

## ***The Babylonian Captivity of the ELCA CCM Verax Talking Letters***

Just months prior to his excommunication, Martin Luther in 1520 wrote his treatise *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In this work, Luther challenged and rejected the entire sacerdotal (priestly) and sacramental system of the Roman Church. As the Jews of old were carried from Jerusalem into Exile in Babylon, so too did Luther consider Christians in Europe to have been carried away from Christ and Scripture to be held captive by the tyranny of the papacy.

In 1999, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) voted at its churchwide assembly to enter into a “full communion” agreement with the Episcopal Church, USA. Through deliberate misrepresentation of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, leaders in the ELCA were able to achieve the passage of this agreement, entitled *Called to Common Mission* (CCM). The passage of CCM requires the ELCA to practice a sacerdotal (priestly) and sacramental clergy structure not too dissimilar from that which Luther rejected. CCM is thus considered by many to be the “Babylonian Captivity of the ELCA.”

In the course of the 2002-2003 academic year, CCM Verax parish scholars have crafted a series of “talking letters” containing basic truths of Lutheranism now endangered in the ELCA by CCM. Entitled *The Babylonian Captivity of the ELCA - CCM Verax Talking Letters*, this series covers eight topics of basic Lutheran teaching increasingly hidden from most members of the ELCA.

Each letter has been designed to be about two pages in length. For the reasons of space, references have been kept brief. These letters represent the first new educational materials for years which address the serious theological and confessional flaws in CCM. For further information about *The Babylonian Captivity of the ELCA*, please contact:

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**I. What is the Church?**

Let us be clear about something from the get-go. The ELCA is not the church. If that is surprising or even sounds harsh, then let us bear in mind that neither, for that matter, are the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, the Anglicans, or any other Christian denomination “the church.” To be sure the church can be found in ELCA, as well as these other denominations, but as ecclesiastical institutions they are never the church.

Why not? And how can the church exist within the church? Does this sound confusing? It shouldn't. “Thank God,” Martin Luther wrote, “even a 7 year old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of the Shepherd” (*Smalcald Articles*, Article XII. The Church). Thus for Luther, the church is always becoming, never having become the church (“*Sie steht nicht im Gewordensein, sondern im Werden*”).

It is for this reason that he never ascribed to the church as one of its “signs” or “marks,” the state of physical unity. Instead, “to make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ.” Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* continues:

“This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”

Prof. Heinrich Bornkamm writes the following:

“Luther’s genuine concept of the church implies a strong striving toward the goal. An organized congregation is always church in the nascent state (“*Kirche im Werden*”); nothing insures that it really is the body of Christ. God has reserved judgment on this question to himself. It must always be in pursuit of its goal; but it has no guarantee that it really is church, neither because of apostolic succession and the resultant hierarchy nor because of a particular form of church government nor because of any mode of worship nor because of so-called pure doctrine nor because of the possession of orthodox confessional writings nor because of outwardly flourishing works of charity, etc. Even a church with the most orthodox confessional writings may be dead, and the same thing pertains to other warrants. Luther’s concept of the church shatters every arrogant and overweening ecclesiasticism that has found its way into every church and often also into the evangelical church. It discourages all satiety. The church is not in the stage of having become but becoming.

“Luther’s view of the church helps to overcome the dilemma of denominational divisions. All external church fences fall before his concept. True belief in Christ may exist in all Christian denominations, for God’s Spirit blows where it wants to. This opens the portals wide. Who can know where God has his true believers? This makes us modest; we need to engage in competition among ourselves. Every church which styles itself as Christian may be concerned that it really does become body of Christ, that faith and love dwell richly in its midst.

“On the other hand, however, Luther’s concept of the church also opens our eyes to the true differences. Whatever is part of the church’s essence according to Catholic doctrine – ceremony, hierarchy, papacy, tradition – contravene’s the church’s true characteristics; the Gospel, a living faith,

and a life in Christ.

“The Gospel marks the point of divergence clearly and sharply. All guarantees of church, also in the Catholic sense, run counter to the Gospel and the New Testament. No sector of the church possesses a monopoly of the body of Christ. All tend and strive toward that goal. For this reason war must be waged in earnest against a false churchism, both within our own borders and against the claims of the Catholic Church. The reality of the body of Christ in the world is at issue.” (*Luther’s World of Thought*, by Heinrich Bornkamm, University of Heidelberg, 1958, pp. 148-152).

Thus for Luther, the church was always “*das kleine Häuflein*” (the little assembly) and “*die Gemeinde*” and the “*ecclesia particularis*” (the local congregation), which is described in the *Augsburg Confession, Article VII* as “the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”

The ELCA, however, brothers and sisters, is increasingly defining itself, not in terms of the ‘*ecclesia particularis*’ gathered around Word and Sacrament, but in terms of the Churchwide Assembly, the national Church Council, the Presiding Bishop’s office, synodical bishops, and local synod assemblies. Ordination candidates now pledge fidelity “to the constitution of the ELCA,” in addition to Scripture and the Confessions, with the constitution in many cases being named first. Lost in this increasingly blatant hierarchical structure, which is foreign to the Reformation and the Lutheran Confessions, is the local congregation, which has little or nothing to say, and no representation. Congregations in the ELCA are now being treated as the local branch offices of the synod, instead of being “fully the church.”

