



The Episcopal Church

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Introduction: The Protestant Episcopal Church is nothing more than the Church of England trans-planted on the American continent. The Church of England was introduced on American soil on June 16, 1607 when Chaplain Robert Hunt administered the Lord's Supper to the settlers of Jamestown (Gray, 1974). As English colonies, seven states supported the Church of England with public taxation prior to the Revolutionary War. Church members included many prominent signers of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry were all members (Stewart, 1964). Naturally, the political and social climate after the revolution necessitated that the Church of England be renamed and reorganized in this country.

The Episcopal Church in the United States is now one of the largest denominations in the country, with a membership of over three million (Mead, 1980). It is one of 19 national and independent churches world-wide which share a form of faith, church government, and worship inherited from the Church of England; collectively, this body of churches is referred to as the Anglican Communion (Gray, 1974). Church members are referred to as Anglicans, or more frequently in the United States as Episcopalians.

The term "Episcopal" is from the Greek word "episkopos" which is usually translated "bishop" or "overseer". Like the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church gets its name from the form of church government it follows. Much like Catholic church government, an Episcopalian "bishop" rules over a geographical area of churches known as a diocese.

< Point of Origin >

Christians were present in England not long after the time of the apostles. They were not brought under the direct influence of the Bishop of Rome until the end of the sixth century A. D. when Augustine was sent to England as a missionary by Gregory the Great. The ties between the Kings of Britain and the Roman Bishop remained unbroken for many centuries to follow, although they were occasionally strained by British desires for more political independence. In the 1300's, John Wyclif led a popular movement protesting the Pope's political power and emphasizing the authority of the Scriptures in religious matters. He and his followers (called Lollards) translated the Bible into English and tried to spread the Word orally in an age before the invention of the printing press. Their efforts met with only modest success; it would be another 150 years before England made a significant break from Rome.

In 1509, 17 year old Henry VIII was crowned King of England. In his early life, Henry had prepared for the priesthood and even carried on a correspondence with Martin Luther. His defense of Catholicism in answer to Luther's "heresies" caused the Pope to bestow upon the British Monarch the title "Defender of the Faith." (Albright, 1964).

But Henry did not stay long in the good graces of the Pope. Because his marriage to his brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon, had failed to produce a male heir, Henry wished the Pope to annul the marriage. The Pope, undoubtedly influenced by Emperor Charles V who was the nephew of Catherine, refused the annulment. Henry took matters into his own hands. He removed the Catholic Cardinal Archbishop Wolsey from his post in England and replaced him with Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer annulled Henry's marriage to Catherine and immediately married him to Anne Boleyn; very soon afterward Anne gave birth to Elizabeth, who would later become Queen. In 1534 Henry had Parliament declare him "Supreme Head of the Church." Excommunicated by the Pope, he took over the existing church structure in England.

Although still a Catholic at heart, Henry did institute changes in the church. The most significant of these was having the Bible translated into English and copies distributed to the churches. Thomas Cranmer, Henry's Archbishop, wrote the Book of Common Prayer which in its later revisions became the official guide book for religious thought and worship in the Church of England.

In 1547 Henry VIII died. By the time of his death he had married and divorced or beheaded several wives, rebelled against the Pope, and begun a religious tradition which lasts to this day. Henry's young son, Edward VI, authorized the highly Calvinistic statement of official beliefs known as the Thirty-Nine Articles. When

Edward died, "Bloody" Mary, the Catholic daughter of Catherine of Aragon ascended the throne. By force she tried to reinstate Catholicism in England, but she died in 1558 after reigning only five years. Her half-sister Elizabeth then came to power. Elizabeth reigned for 41 years and permanently "settled" the Church of England.

< Distinguishing Points of Belief for Episcopalians >

The originators of the Anglican Church, particularly Thomas Cranmer, believed that nothing should be defined as a necessary belief, unless God Himself has defined it so in Scripture; on the other hand, nothing in tradition should be changed unless it is clearly contrary to God's word. While these may seem like good principles on the surface, they have led Episcopalians to be very vague and fuzzy on a number of plain Bible doctrines. The truth of the creation account of Genesis, the virgin birth of Christ, the sinfulness of prostitution, homosexuality, and drinking have all been left open to question by leading Episcopalians in recent years. It is dangerous to state that Episcopalians uniformly hold to or stand for any particular belief. The following beliefs should be taken as generally descriptive of Episcopalians, rather than as absolutely definitive.

