

Evangelicals and their Bishops – the role of bishops and how we should relate to them

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Preface

This booklet is primarily designed to inform our discussion about episcopacy at the 2020 Church Society regional conferences. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to give us some signposts on how we should approach some of the difficulties we face today.

At their heart lies controversy over the Lordship of Christ and the authority of scripture, focused particularly on the issue of the Church's adherence to biblical teaching on sexual relationships and gender. As bishops appear to take different views on these matters, our relationship with them, as evangelicals operating within their dioceses, inevitably comes into question. The hope is that this booklet will help us discern the right way forward for these relationships.

It does so by:

- Examining the biblical and historical basis for episcopacy;
- Identifying recent trends in the practice of episcopacy in the Church of England;
- Analyzing the basis on which bishops exercise their roles in the Church;
- And finally, suggesting that we need to hold together the New Testament's teaching on the avoidance of false teaching with its teaching on accountability and authority.

Where do bishops come from?

In Acts we see the apostles appointing elders / presbyters in the churches they plant. So Paul and Barnabas make disciples in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch for example (Acts 14) and then re-visit each place some time later to appoint elders for these churches (Acts 14:23). Timothy would have observed this pattern first hand (see 2 Timothy 3:10-11) and indeed he was himself ordained by a group of elders including Paul (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). The church can therefore exist without such presbyters (since it is birthed by the living word of God). Yet they are appointed for its wellbeing (Titus 1:3; see also Ephesians 4:11-16), just as elders were appointed and empowered by God in Old Testament Israel to govern the people of God under the Law of Moses (e.g. Exodus 18; Numbers 11).

In the New Testament, Timothy and Paul's other co-worker, Titus, are in fact presented as more than simply pastors or elders. Paul (authorised directly by the Lord Jesus as an apostle) appears to have given these men authority over other elders, in more than a single gathering. In 1 Timothy, Paul tells Timothy to keep other teachers in Ephesus in line, and command them not to preach various heresies (1 Timothy 1:3,18). Paul speaks as though Timothy has authority over them. He tells Timothy the kind of people who should be appointed as elders and overseers publicly (1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Timothy 2:2), if such can be found, and how to organise things in the church — presumably because he will be doing the ordaining and organising. Just as Timothy himself was set aside by the council of elders, through the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 4:14), he is told that he should not be hasty in laying hands on others (1 Timothy 5:22), presumably as he considers whether to ordain them.

When it comes to other elders in Ephesus, Timothy is also to keep an eye on their stipends and assess their performance (1 Timothy 5:17), hear charges against elders, and rebuke their behaviour where necessary (1 Timothy 5:19-20). Paul clearly envisages Timothy as having some authority over the other elders in the large city of Ephesus, just as Titus is also commanded to stay on the island of Crete 'so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you' (Titus 1:5). He is to do this if — and only if — he can find suitable people in each town, exercising his judgment in that island-wide discernment process, in the absence of the apostle. Titus is also told to silence and rebuke false teachers (Titus 1:10-16)

and not let anyone disregard this authority he has been given (Titus 2:15). This is especially so with those who are divisive or heretical teachers, who he is to warn and then avoid (Titus 3:10-11).

All this was certainly taken by the early church as a template for ongoing church leadership — including the clear indication that particular presbyters could exercise authority over other presbyters (also called ‘priests’ in English) in appropriate, orderly, and apostolically-sanctioned ways. It established a precedent for some kind of supra-congregational authority which we see developing when the church grows in the early centuries, as new churches are planted and leadership is required — leadership in line with the wider church, whose commonly accepted canons or rules of conduct were always to be borne in mind by particular congregations, so they did not become too idiosyncratic or eccentric (see 1 Corinthians 1:2, 7:17, 11:16, 14:33,36). Often it was the oldest or most experienced presbyter that chaired the local council of elder-overseers (see the position of James in Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 2:9), and this figure eventually became known as *the overseer/bishop*. The preface to the Anglican Ordinal in the *Book of Common Prayer* says that:

‘It is evident unto all men diligently reading holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Which offices were evermore had in such reverend estimation, that no man might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same; and also by publick Prayer, with imposition of Hands, were approved and admitted thereunto by lawful authority.’¹

¹ See Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 36-38 for another Reformation-era defence of this view of bishops.

