



Anglican Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn

EPISCOPAL ELECTION NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

DIOCESAN BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

The following series of Bible studies has been written by the Rev. Dr. Andrew Cameron, Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre, for use by members of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn as they prepare for the election and ministry of our next Diocesan Bishop.

The studies are designed to be used by individuals and groups. When used in groups, the coloured questions may form a basis for discussion.

Although there are five sections to this study, you may wish to cover more than one in any one session. Section one, in particular, could quite readily be joined to section two.

As we head towards the Electoral Synod on 8-10 November, please continue to pray that God would give his wisdom and guidance to all those involved in this process, including Prospective Nominees, members of the EENC and members of Synod.

Yours in Christ,

Ven. David Ruthven

Chair, Episcopal Election Nominations Committee

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A Prayer at the Time of Choosing a Bishop

Eternal God, shepherd and guide,
in your mercy give your Church in this diocese
a shepherd after your own heart
who will walk in your ways,
and with loving care watch over your people.
Give us a leader of vision and a teacher of your truth.
So may your Church be built up
and your name glorified;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(taken from *A Prayer Book for Australia*, p. 212)

1. The Invention of Bishops

One of the Church's treasures is the second-century letter of Ignatius to Polycarp. Ignatius, an older bishop, exhorts the younger Polycarp on how to do the job well. As was the habit of the day, Ignatius formally begins the letter by introducing himself and greeting Polycarp:

'Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to Polycarp, who is bishop of the Church of the Smyrnaeans, or rather has for his bishop God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; abundant greeting.' (1:1)

There is a clue to 'bishops' in this greeting. For a bishop to have God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as *their* bishop makes clear by whom a bishop is overseen, directed and counselled, and to whom they are accountable.

In biblical times there was a common word for foremen, supervisors, military officers and other leaders. In the New Testament, it names those who oversaw the earliest groups of Christians. The word was *episcopē* (pronounced 'ep-is-co-pear'), from where we get 'episcopal', 'episcopate' and so on. The leaders Paul farewells at Ephesus are this kind of 'overseer' (Acts 20:28). Even Judas Iscariot was regarded as a failed 'overseer' (Acts 1:20). In 1 Timothy 3:1, 'whoever aspires to the office of bishop (*episcopē*) desires a noble task', as the NRSV puts it, other translations going with 'overseer'.

- Have a guess where *episcopē* sits behind these English translations:

Jesus to the city of Jerusalem, as he enters it:

'[Your enemies] will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation' (Luke 19:44, NRSV).

Peter to various groups of Christians:

'Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.'
(1 Peter 2:12, NIV)

If you guessed that it comes at the end in both verses, well done!

- Who is the 'visitor' in each case?
- What 'overseeing' are they doing?
- Why does this 'overseeing' include a hint of judging?

Peter portrays God as an 'overseer', and Jesus may portray himself that way. So we can see why Polycarp is 'overseen' by 'God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. All bishops are 'bishops', by God—a great protection against our next topic: the narcissist bishop.

2. Bishops and Narcissism

Relatively recently (1970s), some letters were rediscovered penned by Augustine, the fifth-century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. One letter was to Fabiola, the Roman patron of a certain Bishop Antonius of Fussala, the province bordering Hippo. Antonius was a piece of work, and Augustine writes to alert Fabiola. Augustine's biographer, Peter Brown, summarises the letter:

'The upshot of repeated attempts to investigate and discipline Antoninus was that, in the hot late summer of 422, Augustine found himself stranded for weeks on end in the middle of a countryside where everyone spoke only Punic. He visited the village of Fussala, where the inhabitants pointed out to him the holes in the houses from which Antoninus had pillaged the stones in order to build a splendid new episcopal palace. He was finally left, sitting alone one morning in a village church after the entire congregation had walked out in disgust—even, he told Fabiola, the nuns—leaving him and his colleagues to wonder how, by what series of misjudgements exploited by an able rogue, they had brought "so much sadness upon the country people".'¹

- Have you ever suffered under a bishop who was a self-absorbed jerk, like Antonius? (*Don't get carried away. No bishop is perfect. Think of those in it for their ego.*)
- Does 'bishopsing' make people become like Antonius, or are such people attracted to becoming bishops?
- How might a modern Anglican synod avoid electing such a person, given that they will be charming, self-assured and able to point to great 'effectiveness'?

