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**METHOPALIANISM - IS THERE SUCH A THING? OBSERVATIONS ABOUT
COMMONALITIES AND CONVERGENCES
BY
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Being not so much new to the concept of ecumenical dialogue, but at least unfamiliar with its stated purpose and procedure in this case, I asked Tom Ferguson what the purpose of this sort of a dialogue might be. He suggested it would be important for both churches is to ponder on what can we do together more effectively, in terms of small or rural churches, in terms of lobbying and social change. That the eventual goal is full communion for enhanced cooperation in mission and world. For that purpose, it seems essential to foster a dialogue around issues that matter, that have to do with life, with ‘people in the pews,’ as well as with clergy and other leaders, with where needs and desires in culture and society are, and not engage in yet another version of bickering about issues arising from clericalism or polity differences.

I was invited to focus my deliberations for this phase of the dialogue on soteriology and ecclesiology. I define these doctrinal topoi as follows:¹ To me, soteriology means discerning, speaking, writing, dreaming about things concerning the physical healing, spiritual education and divine transformation of not only humanity but the entire creation towards a more fully lived life in deeply spirited relation with the Trinity. Ecclesiology for me, at its best, is concerned with issues of where within this process of transformation and healing the community of the church finds itself. How it defines itself, its purpose, views its history, locates its present and envisions its future.

¹I would like to stress that this particular paper does not claim anything but preliminary status. While it may contain some thoughts that I might develop further towards an epistemology that might be helpful to Episcopalians in particular, the present version represents only a sketch. At this stage, my examples are culled mostly from the Episcopal side of things, I have not had a chance to log the equivalent yet on the Methodist side.

I find it further important to locate this particular paper. It is written from a distinct perspective within the Episcopal Church, by a theologian who has a German pietist and Lutheran past and a more recent Methodist lineage.² So, is my theology ‘Episcopal’, is it “Methodist,” or even crypto-“Lutheran”? And from this particular, personal question arises a larger, poignant question that I hardly find discussed among those who do ‘denominational theology’: What makes a theology denominational, makes it Methodist, Anglican? Are there airtight differences between them? Does it mean that I am only doing ‘Anglican theology’ when I discuss what has been written or said by Anglicans? Such a narrow definition seems self-defeating and absurd.³ Rather, I find relevant to my theological process as an Episcopalian everything that helps me understand and conceive better what it means to live as a Christian in this particular church body, with the particular gifts and challenges that this includes. (And I will outline these as I see them below.) That means, no artificial focus on being in conversation with so-called “Anglican” authors only, but with any theological contribution that helps us embody the particular charism of this church body.

Between preoccupations with denominational affiliations, theological topoi, contents, values, and theological method: Where are the differences between these two church bodies to be found? What are the shared values that can help forge coalitions and dialogue? It seems to me

². My ph.d. is from Drew University, where I studied with the Methodist Catherine Keller, who is herself a student of the Methodist John Cobb. As Bruce Mullin pointed out in his paper *Methodists and Episcopalians in the American Context: Siblings Separated By Birth*, some Methodist schools bring together a fair number of Methodists and Episcopalians. Drew for example, has a significant minority of Episcopal students that are able to take occasional classes on Anglican polity, and have formed a caucus for the furthering of their needs within this Methodist setting.

³. This attitude might also lead to the rather problematic practice of using third-rate Anglican writers rather than first rate non-Anglican thinkers just in order to be able to claim doing Anglican theology. Many Anglican writers, however, pull significantly from the modern German Protestant tradition (Barth, Tillich, Bonhoeffer) so even reading an Anglican theologian does not necessarily offer access to Anglican ‘content,’ whatever that may be.

that shared ground may not necessarily found in issues of polity, though those do of course distinguish our churches from each other. My educated hunch is that they might be found to a significant degree in shared assumptions about methodology, as well as issues both churches face in common, issues that affect our larger cultural and social context.

As Integrity’s president Michael Hopkins has recently suggested in the face of the controversies around bishop Gene Robinson’s confirmation, we would do well to remember and focus that we have more in common within the Episcopal Church than divides us.⁴ Likewise, in order for the present dialogue to be successful, it seems crucial (but certainly not uncontested) for all involved to recognize diversity within and between our church bodies can be a good thing, and must not be a threat.⁵ This despite the fact that indeed some within these bodies do see difference and diversity as a danger to the church. But what will these coalitions and dialogues look like?⁶ Who is entering into coalition with whom? There are likely many persons who feel closer to people of different faiths than they feel to people of their own faith who take a very different approach to it.⁷ On the more progressive side of both denominations I see (because that

⁴ find quote in one of the newspaper articles.

