

Notes for “Episcopalians among other Christians,” 5/3/15, TCP

As we pursue the mission of the church in this place, it is helpful for us to know and understand our particular context for preaching the Gospel. Why is worship so important for Episcopalians? Why do we worship the way we do, organize the structure of the church the way we do, or approach theology the way we do? Deepening our connection to our Anglican roots will help us to carry forward this heritage with greater integrity and meaning for us and for those new to our traditions.

Perhaps the first point of reference in describing the Episcopal Church, for most people, is other Christian denominations. Sadly, Christians are not organized together and unified in their approach to the Christian life or some theological issues. Some of the churches spawned by the past few centuries of division have broken from Christianity completely (Unitarians, Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons...). Most, however, retain a basic doctrine about who God is that keeps us in conversation with one another, learning from our remaining differences both in doctrine and in emphasis and in the Christian life. As we examine and learn from the distinctions between these denominations, let us continue to pray for the unity of the Church.

Prayer for the Unity of the Church, Book of Common Prayer, p. 818.

*O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

In the early centuries, the church gained definition, unity and cohesion through councils of bishops from the various centers of Christianity around the Roman Empire. The bishops sought to address teachings that did not represent what was ‘always taught everywhere’ in the church. The writings considered authoritative throughout Christianity were “canonized” as Holy Scripture, and the Nicene Creed was written to mark out the buoys of theological exploration. Both of these moves (and several others) were in response to some whose doctrinal teachings were markedly different from the teachings handed down by the apostles. In these efforts, the church sought that which is **Apostolic** (handed down from the apostles), **Catholic** (believed by all Christians everywhere—universal) and **Orthodox** (right worship/right belief).

When Rome fell to barbarians, the Church was the unifying institution in society, and the bishop of Rome became a unifying figure for the remnants of the Western empire and a bishop of prime importance (he had always been a significant bishop for the church at large). Meanwhile, barbarians, crumbling empire and different cultures left the church in the East and the West without significant interactions for many years. In the tenth century, Pope Leo IX instituted much needed reforms against corruption in the west. Many clergy were ordaining their children and passing on the property of the church to them, becoming like feudal lords. Leo enforced celibacy on the clergy, and reformed and unified much of the worship in the West. When he sent an emissary to the East, however, his emissary was appalled to find married clergy and bewilderment at the idea of papal supremacy (and a few other concerns). The emissary tactlessly responded by excommunicating the entire church in the East. This was the Great Schism of 1054, something that is only thawing out in the last twenty years.

(see the next page of notes and the summary chart with further notes)

**Eastern Orthodox**—catholicity, Trinitarian theology, right worship, very sacramental, transcendence & mystery, especially in worship (lifting us out of the ordinary world and into the presence of God).

**Roman Catholic**—stressing catholicity, a high view of the holiness and authority of the church, especially the primacy of the Pope. High view of the sacraments (not mere symbols, and essential to the Christian life).

**Lutheran**—Luther fought corruption in the church and abuse of power and abuse of the sacraments, especially in a view that bred fear regarding one's sin. Luther's central theme (from Paul's letter to the Romans) was that we are "saved by grace through faith"—not by our good works—we cannot save ourselves, rather God saves us as his gift through Jesus. Lutherans retain the sacraments and clergy (though not apostolic succession of bishops, rather elected bishops), but made reforms such as married clergy and use of the common language.

**Anglican**—(Church of England, Canada, Episcopal Church, Churches in Africa, Asia, South America...) more to say later! Like the Lutherans, but with political beginnings. While the official church in England flip-flopped between Puritan and Roman Catholic for over a century, the worship remained the basis for the church (essentially a somewhat reformed Catholic liturgy). Not *requiring* doctrine from outside the Bible (contra the Roman Catholics) but not throwing away the teachings, systems & sacraments of the church (contra the Puritans). Anglicans retain the sacraments and clergy, with bishops in apostolic succession. Theology is expressed in worship (not dogma like the Roman Catholics or "confessions" like the Lutherans and Presbyterians). Theology & practice is built on Scripture, Tradition & Reason.

