

**RE-MEMBERING AND RE-IMAGINING:  
ESSAYS ON THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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BY THE ECCLESIOLOGY COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

Second Edition, 2016

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## RE-MEMBERING AND RE-IMAGINING: ESSAYS ON THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### PREFACE

What is the Church? Is there one overall Church, or is one denomination or another the “true” Church? Who ought to run it, and how? Answering such questions is the field of study of ecclesiology. What is the local church, what is the Church universal, how are these constituted, and how do they live, are, among others, the basic questions that ecclesiologists ask. Further questions concern how the Church ought to be, as opposed merely to what it is.

These questions have always preoccupied Episcopalians, as they have all Christian churches. But they are particularly acute for us, who are confronting several challenges, and considering how to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances of our times.

A central issue is that of authority. From where does the Church get the right and power — the authority — to be and to do what she does? The answer is obvious: from God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. There are abundant biblical metaphors for this relationship, among them the “temple of the Spirit” and the “Body of Christ”. Christ is the head and chief cornerstone; we are the living stones that build up the temple. Christ is the Head of his Body, of which each of the baptized is a part, a member or limb.

Christ left power to his disciples to forgive sins, to make changes, to “bind and to loose.” And he has given commands to his Church, relayed through the Scriptures, to baptize, celebrate the Eucharist, to teach all he has taught us, to be witnesses to his Cross and Resurrection to the ends of the earth, and all this “not only with our lips, but in our lives.” Among these are, for example, feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoner, clothing the naked, healing the sick, standing up for the powerless, and freeing the victims of spiritual and physical oppression.

All of which is summed up in the earliest confession of faith: “Jesus is Lord” (I Cor. 12:3). In this sense, there is no question of authority: it is settled. However, the Church waits for the fulfillment of the mission of God in Christ, of which it is an instrument. “Christ has died, Christ is risen” has happened; “Christ will come again” has not. We are still in “the middle of time.”<sup>1</sup> And therefore we have had to organize our common life by our own means, though not without the guidance of the Spirit.

To whom does the Church give authority to build and run the institution that can guarantee in the short run the cure of souls, the work of building up the faithful here and now? And in the long run, see to the faithful transmission of all that Christ has taught us, as some 800 generations of Christians have handed down to us today?

Each of the thousands of Christian denominations has to answer these questions for itself, with each succeeding generation. Therefore ecclesiology has to develop a moving viewpoint, from the inception of the faith to today. There are several theological methods for defining authority in the Church that have developed over the centuries, basically associated with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Reformed Churches.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of a well-known commentary on Luke’s Gospel by Hanns Conzelmann: *Die Mitte der Zeit* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957). He analyses that gospel as a story developed to face the delay of the *parousia*, the return of Christ.

And the churches of the Anglican Communion. Within that Communion, indeed, at its origin outside the British Isles, is The Episcopal Church, based in the United States but also now present in sixteen other countries. The American Revolution wrenched the congregations of the Church of England in those colonies away from the mother church. The Episcopalians, as they were called then and now, had to organize themselves alone. The purpose of the present set of essays is to give some idea of the results of that effort, carried down to our day. For to consider the case of the Episcopal Church is not just a fascinating ecclesiological study. The question of authority in the Church, in particular, is as sharp as it ever has been in the life of our church today.

In order to organize its work, the Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops decided to write a *Primer* as a history on which to base its theological reflections. (It was issued separately in October 2013, and is intended to be used by itself as well as in tandem with these essays.) Then follow various articles, of varying length: The whole Church of Christ as image of the life of the Holy Trinity; how the idea of a church council came to be the central organizing principle for the Episcopal Church; what being “servants to one another” looks like in the political life of the church; and the roots of its concepts in the Scriptures and the early Church.

The Committee invites others who might wish to contribute their own articles. In this sense, it is a “Draft Report.” Interested persons should contact a member of the Committee.<sup>2</sup>

It is the Committee’s hope that this work will help further the cause of the first Episcopalians, as they considered how to live the Gospel in their dramatically changed circumstances. More importantly, we also hope that it will be of some use to the lay and ordained leaders of our church as they consider what our changing circumstances require of us now, in the middle of time.

The Rt. Rev. Pierre W. Whalon  
*March 2015*

*A resolution approved by the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church, March 17, 2015:*

***Resolved, that the House of Bishops receive the draft Report of its Ecclesiology Committee entitled "Re-membering and Re-imagining" in order that it may be released to the wider church for study and further development.***

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<sup>2</sup> The addition of new essays is subject to the approval of the whole Committee. Submissions should be in MS Word, presenting an argument amply referenced, following the Chicago Manual of Style.

## Preface to the Second Edition

Apart from the correction of small typos in the *Primer*, which is being released again separately, the major enlargement that this Second Edition of *Re-membering and Re-imagining: Essays on The Episcopal Church* makes is Bishop William Franklin's new essay, "Conciliarism and the ecclesiology of The Episcopal Church," replacing his previous effort of the same title that appeared in the 2015 edition. Bishop Franklin thought he had more to say, and indeed, this new essay gives the reader a much richer consideration of the idea that church councils should have final authority — generally referred to as "conciliarism."

As the overall argument of these essays is that the guiding principle of the way The Episcopal Church organizes its life is a conciliarist one, the new essay provides still more grounding both in the history and theology of conciliarism as it applies to our Church.

Since the release of the *Primer* in the fall of 2013, and the completion of the March 2015 edition of *Re-membering and Re-imagining*, there have been criticisms that this effort was principally intended to buttress legal arguments before secular American courts concerning property rights, as there have been several cases before U.S. courts concerning the ownership of church properties and endowments following a schism. While the authors are obviously not unaware of the situation as it has evolved around this country, what we have sought to do is first, to highlight the importance of new ecclesiological studies as a whole, and second, to try to clarify the ecclesiology of The Episcopal Church in particular. This is primarily theological work that cannot be subordinated to an *ad hoc* legal brief. Our Church has dioceses and congregations in sixteen other countries, after all, not just in the United States of America.

With Bishop Franklin's new essay, we have arguably strengthened the case that the General Convention is the highest authority in the hierarchy of the Church. No diocese has the power to contravene its decisions. Moreover, while its authority is supreme, that authority is limited to certain aspects of the common life of the Church.

The invitation to add to this collection of essays remains open to thinkers who want to address the issues it has raised. Besides adding to the present conversation, further work remains to be done in the matter of the fact that the General Convention can err. The ongoing need to re-imagine The Episcopal Church also requires asking what needs re-forming.

The January 2016 meeting of the Primates called for a "Task Group" whose work is, among other things, to be "recognising the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences."<sup>1</sup> The Ecclesiology Committee of the Episcopal House of Bishops hopes this renewed *Report* will be of some help toward this work, not just for the Group, but for the wider Communion, as well.

Bishop Pierre Whalon

January 2016

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<sup>1</sup> Addendum A to the January 2016 Primates' Communiqué, "Walking Together in the Service of God in the World". Accessed at <http://www.primates2016.org/articles/2016/01/15/communique-primates/>

# **A Primer on the government of The Episcopal Church and its underlying theology**

**offered by the**

## **Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops**

*Fall 2013 (revised March 2015, January 2016)*

The following is an introduction to how and why The Episcopal Church came to be, beginning in the United States of America, and how it seeks to continue in “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Rooted in the original expansion of the Christian faith, the Church developed a distinctive character in England, and further adapted that way of being Church for a new context in America after the Revolution. The Episcopal Church has long since grown beyond the borders of the United States, with dioceses in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador (Central and Litoral), Haiti, Honduras, Micronesia, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Venezuela and Curacao, and the Virgin Islands, along with a Convocation of churches in six countries in Europe. In all these places, Episcopalians have adapted for their local contexts the special heritage and mission passed down through the centuries in this particular part of the Body of Christ.

“Ecclesiology,” the study of the Church in the light of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, is the Church’s thinking and speaking about itself. It involves reflection upon several sources: New Testament images of the Church (of which there are several dozens); the history of the Church in general and that of particular branches within it; various creeds and confessional formulations; the structure of authority; the witness of saints; and the thoughts of theologians. Our understanding of the Church’s identity and purpose invariably intersects with and influences to a large extent how we speak about God, Christ, the Spirit, and ourselves in God’s work of redemption.

The study of the Church begins with history and governance: how it came to be and how it makes decisions. To understand how and why The Episcopal Church functions the way it does today, we must start with its origins in the Church of England. Many people continue to believe quite erroneously that King Henry VIII started his own church in order to get a divorce. The reality, however, is far richer and more complex.

### *In the Beginning...*

Our Episcopal roots extend back a long way. Indeed, one could say that the Episcopal ethos can be found at the very beginning of Christianity, in a city called Antioch. There, an “encouraging” newcomer-turned-church leader named Barnabas and his bold apprentice, Saul of Tarsus, helped form something connected to, but distinct from, the church in Jerusalem. In the latter, Peter and the other apostles preached and healed, but did so always in the shadow of the Jewish temple. Their group, “the Way,” as it was known, was an inspiring, Spirit-filled community, but it was still a Jewish sect and its leaders still went daily to the temple where sacrifices were made.

Antioch was something else entirely, where Greeks as well as Jews heard the Good News proclaimed and formed a faith community entirely separate from temple and sacrifices, an intentionally diverse yet unified community. It was in Antioch, not in Jerusalem, that the

disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11). And it was from Antioch that Barnabas and Saul (now Paul), a new breed of apostolic missionaries, were sent forth to plant communities of faith, love, and hope wherever they went. Again, these churches would be marked by diversity as well as unity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ.” (Gal. 3:28) It was rarely an easy task, for diversity is a nice word to say but a hard reality to appreciate. In places like Corinth, for example, the wealthier church members did not want to wait for those field workers and others on the lower socio-economic level before having their communal meal. The battle over recognizing the uncircumcised may now seem quaint, but then was quite grim.

Still, often despite its own infighting, the movement flourished. And what began there in one small part of the Mediterranean region soon spread throughout the Roman Empire, eventually reaching even the British Isles. Legend has it that no less a figure than Joseph of Arimathea, the follower of Jesus who donated his own tomb for the Crucified One’s burial, traveled to those Isles and planted the gospel, where it took root and grew. However they came, certainly by the year 314 there were Christians in Britain, as representatives from there attended the Council of Arles. There is an unproven tradition that British bishops also were at the Council of Nicaea in 325, from which emerged the Nicene Creed that is still proclaimed week after week in our churches.

Over two hundred and fifty years later, those same isles witnessed the arrival of a somewhat reluctant missionary-monk from Rome named Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory I (“the Great”). This Benedictine monk was to bring the faith to the land of the Angles, or “angels” as Gregory called them. Augustine set up his base in the southeastern region known as Kent, where Æthelbert was king, for there the faith was already in existence, his queen, Berthe, herself being a believer. But the faith he encountered there looked and felt different than that which was familiar to Augustine. It was a Celtic form of Christianity, not Roman. Augustine wrote to Gregory, sharing his concerns, asking how he might show those Celtic Christians the error of their ways and help them to be more Roman. Gregory’s reply evidences great wisdom as well as patience, urging Augustine to take the best of what he found, along with the best of what he brought with him, and worry less about the rest. Eventually, Roman ways would indeed win out, as prescribed at a synod or meeting in 664 in a northeastern town called Whitby, but Celtic ways and Celtic leaders would continue to influence Christianity in the Isles even as the Benedictine tradition that Augustine brought with him was also a strong formational factor of the character of the English Church. It is markedly hierarchical. Broadly participatory, yes, but ultimately, the Abbot makes the decisions. The Benedictine ethos certainly was a factor in how authority, discipline, and order were conceived and exercised in the Church of England.

Augustine thus became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Bishop Justin Welby’s enthronement on March 21, 2013, marks him the 105<sup>th</sup> Archbishop. Since the re-founding of the Christian Church in England, there has always been an Archbishop of Canterbury.

This fact, among other things, shows that the Church of England today is the direct heir of the Church in Britain, as it has existed more or less for 1900 years. What happened in the sixteenth century was not the founding of something new. In fact, Henry VIII’s assertion of his authority over his church stands in a long history of contention of European monarchs for control of the Church in their realms. (The idea that the Pope has universal ordinary jurisdiction over the Catholic Church in all the world is an idea that the Roman Catholic Church itself did not officially make its own until 1870.) The matter for Henry was not religious, theological, or ecclesiastical. It was purely a matter of governance and political power. Henry never rejected his designation as “Defender of the Faith” given him by Pope

Leo X in 1521, and it remains to this day one of the titles of the Crown. Nor did Henry (or any of his successors) repudiate the hierarchy of the Church or its liturgical practices, including the use of the Creeds and ordaining bishops in the historical succession.

After his death, the first Book of Common Prayer was published in 1549, and a second Book in 1552, while Henry's son Edward was king, reflecting the growing importance of doctrinal concerns to the Church. After Edward's early death, Henry's daughter Mary restored England to the Roman Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the Protestant Reformation and its wars were raging across the Continent, and this could not fail but influence events in England. When Henry's last child to take the throne, Elizabeth, became queen in 1558, conflict raged between returning Protestants exiled under Mary and Roman Catholics. After Pope Pius V excommunicated her in 1570, having failed to have her dislodged from the throne by force, Elizabeth laid the foundation of the modern Church of England, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as spiritual head and the Crown as the governor of the church's temporal existence. This "Elizabethan Settlement" no longer has a monarch by divine right in charge, but has endured to this day.

It should, however, be noted that the conflicts on the European continent and that in England were different, though clearly not unrelated. Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth mark the zenith of the Presbyterian experiment in the Church of England as well as in the realm. The experiment ultimately failed after much turmoil and bloodshed. The ecclesial and civil decision was for the Church of England to be a reformed *catholic* church as manifested in, and defined by, its liturgical and sacramental life. Its historical episcopal polity was restored. This restoration constitutes nothing other than a rejection of the Presbyterian model of polity and a permanent embracing of the catholic, hierarchical polity within the Church of England and, by extension, for the worldwide Anglican Communion, including The Episcopal Church. "Anglicanism" (a nineteenth-century word) includes these basic concepts, which are markers of this distinctive way of being Christian, alongside Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Reformed streams of Christianity.

An Episcopal priest named William Reed Huntington proposed in an 1870 essay a potential path toward reuniting churches especially divided after the American Civil War. He set forth four points that he called a "quadrilateral." These would form the basis on which the Episcopal Church could consider reuniting with other Christian bodies. In 1886, the House of Bishops meeting in Chicago approved Huntington's Quadrilateral, and two years later the Lambeth Conference endorsed it with minor changes. Remarkably, the "Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral" has become the touchstone of Anglican identity around the world, summing up as it does the essential features of an Anglican Church:

- (a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
- (b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
- (c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord — ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.
- (d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.



As the first extension of the Church of England beyond the British Isles, the development of The Episcopal Church clearly shows the importance of each of these points to 18-century Americans.

### *English Colonies become the United States of America*

Toward the end of Elizabeth's reign, English colonies in the Americas began to grow after several tentative starts. As people who rejected her "settlement", as it is known, began to cross the Atlantic in order to found what they hoped would be different churches, the Church of England colonists also started their own congregations. These congregations were deemed to be under the episcopal authority of the Bishop of London. With the help of missionary organizations founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the faithful in America significantly increased in numbers. Other colonists named them "Protestant Episcopalians" — Protestant because they did not recognize the authority of the Pope, Episcopalian because they were under the episcopal authority of a bishop.<sup>1</sup>

In some of the colonies, congregations sent representatives to occasional "conventions" in order to discuss matters of common concern. They were not legislative (today we might use the term "networking" to refer to these gatherings). London occasionally sent "commissaries" to oversee the life of the congregations in the colonies, or sometimes appointed the colonial governors to act as them, although these rarely intervened directly. Colonists could not be confirmed unless they traveled to England, for that Church never named a bishop of the American colonies. The SPG sent clergy to many colonies, and colonial churches recruited other clergy in England or found local men to send to England for ordination. By the time of the American Revolution, about half of the clergy were either born in the colonies or recruited for ordination there. Throughout most of the colonial period, the Bishop of London had nominal oversight of the colonial churches, but distance and the role colonial governments played in ordering church life made that oversight very different from that exercised by a Bishop in an English diocese.

As they were left to their own devices in terms of their local life, the American congregations enjoyed some leeway in ordering their own local affairs, including calling of clergy, erection of buildings, and so forth. Despite the often *ad hoc* development of these congregations over time and in different parts of the country, there was never any question that they all belonged to one Church, indeed, one diocese, under the jurisdiction and authority of the Church of England.

In 1781, the American Revolution was successful in throwing off the rule of the English Crown with the shocking defeats of the British Army and Navy at Yorktown and Chesapeake Bay. The war ended officially in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris. For many Episcopalians, this was a disaster. Many of the clergy left for Canada or England, along with some laity, and those left behind were no longer part of the established Church. Many church buildings, formerly property of the Crown,<sup>2</sup> lay in ruins. The situation was somewhat different in Virginia, where many of its Church of England clergy had taken the American side. Death and dislocation, however, further reduced the ranks of the clergy. Some left the ministry for

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<sup>1</sup> The first use of the term seems to be in a polemic by M. de la Milletiere in 1651, to which Bishop John Bramhall replied. See *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, John Bramhall, D.D.*, vol.1 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1842), p. cxxviii (accessed July 26, 2013 at <http://archive.org/stream/bramhallsworks01bramuoft#page/n169/mode/2up>

<sup>2</sup> Even today, the properties of the Church of England belong in the final analysis to the Crown, that is to say, not just the monarch but also Parliament.

secular employment, and for nine years Americans had no way to ordain new clergy. The loss of support from the SPG left Episcopal congregations struggling to find new sources of funding.

On the other hand, those remaining were also proud to be now “Americans.” A new nation had been born from the struggle. No longer were the laity and clergy part of an official church of the land. Now they needed to adapt the church structure and polity to fit an ethnically and religiously diverse nation that had embraced representative government.

### *Keeping the Faith... and Order*

Just as the Church of England became “Anglican” principally by political struggles as well as doctrinal developments, so too The Episcopal Church developed after a political revolution. As new leaders emerged to address the situation, they realized immediately the need to adapt the Church they had inherited to the new realities. In meetings between 1782 and 1785, when the first Convention met, it became clear that there was agreement on some basic points.

The first was that the Episcopalians wanted as much continuity as possible with the Church of England. There were to be no innovations in doctrine, and there needed to be uniformity across the board in discipline and worship as well. They wanted and chose episcopal government, by bishops ordained in the historic succession (just as there have been 105 Archbishops of Canterbury). In 1782, William White, who later became the first Presiding Bishop, had even suggested that the priests ordain other priests if they could not get their own bishop consecrated by three bishops in the succession (he withdrew that suggestion three years later). The congregations were used to settling their own local affairs, voting at the congregational level, and now the former American colonies were now creating a secular government based on suffrage. Therefore the Church’s government also had to rest upon the votes of clergy and laity.

In other words, the first Episcopalians translated Queen Elizabeth’s settlement, as they had come to know it, into democratic, parliamentary terms: the clergy still in charge of spiritual matters, the laity still in charge of temporal matters, and always working together. The intention of catholic polity remained the same. The adaptation concerned how these structures and their work were to be done in a democratic context. Final authority in matters concerning all was vested in General Convention and, in due course, Executive Council between Conventions, to a lesser extent. The democratic process was woven into a system of shared leadership and responsibility that included the whole Church, lay and ordained.

In 1783, the clergy of Connecticut elected and sent Samuel Seabury to be consecrated in England. Since English law required, then as now, that bishops swear allegiance to the Crown at their consecration, Seabury had to go to Scotland, to a smaller Church independent of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church. Their bishops agreed to ordain Seabury to the episcopate, and did so on November 14, 1784.

Also in 1784, three congregations in Pennsylvania met and asked all the churches in that state to meet together. When this statewide group met, it called upon all Episcopalians to come together to form an ecclesiastical government. Shortly thereafter, a second meeting was held at Christ Church, New Brunswick, New Jersey, with wider representation. Finally, a meeting in New York from 8 states came together in October 1784 and decided to attempt to call a “General Convention.” This meeting asked that all Episcopalians organize in order to

send deputies to this first Convention, which would hopefully serve them as the ancient councils of the Church had done in the first centuries.

That 1785 Convention marked the first time Episcopalians had met nationally to decide their own future apart from the Church of England, its canon law, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and the Bishop of London. The colonial conventions had never had any power to make decisions (though some colonial governments did). The Convention decided to write a constitution and canon laws, create a Book of Common Prayer, and negotiate with England for the consecration of bishops for the American church. The Convention also made official the name of the “Protestant Episcopal Church,” thereby validating what had already developed, formally and informally, in the former colonies.

By 1789 all these were in place. In 1786 a proposed Book of Common Prayer that would succeed the 1662 English Book in use then, was completed and began to be circulated. Negotiations between the General Convention and the Church of England bishops cleared several objections and concerns raised by the English bishops. In the same year, Parliament allowed for overseas bishops to be consecrated without the oath of allegiance. Finally, on February 14, 1787, William White and another Episcopal priest, Samuel Provoost, were consecrated bishops by the archbishops of Canterbury and York, and two other bishops. (A third, David Griffith, was prevented from making the journey.)

That third Convention<sup>3</sup> met and adopted the first Constitution and Canons (unlike the United States Constitution, which was ratified by the individual states). It called for each official decision to be made by agreement of a House of Deputies (clergy and lay delegates from each state) and a House of Bishops. From the beginning, the first Constitution made it clear in its second Article that

... if ... no deputies either lay or clerical, should attend at any General Convention, the Church in such state shall nevertheless be bound by the acts of such Convention.<sup>4</sup>

Article VII (now Article VIII) required all members of the clergy to “conform” to the “doctrines and worship” of the Church — which are decided by the General Convention. The 1789 Book of Common Prayer became the standard for worship for all parishes throughout the Church. There is no record of any congregation in the United States that did not accede unconditionally and irrevocably to the authority of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. They had always been part of one Church, and never had the desire to belong to another. What changes they made were those made necessary by the American Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> September, 1785 and June 1786 (reconvened October 1786), both in Philadelphia, were the two previous.

<sup>4</sup> *Journal of a Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the States of New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina, Held in Christ-Church in the City of Philadelphia, From July 28th to August 8th, 1789*, Philadelphia: 1789, pp. 23, 25. Already, the 1785 meeting had passed Article XI which stated, “This general Ecclesiastical Constitution, when ratified by the Church in the different states, shall be considered as fundamental; and shall be unalterable by the Convention of the Church in any state.” See *Journals of the General Conventions, 1785 to 1814*; accessed July 26, 2013, at <http://bit.ly/1aNub1L>. Emphasis added. Note that the term “General Convention” formally belongs to the 1789 convention.

