

Sorted Out

By John M. Campbell

For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians, by The Rev. Allen C. Guelzo, Ph.D. (The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA 1994 404 pages)

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If you'd like to understand the Anglican cedar in America, as well as the Reformed Episcopal twig of it, read this brilliantly researched, engagingly written book by the Rev. Dr. Alan Carl Guelzo. Dr. Guelzo is the former academic dean of Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia, where he taught apologetics and church history. While there he was a voice for the “New School” RE's, if you will, who seek to re-establish the evangelical, reformed, Anglican identity the REC was founded to perpetuate. This book recounts that original vision, what made it necessary, our forgetfulness, and our remembrance.

A Movable Reformation

The REC was begun with a dual vision: to reestablish and protect the religion of the English Reformation on these shores, and to make it a grand, umbrageous haven for evangelicals of every stripe, who could retire to the safety of doctrinal conservatism behind discreet episcopal protection. Guelzo derived the subtitle of the book, *The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians*, from modernist Lutheran gadfly Martin Marty's observation that ecumenical outcomes are often unforeseen, even opposed to the goals and ideals of the participants, Hence irony, a fitter word to describe RE history better than which I cannot conceive.

On the surface, the Reformed Episcopal schism of 1873 was the culmination of an internecine battle between two factions within the Protestant Episcopal Church—the Evangelicals and the Anglo-Catholics—each wanting desperately to direct her future. Beneath that surface... however, the differences that polarized these factions represented deep-seated tensions and anxieties that permeated American culture. The Reformed Episcopalians were at the center of a fierce

struggle between the rationalist impulse of the Evangelical mind in the nineteenth century... and the Gothic Romanticism of the Anglo-Catholics, between classical Protestant dogma and gaudy Catholic ritual, and between the symbols of Whig republicanism and the ambiguous antimodernism of an industrial consumer culture (p. 3).

The making of sausage comes to mind. Guelzo deftly points out that those in the modern day Episcopal Church in the USA who view the REC as a schism are remiss, due to the simple fact that ECUSA stands for nothing, therefore it would be hard to determine just exactly what we are in schism *with*.

It is sometimes hard to tell why a man might choose one tradition over another. From the beginning of the English Reformation, which was often as much a political settlement as a religious one, there were those within the Church of England who were as different as night and day, and yet were still considered good C of E men. There were

High Churchman, who rejoiced in their Englishness and in all the trappings of episcopacy, liturgy, and ceremony that went with being part of the Church of England. At the other end were those whom we even more often call Puritans, who viewed their church as parochial, suspecting that all the elaborate justifications of episcopacy they had been raised on were little more than strained efforts to make a religious virtue out of a political necessity (p. 5).

Amer-Anglican Formation

Guelzo has some remarkable insights into the peculiarly American brand of Anglicanism that developed here. He demonstrates that political settlements were not something endemic only to the Church of England in England. The development of the theory and practice of American episcopacy was a synthesis of Whig conservatism and Jacksonian republicanism, and this is perhaps the most valuable insight he offers in examining the background and development of the Protestant Episcopal Church (pages 46-49), describing the rationalist/romantic tension cited above.

He quotes another historian about how it was—and remains—a mistake to confuse American episcopacy with the Church of England brand (page 48), and demonstrates how the centralizing tendencies in the northern states prior to Mr. Lincoln's War can be attributed to the rejection of Baptist localism, tempered by revulsion for “Episcopal monarchicalism”. There were enough Episcopalians in government in the North, notables like Salmon Chase, to introduce a thesis of reciprocal influence between church and civil government in the northern states, but he doesn't mention that there were a few notable Episcopalians in the South, like Robert E. Lee, confirmed in 1856, and Jefferson Davis, confirmed in 1864, who made mature decisions to embrace Episcopalianism, and yet went to their graves convinced of the rightness of localism, otherwise known as States' Rights. I would have liked to have seen this given some

consideration, but I heard Guelzo refer to these gentlemen as “traitors” more than once in his history class, so I need not guess where that would have gone.

