

# The Measure of A Bishop: The *Episcopi Vagantes*, Apostolic Succession, and the Legitimacy of the Anglican “Continuing Church” Movement.

By Eric A. Badertscher.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Division of Christian Thought in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Church History. September 1998

The author has granted permission for this online reproduction, which may be used for educational purposes only. He retains the copyright.

## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

GLOSSARY

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABSTRACT

## Literature Review

1. Introduction: Everyone Is Someone’s Schismatic
2. Background of the “Continuing Church” Movement
3. The Biblical Witness to the Office of Bishop, and to the Work of God in General
4. Historical Overview of the *Episcopi Vagantes* and the *Ξορεπισχοποι*
5. Doctrines of Apostolic Succession
6. The Irony of the Anglican Position Toward the *Vagantes*
7. Conclusions

## Appendix

1. A List of Some Autocephalous Churches

Badertscher,, *The Measure of a Bishop*

2. The Text of the “Affirmation of St. Louis”
3. Chronology of the “Continuing Church” Movement and Its Predecessors

SOURCES CONSULTED

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like a good cup of coffee, the idea for this thesis took its time in percolating. In fact, the idea originated and took shape over many church coffee-hours at Saint Charles-the-Martyr Parish in Crownsville, Maryland, one of the “Continuing Anglican” churches discussed herein. While setting forth the history of the Continuing Church movement, my coffee-drinking fellow parishioners often used the phrase “*episcopi vagantes*.” These “wandering bishops,” dubious, schismatic personages who strayed into other bishops’ jurisdictions, were somehow connected to the movement, yet no one wanted to claim them. The problem was, however, that in the eyes of the Episcopal Church the “Continuers” themselves were schismatics who, like the *vagantes*, had with invalid ministries because of invalid episcopal consecrations. Here was a mystery worth the riddling out!

I would like, therefore, to thank all the good folk at St. Charles-the-Martyr who started me on the path which led to this thesis. In particular I would like to thank the rector, the Right Reverend Peter Caputo, a bishop of the Traditional Episcopal Church; the Reverend Mr. Alan Kent; Jim Finnerty; and St. Charles’ curate the Reverend George Clark. Bishop Caputo was especially kind in providing me with much written material on the Continuing Church, and giving encouragement along the way.

I would also like to thank Ms. Auburn Faber Traycik, editor of the magazine *The Christian Challenge* (“the only worldwide voice of traditional Anglicanism”), for providing me with numerous back issues of *The Challenge* as well as suggestions for further research sources. In many respects, this journal has been the most valuable source for current information on the Continuing Church; it is also the only place (excluding the World Wide Web) where I have been able to find a copy of the “Affirmation of St. Louis,” the movement’s foundational document.

In light of the fact that several of the Continuing Churches never responded to my queries, the extraordinary help given by two traditionalist jurisdictions stands out in my mind. The Right Reverend Robert Mercer, head bishop of the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada, was *extremely* gracious. Not only did he send pamphlets and newsletters, but he sent me without charge several historical accounts published by the denominational press. The biography of Bishop Carmino de Catanzaro, the ACCC’s first bishop, has proved invaluable. The Anglican Orthodox Church, under Presiding Bishop the Right Reverend Robert J. Godfrey, also proved very gracious. The church’s headquarters sent me biographical information on the late Bishop James Parker Dees, the founder of the AOC, as well as some of Dees’ own works.

I would also like to thank Dr. Garth Rosell, my thesis adviser, and Dr. Royce Gruenler, my second reader. Dr. Rosell has encouraged me not only during the present work, but urged me to consider ways to develop this thesis into a doctoral dissertation. Dr. Gruenler, a graduate of the Reformed Episcopal Seminary in

Philadelphia, brings to his reading of this work an understanding of that particular dissent from the Episcopal Church.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank my parents, Ken and Nancy Badertscher, and my grandmothers, Dorothy Moffett and Hilda Badertscher, for their strong financial, emotional, and spiritual support of my theological education at Gordon-Conwell. My goals have changed since I first arrived in South Hamilton; originally, I came to obtain the M.Div. degree, so that I might be ordained as a pastor in the Continuing Church. As God has worked in my life over the past five years, I now sense my call to be the teaching of church history. Throughout this journey, my family has given its strong support of what I sensed to be God's call.

Most especially, I want to thank my wife, Nancy, for her grace and patience as a "thesis widow" over the past year. Her love and encouragement have helped me to "muddle through" with research and writing, even when I was brain-weary at the end of semesters. She has also helped to proofread the work both for style and content; and her Baptist-trained eyes have helped to clarify points which for non-Anglicans were needlessly obscure.

And though I owe so much to so many in the creation of this thesis, the thanks go ultimately to the Lord God, who has brought me thus far and continues to keep me in His hands. It is with reverence that I submit this work to Him as a workman not ashamed of his handiwork; with His help, I pray that I may have illuminated this corner of church history.

## GLOSSARY

**Anglican Communion.** As defined by the 1930 Lambeth Conference, a fellowship of duly

constituted dioceses, provinces, or regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, England. Their common characteristics are: 1) use of a version of the Book of Common Prayer as their expression of faith and order; 2) existence as particular or national Churches, which seek to promote a national expression of Christian faith, life, and worship; and 3) being bound together by mutual loyalty sustained through the common council of bishops in conference, rather than by a central legislative and executive authority.