<sup>5</sup> “We are unanimous and explicit in assuring your Lordships, that we neither have departed nor propose to depart from the doctrines of your Church. We have retained the same discipline and forms of worship, as far as was consistent with our civil constitutions; and we have made no alterations or omissions in the Book of Common Prayer, but such as that consideration prescribed, and such as were calculated to remove objections,

*Success at last!*

In 1781, Episcopalians worshipped in scattered congregations across the eastern seaboard. They were all, nominally at least, part of the Diocese of London. Most had never seen a bishop, and many of them, as well as non-Episcopalians, were leery of the office.

General Convention created the means by which these congregations could live into the basic idea of the Church as the Church of England from which they came had developed it...but now in a new context. In order to participate in the life of the Church across the country, they were now required to organize into dioceses (although that term was not officially used until the 1830s. Before then they were “the Church in the State of...”). This meant that the Episcopalians could have bishops ordained in the ancient succession. These would be elected by their diocesan conventions, and approved for consecration by the General Convention (as was the rule at first).

If you look at the official seal of The Episcopal Church, you will see the red Cross of St. George from the English church. In the upper left-hand corner, there is a Cross of St. Andrew representing Scotland. This cross is itself made up of nine small plain crosses, representing the original “state conventions” (which we now called “dioceses”) present at the 1789 General Convention. That seal represents the extraordinary achievement of the first Episcopalians of the United States.

While it may be said that this Church’s governance, at first glance, does not look quite like that of the Church of England, it is important to note that *no* other province of the Anglican Communion has a governing structure quite like that of England. It is inimitable, and exists in its peculiar shape because of the unique history of that country. But note the balance of the powers of the bishops and clergy on the one hand, and the powers of the laity on the other, at the congregational, diocesan and national levels. While the present monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, has only a formal role in governing her Church, she symbolizes the considerable power that the laity exercise across England. This original balance of her great ancestor’s Settlement has been a key element of Anglican provinces around the world, including the Episcopal Church, the first Anglican Church outside the British Isles.

With some modifications — for example, prayers for the Monarch now became prayers for the President of the United States — the 1662 Book of Common Prayer continued to order the corporate liturgical life of Episcopal parishes. The 1789 Book began to steer a somewhat different course, incorporating materials from the 1764 Scottish Holy Communion rite (from the Church that ordained Seabury). Throughout its revisions, the Prayer Book has faithfully continued to embody the essential understanding of Christian faith as prayed by the faithful: Episcopalians are a biblical people gathered by Word and Sacrament. We are a people of catholic order and polity as reflected in the Ordinal and in the conduct of our various liturgies. We are a people whose prayer shapes our lives and whose lives are a fundamental part of our prayer. We are a people who continue in the traditions of the ancient Church, reflected in our liturgies of the Daily Offices and Sacraments, the Outline of the Faith (Catechism) as well as our polity, and our commitment to how we live in the world each day. In this way, The Episcopal Church not only has staked its identity in the historic church and faith, but also clearly and intentionally has done so in a manner that remains explicitly linked

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which it appeared to us more conducive to union and general content to obviate, than to dispute.” Reply of Convention to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, June 26, 1786. See *Journals of the General Conventions, 1785 to 1814*; accessed July 26, 2013, at <http://bit.ly/1aNub1L>

to the Church of England (and Scotland) and the Anglican tradition of being both “reformed and catholic”.

The particular commitment to the Orders of Deacon, Priest and Bishop is also part of remaining loyal to the faith and order of the Church of England. Participation in General Convention led to the creation of dioceses, the traditional regional communions of congregations, that could send authorized deputies to vote for them. Within a few years, bishops were in charge of all the original dioceses. And after 1835, missionary bishops, elected by the House of Bishops, held jurisdiction over all areas where no diocese had yet been organized.

### *Comparing and contrasting*

The Episcopal Church succeeded in faithfully translating the four elements of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral into American life, indeed, eventually articulating them in the form accepted around the world today. One should not overlook the similarities between the English and the American churches, therefore. In their daily life, both look almost identical, in fact. The English Church is more democratic than American Episcopalians tend to think, and the Episcopal Church is more hierarchical than English Anglicans often believe.

The basic dissimilarity lies in the adaptations made by the first Episcopalians. These were necessary for a suddenly disestablished group of congregations without any American diocesan or national church structures, transitioning from a monarchical state government to a republican one. Its founders were concerned to keep a certain local autonomy along with the tradition of the English church. Not only was this part of the colonial inheritance, with its relative congregational freedom, it was also part of the political theories of the day.

This point needs developing. It is often asserted that the same people wrote both The Episcopal Church’s Constitution and the federal Constitution of the United States. It is not so. Although Church members were prominent in government, there is only one person (Charles Pinckney) who served both at the convention drafting the U.S. Constitution and any of the General Conventions between 1785 and 1789. No members of the 1789 Congress served as a deputy to any of these Conventions. While many of the Founding Fathers were indeed Episcopalians, like George Washington, for example, there are very significant differences in the founding documents of the Episcopal Church and the United States. They may share a common commitment to ideals of broad participation in governance, but leading a nation and overseeing the Church of Jesus Christ are very different things!

So the General Convention created and adopted the Constitution, without referring it first to the several state conventions (in fact it was originally their reason for being). From the beginning until now, it has limited its decisions with respect to specific local situations, but in making decisions for the whole church, its authority is supreme. Only a successive General Convention can undo the decisions taken at another. The genius of the Episcopal Church’s governance structures has been the ability to set clear parameters for faith and church order that are not subject to local ratification or alteration, while granting the necessary latitude to make decisions at the local level for matters of concern to those Episcopalians, within the parameters of the Constitution and Canons. Over the years there have been attempts to assert “states’ rights” in the church, just as in the country’s history. Over and over, the foremost nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators on the government of The Episcopal Church have refuted this, and the General Convention has never passed any legislation tending in that

direction. While each diocese indeed has significant latitude in ordering its life in adaptation to its local needs, it cannot make decisions that affect the whole Church, including itself.<sup>6</sup>

During the strongest attempt to undo the federal Union, the Civil War, the successive Conventions simply refused to recognize the absence of the dioceses of the Confederate states. With the war over, they were reintegrated as if nothing had happened.<sup>7</sup> That first General Convention made possible in theory today's 109 dioceses, recognizing each one in turn when the General Convention established them.

Another difference between the English and the American churches is in the limiting of the authority of bishops in the exercise of episcopacy. From the beginning, the Episcopal bishops had their powers somewhat limited by their diocesan "standing committees". For example, an English bishop decides alone whether to ordain a properly vetted candidate. An Episcopal bishop must first secure from the diocesan Standing Committee a certificate saying that all canonical requirements have been met for the ordination of a particular candidate. Furthermore, the authority given the General Convention's House of Deputies requires the House of Bishops to work together with them in making decisions, although there is usually the traditional division of labor between "spiritual" and "temporal" matters in which House considers which resolutions first.

Just as the Elizabethan Settlement made the Crown and the Church work together, sharing leadership, the Episcopal version has leadership shared among all the ministers of the Church: Laypersons, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. This is true at the congregational and diocesan levels as well. The ordained assist the whole Church by accepting responsibility for worship, the Church's principal act; for the faithful proclamation of the Gospel, the teaching of the Faith, and the administration of all the sacraments. The laypeople take responsibility for finances, and for maintaining the properties of the congregation for the use by the rector for ministry. Most importantly, they do the work of God's mission in the world. However, it is the whole people of God — all the Baptized — who share together the responsibility for the life and work of the Church in the mission of God.

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<sup>6</sup> In his summary at the 1852 trial of Bishop George W. Doane, John Henry Hopkins, then Bishop of Vermont and future Presiding Bishop during and after the Civil War, wrote: "With respect to the other phrase, AN INDEPENDENT DIOCESE, a definition is equally desirable. According to my judgment, it is a phrase without any meaning, unless it be a very bad one. A diocese cannot be independent in its legislation, because its laws must always be subordinate to the General Convention of the whole Church, of which it is but one member. If its Bishop be infirm, and it be required to give him an Assistant, it cannot be independent, because it must have the consent of the whole Church for the consecration of the elected person. If its Bishop be dead, it cannot be independent, because, without the same consent, it cannot have a successor. And if its Bishop be the subject of evil report, it cannot be independent, because the other Bishops are the only tribunal in the Church who are authorized to try, and either acquit or condemn him. The truth is, that this phrase can never be reconciled with genuine Catholicity. It belongs of right to the Puritan school, and its influence all tends in a schismatic direction." Bishop Doane was acquitted. Accessed January 11, 2013, at <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/gwdoane/trial1852.html>

<sup>7</sup> The founders of the Confederate church made it clear that they founded it only because the Confederacy considered itself a new nation, not because they wanted a new church. However, the General Convention never recognized any of its acts. For example, the Confederates had created a diocese of Arkansas and chosen a bishop for it. The General Convention ignored this decision, and Arkansas had to wait ten years before the Convention made it a diocese of the Church. (Some have commented since the 2013 edition was released that these statements do not describe in detail what happened;but none has claimed that, broadly speaking, they are not historically accurate.)

The single most obvious difference between the Church of England and the Episcopal Church is in the General Convention's consistent refusal to create an archbishop. In the Church of England, as well as many other (but not all) Anglican Provinces of the Communion, an archbishop exercises what is termed "metropolitan" authority. Metropolitan authority is essentially that which a bishop exercises over other bishops in a region or nation, a "supervisory authority for defined purposes".<sup>8</sup> The Pope exercises that same authority in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world, as do the Orthodox Patriarchs in their national churches.

Episcopalians have, since 1785, consistently assigned final authority and function in our church to the General Convention itself. In between Conventions, there is an elected Executive Council whose task is to carry out the policies and budget set by Convention. It is presided by the Presiding Bishop, elected by the House of Bishops and ratified by the House of Deputies. The vice-president of the Council is the President of the House of Deputies, elected by the Deputies. However, major decisions must await the judgment of the General Convention through the agreement of both Houses.

The Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church functions somewhat differently from most such "metropolitan" figures in the Anglican Communion. The Constitution and Canons of the General Convention define the roles and functions of the Presiding Bishop. The direct power and authority of the office are situated within the parameters set by the Convention. Nonetheless, as a peer of the archbishops in the Communion, the Presiding Bishop has carried since the 1982 Convention the title of "Primate" (as well as "Chief Pastor"). In a real sense, the title indicates a "first among equals" understanding of the office.

*What does this all mean?*

This Primer has tried to explain how the distinctive shape of the Episcopal Church began in the United States. Episcopalians following the American Revolution wished to remain loyal to the understanding of the Church as it had evolved in England, along with their own traditions that had developed during the colonial period.

We should also recognize that this form of church government, at once hierarchical and democratic, has not prevented the Church from supporting unjust structures of society. The African-American experience in the Episcopal Church, outlined in the Timeline below, shows how slowly the Church moved from the acceptance of slavery to the full and free participation of African-Americans in the life and governance of the Church. Similar histories hold true for women, Native Americans, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. Yet remarkable saints of "all sorts and conditions" of humans have come forth in the power of the Spirit throughout our history, whose life and witness have changed and continue to change the whole Church.

For today's Episcopalians, living in seventeen countries around the world, this history and theology form our inheritance. What the first General Conventions bequeathed to us is a way of being Church that has proven very fruitful. In 1820 the Domestic & Foreign Missionary Society was created, to which every Episcopalian now belongs. Soon there were Episcopal dioceses across the country, and outside the United States. While remaining a numerically small church, what began in America — the first Anglican Church not under the

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<sup>8</sup> As defined routinely in Church of England documents. Norman Doe points out that among all the provinces of the Anglican Communion, not one defines this type of authority in its canon law. See his *Canon Law in the Anglican Communion: A Worldwide Perspective* (London: Clarendon, 1998), p. 107.

English Crown — has spread around the world. One-quarter of the thirty-eight provinces of the Anglican Communion owe their existence to The Episcopal Church. While no other province has perfectly copied its form of governance exactly (the principle the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral calls “local adaptation” prevents that), its distinction from the polity of the Church of England has encouraged others to establish their own particular way of being the Church of Jesus Christ in their own places and times, while remaining faithful to the ideal of a catholic Church that reforms itself.

All Christians need an ordered church (Gal. 5:1; compare with I Cor. 10:29). Our particular way of being church tries to establish and maintain the conditions of an ordered freedom for the flourishing of all. How this happens is through the participation of every Episcopalian through prayerful voting in representative bodies devoted to “upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order set forth in the Book of Common Prayer” (Preamble to the Church’s Constitution). Even within The Episcopal Church, this life looks somewhat different in, say, the Diocese of Haiti than in the Diocese of New Hampshire. Yet both dioceses belong to the same Church.

And that Church belongs to a global communion of Churches, each trying to practice “ordered freedom” in its own way, yet with results that remain remarkably faithful to the ideals developed in the Church of England from the earliest days of the Body of Christ. At a time when many voices are calling for changes in The Episcopal Church’s governance, it is good to recall where we have come from, for our ancestors in the Faith have made us who we are today.



## *Timeline*

Up to 400 A.D: The Roman period; Christianity is planted in Britain; the Council of Nicaea is held in 325, with representatives from Britain attending.

400-600: Celtic Christianity develops in the British Isles.

597: Augustine and his companions arrive in Canterbury.

664: The Synod of Whitby is held. 600-1300: The Middle Ages; in 1215, King John accepts the Magna Carta, still a statute in England and Wales.

1300-1500: The harbingers of the Reformation; Jan Hus burned at the stake in 1415.

1517: Martin Luther ignites the Reformation with his 95 Theses.

1534: The Act of Supremacy gives the Monarch, not the Pope, authority over the Church in England.

1547: Henry VIII dies, and is succeeded by Edward VI.

1549: The first Book of Common Prayer is published.

1552: The second Book of Common Prayer is published; Queen Mary ascends to the throne the next year.

1558: Elizabeth becomes Queen of England; the 1559 Book of Common Prayer is issued; many “puritans” return from Geneva to England.

1603: Elizabeth I is succeeded by James I.

1607: A colony is established in Jamestown, Virginia, and a Eucharist there marks the beginning of a continuous presence of the Church in America.

1640-1660: Oliver Cromwell makes the Church of England “puritan.”

1662: The restoration of Crown and Church; catholicity of the Church of England is renewed; the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is issued, still the official Prayer Book of that Church today.

1701: Thomas Bray initiates the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, eventual sponsor of some 300 missionaries in the American colonies.

1776: American colonies declare independence from Great Britain; France and Holland soon offer their official recognition.

1783: Peace treaty with England acknowledges the United States of America.

1784: Samuel Seabury consecrated Bishop in Scotland for Connecticut; Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York meetings call for a “General Convention” to ensure the continuity of the Church in a new era.

1785: First Convention plans Constitution, Prayer Book, consecration of bishops, adopts name “Protestant Episcopal Church.”

- 1786: Second Convention — first draft of the Book of Common Prayer; consecrations of William White and Samuel Provoost approved by English bishops under Parliament's new law.
- 1789: Third "General" Convention ratifies Constitution and Book of Common Prayer.
- 1804: Absalom Jones ordained as priest; first African-American to be ordained.
- 1817: General Convention charters the General Theological Seminary in New York City, under leadership of Bishop John Henry Hobart.
- 1819: First diocese after 1789 organized in Ohio; Kentucky (1832), Tennessee (1834), Illinois (1835), and Michigan (1836). The first created by division was Western New York in 1839, which marks the first official use of the term "diocese."
- 1820: The General Convention launches Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society; although originally a club which persons had to join, the Convention in 1835 reconfigured the DFMS to be the whole Church in which all Episcopalians are thereby members.
- 1835: General Convention establishes office of Missionary Bishop. Missionary bishops now required in new territories to organize missionary districts and missionary dioceses.
- Jackson Kemper immediately ordained as first missionary Bishop.
- 1861: Attempt to organize a Confederate Episcopal Church begins.
- 1865: General Convention quietly reintegrates the southern dioceses.
- 1867: St. Augustine's School (now College) chartered by the Protestant Episcopal Freeman's Commission.
- 1868: General Convention establishes Commission of Home Mission to Colored People.
- 1875: The Diocese of Haiti is admitted.
- 1878: Bishop Payne Divinity School established for African-American students.
- 1883: General Convention rejects "the Sewanee Plan" to create "Missionary Organizations" to separate formally white and black Episcopalians.
- 1886: The House of Bishops ratifies the Chicago Quadrilateral, with the Lambeth Conference approving it in 1888.
- 1889: General Convention approves canon "Of Deaconesses."
- 1906: Board of Missions establishes the American Church Institute for Negroes (ACIN) to support religious and vocational training.
- 1917: Edward Thomas Demby (Arkansas) and Henry Beard Delany (North Carolina) elected Suffragan Bishops; consecrated in 1918. First African-American bishops in the United States.
- 1919: The National Council (now Executive Council) is established.
- 1937: General Convention establishes the Joint Commission on Negro Work.

- 1944: Henry St. George Tucker resigns as Bishop of Virginia and becomes the first full-time Presiding Bishop.
- 1949: National Council, ACIN, trustees agree to close Bishop Payne Divinity School. Merged with Virginia Theological Seminary in 1953.
- 1959: Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) formed.
- 1964: General Convention passes a canon that all Episcopalians have equal rights. Bishop James Pike “recognizes” Phyllis Edwards, a deaconess, as a Deacon in Holy Orders.
- 1967: General Convention establishes the General Convention Special Programs to address issues of race and poverty.
- 1969: John Burgess elected Bishop Coadjutor of Massachusetts (diocesan 1970). First African-American diocesan bishop.
- 1970: General Convention approves constitutional change allowing women to serve as Deputies. Deaconess canon repealed; women allowed to be ordained Deacon.
- 1971: Harold Stephen Jones elected Suffragan Bishop of South Dakota, first Native-American Bishop
- 1974: Ordination of first eleven women to the priesthood
- 1976: General Convention approves proposed Book of Common Prayer on first reading; provides for ordination of women to all three orders; declares that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church” (A069-1976); shortly thereafter a group of congregations breaks away and forms an alternative church, though it soon fragments into various bodies.
- 1977: The Rev. Dr. Sr. Bernadette (Ellen Marie Barrett), OSB, was ordained a priest by the Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., Bishop of New York. First openly gay woman to be ordained.
- 1978: General Convention created Navajoland out of the Episcopal dioceses of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, as an “area mission” dedicated to Navajo language, culture, families, and area events.
- 1979: General Convention approves 1979 Book of Common Prayer; affirms traditional understanding of the place of sexual relations to be within marriage between a man and a woman.
- 1989: Barbara Harris becomes the first woman ordained to the episcopate.
- J. Robert Williams ordained on December 16, 1989 by John Shelby Spong, Bishop of Newark. First ordination of an openly partnered gay man.
- 1990: Walter Righter, then Assisting Bishop of Newark, ordained Barry Stopfel, an openly partnered gay man, to the diaconate; Bishop Spong ordained him priest in 1991.
- 1991: Steven Charleston elected Bishop of Alaska, first Native-American diocesan bishop.

- 1993: Otis Charles, father of five, having resigned as Bishop of Utah for several years, steps down as Dean of Episcopal Divinity School, and publicly announces that he is a gay man.
- 1996: Bishop Righter goes on trial for heresy in having ordained Stopfel; trial court rules that "... there is no Core Doctrine [of the Church] prohibiting the ordination of a non-celibate, homosexual person living in a faithful and committed sexual relationship with a person of the same sex..."
- 1998: Rwandan Bishop John Rucyahana asserts episcopal authority over an Episcopal parish in Arkansas, the first breakaway since 1977; later, Lambeth Conference Resolution I.10 asks for pastoral inclusion of gay and lesbian people, but posits that "homosexuality is incompatible with Holy Scripture."
- 2000: The Anglican Mission in America launched in Singapore on January 29 with consecrations of Charles Murphy and John Rodgers by Moses Tay, Archbishop of the Province of South East Asia; John Rucyahana, Bishop of the Diocese of Shyira in Rwanda. They were assisted by C. Fitzsimmons Allison, the thirteenth Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina, Alex D. Dickson, the first Bishop of the Diocese of West Tennessee, and David Pytches, Bishop of Chile, Bolivia and Peru.
- General Convention Resolution D039 acknowledged that "there are couples in this Church" not living in marriage but "in other life-long committed relationships" and states that it "expect[s] such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and ... holy love."
- 2003: V. Gene Robinson elected and consecrated Bishop of New Hampshire, the first openly partnered gay person at the time of his consecration.
- 2004: Archbishop Rowan Williams appoints the Windsor Commission; its resulting report calls for moratoria on other provinces setting up alternative jurisdictions in North America, on the consecrations of openly gay people, and on same-sex blessings.
- 2005: Episcopal House of Bishops declares temporary moratorium on all episcopal consecrations; by request, delegations from The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada voluntarily refrain from taking their seats as members at the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Nottingham, but stay on as observers.
- 2006: Katharine Jefferts Schori elected as Presiding Bishop and Primate, the first woman to hold that position, as well as the first scientist, as she was formerly an oceanographer.
- 2008: Anglican Church of North America constitution approved under Robert Duncan as Archbishop. Some Anglican provinces call for it to be recognized as the North American province of the Anglican Communion.
- 2010: As incursions in the United States continue despite the moratorium, Mary Glasspool, the second openly partnered gay person at the time of her consecration, is consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Los Angeles.
- 2012: General Convention approves a provisional rite of same-sex blessings following the 2000 Convention's resolution D-039, not a new rite of Holy Matrimony; House of Bishops calls for the appointment of an Ecclesiology Committee.

2015: General Convention approves for trial usage two rites of marriage for same- or different-sex couples, and revises the canon on marriage to enable their use, with the approval of the local diocesan Bishop.

The Ecclesiology Committee wishes to thank those who helped make this Primer infinitely better, especially Dr. Joan Gundersen, and Canon Cynthia McFarland.

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# WHAT IS ECCLESIOLOGY?

## CHOOSING A STARTING POINT

In this essay, I will be looking at what seem are to me reasonable potential starting points for thinking theologically about the Church. A starting point is important because it will shape the argument and direction for developing a theology or pastoral practice, or a way of thinking about a topic. It is therefore also important that a starting point be explicitly identified in order to give the reader a sense of the larger theological context of the theology being developed. This essay will focus on possibilities of where to begin, but will not work out in detail where a particular starting point may take us theologically. I seek primarily to define the theological discipline of “ecclesiology”, and to show why it matters to every Christian.

The word, ecclesiology, comes into English from Greek: “*ecclesia*” meaning an assembly called together, later applied to the Church as “assembly of Christians”; and, “*logos*” meaning the logic or reasoning of something. At this level, then, “ecclesiology” is the study of the logic or reasoning of the assembly of Christians. A broad definition is: Ecclesiology is the theological discipline, within the faith, that reflects on and expresses the meaning, purpose, roles, and functions of the Church in the best, clearest language possible.<sup>1</sup> Another way of putting it is to define “ecclesiology” as the disciplined, theological thinking about the Church – what it was/is, who we were/are, what we/it did/does – precisely as Church.