⁵ This already positions me in a particular way within the Episcopal Church. There are those who found it necessary to be drawing lines, to be circling the wagons against the full inclusion and valuing of the calling and ministry of sexual minorities, regarding the confirmation of Gene Robinson. Others are finding their understanding of church one that needs to work to more fully embody the slogan the church has chosen for its signs: “The Episcopal Church welcomes you.” It is among the latter that I count myself. Thus I find myself agreeing, at least here, with Mark Harris, who argues that the Anglican Communion’s only “distinctive “doctrines” [...] would be the call to be comprehensive and the belief that all theology is provisional.” Mark Harris, *The Challenge of Change: The Anglican Communion in the Post-Modern Era* (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), 11.

⁶ And keep in mind that I am a relative newcomer to the wider picture of denominational reality and politics in the USA.

⁷ A Sufi muslim who believes in allowing for many forms of worship of Allah, who does not believe in the need for mediation through a mullah, whose worship includes spontaneous forms of music and dance, and honors diversity in terms of gender and faith practice has more in common with a progressive Protestant than with a fundamentalist mullah who outlaws music,

is what I most observe and stand within) increasing possibilities for coalition/dialogue around issues of economics and environment. Issues that have the ability to bring people together beyond the usual programmatic dividing lines (which often are biblical hermeneutics and issues of human sexuality). What increasingly fascinates me is the newly shifting position of certain groups of evangelicals.⁸ On the more evangelical continuum, issues of gender and human sexuality often form potential for coalition. Expressly those issues are also what separate the faithful intra-denominationally. So one thing to look at is where within the denomination does a person in dialogue stand and is it perhaps even a ‘double dialogue’ that includes a different location on the progressive-evangelical continuum as well as a different denomination?⁹ Along with a deepening dialogue between Methodists and Episcopalians, I also hope to see more and in fact embody more of a fruitful dialogue between so-called “liberals” and so-called “evangelicals.” I believe both sides can learn from each other. The social gospel saw persons like Rauschenbusch who were able to embody a creative tension between the progressive politics of the social gospel and the faithful depth and passion of an evangelical. This third option, or any other number of thinkable combinations between what often form the extremes in our churches, is rarely lived in our churches today. But I see possibilities for this option being embodied again in the younger generations who are dissatisfied with what they often perceive as the spiritual emptiness of liberal theologies as well as with the aggressive biblicisms of evangelical options.

wants to keep women at home, and wants to institute a strict form of sharia as state law. Likewise, fundamentalist Christians have more in common with Islamic fundamentalists than they care to acknowledge.

⁸. A defining feature of U.S. evangelicalism has been its ability to transcend denominationality on behalf of a shared concern for holy living and faith.

⁹. I am aware now as before of the difficulty of using terms such as progressive and evangelical. They are neither very accurate, nor very descriptive. I am using them simply because of a lack of better terms.

But back to the present conversation. So what might we focus on? What makes a doctrine/theology denominationally specific? Its thematic content, its authors’ denominational affiliation, its specific methodology, its relevance for the past, present, and future of a specific church body? What if the dialogue occurs between two churches who have struggled with the difficulties of walking a “via media” or, with the increasing lack of a “unifying theology.”¹⁰ There are moves in each denomination to address what some consider a dangerous loss of focus and tradition by pronouncing a “radical orthodoxy” within the Anglican context, or a “rebirth of orthodoxy” within Methodism, though they take different shapes.¹¹ Other approaches to rethinking where we are today include the projects of constructive theologians, among whom I count myself, who aim to critically and constructively engage scripture, tradition and reason/experience in the present context, i.e. a post-Christian hegemony in the West, post-modern challenges to the securities of Western epistemologies, and the inquiries into colonial and neo-colonial economic imperialisms that our churches have been complicit with as well as at times subversive to. So: What does it mean to be church in such a context?

While the present meeting is focusing on doctrine, I have been wondering if it is not theological methodology (i.e. *how* we produce theological utterances) rather than doctrinal content that binds these two churches together *and* sets them apart from other vernacular churches/reformation traditions.¹² And further, if not these methods of coming to theological

¹⁰ John B. Cobb Jr., *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 8.

