

Denominationalism, Religious Cults and World Religions

Lesson 6

The Episcopal (Anglican) Church

Introduction:

The Episcopal Church (known as the Anglican Church outside of America) traces its heritage to the Church of England, which is described as "the Mother Church of the worldwide Anglican Communion." The Church of England contends that its beginning is traced to the mission of St. Augustine of Canterbury¹ in AD 597, and therefore claims the Church represents the universal church founded by Jesus Christ and the apostles. Although England was originally Roman Catholic and acknowledged the authority of the Pope, a dispute arose between Henry VIII and the Pope of Rome over Henry's desire to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. When the Pope refused to annul the marriage (more for political reasons than religious), England separated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 and formally established the Church of England by an Act of Parliament.

In the years that followed, Catholic churches, monasteries and convents throughout England were looted and many destroyed. Those that survived became the property of the Church of England. Subjects who remained loyal to the Pope of Rome were often persecuted, burned at the stake, or beheaded. The Church of England replaced the authority of the Pope with "the supremacy of the English Crown," which in effect made the King (or Queen) of England the head of the Church.

Following the death of Henry VIII, Queen Mary I (daughter of Catherine of Aragon and a devoted Catholic) restored the power of the Roman Catholic Church in England in 1555. During her five-year reign, she had over 280 religious dissenters burned at the stake. Her re-establishment of Roman Catholicism was reversed after her death in 1558 by her younger half-sister and successor, Queen Elizabeth I. However, Catholic and Reformed factions continued to vie for power to determine the doctrines and worship of the church. This ended with the 1558 Elizabethan settlement, which developed the understanding that the church was to be both *Catholic* and *Reformed*:

- *Catholic* in that it views itself as a part of the universal church of Jesus Christ "in unbroken continuity with the early apostolic church."
- *Reformed* in that it has been shaped by some of the doctrinal principles of the Reformation Movement.

¹ Augustine of Canterbury was a Benedictine monk who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 597. He is considered the "Apostle to the English" and a founder of the English Church (Delaney *Dictionary of Saints* pp. 67–68).

I. The Origin and History of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church:

- A. In its modern form, the Episcopal Church dates from the English Reformation of the 16th century:
1. With the advent of British colonization, the Church of England was established on every continent.
 2. In time, however, these churches gained a form of independence, but retained their connection with the "Mother Church" in what was called "the Anglican Communion."
 - a. Although it is "Protestant" in its rejection of Papal authority, the Church of England and all in the "Anglican Communion" retain much of the government, liturgy², and customs of Catholicism.
 - b. The "Evangelical Movement" in the 18th century emphasized the "Protestant" heritage of the Church, while the "Oxford Movement" in the 19th century emphasized the Catholic heritage.
 - c. These two traditions have persisted in the Church, and are sometimes characterized as "Low Church" and "High Church."
 3. The Episcopal Church derives its name from an "Episcopal" form of government.
 - a. The term "Episcopal" comes from the Greek *episkopos* translated in the New Testament as "bishop" or "overseer."
 - b. However, the "Episcopal" form of church government is a perversion of the New Testament teaching regarding the office and function of bishops.
 - c. The New Testament teaches that bishops (overseers) are the same as elders and shepherds (See: 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4; Acts 14:23).
- B. The Episcopal Church in America:
1. With the establishment of parishes on the North American continent, the Episcopal Church began to spread steadily following the first recorded celebration of "Holy Communion" in 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia.

² Liturgy: the customary form of worship done by a specific religious group.

2. However, during the American Revolution, northern clergy sought to maintain ties with England, while those in the southern colonies were more sympathetic to the Revolution and independence from England.
 - a. The "American Revolution left the Anglican parishes shattered, stripped of most of their financial support, weakened by the flight of many clergy and thousands of members, with a number of buildings destroyed and property lost."³
 - b. Following the war public support of churches in America was withdrawn because of the newly adopted principle of separation of church and state.
3. Church leaders were split over whether the Church in America could continue without proper "episcopal oversight" of a duly ordained "Bishop" who could claim "Apostolic Succession" (a bishop in the line of succession from the twelve apostles).
 - a. On March 25, 1783, ten Connecticut clergy elected Samuel Seabury as their bishop. Seabury traveled to England to be officially ordained, but English canon law prevented the consecration of any clergyman who would not take the Oath of Allegiance to the English Crown.
 - b. In November 1783, Charles Inglis of New York left for England to seek ordination and later returned as the first Bishop of Nova Scotia. Many New England Episcopalians accepted the appointment of Inglis, but Episcopalians in southern states objected.
 - c. A year later Samuel Seabury sought consecration in the Scottish Episcopal Church, where he was officially ordained on November 14, 1784 in Aberdeen, Scotland. Thus, Seabury became the first bishop of the American Episcopal Church.