Ecclesiology is not only thoughtful. It is also the product of prayerful reflection, within the faith, on what the Church is and what the Church does. The activity of prayer by anyone attempting to do theology is essential. Theological thinking is always and necessarily within the context of the daily process of speaking with God and listening with the ear of our heart.<sup>2</sup> It is equally essential to understand that doing ecclesiology, as with all theology, is not merely an intellectual exercise isolated in an ivory tower of abstraction. Theology always properly moves toward the concrete, the incarnational, and this is particularly important within the tradition of Anglican theology, spirituality, and praxis. Therefore, the disciplined, intellectual examination of what it means to be the Body of Christ must ultimately be situated in our world, in our time, in our particular

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<sup>1</sup> For his definition of “theology,” see John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. xi and 1. I would note two things about Macquarrie’s definition that also apply to my adaptation here. (1) Theology properly understood is an “in-house” activity. That is, the practice of theology occurs within a particular faith or religion by one who is a practitioner or member of that faith or religion. When one steps outside of one’s own tradition, then one is engaged in “religious studies” as Macquarrie understands the matter. (2) Theology is a disciplined, intellectual activity that uses language as its primary mode of conveying content about a particular topic. Theology is a process of thinking. It is not the same as, or interested in how a person “feels” about salvation, resurrection, or ecclesiology.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, Joan Chittister, Ed., (New York: Crossroad, 2010), Preface, p. 3.

circumstances, with the people who are there. Thus, ecclesiology articulates the theological core of the Church out of which emerges its life and work as institution, as community, as Body of Christ; it embodies itself in the world through participation in the *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God<sup>3</sup>, in specific, concrete ministries.

The Anglican tradition frequently speaks of the famous “three-legged stool”, Scripture, Reason, and Tradition. A fundamental theological principle has always been that our theology, and hence, our ecclesiology, must be consonant with Scripture. It is therefore appropriate to begin with Scripture as the first starting point. However, to begin with Scripture is not necessarily a simple or clear place to begin. It is well known that the New Testament does not prescribe any one particular ecclesiology. Rather, there are, in fact, several possibilities to be found. Yet, what it does do is to offer clear and compelling witness to the fundamental nature, roles, and functions of the Church.

St. Paul gives us a clear and succinct description of what/who the Church is in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12: we are the Body of Christ, the *Σωμα Χριστου*.<sup>4</sup> It is with this biblical starting point that I begin.

## THE BODY OF CHRIST

St. Paul’s use of the body image in both I Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12 is one of his most powerful and striking images.<sup>5</sup> It is certainly concrete, and it is an image with which all of us can identify, for indeed, we are each a body. We are intimately aware of what it is to be a body. As Karl Rahner argued, our body is our first and primary mode or means of presence to ourselves and to each other.<sup>6</sup> Especially as we grow older, we are aware that our body is made of intricately and intimately connected parts, some large and some so small we cannot see them without a microscope. A body is a contained bio-system. How each part works affects the whole system. St. Paul carefully underscores the systemic nature of the body in his declaration that no part can say to another part, “I have no need of you.” (I Cor. 12:21.)

Paul is very clear: we are the Body of Christ and Christ is the Head of the Body. It is also clear that the Body of Christ is knit together as a body by the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine was equally clear about the implications of this ecclesiological reality in a

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<sup>3</sup> Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the understanding of the Church’s mission began to change. “It is not that God’s Church has a mission, but rather that God’s Mission has a Church,” is a formula often quoted. Vatican II’s *Ad gentes*, on the mission activity of the Church, even speaks of the mission of Christ and the mission of the Spirit. See 1.2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ephesians 4.1-6; Galatians 3.26-29.

<sup>5</sup> I Corinthians 12.12-27(28-30); Romans 12.4-5(6-8).

<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations IV*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), “Theology of Symbol,” pp. 224-27; 234f.

<sup>7</sup> See Romans 8.9-17; cf. I Corinthians 3.16 and 12.1-11.

sermon, in which he said that when coming to the Eucharist, “Be what you see. Receive who you are.”<sup>8</sup> Being the Body of Christ, then, is both an ecclesiological reality and a sacramental reality. We are the Body of Christ, in which the Holy Spirit dwells, constituted sacramentally through Baptism and sustained by the Body and Blood of Christ whose body we are and Who is our Head. The Body of Christ is created and fed sacramentally to be the sacramental presence of Christ in the world. This is the core of the identity of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

It is worth noting at this point that one of the apparent tensions within the New Testament about the Church. Differently than St. Paul, St. John, in the Fourth Gospel, speaks of Christ’s indwelling of the faithful: “I am in you and you are in me...” (17:21). The image is less concrete, focusing on the intimacy of real relationship with the Father through the Son in the Spirit that creates and sustains the faithful both individually and as community (the Church). Both St. Paul and St. John share a common understanding of the community as held together by the Holy Spirit. Both understand the intimacy of relationship between Christ and the Church, one in the image of the Body of Christ with Christ as Head, and one in terms of the indwelling of the Father in the Son and the Son in the faithful such that as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, so shall the Son be in the faithful and the faithful in the Son. The role of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate in the Gospel of John, is the power and presence of God that hold the Church together.

So, already in the New Testament among the Gospels and Epistles, there are differences of imagery and emphasis, which reflect variations in ways of thinking about who and what the Church is. Among the variations on the theme, St. Paul’s Body of Christ image gives us a clear and coherent starting point for developing a biblically grounded ecclesiology.

Perhaps first and foremost, the image of the Body of Christ presents us with an understanding of Church as one, single body. In the language of the Nicene Creed the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” There is and can be only *one* Body of Christ.<sup>10</sup> It is from this perspective that, for the Orthodox, schism is the worst sin in or

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo*, 272.

<sup>9</sup> See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God*. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), Chapter 1, “Christ the Sacrament of God,” esp. pp.13 – 40; and chapters 2 and 5. I would note further that it is important to understand that the Church *qua* Church is *not* a continuation of the incarnation. Rather, the Church is the means of Christ’s ongoing presence and work in the world as empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit. Church, then, is simultaneously both a Christological and Pneumatological expression of God.

<sup>10</sup> It is out of this image as well as the fact of there is only one Christ, that the *ur-principal* of ecclesiology emerges: the essential unity of the Church, the “*one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*” Church *is* Christ. Hence, the fundamental question of ecumenism is the question of how to reunify the Church. For Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, it is the ground, both of their position that the Church *is* the Roman Church or Orthodox Church and all other claims to being Church are at best profoundly defective or simply false. Vatican Council II in the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* articulated a major substantive shift in Roman Catholic thinking by claiming only that the *fullness* of the Church “*subsists in*” (*subsistit in*) the Roman Church. LG 1.8 “*Hæc Ecclesia, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinate, subsistit in*



against the Church<sup>11</sup> What many in the Christian world have apparently forgotten, ignored, or refused to own is the foundational difference, at least as I see it, between how one understands “unity” and “oneness” as well as the role of diversity or differentiation within unity.

Among other things, we, as churches, have created a distorted ecclesiology that at least theoretically assumes that “unity” requires “oneness” in the sense of sameness, simplicity, and no differentiation or diversity. In so doing, there is a “meta-ecclesiology” that manifests in (1) an assumption that we must all be the same as to belief and forms of polity, governance, liturgy, theology, *etc.*; (2) a denial of diversity within the Body of Christ either as a matter of fact or as a matter of praxis; (3) an unhealthy focus on the negative, that is, on what another ecclesial body is *not*, which at the very least, theologically and practically, leads to an inability and unwillingness to see and value the gifts of the various parts of the Body of Christ which these bodies *are*; (4) an exacerbation of differences and elicits judgments of “bad,” “deficient,” “defective” or, in the extreme “not (real) Church”; and, therefore, the existence of the other is a sign of “brokenness” and “division” which must be “fixed”; (5) fostering of deep and on-going division and hostility born of a refusal to recognize one another as parts of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” Church, which while essentially *one* is also essentially diverse or differentiated into various parts; and, (6) a failure to distinguish among *esse*, *bene esse*, *plene esse*, and *adiaphora*.<sup>12</sup>

Theologically, particularly in our day, beginning an ecclesiology with St. Paul’s image of the Body of Christ is especially potent and rich. An ecclesiology grounded in the concept of Body of Christ provides a framework and a foundation for an understanding for the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church that is a unity in Christ its Head, in the power of the Holy Spirit with the Father, and precisely as the Body of Christ in all the glory of its diversity and differentiation among all the parts of the Body. The theological and actual focus of such an ecclesiology is seeing the whole and within that whole to see and receive each part as it is. In this context, the Body of Christ focuses the energy of the Body on learning and living into how each part best functions with all the

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*Ecclesia Catholica...*” [This Church (the one Church of Christ) in this world as a society constituted and organized, subsists in the Catholic Church...]

<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay, which seeks only to give a definition and starting point for ecclesiology, to delve into this point at length. It is a profound and fundamental question of ecclesiology, which the various parts of the Body of Christ have managed for centuries to make insoluble. That, however, is entirely different from whether or not the matter *actually is* insoluble. . See *Church of the Triune God*, The Cyprus Statement of the International Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue, 2006, (London: The Anglican Communion Office), 2006. See also the important work of John Zizioulas on ecclesiology, especially, *Being is Communion*, (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press), 1997; *Communion and Otherness*, (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark), 2006; *The One and the Many* (Muntinlupa City, Putatan: Sebastian Press Publishing House), 2012; and *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press), 2001.

<sup>12</sup> That is, the essence of the Church, its wellbeing, the fullness of the Church, and matters that are not essential.

parts that makes it possible for the Body of Christ most fully, effectively, and faithfully to participate in *God's Mission*. The concern is not “church/not church” or “right/wrong” or “same/different”. Minimally, an ecclesiology of the Body of Christ allows the assumption of recognizing all baptized persons, of whatever denomination, who have been baptized with water in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as part of the Christ’s body, the Church. The focus of discernment is rather on the adequacy or fullness of expression of the Church in a particular part. How do we recognize the *esse* of Church and how do we recognize where that *esse* subsists?<sup>13</sup> The Anglican Communion, through its Bishops gathered at the Lambeth Conference of 1888, adopted the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as its response to the ecumenical question, “When is Church present in another ecclesial body?”<sup>14</sup> Today, and in the context of a Body of Christ ecclesiology, the question would be modified to ask, “*How* is the Church present in another ecclesial body?”<sup>15</sup> Patriarch Athenagoras II, following the 1976 decision of The Episcopal Church to ordain women to the priesthood, made clear that for the Orthodox, this was not something they could accept or embrace; however, while it meant that the purpose and goal ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and Orthodox no longer could be union, the dialogue should continue in order to exchange ideas and develop further understanding between Anglican and Orthodox. The result has been a thriving, rich, and immensely important conversation since then.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Paul Avis, “Becoming a Bishop,” unpub. MS, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral originated in The Episcopal Church and was adopted in 1886, and then taken to the Lambeth Conference of 1888, where, with amendment, it was endorsed by the Bishops of the Anglican Communion (as it was coming to be called). It has subsequently frequently been interpreted as defining the essential marks of the Church from an Anglican perspective. The Quadrilateral names what were considered the *esse* of the Church, which, from the Anglican view, articulates the minimum elements constitutive of Church. Its intention was and is to include, not exclude. The first three items name universals about which there is no disagreement among Christian ecclesial bodies: The necessity of Scripture as the Old and New Testaments, the Baptismal Symbol and the Nicene Creed, and the two Dominical Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The fourth element, the necessity of the historic episcopate, is a point of ecclesiological debate among Christian ecclesial bodies. Especially in the context of a Body of Christ Christology, it is important to note a singular phrase in the fourth item. “Locally adapted” intentionally opens the *form* of historic episcopate to many possibilities. Implicit to where the Church subsists is catholic polity of the Church as the *λαος Θεου* — the People of God — within which are three ordained Orders (Bishop, Priest, Deacon). In typical Anglican form, we have clarity expressed with an intentional ambiguity. Even as Hooker argued in *Lawes*, while the historical formulation and configuration of catholic polity may be the best available, neither that form nor its particular configuration as he knew were necessarily the actual form of polity or the particular configuration that would exist (without change) for ever. (Richard Hooker, *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard UP), 1977ff., V.6.2, p. 33f. All references to *Lawes* are taken from this critical edition. The simple phrase, “locally adapted” allows for the Body to differentiate, to be diverse in its parts, and yet grounded in “the historic episcopate.”

<sup>15</sup> The significance of the shift from “*est*” to “*subsistit in*” in “*Lumen Gentium*, 1.8, is, again, worth noting. “*How*” at least implies that “Church” already exists in an ecclesial body, and so shifts the conversation away from “Is the Church present in this body?”. The conversation, then, begins on a deeper level of exploring a fundamental and mutual reality of each ecclesial body’s being already a part of the Body of Christ.

<sup>16</sup> The most recent public evidence of the substance of this on-going conversation was the publication of *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Statement*, (London: The Anglican Communion Office), 2006.

However, this model or foundation for ecclesiology is not simply about ecumenical relations or a framework for exploring another ecclesial body. Our focus here is on The Episcopal Church, and the question is, “How does a Body of Christ ecclesiology provide a strong foundation for understanding who and what The Episcopal Church is?”

The Episcopal Church thinks of itself as a relational Church in which its structures and processes promote and enhance relationships among the people, congregations, and dioceses and other constituent parts of our polity for the effective creation and sustaining of ministries of love and service in the world in the Name of Jesus. We think of ourselves as a democratic, participatory Church, especially with regard to decision-making. The structures and processes of The Episcopal Church function with a range of flexibility within this dialectic, resulting between a hierarchical church and a democratically formed culture of participation. It is, not infrequently, untidy, unclear, and challenging on many levels. It is also, frequently, extraordinarily and profoundly amazing, life-giving, transforming, lively, and faithful. The parts of this portion of the Body of Christ are profoundly diverse, ranging from the liturgically “high Church” to “low Church;” from the theologically Anglo-Catholic to Reformed Protestant; from the socially and politically liberal to the socially and politically conservative; we live and work in rural, suburban and urban communities; there are among us multiple languages, ethnicities, and cultures. The content and texture of this part of Christ’s body are extraordinarily complex.

It is, I think, precisely these qualities of who we are that make St. Paul’s image powerfully appropriate as a foundation on which to build our theological self-understanding. It begins with the fact of many, complex, organically and systemically connected parts. It assumes that, whether we understand it or not, whether we like it or not, all these parts have a real, substantive, and necessary role to play in making the whole who it is and shaping what we do as The Episcopal Church. It is a Church that believes and seeks to live the principle attributed to Rowan Williams: through Baptism, we are knit together in relations not always of our choosing.<sup>17</sup> A Body of Christ ecclesiology gives us a biblical and theological framework for understanding and engaging our diversity-in-unity as a gift of God through which God works and in which we participate in God’s Mission. This starting point grounds diversity and differentiation as of the *esse*, the very being, of the Church.

I am put in mind of an experience at a clergy conference that focused on African American church music traditions using *Lift Every Voice and Sing II (LEVAS)* led by

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It was my privilege to serve on the International Commission for the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialog from 2001-2007. When the issue is not, in some form, “How do we convince you to be like us?” there is an open, profound conversation that emerges and brings with it blessing, new insights, and new understandings that grow the “bonds of affection” grounded in Baptism between us.

<sup>17</sup> See in this *Report*, Pierre Whalon, “The key to understanding The Episcopal Church”, p. 4, note 9.

Horace C. Boyer.<sup>18</sup> He was trying to teach us how to sing hymns from *LEVAS*. He had made it clear that in the African American church music tradition, what was written on the page was regarded as mere suggestion. We were making a joyful noise when he stopped us, and after a pause, looked at us and said, “Children, I have never heard so much unison in all my life.” Pointed pause. “And children, God does not like unison. God wants to hear harmony. Now sing those parts!” The parts are distinct and give the music its depth, richness, and character. From time to time, unison has its place, as in plainsong chant. But, the natural progression of music is to differentiation, to harmony..

This brings us back to the nature of unity. What St. Paul’s Body of Christ model tells us quite clearly is that the Church is naturally differentiated and diverse, both within each denomination and as the Church as a whole. What an ecclesiology built on this foundation must address is how the Church can be “one” (in unity) with the existing reality of denominations.<sup>19</sup> The Pauline perspective disallows any one denomination to claim to be the whole,<sup>20</sup> which in turn highlights the error of denominationalism that makes it divisive.<sup>21</sup> It is possible, I would argue, from the Pauline perspective of I Corinthians 12 and Romans 8, to see denominations as the natural result of maturation and differentiation, and differences of experiences in good faith within the Body of Christ that is a graced gift to and within the Church.<sup>22</sup> The fundamental question among the denominations shifts from “How do we convince the other to become like us, or how do we absorb the other into us?” to, “How do we learn to function faithfully together as the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church’ of which there is ‘one Lord, one faith, one

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<sup>18</sup> Horace Boyer (1935 – 2009) was one of the foremost scholars in the field of Afro-American gospel music. He received his B.A. From Bethune-Cook College, and the M.A and Ph.D. from the Eastman School of Music. He and his brother sang professionally together in the 1950s. Boyer taught at various universities and colleges, did extensive research and writing, and edited a number of collections, including *LEVAS* (1993) for The Episcopal Church. He also conducted many choirs and conducted workshops and clinics. He introduced many communities to African-American gospel music. In 2009, he was awarded the prestigious Life-time Achievement Award from the Society for American Music.

<sup>19</sup> The “denominations” in this context refers to all the ecclesial bodies within the Christian tradition. From this perspective, the Church catholic is at least the sum of all these parts, regardless of the actual or functional position of any one part.

<sup>20</sup> Again, the important distinction between “*is (est)* the Church” and “*subsists in (subsistit in)*” a particular ecclesial body (denomination).

<sup>21</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to go into a detailed examination of the classical contrasting philosophies of “unity” of Aristotle and Plato. It is worth noting that the root of the conceptual problem that leads to the “problem” of denominationalism is arguably whether one has a fundamentally Aristotelian or Platonic understanding of unity.

<sup>22</sup> To draw briefly a theological parallel, the so-called Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the early Patristic period are generally assumed to be bad things were people (maliciously) promoted errors as truth to do harm to the Church. But I think there is another understanding to be had at the theological level (bracketing some of the individual and collective behaviors that were indeed “bad”), and that is the process of developing what became embraced as “orthodox” Christology and Doctrine of God, reflect a natural (and necessary) course of theological development as the Church worked its way through the profound and complex questions in each of these theological categories. An option, which certainly is contrary to the theological life of the Anglican tradition, is a simplistic fideism in which theological assertions are made and are uncritically accepted.

Baptism, one God and Father of us all'?" The implications for ecumenical dialogues as well as collaborations in ministry at churchwide, diocesan, and parish levels are immense, and hold great possibilities for deeper and more effective participation in God's Mission.

Part of the way forward implicit in a Body of Christ ecclesiology is derived from the intimacy inherent in a body. For the Church, this intimacy moves in two directions simultaneously: (1) intimacy with the Head, Jesus Christ, and (2) intimacy among the parts. This intimacy lives at the heart of the essential relationship among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the beloved people of God. It is especially the mission of the Holy Spirit to enliven and sustain this relationship as God's self-gift in love.<sup>23</sup> The intimacy of this relationship is formally inaugurated through the Sacrament of Initiation: (Baptism, i.e., washing), Anointing (Chrismation), and Feeding (Eucharist). Christ feeding us sacramentally in the Eucharist sustains the intimacy between God and us. The Head, Jesus Christ, knows<sup>24</sup> the Body as a whole and each part at the deepest level of its being, the kind of knowing we find, for example in Psalm 139, "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me! ... For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. ... Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance..." (verses 1, 13, 15, 16).<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the intimacy of the Father and the Son with the beloved is expressed in the language of indwelling, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? ... I will be in you and you in me." (See John 14. 10-11; 20) Also, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23).

The intimacy of the human being with God who is Holy Mystery, grows precisely as God unfailingly gives God's self to each person, and each person chooses to receive that self-gift. We do not, of course, ever know God in the same way or with the completeness that God knows us. We do, however, come to know more and more fully and deeply that God is God and we are God's beloved. This intimacy takes us in the end to where there is no longer anything between us and God, and we know, like Job, that we behold our Redeemer, "and not as a stranger"<sup>26</sup>. Yet this God-ward progression, so long as we live on earth, impels us both to know ourselves and the gifts and capacities God has given us, and thus to grow more consciously and fully into the *imago Dei*, the image of God. In so doing, each of us comes to be in the world in a more Godly manner, one that impels us to work to bring about God's Mission through our living, working, and serving

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<sup>23</sup> See the liturgy for Holy Baptism, *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 308 (Baptism), and p. 418 (Confirmation) Romans 8; I Cor. 12.1-11; Ephesians 4.4; John 3.34; 6.63; 14.26; 15.26; 16.13.

<sup>24</sup> English here lacks the subtlety of French, German, or Spanish that distinguish between knowing about something (Today is Monday.) and knowing in the sense of understanding (I know s/he is a fair person.) In this instance, both sorts of knowing are relevant and important.

<sup>25</sup> *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), p. 794ff.

<sup>26</sup> Job 19.25 – 27.

in the world in the Name of Jesus. Our lives come to be more and more incarnational of God's love. Hence, the Body of Christ becomes more and more clearly the image of God who embodies God's love in its life and work. The Church becomes more and more who it is.

A sound ecclesiology holds both of these two essential aspects of intimacy, with Christ and with one another, within the Body of Christ in clear focus and as a dialectic reality within the Church. This biblical foundations means that each part of the body needs to know systemically both what its roles and functions are and what the roles and functions of the other parts of the Body are. Moreover, each needs to know how its particular roles and functions work in relation to the whole Body, as well as the roles and functions of the other parts. Such knowledge deepens the appreciation for the diversity within the Body and increases respect for each part. The relationships among the parts become more real and concrete, and so build the capacity to understand and value one's self and to understand and value-the roles and functions of the others. Hence the Body is built up and its capacity to be the Body of Christ develops and deepens in quality, content, and effectiveness in the world.

Additionally, the knowledge of self and others as parts of a greater system, the Body of Christ, transforms the tension of difference into the dialectic of the creative relationship of independence and dependence, both of which are mutually powerful in shaping the parts and the whole. Hence, the Body of Christ, the Church, may be conceived of as a system in which the integrity of each part and the integrity of the whole are mutually and equally in an essential relation *and* a *relationship* actualized as diversity-in-unity.

#### CHRISTOLOGY AS STARTING POINT: JESUS CHRIST THE *UR-SAKRAMENT*

Christology, or the study of who Christ is, provides us with another theological starting point for an ecclesiology. Beginning here means that one needs to have a clear and coherent understanding of who, theologically, Jesus was and is, what Jesus did and does,<sup>27</sup> and then draw clearly the lines from that point to the theology of the Church. Why God became human<sup>28</sup> is the crucial question. If, for example, I think that the fundamental purpose of the incarnation was to save the world from sin so we could all go to heaven, then I have already set a tone and certain parameters around what the Church is and what the Church does, based on this interpretation of who Jesus was/is and what Jesus did/does. If I think that the primary reason for Jesus' incarnation is the fact of my sinfulness, I have declared a fundamental position with regard to both the Church and human beings that follows from my understanding of Jesus the Christ. Moreover, I have

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<sup>27</sup> John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, (London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International), 1990, p. 3, and *Christology Revisited*, Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press), 1998. See also, Marcus Borg, *Speaking Christian*, (New York: Harper One, 2011), ch. 7, "Jesus".