The Churchwide Assembly comprises 0.02% of the ELCA, yet it makes decisions that are binding churchwide. There are no “delegates” to CWA’s or to synod assemblies anymore, (as the Reformers themselves had sent representatives as delegates). Now we send “voting members” who are chosen according to a quota system and not because of their baptism, and who are free agents who represent no one but themselves. This was imposed by ELCA Secretary Lowell Almen in order to insure passage of various documents that mark a gross departure from Scripture and the Confessions, and was done in light of the defeat of two churchwide congregational studies whereby the congregations of the ELCA spoke a resounding “No!” to the “*Human Sexuality*” studies of the 1990’s. That departure from Scripture and the Confessions continues with the present \$2.5 million study on the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals (have you noticed that no one is asking you for your opinion this time around?), the adoption of a fictitious “historical episcopacy” which imposes upon the church of the Reformation a human construct “*iure humano*,” which was rejected by Luther and the Confessions; the adoption of ecumenical treaties with church bodies that do not accept the “real presence” of the sacrament in violation of AC VII (Reformed/UCC); the violation of the doctrine of justification by faith in the signing of JDDJ with the Roman Catholic Church (though Rome does not accept “*sola gratia*”), and which through *Dominus Iesus*, does not recognize the Lutherans as the church of Jesus Christ, but as a mere “*ecclesial community*;” the adoption of *Reconciled in Christ* whereby homoerotic behavior is no longer to be understood as sin, but is to be lifted up and celebrated as a “gift” from God in violations of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Is the ELCA the church? A gathering of people among whom “the Gospel is no longer preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are no longer administered according to the Gospel” is no longer the church, but merely a gathering of lost sheep. But there will always remain “*das kleine Häuflein*,” the little assembly, where Word, Sacrament, and confession -- the signs of the church -- can still be found. Thanks be to God! Amen.

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**II. Unity and CCM**

The ecumenical agreement *Called to Common Mission* (CCM), refers us to John's Gospel, Chapter 17, in which Jesus prays that his disciples would be one. But given the wider context of CCM, the stress is not upon Christ, but upon visible unity which is epitomized through the historical succession of bishops. CCM misrepresents both the definition of the church as well as its basis for unity. In both the New Testament as well as in the *Augsburg Confession* (see *Apology* Articles VII and VIII), the true church, while having outward signs (*Zeichen*), is hidden (*verborgen*) under the cross and is known only to God in faith, faith in Him alone being the source of its unity.

“Luther speaks more specifically of the visibility of the church in two succeeding works written to Emser and Mumer. He contrasts their visible Roman church with the invisible, spiritual church of Scripture. The church, he says, is not to be seen and found in a certain place. ‘All Christians in the world pray, ‘I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.’ If that article is true, then it follows that no one can see or feel the holy Christian church, nor say, Lo, here; lo, there. For what one believes one does not see or find, as St. Paul teaches in Hebrews 11. Further, what one sees or feels one does not believe.’” (Herman Preus, *The Communion of Saints*, Chapter 7).

Thus, when John 17 is used to support the notion of “visible” church, it supposes a future hope, a future tense in the Greek, when in fact Jesus is praying in the present tense, concerning the present reality, describing a condition which already exists in Him. Jesus prays that the disciples “be one” (*osin* in Greek) as He and the Father already are one (*esmen*). The oneness or unity is predicated on one thing only, the truth, and by it we are made holy. What is truth? God's Word (“Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.” John 17:17).

The Lutheran reformers insisted the word is the sole basis for church unity in the seventh article of the *Augsburg Confession*.

Article VII - The Church states. “It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever.”

In contrast, CCM contradicts this clear statement by stating, “*episkope* [oversight], ...is necessary to witness to and safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the church.”

Article VII continues, “This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word”

Please note, the ECUSA and ELCA already had an ecumenical agreement on this basis from 1986. But CCM declares such a basis in Word and Sacrament to be *non satis est*, not enough. It has added the fictitious structure *de iure humano* [from human law] of the so-called “historic episcopacy” as a necessity for “full communion,” which contravenes the second half of the article.

“It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as St. Paul says in Eph. 4:4,5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Regarding this second half of Article VII, Joseph A. Burgess writes in the essay, “Lutherans and the Papacy: A Review of Some Basic Issues”:

“Lutherans are of course aware that the church is one, for Christ has but one body. They are aware of what they have in common with most Christians. They have in common the Trinity, Christ, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, and the ministry of bringing Christ to the world. Unity is something that the church already has. How is it possible for the sake of the Gospel to realize the unity we have, and what is the shape of the unity we seek?

“The classic Lutheran answer to these questions is found in the Augsburg Confession: ‘It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.’

“First of all, it should be noted that it is not a specific dogmatic formulation or set of formulations which is required. To the contrary, it is the actual preaching of the Gospel and actual administering of the sacraments that is ‘sufficient.’ Second, such preaching and administering is contrasted with ‘ceremonies,’ which here include the dogmatic formulations just mentioned. ‘It is sufficient’ for realizing the true unity of the church that the Gospel actually be preached and the sacraments actually be administered. From the Lutheran point of view, other steps may be taken to shape unity, but they are secondary and certainly not required.”

Again, in contrast, CCM requires Lutheran subscription to the Anglican historical episcopate as a prerequisite for “full communion.” In 2001, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), representing 28 million Lutherans and Reformed, rejected these Anglican preconditions, as well as the agreement *JDDJ* [*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*] and the Roman Catholic doctrine found in *Dominus Iesus* [*Lord Jesus*]. These momentous decisions were ignored by the ELCA and were never mentioned in her publication *The Lutheran Magazine*.

