

Bishops, Unity, and Rabid Inclusivity **Historic Episcopacy and Historic Hypocrisy in the ELCA**

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Called to Common Mission (CCM), the fraudulent ecumenical agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA), was passed on 19 August 1999 at the ELCA's Churchwide Assembly. Contrary to its purpose, this accord has generated considerable controversy and division within the ELCA. Most of this controversy surrounds the perceived place and role of the Episcopalian understanding of the ordering of bishops, a tradition called the "historic episcopate." Anglicans require the tactile succession of bishops for "full communion" relations between themselves and other church bodies. Although the term "historic episcopate" conjures up images of the past, neither CCM itself nor most statements relating to it portray the historical factors able to explain why Episcopalians consider their "historic episcopate" to be a non-negotiable element for intra- and inter-ecclesial relationships. The following material, presented in catechetical form, seeks to bring precisely those important historical factors to light. This material also seeks to show that the ELCA's adoption of "historic episcopacy" is diametrically opposed to the ELCA's culture of inclusivity which has taken extreme expression in decisions made at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Question: Why does *Called to Common Mission* (CCM) exist?

Answer: CCM was created in order that the ELCA could eventually bring its episcopal polity and ordination practice into conformity with the requirements of the episcopalian (Anglican) Preface to the Ordinal (ordination rites) as established in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. According to CCM §16, the Preface stipulates that "no persons are allowed to exercise the offices of bishop, priest, or deacon in this Church unless they are so ordained, or have already received such ordination with the laying-on-of-hands by bishops who are themselves duly qualified to confer Holy Orders" (ECUSA, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 510).

Question: What does this mean?

Answer: Generally, Episcopalians consider

non-historic episcopally ordered churches, like the ELCA originally was, to be inferior to their own. According to Arthur Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury (1961-1974), Protestant churches without an historic episcopate are incomplete: "(1) With the lack of the historical structure, the sense of worship as the act of the one historic society has been lost. ... (2) With the defective sense of worship as the act of the historic society, there grows easily a false emphasis on the place of human feelings in worship and in religion generally. ... (3) With defect in life and worship there is defect in the presentation of truth. By its attempt to make a 'nude' appeal to Scripture, Protestantism has failed to find a centre of unity and authority in doctrine" (Ramsey, 197-200). Furthermore, according to the Lambeth Conference of 1948, for Anglicans it is impossible either "to declare the sacraments of non-episcopal bodies null and void" or "to treat non-episcopal

ministries as identical in status and authority with the episcopal ministry” (Sykes/Booty, 307). Thus, without the “historic episcopate” the ELCA is considered in classic episcopalian thought to be defective and not fully part of the body of Christ.

Question: Why, then, do Episcopalian churches require other churches to conform specifically with the requirements of the 1662 Preface to the Ordinal for “full communion”?

Answer: Historically, Episcopalians have equated church unity with “conformity to uniformity” under their understanding of episcopalian church government.

Question: Has the episcopalian principle of “conformity to uniformity” always meant that non-historic episcopally ordained ministers were excluded from service in episcopalian churches?

Answer: No. Before 1662, clergy from non-episcopalian churches were allowed on occasion to serve in the Church of England (Sykes/Booty, 151f).

Question: What factors led to this change in episcopalian hospitality in 1662?

Answer: This exclusive stance is rooted in the Church of England, particularly after 1662, and the Church of England’s desire to maintain episcopalianism as the only permitted form of religion in England. Consequently, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical factors in England have direct bearing today on the nature of CCM and its requirements for “full communion” between the ECUSA and the ELCA. Unfortunately, more than thirty years of Lutheran-Episcopal dialogue apparently failed to examine and address the following

disturbing historical realities:

1. In the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the first Act of Uniformity of 1559 was imposed upon her English subjects. This act made episcopalianism with its *Book of Common Prayer* the only permitted religion in England. Dissent from the English state religion was illegal, and meeting in groups (conventicles) to worship differently was forbidden. Refusal to conform to episcopalianism resulted in fines, excommunication, imprisonment, and often death.

2. Those who refused to conform to episcopalianism were called Separatists or Dissenters and later Nonconformists. In order to eradicate persistent dissent from the Church of England, in April 1593 there was passed “An Act for Retaining the Queen's Subjects in their due Obedience. Anyone over the age of sixteen who refused to attend church for a month [that is the Church of England], or who attempted to persuade others not to attend church, or who attended unauthorized religious meetings, was to be committed to prison. If the offender did not conform within three months he was to be given the alternative of exile or death” (Watts, 39f, material in square brackets added). Understandably, most of those who did not want to conform to episcopalianism opted for exile, often in The Netherlands, rather than face execution.