<sup>28</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus homo*.

determined that the essential ministry of the Church is to “save” people so that they can go to heaven. Hence, the primary ministry of the Church should center on asking people the question, “Have you been saved?”<sup>29</sup> What does such a focus mean for the life and work of the Church?

On the other hand, what if we understand God’s incarnation in Jesus as first and foremost an act of love? It is important to remember the theological principle in doctrine of God that Who God is and what God does are the same thing. Hence John wrote, “God is love” (I John 4:8b). What impact does it have to understand incarnation as God’s absolute free choice to give God’s self to us in Jesus because that self-giving in love is the ultimate self-expression of “God is love”? What does it mean for our ecclesiology if the primary purpose of the incarnation, and then the Church, was to show us what divine love looks like so that we are more able, with God’s help, to live and act as the *image* of God? What if divine mercy and forgiveness of sin is not about judgment and mercy, but about compassion and love to empower by the Spirit to live in right relationship (“righteousness”) with God, one another, and ourselves? What if the incarnation is God’s proclamation that what is the final truth about us is not sin and brokenness, but wholeness and life lived with love and compassion in and of the Holy Spirit, in and through the Church — the Body of Christ? These questions raise the possibility that the fundamental work of the Church is not to do what Jesus *did* as merely a matter of repetition and imitation. Rather we are to look deeply at the content of his life and work in order to determine how we can do the same in our day for and with God’s beloved, for they are therefore also *our beloved*.<sup>30</sup>

What do these two different approaches and understandings mean for the way(s) the Gospel is proclaimed? What does it mean for the way(s) in which the Church, individually and corporately, engages the people around it and the world at large? In more specifically Episcopalian terms, what are the ramifications for our understanding and living the Baptismal Covenant?

When Jesus the Christ is the starting point of our ecclesiology, is it Jesus as person or Jesus as Christ or both; knowing about Jesus or knowing Jesus or both; simply my one-on-one individual relationship with Jesus that matters or meeting Jesus in the household of faith? A Christological starting point requires of us to define whom or what the starting point, “Jesus,” means. Who we think or believe that he is tells us who or what the Church is. Does the Church simply do what Jesus did, however we see or understand that? Or, does the Church interpret what Jesus did and discern in the Spirit how that works in the contemporary setting? Or, does the Church do some of both? What are the limits? What are the possibilities?

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Marcus Borg, *Speaking Christian*, (New York: Harper One, 2011), chs. 1 and 2, and *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> See Borg, *Speaking Christian*, *passim*, but especially chs. 1-3, 5-7, 10-15.

When doing ecclesiology from a Christological starting point, we must be careful not to claim that the Church is the “continuation” of the incarnation in space and time. The Incarnate One has ascended; He is no longer here. Christ is now the head of the Church, his Body.<sup>31</sup> The Church is not Christ. It is also important to remember that Paul’s “Body of Christ” language is symbolic or analogous language, and not literal language. It does describe the relationship in which Christ is present and active in the Holy Spirit who gives life and power to the Church at the corporate and individual levels. From a Christological perspective, the Church in and with the Spirit, that is, “with God’s help,”<sup>32</sup> continues the redeeming work of the Son. We do what Jesus did in our day, in our circumstances, among and with the people where we are in our ministries of love and service. We invite, as Jesus invites, God’s people into a life-giving, creative relationship with God that makes it possible for us to become more and more transparently the image of God. To be the Body of Christ as who we are brings forward the icon, the sacramentality of the human person and the Church, as natural to both. This sacramentality of the Church manifests in the ministries for which the Spirit equips and empowers us.

#### “SACRAMENT” AND “SACRAMENTALITY”

Starting from “sacrament” and “sacramentality” also opens for us a consideration of the notions of “sacred,” “holy,” “mystery,” and the Church as sacrament<sup>33</sup> as well as the implications of Jesus the Christ as Son of God (divine) and as son of Mary (human). Sacramentality, then can be understood as a capacity to bear God’s self-gift in the world in concrete, specific ways as well as more generally. That is, the world is the context of God’s self-gift in love, that is, grace, to creation, is also God’s self-revelation. In this sense, we may understand sacramentality as an essential characteristic of the nature of the

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ephesians 1.22; 4.15; Col. 1.18; 2.19.

<sup>32</sup> The Baptismal Covenant, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), pp. 305f.

<sup>33</sup> “Sacramentality” and “sacrament” represent an important theological distinction. Sacramentality is the more general term which refers to a natural or inherent quality of the created order. It is the condition of possibility for the specific sacraments of the Church. Sacramentality, then, refers to the capacity of the created order as a whole, and in its parts, to bear God’s grace. That is, the created order and its parts have the capacity to be instruments or vehicles through which God makes God’s self known in the world. The world, then, is inherently revelatory, as and when God chooses, in general, and in the specific sacraments of the Church. It is the inherent sacramentality of bread and wine that make it possible for them to be the sacramental Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. All Churches, at this point, agree there are at least two sacraments, the so-called Dominical Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1987). This classic work provides a penetrating examination of the relationship among Christ, sacrament, and Church. In this study, Schillebeeckx makes the distinction in the relationship in this way: Christ is the *Ur-sakrament* from and in whom there is the Church, the *primary sacrament* which is the context and instrument of the *sacraments* (including at least Baptism and Eucharist). Schillebeeckx’s sacramental worldview and theology resonates well with the sacramental perspective and theology of Richard Hooker in *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (I.2.2 and V.50, 55, 56.2, 5-7, 57-58), as well as the theology of Karl Rahner on Church, sacraments, and the world. See, for example, Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations IV*, Part 1.2, pp. 36-76; and, Part V, *The Sacraments. The Church and the Sacraments*, (Freiburg: Herder and London: Burns and Oates, 1963).



created order that reflects God's will and capacity to self-disclosure in relation to the created order in general and in relationship with human beings in particular.

Christology also brings us to some of the more thorny questions, especially at ecumenical and interfaith levels, such as the concept, "Outside the church there is no salvation." There is even further compelling need to think theologically about this claim when coupled with Jesus' statement, "No one comes to the Father except through me."<sup>34</sup> As Macquarrie points out in his compelling final chapter of *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, our day demands a very careful reading and interpretation of two statements too often and too quickly read in an utterly facile manner under the rubric of the "plain meaning of the text." The result, simply put, renders a grossly inadequate theology of Christ and the Church that is narrow, exclusive, and judgmental. It also avoids the complex and sometimes difficult work of thinking about these statements and what they say to us about how we build an appropriate, life-giving, and theologically sound Christology and ecclesiology for our day. From Macquarrie's perspective, Christians may claim that in Jesus we see the definitive revelation of God's self and God's purposes for humanity and creation, which, in turn, are explicitly expressed in and through the Church. However, Christians may not legitimately claim that Jesus is the only revelation of God's self and purposes for humanity and creation. Nor can we legitimately claim "*non salus extra ecclesiam*" – outside the Church there is no salvation.<sup>35</sup>

As we look at who and what the Church is from a Christological perspective, we also encounter the theological task of thinking about how our experiences as humans have grown and developed and changed over the centuries. A much, much larger knowledge base challenges the ways we think about Christ and the Church, how we understand who and what it is, and how our knowledge and understanding shapes the life and work of the Church. Hegel's "ugly ditch"<sup>36</sup> between the present and past can serve as

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<sup>34</sup> John 14.6. On this topic, see the very helpful final chapter of John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, ch. 20.

<sup>35</sup> This ancient phrase, as alluded to, has implications for both ecumenical and interfaith relations. A major problem on the ecumenical front has always been the claim of the Church of Rome to be exclusively the true Church. The shift in *Lumen gentium* of Vatican II was of major importance, though John Paul II and Benedict XVI did everything they could to nullify the shift back to the old exclusivism. The change in language from "the Church *is* the Roman Catholic Church," to "the Church *subsists in* allowed for legitimate ecclesial bodies other than the Roman Church that shifted the relationship, in John XXIII's language to "separated brethren". The same problem exists in relationship to the Orthodox Churches, who still maintain that the fullness of the Church is (and can) only be in the Orthodox Church. On the interfaith front, the question is, "How does God's redemptive love and plan become expressed and known in other of the world's religions?" It will not do, I think, to avoid this question (as if we could) by simply hiding in the ancient axiom.

<sup>36</sup> An introduction to this concept in Hegel's thought is here: *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, Graham Ward, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 588

a helpful concept.<sup>37</sup> The question may be put this way, “What is the difference between now and then? How does this difference change our capacity to understand or interpret a statement, and then apply it in our own day?”

Jesus the incarnate Word of God stands as the primary example of the sacramentality of the created order. Jesus is God’s own demonstration of the capacity of the created order to bear God’s grace into the created order, precisely through the sacramentality of his humanness that bears God’s grace most fully in the created order.<sup>38</sup>

In the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, we know and experience the capacity of created elements — water, bread, and wine — to bear God’s grace as these sacraments initiate us into the Body of Christ and sustain us as Christ’s Body precisely as the Church. As that Body through which the sacraments are given, we know and experience the Church as the primary sacrament of the *Ur-sakrament*, Jesus the Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Extending this line of argument can take us to an understanding of the individual Christian as well as the life and work of the Church. We, who are the Church, bear, by virtue of Baptism, a vocation to live in ways that most fully support, enhance, and demonstrate our sacramentality in the ways we are and in the works we do. The

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<sup>37</sup> See Hooker, *Laws* V.19.1-3. Hooker’s discussion about the interpretation and understanding of Scripture articulates a remarkable understanding of history and language for the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Hooker is critiquing the puritan position of insisting on the “plane meaning” of a text as the only possible meaning, and that it then must be applied literally. Hooker makes two charges. First the position of the puritans ignores the reality of the effects of the passage of time, that is history. Secondly, they wrongly assume that the passage of time has no effect on the meaning of words or the capacity of a latter period to grasp the original meanings and subtleties of historic language. Foreshadowing Hegel, Hooker concludes that an historical text cannot simply be moved across centuries and read in a latter century without consideration of the effects of history and human experience on the language and capacity to grasp it entirely. There is what Hegel would later call “an ugly ditch” between the present and past that is insurmountable. See also, *Laws* V.20.4 for a sense of Hooker’s understanding and appreciation of change and development within history in general, and the Church in particular.

<sup>38</sup> Let me be clear at this point that here I am only addressing the inherent sacramentality of humans in general. I am not casting doubts, implicitly or explicitly, on the unique perichoretic being of Jesus as fully God and fully human. This perichoresis of divine and human could only be possible and real if both realities were, *in se*, real. For Jesus to be fully human and fully divine, human being as embodied reality (“embodied spirit,” to use Aquinas’ language), there has to be an inherent capacity of human being to bear God’s grace, which becomes the condition of possibility for God to take that human being and speak it into the created order as God’s self incarnate.

<sup>39</sup>*Ur-sakrament* is a German term applied to Jesus the Christ as the “original or basic or first sacrament” in the sense that he is the primary expression of God’s self, presence, and action from which Church and sacraments derive. Ecclesiology needs to be careful not to claim too much when speaking of the Church as sacrament. We know that inasmuch as the created order has an inherent sacramentality, sacraments are not the *exclusive* bearers of God’s grace in the world. Nor is the Church *qua* primary sacrament the exclusive bearer of God’s grace. It may reasonably be argued theologically, and particularly in the context of ecclesiology, that the sacraments and the Church as primary sacrament are the clearest, most intense, and definitive bearers of God’s grace, in specific moments and events, understanding that grace is God’s self-gift in love to us. This distinction is the parallel form in sacramental theology of the ecclesiological dilemma of “*non salus extra ecclesiam*”.

Christological context of our ecclesiology calls the Church as institution and each of us to living with a sacramental mindfulness of ourselves, of the Church, and of what we do or do not do each day precisely as both image of God and as Body of Christ. In each part of the Body is the whole. The sacramentality of each part and of the whole identifies the vocation of the Church and each of its parts to bear God's grace, as the presence, love, and work of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Just as the *original sacrament*, Jesus, is part and yet bears the whole of God, so each member of the Body of Christ bears the whole of the primary sacrament, the Church, into the world by living in the world in the same manner as God lives with us. God is the steadfast being-present-in-love that gives and sustains life through our participation in God's mission in our ministries.<sup>40</sup>

### *Beginning with the Dominical Sacraments*

The Christological starting point opens naturally into another point of departure for ecclesiology, moving us from Christ the *original sacrament* to a sacramental approach to ecclesiology. This one is particularly pertinent to The Episcopal Church in light of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), which has enabled the church to develop an ecclesiology grounded in Baptism and Eucharist, especially in the last 40 years. The stimulus for such thinking about the Church derives primarily from our emphasis on the Baptismal Covenant, as well as developments in the theology and practice of ministry for both ordained and laypersons. Our grasp of Church is profoundly shaped by our understanding of what it means to be a baptized person and to participate in the Eucharist. The theological emphasis has become, generally speaking, the Church as "missional," as that body who, under the guidance of the Spirit, exists to do ministries in the world in the Name of Jesus. In this light, the work of the Church becomes the means of participation in God's Mission in which God acts. This work, and those who do it, are therefore both sacramental: bearers in concrete ways of God's grace. There is here an overlap with an ecclesiology grounded in Christology. We return to pull together the thread of Jesus as *original sacrament*, and the Church as primary sacrament, in order to explicate further an understanding and practice of Church that grows out of Baptism and Eucharist. The sacramental perspective also pulls forward again the ecclesiology of the Body of Christ as linked with the Eucharist by which God continues to feed the Church to be the Body of Christ.

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<sup>40</sup> In the tradition, we can well remember the insight of St. Thomas Aquinas in his discussion of the sacrament. Aquinas argues that the sacramental elements of bread and wine for one, unified sacramental symbol: the-Body-and-Blood-of-Christ. Therefore, to receive any *part* of the whole is to receive the *whole*. Therefore, the faithful were not being deprived of the whole (or fullness) of the Sacrament because of the practice of only receiving the Bread/Body. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, IV.61 – 69; see also, *Summa Theologica* III, Q lxxx, a.12, ad 3; Bonaventure, *Sentences*, IV, XI, punt. li, a.1, q.2; Cajetan III.q.33; Francisco Suarez, Q.III.q.lxxix, a.8, disp lxiii, IV, 8, sq; Robert Bellarmine, *De Sac. Euch.* IV.2; and others.

Extrapolating from Hooker's understanding of the structures of the created order as possessing an inherent sacramentality, a sacramental approach to ecclesiology links Church, as such, even more intimately to the created order precisely as institution and people through whom God works. We are reminded that we are *created* to participate in God's Mission, which is to be both a people and an organization that embodies God's love. Moreover, we are to be icons of God as we live in ways that demonstrate the meaning of being created in the image and likeness of God. Our natural sacramentality is the condition of possibility for us to be bearers of God's grace in real, concrete ways that in themselves also possess a natural sacramentality. We are to do what God does, especially as demonstrated in the sacraments: to embody God's love, and thus to sustain and enhance life through our lives and works.

Therefore, we may understand the sacraments both as ways through which God comes to us, and as models of how we are to be and live in the world as individuals and as Church. When we begin to consider the Church sacramentally, we enter into a world of symbol and ritual, a world of icon, and a world through which God comes to us. The caveat here is, of course, not to allow ourselves to become lost in abstractions or confuse the symbols and rituals with God. Indeed to think that the world of sacraments, symbols, and rituals is "mere" abstraction and ritual is to miss the very nature and purpose of sacraments entirely.

The notion of sacramentality denotes a natural quality of the created order in general. That is, it does not indicate specific sacraments nor specific sacramental qualities, events, or material. It is of the *esse* (essence) of the created order, identifying the capacity of the created order to be a means through which God's presence and activity occur.<sup>41</sup> A sacrament identifies specific, material qualities and events in which the faithful experience, through symbols and rituals, specific, explicit, intense moments of God's engagement with us and we with God. These events mark fundamental major events in our life. The Dominical sacraments: Baptism, our naming and formal incorporation into the Body of Christ; Eucharist, through which the Risen Christ continue to feed us with Christ's Body and Blood to participate in God's Mission by living our Baptismal Vows; and the other five sacraments.<sup>42</sup> Each of these marks specific critical moments in human life: Marriage, sickness and healing and dying (Unction or Anointing), Ordination, Reconciliation (confession and absolution), and Confirmation. In each case, the Church marks in a liturgical, ritualized, and symbolic way, particular moments when we ask God to be present in an explicit and intense way for us and with us

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<sup>41</sup> See Richard Hooker, *Laws*, 1.1-3,5-8.

<sup>42</sup> Within the Anglican Tradition, the number of sacraments generally depends on where along the spectrum of Anglicanism one sits theologically and liturgically. The Evangelical segment sees two sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist. This position is consistent with Article XXV of the Thirty-nine Articles (*Book of Common Prayer* [1979], p. 872). The Anglo-Catholic portion of Anglicanism recognizes "Those five commonly called sacraments" (Art. XXV) as sacraments in their own right. The theological debate in the matter is beyond the scope of this essay, but to avoid confusion, the matter is here tagged.

in the context of the Church.<sup>43</sup> The ritual and symbol of the liturgy mark in a formal way both an affirmation that God is present and active in this moment and that we receive God's blessing to bring to fruition the intention and focus of this particular moment or event.

So, what does this provide for us in terms of thinking theologically about the Church? If we think of the Church as *primary sacrament* of the original one, we can think of the Church as that body of persons who are keenly aware of and connected to God and to the deepest, most holy, and most concrete dimensions of the created order. We are, both by nature and grace, collectively and individually, what the Celtic tradition calls a "thin place". The Church sees and acts, as institution and as individual members, as God sees us and acts toward us. This seeing and acting on the part of God culminates in the incarnation of the Son, Jesus. To be sacrament and act sacramentally in the world is to be, to see, and to act with mindfulness of our primary connection to God and that sacraments are ways in which Holy Mystery becomes real, concrete, accessible, present, and effectively active within the world and with people. Hence, our lives in all their dimensions are to be embodiments of love: stewards of the created order, personal giving of self to the other, and sustaining of the inherent connectedness of all the parts of the created order. The Church and all its parts are to reflect in their lives the love, orderliness, focus, generativity, and commitment of God toward us and the created order as a whole, as individuals and as Church.

A sacramental ecclesiology, therefore, both connects us constantly and mindfully to the world and to the one Who is our ground and source. Moreover, a sacramental ecclesiology reminds us that who we are, what we do, the means we use, and the ways in which we live and work all have a sacramental dimension that is real and concrete. We can never think of ourselves, of the Church, of others, or the world without a robust understanding of our sacramentality and hence of the holiness of our living and working in the world.

## TRINITY AS STARTING POINT

The Doctrine of God as Trinity may seem a complex and dubious starting point for an ecclesiology. However, I think that it provides us with a rich starting point which, like the others in this essay, both keep us grounded and build a strong, comprehensive,

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<sup>43</sup> It is appropriate to remember that in the Anglican Tradition, sacraments are always "public" celebrations. That is, they are *of* and *by* the Church as *community* of faith, and not private matters. Two examples: From the beginning, the Book of Common Prayer has required that at least one other person be present with the priest in order to celebrate the Eucharist. Especially since the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer (1979), the baptismal liturgy makes it very clear that the former tradition found in many parishes of "private Baptism" is, at best inappropriate, and, except *in extremis*, is not to be done. Indeed, "private Baptism" is a liturgical, theological, and sacramental contradiction of terms.

and accessible way of understanding who and what the Church is.<sup>44</sup> In the Christian tradition, there are two predominant classical models for understanding Trinity: the Augustinian “psychological model”<sup>45</sup> (especially in the West) and the Greek Patristic model (especially in the East).<sup>46</sup> Both models offer important insights for an ecclesiology.

The fundamental difference between the two models is the dynamic and direction of their focus. Augustine’s model is more focused on God’s internal life and the overabundance of love which “spills over” into the created order. The Greek model is an “ecstatic” model in which God chooses in absolute freedom to give God’s self in love into the created order, especially to God’s beloved children.

The Augustinian model addresses the superabundance of love which God is. Within God, there is an eternal exchange of love among the Three Persons of Trinity. There is here, I think, a theological explication of the simple statement of I John 4.8b, “God is love.” Love is explained in terms of a dynamic self-giving of each Person of the Godhead that is constant and timeless. What the Persons of the Godhead do is love each other by giving themselves to each other. What they give is personal, that is, themselves. Theologically, then, within the Godhead, Who God is and what God does are the same thing. Hence, to say, “God is love” and “God loves” has the same meaning. In Augustine’s image, it overflows toward and into the created order. It is in this overflow that humans experience God and know that God is love (Romans 5:5). The ultimate expression of this superabundance of love overflowing into the created order is in its embodiment in Jesus. Jesus then is the embodied love of God (the Son) and is both really and fully human as well as really and fully divine.

This very brief and simplified explanation of Augustine’s theology of God does provide a framework that is helpful for developing an ecclesiology. First, and arguably most fundamentally, because God is love and the Church is the Body of Christ, the deepest essential reality of the Church is that it, too is love. Therefore, it is also of the deepest essence of the Church that what it does is love. The nature and quality of this love is dynamic, eternal, and superabundant. As Christ embodied God’s love within the created order, so also the Church as Body of Christ is to embody God’s love within the created order out of the superabundance of love that is the internal being and doing of the Church.

Within the Church, made up of the People of God (the Baptized), each person is created in the image of God. At the very heart of human essence is this divine image.

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<sup>44</sup> This is not the place to argue the cases about the classical language of Trinitarian theology. I am going to use the classical language, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” because it is most familiar.

<sup>45</sup> See Augustine’s *De Trinitate*. XV.17-19, and also I.4-7; II.3-5, 8; IV 20, 21; V.8-10; VI.3-7; VIII.4-10; IX.1-5. This profound work is a seminal theology of God and provides a fulsome development of Augustine’s thinking about God.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Patristic Fathers, especially the Cappadocian Fathers writings on Trinity and John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa*. See also John Zizioulas, [also see](#) n. 10 above.

Through Baptism and the indwelling of the Spirit, we are empowered to live into the image of God and so become bearers of God's grace (God's self-gift in love). As recipients of God's grace, we carry into the world this divine love. In Augustinian terms, we receive and accept the superabundance of God's love and, in this openness to God, that love flows through us into the world and to others. But this is not all. The image of God within us, enlivened by the Spirit, reveals to us that it is of our very nature to be and act like God. That is, we are created to love as God loves: it is who we truly are and what we are to do.