Addressing ecclesiastical hierarchy, Burgess adds:

“We are concerned precisely about church structures that prove illegitimate because they violate freedom. That church structures have violated freedom is not disputed. What Lutherans are concerned about is the seeming impossibility of limiting these structures by the prior claims of the Gospel, unity, and Christian freedom.” (*A Pope for all Christians? An inquiry into the role of Peter in the modern church*, edited by Peter J. McCord [London: SPCK, 1977], pp. 22, 35, 36).

CCM violates the Gospel, in that it necessitates an adiaphoron as an addition to the unity which is already found in Christ alone, and therefore limits Christian freedom. CCM is not about the Gospel. It is “Gospel Plus.”

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**III. Bishops, the New Testament, and the Lutheran Reformation**

The ecumenical agreement *Called to Common Mission* (CCM) contains considerable misinformation regarding the notion of ministerial “oversight” (or *episkopé* in Greek). For example, CCM paragraph 5 states,

“We believe that a ministry of pastoral oversight (*episkope*), exercised in personal, collegial, and communal ways, is necessary to witness to and safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the church.”

To a certain degree, the Lutheran Reformers would agree. For example, in his Preface to Melancthon’s *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony*, Martin Luther wrote, “Who can describe how useful and necessary this office [oversight] is in the Christian church?” (*Luther’s Works*, 40: 269-273, *Luthers Werke*, WA 26:195-201).

That, however, is as far as the agreement between CCM and the Lutheran Reformers goes because CCM then proceeds to make supra-congregational church bureaucrats in tactile succession (touching) “necessary” for the unity of the churches. What is wrong with this notion?

For starters, the New Testament does not support the idea of episcopal pedigree. For example, Walter Bauer (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 299), has *episkopé* defined as follows:

1) visitation of divine pronouncements, of grace, of Christ’s kingship, etc.; the visitation of grace can bring protection; (2) visitation of an unpleasant kind; and (3) position or office as an overseer as in the office of a bishop

In the New Testament, *episkopé* relates mostly to a “visitation” either as a divine occurrence or as an overseer in ministry. Additionally, the New Testament knows nothing of “tactile succession” being necessary either for *episkopé* or for the unity of the church, as CCM requires. Instead, Christ is our unity, and oversight is ultimately something which Christ undertakes. As I Peter 2: 21-25 indicates, Christ is the “shepherd and overseer (*episkopon*)” of our souls.

So, how did things go from having Jesus as the “overseer of our souls” to having church functionaries in tactile succession become “necessary” for the churches’ unity? The answer is simple. In their sinfulness, human beings cast Jesus aside and put themselves as bishops in his place. This tragic phenomenon was corrected at the Reformation, but CCM subverts the Reformation and again allows episcopal bureaucrats to usurp Christ and his unifying authority. What does this mean?

In the early church, all bishops were parish pastors. Over time, however, as Christianity was integrated into the Roman Empire, the church became imperialistic. By the time of the Reformation, bishops were equivalent to royalty, and bishoprics were sold by the pope to the wealthy aristocracy. The Reformers knew that the word “bishop” came from the term

“*episkopos*” meaning “overseer,” but at that time, few bishops offered oversight, and visitations to parishes were quite rare. For Luther, absentee and theologically negligent bishops obscured the gospel. Luther writes, “If it were left up to the endowment bishops and suffragan (*sic*) bishops, the church would long since have perished a hundred thousand times... The bishop’s office will, I daresay, remain with the pastors and preachers” (*Luther’s Works*, 34: 45).

Furthermore, when the idea of “episcopal succession,” later called “historic episcopacy,” was invented in 1538-1540 (probably as a way to discredit Lutheran ordinations) the Reformers rejected the whole concept and directed people back to Christ and the Word of God.

For example, in 1539 Melanchthon wrote that carnal opinions “imagine the church to be a state of bishops and bind it to the orderly succession of bishops, as the empires consist of the orderly succession of princes. But the church maintains itself differently. Actually, it is a union not bound to the orderly succession but to the Word of God” (*Melanchthon’s Werke*, ed. Stupperich 1: 330, 16-23).

In 1541, Luther wrote, “In the church, the succession of bishops does not make a bishop, but the Lord alone is our bishop” (WA 53: 74).

In short, the tactile succession of bishops in CCM as the basis for church unity has no basis either in Scripture or in the Lutheran Reformation. In contrast, the Reformers exercised supra-congregational oversight through teams of visitors who went to parishes first and foremost to assist pastors in their efforts to proclaim the word of God. So, how has CCM happened?

It is now Thanksgiving time. You know that the Pilgrims came to the New World for religious freedom. Do you recall that the Pilgrims were seeking to escape the religious intolerance of the Church of England and its enforced episcopalianism? Many thousands like the Pilgrims faced persecution and death simply because there did not want to be episcopalian.

Now through CCM this very same religious intolerance has been imported into the “inclusive” ELCA and has been placed at the heart of the ELCA’s ordained ministry. The “historic episcopacy” necessary for unity in CCM is derived from 17<sup>th</sup> century English laws of religious intolerance. Through CCM, this religious intolerance is now being enforced against new ELCA pastors and bishops. Do you think that this reflects the New Testament understanding of unity in Christ (see John 17 and Ephesians 4)?

In other words, through CCM Jesus as shepherd and bishop of our souls has again been cast aside by sinful human beings who covet his unifying authority. Where are the new Reformers who will again bring the church back to God’s Word and to Christ as its sole foundation and unity?

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**IV. Ordination and Call - A Lutheran Understanding**

During an evening meal in the Wittenberg home of Kaspar Cruciger, attended by Luther, Melanchthon, Oertel, Froeschel, and other theologians, Phillip Melanchthon deferred to the importance of Cruciger's ordination (1542). It drew a sharp rebuke from Luther, who snapped, "*Die Ordination ist kein solch gross Ding!* (Ordination is no big deal!)."