3. It should be recalled that in 1620 when the Pilgrims came to the New World seeking religious freedom, they sought primarily to worship differently from the enforced uniformity of episcopalianism. The provisions of the Obedience Act of 1593 help to explain why the Pilgrims sojourned in The Netherlands before departing to “New England” where they would no longer

be required to submit to the episcopal governance of the established Church of England (*cf.* Johnson, 24). Thus, the United States of America as a nation and the freedom of religion enshrined in its constitution's Bill of Rights both partially owe their existence to these brave men and women who ventured their lives to worship God unrestrained by the demands of episcopalianism.

4. Unfortunately, the concept of church unity as "conformity to uniformity" was not meant only for England. In 1637, Archbishop Laud with the support of King Charles I tried to impose a form of the English *Book of Common Prayer* on the Scots. This led to riots and revolt in Scotland. More importantly, however, the attempt to make Scotland conform to episcopalian uniformity served as one of the key precipitating factors for the Bishops' wars with Scotland in 1639-40 and for the civil wars in Britain in the 1640's. Both Archbishop Laud and King Charles I were later executed for causing these wars.

5. Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of Britain in the 1650's, was able to create a form of government which did allow for some religious tolerance. However, upon Cromwell's death a political vacuum ensued and calls for the English monarchy to be restored were heeded. In 1660, Charles II returned from exile to be the king of England. Shortly before his return, Charles II in his "Declaration of Breda" also sought to establish religious "liberty to tender consciences" (Wilkinson, 214). Many hopes were thereby raised for greater religious tolerance in England. Unfortunately, neither the new English Parliament nor the Church of England with its newly restored episcopalianism were inclined to grant any such religious freedoms.

6. The restoration of the episcopalian nature of the Church of England and the compulsory use of the revised *Book of Common Prayer*, including the 1662 Preface to the Ordinal, owe their legal existence to an act of the English Parliament known as the Act of Uniformity of 1662, or as it is more formally entitled "An Act for the Uniformity of Public Prayer and Administration of Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies; and for Establishing the Form of Making, Ordaining and Consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons in the Church of England" (Wilkinson, 45).

7. The 1662 Act of Uniformity required three things for clergy to be acceptable for ministry in the Church of England: "(1) ordination at the hands of a bishop, (2) unfeigned assent to everything in the new Prayer Book, and (3) subscription to a doctrine of non-resistance, ... Much was therefore asked of candidates for Anglican Orders, and much was undertaken by aspirants thereto. But the Act had certain more immediate and more easily-assessed consequences; for by its terms a large number of beneficed clergy were automatically dispossessed if they failed to conform by St. Bartholomew's Day... A reliable estimate is that about 2,000 men, or about a fifth part of all beneficed clergy, were deprived [ejected from office] during the weeks immediately following the 24th of August 1662" (Ogg, 201f, material in square brackets added). To make matters worse, this act also stipulated that after their ejection, nonconformist clergy were to be treated by the church as if they "were dead" (§§ V, VI, *cf.* Wilkinson, 218f).

8. Through a series of subsequent penal laws (Corporation Act of 1661, the Quaker Act of 1662, the First Conventicle Act of 1664, the Five Mile Act of 1665, and the Second

Conventicle Act of 1670), the 1662 Act of Uniformity was brutally enforced with the encouragement and support of the bishops of the Church of England (Watts, 223-227; Wilkinson, 69, 73, 78).

9. Under these penal laws those who refused to conform to episcopalianism were persecuted, arrested, and then were frequently heavily fined, suffered distraint, or were imprisoned. Too often, those arrested were either killed or lost their lives due to appalling conditions in prison. It is estimated that between 1660 and 1685 around 15,000 Quakers went to jail for their nonconformity, of whom 450 died in prison squalor (Wilkinson, 93; Watts, 236). Countless other Dissenters also suffered the same fate. For example, in the County of Norfolk, England, between the years 1661 and 1685 a total of 3,128 Quakers, Catholics, Nonconformists (like Presbyterians and Baptists), and others of unrecorded denomination were convicted for not attending Church of England services. In the County of Middlesex, England, the total number of people convicted on the same charge during this same period of time was 2,566 (Miller, 265-267).

10. Gradually, however, the English Parliament came to the realization that enforced conformity to episcopalianism was an impossibility. Thus, in 1689 it passed the Act of Toleration which ameliorated but did not repeal the 1662 Act of Uniformity or the penal laws. Thus, the 1689 Act of Toleration serves chiefly as an “act of admission” by the English Parliament that the principle of “conformity to uniformity” under episcopalian polity is a form of religious intolerance. As one might expect, though, the Act of Toleration of 1689 could not legislate a more inclusive attitude. “Even under the new liberty granted to Dissenters

by the Act of Toleration there was still strong episcopalian antipathy” to Dissenters, their academies, and their ministries (Wilkinson, pp. 98-105). Unfortunately, by strictly adhering to the Preface to the Ordinal from the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, as required by the 1662 Act of Uniformity, episcopalianism has never fully disavowed its intolerant stance in relation to non-historic episcopally ordained clergy, such as those originally serving in the ELCA.

