

## THE NORDIC AND BALTIC CHURCHES

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In October 1992 representatives of the British and Irish Anglican Churches, together with their counterparts from the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches signed an historic agreement near Porvoo in Finland which, if accepted by all these churches, will bring about their closer communion. The *Porvoo Common Statement* and a supporting dossier of Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe were published in 1993 (*Together in Mission and Ministry*, Church House Publishing, London). The *Porvoo Common Statement* is now being considered by the General Synod which will be asked to accept a core Joint Declaration. This begins by a mutual acknowledgement of each other's churches as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. A second acknowledgement follows concerning the mutual presence of the Word of God and the Sacraments of baptism and the eucharist; then acknowledgements of the common confession of the apostolic faith and the ministry as both an instrument of grace and as having Christ's commission. Two final acknowledgements follow on episcopacy:

'(v) we acknowledge that personal, collegial and communal oversight (*episcopate*) is embodied and exercised in all our churches in a variety of forms, in continuity of apostolic life, mission and ministry;

(vi) we acknowledge that the episcopal office is valued and maintained in all our churches as a visible sign expressing and serving the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry.'

After these 'acknowledgements' come a number of 'commitments', which include the following:

'(v) to welcome persons episcopally ordained in any of our churches to the office of bishop, priest or deacon to serve, by invitation and in accordance with any regulations which may from time to time be in force, in that ministry in the receiving church without re-ordination;

(vi) to invite one another's bishops normally to participate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of bishops as a sign of the unity and continuity of the Church;'

These 'acknowledgements' and 'commitments' represent a development in Anglican relationships with the Nordic and Baltic Churches which touch on the Ecclesiastical and Canon Law.

Whereas, when the Church of England accepted the Meissen declaration with the Evangelical (Protestant) churches in Germany the legal implications were limited to the extension of the provisions of the Ecumenical Canons (B43 & B44) to the German Church, the *Porvoo Common Statement* goes further than this and raises other legal questions, especially in relation to episcopacy.

The issues are already to be found in the earlier agreements between the Church of England and Sweden (1920, 1954, 1961), Finland (1935), and Latvia and Estonia (1939) on the one hand and with Norway, Denmark and Iceland (1953/4) on the other. The former agreements acknowledged the existence of the historic episcopate in Sweden, Finland, Latvia and Estonia; the latter agreements, with Norway, Denmark and Iceland, were not able to go so far. The Nordic and Baltic Churches do not, of course, make such a differentiation among themselves.

The reasons for past Anglican discrimination are to do with the complex history of the Reformation in Denmark, to which Norway and Iceland were then subject politically and ecclesiastically. The story of the Reformation in Denmark is found in the Essays attached to the full report. Essentially, Reformation bishops were ordained in Denmark by a German Lutheran Pastor called Bugenhagen who had certainly been ordained a presbyter/priest and who had also received a further ordination to a wider ministry of superintendency. He called together Danish pastors and they jointly ordained bishops for the historic Danish sees. Thus the Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic Churches have always been *episcopal* and *diocesan* Churches, but their episcopal succession has been deemed, in Anglican eyes, at best 'irregular'.

The *Porvoo Common Statement* stresses that there is a distinction to be drawn between the apostolic succession of the whole Church and the historic episcopate as a sign of that wider succession. In this it follows the *Baptism-Eucharist-Ministry* Agreed Statement of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches which the Church of England accepted in similar terms and at the same time as the *Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in 1985. Such a distinction was first drawn in the French Catholic-Protestant *Groupe des Dombes*. The House of Bishops also recently approved this important distinction in a paper entitled *Apostolicity and Succession: a House of Bishop's Occasional Paper G.S.misc 432* (1994) which owes much of its thrust to the *Porvoo Common Statement*, as will be evident from a close textual comparison.

The *Porvoo Common Statement* also stresses the historic continuity of the Nordic Churches in an uninterrupted diocesan and parochial ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The *Porvoo Common Statement* further contextualises agreement on a shared ministry in a largely secularised Northern Europe, now including the Baltic States; it also grounds its agreement in a common understanding of the Church as the 'sacramental' sign, instrument and foretaste of God's Kingdom, and a vision of unity which moves beyond passive 'intercommunion'. For the sake of the Gospel in Northern Europe the Churches need to develop organs for common decision making. An extensive and ecumenical articulation of the common faith of the Churches is also an essential part of the agreement.