³ Powell Mills Dawley, *Our Christian Heritage*, Morehouse-Gorham, (1959).

- d. By 1786, English churchmen changed the laws of the Church of England so that "Episcopal Consecration" could be offered to bishops outside of England.
- e. An assembly of the American Episcopal Church met in Philadelphia in 1789 to unify all Episcopalians in the United States into a single national church.
- f. A constitution was adopted along with a new set of canon laws. The Church of England's *English Book of Common Prayer* was revised (principally by removing the prayer for the English monarch), and became the first *American Book of Common Prayer*. However, it was still largely based on the *English Book of Common Prayer of 1662*, while its consecration prayer (before the Mass) was based on the *Scottish Book of Common Prayer of 1764*.

C. Recent changes within the Episcopal Church in America:

- 1. There have been a number of changes in the Episcopal Church in America that has sparked major controversies within the church and caused many conservative members to leave the Episcopal Church.
 - 1974: Eleven women were ordained to the priesthood in an "irregular" service in Philadelphia.
 - 1976: General Convention approved the ordination of women, and "regularized" the 1974 ordinations.
 - 1989: Barbara Harris was consecrated the first woman bishop in the "Anglican Communion."
 - 2000: General Convention approved "Called to Common Mission," which established full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church, effective January 1, 2001.

- 2003: General Convention approved the election of the first openly gay priest as "Bishop Coadjutor."⁴
- 2006: Katherine Jefferts Schori was elected the 26th Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and became the first woman to be a church-wide leader in the "Anglican Communion."
- 2009: General Convention authorized to bless and sanctify gay and lesbian marriages in states where same-sex marriages are allowed.

II. Episcopalian Doctrine vs. Biblical Doctrine

- A. Episcopal Church doctrine teaches that human creeds and tradition should be received and believed by its members.
1. Article VIII of the *Thirty Nine Articles of Belief* states, "The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture."⁵
 2. The *Common Book of Prayer* of the Episcopal Church instructs a person what to say, when to say it, and how to say it in worship to God.
 3. However, the Bible teaches that it alone is the only book men should follow in matters of salvation and worship (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 John 9; Matt 15:7-9).
- B. In the Episcopal Church, one bishop may rule over a congregation or even a diocese (several congregations in a general area), and that women may be appointed to the priesthood and serve as bishops.
1. In the New Testament, there is no distinction made between bishops and elders. Both terms are used to describe the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Pet 5:1-5).
 2. Also, in the New Testament a plurality of elders guided local congregations (Acts 14:23; 15:2, 22-23; 16:4; Phil 1:1).

⁴ *Bishop Coadjutor* is a fully ordained bishop in the Roman Catholic Church and Episcopal Church who is appointed to assist a diocesan bishop (the bishop of a diocese). The term *coadjutor* literally means "co-assister" in Latin.

⁵ Online: http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html

3. Furthermore, the New Testament teaches that bishops (elders or shepherds) are to be men (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), and women are forbidden to exercise any authority over men (1 Tim 2:12-14).
- C. Episcopal doctrine teaches that man has no free will, and as such is wholly dependent upon God's grace.
1. Concerning this, the *Thirty Nine Articles of Faith* says, "The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God."⁶
 2. The Bible teaches that man is a free moral agent, and that we can and must call on God out of our own free will (Josh 24:15; Acts 10:34-35; 1 Tim 2:3-6).
- D. Episcopal doctrine states that we are born with a natural tendency to commit sin and evil (sinful nature).
1. The Bible teaches we are born upright and created holy in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27; Ezek 18; 28:15; Eccl 7:29; Matt 18:1-6).
- E. The Episcopal Church teaches that we are justified by faith only.
1. The *Thirty Nine Articles of Faith* says, "Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification."⁷
 2. The Bible says that faith alone will not save. We are saved by grace through faith only when faith is coupled with works of obedience (Jas 2:24; Luke 6:46; Matt 7:21; Heb 5:8-9; Mark 16:16; John 3:36; Luke 13:3; Rom 10:9-10).
- F. The Episcopal Church makes several statements that reveal serious inconsistency between what the church teaches and what the church practices. Consider the following:
1. "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Online: http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html

ministered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred, so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith."⁸