Guelzo takes us on a tour of the consecrations of America's first Episcopal bishops, which is also the story of how and why "romanizing germs" found their way into the Protestant Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer, which is more "Catholic" than the English book of 1662, which is still in use in England, and is basically the book of the REC today.

It was impossible for Samuel Seabury, a former chaplain in Washington's army, to swear allegiance to George III (titular head of the Church of England) in order to be consecrated bishop, and hope ever to re-enter Congregational Connecticut. So he went from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who demanded such an oath, to the "non-juring" bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church for his consecration to the episcopacy. Non-juring (non-swearing) Scottish bishops who, having taken the Oath of Supremacy to the deposed papist King James II, refused to pledge allegiance to William of Orange so long as James was alive. From Guelzo, with characteristic wit:

In 1689, William III, to please his Presbyterian subjects in Scotland, as well as to stick another thorn into English High Church flesh, disestablished the Scottish Episcopal Church and replaced it with the Presbyterian Kirk. The Scottish Episcopalians had developed too high a notion of episcopal grandeur to accept being shut down by a mere king, and so they clung to a forlorn existence of their own as the so-called Non-jurors. Disowned by the Anglican establishment in England, they had nevertheless maintained a clear line of succession in their bishops, and when in 1784 the Scottish primus, Robert Kilgore, learned of the plight of Samuel Seabury, Kilgore concluded that the opportunity to strike a bargain was at hand, page 29.

The bargain was bought, which was this: “We'll consecrate you bishop if you make the American prayer book a little more Catholic than the 1662 book. We'd like the Oblation and Invocation we use included after the consecration of the Eucharist if you please, as well as a reference to and prayer for the church triumphant. Then, you can be consecrated.”

Seabury continued the non-jurors' line of succession in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the non-jurors themselves were reorganized by the Church of England and exist today as the Scottish Episcopal Church (and are ordaining women by the way). Ironically, William White, the low church rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, occasional pastor to George Washington, was consecrated February 4, 1787 by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself after the Supremacy Oath was abolished for foreign Church of England jurisdictions. White was very Low-Church, suspected of mild Arianism and universalism, but by the turn of the century these were venial sins in Philadelphia, because “Philadelphia Episcopalianism had a distinct flavor of genteel latitudinarianism to it... far from the polemical battlefields of new England,” (p.25).

White's Philadelphia was a cosmopolitan and tolerant place. No one was prepared to fight for his low-churchmanship, since there was less to define it by and hence, less to fight for. But the Low-Church/High-Church eggs were now a-hatching, a development that would define Episcopalian churchmanship until the middle of the nineteenth-century in the United States when a third ingredient was added. White had one-upped Seabury, but he too had made a concession for his consecration; he retained the Nicene Creed and the clause, "He descended into hell", in his American proposed prayer book, which he had done away with in his own revision: another political settlement for the church to live with. But "[b]y all the standards Seabury held dear, White's consecration was incontestably valid, whereas Seabury's was at best irregular and at worst fraudulent (p. 31)."

Ironic, that the Low-Churchmen would provide the church with what would appear to be the more valid orders vis-a-vis apostolic succession, for those who care about such things. In many instances, White's Reformed Episcopal heirs could have cared less. What the evangelicals came to be was, as Guelzo put it in an article in *The Christian Challenge* some years ago, "one big, black-gown parish", with central pulpits and honest wooden communion tables, with church interiors largely indistinguishable from Presbyterians', and a fervor for evangelism and Scripture unrivaled on this continent.

Rome via Oxford

While all of this was playing out in America, some Church of England priests and scholars were blaming England's social problems on the Reformation, and were urging a return to pre-Reformation Christianity where everyone behaved himself. Their tracts began to emanate from Oxford University (hence, the "Oxford" or "Tractarian Movement"), advocating a return to primitive Christianity and the abandonment of Reformation principles, practices and doctrines. The problem with this approach to social reform was, among other things, they confused the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church with primitive Christianity. But it wasn't even pre-Reformation Christianity to which they were casting a yearning eye (except for reading the Ante-Nicene Fathers), but the Church of Rome of their day. The excesses of the Rome of the mid-1800's dwarfed anything Martin Luther could have nightmared, so this movement was not exactly embraced in evangelical circles on these shores when it began to migrate hence. (Believe me, Guelzo makes all this read like cloak and dagger stuff, and holds the reader's interest while less gifted communicators would have had us turning off the bed stand light by now.)

