

The Call to Common Mission [CCM] – One More Time

Colleagues,

I'd (almost) taken a vow of silence on ever mentioning CCM again in ThTh after having done so several times in the past 2 years. My own take was, and still is, that unrestricted church-life between US Lutherans and Episcopalians was indeed a good/godly thing, but that the historic episcopate [HE], now woven into the fabric of CCM for Lutheran-Episcopal life-together in the USA, was what the Germans call an "Un-thing" (a non-thing). In short, like the emperor's clothes, not real, a fiction, still unverifiable by historical study, and thus irrelevant to any public commitment among Christians for life together as church. Christ didn't build his church on fuzzy foundations. While holding to that vow of silence I've been badgered more than once to re-engage. But I've persisted—until now. Just last month a dear ELCA friend urged me to "Tell them [the CCM critics] that it's a done deal, Ed. They should stop their gritching and get on with carrying it out." This caveat on gritching got me twitching. Seems to me that in the life of the church the only "done deals" are the foundational stuff of Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost, and all subsequent church history—two whole millennia of it—is always open for review, for re-checking its Biblical grounding, even more, its Gospel-grounding. "Councils can err," a well-known Reformer once said.

ThTh #154 constitutes such a re-checking, a re-checking of New Testament bases and of Gospel-groundings for Lutheran-Episcopal life-together that is now in place with CCM. Its author is Richard Jungkuntz, retired Provost at Pacific Lutheran University. Now 80-something, Richard is a co-confessor from the days of the Wars of Missouri—and before that, the Kirchenkampf

in the Wisconsin Synod. Earlier on in his 4-score years he served as New Testament prof at the LCMS's Springfield (Illinois) seminary and then as Executive Director of Missouri's Commission on Theology and Church Relations. He was purged from both of these spots during the LCMS's time for confessing in the 60s and the 70s. When Seminex came on the scene, he served several terms as chairman of its board of directors. His book on baptism is still the best one I know.

What he says below makes sense to me. So I pass it on to you.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

P.S. Underlined items of Jungkuntz's original typescript I have rendered in CAPS. *[Webmaster note: Underlines put back in for this web page.]*

THE PROBLEM WITH "CCM"

What is this all about? It's about unity in the church—it's about recognizing that unity, that oneness wherever it exists, affirming it, sustaining and strengthening it. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians (4:3-6): "[Endeavor] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Surely we all agree with that. So, I ask again, what are we arguing about?

Well, one way of putting it is that ever since the Reformation,

Lutherans have believed and confessed that the unity of which St. Paul speaks is that same unity which we confess in the third article of the Creed, namely "the communion of saints." And that "Communion of saints," we believe, comes into being solely through the working of the Holy Spirit. Or, as Luther describes it in his explanation of the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Him; but that the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and preserved me in the true faith, JUST AS HE CALLS, GATHERS, ENLIGHTENS, AND SANCTIFIES THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON EARTH AND PRESERVES IT IN UNION with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

In other words, what St. Paul is urging us to do is NOT TO CREATE churchly unity through legislatively imposed ritual requirements, but TO RECOGNIZE the Holy Spirit's gift of unity where it exists, joyfully embrace it, and (in his words) "endeavor to keep [it] in the bond of peace."

Now, that is exactly what the ELCA's predecessor church-bodies, the ALC and LCA, were "endeavoring" to do about twenty years ago, when through their presidents, David Preus and Robert Marshall, they offered "full communion" (then called "pulpit and altar fellowship") to the American branch of the world-wide Anglican communion, namely, the Episcopal Church, USA (ECUSA). After some discussion, the ECUSA representatives refused to accept the Lutheran offer because it did not include submission to the so-called "historic episcopate." Instead, in 1982 the ECUSA agreed to enter into "interim communion" with the ALC and LCA and to continue discussions in what was termed Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue (LED). And after the ELCA was established in 1988, these discussions were continued under the designation LEDII.

I've mentioned the so-called "historic episcopate," and the reason I speak of it as "so-called" is that there is no valid historical evidence for the existence of this succession-based hierarchical form of church government before the 3rd century A.D. Even more importantly, there is no basis for it whatever in the New Testament. In fact, only five New Testament passages mention bishops or the office of bishop. Of these five references, the most important one refers to Jesus, as St. Peter writes in his first epistle (2:25): "For you were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

Then there is St. Paul's reference in his letter to Titus, in which he uses the noun "bishop" not by itself, but as a synonym for "elder" ("presbyter"): "Appoint elders in every city, as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly; for a bishop must be blameless" (1:5-7).

