

Episcopal 101 – Course Outline
St. David of Wales, Portland OR
Sundays, February 25, March 3, 10, & 17 2024 (40 Minutes per session)

Session 1 – History

11 Living World Religions among which is Christianity. We will Study the history of Christianity peculiarly in its manifestation in Episcopalianism

Jesus Christ in order to perpetuate the revelation made by God in him surrounded himself with a group of disciples from which were chosen an “inner circle” known as the 12 and later as the “Apostles”. Deserted by them at death, they were recharged and inspired with new hope at the Resurrection to go forth and carry to the world the “Gospel” or good news.

The first 100 years or so of Christian history expected the imminent return of Jesus from heaven in Glory to judge the world. This is the term which we call “Escatology” or “end things” and this expectation is clearly reflected in some of the letters attributed to Paul written to the earliest Christian communities. Eventually, planning needed to be made for the continuation of the Gospel past the generation of the 12.

The early development of the Church came as a result of the fact that it had to adjust to the reality of the delayed return of the Christ.

In Jerusalem the first disciples continued their worship in the Temple forming a synagogue of the Nazarene which differed from other synagogues only in their belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah predicted by the scriptures and that he was about to return to judge the world and inaugurate the Kingdom. After the persecution and death of Stephen (the first Christian martyr) the separation between Judaism and the followers of Jesus Christ became more and more apparent and the Nazarene believers scattered to other cities. Small groups became organized in various places into communities, assemblies or churches meeting in private homes. Sometimes these were founded by informal methods and spread by word of mouth between friends and neighbors; other times they formed around the preaching of a particular traveling disciple.

The earliest churches were headed and led by the Apostles themselves. As time went on the need of someone to take the place of the Apostles and to oversee the other elders was felt, and one among their number was chosen for this office of overseer. From the Greek word meaning overseer came episcopus in Latin which in the course of time became anglicized as “bishop”. This group were the origin of the third order of Christian ministry. As you can imagine it was not always possible for them to be present at all gatherings and so a share in the leadership fell to other men (and as rarely reported women) in the community just as it did in the synagogue system. The word for elder in Greek is one which has been anglicized as “presbyter” and in the course of time shortened to “priest”. From this group of elder leaders sprang the second order of the Christian ministry, the priesthood. Since the ranks of this sect of believers tended to come from the lower castes

of society who were of limited means and who not only suffered financially for their new beliefs; but also took little thought for the future on account of their expectation of the end times – the problem of the relief of the poor was a great and pressing one. The apostles felt that they could or should not take time from their preaching and teaching to attend to this work and so a body of members was appointed to take charge of this and to visit the sick. They were referred to by the Greek word diakonos which got translated and anglicized as “deacon”. They were the origin of the first order of the Christian Ministry.

The self appointed apostle Paul was the one chiefly instrumental in the process by which the Christian faith grew from a purely Jewish and Asiatic religion to one which could be a Gentile and European one as well. The faith grew quietly and doggedly and spread throughout the Roman Empire in spite of the fact that it was an illegal religion and desposed by the ruling classes and openly persecuted by the State.

The last and most sever persecution happened in the late parts of the second and early parts of the 3rd Century of the common era under the Emperor Diocletian and was followed by the Edict of Toleration which was issued by the Emperor Constantine in 311. Many will account this date as the death of the nascent Church of homes and widows and orpahns and the birth of the Institutional Church as we know it. At any rate from that date forward increasing privilidges were granted to the Church until finally it became the official religion of the Empire (which will have profound and long lasting effects for its subsequent iterations). Church grew in wealth, property and numbers under Constantine; in 325 at Nicaea he assembled the first general council of the whole church to fight out disputed points of doctrine and discipline. General councils have been assembled from that point on at various intervals thoughout the history of the Church (some of which you may recognize would be the Second Ecumenical Council at the Vatican in 1962; perhaps the Lambeth Councils and certainly the General Convention of 2003). In the Church in the East and the Church in the West which had become increasingly estranged from one another since the 9th Century formally separated and have remained so ever since.

Christianity had come to Britan long before this. Unoffical “tradition” attributes the founding to Joseph of Arimetha who is said to have come to Glastonbury with the Holy Grail. Probably is was due to Gallic merchants who were converted and Roman soldiers. Alban, the first Christian martyr in Britan died there in the 3rd century and about the beginning of the 4th (around the year 300) bishoprics are known to have existed in London, York and Lincoln. When the Roman legions were withdrawn in 401, the Christians were soon driven by the invading barbarians (who is barbaric?) into the West of England and Wales and even over into Ireland. During the next century (so the 5th) the attempt to re-convert England was begun by 2 distinct missions. One came from Ireland to Iona under Columba and worked down from the north; the other was the famous mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great under Agustine which established itself at Canterbury in the year 597 and worked up from the south. As a result the Archbishop of Canterbury became the leading bishop of the Church in England. It was to be almost another century and only with the efforts of numerous other leaders and saints of the Church that England became at least nominally Christian once again.