But ordination is indeed a very big deal to the historical episcopacy, and now by adoption of *Called to Common Mission* (CCM), it is to ELCA as well. The ELCA definition of what ordination actually is, continues to be in flux, i.e., what it will finally mean will be determined by either the Churchwide Assembly, the Conference of Bishops, the Joint Episcopal/Lutheran Commission, or all three. In other words, traditional Roman and Anglican dogma teaches that ordination bestows an ontological grace upon the ordinand, that a spiritual change occurs in the candidate for ordination, thus making the priest necessary for the confecting of the sacraments, shifting the focus from the sacrament, to the nomistic organ presiding at the sacrament.

**The CCM View**

ELCA and ECUSA give conflicting signals as to what ordination actually means. ELCA says that no ontological change occurs (which is contrary to the dogma and tradition of the very term "historic episcopacy"). ECUSA does not claim it is a sacrament *per se* (by which special grace is bestowed), even though the *Book of Common Prayer* makes that claim, but now refers to it as a "sacramental rite." But the very basis of historic episcopacy is the priestly succession, thus as ELCA "lives into" the CCM agreement, the importance of ordination must without question or compromise, increase. That's the hold up. That's what the reason is for ELCA's statement that it regards "full communion" to be in effect already, while ECUSA says it will not be fully realized until a date in the future. The centrality of ordination must yet be fully realized by ELCA before it can be regarded as having being fully integrated into the historical episcopacy. It is just a matter of time.

**The Lutheran View**

What CCM's understanding of ordination does, whether realized or yet to be lived into, is it stands the Reformation understanding of an adiaphoristic rite on its head [*adiaphoron* is an "indifferent matter"]. It raises the importance of ordination over that of call. "The call," Luther said, "is everything!" Ordination is nothing more than a witnessing to a previously issued call, Luther using the analogy of a wedding whereby the pastor simply acts as a witness, confirming what has already been agreed upon without him/her, claiming that the arrangement actually exists whether or not the pastor participates. Luther's understanding of ordination was that of installation, and he had little interest in actually formulating an ordination service and liturgy, though begrudgingly finally did so for Wittenberg. In fact, Luther installed a number of pastors without ordination, often couldn't be bothered to even lay on hands, had no use for the term "ordination" as we now understand it, and certainly no use for the Anglican understanding of it whatsoever.

Luther's "*Bibeldeutsch*" [Biblical German] is especially interesting here. The King James Bible (KJV), for instance, has an obsession for the word "ordination" (for obvious reasons). But for every place where the KJV uses "ordain(ed)," Luther insists on translating it non-canonically, e.g. where

Mark 3:14 in the KJV reads: “And he ordained twelve...,” Luther writes, “*und er ordnete zwoelf;...*” Again, John 15:16 in the KJV states, “I have chosen you and ordained you...” Luther translates, “*ich habe euch erwählt und gesetzt...*,” whereby the verbs “*ordnen*” and “*setzen*” mean “to sort out” and “to arrange for/to put in place,” respectively. Melancthon in the section “On the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops” of his *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, not to mention Luther’s treatise *That a Christian Congregation Has the Right to Call*, makes it patently obvious in the German that the Reformers did not recognize Catholic/Anglican ordination as CCM aspires to it, because anywhere and everywhere the Latin *ordinare* (ordain) appears, (which Luther could have simply repeated, as he and Melancthon were wont to do on occasion), it is instead pointedly substituted with the German verb “*ordnen*” (to sort out, arrange).

So powerful assertion, for instance, in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* #65 states, “But since the distinction between bishop and pastor is not by divine right, it is manifest that ordination administered by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine right.” Melancthon writes, “...*wann ein Pfarrherr in seiner Kirchen etliche tuchtige Personen zum Kirchnaemptern ORDNET* (emphasis mine), *dass solche ORDINATIO nach gottlichen Rechten kraeftig und recht ist*” [Translation: “...when a pastor sorts out several able bodied persons for church offices, that such a sorting out/arranging is right according to divine right” - from *Bekennnisschriften der ev-luth. Kirche*, p. 490]. Notice: “*ordinatio*” (noun) for Melancthon is a mere “arrangement,” a “sorting out,” which is based on “*ordnen*,” and CANNOT BE TRANSLATED as is translated in Tappert’s *Book on Concord* as “ORDINATION.” Tappert, instead, should read: “It is manifest that a sorting out/arrangement administered by a pastor...etc.” The same “mistranslation,” if you will, occurs in *Apology XIV*. In short, the Reformers applied ordination to teachers, council members, and even the church janitor. Ordination is, indeed, “*kein gross Ding*.” But CCM will have you believe it is everything. Without it holding center stage in its pursuit of increasing ecclesiastical hierarchy, there can be no significance to the historical episcopacy, no validity to the *successio episcoporum* [succession of bishops] over the *successio fidelium* [succession of the faithful], no reason for stressing that only the ordained can administer the sacraments, and for the bishops to assume a “leadership” role over the Reformation understanding of a servant’s role.

But the “call,” on the other hand, is everything, and it is reserved for the people of God gathered around Word and Sacrament, for the *ecclesia particularis* [local church - see Letter I above], the local congregation or assembly of believers.