A similar reference occurs in I Timothy 3:2: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach . . ." What is unique about this statement, however, is the references in the preceding verse: "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good thing." Why would St. Paul make special mention of something so obvious, you'd think, for someone like Timothy? The answer is most likely found in the Book of Acts (1:17-20) where St. Peter speaks about Judas Iscariot and his betrayal of Jesus: "He was numbered with us and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed forth . . . And . . . that field is called . . . the field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his habitation be desolate and let no man dwell therein; and his bishopric

[Greek: episkope, pronounced eh-pis-co-PAY] let another take.'"

So if the so-called "historic episcopate" could actually be traced back to the apostolic era, then clearly it began with the traitor, Judas Iscariot. But more seriously, what this passage provides is an explanation for that comment which St. Paul made to Timothy. And here let me quote from the Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church (published by the Lutheran World Federation): "The passage in 1 Timothy 3:1: 'If anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task,' seems to indicate that the episkope had to be defended, probably because it was ORIGINALLY A RATHER MENIAL SERVICE. The ministry (diakonia) of Judas was called an episkope and was defined as the keeping of the treasury. The repeated exhortations in the NT literature against greed in connection with the episkope indicate the ORIGIN OF THIS OFFICE as a treasurer's task. The tarnish of Judas coupled with the temptation of greed in this office may explain the early apologetic."

So there we have all the New Testament references to the offices of bishop. And interestingly, no one of these is mentioned in the CCM! Could it be that the authors of the CCM were not interested in, or unconcerned about, what the New Testament says—or does not say—about bishops in the church? I would not venture an answer to that.

But what if we were to ask, not only what does the New Testament say, but what does it not say about bishops in the church? Well, the answer to that question is also interesting. If, for instance, we check the famous chapter 12 in I Corinthians where St. Paul speaks of the church as one body, the body of Christ Himself, endowed with many spiritual gifts, what do we learn? St. Paul says: "Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in

the church first apostles, second prophets [proclaimers, or preachers], third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of languages.” As I’m sure you noticed, there is no mention at all of bishops in this list.

So let’s turn to the other passage in which St. Paul reminds us of the church’s unity and the gifts God gives to sustain that unity. In his letter to the Ephesians (4:4-13) St. Paul urges them to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “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, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all . . . And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some preachers, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ.” As you noticed, again no mention whatsoever of bishops—and this in the context of describing the unity of the church, its “full communion” in Christ.

And what will you find if you look for this significant passage in the CCM? You will find (E.28) that the authors quote the first verse (4:3), “Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and the last verse (4:16), “for building up the Body of Christ”; but they omit everything in between! Why would they omit all that? Obviously, because bishops are never mentioned among the Holy Spirit’s gifts that equip the saints to maintain the church’s unity.

In summary so far, then, what we’ve seen is that while Lutherans initially opened their arms to welcome Episcopalians in churchly fellowship, the Episcopalian representatives refused to accept the fellowship, and instead kept urging our ELCA representatives to include the so-called “historic

episcopate" with all its ritual requirements in the joint agreement. And this despite the incontrovertible fact, as we have just seen, that while the New Testament mentions up to eight forms of Gospel ministry as gifts of the Holy Spirit for building and maintaining the church's unity, NOT ONCE are bishops or the episcopate mentioned in these contexts. The only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from this must be that it is both unbiblical and unevangelical to demand imposition of the so-called "historic episcopate" as a PRE-CONDITION for "full communion" between our churches.

In a way, the CCM tries to anticipate and forestall this normal negative reaction by conceding that the ELCA is "free to maintain that this . . . episcopate is . . . not necessary for the relationship of full communion" (A.13.18). Nevertheless, the same CCM demands that if there is to be "full communion," the ELCA MUST henceforth have at least one Episcopalian bishop participate ritually in the installation of every newly elected ELCA bishop, in order that thereby the so-called "historic episcopate" can be transmitted to our church. In other words, as some have described this arrangement, "You don't have to believe it, you just have to do it!"

