

Chapter 6

The Irony of the Anglican Position toward the *Vagantes*

The mainstream Anglican position toward the *vagantes* (and thus, to the Continuing Church) is ironic for three reasons. First of all, as we saw in the previous chapter, the English Reformers rejected the Roman concept of the “apostolic succession,” or “Historic Episcopate.” in the very early years of the Reformation. Secondly, the centuries have seen a vast improvement in official Anglican Communion relations with “schismatic” groups such as the Non-Jurors and the Methodists. And thirdly, the High Churchmen’s own claims to the “apostolic succession” are clouded in the eyes of Rome.

Looking first at the Reformers’ doctrines of episcopacy, one must always remember that *the* crucial emphasis for men such as Cranmer and Latimer was the reliance on Scripture as the supreme authority for faith and practice. Tradition and reason may inform the Anglican’s use of Scripture, but the Scripture itself is always the basis of faith.¹ The English Reformers defended episcopacy as a legitimate form of church government, as even perhaps the best, but by no means did they consider it part of the Church’s very essence. Any sacerdotal concept of bishops, as needing to be in the tactual succession from the apostles, was repulsive to them.

On the apostolic succession, the Reformer Bishop John Hooper wrote in 1550 that:

As concerning the ministers of the Church, I believe that the Church is bound to no sort of people or any ordinary succession of bishops, but to the only Word of God. Although there be diversity of gifts and knowledge among men: Some know more, and some know less; and if he that knoweth least teach Christ after the Holy Scriptures, he is to be accepted, and [he who] teacheth Christ contrary or any other ways than the Holy Scriptures, is to be refused.²

Bishop John Jewel of Salisbury voiced the same sentiments in his *Defence of the Apology*. To his opponent Harding, he retorts, “Succession, you say, is the chief

¹ “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation,” Article 6 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 868.

² Hooper, *A Godly Confession and Protestation of the Christian Faith*, in *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 90ff in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 179.

way for any Christian man to avoid antichrist. I grant you, if you mean the succession of doctrine!”³

This conception of “apostolic succession” as right doctrine, rather than right consecrations, fits with the Reformers' rejection of all sacerdotalism in the Christian ministry. As seen in chapter three, the Greek word for “sacrificial priest,” ἱερεὺς, does not correspond with πρεσβύτερος, “elder,” the term from which derives the English word “priest.” In the first English Ordinal (1550), or ordination service, the candidate receives not only the bread and cup, which symbolize his duties at the Lord's Table, but also a Bible. The ordinand is given authority “to preach the Word of God and to minister the holy sacraments.”⁴ No mention is made of the offering of sacrifices—all ceremonial from the Roman Catholic ordinal is omitted. In the Reformed English Church's 1552 Ordinal, “which is in all essentials the same as that of 1662 in the present Prayer Book,”⁵ the Church discontinued handing the paten and chalice to the ordinand. This removed “any possible excuse for misconstruction or misrepresentation.”⁶ In this order of service, the bishop explains the office to which the candidates are called, without the mention of any sacerdotal element.⁷

The improved relations between the Non-Jurors and the Church of England is especially interesting in light of the present situation with the Continuing Churches, for the Non-Jurors left or were thrown out for reasons similar to those relating to the Continuing Churchmen of the 20th century. The Non-Jurors were English and Scottish bishops who refused to swear allegiance to King William III and Queen Mary II after the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. These prelates felt themselves still bound by their oath to the preceding monarch, King James II, deposed for being a Roman Catholic. Thus they became known as “Non-Jurors,” for their refusal to take the oath to the new monarchs. For this refusal, William and Mary deprived them of their sees and considered them in schism from the Church of England. In July of 1689, the Scottish Parliament disestablished episcopacy, and in June of the following year ratified the Westminster Confession of Faith and established the Presbyterian form of church government and discipline.⁸

In his book *The High Church Schism*, Bishop J.W.C. Wand of London obviously considers the Non-Jurors at fault for the break, but admits that the issue is clouded regarding the legality of the bishops' deprivation. The Church of

³ Jewel, *Works*, Vol. III, p. 348, in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, 179.

⁴ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, 161.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁸ Frederick Goldie, *A Short History of the Episcopal Church in Scotland: From the Restoration to the Present Time*, revised edition (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1976), p. 29; first edition, S.P.C.K., 1951.