Innovations

In reaction to Anglo-Catholic/Tractarian influences, the evangelical low-

churchmen began to change the liturgy ad hoc to reflect *their* distaste of what some words had come to mean in some quarters after the importation of romanist definitions for them. For instance, some began to remove the word “regenerate” from the baptismal service (“seeing that this child/person is regenerate...”), because the Anglo-Catholics were teaching that regeneration meant salvation, as opposed to being engrafted into the body of Christ, as a means of grace, as e.g. Westminster divine George Gillespie or John Calvin had taught.

The key to understanding the rest of the book, and therefor the Reformed Episcopal Church's formation, is this: The evangelical innovations were met with a much different reaction from the High Church bishops than were the Anglo-Catholics' innovations, which included the introduction of papist lingo and ceremony, including the pushing of communion tables against their chancel walls to serve as sacrificial altars, a development hitherto unheard of in American Episcopal tradition. This unequal treatment was not simply the High-Churchmen's embrace of the Anglo-Catholics; it was the beginning of the persecution of the Low-Church faction through the introduction of prelacy.

Most Reformed people confuse prelacy with episcopacy, which is a grave error. A bad moderator can be as destructive as a bad bishop, while a good man can be wise and pastoral in either office. There is goofiness and heresy abounding among the “independent, fundamentalist” churches today that got their errors without the assistance of bishops. While few hard-core evangelicals would unchurch the Arminian, dispensationalist, baptistic independent down the street, some barely consider Episcopalians Christian at all, even if they wear out their copies of Calvin's Institutes every two years. Americans are more forgiving of doctrinal error than of power plays, so the idea of a bishop telling us what to do or believe is scarier than sitting under the ramblings of an unordained independent preacher, even if we strongly disagree with him.

Be that as it may, the evangelicals in the Episcopal Church were now about to experience real prelacy, the old fashioned pre-Reformation type. For instance, the High Church faction refused to accept the resignation of Bishop Smith of Kentucky when he retired to Hoboken, New Jersey, and even granted him a waiver to reside outside his diocese, in order that his evangelical, Low-Church assistant, George David Cummins, might be kept from succeeding him, the kind of prelatic trickery characteristic of the abuses the Reformers fought in the sixteenth century. But it was the response to prelacy, not its imposition, that became headline news in its day, just as in the sixteenth century.

Bishop Cummins, to cut to the chase, participated in an ecumenical communion service at a conference of the Evangelical Alliance at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, along with Presbyterians and Methodists, not to mention the Dean of Canterbury. Dean Smith was subsequently pilloried in the New York Tribune by William George Tozer, “late Bishop of Zanzibar”, in an open letter to the bishop of New York, for fraternizing with unwashed sectarians and conducting episcopal duties within a diocese other than his own without the permission of the Bishop of New York, Horatio Potter

(page 129).

Suspensions abounded, however, that it was Potter who put Tozer up to this letter, hoping that Cummins would get hit by the blunderbuss aimed at Dean Smith, since Cummins had been pushing for prayer book revision to excise the last vestiges of romanism, real or imagined, from the liturgy and services. To shorten this significantly, Cummins left the church rather than face censure or worse, consecrated another embattled Low Church presbyter Charles Edward Cheney as bishop, and founded the Reformed Episcopal Church in December, 1873.

The rally around evangelical Episcopalianism Cummins had hoped for never occurred, though. What the REC devolved into over the course of the next few decades was a Cave of Adullam for all of the disgruntled Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and others who largely defined conservatism by adherence to the Scofield Reference Bible notes, which Reformed Episcopalians James Gray and Arno Gaebelein helped produce, for which God has only recently forgiven us. RE Bishop Culbertson headed the Moody Bible Institute for a while: you get the picture. Who among the staid and stodgy ranks of Episcopalianism would be attracted to this gaggle?