These questions are more pressing now than ever. Antonius shows that narcissism has always been with us, even if we once just called it sin, or selfishness, or 'pride'. But in *The Life of I* (Melbourne University Press, 2014), author Anne Manne catalogues the recent rise of narcissistic values in modern Australia. She is sympathetic to the view that consumer capitalism *needs* us *all* to become this way (p. 198), and that mass-narcissism is what you get after Christianity (pp. 179, 199). We all have narcissistic features: a grandiose sense of self-importance; brittle hostility to, or even rage at, criticism; an excessive requirement for admiration; lack of empathy; constant envy; a sense of entitlement; and so on. Not only do we *not* need such a bishop—we need bishops who challenge these traits within themselves, the church and our culture.

The biblical Pastoral Epistle of 1 Timothy says 'whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task' (3:1).

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography (A New Edition with an Epilogue)* (London: Faber, 2000), p. 469; citing Augustine's letter.

- How does the list that follows help us spot and avoid narcissists?

‘Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.⁴ He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.’ (1 Timothy 3:2–7 NRSV)

Another pastoral epistle asserts that

‘in the last days distressing times will come.² For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,³ inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good,⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,⁵ holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power.’ (2 Timothy 3:1–5 NRSV)

Are there further clues here about

- what a bishop must not be?
- what a bishop will need to oppose?
- what a bishop will stand for instead?

Anne Manne ends her book by suggesting that climate change (and its denial) is largely the result of mass-narcissism. Go with this claim for a moment:

- If climate change *is* the result of mass-narcissism, what would a bishop who wished to protect the planet need to think and teach about *people*?

3. Bishops and Healthy Communities

Ignatius calls upon Polycarp to care for the vulnerable, so that communities can flourish:

‘Let not the widows be neglected. Be yourself their protector after the Lord.’
(4:1)

‘Do not be haughty to slaves, either men or women; yet do not let them be puffed up’. (4:3)

‘Speak to my sisters that they love the Lord, and be content with their husbands in flesh and in spirit. In the same way enjoin on my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ ‘to love their wives as the Lord loved the Church’. (5:1)

- But what do we make of the following—would these also enable communities to flourish?

‘If you love good disciples, it is no credit to you; rather bring to subjection by your gentleness the more troublesome.’ (2:1)

‘Let not those that appear to be plausible, but teach strange doctrine, overthrow you. Stand firm as an anvil which is smitten. The task of great athletes is to suffer punishment and yet conquer.’ (3:1)

These moments show Ignatius’ debt to the biblical Pastoral Epistles. For example:

‘Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. ⁵ And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules.’ (2 Timothy 2:3–5 NRSV)

‘There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers ... they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach. (Titus 1:10–11)

‘But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.’ (Titus 2:1)

‘After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions ...’ (Titus 3:10)

Let’s be honest: we hate this stuff. Even if we like flourishing communities, we hate it when a bishop wants someone to do what the bishop says, especially if it is a gentle-but-firm ‘cease and desist’. Some of us are even suspicious of ‘sound doctrine’, because we question the motives of whoever decides what is sound, and we almost automatically side with whomever gets ‘silenced’ or sidelined.

- How necessary is it for leaders to oppose 'error' if the communities they lead are going to flourish?

For antsy people like us, it can be helpful to know that this notion of 'sound' originally just meant 'healthy'. The biblical letter to Titus was written to a young leader on the island of Crete, where social life was pretty sick. 'It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, "Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons"', the writer observes (1:12). Not that he thinks himself much better: 'we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another' (3:3). Hell can definitely be other people. Crete was garden-variety hellish, like much of modern Australian.

- How would the following kind of overseer be the antidote?