England claimed it was illegal for the government to deprive bishops of their sees by an Act of Parliament, without also relying on a church synod. On this point, Wand considers problems relating to the Augustinian/Cyprianic debate over a bishop's orders and his jurisdiction. The question of orders, he declares, is the business of the Church; the question of episcopal jurisdiction, however, is the purview of the state and the state therefore may rightly take it away.⁹

Regardless of the rights or wrongs of this view, in the 19th century "the Church of England would recognize the nonjuring Scottish Church as a legitimate part of the Anglican Communion."¹⁰ As expressed by Marion Lochhead, the Scottish Church is truly one with the other Anglican provinces, "sharing the same creeds, upholding the same Apostolic Succession and threefold ministry of Bishop, Priest and Deacon; one with them in sacramental worship, with her own Prayer Book similar to that of the Church of England; although different in some details, chiefly in the service of Holy Communion."¹¹ The lineage of the Scottish bishops had not changed; what had changed, was the attitude of the English bishops. The same Non-Juring Church which had previously been in schism with the Church of England, was now no longer in schism.

The Scottish connection becomes even more important to the case when one remembers that one of the founders of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Connecticut Bishop Samuel Seabury, received his consecration at the hands of the Non-Juring Scottish Church. Following the end of the American Revolution in 1783, Anglicans in the former colonies were left without ecclesiastical leadership. The Church of England had never appointed resident bishops for the colonies; instead, colonial religious matters were in the hands of an English bishop. Although they had learned to handle their own parish affairs, they were concerned to have duly appointed episcopal leadership. Part of the concern was that, without bishops, American Churchmen "would be swamped by the sects which were in existence around them."¹² The rub was that English law "forbade anyone to be consecrated there who did not acknowledge the royal supremacy."¹³ This, of course, the newly-independent Americans were unable to do.

Having been chosen by his fellow Connecticut clergy to be their bishop, Seabury had gone to England in hopes of gaining consecration there. But when no English prelate was willing to perform the act,¹⁴ the American was referred to the

⁹ Wand, J.W.C. *The High Church Schism: Four Lectures on the Nonjurors* (London: The Faith Press, Ltd., 1951), 15.

¹⁰ Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, 103, Endnote 50 to Chapter 4.

¹¹ Marion Lochhead, *Episcopal Scotland in the 19th Century* (London: John Murry, 1966), p. 1.

¹² Goldie, 66.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ An Act of Parliament was passed on August 13, 1784 which allowed the Bishop of London to ordain foreign candidates as deacons and priests, without requiring the oath of

Scottish Non-Jurors. Letters which he wrote home show that Seabury thought highly of the Scots' episcopal succession, which he wrote were “said to be equal to any succession in the world.”¹⁵ The Scots were more than willing to oblige him in his quest, and on November 14, 1784, Seabury was consecrated by the Primus (the presiding bishop), the Bishop of Moray and Ross, and the coadjutor Bishop of Aberdeen.¹⁶

Although the English government finally in 1792 repealed the Penal Laws which hindered the Non-Jurors,¹⁷ and though the Church of England finally recognized the American Church's orders, for a period of time the only episcopacy in “apostolic succession” which the Protestant Episcopal Church possessed was to be found through the lines of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

In similar fashion, the Church of England gradually changed its attitude toward the Methodists. In the 18th century, at the inception of the Methodist movement, the English bishops and others vilified John Wesley for taking upon himself the power of ordination, when he was only a priest (i.e., a presbyter, or *πρεσβυτερος*). Wesley's own brother Charles was one of the fiercest opponents to John's September 2, 1784, ordination of Thomas Coke as a Methodist “superintendent” for America.¹⁸ Less than two hundred years later, however, the Church of England was discussing with Britain's Methodist Church the possibility of reunion on almost equal grounds. During the 1960's, the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission put out two reports which showed progress toward organic reunion.¹⁹ The Methodist dissenting report puts an ironic twist on the whole matter of episcopal legitimacy. Anglicanism should not emphasize the “Historic

allegiance to the British Crown. The act did not help Seabury, however, because no permission was granted for his own consecration. “Instead, Parliament ruled that the former consent either of Congress or of a state legislative body must be obtained, and that a definite diocese must be established, with provision for an adequate living, before any bishop be sent to America.” Clara O. Loveland, *The Critical Years: The Reconstitution of the Anglican Church in the United States of America: 1780-1789* (Greenwich, Connecticut: The Seabury Press, 1956), 99.

¹⁵ Loveland, 99, 100.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71. The Repeal Act required that all Scottish Episcopal clergy must, among other things, subscribe to the oath of allegiance and the oath of abjuration, and also assent to the 39 Articles of the Church of England.