Yet, we know all too painfully that, with great creativity, persistence, and effectiveness, we often do not love. We do not love God or ourselves or anyone else. We sin, living out the shadow side of the gift of free will. And yet, here we also encounter the superabundance of God's love through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation, whether sacramentally or less formally in our conversations with God and our engagements with one another. The explicit acts of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation are acts of love that re-create and renew our capacity to love. Because the People of God are created in the image and likeness of Love and empowered by the Spirit to be and do this love, it is then true that the Church, including the institution, are to be individuals and a body who love. This love is no abstraction or sentiment: its expressions are real, concrete, and practical. And this comes about especially through confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Augustine's model is personal – not *about* God, but *of* God. The essence of the Church is love, both as it is the Body of Christ and as the People of God who are made in the image of God. God's love within the Church and within each person is in a superabundance which, as with God to us, so we to the world. We are to receive and let flow through us this superabundance, not in the abstract, but through us and through the ministries we as the Church do in the world. Moreover, as God is eternal and the superabundance of God's love is eternal, the capacity of the People of God as individuals and as Church to love is unlimited by space and time. From an Episcopalian perspective, the ways we learn and live and embody this reality is precisely in our embracing and committing ourselves, singly and together, to live daily our Baptismal Vows.

The Greek model of Trinity places its emphasis on the ecstatic nature of God. The Greek word, *εκστασις*, commonly translated as "ecstasy", means "to go or stand out of."<sup>47</sup> To describe God as "ecstatic" is to identify the fundamental dynamic and character of God's self-revelation. It is God's free choice to be in relationship with the created order in general and with human beings in particular, precisely by going out of God's self to us. Again, "grace" here is understood as God's self-gift in love. The difference here, in contrast to the Augustinian model is that the decision for *ekstasis* is not secondary, the

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<sup>47</sup> The usual meaning of "ecstasy" is an experience of rapture, of being transported out of one's self. Here it means the love at the heart of God the Trinity that "overflows" "out" of God into creating, redeeming, and making holy. To make this distinction, the word "*ekstasis*" shall be used.

product of an overflow or superabundance of love. It is a primary decision of God to be in relationship with the created order, especially human beings, in a particular way, as revealed in God's self-revelation.<sup>48</sup>

What we find especially in the Greek model is an understanding of love as personal, dynamic, and always moving outward into embodiment. As with Augustine, the ultimate embodiment of God's *ekstasis* is Jesus. The ecstatic nature of God's love was embodied and lived in the life and ministry of Jesus. The ministry of Jesus was, at its base, a ministry of "going out" and giving himself to the other. Jesus also demonstrates in his own life that the *ekstasis* of God is a disciplined and timely activity. Love does not simply go careening hither and yon throughout the created order.<sup>49</sup> One of the central points of both creation stories in Genesis is that God is a God of order.<sup>50</sup> This intentional, disciplined self-giving culminates in the final act of the crucifixion of Jesus. Yet, actually, the crucifixion is not the ultimate act in God's decision of redemption for us by God's self-gift in love. The crucifixion is prelude to the resurrection, which is prelude to Pentecost. The redemption of the world is effected through God's self-gift, each Person of Trinity having its particular mission in the whole process.<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, we see in Jesus and in his life that the going out into the world has two other dimensions: (1) a keen sense of *καιρος*, the "right time", and (2) the necessity of preparation and continuous living in intentional relationship with God. More than once Jesus says, "My time has not yet come". He had a deep sense of when it was time to do certain things and when it was not. Doing things "out of time" would be contrary to the will of the Father Who "had sent" him into the world to do specific work. We see in Jesus

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<sup>48</sup> See Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, I.2 Hooker's discussion of the Second Law Eternal is germane here. Hooker, building on Aquinas, created what he called "The Second Law Eternal" to describe theologically the self-revelation of God. The Second Law Eternal is the revelation by God of how God *in se* has chosen to relate to and be with the world, especially human beings. The influence of both classical Greek sources as well as Greek Patristic sources is evident. The presence of St. Augustine's theology is also present. Hooker weaves his secondary sources and their perspectives with a clear biblical grounding.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the story of Zacchaeus, Luke 19.1-7; and, the healing of Jairus' daughter, Mark 5.17-27; Luke 8.36-46.

<sup>50</sup> Genesis 1 – 2.

<sup>51</sup> While I think we can say that God put God's whole self into the redemption of the world, and that the work of redemption is the work of all three Persons, we must be careful not to imply that the process of redemption exhausts the revelation of God's self to us. As much as God is love, God is also, as Karl Rahner often termed it, Holy Mystery. The revelation of God is always qualified by God's choices known in revelation and the fact that God is and remains absolute mystery – infinite and eternal, never completely knowable by finite humans. The Greek Fathers spoke of our final union with God and the Latin and Medieval Fathers spoke of the beatific vision. In both cases, there has always been clarity that when we die, it will be as Job declared: "and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger" (Job 19.25-27, *Book of Common Prayer*, The Burial of the Dead, p. 469), that union with God is not a dissolution of our finite self into God. Rather it is the ultimate experience of the absolute difference between God and ourselves: God is eternally God and we are eternally our self. And in that reality, we enter the "lightsome darkness" the light so bright, intense, and pure that we actually "see" (know) nothing, yet see (know) everything that finally matters – we are with God and there is nothing between us. We have entered into the mansion prepared for us.



both the discipline of restraint and of going forward. Both of these qualities mark his sense of *kairos* (timeliness), discipline, and obedience to the Father. He never simply goes willy-nilly into the world and peoples' lives. Secondly, he was a man of prayer. We see this especially in the Gospel according to Luke. Jesus went off alone to care for his heart and soul in conversation with the Father and the Spirit. In a sense, we can think of this conversation much in the same way as the implied conversation within God's self about the creation of humanity.<sup>52</sup>

From this brief discussion of the Greek Patristic model, the suggestions for an ecclesiology include these points: The Church, as the Body of Christ, and each part of the Body, is ecstatic. This essential *ekstasis* reflects both the nature of God's love and the dynamic of God's life as revealed in the created order. An essential dynamic of the Church is, therefore to be ecstatic. The *ekstasis* of the Church takes the forms of its participation in the world and the ministries it does in the Name of Jesus.

The life and work of Jesus remind us that God's work, and therefore, our participation as the Body of Christ in that work, is ordered and disciplined. It happens in obedience to our hearing of God's call to us, and in using the gifts given us to accomplish that work. In so far as the *ekstasis* of both members and Body as a whole are faithful to God, then, with the indwelling of the Spirit, we participate in God's Mission, demonstrating the truth of God's proclamation:

So it is my word goes forth from my mouth, it will not return to me empty,  
But it will accomplish that for which I purposed, and prosper in that for  
which I sent it.<sup>53</sup>

Participating in God's *ekstasis* through our own going forth *must* also reflect Jesus' same mindfulness of *kairos*. Timeliness and effectiveness go hand in hand. And, perhaps most importantly, the life and work of Jesus remind us that participation in God's *ekstasis* lives in and out of the radical relationship we have with the Father in the Son through the Spirit. This relationship is fueled by formation, training, and prayer, under the guidance of the Spirit.

This dimension of beginning with the Trinity to shape our ecclesiology grows out of both a sense of *kairos* and of our living our lives based on the ways God is for us and with us. Jesus shows us clearly that the relationship between the Father and him was intentional, prayerful, and disciplined. It was not a secondary or optional. Therefore, for us individually, and for us together as the Church, life-giving conversation, formation of heart, mind, and soul through careful attention to the Spirit within us, and developing knowledge and skills are necessary for us to be able to hear and respond to the work God gives to us individually and to the Church. God as Trinity is a community of persons who

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<sup>52</sup> Genesis 1.26-27. Note especially the "Let us make..."

<sup>53</sup> Isaiah 55.11

live and work in the greatest possible intimacy. The Trinity is an *us*, and therefore stands as one, in complete and absolute unity. As finite and sinful creatures, our functioning and our unity are always qualified by our choices to respond or not to God's invitation. We are always a mixture of righteousness and unrighteousness. Nonetheless, *the model* of the life of God in God's self, insofar as we can extrapolate that life from God's self-revelation, is the primary way we, as individuals and as the Body of Christ, come most fully to be and do precisely that in our life and work in a manner that is intimate, personal, balanced, and effective.

Developing an ecclesiology from a Trinitarian perspective makes it possible to understand the Church at least in these ways:

The Church is a "who," not an "it."<sup>54</sup> That is, the personal nature of the Church as a whole and in its parts (the People of God) is brought forward. From this perspective, the structures and processes of the Church as institution are set within a context of relationships grounded in the interior relationships among the Persons of the Trinity. We know these relationships insofar as God reveals them to us.

The proper ordering of the life and work of the Church, therefore, is always for living an *ecstatic* life in love that clearly bears God's grace in the world through its prayer and worship, and through generative, effective ministries in service to God's mission. The Church is truly itself when who we are and what we do are the same. This essential unity of being and doing in the Church reflects the actual essential unity within the Godhead as well as the *ecstatic* dynamic of God, the personal giving of self in love. The Church embodies this love, precisely as the individual and corporate image and likeness of God who is love. The Church, therefore, is also to be seen as symbol and instrument through which God is present and acts in the world.

Trinity demonstrates to us the fundamental way we are created and called to participate in God's Mission. Our life is to be participatory, reflecting the participatory life of Trinity. Trinity makes clear that life with the Father in the Son through the Spirit is relational among persons. It is in this personal participation that we come to the core of what it is to be human, through which we draw most closely to God, and by which we most fully participate in God's Mission.

Beginning with our understanding of Trinity also opens for us a platform from which to connect other starting points: the Church as sacrament or the Church as Body of Christ. The common thread is each perspective focuses on God and derives from our understanding of God.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986)

In this essay, I have offered a basic definition of ecclesiology. I articulated briefly several starting points from which we can understand the Church. In this process, I have also given some indication of the natural inter-relatedness among these starting points.

Beginning with a biblical starting point, St. Paul's Body of Christ model of I Corinthians, we have looked at Christology, sacramental theology, and Trinity. There are others. One does well to look at Avery Dulles' classic, *Models of the Church*, for still other possibilities.<sup>55</sup> As Dulles rightly argues, models (or here, starting points) do not and cannot be exhaustive, nor are they properly understood as the single definitive expression of what the Church is. Models and starting points are only particular lenses that focus our attention or thinking. They are not comprehensive in and of themselves. They are suggestive, provocative, evocative. Models are devices, much like a literary device, to engage our intellect, imagination, and creativity in disciplined, thoughtful, and faithful ways. Therefore, theologically, there really is no such thing as a single, comprehensive, exhaustive, and exclusive "ecclesiology". The reality is that there are, rightly and always, "ecclesiologies", which, when taken as a whole, give us a broad and more comprehensive theological understanding of the Church.<sup>56</sup>

Models also are, by nature, articulations of the ideal. As such, they create tensions between the possibilities we imagine and the realities that we see and experience concretely in daily living. The ideal and the actual seem for us, at many levels, contradictory. This dilemma seems to be an inescapable dialectic, and therefore at least briefly needs commenting.

We can see clear relationships among Christological, sacramental, and Body of Christ ecclesiologies. These three perspectives deepen the understanding both theologically and practically what it means to be the Body and Christ and what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ, institutionally and individually. The interrelation among them is important to note methodologically for at least two reasons. First, the interconnection points up clearly that no one perspective, as comprehensive as it may be, is complete or absolute in itself. Secondly, and related to the first, is that regardless of where we start, we shall necessarily encounter and need to address other possible models at some point and in some way, even while the focus may remain on a particular starting point or particular perspectives. In a sense, then, it does not really matter where we start. Any given starting point will take us to multiple other starting points and possible perspectives. The caution in the discipline of theology in general, and ecclesiology in

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<sup>55</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, New York: Image Classics), 1991. Additional possibilities are found in the documents of Vatican II, especially *Lumen gentium*, *Dei verbum*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, as well as *Apostolicam acuositatum* (on the laity) *Christus Dominus* (on bishops), *Optatum Totius* (priestly formation), *Presbyteriorum ordinis* (on the ministry and life of priests).

<sup>56</sup> Analogously, the same may be argued of the Gospels. Each gives us a perspective, portrait, and understanding of who Jesus was and what he did. When taken all together, the four Gospels give us a fuller, more comprehensive portrait as well as perspectives and understandings.

particular, is that we be always open to where the discipline takes us, both in terms of sources and perspectives. The basic principle here is that the doing of theology is not simply about “proving the point” with which we began. It is also, necessarily and equally, following the logic and evidence of our thinking, praying, and discerning. Faithfully allowing room for the Spirit to move within us will lead to places we had not intended or even thought of at the outset. Therein lies the challenge and liveliness of the discipline.

### **THE IDEAL AND THE ACTUAL: A PROVERBIAL DILEMMA**

Ecclesiology cannot simply examine and explicate *the* theological ideal of the Church, though the primary task is to do precisely that. A balanced ecclesiology addresses both the theological ideal and the “on-the-ground” realities of who the Church is and how it actualizes itself internally and in the world. A sound starting point will also provide opportunity for the Church to be self-critical, holding itself accountable and responsible internally and externally for its life and work. The theological ideal and the reality of practice create and maintain a dialectic that enlivens and challenges us. In this dialectic, there is always a gap, a difference, which is not only the product of ignorance, but also especially the sin of God’s people and the sin of the Church. This gap is not simply a matter of hypocrisy, though at times it is certainly that. Even with God’s help, human beings individually and institutionally continue to choose not-God, to turn away from God, to break right relationship with God, ourselves, and one another. It is precisely within the context of this truth about ourselves that the theological and practical question of how we are created and called to be becomes so crucial. It is in these moments that we experience and know the dialectic between the whole and the broken. This dialectic stands as judgment. Even more importantly, this experience stands as call, as invitation, to remember who we are and Whose we are. We are invited to repent, in the sense of choosing again to turn Godward and be received again by God with compassion and love. It is God’s invitation to turn again to one another and ourselves with the same compassion and love. The image of the Church as Body of Christ, and of ourselves as God’s image, reminds us of the possibilities of the abundant life that God wills for us, as well as the vows we have made (and renewed) through Baptism. It reminds us of why continuing in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of Bread, and the prayers is important, indeed essential, on a daily basis as well as in the weekly gathering for Eucharist.<sup>57</sup> A proper ecclesiology of the Church must remind us of the “daily-ness” of our living the faith, not as mere theory, but as the substance of engaging practically the world around us. This commitment to living as the Church is the essence of the Baptismal Covenant. It is what it means to “be raised to the new life of grace” which we live, “with God’s help.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The Baptismal Covenant, Book of Common Prayer (1979) 304, referencing Acts 2:42.

<sup>58</sup> BCP, p. 304 and p. 308.

The Church is not called to be perfect. The Church is called to be faithful. The Church is called to strive, with God's help, to do and be fully its true self, to participate in God's Mission through effective ministries, to bear God's grace in the world, and to repent and seek God's forgiveness when we fail to do so. The Church is called to live within the realities of our humanness, and yet, in the Spirit, hold fast to the vision, the mission, and the God who created us, loves and redeems us, this God, whom at the last day we shall behold, and not as a stranger. An essential part of this faithful response to God is disciplined thinking about who we are individually and as Church. Being the Church is hard work and daily work. And with God's help, it is do-able work.

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## THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Is subsidiarity the key theological concept underlying the polity of The Episcopal Church?<sup>1</sup> This paper will argue that it is. Furthermore, subsidiarity is much more than a mere organizational principle. It is a direct result of the communion between God and the Church, and the members of the Church with one another. The concept therefore deserves much more consideration than, to date, it has received.

The most significant change from the colonial congregations to The Episcopal Church in 1789 is the limiting of churchwide powers. Before, the Crown, the Bishop of London, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel held what theoretically was absolute power over the life of the American congregations. Theoretically: for the life of these from 1607 to 1781 was marked first by the inability of the Church of England, and later, that Church's relative indifference, to provide for their need for oversight. The colonial churches thus had considerable leeway in ordering their lives. Yet whenever the mother church pulled the reins, the colonials obeyed.

In constituting a Church that satisfied both their need for continuity in their inherited tradition (which we would now call "Anglican"), and the respect of the albeit informal autonomy they had enjoyed, the Episcopalians developed a principle which in the twentieth century became known as "subsidiarity." Its Latin root, *subsidium*, means "aid".

Pius XI, in his encyclical *Quadragesima anno*, enunciated the principle:

As history abundantly proves, it is true that on account of changed conditions many things which were done by small associations in former times cannot be done now save by large associations. Still, that most weighty principle, which cannot be set aside or changed, remains fixed and unshaken in social philosophy: Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also *it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do*. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them. (paragraph no. 79, emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

This idea is now at the heart of Roman Catholic social teaching, though has not been applied to that Church's life. But it did have great significance in the creation of the European Union, as spelled out in Article V of the Treaty on European Union, which is worth quoting in full:

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Whalon, "The Tale Needs Retelling: A reply to Colin Podmore's 'A tale of two churches'" *Theology* 114.1, pp. 3-12

<sup>2</sup> Accessed on May 21, 2014 at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19310515\\_quadragesimo-anno\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html)

## ARTICLE 5: ‘Fundamental principles relating to competences’

1. The limits of Union competences are governed by the principle of conferral. The use of Union competences is governed by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

2. Under the principle of conferral, the Union shall act within the limits of the competences conferred upon it by the Member States in the Treaties to attain the objectives set out therein. Competences not conferred upon the Union in the Treaties remain with the Member States.

3. Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level.

The institutions of the Union shall apply the principle of subsidiarity as laid down in the Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. National Parliaments shall ensure compliance with that principle in accordance with the procedure set out in that Protocol.

4. Under the principle of proportionality, the content and form of Union action shall not exceed what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaties. The institutions of the Union shall apply the principle of proportionality as laid down in the Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.<sup>3</sup>

William White wrote in his 1782 pamphlet, *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered*, that a churchwide “representative body” should “make such regulations, and receive appeals in such matters only, as shall be judged necessary for their continuing religious communion.”<sup>4</sup> Meeting in 1784, he and fellow Pennsylvanians adjudged that “no powers be delegated to a central ecclesiastical government, except such as cannot be conveniently exercised by the clergy and laity, in their respective congregations.”<sup>5</sup> As we have argued in the *Primer of this Report*, these concepts remain at the heart of the polity of The Episcopal Church.

From all of these, we can see that the papal encyclical and European treaty have several elements in common with the thinking at the origin of The Episcopal Church:

- 1.) Individual people and local societies can and should make most decisions for their lives, not only as a matter of political reality but also as a moral matter.

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed May 21, 2014 at <http://www.eurotreaties.com/lisbontext.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Chapter III. Accessed May 21, 2014 at <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/wwhite/case1782.html>

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Paul Marshall, *One, Catholic, and Apostolic: Samuel Seabury and the Early Episcopal Church*. (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2004), p. 70.

- 2.) Insofar as an overall unity is necessary for the maintenance of identity (that is, survival), “higher” authorities are necessary, but they exist to ensure not only the continuing identity of the whole but also the flourishing of its individual members. Therefore their powers are to be limited to what is necessary to their functions.
- 3.) The constituting members of the whole shall be the ones to determine the powers of the overall government.

This last is missing from Roman Catholic reflection on its own organization, as we shall see below, but has been reiterated in several papal encyclicals as essential to the just ordering of secular society.

So far, however, this describes what The Episcopal Church has in common with, say, the Rotary Club. Beyond these very practical considerations, what weight does the idea of subsidiarity have beyond them? The question remains as to why this idea should have moral warrant in the Church.

First, the Church “here below” lives in its outcroppings in time and space, that is, the local congregations. These require an organization to create them and keep them flourishing, beginning with the maintenance over time of their collective identity. In other words, there must be an institutionalization of their common life, first so that they can have a common life, “a religious communion,” in White’s words. This happens through the ministry of a bishop and the outgrowth of episcopal ministry, the diocese.

This point is at the heart of the conflict between the need to spread the Gospel and as a result, the need to ensure that it is indeed the Gospel that is being spread as generation succeeds generation. With the dying off of the first disciples, and the delay of the return of Christ, resources that would withstand the passage of time, and the structures to develop and nurture those resources, were essential to the survival of the Church’s identity. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of Bible, Creeds, sacraments, and the episcopate, is clearly the result of the necessary work begun by the second generation of Jesus’ disciples, which succeeding generations have carried on to this day. As Charles Williams observed, the Church has to re-invent itself every thirty years.<sup>6</sup> Thus the Church continues through time not through a recalling of past events, but a perpetual re-remembering of the future that belongs to God. In Catherine Pickstock’s extraordinary expression, celebrating the liturgy makes us “stand *expectantly*, in a position *prior* to the ‘making now’ of what mundanely lies *behind* us.”<sup>7</sup>

The Episcopal Church, as a part of Christ’s One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, continues to celebrate that future. And its ordering must therefore also rest not merely on convenient organizational theory or even moral law, but on doctrine. Not only must its polity be just, its grasp of the nature of the Church — its ecclesiology — needs to be of a piece with its overall incarnational theology.

The reason why The Episcopal Church should be organized according to subsidiarity proceeds from what constitutes the Church itself. It is a truism that all

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishers, 2001), 83.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 318. Emphasis hers.



moral reasoning must have as underlying support a doctrinal consideration. And as Avery Dulles pointed out, "... the Church pertains to the mystery of Christ; Christ is carrying out in his Church his plan of redemption."<sup>8</sup>

God's plan of redemption, or mission in creation, has the Church. It is constituted by people linked together to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Baptism, it has been said, creates solidarities not of our own choosing.<sup>9</sup> Solidarity with Christ, which people freely accept after first having been chosen, but also solidarities with each other. The most obvious example is sharing the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, but also hearing and proclaiming the Gospel, baptizing others, absolving, blessing marriages, ordering people to fill the needs of the Church, healing the sick, sitting with the grieving, and freeing the physically, economically, and spiritually oppressed.

If these are what we do together, then these are what make us individually disciples of Jesus, and collectively, the Church. Underlying this activity is the unifying and empowering action of the Spirit. In Baptism, each of us receives the gift of the Spirit, to transform us for the ministry we have been given, each of us individually, but exercising it "commun-ally". And as "comm-unities", each congregation exercises as one various ministries of witness, teaching, blessing and celebrating, in its own time and place.<sup>10</sup>

Every congregation existing in the world today, no matter to which church it belongs, has antecedents. The work of the first witnesses to Jesus Christ has gone forward over two millennia until Christianity is now the world's largest religion. No congregation today came into being on its own. Even the first Church, Jerusalem, had as its ancestor the earthly ministry of Jesus and the women and men who followed him, saw him crucified, buried him, and witnessed his resurrection. The gift of the Spirit made them the Church, as the same gift poured out in each generation continues to ensure that the Word of God is preached and the sacraments of the New Covenant are celebrated, "proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes."<sup>11</sup> There is no reason to believe this is some ossified institution: the Holy Spirit enacts each gift as a new event in God's freedom.

Within this great river flowing through time is The Episcopal Church. Each of its congregations belongs to a diocese under a bishop meeting in convention (synod), and all the dioceses are subject to the General Convention. These are the institutional outcroppings in time and space of the inner relation that binds all of us together: Communion.