“Why do these raging tyrants condemn us for such electing and calling? They themselves do and must do the same thing. Not one of them is ever instituted by pope or bishop by the power of someone; rather he is elected and called by his chapter and then confirmed by others – the bishops by the pope as their supreme head, and he, the pope himself, by the cardinal of Ostia as by his inferior. And even if one of them were not confirmed, he would still be bishop and pope. Thus I ask the dear tyrants: if bishops are made by the election and call of their own congregation, and if the pope is pope without confirmation by any other authority and by election alone, why should not a Christian congregation, too, make a preacher by its call alone? For they [the tyrants] regard the episcopal and papal estate as higher than the office of preaching! Who gave them this right and took it from us, especially since our calling has Scripture on its side, but their calling is nothing but a mere human trifle without Scripture, with which they rob us of our rights?” - (Dr. M. Luther, *That a Christian Congregation Has the Right to Call* [1523], *Luther’s Works* 39:313).

God’s Richest Blessings to you in this New Year of Our Lord!

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**V. Historic Episcopacy - An *Adiaphoron* or the ELCA's Betrayal of the Reformation?**

Please take a few moments to read another communiqué from pastors concerned about you and your future.

Proponents of *Called to Common Mission* (CCM), the full communion agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Episcopal Church in the USA, say many curious things. Unfortunately, these things are often much more curious than true.

For example, Dennis A. Anderson, former President of Trinity Lutheran Seminary and proponent of CCM, stated in 1999, “*WE ARE FREE, in accord with the Lutheran Confessions, to accept the historic episcopate as a human but not a divine tradition, and as a sign but not a guarantee of the unity of the Church in the Gospel and in mission*” (italics original).

For many in the ELCA, the notion behind this thought is that “historic episcopacy” or bishops in historic succession (whatever that might be) is a human invention. Such human inventions are sometimes called “indifferent matters” or *adiaphora*, to use the Greek term. The word *adiaphoron* comes from the Greek verb *diapherein* or “to separate” or “to make a difference.” So, an *a-diaphoron* (with “a” meaning “no”) is something not separated or not differentiated.

In other words, an *adiaphoron* does not matter. So, in Christian freedom, it can be used. That said, if something does not matter, then why use it? That is the crux of the matter. If the “historic episcopate” in CCM does not matter, then why is “historic episcopacy” the center of the CCM-controversy?

Although many in the ELCA think that “historic episcopacy” is an indifferent, human invention, Episcopalians (Anglicans) consider the matter very differently. For Anglicans, “historic episcopacy” and its related “holy orders” are believed to be divine, of the gospel, something which bears and transmits God’s grace. For this reason, Anglicans consider “ordination” to be a “sacramental rite,” something of divine worship and the gospel which transmits God’s grace.

Proper Lutherans, however, believe that grace is given only in word and sacrament. This grace comes to human beings freely because of God’s promise in Christ, the word made flesh. Thus, for Lutherans “ordination” and “ordained ministries” do not transmit or bear grace. Instead, ministers are “ordered” (or commanded) to proclaim God’s grace. These proclaimers of the word have no “special” powers apart from the word of God.

In short, for Anglicans “historic episcopacy” and its “holy orders” do matter because they are considered to be part of the gospel. In contrast, Lutherans think that such things do not matter because they are human inventions. So, who is right? Consider the following:

1. If Anglicans hold their “historic episcopate” to be divine, but Lutherans do not, then where is the agreement in CCM? In other words, how can the “historic episcopate” be a sign of unity, when the ELCA and the Episcopal Church are not unified in their understanding of “historic

episcopacy” (see CCM §13)?

2. Likewise, the Episcopal Church now considers ELCA bishops to be “ordained” into the “historic episcopate,” i.e. they are receiving special grace, but the ELCA considers such bishops to be merely “installed” into the “historic episcopate” (see CCM §§10, 12, 15). Which is the case? Where is the unity? To use an analogy, can someone be married and not married at the same time? What kind of a marriage would that be? What kind of unity does CCM represent?

The Lutheran Reformers rejected such doubletalk and duplicity. Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* says simply that it “is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere.” Do you see “historic episcopate” mentioned above as being part of the gospel? It is not there!

The main problem with CCM, however, is not whether the ELCA has adopted an indifferent matter (*adiaphoron*) for unity with the Episcopal Church. Similarly, the problem in CCM is not just about a lack of agreement in the gospel, although this is true.

Instead, as an ecumenical agreement, CCM fails first and foremost because through CCM the ELCA has agreed to conditions of unity based on an Anglican understanding of the gospel. This understanding is not compatible with Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*. Plainly, if CCM contained agreement in the gospel, then CCM would offer no controversies to be resolved.

The supposed “freedom” to adopt an “historic episcopate” as per CCM is thus not supported by Scripture or by the Lutheran Confessions. True Christian freedom comes from Christ alone to believers as his free gift. Christian freedom is thus relational, from Christ to others. Freedom outside of Christ is not Christian. Instead, it is rebellion against God, also known as sin.

Freedom relates to a lord and master. Judas was free to betray Christ in order to collect his ransom. Peter was free to betray and deny Christ in order to collect his freedom from persecution and arrest. Likewise, ELCA pastors and bishops are free to betray Christ, his gospel, and his lordship in order to collect acceptance by the Episcopal Church. In so doing, however, they do not serve Christ or his body. Instead, they serve their new master, namely Anglican canonical and ecclesiastical laws which are designed to eradicate non-episcopal forms of Christian expression.

Whom will you choose to serve?