1. The Book of Common Prayer. Episcopalians believe and practice, at least loosely, what is in their Prayer Book. This book not only details their Articles of Religion, but also describes the proper order and content of their services. "A study of the Prayer Book is the best way of coming to an understanding of the life of the Anglican Churches." (Neill, 1986, p. 207). Although Anglican churches in different countries use different revisions of Thomas Cranmer's original work, the basic form and teachings remain relatively unchanged. A 1979 revision is currently used in the United States. As one of their leading scholars has said, "The Prayer Book is essential to the character of the Episcopal Church..." (Wall, 1985, p. 29).

2. Creeds. The Episcopal Church teaches that the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed contain the basic affirmations of Christian belief. These creeds are recited frequently in Episcopal services, but they do not have to be literally believed to be an Episcopalian. "References to the Virgin Birth and the bodily resurrection of Jesus are open to interpretation without a dogmatic requirement by the church for a specific belief" (Gray, 1974, pp. 59-60).

3. Calvinism. Classic Calvinism survives almost entirely intact in the official doctrinal statements of the Episcopal Church. Original sin, total depravity, salvation

by faith only apart from works, and individual predestination to salvation or damnation are doctrines clearly taught in The Thirty Nine Articles of Religion. However, many Episcopalians view these teachings mainly as the historical position of their church, and not of much importance today.

4. Apostolic Succession. Episcopalians believe themselves to be part of the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church". Their bishops, having been Catholic bishops in the days of Henry VIII, claim authority through "an unbroken line of succession back to the apostles themselves." (Wall, 1985, p. 20).

5. The Sacraments and Baptism. Episcopalians hold that the Lord's supper and baptism are sacraments "generally necessary to salvation" (Book of Common Prayer). Other sacraments include Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Absolution and Anointing of the Sick. "Baptism may be by immersion or by pouring water over the head of the baptized" (Wall, 1985, p. 25). It is a sign of salvation which is to be accompanied by promises of faithfulness. "If the person baptized is too young to make the baptismal promises, they are made in the name of the child by the parents and god-parents" (Wall, 1985, p. 25).

Distinctive Points of Practice

1. Church Government. A local congregation of the Episcopal Church is called a parish. It is governed by the vestry, which is a committee made up of the local parish priest (called a rector) and men and women elected from the parish. Parishes are organized regionally into dioceses. Each diocese holds an annual convention to elect the diocesan bishop and to govern the diocese. There are about 100 diocese in the United States. The diocesan bishops, along with eight deputies elected from each diocese, attend the tri-annual General Convention which enacts church legislation and elects a presiding bishop (Hardy, 1987). The laws enacted by these conventions are called Canon Law and they "define the rules and procedures by which the church and its members are to live" (Wall, 1985, p. 34).

2. Women priests. Beginning in 1976 women were accepted into the priesthood.

3. Special Orders. Unique among protestants, but much like the Catholics, the Episcopalians also maintain over thirty special religious orders of monks, friars and nuns that frequently wear distinctive garments called habits.

4. Other Similarities to Catholics. If it can be said that a group makes itself distinct

by being similar to another group, Episcopalians are distinct from most Protestant groups in that their practices are so similar to those of the Catholics. Besides the things noted above, Episcopalians have also adopted Catholic holy days such as Easter, Lent, and Christmas, Catholic vestments such as a robe and mitre for the clergy, and Catholic worship terminology such as "The Eucharist", "Confessional", "Mass" and "Sacrament".

Cross-points

The following comparisons of official Episcopalian doctrines with statements from the Bible are intended merely as representative points of difference between the Episcopal Church and the Bible.

Episcopal Church Doctrine	The Bible
<p>1. The Law of Moses. "In both the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind through Christ . . . Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men . . . no Christian man whatsoever is free from obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral." (Articles of Religion)</p> <p>2. Original Sin. "...every person born in this world...deserveth God's wrath and damnation." (Articles of Religion).</p> <p>3. Religious titles. "Episcopal priests may be referred to as 'Father' or 'Mister' depending on the local custom" (Gray, 1974, p. 88). "The official title of a bishop is The Right Reverend" (Wall, '85, p. 28).</p> <p>4. Priests. The priest is ordained to "represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people; to</p>	<p>1. The Law of Moses. "But now we have been delivered from the law . . . I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:6-7; see also Colossians 2:14; Galatians 3:23-25).</p> <p>2. Original Sin. "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14b).</p> <p>3. Religious Titles. "Do not call anyone on earth your father..." (Matthew 23:9). "He sent redemption to his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name" (Psalm 111:9).</p> <p>4. Priests. "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,</p>