What is the Anglican view of bishops?

The Church of England inherited episcopacy from the early and medieval church.² Both Celtic and later Roman forms of Christianity in England had bishops (just as Eastern Orthodoxy does), though they often conceived of their roles in different ways (with the more settled, Roman pattern of a bishop overseeing a territory called a diocese winning the day as time went by). The Protestant Reformers did not seek to abolish the office of bishop, but to capture the power of appointments and reform the office according to the word of God, so that it would be a more useful instrument for the evangelisation and edification of the people. They did not seek to establish government by local committees of presbyters (Presbyterianism) or transfer significant episcopal powers to more 'democratic' parish gatherings (Congregationalism).

In the wider context of our foundational *Thirty-nine Articles*, and the Prayer Book in which they are found, it is clear that the Church of England does not consider a parish congregation to be 'the highest tribunal to which an aggrieved party may appeal', as the Congregationalist theologian Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) claimed in his argument over church polity with the Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford.³ Thus, the Articles talk about the biblically-circumscribed jurisdiction of the monarch over the church (Article 37); and about archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons (Articles 32 and 36). The Prayer Book provides for the consecration of bishops and archbishops, charging them to preach, drive away erroneous doctrine, and administer discipline across their dioceses, in accordance with the canon law rules of the Church. Articles 33 and 34 speak about the Church and excommunication (which is reserved to bishops, not local gatherings), and about particular national churches having authority to ordain, change, and abolish rites and ceremonies (which has never been a power given to each individual parish meeting within Anglican polity). So understood in their own context, the Articles cannot (as some have claimed) be singling out the local parish assembly in Article 19 as self-contained and supreme, apart from the wider Church, unless they are contradicting themselves rather blatantly.

² Episcopacy is the government of the church through bishops or overseers — in Greek, *episcopoi*.

³ Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (London: 1648), 4.19.

Article 19 says that ‘The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered.’ It doesn’t say the local congregation is all that matters. Rather, it defines the whole visible catholic church as a certain group of those who have faith, called out and distinguished from the world by the preaching of the word and the orderly, disciplined administration of the sacraments (which includes the idea of excommunication or barring people from those sacraments, as the Articles and Prayer Book make clear). In its historical context, it establishes that a church does not need to be under the authority of the Bishop of Rome to be a true church, rejecting that institutional definition in favour of one which prioritises confession over connection, practice over Pope, laity over leadership.

The proposals in the *Reformation of Church Law* (contemporary with the *Thirty-nine Articles* and drafted by Thomas Cranmer, Peter Martyr Vermigli and others) explain the system of church government and discipline which the Reformers intended to put in place alongside the *Thirty-nine Articles* and the *Book of Common Prayer*. It said,

‘Bishops, because they hold the chief place among the other ministers of the church, must therefore govern and pastor the lower orders of the clergy, as well as the whole people of God, with sound doctrine, sober authority and wise counsel, not indeed in order to lord it over their faith, but that they might prove themselves to be true servants of the servants of God. And they shall know that the government / authority and ecclesiastical jurisdiction has been specially entrusted to them for no other reason than that by their ministry and hard work / dedication as many people as possible may be made rich in / joined to Christ...’

It also speaks about the obedience to be shown to such bishops, ‘to foster harmony’ and ‘for the sake of Christian discipline’. Indeed, Cranmer’s committee outlined the tasks of a bishop as: passing on sound doctrine; conferring holy orders and instituting ministers to benefices as well as removing those who are unworthy; settling complaints and quarrels between ministers and their churches; correcting vices by ecclesiastical censures and excommunicating persistent offenders; visiting the whole diocese regularly;

holding synods; and confirming people.⁴ As well as in the Ordinal, (ordination services) such a view of bishops is set out in Canon Law even today; Canon C18 says of a bishop that 'it appertains to his office to teach and to uphold sound and wholesome doctrine, and to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange opinions; and, himself an example of righteous and godly living, it is his duty to set forward and maintain quietness, love, and peace among all men.' This is very much in line with what the Pastoral Epistles and 1 Peter 5 say about the qualifications for elders.