Not only that, but in addition, in order to establish "full communion," henceforth every ordination in the ELCA must include participation by a bishop who has allowed himself to be inveigled into the so-called "historic episcopate" (C.20).

What is obviously implicit in this requirement regarding ordination is the very mistaken and misleading notion that the "clergy" constitute a unique and special category, or rank, or class, or—as the Hindus would say—a caste, within the church at large. Unfortunately, this erroneous notion has gained rather wide credence also among contemporary Lutherans (even before the CCM was adopted). For example, in our ELCA Constitution the

phrase “ordained ministry” or “ordained minister” occurs at least 56 times in only 14 pages.

We know, of course, that the liturgical custom that we call “ordination” has a very long history in the church. But what is usually ignored is that for many Christians it has become a ritual requirement with doctrinal implications that are neither Biblical nor Lutheran. Let me now try to demonstrate this as simply as possible.

Take the term “ordained ministry” itself (which, by the way, the CCM mentions at least 14 times in only 6 pages). Intrinsic to this concept is the notion that certain individuals hold special rank in the church and thus constitute a special class of Christians. In fact, the phrase “set apart” is also frequently applied to them (e.g., CCM, A.7.10). And the idea of “ranks,” higher and lower, becomes obvious when one considers the CCM requirement that only a bishop, not a fellow pastor, much less fellow church member, has intrinsic authority to “ordain.” And this “ranking” notion becomes even clearer when we recognize that etymologically the word “ordain” itself means “to place in rank; to set in order.” As you can imagine, originally the word often occurred in military contexts.

Now, “ordain” is simply an Anglicized form of the Latin verb *ordino*, – are. But since the New Testament was written in Greek, what would be the Greek equivalent? Well, there is a Greek word (*tassoo*, -ein) which has exactly the same meaning. But what is strikingly significant is that in the Greek New Testament this word for “ordain” NEVER occurs in any context related to the Gospel ministry. What’s more, in the 4th century when St. Jerome and others translated the New Testament into Latin (the Vulgate version), they NEVER used the verb *ordino* in any passage about the Gospel ministry. It was not until the Medieval era that Roman Catholicism introduced this

mistranslation and misrepresentation of the original text to add weight to the hierarchical and sacerdotal forms of church ministry it had developed by then.

But the mistranslation did not only add weight to the hierarchical system of “orders” (as the different clergy ranks were called). It also added some superstitious notions, among them the idea that by being ordained at the hands of a bishop in the so-called “historic episcopate,” the person so ordained experiences an ontological change that sets him or her apart from the ordinary laity, and gives this person an intrinsic and unique power over the sacramental elements of bread and wine in the Holy Supper.

Now what is interesting here is that while the New Testament often does speak of the “laity” (a word that simply means “people”), as for instance in I Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” it NEVER does so in contrast to “clergy.” In fact, the term “clergy” itself NEVER occurs in the New Testament. Nor does any other synonymous collective term for those who serve as ministers in the church.

This is not a disparagement of those who serve as ministers in the church. Rather it is a simple and clear indication that they are NOT a special rank or class, but are themselves members of the laity chosen by fellow members of the people of God to serve the church in a public way. Just as the church’s members choose council members, administrators, choir directors, teachers, and others to serve in various ways, as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians in the passage we noted earlier: “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ” (4:12 AV). As St Paul makes very clear both in this chapter and in I Corinthians 12, “pastors” are NOT “set apart” from,

but INCLUDED with all the other members of Christ's Body who are, in his words, "inspired by one and the selfsame Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:11).

And neither is this a disparagement of the familiar liturgical act which has for centuries been called "ordination"—even though that is not a Biblical term. Rather, it is a reminder of the simple clarification that Philip Melanchthon provided in the days of the Reformation when he pointed out in his *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (65-70) that the ceremony of ordination, whether performed by a pastor or bishop, is nothing more than a public "confirmation" of the people's election (call) of their pastor or bishop. Worth noting here is that this *Treatise* was UNANIMOUSLY adopted in 1537 by the Lutheran Confessors as a supplement to the Augsburg Confession. Incidentally, already in 1524 Martin Luther himself had affirmed this in a sermon he preached on the 21st Sunday after Trinity, when he declared: "To ordain does NOT mean to consecrate Ordination confirms the result of election." So if we take both Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions seriously, then we can easily recognize that ordination is not a unique event in one's career, but simply a person's first installation as a called servant of the Word.

