

Apostolicity and Episkopé in U.S. Ecumenical Dialogue

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I. Introduction

The historic ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), issued in 1982 by the *World Council of Churches'* Faith and Order Commission, stated at the conclusion of its "Ministry" section that a mutual recognition of ministries and a path toward full communion among the different Christian churches rested on coming to common understandings of apostolicity and episkopé.¹ Apostolicity is understood as a constitutive mark of the church (one, holy, catholic, and *apostolic*). Episkopé is the transliterated biblical Greek term denoting "oversight," and has come to refer to ways in which the churches give expression to oversight as a meaningful part of ministry. This presentation seeks to evaluate how ecumenical efforts focused on achieving a common understanding of these two realities have progressed in the U.S. context, twenty-six years after BEM was issued.

In particular, I will proceed by first examining the text of the BEM document with respect to apostolicity and episkopé. I will then seek to indicate significant advances and shifts in the dialogue by evaluating more contemporary sources, namely, the insights of theologians from different Churches of the Reformation in the U.S., working on the *Churches Uniting in Christ's* "Consultation on Episkopé," and an independent, though related, presentation of a contemporary U.S. Catholic theologian. I have chosen to restrict my inquiry primarily to the context of the United States, though obviously the BEM text and the Roman Catholic Church are global in their scope. I do so because my experiences of church have been shaped in this context and the U.S. ecumenical efforts of the past two decades have proven to be quite fruitful. I

¹ World Council of Churches, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), "Ministry," nos. 51-53. Future references to this text will be as "BEM."

recognize in restricting my inquiry that certain perspectives from even several North American churches will not be represented here, to say nothing of the churches in other parts of the world. However, the churches and theologians I have chosen to highlight offer some very meaningful ways of evaluating past ecumenical progress in regard to apostolicity and episkopé, and converge on key themes that suggest needed future discussions. It is hoped that even though this comparative effort is thus limited in focus and scope, it will provide useful insights that can be carried further in the context of diverse bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues in different places.

Finally, it is important to note that, as a Roman Catholic layman, I come to the discussion with that tradition and its theological assumptions as part of my evaluation and themes highlighted here. To the extent possible, I believe I have been faithful to the sources I cite in terms of their own theological integrity with respect to the traditions out of which they come. This, of course, is not to imply that I am a neutral observer to the issues under consideration here, as I do find great value in the Catholic contribution to these discussions. I hope that the value I see in the Catholic perspectives presented here can be viewed by others as meaningful to the entire ecumenical conversation, and not simply as a “confessional” digression.

II. Apostolicity and Episkopé in the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* Text

The 1982 BEM Statement noted the necessary interrelationship between these three realities in the lives of the churches. That is to say, the text’s focus on baptism as the foundational initiatory experience that places one in a Trinitarian and ecclesial relationship² and Eucharist as the ongoing sacramental participation in those linked relational realities³ helps contextualize the discussion of what constitutes ministry. This is reflected in the first part of the

² Ibid., “Baptism,” nos. 2-6.

³ Ibid., “Eucharist,” nos. 19-21.

“Ministry” section, in which the foundation for all ministry is likewise seen as a Trinitarian and ecclesiological reality – the calling of the whole people of God.⁴ At the same time, BEM is also clear that the reality of ministry is a constitutive dimension of the community of the church. For example, the ordained ministry is presented as a necessity, as these public, responsible, authorized agents concretely manifest the unity of the church, among other things.⁵ Thus, from the integral relationship between ministry, Trinity, and church, the topics of episkopé and apostolicity are broached.

After discussing the relationship of the ordained ministry to authority, the priesthood, and women in ministry, part III of the “Ministry” section focuses on its historical forms, especially the three-fold model of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and the contemporary manifestations and functions that ordained ministers exemplify in the various churches. Here is where the document’s understanding of episkopé is made explicit. It is in part IV that the notion of apostolicity is first mentioned, followed by part V on ordination and part VI on mutual recognition of ordained ministries.

Overall, then, the order of topics put forward in BEM seems to suggest three things: (1) that the ordained ministries are to be understood in the relational ecclesiological context articulated at the beginning of the “Ministry” section, (2) that both ordination and its forms are in some way constitutive of episkopé and apostolicity, but not completely delineated by them, and (3) that a clearer understanding of all of these realities is necessary for meaningful progress on the ecumenical goal of mutual recognition of ministries.

We also see that the actual presentations of episkopé and apostolicity in BEM embody these understandings. First, in considering the references to episkopé, “Ministry,” no. 14, notes

⁴ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 1-6.

