 'Methodist identity' is to work with a kaleidoscope of identities. Salmon suggests that a core component of being Methodist is being prepared to accept different viewpoints and different reflections of the Wesleyan heritage, and different approaches to God and Christian life.

*Wesleyan faith might be about assurance, but it is not about certainty. Certainty blocks us off from those who think differently from us, and is in many ways the opposite of faith. Wesley's call is to recognise that none of us has the whole truth and that all of us are wrong to some degree. This stance enables us recognise others and their views, but it doesn't mean we need to agree with everybody. We should be able to shake hands, and then state why we think this or that idea or interpretation or emphasis of ours is worthwhile. In that way, we begin to enter into dialogue.*⁵⁸

Further to the often-quoted Catholic Spirit, Brian Beck explores another dimension of Methodist ethos that provides a parallel to contemporary ecumenical ethos.⁵⁹ He suggests Methodist 'connexion' offers a parallel to ecumenical 'koinonia', in that both involve an interpersonal dimension, and are mission oriented. They also present a challenge of

⁵⁶ James D Holway, *Sermons on Several Occasions by the Reverend John Wesley: Translated into Modern English*, (likeston: Moorley's Print & Publishing, 2003), 396.

John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 450.

⁵⁷ John Salmon is a Fellow and former Principal of Trinity Methodist Theological College; and a past Vice President and President of MCNZ. His address was to an annual Wesley Dinner held in 2006 at Trinity Methodist Theological College.

⁵⁸ John Salmon. A "Catholic Spirit"?, Auckland: Unpublished paper, 2006.

⁵⁹ Brian E Beck, "Connexion and Koinonia: Wesley's Legacy and the Ecumenical Ideal" in Randy L Maddox (ed.) *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 129-141.

embracing unity and diversity, and of creating accountability. He concludes the centrality of the spiritual values of faith and love that undergirded Wesley's day and ours is:

... a program for reaching across the denominational barriers while those barriers remain, and possibly a means by which one day will come to see that they are unnecessary and can be removed. But connexion, and its larger, theologically more adequate counterpart, koinonia, look forward to the day when there are no barriers and asks: Shall we still live as though there were barriers? And if not, how shall our common life be ordered?⁶⁰

Concluding comments

The challenging frontier in our mutual ecumenical pilgrimage is the encountering of barriers and boundaries; and discerning their differences. Understanding nuances of language, the act of embrace, expressing a spiritual catholicity – are all assisted by an underlying and immersing grace.

Methodism may be theologically equipped for the ecumenical pilgrimage and holding a demeanour of welcoming embrace that, for the most part, does not seek to set obstacles to unity. However it might also contain a blind spot of underestimating the difficulties other Christian traditions have with certain features of Methodism.

The invitation of grace is to revive and reform distinctiveness through embrace. Change is offered and received, gracefully; local adaptation is honoured within the framework of a wider catholicity; all for both our own sake and for the sake of the unity prayed for by Christ. The image of a 'rainbow of diversity', in the many contexts of exploring barriers and boundaries, offers a universal eschatological hope for a unity that encompasses a catholicity in its fullest sense.

The Anglican-Methodist dialogues I have discussed offer insights that have endeavoured to draw the traditions together, in their particular contexts, so that an encompassing Catholic Spirit of embrace is brought forth. Methodists whilst open to fresh insights into the nature of church, is offering of itself ecumenical gifts and insights to others; that together might overcome barriers of division yet affirm the boundaries of self-identity. A 'catholic personality' so arises.

Without the intention to create a parallel and uniform episcopate, the invitation for Anglican-Methodist dialogue is to explore and affirm the apostolicity that exists, though expressed differently. The 'Irish Model' presents the discernment of sufficient consonance to affirm a 'communion of episcopacy' of both historic *episcopate* and corporate *episcopate* represented diversely in the respective churches. Meanwhile this is not seen as a permanent stasis; but acknowledges an ongoing opportunity and ecumenical pilgrimage to continue to grow into

⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

each other through both convergence and consonance. Grace is effected through an embrace that changes both by contact with the other, yet still remaining true to one's own identity and boundaries. Is this a strength to be found in the otherwise asserted 'slipperiness of BEM regarding apostolicity'?

The potential of this model will truly be realised when it inspires ecumenical dialogues outside of the Anglican-Methodist context in the consonance between historic episcopate and non-episcopal churches, while nonetheless being affirmed as being faithful in the Apostolic Tradition of the church-universal.

Through discovering and affirming where there is sufficient consonance; or from making changes in order to reform and renew expressions of episcopate and apostolicity in order to strengthen unity, I am reminded of Karl Barth's declaration *ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda* ("the church reformed, but always needing to be reformed"). Will "the chains fall off" so that that ecumenical grace is restored and the ecumenical work revived?

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*