¹¹ The culprit is often designated as a monolithically understood “modernity” that has destroyed faith, mores and doctrine. In various forms, then, a return to forms of premodern faith is promoted by such anti-modernists. See for example John. ed Milbank, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999) and Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Theology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).

¹² This along with the problems Anglicans keep experiencing when they find themselves asked for their doctrinal standpoints. See Ian T Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial*

positions are not a doctrinal formation, if more implicitly so. Expression of doctrine occurs not only through creeds, but often through social engagement, through incarnate living of one’s faith. Thus I propose that there are certain commonalities, struggles as well as chances, gifts and challenges that Episcopalians and Methodists share and that are expressed in lived faith practice as well as doctrinal formation. A preliminary list of these issues in the ECUSA includes: The shape of lay and ordained ministry and the relationship between them,¹³ the promotion of peace, Anglican AIDS initiatives, the shape and form of women’s ministries, the presence of ethnic and cultural minorities in church and ministry, human sexuality, biomedical ethics, environment, economics, ‘mission’/‘development’, and other issues concerning the ‘postcolonial’ relations to formerly planted churches.

A Shared Approach to Theological Methodology:

My answer hitherto¹⁴ has been that more than a question of content and denominational affiliation, what has stood out for me is the methodology of Episcopal, and in many ways of Methodist formations of theology.¹⁵ Each of these faith communities acknowledges a variety of resources for theology:

Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twentyfirst Century (New York: Church Publishing, 2001), 6.

¹³ The General Convention 2003 has abolished the difference between Canon 9 and ‘regular’ ordinations to the priesthood. It will have to be seen what the impact of this clerical ministry and theological education will be.

¹⁴ Such as it is, with close to three years of teaching in an Episcopal Seminary and struggling with defining what Anglican theologies might look like under my belt.

¹⁵ Both churches have been highly influenced by theologians from outside their own tradition, and it would be insincere to pretend otherwise. (Luther and Zinzendorf are some of the more obvious influences.) There is little in my opinion to commend the use of unoriginal but denominationally ‘correct’ theologians who merely rehash the thoughts of others from outside the tradition. Rather, what seems to me to be important beyond the denominational provenance of a theologian or source is how that theologian or source can speak to the issues that are facing the church at this time, and how what this theologian offers helps and enhances the commitment

Anglican/Episcopal tripod: scripture, tradition, reason, (experience.)¹⁶

Methodist quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, experience.¹⁷

These benchmarks outline, at least, a shared commitment to ongoing negotiation in the process of doing theology. The specifics of this will still have to be mapped out. This multiple theological epistemology flows out of a soteriology that affirms that revelation/redemption is not mediated *sola scriptura* but through other sources as well. This shows considerable confidence in the ability of humanity to do this (relatively) successfully, it shows confidence in body and mind, is the effect of a processual soteriology and a relatively positive anthropology/ecclesiology. Both denominations contend with the pervasiveness of Calvinist theological concepts such as double predestination, utter fallenness and depravity of humanity, the extreme dependency of humanity on the salvific work of Christ, and an extreme doctrine of divine omnipotence. These features are starkly embedded in much of American Christianity and have become pervasive also in mainline churches through the excessive fundamentalist/conservative backlashes against the excesses of liberal theology and the culture wars of the sixties, coming both from the larger context of

of Methodists or Episcopalians to considering scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in the formation of their past and present lives in faith.

¹⁶ In his preface to *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker lists experience as one of the sources of education of the human mind. See Chapter VI, 1. Many Episcopal theologians have added the category of experience. Or, one may not want to distinguish as tightly between reason and experience and see them as deeply connected. In an environment where we have at least begun to deconstruct binaries like mind and body, etc. Despite the fact that both denominations have at times stressed scripture as the central one of these facets, they also recognize the importance of others. Hooker does however recommend the *via media* as a third alternative to the sole focus on scripture or tradition. This remains crucial even if we also stress that Hooker saw scripture as the central cord around which the two other are woven.