Bishops are not an essential part of our definition of the church, but in the Church of England they have always been regarded as a useful biblical means for safeguarding our spiritual health. They must not ordain rites and ceremonies that are 'contrary to God's Word written' (Article 20). We must have lawfully called and consecrated preachers and ministers (Article 23, Article 36), who do not need to be celibate singles but may be married (Article 32), and who speak in a language understood by the people (Article 24). Sacraments 'duly administered' also means properly using the sacraments for the purpose for which they were instituted (Article 25, Article 28), including baptising infants which is 'most agreeable with the institution of Christ' (Article 27), and giving communion in both kinds (Article 30). It also means the ministers who administer the sacraments must be subject to discipline and removal if they fall short (Article 26), and must also discipline others (Article 33), while not offending the common order of the church in their attitude towards traditions which are in themselves not repugnant to the Bible (Article 34).

Yet reformation there must always be, in accordance with God's word. According to the *Reformation of Church Law*, a crisis in church leadership requires urgent attention. 'Just as the condition of the state is ruined when it is governed by people who are stupid, demanding, and burning with ambition,' it says, 'so in these times the church of God is struggling, since it is committed to the care of those who are totally incompetent to assume so important a task, in which respect it has fallen very far short indeed of those rules of the blessed Paul, which he prescribed to Timothy and Titus. Therefore we must find an appropriate remedy for so serious a plague on our

⁴ *Tudor Church Reform: The Henrician Canons of 1535 and the Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* ed. by Gerald Bray (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 356–59 (*Reformatio*, 20:10–12).

churches'.⁵ One of the roles of a bishop, therefore, is to train up godly and effective ministers. In particular, a bishop should also appoint people to 'make up for the defects and negligence of the parish priests when need be'.⁶

So, according to the English Reformers, what are the marks of the visible church, or indeed of an Anglican church (or denomination)? A group of people, with lives marked by an intention to be faithful and loyal to the holy God in their lives, who listen to his word and celebrate his sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper in a disciplined and orderly way under the properly constituted and accountable leadership of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. This is the kind of healthy congregation that today we seek to pioneer, establish, and secure, and is the goal of all the reforming and renewing activity of evangelicals within the Church of England.

More Recent Developments

In the nineteenth century, the rise of the Oxford Movement and the Romanising of the Church of England by some led to many problems (as similar movements had also done prior to the Civil Wars). No bishop ever wore a mitre in the Church of England from the Reformation downwards, for example. Yet they have not only been re-introduced (at the beginning of the twentieth century) but have now become entirely normal and uncommented upon — as, more seriously, have many other aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice.⁷ The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) also placed bishops above parishes in a way that the Church of England never has, defining local churches as merely 'lesser groupings of the faithful', subordinate to the bishop and diocese, the 'real' church:

'the bishop is to be considered as the high priest of his flock, from whom the life in Christ of his faithful is in some way derived and dependent. Therefore all should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centered around the bishop, especially in his

⁵ Bray, *Tudor Church Reform*, 280–81 (*Reformatio*, 11:1).

⁶ Bray, *Tudor Church Reform*, 359–61 (*Reformatio*, 20:13).

⁷ See Lee Gatiss 'How to Transform a Church' in *Positively Anglican: Building on the Foundations and Reforming the Church* (London: Lost Coin, 2016), 84-88.

cathedral church; they must be convinced that the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the full active participation of all God's holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers'.⁸

This Roman Catholic view of the centrality of the bishop, the cathedral, and the diocese is now widely held within the Church of England, to the detriment of the local church. Furthermore, a few years ago *The Times* referred to a new phenomenon of 'episcopal inflation' — noting that the more than fourfold growth in the number of bishops since 1850 (from 26 bishops to around 120 now) had occurred at the same time as the average Sunday attendance has plummeted dramatically. They concluded that we had moved from one bishop per 115,000 people in the pews on Sunday, to one bishop per 8,000. This is not the interesting seventeenth-century suggestion of Archbishop Ussher called *Reduced Episcopacy*, which would have crossed Presbyterianism with Episcopacy by increasing the number of bishops but drastically reducing their power. It seems rather to be a lack of confidence in our own understanding of the episcopal role.