Building on the hint in White's Case that the point of such structures is to do those things that "shall be judged necessary for their continuing one religious communion," I will now argue that subsidiarity, properly understood, is not freedom of

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<sup>8</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1987), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Attributed to Rowan Williams, who replied to a query about its origin that he could not find the reference, "though it sounds like me."

<sup>10</sup> See "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry – the Lima Text" (Faith and Order Paper 111, World Council of Churches) : Ministry III. D. Accessed 10 October 2014 at <http://oikoumene.net/eng.global/eng.lima82/eng.lima.4.3/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> I Cor. 11:26

the local, recognized and granted by a higher authority. This is implicit in Pius XI's formulation of it. Rather, subsidiarity is the principle based upon the rock of the "comm-union" of all the disciples of Christ. The power necessary to continue "one religious communion" comes from the gift of the Spirit manifested first and foremost in the local congregation. Not only manifested in its individual members, but like the lampstands before the throne in St. John the Divine's apocalyptic vision,<sup>12</sup> each congregation itself shows forth the universal Church in miniature, in the Spirit.

While power in The Episcopal Church does flow from local to churchwide bodies, it also flows in the reverse. Every one of the Church's congregations came from an antecedent body, and not merely a mother parish. The original congregations that made The Episcopal Church in 1789 had all been part of the Church of England's Diocese of London, under the governorship of the British Crown, if only formally. That diocese had an antecedent, albeit a very long time ago (the present Bishop of London is the 132nd).

Therefore while the local congregation is where the Church appears in time and space, and, as a community and as individuals, does the part of God's mission in creation that the Spirit commissions it to do, it cannot be sufficient unto itself. We are not only in communion with one another; we are also in communion with those who have gone before. This can be understood not only in its properly mystical sense, but also in the mundane fact that we are our past. We have always been standing expectantly, in a position prior to the "making now" of what lies behind us. For us to be here and now, others had to come before, and the power they exercised to build up the Church came not only from the local but also from the universal.

While affirming that it is the Risen Jesus who is doing the work of salvation through the Church, of course, it is also crucial to note that structures that are wider than the local are essential to the maintenance and development of the human aspect of God's mission: "... continuing in one religious communion."

The relationship between the local and the wider communities should be governed by subsidiarity, understood as the maintenance, development, and deepening of Communion, not only together with one another but also with the Triune God. Ministers discerned and elected for the task should constitute the bodies that ensure these. It begins with the Vestry or Bishop's Committee, who act with the Priest in charge to see to it that the living God is worshipped, the Word is preached, the Faith is taught, and the sacraments duly administered.

In the accomplishment of their duties, and in the larger picture of the congregation's ministry, certain needs will arise that the congregation cannot meet for itself. These are decisions about doctrine, discipline, and worship. There will also be other things that the local church may need: help with Christian formation, for instance, financing, compliance with secular law, etc.

The wider, regional body that exists to meet the needs that the local congregations cannot meet for themselves is the diocese. Its ministry turns around the work of the

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<sup>12</sup> Revelation 1:12, 20

bishop, and the clergy and lay leaders elected to share in the bishop's oversight of all its congregations. The first need that the diocese meets is to launch new congregations. Every parish exists because it is part of a diocese. The ministry of the bishop and diocese is first that of unifying all its congregations, as well as creating and making available resources for their flourishing. It is also a ministry of oversight, meaning the power to create new congregations, close dying ones, and to intervene when events are bearing a congregation away from healthy communal living. For all these reasons, Anglicans refer to the diocese and not the congregation as "the local church."

Dioceses also have needs that they cannot meet on their own. The first is their creation, obviously. As we saw in the *Primer*, the dioceses of The Episcopal Church did not exist before the General Convention made it possible for them to become dioceses and not merely occasional meetings. Dioceses' needs are churchwide, and all concern unity as well. The establishment and occasional revision of the Book of Common Prayer is one of them. Carrying forward a constitution and canons is another. Collective decisions on doctrine are sometimes required, both in the doctrinal and moral spheres.

Ecumenical relations with other churches in this age of the outwardly fractured Church cannot be the purview of a single diocese. Interreligious relations are another churchwide matter, although the churchwide body should create and make available resources for local (diocesan) dialogues and other joint actions.

The formation of deacons and priests requires churchwide attention, in terms of standards, even though such training takes place in seminaries and diocesan schools. The elections, consecrations, and formation of bishops must also be a churchwide matter, and handled at that level.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, deployment of clergy can only be effectively maintained at the same level.

Finally, there need to be officials who can speak for the Church. The General Convention holds the power to rule on doctrine, discipline and worship for all Episcopalians. It often addresses issues of society, but in these cases, such rulings are only the "mind" of the two Houses. Like the Lambeth Conference, these decisions are only recommendatory: "the mind of the Convention," not The Episcopal Church.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, the creation of dioceses is in the sole purview of the Convention, as it is the creation of a new bishopric. Beyond conforming to the General Canons, however, the dioceses have great latitude, even deciding to merge, if such an action reverses the division of a previous diocese<sup>15</sup>. The General Convention's powers are limited to matters of the whole, though those decisions within its purview can be

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<sup>13</sup> See *Theological Education in the Anglican Communion*, an attempt to do this on a global level. <http://www.aco.org/ministry/theological/teac/> accessed on June 2, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> There are decisions that have an intermediate status, such as the teachings on abortion, the death penalty, or interreligious relations approved by a General Convention. These have official status, but cannot command the allegiance of the faithful. Their effect on the ordained, who have sworn to "uphold the doctrine, discipline, and worship" of the church, may be more significant, though how much is an open question.

<sup>15</sup> Though this decision still requires the approval of General Convention. See Article V of the Constitution.

reversed only by actions of future Conventions. Thus The Episcopal Church's form of government is neither "confederal" nor "federal", but "unitary".<sup>16</sup>

In order to meet these needs when Convention is not in session, The Episcopal Church has an elected Presiding Bishop, an elected President of the House of Deputies, and an Executive Council chaired by these two officials. The principle of subsidiarity must inform their ongoing ministries, as much as it is to guide the work of the General Convention.

### *Two challenges of subsidiarity*

As the history of the European Union attests, the practical application of subsidiarity is not simple. (It is necessary to distinguish the Union, with its twenty-eight member nations, from the "Eurozone", those eighteen members of the Union that participate in the common currency, the Euro.) The basic challenge is to know when the European Commission and Parliament should rule, and when national sovereignty continues to be respected. Recent popular discontent centers on the Commission making rules for the whole Union concerning, for example, the use of wooden instruments in making cheese. In other words, not respecting subsidiarity. There is also growing anger at what is *not* brought under common rule, banking, foreign policy, defense, and so on — another defect, this time in reverse, of the application of subsidiarity.

The same issue surfaces in the life of The Episcopal Church. For example, the question has been raised by what authority the Presiding Bishop decided not to allow the sale of properties to dissidents affiliated with several schismatic bodies, and to go to court to have properties and funds returned. The former was only possible with the support (or not) of the several bishops concerned, and the latter could be authorized, as the Presiding Bishop is also the president of the legal entity of the Church, the Domestic & Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, Inc. Since this arguably concerned the survival of the church, these actions were in fact not inconsistent with the polity of the church, though the fact that questions were raised shows that the intervention of the common authority in a member's life is always extraordinary and temporary — which are marks of the application of subsidiarity.

A clearer example was the intervention by the Presiding Bishop and the whole House of Bishops in the Diocese of Ecuador Central, in which the life of the diocese was severely compromised by the actions of some lay and clergy leaders. The bishop elected for the diocese by the House of Bishops resigned, for his own welfare, and the standing committee was dissolved.

It may seem peculiar that the General Convention creates a diocese, but it does not have the power to reunite two dioceses that once formed only one without the consent of both. Also, diocesan constitutions and canons are not regulated by Convention, except that they must not contradict the General Constitution and Canons. These instances, however, are examples of subsidiarity properly applied. Dioceses reuniting because of local conditions of mission do not need help to make that decision.

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<sup>16</sup> See James Dator, *Many Parts, One Church: How The Episcopal Church Works* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), 142ff.

Requiring the permission of the General Convention would be unnecessary interference in their decision-making. The same is true for diocesan canons, which must be adapted to local laws and customs — again, something best decided at the local church level.

Prudence is absolutely required in any government, sacred or secular, that respects the principle of subsidiarity.

An even greater challenge is to discern when subsidiarity does *not* apply. In the life of the Church that concerns doctrine.

At the October 2001 Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops, then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio expressed the inapplicability of subsidiarity in his church, referring to “the singular hierarchical structure of the Church, existing by the will of Christ.” The future Pope Francis went on to say that the autonomy of the local bishop “coexists with the supreme authority of the Pope, which is also episcopal, ordinary and immediate over all the churches and over all the shepherds and faithful.”<sup>17</sup>

Anglicans do not have, and do not want, such authority. But what kind of authority do we have? To put it another way, does the General Convention have the power to change the doctrine of the Church?

The Preamble to the church’s Constitution declares this:

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church (which name is hereby recognized as also designating the Church), is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

To “uphold and propagate the historic Faith and Order” does not seem to give the Convention the power to change these. Of course, this Preamble was added by the same Convention to the Constitution in 1967, and it could, by vote of two successive Conventions, amend or delete it. In theory, therefore, the General Convention could change the doctrine of the Church.

However, the self-definition of The Episcopal Church since its beginning has been to continue in the faith it had inherited from the Church of England. Furthermore, being in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury has always been part of that identity, and presumably, the General Convention would not want to threaten that.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Zenit Press. Accessed May 27, 2014, At [www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/ZSUBSIDI.HTM](http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/ZSUBSIDI.HTM)

<sup>18</sup> The fact that The Episcopal Church has paid far more attention to the proposed Anglican Covenant than any other province of the Communion argues in favor of this assertion.

Moreover, the mention of the Book of Common Prayer is also an important limit. Just as every congregation and diocese has an historical antecedent, the present Book of Common Prayer is also the latest in a line of constituting Books: 1928, 1892, 1789, 1662, 1559, 1552, and 1549. Despite the accretions of other sources of worship (Enriching Our Worship, the Anglican Missal, etc.), the Prayer Book is a constitutional document whose text and rubrics have the full force of canon law.<sup>19</sup> Every revision of the Book entailed some adjustment of focus on doctrinal questions, but it cannot be argued persuasively that the creedal statements — the heart of Christian doctrine — have ever been modified by addition or subtraction, or eliminated.

The discipline of the Church, to which all Episcopal clergy swear to conform, is another matter. Already the Church of England had significantly changed it, well before The Episcopal Church came into being. Marriage of clergy, use of the vernacular, communion in both kinds, the Scriptures as final authority in the Church, laity sharing in the government of the Church, and above all, the institution of the Book of Common Prayer as “the law of believing,”<sup>20</sup> these changes to previous discipline were the inheritance of the English Reformation. Remarriage of the divorced, ordination of women to all three Orders, blessing of same-sex unions, are three major changes to The Episcopal Church’s discipline made by the General Convention. While these have doctrinal considerations, of course, they are principally matters of discipline — what the Church itself allows and disallows on its own authority.<sup>21</sup>

Subsidiarity operates in this area “in reverse”: the local church must respect such decisions. They cannot properly be made at the local level, as these decisions have global implications. Changes in discipline and adjustment of focus on this or that dogma require the authority of the whole Church. Subsidiarity does not abolish hierarchy, as some believe. Rather, it should establish a hierarchy that conforms to the Reign of God — the greatest being servant of all<sup>22</sup>.

Understood in this way, the Roman Catholic exemption of its government to its understanding of subsidiarity can be seen to apply to The Episcopal Church as well, though in a very different way. The real difference is that decisions about doctrine rest in the hands of the Deputies and Bishops together, and these decisions can be revisited and changed, if need be. The Episcopal Church is strongly conscious of itself as a part, a fraction, of the whole Church (which is why ecumenism has been so important in its life). Therefore authority is given to a governing council whose fallibility is a given.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See General Canons, Title IV.4 (b).

<sup>20</sup> *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is the Latin shorthand for this dictum: the way we pray expresses what we believe.

<sup>21</sup> Many would argue that allowing the blessing of same-sex unions (and ordaining people in them) is a change of doctrine. It is. However, it is a change of a moral question, not a creedal one. Moral doctrines are, with few exceptions (“love your neighbor as yourself”), contextual, not formal. For instance, the moral doctrine against usury, taught for the major portion of the Church’s existence, has disappeared, as lending with interest has become a mainstay of the world economy, cautiously approved by the Church.

<sup>22</sup> Widely attested: e.g., Matthew 23:11; 20:26, 27; Mark 10:43, 44; Luke 22:26, 27; John 13:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 9:19; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 11:23; Galatians 5:13; Philippians 2:5-8, etc.

<sup>23</sup> See in this *Report* R. William Franklin’s “Conciliarism and the Ecclesiology of The Episcopal Church”, and Charles Robertson’s “Proto-conciliarism in Acts 15”, on the biblical base for this manner of governing the Church’s life.

While no part of the Church should make decisions about creedal doctrine for the whole (violating subsidiarity), this consideration only applies to a Church united, or rather, re-united. In the present state of the Christian Church's brokenness, we have to make decisions that we conclude are necessary to being faithful disciples of Christ in the here and now.

From this discussion, it is clear that subsidiarity is a moral doctrine that is a formal, not contextual, norm.<sup>24</sup> It is the logical outgrowth of the doctrine of Communion, the basic relation that is simultaneously "vertical and horizontal."

John Zizioulas argues that ecclesiologists have over the centuries separated the Body of Christ image that Paul developed into watertight compartments, as it were: Christology, ecclesiology and the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup> In order to understand the nature of the Church, however, these must always be considered together, as the Apostle himself did.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Cranmer's post-communion prayer in the 1549 Prayer Book hints at such a reconnection:

ALMIGHTYE and everlyvyng GOD, we moste hartely thanke thee, for that thou hast vouchsafed to feede us in these holy Misteries, with the spirituall foode of the moste precious body and bloud of thy sonne, our saviour Jesus Christ, and haste assured us (duely receiving the same) of thy favour and goodnes toward us, and that we be very membres incorporate in thy Misticall bodye, whiche is the blessed companye of all faythfull people, and heyres through hope of thy everlasting kingdome, by the merites of the most precious death and passion, of thy deare sonne...<sup>27</sup>

The "Misteries" refers to *musterion*, translated into Latin as *sacramentum*. Its root is *muo*, "to be silent", which it shares with *mustikos* or "mystical". Zizioulas points out that the original meaning of "mystical" was not an individual, ineffable experience separate from the "ordinary" life of the institutional Church. Rather it belongs to every member. While he does not mention it, the driving force of the Protestant Reformation was arguably the desire to give back to all members of the Church, not just monastics, the possibility of mystical experience.<sup>28</sup>

This experience is not a conscious one: it does not happen in our consciousness but in our relation. "The crucial thing is not what happens in me, but what happens between me and someone else."<sup>29</sup> In Baptism, completed by Eucharist, grace draws us into adoption as children of God, the God who is love. This God is because of the relations among Father, Son and Spirit, which allow each to be one and yet, other as well.

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<sup>24</sup> See note 21 above.

<sup>25</sup> William Gregg's article in this Report is an argument to re-unite these.

<sup>26</sup> John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 286.

<sup>27</sup> [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Communion\\_1549.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Communion_1549.htm) Accessed on July 10, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Steven E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969) 45f.

<sup>29</sup> Zizioulas, *Communion*, 306. Emphasis in the original.

The Church as the Body of Christ points to a mysticism of communion and relationship through which one is so united with the “other” (God and our neighbor) as to form one indivisible unity through which otherness emerges clearly, and the partners in the relationship are distinct and particular not as individuals of a species but as persons.<sup>30</sup>

To live this fundamental reality in the Church is to serve one another as Christ serves us. Therefore, subsidiarity as organizing principle is a moral imperative for governance, growing as it does out of the communion between us — you and me — and God. It should shape and inform not just the practice of ordained ministry, or of governing councils and synods, but indeed the life of all the baptized.

Communion with the Father through the Son in the Spirit is the gift that Jesus Christ won for us on the cross, and sealed with his resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. This unmerited gift that invites each person to share in the life of the Triune God requires each of us to see the shape of the common life that it creates, a communion of hearts, minds and bodies in which each of us is the servant of the other.<sup>31</sup> This service of subsidiarity respects the integrity of the individual Christian, the work of the Spirit in the congregation, the ministry of servanthood to each of these. At the same time it requires that all respect and seek to share fully in the life of the whole Church, “that wonderful and sacred mystery.”<sup>32</sup>

THE RIGHT REVEREND PIERRE W. WHALON, D.D.  
Bishop in charge and Suffragan to the Presiding Bishop  
Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 307. For Zizioulas, individuals are members of the species, persons are identities that emerge through relationships — “an ‘I’ that can exist only as long as it relates to a ‘thou’ which affirms its existence and its otherness.” (p. 9).

<sup>31</sup> See William Gregg’s essay “What is ecclesiology?” in this *Report*.

<sup>32</sup> From the Collect for Good Fridays and Ordinations.



# CONCILIARISM AND THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## A REVIEW OF RESOURCES ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION

*Abstract: This essay has three themes: (1.) the sovereign authority of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church; (2.) the ecclesiological arguments which support this sovereign authority; and (3.) the origins of these theological arguments within the movement known as “conciliarism.” In addition, there are three goals of the essay: (1.) I focus on conciliarism as but one among many ecclesiological themes that can be found to link The Episcopal Church’s General Convention to the early Christian Church. (2.) To make clear that this link of conciliarism to the authority of the General Convention is not based on my ideas alone but is the work of a long line of scholars, this essay is a review of the scholarship on this topic to serve as a resource for others to consult.<sup>1</sup> (3.) Finally, this essay is an invitation to further debate on the authority of General Convention at a time when the relevance and effectiveness of all institutions of The Episcopal Church are under review.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is an expanded version of two articles which originally appeared in *The Living Church*: R. William Franklin, “Conciliarism and Convention’s Authority,” *The Living Church*, Vol. 243, No. 7, September 25, 2011; pp. 19-21; and R. William Franklin, “No Higher Human Authority,” *The Living Church*, Vol. 243, No. 8, October 9, 2011; pp. 20-22. I wish to thank Mr. Richard J. Mammanna, Board of Directors of *The Living Church*, and Dr. Christopher Wells, Executive Director of *The Living Church*, for their advice and counsel on those two original articles and on this expanded essay.

<sup>2</sup> My two original *Living Church* articles were intended to initiate such a debate. Bishop Daniel Martins introduced the debate in Daniel H. Martins, “The Authority of General Convention: A Conversation,” *The Living Church*, Vol. 243, No. 7, September 25, 2011; pp. 18-19. Prof. Ephraim Radner responded to my original articles in Ephraim Radner, “Authority Under Larger Authority,” *The Living Church*, Vol. 243, No. 7, September 25, 2011; pp. 21-24; and Ephraim Radner, “The Local Church Serves the Whole,” *The Living Church*, Vol. 243, No. 8, October 9, 2011; pp. 22-25. I wish to thank both Bishop Martins and Prof. Radner for their responses to and support of our producing these articles on conciliarism. In their articles published as part of our exchange and in their other writings, they have raised questions which differ from the point of view I express in this essay, and I want to acknowledge these differences at the outset. In his introduction to the 2011 essays Bishop Martins raises this question: “Is General Convention, for Episcopalians, tantamount to the sort of ‘council’ that has broad authority to define doctrine, to propound church teaching, and to bind the conscience of the faithful?” (9/25/11, p. 19). Prof. Radner in his responses to my position also raises five fundamental questions that the reader should bear in mind:

- (1.) “Is General Convention a true council of the Church, and if so what kind?” He says later “...she is not a council in her own right...” (9/11/15, pp. 21, 24).
- (2.) “...conciliarism was definitely not ordered to a regional or national understanding of the Church...” (10/9/11, p. 22).
- (3.) “...conciliarists were clear that ‘ultimate authority ‘always lay outside the council...’ (10/9/11, p. 23).
- (4.) “...General Convention has never claimed such authority over dioceses, its Constitution does not contain references to such claimed authority...” (10/9/11, p. 25). (10/9/11, p. 25).
- (5.) Most importantly, Prof. Radner asks for a theological perspective on the claimed authority of the General Convention: “Indeed, the theological perspective tells us why the juridical perspective regarding General Convention is as limited as it seems to be. For it tells us that the weight of ecclesial decision-making in these important areas—that today touch on the issues of ordination, same-sex blessings and marriages, Trinitarian doctrines and language, ecclesial communion—cannot and should not lie with General Convention at all! Rather it lies elsewhere.” (9/25/11, p.24).

## The Authority of General Convention

One place to begin a discussion of the authority of General Convention is the 1964 concurrent resolution of the Convention of that year on “Levels of Authority within the Church”:

“Sec. 1. The Protestant Episcopal Church accepts as its authority the Holy Scriptures, the Nicene and Apostles Creeds and speaks through the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of the Church. The Protestant Episcopal Church speaks also through Resolutions, Statements and actions of the General Convention. In these ways the Church speaks at the highest level of responsibility for the Church to the Church and to the world.”<sup>3</sup>

This phrase “highest level of responsibility” means that the General Convention has the final authority over all budget, policies, and programs of the wider Church. It possesses the liturgical authority to revise the Book of Common Prayer (in order to insure uniformity in worship), the constitutional authority to amend the Constitution and Canons of the wider Church, and the ecclesial authority to admit new dioceses and elect some bishops. The Convention can articulate doctrine and it holds disciplinary authority over all bishops, dioceses, and parishes. There is no appeal from its decisions and no diocese may contravene its legislation. Therefore, the legislative authority of the General Convention is unrestricted.<sup>4</sup>

As a further example of this supreme authority, the Primate of The Episcopal Church, the Presiding Bishop, possesses no independent authority above that of the General Convention. By contrast, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York possess their own metropolitan authority and are not accountable to the General Synod of the Church of England. The Presiding Bishop’s authority and actions are derivative of that of the General Convention.<sup>5</sup>

Canon I.2. Sec. 4(a) (on the powers of the Presiding Bishop) makes it clear that his or her leadership is always subject to the Constitution and Canons and to other directives of the General Convention. He or she is “charged with responsibility for leadership in initiating and developing

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This conversation is necessary in the light of the call to examine the institutions and structures of the wider Episcopal Church issued by the 77<sup>th</sup> General Convention and the establishment of the Task Force for Reimagining The Episcopal Church. TREC’s report of December 2014, “Engaging God’s Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Final Report of the Task Force for Reimagining The Episcopal Church”

(<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/12219.pdf>) does not contain a discussion of the history or theological background of current Episcopal Church institutions and structures. History and theology are essential for any re-imagining of the Church.

<sup>3</sup> 1964 *Journal of the General Convention*, pp. 312-313.