Finally now, let's look at the whole issue from another angle. At the beginning of this paper I said what this is all about is unity in the church. In a very important sense that is absolutely true, and I want to return to that before closing. Nevertheless, from another perspective you could say that what it's really about is "mission." After all, isn't that what the title of our document is trying to tell us? "CCM: Called to Common MISSION." And if you want to count the number of times that the word "mission" occurs in the document, you'll find that it turns up at least ten times. But you'll also find that nowhere are there any details provided nor any description of

the kind of mission work the writers had in mind—was it global? inner city? door to door in our church's neighborhood? No clue.

Well, after some research, I discovered that when the Episcopal Church is talking about what we regard as missionary efforts, or what we sometimes speak of as mission work, they do not use the word *mission* in its singular form. Instead they speak of MISSIONS in the plural. You can confirm this, if you wish, by looking up the word MISSIONS in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (edited by F.L. Cross, an Episcopalian priest and professor of theology). But if that's the case, what then do they mean by the word MISSION in the singular form?

Well, just look under the word "bishop" in this same Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, and what you'll find is this: "Mission is the CONVEYING OF THE POWER OF A BISHOP." And also this: " In the Roman Church a Bishop receives MISSION either directly from the Pope or through the Metropolitan [Bishop]." You can double check this information by looking up "bishop" in The Lutheran Cyclopedia, where you will read this: "In Western canon law three things are necessary to establish a bishop in office: election, MISSION, and consecration." So there we have it. And now we can understand why our "full communion" agreement is entitled "Called to Common MISSION"—"conveying the power of a bishop."

Also worth noting in this connection is the fact that when the Episcopalians met with Roman Catholic representatives for fellowship negotiations in Canada last spring, their discussion was based on a document entitled "Communion in MISSION," which, of course, had to do with mutual recognition of their respective episcopates.

A little while ago I quoted briefly from one of our Lutheran Confessions (Treatise, 65-70), and I will come back to that in

a moment. But as you may know, some supporters of the CCM like to cite a certain passage that appears in Melanchthon's Apology of the Augsburg Confession (XIV, 1), which reads as follows: "[It is] our deep desire to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority." What is overlooked, however, by those who consider this supportive of the CCM, is the context in which this is found. For the context is that the Reformers were vigorously addressing the main substantive issues of the Reformation, namely, justification by grace alone through faith alone; the Word and Sacraments as the only means of grace; and the freedom which the Gospel conveys and imparts to every believer. What they were saying, therefore, was that if the Roman hierarchy would support them on these issues, they'd be willing to continue in the outward form of church administration that was then in place—even though it was of human, not divine origin, and in itself had nothing to do whatsoever with the unity of the church which they had already addressed in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII.

And at the same time they were already pointing out and correcting many of the mistaken and unbiblical teachings that had arisen in regard to this hierarchical mode of governance. But that, alas, is what our friends who support the CCM ignore. For instance, in paragraph 26 of the Treatise, Melanchthon and the Lutheran Confessors unanimously declare: "The ministry of the New Testament is NOT bound to places and PERSONS, as the Levitical priesthood is . . . NOR is this ministry valid because of any individual's authority" (e.g., ordination by a bishop of the so-called "historic episcopate). And in the same Treatise (65) they declare: "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."

Then there is the frequently quoted (and rightly so!) Article VII of 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 that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word," and "it is NOT necessary for the true unity of the church that ceremonies instituted by men [such as episcopal ordination] should be uniformly observed in all places."

What then shall we say in conclusion? Exactly what we said at the beginning. It is the Holy Spirit who creates the communion of saints through the Gospel, not a handful of voters at a churchwide assembly who legislatively impose mistaken traditions and ritual laws on the rest of us. What we are called to do is to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" to recognize that oneness wherever it exists, affirm it, sustain it, and strengthen it. To that end let us call for the rescinding and annulment of the CCM and at the same time cordially renew the invitation offered twenty years ago by our leaders David Preus and Robert Marshall, altar and pulpit fellowship, full communion with our Episcopalian brothers and sisters in Christ, no strings attached.

And through it all, let us bear in mind that while speaking of ecclesiastical traditions, the Apology of our Augsburg Confession (XXVIII, 15) urges us to heed St. Paul's evangelical reminder that "for freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

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April 26, 2001*