At the same time, we also now have far more openly liberal or progressive bishops, who are willing, often very publicly, to challenge the long-established teaching of the church. In the past, any qualms episcopal candidates may have had about the official doctrine of the church (which they are called to maintain and defend) would have largely been kept private. But since the 1960s, starting with Bishop John Robinson's book *Honest to God* (SCM, 1963 republished 2013), the liberal cause has become increasingly emboldened. One Bishop of Durham infamously declared that the resurrection of Christ was merely 'a conjuring trick with bones'. More recently there has been open advocacy of sexual relationships that undermine traditional Christian moral teaching about sex and marriage. While this continues to hold and clergy are expected to respect this teaching in the way they order their own lives, nevertheless it is repeatedly said that 'clergy are fully entitled to argue... for a change in that teaching' (see e.g. the recent Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships for opposite-sex couples).

⁸ *Sacrosanctum Consilium*, E41–42. *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbot and trans. by Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 152.

Evangelicals and bishops today

The issue which many evangelicals face is deciding how far they could be regarded as colluding with false teaching by remaining in fellowship with bishops who appear to be complicit with such teaching. We will return to this question of complicity later, but the underlying issue raises the preliminary question of whether or not it is possible to be part of the Church of England, but separated in some way from its bishops.

To answer this question, we need to examine the extent to which there is a difference between the temporal and spiritual powers of a bishop and what the implications of this are both in terms of differentiation within the church and also for taking the oath of canonical obedience.

Temporal and Spiritual

With the spread of the gospel and the increasing power of the Papacy in the middle ages, the ecclesiastical hierarchy sought to use its worldly wealth and power to claim primacy over the secular rulers of Europe in what is known as the Investiture Controversy. This lasted roughly from 1076 to 1122 and was only settled by carefully differentiating between secular and spiritual power, or power in the *temporal* realm and power over *spiritual* affairs. Bishops had both kinds of power, and it was decided to make it clear that they derived their temporal power from the secular state or monarch, and their spiritual power from the church, i.e. from the Pope. This distinction between different parts of a bishop's power is now a common one. In the classic sit-com *Yes Prime Minister*, for example, 'theology' is tellingly described as a tool to enable agnostics to remain within the church, and bishops are reportedly 'managers in fancy dress'. As Prime Minister Hacker tells his wife, 'The Church of England has over 172,000 acres of land, thousands of tenants, leaseholds, property and investments... the ideal bishop is a corporate executive. A sort of merchant banker, personnel manager, and estate agent.' She replies, rather witheringly, 'I'd prefer you to choose a man of God'; but he insists that 'They offered me one of those, but he wants to turn the Church into a religious movement.'⁹ This describes the ever-present tension between the temporal authority which bishops still possess, and the spiritual dimensions of their role, which we might see as primary but which others

⁹ The Bishop's Gambit, *Yes Prime Minister* series 1 episode 7 (1986).

may not. The distinction is made clear wherever ministers take up their role in the Church of England: they are *instituted* into the spiritualities of a benefice when they are given ‘cure of souls’ there (the legal responsibility to preach and lead services etc); but they are *inducted* into the temporalities of the benefice (i.e. given the key to the church building and so on).