⁵ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 8.

its relationship to the celebration of the eucharist and the ordained ministry. Since the ordained ministry is seen to be the visible focus of communion between Christ and the Church, and this focus is manifested especially in the eucharistic gathering, it is “appropriate that an ordained minister should be given” the task of presiding at the eucharist.⁶ This task is seen as “intimately related” to the task of episkopé.⁷

However, it is only in “Ministry,” no. 21, that episkopé is more broadly discussed, and this paragraph seems to inform the other uses of the term elsewhere in the text. After recognizing the pluriform patterns of ministry present in the New Testament texts and the historical restructuring of ministry that was necessary as the church grew and spread across the Roman Empire, BEM focuses on how this restructuring resulted in the tripartite ministerial structure within (some) local eucharistic communities. In these places, the *episkopoi* were seen as the communities’ leaders, who were “ordained and installed to proclaim the Word and preside over the eucharist,” assisted in their tasks by *presbyteroi* and *diakonoi*.⁸

However, with the passage of time from the original apostolic era to the sub-apostolic period (i.e. late first century into the second century), significant shifts occurred in what these different ministers did. Although the apostles exercised oversight in a broad sense, the New Testament Pastoral Epistles (especially Timothy and Titus) show a shift toward the need for oversight within particular areas. Subsequently, *episkopoi* became regional leaders, and their oversight likewise became more geographically extensive.⁹ Later in BEM, the ministry of episkopé is also mentioned in a discussion of the varieties of ministries present in the church,

⁶ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 14.

⁷ Ibid., “Ministry,” Commentary on no. 14.

⁸ Ibid., “Ministry,” nos. 19-20.

⁹ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 21.

with the former viewed as “necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body.”¹⁰

Nevertheless, in the section on mutual recognition of ministries, the document indicates that a ministry of episkopé has been retained in the churches which have not historically had bishops or ordained ministries, because it calls upon these variant forms of episkopé to be recognized as such. However, BEM does not indicate what the specific nature of episkopé is in churches that do not ordain ministers (such as the Quakers, for example), simply that it is manifested in them in “various forms.”¹¹

These references to episkopé, while informative, are few when compared to the references to apostolicity, apostolic life or tradition, and apostolic succession, to which the entirety of part IV of the “Ministry” section is dedicated. It begins by noting the fact that any notion of historical apostolic succession of bishops should be seen within the context of the larger apostolicity of the church. Thus, an effort is made to treat these as differentiated but interrelated realities.¹² Apostolicity is broadly defined as “continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles,” but is specified immediately by a list of several concrete manifestations of it:

witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.¹³

BEM articulates a view on apostolic succession in this context. It says that the apostolic tradition described above is the “primary manifestation” of that succession, with the ordained

¹⁰ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 23.

¹¹ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 53a.

¹² Ibid., “Ministry,” Commentary on no. 34.

¹³ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 34.

ministry having a “particular task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith.”¹⁴ Thus, continuity of the ordained ministry in history is thus seen as a “powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history,” but it is not the *only* expression of that reality, for the document also notes that those churches which have not preserved the episcopate are nonetheless seen to share in the broader apostolicity of the Church.¹⁵ This is confirmed with a reference to Ignatius of Antioch’s view of the ongoing presence of Christ in the Church manifested in both the historic apostolic succession of bishops, as well as the broader apostolicity of life in the community “assembled around the bishop in the midst of the presbyters and deacons.”¹⁶ The ongoing presence of Christ is seen as an “actual manifestation of the Spirit,” meaning that, as the commentary notes, “[t]he sign of apostolic succession thus not only points to historical continuity; it also manifests an actual spiritual reality.”¹⁷

This differentiation of the larger apostolicity of the Church from the historic apostolic succession of bishops is important for ecumenical ecclesiology because, as BEM also notes, while not diminishing the importance or value of the episcopal ministry, it provides a meaningful theological framework in which discussion about mutual recognition of ministries might proceed between churches with historic apostolic succession via the episcopate *themselves*, as well as with *other* churches who do not have this succession. BEM holds that such a framework can allow the former to acknowledge the historic *apostolicity* of the latter, while the latter can come to see the value of *historic apostolic succession* as a concrete manifestation of apostolicity.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 35.

¹⁵ Ibid., “Ministry,” nos. 35,37.

¹⁶ Ibid., “Ministry,” Commentary on no. 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., “Ministry,” Commentary on no. 36.

¹⁸ Ibid., “Ministry,” no. 38.

By way of summary, then, BEM draws upon Scriptural and historical evidence (tradition) for an analysis of episkopé and its ancient and contemporary expressions. Although episkopé is seen to be related to the ordained ministry, the document recognizes that it can be expressed in other ways within different church communities. Also, while BEM does not contextualize episkopé in apostolicity explicitly, it can be seen in what is said about apostolicity and apostolic succession that the two realities are linked in key ways. Even though ambiguity remains in the text on this issue, BEM believed it helped pave the way for more explicit considerations of the relationship between the two among the churches involved in ecumenical dialogue. Thus, in light of that hope, we can turn to the more contemporary discussions of the CUIC and Catholic communities as examples of how the document both helped and challenged the individual churches' responses and their ongoing dialogue on these key issues.