The High-Church Christ was kind of frosty and rationalistic. The Low-Church Christ preached fire and brimstone, which is hard to squeeze in among all of that liturgy. But the Anglo-Catholic Christ was tangible (at least allegedly) in the bread and wine, and adorable in the beauty of the nave and sanctuary (see p. 102 &f). Besides, you could get all misty and sentimental in church and forget that you were not paying your workers a livable wage. The Low-Churchmen were more or less the working-class Episcopalians, and Cummins wanted to go lower than they already were, so social stigma was there to consider as well. The differences between the High and Dry became less and less distinguishable with the Anglo-Catholics, Holy Scripture rarely having been the rallying-cry for either.

Ecclesiastically, the REC came to be seen by Presbyterians and Episcopalians alike (their two closest cousins) as an anachronism; were they Presbyterians with a prayer book, or Episcopalians embarrassed by a prayer book, and vestments, and even bishops?

It remains a source of amazement that within the mainline Episcopal Church there are clergymen and laymen alike who both love Jesus and the Bible, yet remain in a church where women and sodomists are routinely ordained, where one diocese couldn't pass a resolution a few years ago affirming that Jesus was the Savior, and so on. They have drawn so many lines in the sand that they look like they're standing in the end zone looking out through the ear hole of their helmets, having just been tackled for a tenth safety in ten possessions. They continue to voice "outrage" over every new outrage, from modernistic prayer book revision to the ordination of women and sex-perverts and prayers to non-existent deities, ever inventing new campaigns and strategies to "take back the helm of the church", while it continues to drift further from shore with them locked safely in the brig. The irony of it all is that the ones who have left recently, beginning in 1977

and following, are largely the heirs of the “papists” that were happy to see Cummins et al leave in 1873!

At any rate, what could seem dusty and parochial is told in a way that will interest the reader unfamiliar with the REC, or Episcopalianism for that matter, simply because Guelzo is unmatched as a storyteller. It was a joy to read for me personally, so much so that I recommended the book to many friends before I was finished. But that was a mistake, which I only realized upon reading the epilogue.

A man that studieth revenge

Guelzo takes great pains throughout to keep to his theme that the REC was begun “for the union of evangelical Christendom”, and ends the book judging her success or failure by her adherence to this standard. He jumps carefully from rock to rock in the REC's ecumenical stream, maintaining his sure-footedness until the epilogue.

The Reformed Episcopal Church has been involved in any number of missionary societies, church alliances, and so on. We went into the American south and founded a missionary jurisdiction among the blacks with which the Episcopal Church wanted nothing to do. We have a sister church in Canada and one in England, the latter of which was unfortunately headed by a lunatic, so that relationship was poisoned from the jump. But the scope and interests of the REC were from the beginning wide, even international and groundbreaking. Our oldest mission, e.g., is in India.

For better or worse, we were also actively involved in the early days of the Federal Council of Churches, and there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the FCC in the REC, recounted in this book by quotes from those involved as both participants and cheerleaders. Guelzo laments the theological liberalism of the FCC which drove the REC away in 1945 (page 332), but he amazes us with the declaration that, “The great age of ecumenical endeavor in the Reformed Episcopal Church was over, and with it the most important reason for the existence of the Reformed Episcopal Church.”

He could have reported that the FCC was shortly thereafter exposed as a Communist front operation by Congress, closing only long enough to re-emerge as the National Council of Churches. I for one think it was a good thing that the RE wagon was unhitched from an agent of Muscovite Communism. I hardly see this fifty year-old divorce as the end of our reason for being.