In the succeeding centuries the English bishops (like those of other lands distant from Rome) came more and more under the direction of the Bishop of Rome (or as he is also known the Pope); so also did the King of England John who became the Pope's feudal fief. As more and more of the Popes began to abuse their authority and exact heavy financial payments in tax; a revolt gradually began to set in after the Black Death in 1349 and with the passing of the Statutes of Provisors and Praemunire laws forbidding appointments to English bishoprics or benefices, or appeals to courts outside the realm, without the king's consent.

Throughout the Dark Ages it was the Church which not only maintained the culture and learning of the ancient civilized world, but also looked after the social needs of the people through its own religious communities, caring for the poor, the sick, and the wayfarers. With the dawn of the Renaissance, and influenced in no small degree by the continental reformation of the Church initiated by Luther, inflamed by disgust at the moral corruption of the papacy and clergy, and brought to a head by an unworthy personal controversy of Henry VIII with the Pope over the question of annulment, parliament more and more restricted papal authority in England until, in 1534, it was declared that the Bishop of Rome had no authority over the bishops of the Church of England. In spite of the momentous consequences of this decision, the ordinary Christian was little affected at first by this decree, for she/he continued to worship in the same parish church and cathedral in the Latin tongue and to receive the sacraments from the hands of the same priests as formerly. Henry died no less orthodox and catholic than when the Pope conferred on him the title, still claimed by English sovereigns, "Defender of the Faith." Before the final breach with Rome, Henry had obtained the appointment of Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury, and Cranmer took a leading part in the reformation of the Church of England.

When Henry died in 1547 he was succeeded by his 9 year old son Edward VI who was controlled in turn by his uncle, the Duke of Somerset, as Protector, and then by the Duke of Northumberland. Under them, in response to strong urgings on the part of people who wished to further purify the Church of England of what they considered "unscriptural" elements and unholy practices, the service books were first translated into the vernacular English and drastic reforms were made in the conduct and practice of worship.

Edward was succeeded in 1553 by his half sister Mary who restored the Papal authority and Latin service and also put to death several of the Bishops who refused to take the oath of obedience to the Pope, including Archbishop Cranmer of Canterbury. In 1558 she was succeeded by her half sister Elizabeth, who once more repudiated the authority of the Bishop of Rome over the Church of England and issued a revised English Prayerbook in 1559. In 1570 Elizabeth was excommunicated by the Pope. This marks the formal withdrawal for the Church of Rome from communion with the Church of England. Although England repudiated the authority of the Bishop of Rome, she did not withdraw from fellowship with the Church of Rome, but Rome from her. Centuries before this the Church in England, mentioned in the Magna Carta of 1215 had been established by law

as the official Church of the realm of England, and it was authorized to receive land taxes, known as tithes for its support.

During Elizabeth's reign the new country to the west across the pond was being explored and opened up. It was a chaplain of the flagship of Sir Francis Drake, who on the shores of Golden Gate Bay in San Francisco in the year 1579, held the first prayerbook service in this country. Various parts of the new America were settled by different religious groups, Florida and Maryland by the Roman Catholics; New England by the Congregationalists or Puritans; Rhode Island by the Baptists; New York by the Dutch Reformed; Pennsylvania and New Jersey by the Society of Friends; Delaware by the Swedish Lutherans; and Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia by the Church of England.

The first permanent English settlement was made at Jamestown in 1607, where the Rev. Rubert Hunt preached and administered the sacraments. The direct ancestor of that congregation still exists today as Bruton Parish Williamsburg, VA. From there the Church of England spread into Maryland, and in the two states became established by law as in England, and received tithes for its support.

Despite great opposition the W\orship of the Church began to be held in Boston at King's Chapel in 1687. In 1664 when the English Govenour came to NY Churh of England services were held, after those in Dutch at the old church within the fort. Trinity Parish was organized in 1697, while in Philladelphia Christ Church was founded as early as 1695.

By the time of the American Revolutionary war there were congregations of the Church of England established in each of the colonies. Many of these were assisted greatly by two missionary organizations, The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and commonly known by its initials S.P.C.K. and the Society for the Propogation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and still in existance as the U.S. P.G.

Throughout all these years, not only was no bishop ever appointed for the colonies, in spite of many requests on their part – but not ever even visited them. In name, the were under the auspices of the Bishop of London; in reality Confirmation was never administered, and anyone wishing to be ordained had to make the perilous trip back to England which greatly hindered the development of a local ministry.

When the war broke out, while there were priests like Dr. William White of Christ Church Philadelphia, who became Chaplain not only of the Continental Army but also of the Continental Congress; the majority of the clergy remained loyal to the King. After the war was over, the Church suffered in tbe hearts and minds of the new Americans; in spite of the fact that the majority of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution of the United States were members.