The Porvoo Joint Declaration is business covered by Article 7 of the Constitution of the General Synod of the Church of England, which applies to 'doctrinal formulae or the services or ceremonies of the Church of England or the administration of the Sacraments'. This requires amongst other things that the text submitted to the Synod for final approval shall be in terms proposed by the House of Bishops. It need not necessarily have been deemed Article 8

Business, requiring a reference to diocesan synods, and allowing a vote by Houses and special majorities. For although proposing a substantially changed relationship with another church its reference is to churches without substantial numbers in this country. Nevertheless the Archbishops rightly exercised their discretion and prerogative to so declare the matter.

As the Porvoo Declaration has passed through the diocesan synods there has been a very favourable approval, as also at its 'first reading' in the General Synod itself. But some anxieties about the historic episcopate, or rather its lack, have remained, in spite of overwhelming votes in favour. In spite of the fact that the agreement would entail the acceptances and use of the historic episcopate as the sign of apostolic succession by *all* the Churches in the *future*, how does a present acceptance of Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic ministries square with traditional Anglican understandings and law?

The Preface to the Ordinal, tightened somewhat in 1662 in relation to what became non-conformist, non-episcopal ministry, makes it clear that: 'No man shall be accounted or taken to be a lawful Bishop, Priest, or Deacon in the Church of England . . . except he be . . . admitted thereunto according to (the Ordinal) or hath had formerly Episcopal Consecration or Ordination.' Similar wording is found in the 1662 Act of Uniformity, giving statute force to the Prayer Book. Canon C1 gives contemporary expression to essentially the same law by, in effect, including the Ordinal of the *Alternative Service Book 1980*. It gives precision to the law in terms of the recognition of those who have had other episcopal ordination by glossing the 1662 wording as follows: 'or has had formerly episcopal consecration or ordination *in some Church whose orders are recognised and accepted by the Church of England*.' From this it is clear that the key questions are whether and how the Church of England recognises the ministerial orders of another episcopal Church.

The answer to both these questions, as far as the Nordic and Baltic Churches are concerned, at least in terms of law, is found in the *Overseas and Other Clergy (Ministry and Ordination) Measure 1967*. This Measure provides not only for overseas Anglican clergy to be given permission to officiate in the Church of England, or whether a Church is in communion with the recognised and accepted by the Church of England, 'it shall be determined by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, whose decisions shall be conclusive'. (s.6(2)).

It is interesting to note that the Archbishops are the arbiters of communion, confirming the theological tradition that the determination of communion, in the absence of a Council, is an essentially primatial act, not a matter for individual priests or lay people.

Technically, the Archbishops might apparently determine that the Church of England does now recognise Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic orders. But the law presupposes an act of joint primatial discernment and that can never be a simplistic matter. So the mind of the House of Bishops has been tested through discussion and acceptance of the paper *Apostolicity and Succession* and the mind of the wider Church through an Article 8 Reference in General Synod will duly accept the Porvoo Declaration in July 1995 with the requisite majorities, having been passed overwhelmingly in all the forty-three Diocesan Synods which have so far considered it.

The Roman Catholic Observer Fr. Henrik Roelvink OFM on the Conversations has recently written approvingly of the new understanding of Apostolic Succession embodied in the *Porvoo Common Statement*, and commends it in terms of Roman Catholic – Lutheran relations (see *One in Christ* 1994.4). Other ecumenical partners are also following the progress of the proposals closely, not least among the English Free Churches. It must however be stressed that the Nordic and Baltic Churches are *episcopal* Churches and that the Ecclesiastical and Canon Law in question is about those who have been *episcopally* ordained. Thus even with the Nordic and Baltic Churches a maverick ordination by a presbyter could not be recognised. Nor can the orders of men or women ordained by a *woman* bishop, unless or until that issue is resolved by the Archbishops of the Church of England in relation to the orders of a woman bishop within the Anglican Communion.

In spite of these qualifications, the *Porvoo Common Statement* represents a genuine and substantial ecumenical advance, touching on the Canon, Statute, and Ecclesiastical Law.