¹⁷ The new motto of one United Methodist website is then, prophetically: Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. <http://unitedmethodist.org> (Accessed July 18, 2003).

society, and in part also as it prevails within their own church bodies.¹⁸ This is counterbalanced, more or less forcefully through a commitment to negotiate scriptural reading with the past and present forms of tradition, as well as forms of human reasoning and experience. That would suggest that neither of them is inclined to a literalist reading of scripture or tradition, but is committed to negotiating scripture with its reception throughout history, as well as with human thought and experience in the contemporary context of the church in society and world.

The great attraction of the Episcopal Church for me as a person and theologian was and is that it understands its theology as provisional, contextual, and in process. That it not only allows, but requires its faithful to engage in discernment of the will and power of the triune God in their lives. **That part of its doctrinal expression is the very resistance to setting doctrines in stone.** And I have reason to believe that similar things can be said for the Methodist Quadrilateral.

Both denominations thus are committed to considering multiple factors in their theological deliberations. I have wanted to stress, against those who would claim the consequence of this plural approach to theology is the cause for a lack of center and doctrinal clarity, that, in fact, there is a doctrine right in here: The commitment to recognize divine inspiration not only in the bible (not *sola scriptura*), but to find its expression also in postbiblical theology and in the forms of reason and experience found within humanity. That, at least, is my reading. How they are negotiated is another thing, but it seems beyond denial that biblical literalism is not an option. At least Hooker, in his Preface to the laws energetically rejected the literalism of the Calvinists as well as the traditionalism of the Catholic church. The Anglican via media is by definition trying to find this middle way between the extremes by help of reason. Methodists have retained the three components, and added a fourth that was evolving during the

¹⁸ Furthermore, as far as I can tell, neither denomination is strongly involved in apocalyptic thinking, and does therein also find itself at odds with much of the more conservative Christian contingent in U.S. society.

enlightenment: experience, emotion. Thus, both bodies are committed to living with ongoing questions in the context of their cultural location, and to negotiating multiple sources of inspiration. To my mind at least, this produces a diversity of approaches and opinions on various doctrinal matters, to which both communities then have already committed themselves. That is, for me at least, literalist readings of the bible are out of the question. Not even Lutheranism has produced, aside perhaps from certain parts of American Lutheranism, a strict literalism, but *sola scriptura* has also meant commitment to critical ways of reading the bible, even has produced them in the form of German higher criticism.

Theological moves of recent decades: recovering of pneumatology to redevelop a fully trinitarian faith. Retrieval of the Jesus of the synoptic gospels to balance the almost exclusive doctrinal focus on Johannine christology for doctrinal utterances such as the Nicene Creed. From there flows: focus on human encounter, embracing, healing, forgiveness, transgression of boundaries of purity, transformation, economic challenges. I increasingly see concerns like these come to the fore.

A Common Focus on a Positive Anthropology and Processual Soteriology:

In contrast to the Lutheran reformation which brought with it a renaissance of Augustinian thought in the West, the Anglican reformation, as well as Methodism brought with it a return to patristic writings beyond and before Augustine. This includes the influx of Greek Eastern writers, who had a less pessimistic anthropology than is commonly found within Augustinian Western Latin context. Thus both denominations have less of a tendency to focus on the ‘total depravity’ of all humanity, but rather to see within every person the potential for conversion as well as for sanctification. Both, in their contemporary versions, have retained little of the harshness of Calvinist double predestination. The shape of many soteriologies found within both communities emphasizes a mutual engagement in the process of salvation rather than a starkly one-sided act of God with a completely passive human on the receiving side (at least compared to strong Calvinism). The strong emphasis among many Episcopalians on an ‘incarnational faith’

is an example for this affirmation of a basic human goodness. Many Episcopalians describe their faith as “incarnational” or incarnation-centered, but there are many whose soteriology focuses on the cross.¹⁹ Many stress the primacy of the baptismal covenant for the full inclusion in the church and calling to ministry.²⁰

Within both denominations one will find a tendency to what one might call Arian, semi/pelagian, or Arminian sentiments around soteriology. A fair number of Methodists, whose soteriology has been described with the Wesleyan “way of salvation,” find themselves attracted to process theology, which also sees creation as involved in a process, if not as determined as most Christian doctrine has it. Wesley recommended self-examination and self-discipline as a way to form the believer ever more fully towards sanctification. Many Episcopalians likewise believe in the possibility for humans to improve throughout life and see salvation as an ongoing process.²¹ However, theologians of both traditions also recognize the need to go beyond the affirmation of the goodness of incarnational life to a challenge towards the faithful.²²

¹⁹ I am beginning to wonder if this difference translates into different ecclesiologies and positions towards human sexuality, among other. If Christ’s incarnation is considered salvific, and hence human incarnation takes on a central place, rather than redemptive suffering, there seems to be less emphasis on “original sin” as formulated by Augustine, and more on the grace, beauty, and wholeness of incarnation.