**Methodists**—The Wesleys (Anglican Priests) sought reform in a 18th century Anglican Church that was very cerebral. They brought a sense of the experience of God and sought a more disciplined Christian life (see their doctrine of 'perfection'), with small groups of Christians praying with and encouraging each other at the core. Later Methodists broke with the church and became their own denomination, with elected bishops (in the US) and the sacraments but a more congregational organization and fairly Reformed theology (see below).

**Reformed**—Swiss reformers Zwingli and Calvin reacted more strongly to the Roman Catholic Church, rejecting bishops and holding a lower view of the sacraments. Later followers would take reform further and reject all that was not in the Bible—including strong objection to such elements as candles or musical instruments in worship. Sacraments such as Communion were merely memorials, with little special significance (a very "low" view of the sacraments). Church order was more congregational (the congregation ordained the minister and governed the church). The ardent followers of this reformed tradition were called "Puritans." They strongly rejected anything that wasn't in the Bible and had a very grim view of human capacity for good (their doctrine of "Total Depravity").

Three major Reformed Traditions (many of which today are much less strict in their theology and practice):

**Presbyterians**—retained clergy ("presbyter" is the Greek word we translate "priest;" the choice was an effort to distinguish their clergy from any idea of Communion as a "sacrifice" vs. a memorial), retained association between congregations, though not bishops. More congregational in governance; a heavy emphasis on the Word—reading scripture & preaching. Very low view of the authority of the church outside of scriptures.

**Congregationalists**—rejected clergy as a special class. The congregation regulates order and doctrine. The United Church of Christ represents a few strains of this tradition.

**Baptist**—went further in rejecting the authority & traditions of the church by stressing the sole authority of the individual and the Bible. Baptists did/do not baptize infants or children, claiming the necessity of the "believer's baptism." This tradition is the background to many contemporary independent protestant churches including non-denominational and others who do not use the name "Baptist."

Two other traditions of interest:

**Anabaptist**—Some in Europe reacted against the bloodshed that accompanied the reformation, and sought instead to reject the integration of church and society, preferring to stand as witnesses against society. The **Mennonites** (followers of Meno Simons) and **Amish** (followers of Jacob Amon) are pacifists and tend to be separatists from society. They are very congregational and have a very low view of the sacraments (the Amish have no church buildings or official clergy), and baptize only adults.

**Quaker**—developing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (perhaps in partial response to enlightenment philosophy), Quakers rejected the sacraments and the church entirely, stressing instead the "inner light" in everyone. Their basic ideas of God follow the Christian tradition, but their theology of the inner light and rejection of the sacraments (even baptism) begins to part company with Christian tradition in several ways.