<sup>4</sup> The House of Deputies special study committee on Church Governance and Polity, *Shared Governance: The Polity of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> William Joseph Barnds, “A Study of the Development of the Office of Presiding Bishop of the American Episcopal Church, 1794-1944,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1958, pp. 254-286; Walter D. Dennis, “Electing the Presiding Bishop: Proposed Changes for 1997 and 2006,” *Anglican and Episcopal History*, Vol. 65, No. 3, 1996; pp. 278-292. See also Roland Foster, *The Role of the Presiding Bishop* (New York: Church Publishing: 1982).

the policy and strategy in the Church and speaking for the Church as to the policies, strategies, and programs authorized by the General Convention.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1982 the replacement of “Presiding Bishop” by “Archbishop” as the title of the Primate was rejected by the House of Bishops to make it clear that the Presiding Bishop had no independent authority of that of a metropolitan. At the Convention of 1982 the House of Deputies agreed to adding “Primate” to the Presiding Bishop’s title only following “considerable debate as to whether or not ‘Primate’ was a slippery slope towards a feared and unwanted metropolitical authority in the office of Presiding Bishop.”<sup>7</sup>

There has been widespread agreement that the scope of this authority of General Convention is unique among the self-governing Provinces and Churches of the Anglican Communion. But on the question of how that authority came to be, is to be theologically supported, named in ecclesiology, and located historically---there has not been a consensus.<sup>8</sup>

Three scholars come to the same conclusions that I have:

(1.) Colin Podmore in an article of 2008 states:

The question of whether The Episcopal Church is essentially a federal, confederate, or unitary body has been the focus of much discussion. Ultimately, it must be said to be unitary, in that the power of the General Convention is supreme and unlimited. It is not confederal, in that the General Convention’s decisions do not require the assent of the diocesan conventions in order to come into effect ... The Episcopal Church is not a federal Church, in that there is no division of powers between the General Convention and the dioceses; the Constitution of the General Convention does not reserve any powers to the dioceses.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Canon I.2: Sec. 4(a)1; *Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2009); p. 28. See also Joint Nominating Committee for the Election of the Presiding Bishop, “Third Educational Piece: The Evolving Role and the Changing Selection Process of the Presiding Bishop,” (2014, <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/notice/joint-nominating-committee-presents-last-three-essays>), pp. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> Robert C. Royce, “The Roles, Duties and Responsibilities of the Executive Council, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies in the Governance of the Episcopal Church,” MS Word document dated May 31, 2008, Accession No. 2009.011: The Archives of The Episcopal Church, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Some documents filed in property cases involving The Episcopal Church seek to make the case that the General Convention does not have final authority over the dioceses and that its legislative authority is restricted. Two examples are: MS “Affidavit of Dr. Jeremy Bonner in the Circuit Court of the Eighth Judicial Circuit of the State of Illinois, Adams County”, (2011), particularly p. 65; and Mark McCall, MS, “Is the Episcopal Church Hierarchical?” September, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Podmore, “A Tale of Two Churches: The Ecclesiologies of The Episcopal Church and the Church of England Compared,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*,” Vol. 8, No. 2, May 2008, pp. 129-130.

(2.) James A. Dator’s unpublished 1959 American University dissertation, “Government in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America—Confederal, Federal or Unitary,” finds the ecclesiology of The Episcopal Church to be unitary, purely hierarchical, and not made up of a union of separate dioceses which each possess individually within themselves ultimate independent authority. Dator goes so far as to defend and document the idea that the ancient canons of the Undivided Church and the catholic faith itself are interpreted and adapted solely by the General Convention within the polity of The Episcopal Church.<sup>10</sup>

(3.) Prof. Bruce Mullin in a decade of testimony and submitted documents in court cases involving The Episcopal Church provides extensive evidence that supports this conclusion:

“This concept of the inherent legislative authority of the General Convention was evident from the very beginning...the General Convention has consistently acted as a body with supreme authority.”<sup>11</sup>

But the question remains: where do we find the model, precedent, and theological basis for such an institution in Church history? In 2008 Robert C. Royce was asked to prepare a study paper on the governance of The Episcopal Church for the Executive Council. He introduces the General Convention with these words: “Article I of the Constitutions begins ‘There shall be a General Convention of this Church consisting of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies...,’ which enunciates the great principle that this is a national Church, and that such a convention was to be its highest council attaching to it every power inherent in such a body.”<sup>12</sup>

What is crucial here are the words “its highest council attaching to it every power inherent in such a body.” Royce uses the word “council,” rather than “synod” or “convention” to identify the historical precedents and the theology of the General Convention as the ultimate unit of church government of this autonomous province of the Anglican Communion. By the choice and application of the word “council” to identify General Convention a crucial door is opened to understanding the authority of this Church which is at the heart of this present project of a committee of the House of Bishops: to present the ecclesiology of The Episcopal Church at this time of re-imagining the Church.

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<sup>10</sup> James Allen Dator, “The Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Confederal, Federal, or Unitary (1959: Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, The American University, <http://www.edow.org>; James Dator’s own words may be found in published form in James Dator, with Jan Nunley, *Many Parts, One Body* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010); p. 144: “...there is no limit at all upon the Convention’s governing powers, unless it be the ancient canons and the necessity of conforming to the Catholic faith: but these are interpreted finally by the General Convention alone.”

<sup>11</sup> Robert Bruce Mullin, “Statement of Robert Bruce Mullin of September 2010,” entered in the Circuit Court of the Eighth Judicial Circuit of the State of Illinois, Adams County, 2011; pp. 31, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Royce, MS “The Roles, Duties, and Responsibilities...” *Ibid.*, p. 1.

## **Ecclesiology**

The purpose of this collection of essays is both to define ecclesiology and apply it as a tool in the current evaluation of the institutions of the Church. Bishop Pierre Whalon states in the “Preface” to our essays that we “...are confronting several challenges and considering how to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances of our times.” In the midst of this “... a central issue is that of authority.”<sup>13</sup> Ecclesiology directs us to use several sources in this re-evaluation of structures of authority, above all “the thoughts of theologians,” and “the history of the Church.”<sup>14</sup> Bishop William Gregg defines “ecclesiology” for our House of Bishops Committee as “...the disciplined, theological thinking about the Church...”<sup>15</sup> Ecclesiology is the systematic study of trends and movements concerning church authority that still influence us today.

In his responses to my 2011 essays on the authority of General Convention Prof. Ephraim Radner asked for a similar analysis of three components of the authority of General Convention:

- (1.) “...the juridical level of the explicit laws that govern General Convention,....”<sup>16</sup>
- (2.) “...and second on the theological level that explicates General Convention within the context of the general nature of a Christian church as The Episcopal Church has understood this.”<sup>17</sup>
- (3.) And finally, we must look at General Convention within the “evolving context” of how the authority of church institutions has been understood over time.<sup>18</sup> There has been widespread discussion of all of these questions within the Anglican Communion since 2003.<sup>19</sup>

Is there any one movement of ecclesiology that can link the juridical level, the theological level, and the historical level of General Convention to the long millennia of the evolution of the Christian Church?

## **The Conciliar Movement**

I believe there is such a link, and it is conciliarism. The foundations of what has come to be called the Conciliar Movement were laid in the twelfth century by German, French, Spanish, and Italian canon lawyers and decretists. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Conciliar

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Whalon, “Preface” to “Re-Membering and Re-Imaging: Essays on The Episcopal Church,” Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops (2015); p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> “A Primer on the Government of The Episcopal Church and its Underlying Theology,” in “Re-Membering and Re-Imaging,” *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> William O. Gregg, “What is Ecclesiology?” in “Re-Membering and Re-Imaging,” *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ephraim Radner, “Authority Under Larger Authority,” *Ibid.* p.21.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>18</sup> Ephraim Radner, “Authority Under Larger Authority,” *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> For a review article on the most significant books on the ecclesiology of authority within Anglicanism since 2003, with special attention to the topic of conciliarism see Ellen K. Wondra, “Questioning Authority,” *The Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 97, No. 2, Spring 2015; pp. 307-325.

Movement became a project of those Scholastic theologians concerned with ecclesiology. In the face of the rising claims of the absolute monarchical authority of the papacy over the whole Church articulated by the Gregorian Reform Movement of the eleventh century, medieval canon lawyers launched a legal counter-argument: that ultimate authority in the Church lies not with the single primatial office of the Bishop of Rome, but in a corporate body, a council, that is representative of the people of the Church.

When the conciliar theologians were faced with the deep institutional crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they put forth an ecclesiology that defended the authority of representative gathered councils as a permanent element in the government of the Church and as instruments of reform and unity. The Council of Constance, 1414-1417, guided by the conciliarists, called for the reform of the Church in “head and members.” It prescribed a strategy to do this through the calling of general councils periodically, gatherings that would each possess two fundamental characteristics:

- 1.) General Councils derived their authority from the people of the Church, the *congregatio fidelium*, and thus were to be representative assemblies of clergy and laity.<sup>20</sup>
- 2.) The papal leadership of the Church stood within, and not above, the general councils. The authority of councils was to be “over the patriarchs and the Roman pontiff.”<sup>21</sup>

Paul Valliere concludes that a lasting contribution of the Conciliar Movement by the mid-fifteenth century was “to make the case for constitutionalism in the Roman Catholic Church by placing limits on papal power ... the notion of constitutionalism was conciliarism’s greatest achievement.”<sup>22</sup> If supreme authority was to be placed within a representative assembly rather than upon a single primatial office of the Church, then the Church required a constitution.<sup>23</sup>

There were, therefore, three stages of the Conciliar Movement:

- 1.) The thirteenth-century canonists’ defense of councils in opposition to rising papal claims
- 2.) The fourteenth-century cardinals and Scholastics turning to councils as a means to reform and unity

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<sup>20</sup> Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); p. 214; Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); p. vii; Paul Valliere, *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-Making in the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas of Cusa quoted in Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 151; Tierney, *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>23</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

3.) The fifteenth-century conciliar theologians turn to the necessity of a constitution, based on the commentaries of the medieval canon lawyers, in order for conciliarism to survive.

The evolution of this trajectory was based upon and parallel to the three initiatives we are called upon to take today in The Episcopal Church:

- 1.) Reflection and commentaries on the juridical and institutional structures of the Church by medieval canon lawyers
- 2.) Theological reflection on the experience of authoritative councils of the fifteenth century by significant theologians such as Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464)
- 3.) This work done within the recognition of a deep crisis facing the institutional Church.

The evolution of the Conciliar Movement cannot be separated from such a period of a series of disasters in Church history. The Great Schism was a period of chaos from 1378 to 1417 in which the papacy was no institutional source of unity. There were at times three popes at once, including Urban VI, Clement VII, and Alexander V. A practical test of the Conciliar Movement happened between 1414 and 1417, when the Western Church faced again the dilemma of three popes ruling at once: John XXIII, Gregory XII, and Benedict XIII.

In response to this the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund presided over a general council that met in the imperial city of Constance. By its own authority the Council of Constance re-established unity by deposing two popes, John XXIII and Benedict XIII. Constance took steps to reform the Church and protect it from heresy by condemning the teaching of John Wycliffe (already dead) and John Huss whom it burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

## **Conciliarism**

Conciliarism must be seen as a broader topic than the medieval Conciliar Movement alone if we are to understand how it is a source for the General Convention. This section defines the term conciliarism and looks both backwards from the Middle Ages, and forward. It makes clear that the Conciliar Movement looked backwards to the conciliarism of the patristic era as the basis for its own understanding of authority. We look forward by means of an overview of the selective historiography of the topic over the last sixty years, which has treated the conciliarism of the Middle Ages and how it shaped the future.

“Conciliarism” is a perfectly orthodox strand of catholic ecclesiology that is the natural outgrowth of the role that councils played in the ancient Church. Frederick Shriver defines these

councils as “those representative gatherings which meet for the purpose of mutual consent or consensus in Christian belief and practice.”<sup>24</sup>

Conciliarists appeal to Acts 15 as their Scriptural proof-text for the final authority of councils by contrast to the defenders of the absolute power of the papacy who go to Matthew 16 (“You are Peter”). Acts 15:2-6 describes a “Council at Jerusalem” to which “Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go ... to discuss their question [circumcision] with the Apostles and the elders.”<sup>25</sup>

A continuing tradition of such “conciliar practice” can be traced from the end of the second century.<sup>26</sup> These were regional gatherings until a layman, the Emperor Constantine, assembled bishops at Nicaea in 325 for the first international general council to produce our Creed. The fourth international general council, assembled in 451 by another layman, the Emperor Marcion, issued regulations on doctrine and discipline governing the whole Church.

There were equally important ancient international councils at Ephesus and Constantinople. These first seven international gatherings became the epitome of the communitarian, as opposed to the later monarchical, ecclesiology of the ancient Church. Francis Oakley writes: “The characteristic institutional expression of these bonds of communion was the complex pattern of episcopal governance and synodal activity which stands out as so marked a feature of the Church’s earliest centuries. And that essentially conciliar mode of governance was to find its culmination at the level of the Universal Church in the great succession of ecumenical councils stretching from Nicaea I (325) to Nicaea II (787).”<sup>27</sup>

Conciliarism is characterized by looking at authoritative representative assemblies as the one reliable means to bring the dominical mandates for unity, new life, and fellowship to the Body of Christ. Paul Valliere believes that the Christian Church in its first millennium actually lived into this concept of government: “... councils answered to the ideal of spiritual unity, and they gave concrete expression to that unity by practicing consensus-based decision-making ... Unity was the first principle of ecclesiology in the ancient Church, and conciliarism was an expression of it.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick H. Shriver, “Councils, Conferences, and Synods,” in Stephen Sykes and John Booty, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1988); p. 189.

<sup>25</sup> For Acts 15 as a Scriptural foundation for conciliarism see Charles Robertson, “Proto-Conciliarism in Acts 15,” in *Re-Membering and Re-Imaging*; pp. 1-4, in this collection of essays.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Valliere, *Ibid.*, chapter two, “The Conciliar Tradition;” pp. 49, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Francis Oakley, *Ibid.*, p. 4. See on the ancient ecclesiology of councils Henry Chadwick, “The status of ecumenical councils in Anglican thought,” *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, Vol. 195, 1973; pp. 393-408.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 109.



Canon lawyers, beginning in the twelfth century, looked back to the first millennium and recovered the roots of this ecclesiology in Scripture and in the twelfth-century *Decretum* of Gratian. The *Decretum* was a compilation of over 4,000 texts, decrees, and pronouncements of councils, bishops, and theologians from the earliest times down to 1139. Brian Tierney writes: "... in the *Decretum* of Gratian they found texts attributed to Cyprian, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great which could be used to offset the papal examples, drawn from the early Church."<sup>29</sup> By looking back, legal, theological, and spiritual tools had been recovered to rebuild the Church.

But the Conciliar Movement suddenly collapsed when Pope Eugenius IV defeated the conciliarists at the Council of Basel, 1431-1449. The final blow was struck in 1460 when the bull of Pope Pius II, *Execrabilis*, formally proscribed conciliarism as heretical and forbade any appeals from a pope to a future general council.

### **Historiography of Conciliarism: Brian Tierney**

Over the last sixty years, scholars have charted the way from this disaster to the rebirth of conciliarism time after time. Out of a huge literature on this topic I have chosen to focus on five scholars, two who have dealt with Roman Catholicism, four with Anglicanism, or are Anglican scholars.

Francis Oakley refers to Brian Tierney, long-time professor of history at Cornell University, as "the distinguished historian of canon law to whom conciliar studies owe so much."<sup>30</sup> On what is this great debt based? Walter Ullmann, Tierney's teacher at the University of Cambridge, was typical of World War II-era academics who portrayed the legal technicalities of conciliarism primarily as an eccentric dead-end of history overcome by the triumph of papal absolutism.<sup>31</sup> Tierney's classic revision of this point of view is *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*.<sup>32</sup> It came out first in 1955 and new editions appeared until 1998. On one level this is not unlike Ullmann, a technical study of the thought of canon lawyers of the classical age of medieval jurisprudence. But Tierney's book had a larger and much more influential purpose. It was written not to pass judgment but to "explain" that the conciliarists were not heretics and that their ecclesiology was not a novelty but that it was rooted in ancient orthodoxy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Tierney, *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>30</sup> Francis Oakley, *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Ullmann was an Austrian scholar who taught at the University of Cambridge from 1949. His most influential book is *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1955).

<sup>32</sup> Latest edition, Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); previous editions 1955 and 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Brian Tierney, *Ibid.*, p. 222.

The depth and clarity of the scholarship and the luck of the timing of its publication, the fact that *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory* was published on the eve of the calling of the Second Vatican Council, made all the difference in the world. Tierney's work was a parallel in ecclesiological studies to that of the Liturgical Movement in renewing knowledge of the communal, corporate dimensions of the Church's worship in ages past, as over against that of dominant current hierarchical models. The revival of lay participation in the Roman liturgy, which was to be achieved by the Second Vatican Council, was based on the scholarship of the Liturgical Movement grounded in a return to the theology of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>34</sup> In a manner that is parallel to the liturgists, Tierney understood the primary achievement of *Foundations* to be the convincing demonstration of "the gradual assimilation into canonistic theory of the ancient doctrine of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, with a consequent fusion between the theological concept of mystical Unity in the Church and the juristic idea of legal incorporation."<sup>35</sup>

### **Francis Oakley**

Francis Oakley, a professor of history and former President of Williams College, continued in the footsteps of Brian Tierney and expanded the scope of his coverage of conciliarism into the early twenty-first century. This is seen above all in Oakley's final book: *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300-1870*, published in 2003, a year Oakley defines as "a moment of deepening crisis in the authority structures of the Western, Latin, or Roman Catholic Church."<sup>36</sup> Writing in the midst of this concern about the stability of the Western Church, Oakley makes the case that, five hundred years after *Execrabilis* of 1460, conciliarism survived in various forms within the Roman Catholic Church. He summarizes his findings: "...tattered remnants of that conciliar ecclesiology were to be found caught up in those provincial, obscurely subversive and usually statist ideologies that have down in history as Gallicanism, Richerism, Febronianism, and Josephism."<sup>37</sup>

What is significant for our subject of connecting conciliarism to The Episcopal Church's General Convention is that all of these Roman Catholic movements used the ecclesiology of conciliarism to defend the authority of national church bodies.

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<sup>34</sup> I discuss the parallel revival of a communitarian understanding of the Church in Roman Catholicism and in Anglican liturgical renewal in my book, R. W. Franklin, *Nineteenth-Century Churches: The History of a New Catholicism in Wurttemberg, England, and France* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).

<sup>35</sup> Brian Tierney, *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>36</sup> Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); p. vii. An extensive bibliography of Oakley's twenty books and articles on this topic can be found on pages 281-282 of this book.

<sup>37</sup> Oakley, *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Gallicanism, for example, asserted the freedoms of the national Church of France (the *libertés de l'Église*) from unilateral interventions by the papacy. It was based on the conciliarist ecclesiology as articulated by a French theologian, Jean Gerson (1363-1429) and a French cardinal, Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420) who both had taken part in the Council of Constance. It was expanded further by Edmond Richer (1559-1631) who advanced the authority of national councils. Gallicanism asserted the superiority of a General Council over the pope, and the participation of theologians as well as bishops in authoritative national councils. From 1682 Gallicanism was officially supported by the French Church, it was taught in the French seminaries, and continued to flourish down to the eve of the French Revolution when its principles were officially sanctioned by the Synod of Pistoia in 1786.

Febronianism was a counterpart to Gallicanism in the German states and in the Holy Roman Empire. In 1736 a bishop in Trier, J.N. von Hontheim, published *De statu ecclesiae* under the name of "Febronius." Febronianism subjected the papal primacy to the oversight of General Councils. It gave authority to the regional councils of the archbishop-electors of the German states. Not surprisingly it received the backing of the archbishop-electors (who were also secular rulers) who produced a manifesto against papal claims within their tiny territories.

"Josephism" was the practical restriction on the papacy within the governmental units of the Holy Roman Empire under the emperor Joseph II from 1765 to 1790.

These surviving northern European Roman Catholic conciliarist strands were wiped out once again by the triumph of the concept of a now infallible papal monarchy at the First Vatican Council in 1870. But the story of Catholic conciliarism still did not come to an end. Oakley shows that, during the 1950s and the 1960s (the run-up to the Second Vatican Council), in the scholarship of Tierney and that of the Liturgical Movement "...it is certainly true that the return to scriptural, patristic, and historical sources that was to characterize so much Catholic theology in the twentieth century did promote a resulting recognition of the centrality to the Church's governance in its earliest centuries of episcopal collegiality and conciliar activity."<sup>38</sup>

So, in fact, the ecclesiology of *communio* was indeed revived and became momentarily influential in the Roman Catholic Church in the era of the Second Vatican Council. However, Oakley comes to the conclusion that in the 1960's "a few attempts were made to draw attention to the relevance of the conciliarists' position and to its appeal as a viable ecclesiological option. But these attempts met with no success, and the tradition of conciliarist constitutionalism receded once more to its established status as a fragile counter-memory lingering on the very margins of

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<sup>38</sup> Oakley, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

theological concern, or at most, as a minor perturbation in the outermost orbit of the ecclesiastical consciousness.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Conciliarism in Anglicanism and in The Episcopal Church: Raymond Albright**

I have inserted this discussion of Roman Catholic scholarship and its discovery of parallel developments to our own into our discussion because this scholarship has been a resource, and the parallels have much to teach us in an Anglican discussion on the continuing influence of conciliarism upon our Communion. As an example of this I review now the work of four Anglican scholars: Raymond Albright, Gillian Evans, Ephraim Radner, and Paul Valliere.

Raymond Albright, professor of Church history at the Episcopal Theological Seminary, in his seminal article “Conciliarism in Anglicanism,” narrates the very complex process by which the theories of conciliarism survived in and shape the evolution of Anglicanism into our own time, just as Francis Oakley demonstrates a similar pattern in the Roman Catholic Church. The theories of conciliarism buttressed the granting of authority over the Church of England to the monarch and to the English parliament in the sixteenth century. At the conclusion of the American War of Independence and America’s breaking of political ties with Britain, Albright shows that this English conciliarist model of church government was successfully translated into the new republican context of the United States by the creation of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church. Albright reaches this conclusion: “In all these steps and in its subsequent legislation through the last 175 years this church, like the Church of England, has respected its heritage, has recognized its common background, and has stood in the conciliar tradition dependent on the canon law and constitutions adopted from the beginning of conciliar proceedings....The evidence is cumulative and convincing that both the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church have in intention, in legislation, and in usage and practice continued the conciliar principle which has been in force in the Church from the earliest centuries.”<sup>40</sup>

To Albright there were two “steps” in this evolution. First, as Henry VIII moved the Church of England out from under the absolute monarchy of the papacy in the 1530s, he was attracted to the conciliarists’ revival of the ideal of an emperor presiding over a council as an alternate and valid model of church government. As the Emperor Constantine had assembled and played a key role at the Council of Nicaea, and as the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund had done the same at the Council of Constance a century before the Reformation, so Henry understood his

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<sup>39</sup> Oakley, *Ibid.*, p. 18. In the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium*, Oakley describes this failure again of conciliarism: “The ecclesiology of jurisdiction, or rather that of Vatican I, and the still older and now rediscovered ecclesiology of *communio* are placed side by side but remain unconnected.” (p. 11).