Reformers have always struggled with this. John Wycliffe taught that ideally, bishops should leave all temporal dominion to the secular power, and should urge clergy to do likewise. Indeed, he said, clergy with a lust for power and only a pretence of holiness ought to have their historic resources removed from them by the laity, who should be on the lookout for such deceit and withdraw their alms and offerings as an act of spiritual kindness to the erring.¹⁰ Lutherans also discussed the temporal-spiritual tension. Article 28 of their Augsburg Confession talks in detail about the authority of bishops, which is based on their preaching of the word and refutation of error. While ‘bishops have no authority to decree anything against the Gospel, and should not burden the church with traditions and ceremonies which ensnare people’s consciences,’ it says, they can exercise certain temporal powers given to them by the civil power (to hear certain cases of marriage law or tithes, for example). What is more, they do have, by their spiritual authority, the right to exclude people from the communion of the church. The Lutheran confession was careful to say, ‘It is not our intention to take oversight away from the bishops.’¹¹ Puritans struggling with less-than-ideal bishops in the sixteenth century formed something of a church within a church, with alternative networks of fellowship behind the official structures; and sometimes they regarded bishops simply as civil magistrates (able to rubber stamp their credentials at ordination or their appointments to livings) rather than their spiritual leaders.¹² It is precisely this distinction that many evangelicals employ today as well, when it comes to relating to liberal bishops — accepting their jurisdictional role but not their spiritual guidance or oversight.

¹⁰ See more in Lee Gatiss, *Fight Valiantly: Contending for the Faith in the Bible and in the Church of England* (London: Lost Coin, 2019), 164–165.

¹¹ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* ed. by P.T. McCain (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2006), 58–62.

¹² See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 344–345.

To some extent this distinction is reflected in the legal position of bishops in the Church of England. In the debates about the introduction of female bishops prior to the failure of the first Measure designed to bring this about in 2012, it was made clear that while the jurisdiction of a Diocesan bishop could be delegated to another (e.g. to one of the Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs) or 'flying bishops'), the authority that would then be exercised by the PEV could not be delegated. That authority was exercised in their own right as a consequence of their consecration as bishops.

A) Differentiation

If therefore, it is possible to distinguish a difference between a bishop's jurisdictional role and his or her spiritual role, one of the implications is that it must be possible to introduce 'differentiation' into the Church of England so that spiritual matters are dealt with by one bishop and jurisdictional matters by another. Jurisdictional issues could include licensings of clergy; rules governing safeguarding and professional conduct, aspects of discipline, administration of financial affairs (including paying for clergy, housing, and administration through the parish share arrangements); schemes for pastoral rearrangement (where these do not raise theological concerns); and upkeep of buildings. Spiritual issues might include selection for ordination, ordinations, appointments, aspects of discipline, teaching, and pastoral care.

The present system for parishes to register their theological convictions over men's and women's priestly and episcopal ministry and to ask for 'arrangements' to be made, reflect something of the 'differentiation' outlined above. As discussions over sexuality continue within the Church, deeper forms of 'differentiation' may need to be considered. However, in the absence of an agreed way forward, many clergy feel the need to demonstrate 'avoidance' of false teaching by distancing themselves from the spiritual authority of their bishops. This then raises the question of whether this is possible, given that all clergy take a vow of canonical obedience to their bishop.

B) Oath of Canonical Obedience

The oath of canonical obedience is not an oath of personal, feudal loyalty to obey whatever the bishop feels like commanding. It is an oath to obey, in all things lawful and honest, i.e. it only requires obedience to such commands as

the bishop is authorised to impose by canon law.¹³ Canon law does not work on the same basis of precedent as does our civil law, but the most relevant ruling would be that of the Privy Council in *Long v. Capetown* (1863), which laid down that bishops cannot command what canon law does not command. That law states that, 'The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal' (Canon A5). So ministers cannot be commanded to do or teach anything at odds with that doctrinal or liturgical standard. Indeed, it is their duty, in all honesty, to disobey commands that would be contrary to Scripture, and they do not have to obey any instructions which are lacking a basis in canon law.

Avoidance, Accountability and Authority

It is not within the scope of a booklet such as this to open up all the New Testament teaching on how to respond to false teaching.¹⁴ In general, there is an emphasis on 'avoidance' (e.g. Romans 16:17); on not 'partnering' with dangerous teaching (e.g. Ephesians 5: 6-7); and on not tolerating those who teach or practice sexual immorality (Revelation 2: 20). There is never any suggestion that people should leave congregations, although 2 Corinthians 6 does speak about separation from the unbelieving world.