share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God" (Book of Common Prayer, 856). Note: Episcopalians admit that "Scripture does not discuss ordination with direct reference to priests;" they claim that the formal orders of bishop, priest and deacon emerged after the Scriptures were completed, during a time "in which the Church was evidently ordering itself" (Gray, 1974, p. 78).

5. Church Discipline. "The priest does not excommunicate without good cause, or without giving an individual a chance to appeal the ruling to the bishop." "Acts worthy of excommunication have to be overt and an offense to the whole community, not individual sins that can be dealt with pastorally by the priest" (Gray, 1974, p. 68).

6. Giving. "Pledging to the Church is a voluntary act." "The pledger should consider tithing as a guideline for giving." "A pledge is a moral obligation and should be paid just as any other bill is paid." (Gray, 1974, p. 70).

7. Divorce and Remarriage. "A big change has been made in Canon (Law) I.18 entitled 'Of Regulations Respecting Holy Matrimony: Concerning Preservation of Marriage, Dissolution of Marriage, and Remarriage.'" A priest may perform the

and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Revelation 1:6; see I Peter 2:5, 9; I Corinthians 4:6 & II John 9). "When they had appointed elders in every church..." (Acts 14:23). Note: Some Episcopalians claim that "priest" is a fair "traditional translation of the Greek 'presbuteros'" (Wall, 1985, p. 83). In truth, reliable versions of the Bible always translate "presbuteros" as "elder" or some similar word. The Greek word for priest is "hiereus".

5. Church Discipline. "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (II Thessalonians 3:6, see also 3:14 and I Corinthians 5:4-5, 9-13).

6. Giving. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7).

7. Divorce and Remarriage. "...whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9). "Now the works of the flesh are

rite of Marriage when he has "evidence that the prior marriage was annulled or dissolved by a final judgment or decree of a civil court," counsels the parties on "the need for continuing concern for the well-being of the former spouse and the children, if any," and receives permission from the bishop. (Gray, 1974, pp. 73-74)

evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness . . . those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

< Weak Points in Episcopalianism >

1. Carnal Origin. The Church of England was started by a self-serving and wicked king known to history as Henry VIII. How can a church with such corrupt foundations ever hope to stand for what is pure and be "the pillar and ground of the truth"?
2. Carnal Appeal. Episcopal worship services typically borrow the elaborate and showy from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Social programs and secular activities are often used to make the Episcopal church appealing to the community. John Krumm, in his 1957 book *Why I Am An Episcopalian*, makes a revealing admission. The first reason he gives for being an Episcopalian is that a boyhood friend told him if he would join the boys choir, rehearse for a few weeks, and then sing in the Christmas program, he would get to make a trip with the choir to San Francisco. Concerning his performance in the Christmas program, Krumm wrote:

Being fitted for vestments was also exciting, for I liked the idea of getting "dressed up". . . Then, however, came Christmas Eve itself, and I was entranced. The Christmas greens and the yellow candles, the dignity and reverence of the service, and the sense of being an important part of a great significant activity--all of this captivated me completely" (p. 18).
3. The Wrong Book is Followed. Later in his book, Krumm wrote, "If I were to cite one single reason why I became and still remain an Episcopalian, I think I would point to the Book of Common Prayer and to its universal acceptance in the Anglican communion as the basis for Christian life and worship". How sad. Episcopalians claim to believe the scriptures, but apparently they don't believe that the scriptures thoroughly equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Questions on the Episcopalians

1. How did the Episcopal Church derive its name? What does "Episcopal" mean?
2. Who was Thomas Cranmer? What were his major contributions to the Episcopal Church?
3. What significant changes did Henry VIII make to the church?
4. List at least five errors of Episcopalian belief or practice along with the scriptures which plainly show them to be errors.
5. What are some of the major similarities between the Episcopalian Church and the Catholic Church?
6. What do you see as the biggest weakness in Episcopalianism?
7. What point or issue would you first raise with a Episcopalian friend or neighbor if you were trying to convert him?

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