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**VI. Luther's Priesthood of All Bishops**

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson wrote in the September 2002 issue of *The Lutheran* [page 53] that a so-called “evangelical episcopate..., assists us to see more clearly God’s will for our lives and God’s work in the world,” as well as “where the text of Scripture intersects with the context of our lives.” Professor Dennis Bielfeldt, from South Dakota State University, responded in part (*The Lutheran*, February 2003, p. 11), by saying, “Bishops, insofar as they are bishops, possess no special powers to understand God’s work, know his will, apprehend his word in Scripture or compassionately empathize with the oppressed. With respect to these matters, an evangelical plumber is every bit the evangelical bishop’s equal.”

Dr. Martin Luther would have been most pleased with Prof. Bielfeldt’s response, especially in light of CCM’s overtly slick campaign which would have us think that Luther and the Reformers would have approved of ELCA’s adoption of a so-called “historical episcopacy.” Writing a full seven years before the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession*, Luther didn’t mince his words in *Concerning the Ministry* 1523:

“There is something ridiculous about the conferring of orders. For the episcopal dignity is not a sacrament nor has it a ‘character.’ Yet it gives a priestly dignity and power supposedly above all others. Though the episcopal authority ranks as the highest since it grants the ordination and ‘character’ of a priest, it is at the same time inferior since it is not itself an order or in possession of a peculiar ‘character’”(LW 40:24).

He goes on to refer to the notion of episcopal succession as an “absurdity” (“it is not itself an order”), a “fictitious distinction” which “overleaps the bounds of common sense.” Did Luther change his mind in later years? Hardly. Citing Gideon’s speech in *Judges* 8, Luther attacks episcopal succession in his *Chronikon* of 1541 (and which he revised as late as 1545):

“A bishop is not made a bishop in the church through succession, for the Lord alone is our bishop. He creates bishops when and where he wills, as we see in Hieronymus, Augustine, Ambrosius, Hus, and we ourselves, putting aside the succession, which the papists, praise so highly” (WA 53:74)

CCM imposes a historical episcopal succession and ordination upon ELCA, which Luther and the Reformers “put aside” and called “ridiculous” and “absurd.” ELCA is not merely being misled. It is being lied to. For Martin Luther, everyone was automatically a bishop the moment they arose out of the baptismal waters. What he called the “terrible domination of the clergy over the laity” in *The Pagan Servitude of the Church* of 1520, was the result of what “the Romanists have attributed to the sacrament of ordination, a certain fictitious character, which is said to be indelibly impressed upon the ordinand. I would ask whence do such ideas arise, and on whose authority and for what reason have they become established?” (*cf.*, LW, 36:110-111).

CCM attributes a “certain fictitious character” to ordination by bishops who claim to trace their priesthood through the lineage of the historical episcopal succession, a succession that Luther and

the Reformers had “put aside.” Yet for Luther, a bishop was only ever such by virtue of one’s baptism, a member of the *successio fidelium* [succession of the faithful], and never the *successio episcoporum* [succession of bishops]. In *An Appeal to the Ruling Class*, Luther writes in 1520:

“All these are human inventions and regulations. Hence we deduce that there is, at bottom, really no other difference between laymen, priests, princes, bishops, or, in Romanist terminology, between religious and secular, than that of office or occupation, and not that of Christian status. All have spiritual status, and all are truly priests, bishops, and popes” (*cf.*, LW 44:129-130).

Some ELCA theologians and historians are quick point to Luther’s installation of his good friend, Nicolas von Amsdorf as the bishop of Naumburg in 1542, as “evidence” that Luther wished to continue (or to use CCM §11’s misappropriated words from *Apology* XIV, “deeply desired to maintain”) an historic episcopacy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Luther made clear to the Kurfürst (Elector) that he had no interest in installing a bishop, even if it was his friend von Amsdorf. The Kurfürst responded by ordering Luther to do it, even sending a wagon to have him physically carted to Naumburg for it. What never seems to occur to those who would cite this example, is the fact that by the very act of Luther doing it, he was flagrantly violating the practice of episcopal succession, not being an *episkopos* [overseer] himself.

*Episkope*, or “oversight” in Luther’s electoral Saxony was exercised by “visitation,” which included “*Superintendenten*” who, although they were ordained clergy, were not bishops. German theologian Bernhard Lohse writes, “The question of apostolic succession was meaningless for him (Luther), and had not been dealt with by either side” (*Martin Luther - An Introduction to His Life and Work*, Fortress Press 1986.) This, incidentally, is another hoax on the part of CCM, i.e., to make the reader think that episcopal succession was on the table in Augsburg or even on the minds of the papists. It wasn’t, and contrary to CCM §11, *Apology* XIV has nothing to do with it.

But how meaningless was the question of succession for Luther really? Meaningless enough for him to clown around with the bishop’s title and begin irreverently bestowing it on the laity as well as ordinary pastors. For example, he confers the highest of titles on his friend George Spalatin, referring to him in a letter dated August 15, 1539, addressing him in the vocative as, “*Georgia Spalatio, Archiepiscopo Misnen,*” making him the Archbishop of Meissen! He even confers bishops’ titles on Spalatin’s lay friends, including Justus Jonas, Melchior von Creutzen, Casper von Schoenberg, and Rudolf von Rechenberg (“*Saluta D. Ionam et alio coepiscopos!*”). He signs a letter sending a greeting to (lay) “co-bishops” (“*Gruesse den D. Jonas und die anderen Mitbischoefe. Am Freitag nach Laurentii 1539. Dein Martin Luther*”).