¹³ See Rupert Bursell, 'The Oath of Canonical Obedience' in *The Ecclesiastical Law Journal* (May 2014), 168-186 and Gerald Bray, *The Oath of Canonical Obedience* (London: Latimer Trust, 2004). This understanding was confirmed recently in *The Five Guiding Principles: A Resource for Study* by the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England (Church House Publishing, 2018), 19 which says the oath 'does not mean a blanket agreement to follow every episcopal instruction, but to obey those instructions which the bishop is authorized to give under canon law.'

¹⁴ See Lee Gatiss, *Fight Valiantly: Contending for the Faith in the Bible and in the Church of England* which looks at the biblical texts on this, many examples from the contemporary church and from church history, and applications of this teaching to the Church of England today.

One of the issues we face is whether a particular approach to pastoral care and outreach amounts to a degradation of the Church's existing doctrine sufficient to classify it as 'false teaching':

- Is a failure to teach on a subject, false teaching?
- Is an inability or refusal to discipline, false teaching?
- Is an accommodation (e.g. not asking questions about relationships prior to the baptism of an infant), false teaching?
- Is a dislike of confrontation, false teaching?

For many of us, the answers to these questions will vary, particularly as the stated doctrinal position of the Church on the most controversial issue of our day – that of sexual ethics – remains orthodox.¹⁵ If, however, we are convinced that 'avoidance' must find some expression, there is some clear apostolic guidance:

- We should not invite those who advocate non-apostolic teaching into our congregations (2 John 10);
- We should teach the truth clearly but gently ourselves (2 Timothy 2:24-26);
- We should 'take no part' in what is advocated by those who 'deceive' with 'empty words' (Ephesians 5:6-7),

All of these actions lie within our legal rights in parishes; none require us to vacate them or to break up the practical arrangements that sustain the present polity of the Church of England.

We also need to be very careful about the key issues of accountability and authority, not least because some recent scandals have demonstrated our own weakness in these areas. Bishops and diocesan staff do provide external reference points that can enable us to see what would otherwise be our 'blind spots'. If it is argued that their theological position makes openness with them impossible, it must be remembered that the New Testament calls us all to transparency of lifestyle and to the maintenance of a good reputation even with 'outsiders' (1 Timothy 3:7). The way in which this works in practice is also important. We are not officially held to account for our teaching (which is specifically excluded from the Clergy Discipline Measure),

¹⁵ See the 1987 Highton motion of General Synod, or Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, for example, or the Faith and Order Commission's report *Men and Women in Marriage* (GS Misc 1046) available online.

but our pastoral practice must be in line with *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy*, none of which is inconsistent with New Testament teaching; indeed it helps us to implement it. We may object to particular ways in which some Dioceses proceed – but here we have to be consistent with our own beliefs. If Dioceses are simply seeking to implement good practice as they see it, then we may have no doctrinal grounds for refusing to go along with it. Furthermore, insofar as advice from bishops is concerned, if it is consistent with the canons, then we act as those under authority. To do otherwise is to retreat from our commitment to what the Reformers sought to establish within the Church of England.

Questions to ponder:

1. If bishops refuse to exercise proper church discipline around the sacraments or around clergy appointments, what options are there for faithful parishes to keep to the teaching of the Bible and the *Thirty-nine Articles*?
2. Given that spiritual oversight from bishops can to a certain extent be avoided while a vicar is in charge (they do not have to be invited to preach etc), and that obedience is required only for ‘all things lawful and honest’, is it necessary to separate further while the doctrine and liturgy of the Church remains orthodox?

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet’s website contains useful advice and guidance: www.bishopofebbsfleet.org See especially the section on Guidance.

If you have any queries, please contact the Bishop of Ebbsfleet’s office: admin@bishopofebbsfleet.org or on **07710 232423**.