The REC is now a member of the National Association of Evangelicals. Does this count for nothing? Our *raison d'etre* is called into question because we left the FCC, yet Guelzo leaves our affiliation with the NAE in the dark. Although there are other confederations with which we might more profitably plight our troth, the NAE is still better than the FCC/NCC if one thinks we should do something ecumenical to remain faithful to Bishop Cummins' vision. If the REC exists to promote ecumenism at any cost, then she is doing so in uniting with the NAE. But it seems that Guelzo is bent on writing

the obituary of the REC, and therefore must allege that the reason we exist is to be ecumenical, which is of course partly true, but our main purpose is to be the Reformed Episcopal Church, not the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

He writes on page 335, “With the closing of the Reformed Episcopal seminary's historic buildings in Philadelphia in 1993, the pool of... leadership will only get smaller.” But Reformed Episcopal Seminary has only moved across town, thank you. She now reposes in Blue Bell, PA. I see how reporting that the historic building's closing could be used to craft inferences, but I don't see how this will necessarily lead to a shrinkage of the pool of leadership, especially in light of the fact that these buildings closed nearly twenty years ago. The building that closed in 1993 was only in use for ten years, and the dorm was the only part of the “historic buildings” in use then.

Dr. Guelzo, as mentioned earlier, was formerly employed at Reformed Episcopal Seminary. One would never learn that from reading the book since it is never stated, though one is free to wonder why. He left when the seminary hired the REC's Archdeacon of Texas, the Rev. Dr. Ray R. Sutton, as president, and forced out the neo-evangelical former president, David Schroder, last seen at the Christian and Missionary Alliance's school in Nyack, New York, where we hope he doesn't do as much damage as he did at Reformed Episcopal Seminary in his two years there. Guelzo dedicated the book to him, saying, “For David, who fled from Saul to the mountains...” We still wonder who played the role of Saul in Guelzo's mind. The seminary in Philadelphia is now in the capable hands of the Rev. Dr. Wayne Headman, by the way.

Guelzo was publicly fearful before he left that the seminary, let alone the denomination, was adopting Christian Reconstructionism despite many personal assurances that this was not the case. He was apparently more comfortable after leaving RE Seminary to be at Eastern College rubbing elbow patches with Tony Campolo and Ron Sider. His recent re-ordination in the apostate ECUSA is astonishing in light of his concern for catholicity in his allegation that we are being seduced by Reconstructionism, a false prophecy if ever there was one.

Bishop Sutton headed up our seminary in Shreveport, Louisiana until leaving to take a parish, and is firmly in place as a churchman and heir of the English Reformation by studied choice. He made that clear at the time of his acceptance into the REC's clergy role. He continues his repudiation of Reconstructionism. He has done nothing in over a decade to promote Reconstructionism, and the provost of the seminary even sent supporters and friends a circular in which Bishop Sutton's repudiation of Reconstructionism was stated.

Yet Guelzo sees fit to ignore this and to allege that the church has now blundered into the hopelessly splintered “Christian Reconstruction” camp. The REC, from his perch, “has groped wildly for a series of 'isms’—Calvinism, dispensationalism, and more recently, Christian Reconstructionism—less with a concern for how well these 'isms’ matched the reasons for their founding than with an urge to hitch the Reformed Episcopal

wagon to any vehicle that looked like [a] movement”, page 336. Coming from Guelzo this is like saying that we now worship trees. I have no information about whether Guelzo has received communion from Bishop Spong.

Alan Carl Guelzo was a leader in the REC's return to a more thorough, Reformed Anglicanism, and engaged in ecumenical contacts with conservatives within ECUSA. Did he feel that we were, at that time, “groping” for some “ism?” He mentions that at the founding meeting of the more or less conservative Episcopal Synod of America in 1989, they “welcomed a Reformed Episcopalian onto their platform”, page 334. He could have looked at his own driver's license to research that guy's identity, who was trying to hitch the RE wagon to the Episcopal Synod of America.

And so on and on. In order to review this book fully and to explain the epilogue to those to whom I've recommended it, I had to get into this messy 9th Commandment work, but I still recommend the book up to, but not including, the epilogue.

Now go on and read it, and know this about the REC today: We are Reformed and liturgical. We believe the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, fully inspired Word of the Triune God. We have no modernists, women, or sodomists among our clergy. We renew our anti-abortion resolution each General Council. We have, in the past fifteen years, begun to recapture the Episcopal part of our name, and are growing healthily now that we have sorted out our Anglican identity once and for all under the godly leadership of our current class of bishops. And you are welcome.