²⁰ Those favoring the inclusion of sexual minorities in the ECUSA have argued that those who oppose the ordination and consecration of GLBTs should also not baptize them. (This could also be interpreted as a critique of the clerical hierarchy within the Anglican polity.)

²¹ Hence, perhaps, also Episcopalians’ sustained deep interest in monastic communities and life.

²² John Cobb calls this the need to not only proclaim gospel, but also the law. “One of our problems is that law and gospel have fallen apart. We rarely challenge ourselves by presenting high standards of personal living.” See Cobb Jr., *Grace & Responsibility*, 11. Similarly, the influx of newcomers recovering from religious abuse in more conservative churchbodies has often led Episcopalian clergy and teachers to emphasize affirmation and grace to the detriment of challenge towards a changed life. I see both denominations struggling with how to bring grace and responsibility, as John Cobb puts it, into a healthy a balance.

A Common Concern for Economic Justice:

Sallie McFague, an Episcopal theologian has named as detrimental to the continued relevance and prophetic witness of the churches the continuing obsessive focus on issues of human sexuality, while neglecting growing economic inequity both at home and worldwide, as well as ecological destruction.²³ While there is a comparatively thin basis upon which to erect edifices of sexual ethics that condemn same sex erotic encounters, the witness against economic exploitation of the poor and the disregard of God’s creation is far more prevalent in biblical texts as well as in tradition. But why this strange occupation on a minority among sexual subjects? Is it perhaps also because it is easier to focus upon what can be isolated and looked at from a safe distance rather than having to undergo a reality check of our own complex involvement in, and the churches’ potential complicities with economic exploitation and environmental degradation?

While class differences has likely in the past been an issue that may have prevented dialogue between Methodists and Episcopalians on issues of social and economic justice, the changing profiles of both churches, and especially the less patrician shape of the Episcopal Church in the Midwest and West as well as in pockets on the East Coast will likely enable future dialogues. This may then be a good time to remember that both Methodists and Anglicans/Episcopalians showed significant involvement in social justice before and during the time of the Social Gospel. Both denominations were involved in developing the “Social Creed” in 1910.²⁴ We can remember Wesley’s concern for working people, but also Frederick Denison

²³. Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 203.

²⁴. It can be found in the Methodist hymnal on p. 122. Episcopalians were not members of the FCC until the 1940s, so were not signees of the Social Creed. However, Bruce Mullin argues and Tom Ferguson confirms, they were involved in forming it, in conversation, etc. Part of the difference between the churches is however also where they position their social efforts. Episcopalians more in terms of establishmentarian strategies, Methodists taking it more practical out in the cities. This is a challenging difference.

Maurice, the “ritualist slum priest” James Huntington, William Dwight Porter Bliss, and women like Vida Scudder on the Anglican/Episcopal side. The “Anglican Left” has rarely been a central topic in Episcopal circles, and this may be a good time to remember and reevaluate it for the prophetic witness of the Episcopal Church as well for dialogue with the UMC.²⁵ Having gone to a historically Methodist school, I encountered and learned to appreciate the social dimensions of Methodism, and I believe it has made me a better and more passionate Episcopalian, certainly also because I felt that this is still an area of much-needed growth for my church. A recent incident of where this commonality has become visible is the involvement of clergy/pastors and laity from both churches in protests against the WTO in Seattle, in the Jubilee drive for debt relief (which has seen significant Anglican involvement), and continue work in local, national and global ways to address issues of inequity and poverty. A dilemma faced by both denominations, as well as many other church contexts: How to distinguish social welfare from what easily turns into gentrification, middle class values, and upward mobility? That was likely one of the reasons why the social gospel did not last. Can we rediscover the heritage of a “social creed” in the light of both national and international economic crises and disasters?

Challenges for the future are:

-Protesting and lobbying against abuse of corporate power structures that disregard values of the common good (John Cobb), that neglect human needs, the integrity of the environment at the expense of what masks as profitability and effectivity. (at home and abroad)

-embodying alternative forms of living together and supporting community both human and non-human (co-housing, denser living in urban areas rather than commuting, living without cars, etc.)