III. Apostolicity and Episkopé in Some U.S. Ecumenical Discussions Today

Although a presentation of issues around apostolicity and episkopé could have been drawn from any number of ecumenical sources today, including more official statements from various churches, I believe it can be more helpful to see the progress being made on issues of ecumenical discussion by observing the ways in which theologians from the different traditions address themselves to each other on these issues. Such observation often reveals the way that official ecumenical statements are brought to a point where different churches can reach consensus about them.

To focus the discussion, I am here drawing from the insights of some theologians involved in the *Churches Uniting in Christ* (CUIC)'s¹⁹ "Consultation on Episkopé" associated

¹⁹ The CUIC was formed in the U.S. in 2002 from the commitment of nine (now ten) Christian churches to "draw closer in sacred things -- including regular sharing of the Lord's Supper and common mission, especially a

with the processing of their draft *Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries* (MRMRM) document.²⁰ In particular, the insights of U.S. Episcopalian theologian Ellen Wondra, Presbyterian theologian Anna Case-Winter, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) theologian Kristen Kvam will be discussed. Additionally, since the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. sends an official observer to the CUIC, it seems important to include perspectives from Catholic theologians who have likewise been involved in ecumenical dialogue and consultation around issues of apostolicity and episkopé. Franciscan Fr. John Burkhard, though not part of the CUIC effort, offers insights that can be brought into conversation quite readily with those from the CUIC, so I have included him in this section as well.

Ellen Wondra & Anna Case-Winter: Personal, Collegial and Corporate Episkopé

Ellen Wondra, in her contribution, recognizes an initial context in which to assess the present ecumenical discussions around episkopé, apostolicity, and the possibility of mutually recognized and reconciled ministries, namely, *fear*. She notes that many members of the churches of the Reformation still experience a fear that efforts to establish order, particularly in the context of episkopé, can go overboard and create situations that are too open to abuses of unchecked power. Alternatively, other people fear the exact opposite, namely, no form of meaningful ecclesiological order, and therefore, a type of anarchy expressed in a crude form of individual claims of “personal revelation,” which, Wondra notes, usually means “‘private and unexaminable revelation’ or, bluntly, ‘because I say so, that’s why’ dressed up in ecclesial

mission to combat racism together. Each church also committed itself to undertake an intensive dialogue toward the day when ministers are authorized to serve and lead worship, when invited, in each of the communions.” (Cf. the “Churches Uniting in Christ” website [www.cuicinfo.org], Accessed: December 16, 2007. The website also lists the member churches.

²⁰ As of this writing, the MRMRM text is in its seventh draft and under review by the representatives of the ten member churches of the CUIC and the observer churches. As a result, the draft is not presently available for public review, though I was able to obtain a copy for private review in preparation for this presentation, for which I express my thanks to the CUIC and observer-participant Fr. John Ford.

garb.”²¹ These are legitimate fears, and ones that do not always find adequate expression in official ecumenical texts. Wondra says that the challenge in responding to these fears in the context of discussions on episkopé is for all churches to find a way to live in the tension between the legitimate values underlying these fears, namely the value of order and the value of personal freedom and responsibility, as well as the recognition that “orderliness is irreducibly ambiguous,” and, like all human endeavors, can fall into patterns that are sinful and broken.²²

In light of all this, Wondra notes that the reality of episkopé in its “personal” and “corporate” forms (using the language of the MRMRM draft text) can point the way toward ensuring that the values of order and personal freedom and responsibility are not seen as conflicting, but are, in fact, integral to each other.

Recognizing the valuable ways in which the MRMRM draft recognizes that the Church as a whole both needs and has episkopé, not as a *human necessity*, but as a *divine gift*, and that this episkopé is “inherent in ... the *laos* or whole people of God,” she critiques the way in which the draft implied that personal episkopé and corporate episkopé are opposites of each other. She challenges this presentation by an appeal to the practices of the Episcopal Church with respect to the selection of congregational clergy leadership and responses to allegations of clergy misconduct. While space does not permit a full exposition of these examples here, suffice it to say that the structures the Episcopal Church has in place are designed to ensure that the episkopé exercised in these matters is both personal and corporate, formal, informal, and, at times, mixed. This means, for example, that the bishop’s exercise of episkopé is limited by church law based on the actions of a church vestry, or that a disciplinary hearing by an ecclesiastical court

²¹ Ellen K. Wondra, “Expression of Episkopé in the Episcopal Church,” *Call to Unity* Issue 7 (Dec. 2006), 20.