Question: Why is this history of episcopalianism important to the ELCA and its adoption of CCM?

Answer: The preceding brief history of the Episcopalian understanding of church unity as “conformity to uniformity” under episcopal polity helps to explain why CCM has also generated so much strife within the ELCA. Conformity to episcopalian uniformity has never achieved true church unity but only “visible” (or “apparent”) unity. Similar to events in England long ago, CCM has created a situation in the ELCA whereby many feel persecuted for their desire to uphold the Lutheran religious and confessional freedoms which conforming to aspects of episcopalian polity would erode.

So, when opponents of CCM speak of forming “confessing synods,” they are, like the Dissenters before them, seeking to establish “conventicles” as a way to continue exercising their religious freedom within what has effectively become the “Episcopal Lutheran Church in America.” Likewise, when CCM-opponents express the desire to leave the ELCA now that CCM has passed, they express the effective reality of their own ecclesial exile or death in the ELCA.

As in seventeenth-century Great Britain,

CCM and its requirements of conformity with certain principles of episcopalian polity have given rise to “bishops’ wars” and “civil war” in the ELCA. Similar to the 1662 Act of Uniformity, the adoption of CCM has meant that the previous, flexible practice of ordaining pastors in the ELCA has been “utterly disabled,” with a few exceptions, in favour of a strict, legalistic adherence to “Episcopalian approved” ordinations. Finally, since CCM has passed, the ELCA has become obliged in one way or another to enact its own “penal laws” to enforce conformity with the ELCA’s newly acquired episcopalian religious intolerance and corresponding governance. Those in the ELCA who refuse to conform may expect in one way or another to be persecuted, denied ordination, and barred from holding the office of bishop. In general, CCM-Dissenters have had to grow accustomed to the reality that they too, like the Dissenters before them, are and will be treated by the ELCA as if they “were dead.”

Due to ignorance of English history, Called to Common Mission has paradoxically re-created the dark history of episcopalian religious intolerance in the hyper-inclusive, politically correct institutional ELCA of today.

Contrary to the text of CCM, this is hardly the kind of unity to which Jesus refers in John chapter 17 when he prays “that they may be one.” Also contrary to CCM §11 specifically, the 1662 Act of Uniformity is simply not the “ecclesiastical and canonical polity” which Lutherans, according to Article 14 of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* 1531, “desire to maintain” (cf. Menacher, 21-28). Because CCM seeks to accommodate a system of religious intolerance, it cannot and has not been able to offer the true church unity in Christ which

both Episcopalians and Lutherans desire.

Question: Why, then, has the ELCA made every effort and spared no expense to alter its original episcopal polity and ordination practice in order to conform to the religiously intolerant ordination requirements of the 1662 Preface to the Ordinal of the *Book of Common Prayer*?

Answer: Without question, the official pro-CCM stance of the ELCA is theologically and ethically paradoxical. This is well demonstrated and documented by ELCA’s inter-faith and ecumenical statements relating to the Jewish and Mennonite communities.

First, in its 1994 *Declaration to the Jewish Community*, the ELCA stated on one hand, “We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us.” Then, on the other hand, through *Called to Common Mission* the ELCA seems to be declaring, “We recognize in our conformity to aspects of episcopalian state church law no contradiction or affront to the Gospel. In fact, conforming to the demands of exclusive forms of religious intolerance is our hope and calling. Therefore, we pledge this church to share in the past deadly workings of such bigotry, both within our own circles and with the ECUSA requiring this of us.”

Likewise, in the 2006 *Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on the Condemnation of Anabaptists*, the ELCA poignantly stated to the Mennonite community, “The ELCA repudiates the use of governmental authorities to punish

individuals or groups with whom it disagrees theologically. ... no church should use the state to impose its own beliefs and practices on others.” Clearly, the ELCA could just as easily be chastising itself for having adopted CCM seven years earlier. By “deeply desiring” the stipulations in CCM §16, the ELCA has incorporated intolerant episcopalian structures and practices once imposed by the English state. Thus, contrary to its own declarations, through CCM the ELCA directly or indirectly condones the use of governmental authorities to punish individuals and groups which once disagreed and likewise which today disagree with the English government’s various acts of uniformity and the associated persecutory legislation.