¹⁸ Wade Crawford Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844*, in 2 volumes, vol. I, *Missionary Motivation and Expansion* (New York: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1949), 95.

¹⁹ *Conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church: A Report to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Conference of the Methodist Church* (Great Britain: Church Information Office and The Epworth Press, 1963) and *Anglican-Methodist Unity: Report of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission; Part 2, The Scheme* (London: S.P.C.K. and The Epworth Press, 1968).

Episcopate” at the Methodists’ expense, since the largest episcopal Church in the world, the Roman Catholic Church, considers Anglican bishops invalid.

The irony of the Anglican Communion’s attitude toward Methodist orders is compounded by the fact that, as seen above, the Church of England during the Reformation held very similar views to those of the Methodists. Cooke asserts that the “Roman Catholic doctrine of orders adopted by High Churchmen was utterly discarded by the founders of the English Church, and to emphasize their dissent they both maintained fraternal relations with, and sought assistance from, episcopacy-rejecting Churches of Germany, France, and Holland.”²⁰ It was only when the Church of England moved away from the principles of the English Reformers that the principles of the Methodists seemed to certain Churchmen so vile. As Cooke says succinctly, the Methodist ministry “at its origin held the same attitude toward the High Church principles of the Church of England that the founders of the Church of England did toward those same principles in the Church of Rome.”²¹ The Reformers struggled against the corrupt papacy and Roman hierarchy of the 16th century; the Methodists two hundred years later struggled against “the dead formality of the Church of England in the eighteenth century, its practical abandonment of its divine mission, and the almost universal diffusion of a coarse-grained rationalism which was eating out the heart of faith in the supernatural among the people of England.”²²

As a side note to these ecumenical discussions involving the Non-Jurors and the Methodists, it might be helpful to mention the changing relations between ECUSA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For over fifteen years, throughout the 1980’s and well into the 1990’s, the two churches were in discussions to bring about closer connections between them with the ultimate view of complete merger. The Lutheran Episcopal Dialogues I and II resulted in a 1982 agreement for taking part in joint Holy Communion services (the Interim Eucharistic Sharing Agreement of 1982). The LED III led to a proposal in the late 1990s, to bring about “full communion” between the two churches. Known as the Concordat of Agreement,²³ the proposal “would mean that we will recognize each

²⁰ R.J. Cooke, *The Historic Episcopate: A Study of Anglican Claims and Methodist Order* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1896), 88.

²¹ Cooke, 134.

²² *Ibid.*, 134,135.

²³ See “A beginner’s guide to the Concordat of Agreement,” by the Rev. Walt Gordon, Communications Officer of the ECUSA Diocese of Minnesota, at <http://www.dfms.org/ecumenism/concordat/beginner.html>, as a link on the World Wide Web page “ECUSA: Unofficial Homepage of the Episcopal Church.” Site maintained by Br. Thomas Bushnell, n/BSG. This unofficial site is located at the Web address: <http://www.ai.mit.edu/people/mib/anglican/anglican.html>. Official information on the Concordat of Agreement, in the form of the report of the Joint Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, can be found at the address <http://www.dfms.org/ecumenism/concordat/revconc.html> through ECUSA’s official Web

other's ordained ministries. Lutheran pastors will be able to celebrate the Eucharist in Lutheran Churches."²⁴ Each Church was to vote on the measure at its 1997 national meeting. At their 1997 convention the Lutherans accepted communion with three Reformed churches (the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ), but voted communion with ECUSA because of the Lutherans' refusal to accept the requirement of the "Historic Episcopate." In the online article "Lutherans approve full communion with Reformed but not with Episcopal Church—yet," James Solheim reported for the Episcopal News Service on the Lutherans' strong opposition to the Historic Episcopate:

Speaker after speaker pointed out that the Augsburg Confession, the authoritative 16th century document of the Lutheran Reformation, says that agreement in Word and Sacrament is the only condition for unity. "The requirement of the Concordat is that we adopt the hierarchical system of episcopal structure as an additional condition for full communion, thus adding a condition for unity which we have never had before," argued Prof. Michael Rogness of the Luther Seminary in St. Paul.²⁵

Although many Lutherans are not opposed to the "Historic Episcopate" in principle, they "have been reluctant to make the episcopate an essential element of church life, preferring to consider it instead as *adiaphora* (things often important but never essential to the unity of the church)."²⁶

And, as Cummins notes in his consecration sermon for Charles Cheney, the PECUSA's own canon law betrays inconsistency toward so-called schismatic traditionalists. When reaccepting a minister whom it has deposed, the Church does not require re-ordination; in fact, it even accepts former Roman Catholic priests without re-ordination. This acknowledges that ordination is something not taken away by deposition. To say otherwise would be to assert that all the Reformation churches of Europe are without a leg to stand on, for Rome deposed and excommunicated them all. Thus, everyone is someone's schismatic—even Anglicans.²⁷

site (at the Web address <http://www.dfms.org/>). The text of the Concordat itself is found at the Web address: <http://www.dfms.org/ecumenism/concordat/revconc.html#text>.

