

# ‘The Nature of Oversight: English Baptists and the question of bishops.’

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Key Words: Ecclesiology, Episcopacy, Ministry, Baptist, Anglican,

## **Abstract**

Recognising the call to ‘listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches’ this paper will engage with the respective theology and practice of episcopacy and ecclesiology of Anglican and Baptists traditions in England. Within the Church of England regional oversight is offered by the Bishops and for Baptists it is Regional Ministers, however the theology, context and nature of their respective ministries is considerably different. In the spirit and methodology of Receptive Ecumenism I intend to explore what Baptists in England can receive from the Church of England in regard to episcopacy; its nature, theological rationale, and practice.

The paper will engage with Anglican ecclesiology, specifically in relation to understandings of authority, apostolic succession, ecclesiology and the nature of the local congregation. Historical factors will be explored taking note of the creation of the Church of England and the emergence of Dissenters and Separatists who, with Anabaptists, led to the formation of Baptist congregations and their subsequent development into area Associations and a national Union. Recognition will be given to the nature of the Church of England as the Established Church and the social and political power acceded to the Church of England with the consequent social standing and influence accorded to the role of Bishops and the consequent implications for Baptists in using the term ‘Bishop’.

Within the paper I will seek to engage with Biblical texts and theology relating to the nature of episcopacy, authority, the mission of the church, the cure of souls and regional oversight considering key texts for both Anglicans and Baptists.

As a consequence I will attempt to draw out those insights, principles and practices that could be received by Baptists in the further development of their understanding of episcopacy, ecclesiology and mission.