²² *Ibid.*

resulting in an ecclesial sanction recommendation is put in place (or decreased) by a bishop.²³

The point is that, in general, the Episcopal Church recognizes and structures a *simultaneous* personal and corporate exercise of episkopé that can be “local, regional, national, and even global,” depending on the nature of the issue.²⁴

Wondra also raises an important point with particular relevance for personal episkopé. She notes that while the post-Enlightenment understanding of “personal” tends to reflect both individualistic, private, and autonomous understandings, in a theological sense, to be a “person” means “to be self-conscious that one’s being does not originate in and of oneself, and ... to be open toward and receptive of distinct others.”²⁵ That is to say, “personal” in a theological sense is about the integration of “connection and differentiation,” as well as cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic (touching / embodied) dimensions.²⁶ To be “personal” is to simultaneously already always be “corporate, collegial, and communal.”²⁷ This means that when speaking about the “personal” aspects of ministry, including episkopé, it is not just a discussion about “function or office, but of *manner of being*.”²⁸ Similarly, it indicates that expressions of any ministry, including episkopé, need to undergo a reform in their understanding and practice to the extent that their “personal” dimension has tended to refer exclusively to the notion of an “autonomous individual.”²⁹ She extends this argument to exclude the notion of “complementarity” between

²³ Ibid., 21-25.

²⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 25-26.

²⁷ Ibid., 26.

²⁸ Ibid., emphasis added.

²⁹ Ibid.

personal and corporate episkopé which she sees expressed in the draft MRMRM text, instead choosing to envision them as completely and inextricably connected in theology and practice.³⁰

Although Wondra does not directly address the notion of apostolicity in this particular presentation, it is certainly possible to see an application of these insights on episkopé to the discussion on the nature of the relationship between apostolicity and historic apostolic succession. It is also helpful to include a more explicit treatment of the relationship between the two to complement Wondra's analysis, by incorporating the perspective of Anna Case-Winter. Her contribution to the "Consultation on Episkopé" focuses specifically on the way MRMRM builds upon foundations laid in specific Anglican-Lutheran-Reformed dialogues, but her general comments dovetail with Wondra's, even while giving voice to unique concerns of the Reformed Churches in general and Presbyterianism in particular.

Case-Winter, speaking first about episkopé, makes the point that many ecumenical conversations are presently drawing a helpful distinction between "form" and "substance," with regard to episkopé, apostolicity, and many other aspects of ministry.³¹ She acknowledges that episkopé is expressed in the Reformed Churches in a variety of ways already (e.g. congregational, presbyteral, episcopal). Even the Catholic position, she notes, well known for its insistence on the sacramental and representational value of the bishop, has acknowledged that the "exercise and shape" of episkopé "can change and is historically conditioned."³² Thus, she is hard pressed to see why the various forms of episkopé need to be dividing, and offers a critique

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Anna Case-Winter, "Expressions of Episkopé," *Call to Unity* Issue 7 (Dec. 2006), 27.

³² Ibid. It is also important to note that the Catholic use of the term "representational" is not simply used as a juridical and pastoral reference to a bishop's representing the diocese under his care, but is meant in a theological sense that also includes the notion that the bishop is an "effective sign" and "guarantee" of the communion of his diocese with the universal church and is a "representation," in this theological sense of the authoritative leadership of Christ. For a fuller explanation, the Roman Catholic Church's response to BEM may be insightful. (Cf. Max Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM*. Volume VI. Geneva: World Council of Churches. 1988. "Roman Catholic Church" response: 1-40, esp. p. 33 and following.)

of the draft MRMRM text’s tendency to incorporate the perspective on the tripartite ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon that BEM held, namely, that it is *the* model that can bring about unity.

She recognizes that Anglican-Lutheran-Reformed dialogues have already acknowledged that in absence of a common form, there is nevertheless a “common pattern” present in the exercise of episkopé, be it in the form of bishop and priest, or minister and elder, or whether “local church” is taken to mean “congregation” or “diocese.”³³ This common pattern, she notes, echoing Wondra, indicates that “whatever the particular forms may be, the ministry of oversight should have *personal, collegial and communal* dimensions at all levels.”³⁴ She seems to argue that the reality of the different forms do not detract from the substance of episkopé, as long as the common pattern being practiced in any given church has all three of these dimensions.