²⁵ For this purpose, see the important contribution of Markwell, Bernard Kent Markwell, *The Anglican Left: Radical Social Reformers in the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1846-1954* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

-working towards local, national, and international economies that do not sell out local people against each other worldwide for the lowest bidder.

- debt relief and the issues involved in the debt of nations as well as individuals

-how can we as churches go beyond being an instrument to help people enter the current consumer capitalist market as obedient consumers? How can we learn to distinguish between striving for economic justice and the cooptation of the churches as a means to promote a (no longer exclusively Protestant) work ethic that bolsters current economic forces while being unable to help guarantee that this work ethic will result in employment or better lives.

A Growing Concern about the Destruction and Manipulation of Creation:

Lately, I have been noticing an increasing convergence not only among progressive Methodists and Episcopalians, but also between evangelical Methodists and Episcopalians. At this point in time, evangelicals of the more moderate kind are again engaging in issues of social justice, and of, as they name it, ‘stewardship of creation.’ This is where I see a potential for prophetic witness that unites persons of faith between the two denominations, beyond the differences of evangelical and progressive. This relatively new common concern can serve to bring together evangelicals and progressives, it is a movement that defies political and left-right issues, that is if people can move beyond the stale and stifling, paralyzing boundaries.²⁶

John Cobb was one of the first to argue that religious people can and must contribute if we do want to preserve even a semblance of a natural world around us. Scientist E.O. Wilson likewise holds ecumenical efforts that put environmental issues high priority in high regard and considers them essential for the survival of humanity and other animal species.²⁷ This must happen in an ecumenical global setting, and by remembering the worldwide connections between nature, environmental protection, poverty, local laws and efforts and the effects this has on

²⁶. Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 157ff.

²⁷. Wilson, *Future of Life*, 159.

people around the globe. Environmental policies that protect nature in places where humans can afford to do so must not allowed to create destruction and pollution among the poor and ethnic non-whites.²⁸ If we let nature ‘go to hell,’ so will part of creation that humans were entrusted to respect and coexist with, and part of their own spirit will die. This is part of what was done to Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples across the earth who have been pushed aside by what has been called progress. The issues are complex, and we need to move beyond the stereotypes and dualities. beyond the dualisms of either capitalism or communism. Communism has even a worse environmental record than capitalism. It is for the churches and religious bodies to provide ethical and moral consciousness that can help equip those who will act and make decisions on behalf of the environment. The churches should help enable people to re-connect their spirit to their bodies, and to the body of the earth.

A Common Wrestling for the Equality of Women in Ministry:

Both church bodies are still struggling with giving women equal access to local, regional and national leadership. Both are in theory and theology committed to the equality of women, but even where the oral commitment is there, the practice still lags far behind. Overwhelmingly, men occupy key positions and sexism, theological and ecclesial, pervades much of the church structures. The recovery of pneumatology to redevelop a fully trinitarian faith included the search for a feminine face of God and finding a relevant space for women in the church. This happened in relation with claiming more space for women in a male-dominated church (and in case you thought this was no longer an issue, you only had to attend the ECUSA’s General Convention to note that it yet remains a church of predominantly older white men, some

²⁸ For this particular global connectivity, see the excellent report by Tom Knudsen of the Sacramento Bee. Tom Knudson, “State of Denial: A Special Report on the Environment,” *Sacramento Bee*, 27 April 2003, [Http://www.sacbee.com/denial](http://www.sacbee.com/denial).

of them the most vocal opponents of changes in how this church addresses issues of gender and sexuality in ordained ministry. We see many women priests, but few in prominent positions, large parishes, or as diocesan bishops.

How far have we come, if anywhere, in regards to recovering the feminine face of God, of pneumatology, where are we on gender-neutral (at least?) or feminine and masculine images of God? We continue to see the putdown and trivialization of women providing teaching ministries. Clericalism occurs among women occurs as well as among men, often perhaps initially as a strategy to counteract sexism, though it continues to have problematic effects. Issues of internalized sexism continue to abound and to exacerbate external sexist practices and attitudes.