In 1783 the Church in Connnecticut elected The Rev. Dr. Samuel Seabury as its Bishop and sent him to England to be consecrated under the hands of the English Bishops. This

they refused to do because he could not and would not take the oath of allegiance to the King; and they had no authority without Parliamentary sanction to dispense with that oath. Tired of the delay, Seabury turned to the Scottish non-juror Bishops who had remained loyal to the House of Stuart and were consequently not recognized by the State nor bound by the laws of the Established Church, and was consecrated by them at Aberdeen, Scotland in 1784. In the years 1784 – 86 Conventions of the various churches were held to decide what course of action should be taken. In 1787, The Rev. Dr. Samuel Provoost, Rector of Trinity Church New York and the Rev. Dr. William White, Rector of Christ Church Philadelphia went to England and were consecrated Bishops in Lambeth Palace Chapel by the Archbishops of Canterbury, and York, the Bishops of Bath and Wells and the Bishop of Peterborough a law having been passed to make this possible. Later in 1790 The Rev. Dr. James Madison was consecrated in England as the Bishop of Virginia. In Philadelphia in the year 1789 a General Convention was held at which a Constitution was adopted for the Church and the English Prayer Book was revised for American needs.

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America grew slowly. This was partly because of the 18th Century growth of Deism (a movement toward naturalistic and rationalistic religion) and most of the clergy were uninterested and indifferent to missionary activity which was needed to grow. Also there was huge move westward past the Alleghenies and the clergy were uninterested and indifferent to following, so the vast area of the central States and the Middle West were left to the Methodists and Baptists to evangelize. Finally in response to the Great Awakening led by Charles and John Wesley and George Whitefield the Episcopal Church did awake to its evangelistic responsibility, led by the efforts of the Bishops of New York and New England. Having reached their own critical mass, the bishops were able to consecrate without the assistance of the mother church one of their own as Bishop of Ohio in 1819. In the following year The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society was incorporated, and in 1835 General Convention declared that every member of the Episcopal Church by virtue of his membership also a member of the Missionary Society. In the same year Bishops were consecrated for the Northwest and by the time of the gold rush the Episcopal Church was fully alive to its responsibility and Bishop William Kip was sent to the Missionary territory of California. The General Theological Seminary for the education of men for ministry in the Episcopal Church was opened in NYC in 1819 and shortly after the Virginia Theological Seminary was established at Alexandria with special emphasis on preparing men for missionary work. Since, many more have been started throughout this country and also overseas.

The 19th century saw the flowering of the Evangelical Movement with its emphasis on personal piety and good works and then in reaction the Anglo-Catholic or Oxford Movement with its emphasis on the catholic and apostolic visions of the Church this was followed by renewed attention to ritual, ceremony, liturgy and the “catholic” trappings of this catholic branch of the church protestant. In addition, the Church needed to adjust to the increased scientific advancements happening in the world which tended to discount the biblical vision of creation; and especially the work of Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution as well as the emergence of a new field of study called biblical criticism in

which the books of the bible were investigated and studied by the same methods of literary and historical criticism as any other writing.

Unlike many of the other protestant denominations of the time, The Episcopal Church was able to weather the American Civil War without any major North/South split in the aftermath. In the middle part of the 19th Century women and men formed monastic communities in the States who then went on to found secondary education institutions as well as hospitals and colleges. Mission fields were established in the dependant territorial possessions of the United States and the Episcopal Church took its place among the missionary work of the major faith denominations growing in influence and service to the social gospel movement of the day. As interest increased in the beauty of worship, churches and Cathedrals were built which were the height of art and architecture and demonstrated in its National Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul in Washington D.C. as well as the ongoing work of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in NYC's upper Manhattan.

In 1919 the central administration of the large and unwieldy institution of the Episcopal Church was reorganized to more efficiently manage its affairs between General Conventions. The formation of the National Council in that year gave over those responsibilities for governance to that Council with the leadership of the President of the House of Deputies and the Presiding Bishop for the House of Bishops. That title passed from the most senior member of the House to one who is elected for a specified term by the full membership of the House of Bishops and affirmed by a majority vote in the House of Deputies.

The second half of the 20th century saw movement from the focus of the social gospel toward the influence of the Liberation Theologians who had been doing their work in the base camps of Central and South America. The liturgical renewal movement coming out of the Second Eucumenical Vatican Council had profound influence in the seminaries and leading edge parishes of the Episcopal Church. This would influence the Standing Liturgical Committee of the General Convention and consequently the revision of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer which was ratified by the conventions of 1973 and 1976 resulting in the issuance of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Another monumental vote of the 1976 General Convention was the opening of all three of the ordained ministries of the Episcopal Church to the women of that Church. These seismic shifts rocked the foundations of this Church and have resulted in continuing struggle for the liberation of other historically marginalized of her members; African American; Hispanic and Asian Americans and into the 21st century for her sexual minority members. The highlight of the most recent General Convention gathering was its election in the House of Bishops and affirmation in the House of Deputies of the first woman to the office of Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Anglican Communion.