**Congress of St. Louis.** The name commonly given to the Congress of Concerned Churchmen held in St. Louis, Missouri in September, 1977. Held under the auspices of the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen, this was a watershed event which led to the departure of many persons from the Episcopal Church and the formation of many so-called “Continuing Church” groups.

**Continuing Church, or Continuum.** The churches which in the 1960’s and 1970’s were

formed by dissenters from the Anglican Communion, in opposition to issues such as the ordination of women, the “social gospel,” liturgical revision, and denial of basic doctrines such as the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. Many of these churches were formed following the 1977 Congress of Concerned Churchmen, held in St. Louis, Missouri. They call themselves “Continuing” because they came out of established Anglicanism and intended no innovations; they merely sought to continue that which already existed.

**Episcopal Church.** The member Church of the Anglican Communion which was established in

1789 as “the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.” Although the longer name remains the official designation, the Church’s legislative body, the General Convention, authorized the shorter title in 1967 as an alternative form. In 1976, the Convention amended the declaration of conformity required of clergy (article viii) of the Church’s constitution) to use this shorter title. When capitalized and standing alone, the adjective and

noun “Episcopalian” refer to persons and things connected with the Protestant Episcopal Church.

***Episcopi vagantes* (s., *episcopus vagans*).** Latin for “itinerant bishops.” Historically, bishops with no fixed jurisdiction. The modern definition is that held by the Anglican Communion, meaning persons who have been consecrated bishop in an irregular or clandestine manner, and who are not in communion with any recognized see. Many of these bishops have extremely small followings.

**Historic Episcopate.** A term found in the Anglican Communion's Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which is synonymous with the term “Apostolic Succession of Bishops.” It refers to “apostolic succession” in the sense of a chain of unbroken episcopal ordinations from the time of the apostles (the first bishops) to the present day.

**Lambeth Conferences.** The decennial gatherings of Anglican bishops from around the world,

hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Though the conferences have no binding authority over the various Anglican Churches, decisions made there have great moral force. In a similar way, the Archbishop of Canterbury (who presides over the conferences) has a premier place in prestige, but not in executive power.

**Non-Jurors.** The name given to the members of the Church of England and the Scottish

Episcopal Church who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to William and Mary after England's “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. Six English bishops, all the Scottish bishops, and about 400 English clergy felt bound to their oath to the deposed King James II, and so were deposed in 1690. These bishops and clergy set up their own denomination, High Church in doctrine and order, including a high view of the “Historic Episcopate” (see above). The movement died out in 1805.

**Old Catholics.** A movement in the German-speaking lands of Europe which rejected the First

Vatican Council's (1870) declaration of the dogma of papal infallibility. The founders, including the historian and theologian J.J.I. von Döllinger (1799-1890), founded Catholic churches not in communion with Rome. The separatists claimed that Rome had created a new church through decrees

such as those of the Vatican Council—hence, their self-designation as “Old Catholics.” The Anglicans have been close to the Old Catholics since the beginning of the movement. In 1925, the Old Catholics recognized Anglican ordinations; they later obtained full communion with the Church of England (in 1932), and most of the other Anglican churches.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Anglican Church in America
ACC	Anglican Catholic Church
ACNA	Anglican Church in North America
AEC	American Episcopal Church
AECNA	Anglican Episcopal Church of North America
AOC	Anglican Orthodox Church
APCK	Anglican Province of Christ the King (see also DCK)
CESA	Church of England in South Africa
DCK	Diocese of Christ the King (see also APCK)
ECUSA PECUSA)	Episcopal Church in the United States of America (see also
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ESA	Episcopal Synod of America
FCT	Foundation for Christian Theology
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LED	Lutheran Episcopal Dialogues
MDA	Missionary Diocese of the Americas
ICCEC	International Communion of Charismatic Episcopal Churches
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
OCCA	Orthodox Catholic Church of America



<i>ODCC</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church (USA)
PECUSA	Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (see also ECUSA)
REC	Reformed Episcopal Church
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SSJE	Society of St. John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers)
TAC	Traditional Anglican Communion
<i>TCC</i>	<i>The Christian Challenge</i>
TEC	Traditional Episcopal Church
UCC	United Church of Christ
UECNA	United Episcopal Church of North America

## **ABSTRACT**

Many within the Anglican Communion have criticized the validity of Holy Orders in separatist Anglican denominations known collectively as the “Continuing Church.” Specifically, those in the mainstream church have charged that the separatists lack validly ordained clergy because some of the ordaining bishops are outside the so-called apostolic succession of bishops (also known as the “Historic Episcopate.”) The reasons why the Anglican Communion considers these men to lack the Apostolic Succession, are: a) they are “schismatic” for breaking with the existing church, and b) they trace their episcopal lineage from bishops known as *episcopi vagantes* (“wandering bishops.”)

Using the triple witness of Scripture, history, and Anglican canon law, this study concludes that the separatists do indeed possess valid Holy Orders, though the ministers themselves may not show much if any fruit in their Christian lives.