She makes a similar argument with respect to apostolicity. She notes that those in the Reformed tradition believe their churches already stand in apostolic succession, which “refers primarily to the church’s faithfulness to the apostolic witness.”³⁵ Even though some of these churches do not have an historic episcopate, the enacting of ordination in a liturgical context within these traditions does not assure that these communities have both “the sign and the thing signified” with respect to apostolicity.³⁶ While she is quite clear that the practice of apostolicity in these communities “may be deficient,” she acknowledges that this is the case with *all* churches and she will not countenance any effort at recognition or reconciliation of ministries that denies full apostolicity to the Reformed Churches without an episcopate.³⁷ Again, her points seems to

³³ Ibid., 28.

³⁴ Ibid., 29. Italics is in the original text.

³⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

³⁷ Ibid., 30.

be that apostolicity does not require a common form or polity, but simply a common substance. She maintains that there is a need to respect the “dignity of difference” with regard to its forms.³⁸

Thus, although Wondra and Case-Winter are presenting perspectives on episkopé and apostolicity from different confessional perspectives, there are clearly several links between themes they have raised that seem to be foundational to ongoing ecumenical dialogue. Both clearly favor and point to the importance of the interconnection between “personal, collegial, and communal (or corporate) episkopé.”

Although Wondra and Case-Winter do not use this three-fold distinction explicitly, it is clear from their arguments that they acknowledge these different expressions of episkopé, and Wondra, particularly, notes the importance of their integral and interpenetrating expressions. The recognition that personal episkopé is linked to the other forms and is presented as a “manner of being” as well as on a functional level, is an important breakthrough, especially in light of some Catholic concerns. Similarly, Case-Winter’s argument for “dignity in difference” tries to address the significant concerns of those churches which lack an historic episcopate and the value of their practices of episkopé and apostolicity. More will be said about these considerations in the conclusion below. However, we next turn to look at the notions of apostolicity and episkopé from an ELCA perspective.

Kristen Kvam: Grounding Episkopé in Apostolicity

Kristen Kvam notes from the outset of her contribution to the “Consultation on Episkopé” that “[w]here we begin affects where we are able to go.”³⁹ On this basis, she presents

³⁸ Ibid., 31.

³⁹ Kristen E. Kvam, “Relationship Between Episkopé and Apostolic Succession; Continuity In, Through, and Across Time,” *Call to Unity* Issue 7 (Dec. 2006), 40.

apostolicity as a starting point and grounds an understanding of episkopé on it.⁴⁰ This perspective is a very helpful contribution, because even the BEM text did not make it clear how the two are related. She says that her decision to consider apostolicity first is not arbitrary, but rather based on theological reasons. Even though she notes there is no full discussion of apostolicity in the draft MRMRM text, it is a key concept in the text and requires attention. The draft text asserts that “a ministry of episkopé [is] one of the ways, in the context of ordained ministries and the whole people of God, in which the apostolic succession of the Church is visibly expressed and personally symbolized”⁴¹ Kvam notes in this text three key points: (1) that apostolic succession is attributed to the whole church, (2) brought to expression in various ways, and (3) that episkopé is “one of the ways” apostolicity is expressed in the church.⁴² These points demonstrate that apostolicity is wider than a “mechanistic” understanding of historic apostolic succession that reflects more genealogy than theology, and that there are other ways apostolicity (and, by extension, apostolic succession) gets expressed in the churches. Kvam notes that even those churches with an historic episcopal succession readily acknowledge this expansive view of apostolicity.⁴³

The fact that the draft text speaks of episcopate as “one of the ways” apostolicity is expressed indicates that it is taken to be an essential element of that apostolicity, thus supporting a theological approach that grounds the former in the latter, and recognizing the former’s importance to the life of the church. Kvam notes that the emerging ecumenical consensus on episkopé appears to be that some form of “supra-congregational” expression is a central

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Churches Uniting in Christ, *Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries*. Unpublished draft manuscript, December 2007, no. 78. Future references will be “MRMRM draft.”

⁴² Kvam, 41-42.

⁴³ Ibid.

dimension of it.⁴⁴ While such an expression of episkopé is valuable for pastoral and practical reasons, Kvam again notes theological ones as well: “For the sake of unity of the Church’s witness, a means beyond – or even “over and above” – the local congregation is important.”⁴⁵

As Wondra and Case-Winter noted, so Kvam also confirms: (1) how such a supra-congregational episkopé gets expressed is an essential part of the ongoing ecumenical dialogue, particularly with reference to personal, collegial, and communal dimensions of episkopé. With that as her first observation about key directions for future dialogue, Kvam notes an additional three points: (2) the implications for churches who primarily (or only) use a form of corporate episkopé for their oversight, (3) the notion of historic episcopacy as a “sign though not a guarantee” of apostolic continuity in the church, and (4) the recognition that mutual reconciliation of ministries and full communion of churches hinges on “full development of two forms of episkopé,” namely the historic episcopate and “authentic expression” of corporate episkopé.⁴⁶

The first point has already been discussed in Wondra’s and Case-Winter’s comments. The second has implications for liturgies of union and who represents churches that use corporate episkopé as their primary form over oversight in such ceremonies.⁴⁷ Additionally, the role and status of lay persons in corporate episkopé is a discussion point that flows from this consideration.⁴⁸ The third point is based on the draft MRMRM text which indicates a desire that any episcopal succession shared by the member churches of CUIC be “both evangelical (gospel-centered) and historic,” and secondarily includes the perspective that this historic succession is a

⁴⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 43-44.