A Common Wrestling with Ethnocentricity in the National Context

Both denominations began as white, European denominations, but have through mission expanded to other continents and ethnicities. They are still largely white churches, with Episcopalians lagging behind Methodists in their efforts to reach out and include African Americans and Latinos and other non-Europeans. In the same vein, hymnody and theology remain largely eurocentric, and only hesitatingly open to other cultural influences upon liturgy, prayer life, theology and faith practice. What is a good way to address this in a church that remains overwhelmingly Euro-American? Who is involved in the dialogue to address these issues? What do the demographics of our churches look like? With 20/20, the new initiative of the ECUSA meant to attract and foster increased membership to a great degree by reaching out to youth, has also pledged that it wants to look as diverse as the society in which it is located. How will this happen? What are the issues involved in fostering, mentoring, recruiting minority leadership, to foster and mentor minority (thereby I mean both young and ethnic minority) seminarians and young priests?

A Common Wrestling with Ethnocentricity in the International Context: Increasing Awareness of the Post-Colonial Reality of Global Mission

Both churches struggle with what it means to be a church of European origins, of missionary nature and with a strong U.S. presence in an age of U.S. imperialism. What does it mean to live as a church with global connections in a time after official colonialism is over, but economic globalism and unilateral U.S. cultural imperialism loom far and wide. How can both churches repent of their ethnocentric missionary efforts in collusion with the British empire, change present liturgical and theological practice as well as missionary practice, without losing a voice that challenges problematic and oppressive practices whether at home or abroad? These issues have for the Episcopal Church and for the Anglican Communion erupted most poignantly in the events around the Lambeth meeting in 1998 and are highly complex in their implications for intra-Anglican dialogue, and I believe also for Methodist-Episcopal dialogues.²⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, in particular, has described the Anglican church as a cultural hybrid.³⁰ Methodism is perhaps even more so: its lineage combines German pietism with Anglicanism. These forms of initial hybridity are part of what distinguishes and blesses Anglican and Methodist forms of faith.

²⁹ Should there be an Archbishop of Canterbury, i.e. an Anglo primate as the primary focus figure of the communion. What is the shape of the communion? In trying to force doctrinal and practical conformity and ‘obedience’ is not the formerly colonial logic of the British empire being reinforced. How can the Anglican communion (if that then still is a good term for it) continue as companions in faith without repeating the mistakes and imperialisms of the past, no matter who engages in them. See Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 10, 3, 6. Colonial mimicry also means that the colonized have become skillful at mimicking the logic, polity, structures, and certain forms of theology of the colonizers and are then turning it back towards the ‘empire.’ Sugi’s book on the Bible in the Third World maps wonderfully the complexity of colonial interactions with missionaries and the bible. Also, how can we find responses to the prosperity gospel that is taking over in Latin America and Africa? A missionary logic that combines Western economics with Western lower class spirituality. A tempting and problematic mix. “That is the faith you brought us” needs to be detailed: Who brought the faith and how did they teach it, transmit it, and - how is it received, filtered, amended, applied in the new context. Need to recognize and take responsibility for the contextuality of all forms of mission and faith.

³⁰ Theologians that have engaged in these questions are John Cobb (Methodist), Ian Douglas, Kwok Pui Lan, Christopher Duraisingh (Anglican), among other. See Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 56.

Remembering those forms of hybridity could help to honor other forms of diversity as they clamor for entrance.

Challenges for the future: How to live the tension between mission and decolonization? Anglicans concerned about the past, present and future of a colonial church who has been in collusion with the British empire in the spreading of Western religion and Western culture around the world tend to disavow a mission and often leave missionary efforts to more missionary oriented Anglicans who harbor less suspicion about cultural imperialism unless it fits their agenda.³¹ What I would hope to see is that many Anglicans begin to think self-critically both about mission and about cultural imperialism, and negotiate them in tension with each other. The extremes we have been seeing up until now: progressives disinvolved and dismissive of mission but passionately self-critical up until a self-defeating paralysis, conservatives uncritically passionate about mission, without taking into account the realities and dangers of cultural imperialism in missionary efforts, are not sufficient for an adequate, complex response to the challenges of churches wrestling with addressing the realities of post-colonial existence. How to define mission in a context that must also be aware and respond to current neo-imperialist globalisms that function to feed a U.S. consumer capitalist economy is a highly critical moment. This definition of mission must include how Anglicans/Episcopalians live at home and abroad. The connections and the exploitations can no longer be denied. Defining and living a mission that embraces both spiritual nurturing and social justice.³²

³¹. See, for example, the accusations brought by some of those who oppose the confirmation of Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire of cultural imperialism of the American church. This “unilateral action” was described as an act of imperialism, just as the Iraq war. However, the same people were not particularly vocal in opposing the preemptive strikes against Iraq and apply little thought to the cultural imperialism that is involved in their own efforts at “spreading the gospel” around the world along with a particular theology that is inculturated in a conservative U.S. culture, that carries a particular cultural, and yes, potentially imperialist charge.

³². Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 3,6, 10.

Furthermore, how can we negotiate the ambivalence of the particular British slant on episcopal hierarchy and church polity, as the imperial structure is reflected, for better and for worse, in the ecclesial hierarchy. What was and is the interaction between native and imperial structures of patriarchal leadership? How have particular cultural renderings of Christianity influenced the interpretation of the Bible?³³ What is happening when voices from former missionary churches are calling for a more legislative and binding function of the Lambeth conference in order to press certain conservative issues?

The new canons of the ECUSA ask that priests be proficient in a language/culture other than their native own. Even so it seemed that while the struggle for the inclusion of sexual minorities in the Episcopal church was pushed forward significantly at this convention, the struggle for the furthering of ministries of ethnic minorities received far less attention, and at least at this point, has experienced a personnel setback. A sign of hope for worldwide mission is the report prepared for the GC entitled “Companions in Transformation” which aims to address and amend the problems of colonialist missions. Progressives among Episcopalians have trouble articulating a sense of mission, they find it hard to negotiate mission with a critique of empire. But ‘hands off’ is not an option, since it is way too late for that. It now it a matter of what engagement in mission looks like and there, too, we need to talk beyond the lines of conservative and progressive, about how various forms of power have structured and continue to structure faith, party lines, cultural controversies.

A Common Fight Against the Growing Threat of AIDS worldwide:

The Episcopal Church, because of its strong presence in Africa where AIDS is raging worse than pestilence ever did, eliminating entire congregations, has had global AIDS on its mind for quite some time now. It continues to call the church to remembering its sisters and

³³. See Sugi’s *The Bible in the Third World*.

brothers at home and abroad in the struggle against AIDS. When we talk about infectious diseases like malaria and AIDS, we think we're only talking about human issues, but these infections can travel also because of the way in which environments are destroyed, (malaria esp. spreads when humans live in too close proximity with farm animals, i.e. in slums, and cramped quarters. destruction of environment that leads to people moving to slums, all that goes hand in hand. If we believe that our calling as it comes to us in this particular *kairos* is not only to care for the so-called spiritual needs of our fellow humans, but also to see their bodies and spirits as integral to each other, then this must be on top of our list, and not just in words, it must transpire into our actions. Spiritual environmental action can also enliven the ministries of our parishes, bring youth back into the church, engage many who are not generally found in churches. that is, this is not only our calling, but it can also help fill our churches. We need to be able to make sensible and strong links between spiritual nourishing and environmental action. They should be hand in hand, strengthening each other, rather than the one go at the cost of the other. We have seen that in the later phases of the social gospel, and that led to an unfortunate split between society and spirituality, some of which turned into the opposite of what was initially intended.

A Common Opposition Against Preemptive War and US-Unilateralism:

The spokespersons of both churches spoke out against the war on Iraq, sometimes more clearly than others. Both share a commitment to peace in the Middle East, in Africa, and are committed ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. What is needed in these efforts is great wisdom and clarity, a sound, intelligent and deep analysis of the contexts and histories, beyond the cooptation of progressive, postmodern and postcolonial concepts such as “cultural imperialism” for conservative agendas.³⁴ We need more honest, self-critical, and open

³⁴. As seen at IRD booth which tried to mark its “defense of marriage” as a concern for social justice. Likewise, arguments against Gene Robinson’s confirmation were laced with language that invoked postcolonial theory, i.e. the claim that it constitutes an act of cultural imperialism.

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conversations of what constitutes a necessary expression of mission of a Christian community and what constitutes problematic instances of cultural imperialism if we want to move beyond the short-sighted accusations and designations of blame that ultimately only serve to separate and polarize.

This is the extent of my deliberations so far. They are meant as no more than a preliminary vision of what might be points of interaction for the future. I would like to thank the committee for inviting me, and for allowing me to contribute to its work.

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