Brothers and sisters in Christ. There is indeed “something ridiculous about the conferring of orders,” about “this absurdity” known as “episcopal authority,” this “fictitious distinction” that ELCA has imposed upon the baptized faithful which “overleaps the bounds of common sense,” and which Luther and the Reformers had “put aside.” Do bishops “assist us to see more clearly God’s will for our lives,” “to see more clearly...the text of Scripture” as Bishop Hanson claims in *The Lutheran?* Or is “an evangelical plumber every bit the evangelical bishop’s equal,” as Prof. Bielfeldt maintains? In light of the evidence of the Reformation, it would seem clear that Luther not only believed in a “priesthood of all believers,” but in fact he believed in a “priesthood of all bishops.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

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**VII. Bishops in the Reformation**

For Lutherans in the United States, and in many parts of the world today, it is hard to understand adequately the circumstances of the Reformers. At that time, the church and state were so intertwined as to be hardly separated. Bishops were often princes, and bishops also sat in the imperial diets (legislatures). Even today, Church of England bishops sit in the House of Lords in the British Parliament. A bishop and his bishopric (or bishoprics in some cases) was a fundamental element of imperial life and structure. Despite that, a bishop often did not reside in his diocese to minister to his people.

In this milieu, anyone who challenged the monarchical status and role of bishops also challenged the imperial state, which was obliged to defend the church. Luther became an outlaw first because he challenged the pope with his bishops and then because he defied imperial authority by refusing to recant his writings against the hierarchical Roman church and its abuses of power. It was a vicious circle.

So, how could anyone reform a deformed church and yet appear to remain loyal to the emperor? This was a precarious situation for the Reformers.

Believing in the equality of all Christians in baptism (priesthood of all believers), Luther sought with scriptural authority to show that a “bishop” was one person selected from fellow Christians to proclaim the gospel in Word and Sacrament and also to exercise the office of the keys (discipline) in order to protect believers from the effects of sin. Luther writes,

“There is ... no essential difference between bishops, elders, and priests on the one hand and laymen on the other, nothing to distinguish them from other Christians except that the one has a different office which is entrusted to him, namely, to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; just as a mayor or judge is distinguished from other citizens by nothing except that the governing of the city is entrusted to him.”

In contrast to this, according to Luther, the “whole Babylonian crowd” of the hierarchical church sought to divide the Christian people into “sects,” namely clergy and laity. Luther continues, “These persons are the very same ones who have destroyed the church and the Word of God, and with the old serpents cunning have torn the minds and hearts of Christians from the unity in Christ Jesus, as Paul says in Corinthians [II Cor. 11:3]. Therefore the name of bishop or priest is not the name of a sect, but the name of an office. Priest is the equivalent of elders; bishop is the equivalent of overseer. Out of these the ungodly men have made ranks and dignities.”

For Luther, divisions in the church arise primarily when “clergy” are differentiated from “laity.” This division leads to further hierarchical divisions amongst clerics and subsequently to clerical divisions between ecclesial bodies.

This phenomenon of disunity points to one of the chief problems with *Called to Common Mission* (CCM). On the surface, CCM claims to address the divisions between Lutherans and Episcopalians. CCM does so by seeking to standardize ecclesial hierarchies of ordained ministers. In other words, for “full communion” to occur the ELCA must make itself “episcopalian enough” to become acceptable to the Episcopal Church (CCM §§ 16 and 18). By assuming the principles of hierarchical and clerical

Episcopalianism, however, the ELCA is importing those very things. according to Luther, which “have severed and cut to pieces the unity of the Christian people” (preceding quotations from LW 36: 158-159, see also LW 39: 254).

In short, CCM is the fruit of a new, sectarian “Babylonian crowd” whose goal is to achieve “organic, visible” unity (read hierarchical uniformity) at the expense of the baptismal unity given by Christ to every member of his royal priesthood.

In contrast to the structural ecumenists, Luther asserts that “whoever has the office of preaching imposed on him has the highest office in Christendom imposed on him. Afterward he may also baptize, celebrate mass, and exercise all pastoral care...” (LW 39: 313). “Elders” (presbyters) and “bishops” (episcopoi) are equal because they fulfil identical duties, namely proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments (see LW 36: 281; 39: 284). In fact, for Lutherans all pastors are bishops (*Book of Concord*, Tappert, 330.61.62; 332.74). According to Luther, bishops distinguish themselves as servants charged with ministerial oversight to be exercised through parochial visitation. Thus, in contrast to the princely bishops of his day, Luther saw the effective office (function) of bishop exercised by parish pastors and preachers (see LW 34: 45). So little did Luther desire centralized, hierarchical control that he opposed a common treasury in order to prevent bishops from misappropriating funds (LW 28 on I Timothy 3:2).

In Luther’s biblical theology, such clerical, princely bishops were contrary to servant ministry. “We say: All that is not with the Scriptures is against the Scriptures. Their priesthood and its sacrifice and office, their episcopate, are not with the Scriptures, as shown above; therefore they are necessarily against the Scriptures and thus against God. But what is against God is the work of the devil” (LW 36: 160). For such bishops, Luther saw a bleak future, “They are the mockery of the devil, God’s enemies, and soon to be eradicated with their prince and creator, the pope, by the coming of our Savior, amen” (LW 36: 158).

Contrary to Luther’s forecast, however, the monarchical bishops were not eradicated. Neither were they reformed. Instead, as an integral part of the Holy Roman Empire, the monarchical bishops of the Counter-Reformation exercised their worldly powers and brutally eradicated Protestantism in large tracts of Europe. (Later, the episcopalian Church of England pursued a similar program against non-episcopalian Protestants in England and Wales.)