⁴⁷ Kvam, 43.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

“sign” but not a “guarantee” of apostolic continuity.⁴⁹ This point raises two key issues in light of statements discussed above. First, it invites dialogue with respect to how the historic episcopate is perceived, particularly with those churches, such as the Catholic Church, who see the episcopal succession as not only a sign but *also* a guarantee of unity and continuity. Second, the importance of a “gospel-centered” episcopal succession reflects the hopes of many churches of the Reformation that church institutions in general not only be reflective of continuity with the past, but a prophetic witness in the present as well. Finally, the fourth point raises issues of a multiperspectival nature with respect to different churches’ understandings’ of full communion. Kvam wonders how different churches’ perspectives on what constitutes full communion will be incorporated in the MRMRM text.⁵⁰

John Burkhard: Multiple Models of Episkopé and Collegial Apostolic Succession

Although not involved in the discussion of CUIC on MRMRM, John Burkhard, a Franciscan Roman Catholic priest and theologian, deserves attention here, largely because of the important contribution he has made to the discussion of the issue of apostolicity and episkopé in his book, *Apostolicity: Then and Now*. His perspective can serve to further illumine some of the issues around these realities from a Catholic perspective. The way Burkhard addresses the concepts of apostolicity and episkopé in his book indicate that he is following an approach similar to Kvam with respect to giving apostolicity theological priority. It is only in the final chapter of *Apostolicity: Then and Now* that he broaches the topic of episkopé specifically, and thus within the context of various previous discussions on apostolicity.

In his presentation, he notes – echoing BEM and others – that the use of the term *episkopos* in the New Testament does not denote a singular meaning, nor a singular application

⁴⁹ MRMRM draft, no. 77.

⁵⁰ Kvam, 44.

to a monarchical bishop.⁵¹ This begins to shift in the second century. Citing the work of John Zizioulas,⁵² a patriarch and theologian in the Orthodox Church, Burkhard notes that as the historic office of *episkopos* began to form, different understandings of the model of bishop emerged, exemplified in the views of Ignatius of Antioch (briefly cited in the BEM text, as noted above) and Cyprian of Carthage. In brief, Ignatius' view represents a more symbolic Christological-eschatological function of the bishop, while Cyprian's view is much more focused on teaching, governing, and the bishop's juridical function as head of the local church.⁵³ Burkhard argues, with Zizioulas, that within the Catholic-Orthodox ambit (and the close relationship that exists between them ecclesologically is not irrelevant here):

[F]or centuries ... there have been two understandings of a bishop – the Eastern (Christological-eschatological) and the Western (monarchical-hierarchical). ... [D]e facto, there is more than just one orthodox understanding of episcopacy in the church and therefore of apostolic succession in the ministry. ... There are at least two ways of realizing episkopé in the church.⁵⁴

While this perspective obviously shares a lot with the other authors considered up to this point, its value relates to the issue of understanding how the bishop is “representational” in the Catholic sense and how personal episkopé gets expressed as a “manner of being,” to speak in Wondra's terms.

In a similar vein, Burkhard argues that this representational notion, when considered in light of a Catholic ecclesiology that emphasizes the link between church as “sacrament” and church as “communion,” points to the fact that the role of bishop is integrally linked, by this

⁵¹ John J. Burkhard, *Apostolicity: Then and Now: An Ecumenical Church in a Postmodern World* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 211-13.

⁵² For the full presentation of Zizioulas' argument, see John D. Zizioulas, “*Episkopé* and *Episkopos* in the Early Church: A Brief Survey,” in *Episkopé and Episcopate in Ecumenical Perspective*, Faith and Order Paper 102 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980): 30-42.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 213-17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

representational notion, to the entire communion of the church in his expression of episkopé.⁵⁵ Again, this recalls Wondra's presentation of the integrated nature of personal, communal, and corporate episkopé. In Burkhard's analysis, one finds a similar approach from a Catholic perspective.