**Eastern Orthodox**—catholicity, transcendence & mystery, sacramental

**Roman Catholic**—catholicity, sacramental, high view of the church

**Lutheran**—“salvation by grace through faith,” clergy, sacraments

**Anglican**—apostolic bishops, sacraments, traditions of the church (without mandating non-Biblical teachings)

**Methodist**—experience of God, small groups & piety, lower view of church & sacraments

**Reformed**—(Puritans) Bible only, very low view of sacraments & church. Tend to reject traditions outside of scripture

**Presbyterian**—retained a class of clergy (presbyters)

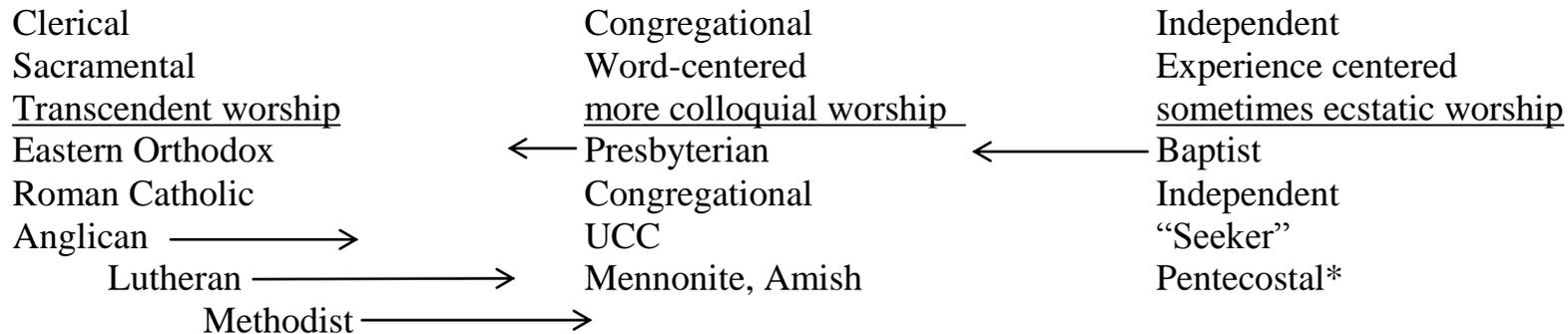
**Congregational**—congregation has prime authority

**Baptist**—Individual and scriptures only, adult baptism only

**Anabaptist** (Mennonite, Amish)-pacifist, separatist, low view of sacraments, adult baptism only, strictly congregational

**Quaker**—spiritualists—strict individualists, anti-sacramental (rejecting baptism and communion)

Contemporary denominations might also be compared in the following three groups (though not strictly categorized):



\*“**Pentecostal**” describes independent churches (and denominations such as the Assemblies of God) who are “charismatic” in their theology and practice, emphasizing the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and usually preferring ecstatic worship. This tradition arose ~1900, but has influenced other denominations, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and others. “Fundamentalist” churches (using the technical term rather than its common derogatory use) are generally opposed to this charismatic tradition. Fundamentalists object to ongoing revelation of the Holy Spirit, limiting revelation to the Bible. “**Fundamentalists**” describe a Reformed tradition movement of reaction to the excessive influence of skeptical “modernist” philosophy on many churches in the late 1800s. There were other theological reactions to modernism in some churches, including “neo-orthodoxy” that began after WWI and WWII.

Due to racism, African Americans also developed offshoots, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (“A.M.E.”).

## **2011 statistics massaged from Wikipedia**

(so take this with a grain of salt, but they're probably close):

### 2 Billion Christians in the world

1.1 Billion Roman Catholics (55% of all Christians)

312 Million Eastern Orthodox (15%)

230 Million Eastern Orthodox (e.g. Greek, Russian, etc) (11%)

82 Million "Oriental Orthodox," (e.g. Coptic, etc)

82 Million Anglicans (4%)

2 million Episcopalians (0.1% of all Christians; 1.5% of all American Christians)

500 Million Protestants (25%)

130 Million Pentecostals (6.5%)

100 Million Baptists (5%)

75 Million Lutherans (4%)

75 Million Methodists

75 Million Reformed (e.g. Presbyterian, etc)

40 Million Independent and other protestant

5 Million Anabaptists (Mennonite, Amish...)

0.4 Million Quakers

## **2008 Pew Report on Religion in America**

(Pew reported in %; assume 225 million Americans)

### 171 Million Christians in America (76% of all Americans)

54 Million Roman Catholics (23.9% of all Americans)

39 Million Baptists (17.2%)

23 Million Independents or "non-specific" (10%)

14 Million Methodists (6.2%)

10 Million Lutherans (4.6%)

10 Million Pentecostals (4.4%)

6 Million Presbyterians (2.7%)

2 Million Episcopalians (1%)

2 Million Congregationalists (0.8%)

1.3 Million Orthodox (0.6%)

9 Million other protestant (mostly denominations from the reformed tradition)

Pew further classified Protestants as from an "evangelical" tradition (half of all protestants, 26.3% of Americans), from "mainline" tradition (35% of protestants, 18.1% of Americans) and from historically Black churches (14% of protestants, 6.9% of Americans). Note that some members of "mainline" denominations self-identified as "evangelical."

## **Using the chart categories, the groups fall out loosely in percentage of American Christians:**

50% "Clerical/sacramental"

16% "Word-centered"

35% "Independent, experience-centered"