In their feudal world, the Reformers were confronted with two choices. They could either undermine the emperor, and face either peasant revolt or invasion by the Turks or death, or they could institute limited ecclesial reforms within the confines of feudal, medieval Europe. They reluctantly chose the second option as the lesser of two evils. This was not ideal, but it explains why the Reformers in the Lutheran Confessions made compromising statements about having or working with bishops and also why the Reformers experimented, unsuccessfully, with “evangelical” bishops in places like Naumburg, Merseburg, and Kammin. In 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg, however, these discussions came to an end, at least in Germany. After that time, the title of bishop was reserved for the Roman Catholic Church, thus freeing the Lutherans to develop their own various offices of “oversight” (*episkopé*), such as superintendents.

Such freedom is no longer possible in the ELCA, and neither is true church unity in the gospel (see *Augsburg Confession* VII). Instead, by inflaming perpetual divisions between laity and clergy and by reinstating redundant, hierarchical orders of clergy CCM is actually working to destroy both the ELCA and the Word of God. Are you preparing to be a kingdom builder or a church destroyer?

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**VIII. Lay Presidency at Communion and the Priesthood of All Believers**

“You will not notice the changes!” This claim by proponents of *Called to Common Mission* (CCM) has become a mantra. It is used to lead trusting ELCA members into believing falsely that adopting “episcopalian” structures for “full communion” with the Episcopal Church means nothing.

Think for a moment. If CCM entails no meaningful changes to the ELCA, then why does the Episcopal Church not accept the ELCA “as is” for “full communion”? In other words, if God in Christ accepts all sinners “as is,” then why can the Episcopal Church not accept the ELCA as an equal, sister church? Why, exactly, is the ELCA not fully acceptable for “full communion” now?

The answer is simple. True Lutherans believe in the priesthood of all believers. This means that through God’s Word in baptism all believers are given the necessary grace to perform any function in the church. That includes preaching and administering the sacraments. Luther writes,

“But let us go on and show from the priestly offices (as they call them) that all Christians are priests in equal degree. For such passages as, “You are a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2[:9]) and, “Thou has made them a kingdom and priests” (Rev. 5[:10]), [demonstrate this]. ... [T]he first and foremost of all [priestly duties] on which everything else depends, is the teaching of the Word of God. For we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sins by the Word, we baptize with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word. Therefore when we grant the Word to anyone, we cannot deny anything to him pertaining to the exercise of his priesthood. This Word is the same for all, ... The first office, that of the ministry of the Word, therefore, is common to all Christians.” (LW 40:21).

Is there a “higher” priesthood within the priesthood of all believers? Anglicans (Episcopalians) and Roman Catholics maintain that there is. Luther, however, in rejecting this notion says,

“But some imagine a twofold priesthood, one spiritual and common to all, the other external and limited, and say that Peter here speaks of the spiritual one. But what is the function of this limited and external office? Is it not to declare the wonderful deeds of God? ... These passages [Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24, 26; 14: 26, 31] very strongly and clearly corroborate that the ministry of the Word is the highest office in the church, that it is unique and belongs to all who are Christians, not only by right but by command” (LW 40: 22-23).

Luther further rejects the whole notion of “episcopal ordination” as understood by Roman Catholics and Anglicans and as now prescribed in the ELCA due to CCM. Luther continues,

“There is something ridiculous about this conferring of orders. For the episcopal dignity is not a sacrament nor is it a ‘character.’ Yet it gives a priestly dignity and power supposedly above all others.”

For Lutherans, everyone in the priesthood of all believers is equal. That was the case in the ELCA until CCM passed. Now, a separation between “laity” and “clergy,” which destroys “the

church and the Word of God,” is being introduced into the ELCA (see LW 36: 158-159).

According to the “Tucson Resolution” issued by the ELCA’s Conference of Bishops (which apparently was not adopted by the ELCA’s 1999 Churchwide Assembly), “lay persons may continue to be licensed by the synodical bishop in unusual circumstances to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion” (B.4). That means that the command of Christ given to everyone in the priesthood of all believers has become an “unusual circumstance” in the ELCA. You, however, will not notice this change. So, what other changes will you not notice?

It is widely known that Anglicans (Episcopalians) do not allow “lay” persons to preside at Holy Communion. To achieve “full communion” with the Episcopal Church, the ELCA must conform to Episcopalian practice. Curiously, after CCM’s passage the story about “lay presidency” in the ELCA continues to change. According to an ELCA News Service report from October 15, 2002, Rev. Philip L. Hougen, bishop of the ELCA Southeastern Iowa Synod, states,

“The Episcopal Church is looking for us to be an ally in limiting lay presidency.” Hougen adds, “It is fair to report that it’s the hope of the Episcopal Church that we would move away from lay presidency.”

Please note. Over against the command of Christ, the ELCA is expected to be an “ally” with the Episcopal Church in destroying the equality of all believers in our common priesthood. Is this really possible for Lutherans?

Yes. In fact, precisely this has happened in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), even before their CCM-like accord with Canadian Anglicans (Waterloo Agreement) was adopted. The Primate of the Anglican Church in Canada, Archbishop Michael Peers, is reported by an Australian church newspaper as stressing that the ELCIC had already “agreed to end that practice [lay presidency] for the sake of Anglican/Lutheran relationships” (Southern Cross Online, April 2000 - <http://www.anglicanmedia.com.au/april2000/world2.html> ).

You, however, are not supposed to notice these changes in the priesthood of all believers. You are not supposed to see that the gains of the Reformation are being reversed for a unity not founded on Christ. Jesus says that we cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). Ask yourself. Whose sacrament is Holy Communion? Is it an “Anglican Eucharist” or is it the Lord’s Supper?

As you consider your response, please notice something that will never change. The Jesus who presided at the first Lord’s Supper – was a layman. Whose ally will you be?