In regard to apostolicity and the historic apostolic succession, Burkhard presents some developments in Catholic theology on the issue that are particularly relevant, again in light of the links between personal, communal, and corporate expressions of episkopé. Rejecting, like Kvam, the notion of a "mechanical sense" of apostolic succession that ends in a form of "historical reductionism," Burkhard turns to Walter Cardinal Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, and his presentation on apostolic succession, for a much more comprehensive and integral view of it from a Catholic perspective.⁵⁶ He notes that Kasper contextualizes apostolic succession in light of the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the importance of the college of bishops – the fundamentally relational nature of all bishops (including the pope, who is also a bishop) to one another that was highlighted above in the RCC response to BEM. A bishop, when ordained, does not "succeed" any particular bishop and, based on a long historical genealogical-type chain, a particular apostle. Instead, Kasper argues that the episcopal *college* as a whole succeeds from the original *apostolic* college, and individual bishops are incorporated into apostolic succession by incorporation into, and subsequent communion with, the entire college of bishops.⁵⁷ The college, in its turn, represents the communion of the whole church. As Burkhard notes, this post-Vatican II development in

⁵⁵ Ibid., 237-45.

⁵⁶ For a fuller presentation of Kasper's points, see Walter Kasper, *Leadership in the Church: How Traditional Roles Can Serve the Christian Community Today* (trans. Brian McNeil), (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 114-43.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 246-47.

Catholic theology creates a significant space for interaction across ecumenical dialogue on issues of apostolicity and episkopé:

At the very heart of the collegiality and the sense of communion of the bishops is the notion of relationality. No bishop, not even the pope as Bishop of Rome, stands entirely outside the circle of the college. ... Episcopal collegiality creates space for a new image of the bishop to emerge that can also incorporate the idea of synodality or conciliarity, so dear to the churches of the East and increasingly, too, expressly desired by the churches that have issued from the Reformation.⁵⁸

Burkhard further comments that if the papal office is seen in this light – as successor to the one who was foundational to the college of apostles (i.e., Peter) – the pope’s current role as head of the bishops’ college, as unifier for the entire body of bishops, and ecclesiological center of unity likewise takes on a much more collegial light.⁵⁹

In sum, then, Burkhard’s analysis, while meaningfully and helpfully echoing the insights of Wondra, Case-Winter, and Kvam, also brings forth the realization that, even within the Catholic Church, an increasing awareness of the theological value of a variety of understandings with respect to episkopé, as well as a communal foundation for it, and for apostolicity, has served as a fulcrum for significant reorientations in Catholic theology in these areas. Burkhard’s work demonstrates that the possibility exists for a harmonization of personal, collegial, and corporate episkopé with the Catholic notions of the personal-symbolic-representational function of bishops. Such a development would evince a significant advance in ecumenical dialogue on this topic from the Catholic side.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 248.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 248-49.

IV. Key Questions for Ongoing Discussion

In reviewing, then, all that has been presented here, several reference points become clear, from which key questions to guide aspects of the ongoing ecumenical dialogue become apparent. I will present them here as a way to integrate the themes highlighted in this presentation. The order in which they are presented is an effort to show logical progression of themes, not priority of importance.

1. What is the best way to give expression to the relationship between apostolicity and episkopé? Indications from the theological rationale developed by Kvam and Burkhard, suggest the need to perhaps move beyond the notion that apostolicity and episkopé are simply related, and discuss the nature of that relationship at the level of theological (though not ontological) priority. There seems to be an emerging consensus that broad apostolicity (and not just historic apostolic succession in the form of episcopal succession) as a foundational mark of the church is *the* context in which a theology of episkopé is best understood and conveyed. There seems to be a greater need for explicit development of the relationship between the two along these lines in subsequent dialogue.

2. What are the concrete ways in which the broad apostolicity of the church is seen to be manifested in concrete ways in particular denominational churches? While there is clarity about the fact that episkopé is expressed in different ways in different churches, are there unique ways that the apostolic life of the church has been preserved in particular denominational communities? If so, and it would seem that this is the case, it may be useful for the overall dialogue if particular churches presented these in concrete ways as part of the dialogue. The effort could serve to enhance individual churches' and believers' appreciation of apostolicity within their own communions, while presenting core aspects of apostolicity that are crucial for

its concrete expression in all the churches. The BEM definition of what apostolicity is (cf. no. 34) would be a helpful starting point for this endeavor.

3. *How can the understandings of broad apostolicity, apostolic succession, and historic episcopal succession be better clarified to enhance the process of dialogue?* There seem to be two dimensions of this issue: (a) how to present apostolicity and apostolic succession in a way that does not, again, simply fall into an ontological priority question, but how they are interrelated expressions as a mark of the apostolic church, and (b) a clarification of terminology. Throughout this essay, the different presentations we have reviewed evince occasional confusion on the equation of “apostolic succession” with “historic episcopal succession.” Yet, indications also suggest these two realities are not the same, though they may be integrally related, just as apostolicity and apostolic succession are. Further clarification on these points can only assist the ongoing dialogue.