As you read, try replacing 'sound' with 'healthy':

'For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; ⁸ but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. ⁹ He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.' (Titus 1:7–9 NRSV)

- What effect would the previous and the following model have upon a toxic community?

'Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.' (Titus 2:7 –8 NRSV)

- The following passage adds some further antidote to the toxic community of Crete. We see the essence of the 'sound doctrine' needed for healthy communities. What is it?

'Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.

⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but

according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.’ (Titus 3:1–7 NRSV)

This biblical passage and others like it explains Ignatius’ very **first** entreaty to Polycarp:

‘I exhort you to press forward on your course, in the grace wherewith you are endued, and to exhort all to gain salvation.’ (1:2)

- How much do we want a bishop who helps us build healthy communities?
- How much will we tolerate a bishop who tells us what we don’t want to hear?
- How willing are we to be overseen by someone who will gently insist we are wrong?
- How important is it today to look for bishops who think people need salvation, mercy and the Spirit’s rebirth in order to find health?
- How will a good bishop inhabit God’s grace?

4. Bishops and Management

In the Pastoral Epistles, the prospective overseer:

‘must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?’ (1 Timothy 3:4–5 NRSV).

Actually this quality is seen early, when a person is a deacon:

‘Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well’ (1 Timothy 3:12 NRSV).

[Note: ‘married only once’ translates ‘husband of one wife.’ It could mean (i) not polygamous; (ii) not remarried after divorce; or even (iii) not single (but that’s unlikely). Let us at least assume it indicates a settled and orderly home life.]

These ‘households’ were not only nuclear families. They were more like mini-businesses, with servants, animals, some small-business trading in fish or cloth or whatever.

- What do these verses suggest about an overseer’s *people management* skills?
- What might they indicate about a prospective overseer’s *organizational* skills?

A modern Diocese is, alas, more complicated than the Church mentioned in the verse above. The Pastoral Epistles are uncompromising about the overseer’s people-skills, which must be exemplary, as must be the overseer’s ability to enable ‘soundness’ and to bring God’s salvation to people. In addition, a modern Diocesan bishop now oversees:

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| Safe-church culture and practice | Redress for past wrongs |
| Property and assets held in trust | Strategic planning around new and old churches |
| Legal and financial risks | Ministry recruitment, training and placement |
| Work, health and safety compliance | Satellite entities (e.g. schools and other agencies) |
| Worker protections and rights (paid and volunteer) | Advocacy against social evils |
| | Strategic planning for new Diocesan initiatives |
| | Relationships with neighbouring Dioceses |

... and much, much more.

- How much can 1 Timothy 3:4–5 apply to a modern bishop?
- What ‘management minimums’ should we expect of a modern bishop?
- How should a modern bishop indicate their limits, and ask for help?
- What experience should we look for to gauge whether they can do this role?
- What is unreasonable to expect

5. Bishops and Power

Let's be clear: everyone has power. It may be limited and minimal, but we all have it. We have it even when we breathe, move and choose. We exert social power when we speak. Another name for it is 'agency'—our ability to affect the world nearby. For a season we may have power over others, such as when we raise a child or farm a herd. Power arises from knowledge when a doctor heals, a teacher teaches, or a public servant develops a policy. Some have powers to coerce, as when a police officer writes a ticket or captures a criminal.

- Where do you have some power at this time of your life?

'Agency' and 'power' are like:

shovels: neither good nor bad until used.

oxygen: you can't exist without them.

talents: a society needs people with varied powers.

dynamite: also powerful.

- What powers, or agency, do you expect a bishop to have?
- How useful is a powerless bishop?

Look now at Peter's first letter in the Bible:

'I exhort the elders among you ² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight [*episcopē-ing*] not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. ³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1–3 NRSV)

Peter definitely saw the episode when James and John demanded of Jesus that he 'grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory':

'When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:41–45 NRSV)

- What is the difference between lording-power and serving-power?
- Does serving us entail giving us what we want?
- How would a new bishop inhabit this Jesus-power?
- What will *you* be looking for, and praying for, in an effective Christian bishop?