

ABSTRACT

Ordination, Apostolic Succession, and Ecumenism

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Inherent in today's Christianity is the differing approaches to central theological and practical questions by Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant denominations, and the division among these denominations is contrary to the love and unity of Christ. Enter ecumenism; women's ordination relates closely to ecumenism by way of questions regarding episcopacy and apostolic succession. My research focuses on the centrality of apostolic succession to ecumenism. This paper surveys documents that have come out of discussions between Northern European, American, and Canadian Lutherans and Anglicans on their way to full communion with each other. In particular, it surveys the way their strikingly different theologies of apostolic succession shaped their interactions with one another, and what theological moves were made that enabled them to finally enter into full communion with one another. I conclude with a series of questions and observations: what can Christianity at large take from these discussions? What is inherent in questions of episcopacy? Are some items theologically central while others are flexible? How do we make sense of the different historical trajectories that various Christian denominations have taken while maintaining the integrity of the apostolic faith? How does ecclesiology solve or not solve differences? What is keeping divided Christendom divided? In particular, I will draw on the ecumenical theology and ecclesiology of Yves Congar to make my reflections. This methodology is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of Congar's theology; rather, I use his theology to interpret these the dialogue among Anglicans and Lutherans that led to their full communion. The reason I am focusing specifically on dialogues between Northern European, American and Canadian Anglicans and Lutherans is that these are the dialogues that actually led to full communion. They are not intellectual exercises; they are truly practical examples of ecumenism from which Christianity can and should glean wisdom.