4. *What constitutes the integration of personal, collegial, and communal (or corporate) episkopé?* At least two issues fall under this question. First, with the recognition that episkopé may be integral, though not coterminous with historic episcopal succession, it is important to follow the lead of BEM and the theologians from CUIIC in reflecting on how it is manifested within the context of other ordained ministries. Particularly if one uses the tripartite model as “normative” in some way, the way presbyters and deacons participate in episkopé needs to be fleshed out.

Second, the issue of episcopal authority and the broader question of authority in the church needs to be articulated more clearly. The Catholic Church’s value of the personal authority of the bishop, and, by extension, the pope, in relation to expressions of collegial and corporate episkopé needs to be seriously considered. Burkhard’s efforts to highlight the collegial nature of

the episcopacy is an important step, but still leaves untouched a corporate episkopé that extends beyond the hierarchy and magisterium to lay people. There is a need to consider if and how lay people in churches exercise personal, collegial, and communal episkopé and how the notion of relationality Burkhard mentions is connected to the wider church in this regard. Additionally, Kvam's recognition of the value of supra-congregational oversight creates space from the side of the Reformation Churches to better understand the value of a "bishop-like" figure, especially from those churches who have never had this office, though resistance to such a figure may still remain in some Reformed Churches, particularly if the perspectives of Case-Winter are more normative.

5. Is there a way to develop an integrated understanding of the functional understanding of episkopé and the "representational" understanding, especially with respect to the role of the bishop? If one way the personal dimension of episkopé is expressed is by a bishop or other ordained person, the issues raised by Wondra and Burkhard suggest the need for a clear articulation of how function relates to representation. Besides dealing with that term's shades of meaning in Catholicism, clarification on the type of representation (Christological-eschatological, hierarchical, or both) is necessary. There may be a way of bringing together Wondra's reflections on the theological understanding of person and the exercise of personal episkopé as, in part, a "manner of being," with the Catholic representational notion. There seems to be a potentially fruitful theological convergence here, but only greater in-depth analysis will be able to solidify it. However, the perspective of Case-Winter on a distinction between variant forms and common substance in the expression of episkopé and apostolicity and "dignity in difference" may also have an important role to play in such a convergence. A key related question to be addressed, then, is: Can an office (bishop) that is construed to be integral to the

nature of the church by one or more churches be expressed in a different capacity in another church and be seen as equivalent? If so, how?

There is also a need to consider the divergence on the issue of whether the historic episcopal succession is a “sign,” “effective sign,” and/or “guarantee” of the continuity of apostolicity in its wider sense. Clearly the views expressed by Burkhard, and official Catholic teaching, assume the stance of “effective sign” and “guarantee”, whereas the Reformation Churches, exemplified by Kvam’s presentation, seem reticent to embrace this language. It may be a helpful starting point to note that there is potentially a distinction between the historic episcopal succession as “guarantee” of apostolicity, and the need for individual bishops to bear the responsibility of being a faithful guarantor.⁶⁰

6. What is the role of less permanent, but nevertheless vital, ministries in the expression of apostolicity and episkopé, as well as their contribution to ensuring continuity with the Gospel and the faith of the apostles? This is a necessary consideration if the notion that individual bishops may not, in certain circumstances, be faithful guarantors of apostolic continuity is taken seriously. The realities of individual and social sin, as evidenced by abuses of power among clergy and other church leaders throughout history (the recent sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church and multiple embezzlement scandals in various churches being more recent examples) make this an essential component of the ongoing dialogue. It seems here that the dimensions of personal, collegial, and corporate episkopé can also have relevance to the notion of prophetic ministry being able to “speak truth to power” and, when necessary, and in very circumscribed ways, constitute an effective means of dealing with scandalous, immoral, unethical, or illegal behavior. Such an effort could also serve as a means of ascertaining how the structuring of personal, collegial, and corporate episkopé actually works. That is to say, it can

⁶⁰ Cf. Thurian, 33.

help develop a means of meaningful evaluation of existing church structures to determine to what extent they are truly effective in assisting the preservation of apostolic continuity, and suggest measured changes or alternatives for the purpose of serving the ongoing mission of the churches.

V. Conclusion

These are, of course, not the only questions that can arise from the information presented here, and are certainly not exhaustive. It is certainly likely that different points of departure would raise some different issues and themes, though perhaps they would overlap with those presented here as well. Developing answers to the questions presented here, however, seem to be necessary to enable future ecumenical dialogue on the relationship between apostolicity and episkopé to contribute to the ultimate hoped-for recognition and reconciliation of ministries, and as a path toward realization of the full communion that is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the whole Church.

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