- a. It's true that the Lord's church is made up of congregations of faithful men and women who hold to the Bible (Acts 2:42, 47; Matt 16:13-18).
 - b. However, while the Episcopal Church condemns the Catholic Church, it follows the Catholic Church in much of what it does.
- G. As mentioned earlier the Episcopal Church now accepts same-sex (gay and lesbian) unions and has appointed openly gay and lesbians priests.
1. The Lambreth Conference (2008) noted that the Church "recognizes that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptized, believing, and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ. . ."⁹
 2. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that homosexuality is a sin that, if participated in, will cause one to be an unfaithful member of the Lord's church.
 - a. God has given the final word on this subject, and we must listen to Him only (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-32; 1 Cor 6:9-11).
- H. One of the more interesting "Saint's Days" observed by the Episcopal Church is "Pet's Day."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Online: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_41254_ENG_HTML.htm

1. Pet's Day (October 4) is in honor of St. Francis of Assisi (who apparently was a pet lover).
 - a. His dying words are supposed to have been, "I have sinned against my brother the ass."
 - b. Therefore, on Pet's Day, Episcopalians may bring their animals to be blessed by the priest, who then offers the following prayer:
*"Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters. We ask you to bless this pet. By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen."*¹⁰
 - c. It has been alleged that St. Francis was a vegetarian, although there is no credible evidence to support this claim. However, if "the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and animals on the land" were called by him as his "brothers and sisters" it seems likely that he was a vegetarian.
2. There are no passages in the Bible that authorize the spiritual blessing of any type of animal. Nor is there any authority for naming a day after such a person as a "saint."
3. Such spiritual matters as God's blessings are reserved for those with an immortal soul (unlike animals, which cease to exist after they die; Eccl 3:21).

Conclusion:

I. How to Convert Episcopalians.

- A. While it is not easy to change the beliefs of those who accept church doctrine and tradition as holding as much authority as the Bible, it is still possible to teach Episcopalians the truth.

¹⁰ Online: <http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/francis/blessing.asp>

1. Help them see when the church began (Acts 2:47), Who started the church (Matt 16:18), where the church began (Isa 2:1-2; Acts 2), and the price that was paid to purchase the church (Acts 20:28).
2. Help them see that the Bible is the only source of religious authority for humankind (1 Cor 4:6; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Pet 1:22-25; Jude 3; Rev 22:18-19; Prov 30:6).
3. Help them see that human tradition has always led to people being lost (Matt 15:3-9; Rom 10:1-3).
4. Help them see the necessary steps in the plan of salvation (John 3:5; Luke 13:3; Rom 10:9-10; Acts 2:38; 8:12, 25-29; 22:16; Mark 16:16).
5. Help them see how the church of the New Testament worshiped, and how first-century worship differs from their worship today (John 4:24; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:23-29; 16:1-2; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).
6. Help them see that the Lord's church upholds the highest standards of morality and refuses to compromise with what the world considers as acceptable social and moral norms (Gal 5:19-21; Rom 1:26-32; 1 Cor 5; 1 Cor 6:9-11).

Study Questions:

1. What is the "Mother Church" of the Episcopal Church? How did that church begin?

2. When it comes to church government, liturgy, and customs, what church does the Episcopal Church most closely follow?

3. Where does the term "Episcopal" come from and what does it mean?

4. What does the New Testament teach about "bishops"?

5. What does the Bible teach about women serving as "bishops" or holding any other office in the church?

6. What does the Episcopal Church teach about free will, and justification by faith only? What does the Bible teach?

7. What does the Bible teach about us having a "sinful nature" (a propensity toward sin from birth)?

8. Summarize the Episcopal Church position on homosexuality. What does the Bible teach?

9. Is there anything wrong with celebrating "Pet's Day" as a religious holiday?