²⁴ Gordon, "A beginner's guide to the Concordat of Agreement," 1.

²⁵ James Solheim, "Lutherans approve full communion with Reformed but not with Episcopal Church—yet," August 20, 1997, The Episcopal News Service, at <http://www.dfms.org/ens/elca.html>.

²⁶ Gordon, 2.

²⁷ Cummins, 158.

This inconsistency comes out in the Anglican Communion's position toward the Old Catholics. Part of the problem with Chambers' consecrations in Denver in 1978 was that there were only two bishops physically present. Yet at the 1880 General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church the House of Bishops passed a unanimous resolution declaring that the Old Catholic consecrations by a single bishop were lawful in the circumstances.²⁸ Dorothy Faber points out that the 19th century Anglican bishops were far more sympathetic to the idea of schism when it was a schism from Rome, rather than from their own ranks. She makes the same point as Bishop Cummins, that never has the Episcopal Church "ever tried to discredit the Roman Catholic succession in America, although it is dependent on a single consecrator—Archbishop John Carroll of Baltimore. At no time has the Episcopal Church ever questioned the validity of Old Catholic orders in the U.S. or those of the Polish National Catholic Church, although they also descend from consecrations by single bishops."²⁹

Even more ironic, Although relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion have certainly improved since the days of Henry VIII of England, the fundamental point remains valid that the Romans consider the Anglicans to be in schism, and to have invalid Holy Orders. The 1896 papal bull of Leo XIII, *Apostolicae Curae*, declared Anglican orders "null and void" on the grounds of defect of form and intention.³⁰ This bull has never been overturned. Actually, the matters of schism and defective orders are not completely related, for though it was Henry who started the "schism" from Rome, it was not until the reign of his daughter Elizabeth that Anglican orders began to be "defective," due to the Reformers' changes to the Ordinal. The early 20th century French Catholic scholar Gustave Constant freely admits that Henry VIII's own religion remained "orthodox," in opposition to Lutheranism: "All his life Henry upheld the orthodox teaching and persecuted the partisans of the new doctrines. Those who remained faithful to the Pope were looked upon as traitors, but the Reformers were condemned as heretics."³¹ In fact, Constant says, the king "probably had visions of a schismatic Church, like the Greek or Russian Church."

²⁸ C.B. Moss, *The Old Catholic Movement: Its Origins and History*, reprint, Eureka Springs, Arkansas: The Episcopal Book Club [n.d.], in Faber, "The Ecclesiastical Put-Down," *TCC*, May 1978, 11.

²⁹ Faber, "The Ecclesiastical Put-Down," 11.

³⁰ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Apostolicae Curae,"

<http://www.knight.org/advent/cathen/01644a.htm>.

³¹ Gustave Constant, *The Reformation in England: The English Schism and Henry VIII, 1509-1547*, translated by the Rev. R.E. Scantlebury (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966, Harper Torchbooks edition), 394. Originally published in French as *La Reforme en Angleterre* (Paris: Perrin et Cie., 1929-1930); English language translation by Scantlebury, incorporating slight alterations and a new appendix, published London: Sheet & Ward, 1934).

English author A.G. Dickens, a Protestant, would disagree with this description of the Reformed Church of England as schismatic, but concurs with Constant's assessment of Henry's orthodoxy in Catholic doctrine. After all, Henry had gained for himself and his successors the title "Defender of the Faith," for his 1521 anti-Lutheran work *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*. [*Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*]³² Yet Henry's Church of England ended with his death, and the Reformation doctrines of ministry took hold.

If, then, the High Church position on episcopacy is so clouded, we must consider carefully what to make of the Continuing Churches and their bishops. The Continuum's episcopal orders do derive in part from the *episcopi vagantes*, but it is apparent that sometimes this term sometimes simply shows mainstream disapproval of the dissenters' existence. Yet the Continuum as well is torn internally with issues of episcopal legitimacy. What then shall we make of these traditionalist bishops?

³² A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 95.