Lutheranism has enough dark spots in its own history without the ELCA obliging itself to adopt and to enforce a destructive form of church governance. By adopting declarations which claim to repudiate such dark spots, the ELCA only highlights its own institutional hypocrisy.

Question: Is the ECUSA any more tolerant of non-Episcopalians than its English ancestors?

Answer: Yes, but only in a qualified sense. The interim sharing of communion that existed between the ELCA and the ECUSA prior to CCM was a hopeful sign that the ECUSA might be more tolerant than its sixteenth- and seventeen-century predecessors. Also, the ECUSA has enacted a temporary suspension of its 1662 restrictions against non-historic episcopally ordained clergy (CCM §16). This should be viewed cautiously as a step in the right direction.

Nevertheless, given the brutal nature of the

history of episcopalianism, especially since 1662, the ELCA in its self-proclaimed concerns for peace and justice should have accepted nothing less than the indefinite suspension of the 1662 Preface to the Ordinal for “full communion” between these two churches. Unfortunately, that has not happened, and Anglican religious intolerance prevails today in the ELCA. Importantly, those ELCA pastors ordained outside the confines of CCM after its implementation are now clergy second class, unwelcome and unable to be counted part of the “full-communion” arrangements between the ELCA and the ECUSA.

Question: Is there any hope for true unity in the future between the ELCA and the ECUSA?

Answer: Yes. What really divides Episcopalians and Lutherans is human sin, and no amount of “historic episcopacy” with its “laying-on-of-hands” can remedy this condition. In fact, the only valid and visible “sign” of church unity which can be made with human hands is the sign of the cross of Christ.

It is one thing for the ELCA to welcome wholeheartedly the Episcopal Church’s clergy into the ELCA’s ministry in the service of the Gospel. It is quite another for the ELCA to transform itself and to conform itself to the historically conditioned, religious intolerance of episcopalianism. If the ELCA thinks that by so conforming it has advanced the mission of the church, then the ELCA has lost sight of what it really means to make the crucified Christ known.

As a Lutheran pastor married to a Welsh Anglican, the author of this paper knows, contrary to the legalism of CCM, that the “laying-on-of-hands” by bishops as required

by the 1662 Act of Uniformity does not unite Lutherans and Episcopalians. Instead, when Lutherans and Anglicans truly marry on 19 August, they do so with promises made before God, promises which reflect the promise that God has made to sinners in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Question: Can the ELCA be saved?

Answer: No. To begin, the ELCA is not a creation of the gospel of Jesus Christ but rather the product of a false gospel, namely the “gospel of inclusivity.” Instead of concerning itself primarily with the justification of sinners through faith alone in Jesus Christ, the ELCA has advanced its secularized gospel through well-intentioned social and political activism. Deceptively cloaked in Lutheran garb, this secular mission accounts for the ELCA’s lack of theological and ecclesial integrity which, in turn, has led to so much internal conflict and hostility.

Further, the ELCA’s adoption of the religious intolerance inherent in CCM completely contradicts not only the gospel of Jesus Christ but also the ELCA’s own false “gospel of inclusivity.” From its inception, the ELCA has resolutely rejected all exclusive attitudes and practices along the lines of race, class, sex, and ability. Since the passage of CCM in 1999, however, the ELCA has effectively cast all that aside by adopting and internalizing the antiquated principles of English state-sponsored, religious exclusion. Thus, in the name of fostering church unity, the ELCA has sacrificed not only remnants of the gospel of Jesus Christ but also the very essence of its own “gospel of inclusivity.” Consequently, the ELCA has no credible Christian or

secular reason to exist.

Finally, in defiance of all its critics, at its Churchwide Assembly in August 2009 the institutional ELCA took this paradoxical situation to new extremes by voting to allow persons in “lifelong, publicly accountable, monogamous same-gender relationships” to serve as ministers in the ELCA. By so doing, the ELCA has instituted and enshrined a form same-sex marriage via the ELCA’s ordained ministry which itself is structured and governed by the dictates of anachronistic, Anglican, religious bigotry and injustice. This contradictory situation not only defies the ELCA’s critics, but more importantly it defies clear reason, the testimony of Scripture, and the Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith.

As Scripture attests, a house divided against itself cannot stand, and a church built upon any foundation other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is destined for ruin. By abandoning Jesus Christ for a contradictory concoction of secular-humanist ideology and manifest, religious intolerance, the ELCA is now held together only by the inertia of its own institutional narcissism, seeking vainly to persuade its ever diminishing membership to worship an idol created in the ELCA’s own corporate image. Tragically, the ELCA’s insatiable lust for Anglican historic episcopacy and its rabid devotion to its own “gospel of inclusivity” have begotten this woeful tale of historic hypocrisy and ecclesial self-emasculation.

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