<sup>40</sup> Raymond W. Albright, “Conciliarism in Anglicanism,” *Church History*, Vol. 33, No. 1, March 1964; pp. 3-22; pp. 21, 20, 21.

authority and that of the English parliament over the church to be based on this previous conciliarist pattern.

Albright shows with detail and precision how acts of the 1540's fused the legal authority of church and state and introduced into canon law the essential elements of English common-law procedure. The two convocations of the clergy in England were placed under the absolute authority of monarch and parliament, as church law was subsumed into the national law of the English state.

Conciliarist theories of the Church as a communal corporation and the medieval canon lawyers' ideal of the legal incorporation of church affairs into the law of the nation supported this evolution. Through this process of the incorporation of conciliarism the English parliament came to be understood as a church "council." The bishops made up part of the Upper House of parliament. Lay members of the Church of England sat in the Lower House and shared in the authority of the state exercised over ecclesiastical affairs.

Albright sees these developments as part of a national-level conciliarism which also appeared in France and in the German states: "In England the Parliament regulates not only the civil and political life of the country, but, since the Church of England is the established church, it legislates for the church as well and in doing so assumes part of the function performed by the ancient church councils ... Following the Reformation the Church law enforced in England was modified from time to time by Parliamentary action which altered or modified papal codes still in force in England."<sup>41</sup>

As "step" two of his argument Albright shows that the modern constitutional and canonical structures of The Episcopal Church are ultimately rooted and shaped by this sixteenth-century Reformation incorporation of church into state. Albright writes of The Episcopal Church: "Its legal structure is specifically based upon the Canon Law of the Church of England and both in its canons and its constitution it has preserved the dependence upon continuous conciliar procedure and the intention to abide by the purpose of the historical church of which it is a part."<sup>42</sup> This process happened in the New World in the English colonies of New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia because Anglican parishes there were a part of the English state church. Ultimately the English monarch and parliament possessed sovereign authority over these American parishes, and the parishes were a part of this legal structure.

Raymond Albright shows that following the American Revolution, after a series of three "conventions" in the 1780's, there were promulgated by 1789 a constitution and canons for the newly independent Protestant Episcopal Church. This achievement was guided above all by

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<sup>41</sup> Raymond Albright, *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

<sup>42</sup> Albright, *Ibid.*, p. 14.

William White of Philadelphia, later to be the first Bishop of Pennsylvania and Presiding Bishop. In *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered* (1782), White sketched out his idea of the Church as a corporation governed by representative “conventions.” He gave American and republican expression to the conciliarists’ concept of ultimate authority over the Church vested in a convention (council) made up of the elected representatives of the *congregatio fidelium*—elected (not appointed) bishops, priests, and laity. White saw this role of the laity to be nothing new but rather in continuity with the conciliar tradition. Albright says of this: “The introduction of laymen into the government of the Church was hardly an innovation, but rather the restoration of a very ancient principle in conciliar history...William White very early showed enthusiasm for this practice in the Episcopal Church since his studies in the early church convinced him that the laity were represented in the ancient ecclesiastical synods.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1782 when White published his *Case* there were no bishops in America. He later incorporated bishops consecrated into the historic line of succession into a separate house of the General Convention. White was one of three who sailed to England and Scotland for consecration into the historic episcopal succession, which he considered a necessary link outside of the United States to ensure the validity of the General Convention’s authority. The adaptation of conciliarism to American republicanism was White’s greatest achievement. In this Albright stresses continuity rather than innovation: “These differences [from the Church of England], however, were entirely procedural and were not designated to separate the church from the episcopal government and conciliar procedures in the earlier church....This unqualified pledge to continue what the English Church had always been and done included the perpetuation of the conciliar idea and practice as well as the historic episcopate.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Gillian R. Evans**

Let me cite another seminal article which demonstrates the themes of complexity, continuity, and transformation in relating conciliar ecclesiology to Anglicanism, “Anglican Conciliar Theory: Provincial Autonomy and the Present Crisis,” by Gillian R. Evans, a lecturer in history at the University of Cambridge.<sup>45</sup> The title sums up the article’s purpose and conclusion. “The present crisis” is the threat to the unity of the Anglican Communion posed by the 1988 election of Barbara C. Harris as the first woman bishop by one province, The Episcopal Church, without consensus having been reached on the issue by the other provinces. The larger issue of the crisis was that of provincial autonomy. How can one national Church act alone, and by what authority? Evans cites “Anglican conciliar theory” as the source which made possible such an action. She writes: “...Anglican provincial autonomy is a function of a synodical or

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<sup>43</sup> Albright, *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Albright, *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>45</sup> Gillian R. Evans, “Anglican Conciliar Theory: Provincial Autonomy and the Present Crisis,” *One in Christ*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1989; pp. 34-52.

conciliar pattern of Church government...it depends ultimately upon the Communion's sense of its heritage of conciliar theory and practice."<sup>46</sup>

Evans makes available for the study of Anglicanism what Oakley provides for Roman Catholicism, a demonstration of conciliarism as a "heritage" of ecclesiology which links a current crisis to five hundred years of an on-going development. Of her purpose she says: "I have attempted ... an outline of this history; in which is embedded a theology with, it must be admitted, a number of loose ends."<sup>47</sup> She divides this history into four epochs.

The first is "The sixteenth century," itself divided into two parts, covering the Articles and theologians. Her analysis of Article 21 of the Thirty-Nine Articles finds that it "speaks only of General Councils," called by secular rulers (the source of their validity) and thought not to be infallible.<sup>48</sup> According to the Articles, the purposes of General Councils are to preserve unity and condemn heresies. In part two she finds that leading sixteenth-century Anglican theologians (Jewel, Tyndale, Cranmer, Whitaker, Philpot) looked in a variety of ways at many aspects of General Councils, their validity, representative nature, authority, universality, and the fact that an individual's faith can be bound by a council only if its decisions can be supported by Scripture: "These commonplaces of conciliar function were matters on which everyone could agree."<sup>49</sup>

In section two, "The seventeenth to nineteenth century," she turns to the question of the authority of national councils which is at the heart of this exploration of the ecclesiology of General Convention. Her focus here is on the defense of national councils by William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to 1645. She writes: "William Laud's Conference with Fisher the Jesuit in 1622 represents a new departure because Laud gave serious thought to the question of the powers of independent action of provincial or national synods representing only part of the Universal Church."<sup>50</sup>

Laud's argument is that if an emergency arises in a specific national Church and it is not possible to call a General Council, then "parts" of the Universal Church may call national or provincial councils which are valid gatherings to make authoritative decisions concerning national Churches. Laud's national conciliarism was contemporary with and similar to the Gallicanism of the Church of France.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Gillian R. Evans, "Anglican Conciliar Theory," *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 31. This crucial *Conference* is contained within the Oxford edition of Laud's *Works*.

<sup>51</sup> Evans also considers the arguments of theologian Herbert Thorndike (1598-1672) who believed no "part" of the Universal Church can take an action which threatens the unity of the larger Church, and that defending the rights of "independent" Churches leads to schism.

In parts Three and Four, “Not a Council but a Conference” and “The Twentieth century,” Evans shows that in the nineteenth century the creators of the Lambeth Conferences and in the twentieth century the attending bishops themselves continued this Laudian “*per partes*” tradition of national provincial authority and did not consider the Lambeth Conferences to be General Councils at all. At the first Lambeth Conference in 1867 Archbishop of Canterbury Charles Longley said: “It has never been contemplated that we should assume the function of a general synod of all the Churches in full communion with the Church of England, and take upon ourselves to enact canons that should be binding upon those here represented.”<sup>52</sup>

Lambeth Conferences of the twentieth century stood by this principle of provincial authority for national councils. A committee of the 1920 Lambeth Conference reported that “each National or Regional Church or Province would necessarily determine its own constitutional and canonical enactments.”<sup>53</sup> The Lambeth Conference of 1930 discussed two types of ecclesiastical organization, “that of centralized government and that of regional autonomy,” available to world families of Churches.<sup>54</sup> The Anglican Communion was said to have a government of provincial authorities. And the 1930 Conference said further that “the right of Provinces to consecrate bishops without reference to authorities exterior to the Provinces has often been regarded as ...essential...to the forming of a Province.”<sup>55</sup>

But the 1988 Lambeth Conference marked a turning away from a sole reliance on the “*per partes*” tradition, and its Resolution of August 1, 1988, called for a collective discussion of the continued viability of “*per partes*” conciliarism.<sup>56</sup> The 1988 Resolution asked the question of what happens when a province acts so independently as to become an absent and separate Church. Evans sees this as a turning point in the history of Anglican conciliarism: “At the 1988 Lambeth Conference the right to independence began to be seriously weighed against the duty to act with catholic intention in a manner not envisaged as being divisive in relation to other communities.”<sup>57</sup> The scale of this emerging 1988 crisis is seen by Gillian Evans to be as large as those which led to the major councils of the early Church, and in the light of Lambeth 1988, she called for a re-evaluation of the prevailing ecclesiology of the Anglican Communion.

### **Ephraim Radner: Conciliarism and Disunity**

In his articles in response to my two essays on conciliarism in *The Living Church* in 2011, Ephraim Radner, professor of historical theology at Wycliffe College of the University of Toronto, called for a deeper critique and examination of the background for the claims of

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<sup>52</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p.49-50.

<sup>54</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>56</sup> Lambeth Conference Resolution of August 1, 1988, in *One in Christ*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1989, pp. 25-26.

<sup>57</sup> Evans, *Ibid.*, p. 52.



authority of the General Convention. Radner provides this major critical review in *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church*, published in 2012.<sup>58</sup> *A Brutal Unity* breaks new ground in our contemporary debate about conciliarism because of its focus on the ecclesiology of *disunity*, rather than unity.<sup>59</sup>

Radner describes his purpose in these words:

“Failure to confront Christian division is not simply the evasion of a task, or the setting aside of one from a number of possible Christian tasks; it is an immoral act in and of itself ... division has always been a religious concern, and not simply an organizational one ... There has been little theological interest in ecclesial division in modern times ...”<sup>60</sup>

It is within this context of what Radner refers to as “eristology,” the study of discord in the church, that Radner conducts his detailed examination of conciliarism, and finds much that is positive:

“Indeed, the conciliar model was generally informed by an intrinsic pastoral mission focused on the temporal out-working of individual ministries, liked the bishop’s. This pastoral impetus, however, was always seen as ordered in a synodical, or conciliar, form.”<sup>61</sup>

Radner’s book is the story of the constant Christian search for agreement, and the hindrance to such agreement. There are great models for this. He gives us a detailed account of the supreme model of a community coming to agreement in the Acts 15 account of the Council of Jerusalem. He finds conciliarism to be one attractive model of agreement considered as a possibility by Henry VIII at the beginning of the English Reformation, streaming on in as varied places as English Puritanism, and French Gallicanism, down to the French Revolution. He reminds us of “the critical influence of conciliarism in the development of early modern (and modern) constitutional ideas”.<sup>62</sup> He notes the lure toward conciliarism in Roman Catholic theologians of the era of the Second Vatican Council, and the revived interest in it in the scholarly journals of the last sixty years.

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<sup>58</sup> Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> A major work on the ecclesiology of unity, rather than disunity is Lorelei F. Fuchs, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations Through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, *Ibid.*, pp. 462, 4, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>62</sup> Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, *Ibid.*, p. 286. He discusses the great work in this area of secular constitutionalism related to conciliarism in the work of John Neville Figgis, *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius: 1414-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), and he reviews the scholarship of Tierney, Oakley, and Antony Black on the influence of conciliarism on secular constitutionalism

But what is new is Radner's significant concern about the methods sometimes used in councils to secure "a brutal unity." Let me cite three examples he explores concerning the potential "brutal unity" of councils and commentators on the methods of councils in the past.

First, he provides us the conclusions of the scholarship of Ramsay MacMullen in *Voting About God in Early Church Councils*, published in 2006.<sup>63</sup> In a balanced work of detailed scholarship, MacMullen raises the question of how human, political, emotional, and base motives at times may have shaped conciliar decisions. I believe that Radner's descriptions of Ramsay's critical analysis of decision-making by early councils may be for the purpose of asking us to raise similar questions about how modern councils operate.

Here is a key passage of Radner's:

In addition, MacMullen has analyzed the procedural orchestration of councils in a way that discloses carefully determined, if entirely predictable, attainment of outcome: controlling agendas, suppressing speech, organizing caucuses and manipulating factions, communicating threats, dividing duties, and secreting elite decision making behind closed doors ... MacMullen properly attempts to avoid reducing conciliar agreement to coercion, or 'violence' ... Instead, he takes seriously the intentions and motivations of participants, categorizing these broadly into three other aspects: the cognitive, the supernatural, and the democratic ... it was just this motivated and invested importance that turned councils into arenas of more contested and coercive striving: the 'cognitive' was easily transformed into the 'emotive'; the supernatural substance was easily aimed at a demonized opponent; the consent of the 'people' turned into a demand only for (achievable) assent, however produced ... the very meaning of Christian agreement becomes the undoing of its accomplishment.<sup>64</sup>

Radner makes the case that the methods of "brutal unity" were also a factor in turning both Martin Luther and John Calvin away from councils as effective instruments of reformed authority, and turned them toward the authority in the church of the secular magistrate, and of holy Scripture, instead of councils. Radner shows that Luther makes use of a similar critique to that of MacMullen in his *On the Councils and the Church* of 1539, and John Calvin does so as well in his edition of the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, also of 1539:

Luther quotes [Pope] Gregory [the Great] with gusto in his 1539 *On the Councils and the Church* using the latter's general criticism of councils as things to "flee" for their combustible gathering of individuals driven by ambition and

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<sup>63</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting about God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, *Ibid.*, p. 243.

self-regard, as a reason to brand even Chalcedon as a meeting filled with ‘arguing’ and selfish and useless commotion. Likewise, Calvin turns to Gregory as well, at the end of a long discussion of the relative values of councils (*Institutes* IV.9.9-11), filled as they are and have been with quarrelling and jealous and simply erroneous human machinations. Both Luther and Calvin use these realities of complex (and sinful) human relations at work within Christian councils to subvert the intrinsic authority of conciliar decisions. For both, only Scripture can found a truthful and authoritative ecclesial decision, and councils themselves are neither guaranteed pneumatic direction, nor does history convince us that many even received it.<sup>65</sup>

The struggle for Christian communities to come to agreement has been a part of our history from the beginning. Radner’s book reminds us that the complexities of human nature have always been present, and often a negative hindrance, in the process leading toward agreement. Or, as Henry Chadwick writes: “Human nature being what it is, disagreement was a normal condition in a diocese...”<sup>66</sup> And in Lincoln’s phrase, “the better angels of our nature” have not always been present. From this negative perspective conciliarism does have a checkered history at best and we are not surprised that those frustrated with it in the past, have turned to a secular magistrate or a papal monarch as an alternate mode of authority.

Radner’s review of the history and literature of the brutal side of unity, of “eristology,” and of the human factors that through each age have wounded the efforts of councils must be taken seriously as any future review of the governance structures of The Episcopal Church progresses.

### **Paul Valliere**

Paul Valliere, a professor of history at Emory University, published *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-Making in the Church*, also in 2012. Like the studies of Oakley and Evans, his history once again is written against the background of a crisis, the 2003 consecration of an openly gay and partnered bishop in The Episcopal Church. Valliere locates the origins of this crisis precisely within the topic under consideration. He asks: “What was the outcome of the conciliarism practiced by the General Conventions of 2003 and 2006? Nothing less than the largest schism in the history of The Episcopal Church.”<sup>67</sup> The purpose of his book is a recounting of the entire history of conciliarism so that “the domestic conciliar institutions of The Episcopal Church must be reconstituted so that church can be reunified ... Our study of conciliarism

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<sup>65</sup> Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 62.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Valliere, *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-Making in the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); p. 226.

suggests both a destination and a perspective on how to get there.”<sup>68</sup> ( The destination he has in mind is a “reunion council” between The Episcopal Church and the separated Anglican bodies in North America.)

Valliere’s chapter two, “The Conciliar Tradition,” is a complete review of the origin and expansion of the influence of councils in the patristic Church which results in the creation of what he calls “conciliar spirituality,” with which he defines the continuing governance of both national and international councils all through the subsequent evolution of Church history. For Valliere, “conciliar spirituality” means for each epoch: “Decision-making is a spiritual act, and decision-making procedures always reflect a spiritual culture.”<sup>69</sup> Councils were the great contribution of the patristic Church to the future because “...councils answered to the ideal of spiritual unity, and they gave concrete expression to that unity by practicing consensus-based decision-making.”<sup>70</sup>

Valliere’s chapter three, “The Conciliar Theory,” is a similar treatment of the whole history of the revival of conciliarism in the Middle Ages through the Council of Constance. The Council of Constance is treated as of the greatest importance because it was able to move conciliarism from a spiritual theory to the articulation of a distinct theology of Church government which becomes foundational for the future. The Council of Constance, in the following passage from its decree *Haec sancta*, gives a theological definition of the authority of councils in which each word will be of significance for the future:

First it [the Council of Constance] declares that legitimately assembled in the Holy Spirit, constituting a general council and representing the catholic Church militant, it has power immediately from Christ; and that everyone of whatever state or dignity, even papal, is bound to obey it in these matters which pertain to the faith, the eradication of the said schism and the general reform of the said church of God in head and members.<sup>71</sup>

Valliere’s chapter four focuses on the survival of this theology throughout the ups and downs and the waxing and waning of its influence throughout the whole history of Anglicanism. He, like Raymond Albright, is convinced that “the tradition continued in the political conciliarism embodied in the English Parliament.”<sup>72</sup> This parliamentary conciliarism is defended by John Jewel, the Bishop of Salisbury from 1559 to 1571: “Jewel saw the English Church as practicing a healthy conciliarism. He insisted on the conciliar character of the Elizabethan

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<sup>68</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>69</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>70</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>71</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>72</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 166.

settlement.”<sup>73</sup> In one of the earliest works of Anglican ecclesiology, *An Apology of the Church of England* (1562), Bishop Jewel says: “Yet truly we do not despise councils....The matter hath been treated in open parliament, with long consultation and before a notable synod and convocation.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Richard Hooker supported the revival of councils in the Church of England as way to insure lay participation in the governance of the Church. Hooker defends this practice and the regular calling of councils in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594, 1597) as “a thing where of God’s own blessed Spirit was the author....”<sup>75</sup>

Valliere is brief in his treatment of the continuity and triumph of Anglican “conciliar spirituality” in the creation of the General Convention, though he notes “that the Episcopal Church in America has preferred not to speak of itself in the idiom of ...conciliarism.”<sup>76</sup> In this passage he addresses key themes of this present review of the literature, so I quote Valliere extensively:

The revival of conciliarism in the English Church tradition did not begin with decisions made in England but with the emergence of Anglican Churches abroad, beginning with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. Conciliarism sprang from the need to create structures of local church government to replace collapsed or impractical arrangements for ecclesiastical oversight from England ... The Protestant Episcopal Church was constituted as self-governing, juridically subject to no external authority, sacred or secular....presiding bishops were not elected at all; the office simply devolved on the senior member of the episcopate.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>74</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Valliere, *Ibid.*, p.172. The passage is worth quoting at length: “For as one and the same law divine, whereof in the next place we are to speak, is unto all Christian churches a rule for the chiefest things; by means whereof they all in that respect make one church, as having all but “one Lord, one faith, and one baptism:” so the urgent necessity of mutual communion for preservation of our unity in these things, as also for order in some other things convenient to be every where uniformly kept, maketh it requisite that the Church of God here on earth have her laws of spiritual commerce between Christian nations; laws by virtue whereof all churches may enjoy freely the use of those reverend, religious, and sacred consultations, which are termed Councils General. A thing whereof God’s own blessed Spirit was the author; a thing practised by the holy Apostles themselves; a thing always afterwards kept and observed throughout the world; a thing never otherwise than most highly esteemed of, till pride, ambition, and tyranny began by factious and vile endeavours to abuse that divine invention unto the furtherance of wicked purposes. But as the just authority of civil courts and parliaments is not therefore to be abolished, because sometime there is cunning used to frame them according to the private intents of men over potent in the commonwealth; so the grievous abuse which hath been of councils should rather cause men to study how so gracious a thing may again be reduced to that first perfection, than in regard of stains and blemishes sithence growing be held for ever in extreme disgrace.” (*Laws*, Book I.x.14; Keble edition)

<sup>76</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>77</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

I conclude my consideration of Valliere with a mention of his brief section “The New Ecclesiology” which comes just before his consideration of the Lambeth Conferences. Like Francis Oakley, he observes a marked revival of interest in conciliarism almost simultaneously in the first half of the nineteenth century in many world families of Churches. This was part of a new and widespread interest in the Christian ideal of community in opposition to the rising and dominant cultural dynamic of individualism which was a part of the epoch of the democratic and industrial revolutions. The nineteenth-century revival of the liturgy in many countries which led on to the Liturgical Movement was part of this, and Valliere notes that “The recovery of conciliarist ideas was another aspect of the nineteenth-century ecclesiological revival.”<sup>78</sup>

A return to patristic conciliarism as a response to secular revolutionary challenges to Christianity is addressed in his 1825 *The Unity of the Church* by the great German Roman Catholic ecclesiologist Johann Adam Mohler, and it is a component of the movement led by the Danish ecclesiologist N.F.S. Grundtvig leading to the reconstitution of the Church of Denmark in 1849. In addition, a return to the patristic understanding of the role of councils in the government of the Church was also part of the Anglican catholic revival of the Oxford Movement, above all in the 1857 volume of E. B. Pusey, *The Councils in the Church from the Council of Jerusalem A.D. 51, to the Council of Constantinople A.D. 381*. A revival of councils was important to Dr. Pusey, but at the same time he was deeply and publicly critical of the participation of the laity as authoritative deputies who formed a part of the General Convention of the American Episcopal Church. Pusey believed that councils should be made up of bishops alone.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

I close with this reference to E. B. Pusey because he greatly influenced Charles C. Grafton, an American bishop whose thoughts on the General Convention are relevant to yet another crisis that our generation of bishops faces in The Episcopal Church today, and with which I wish to close this review.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Valliere, *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>79</sup> I discuss the links and connections of Mohler and Pusey in my *Nineteenth-Century Churches: The History of a New Catholicism in Wurttemberg, England, and France* (1987). I discuss the links and connections of Mohler, Pusey, and Grundtvig in R. William Franklin and Joseph M. Shaw, *The Case for Christian Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); pp. 140-176, 206-225.

<sup>80</sup> Another recent key survey of conciliarism in Anglicanism is Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy, and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition* (London: T and T Clark, 2006). Avis provides more documentation to make the case that the “English Reformers were closer to the Conciliarists than has generally been thought.” Avis suggests a solution to current problems of the Anglican Communion by giving the conciliar authority of the Lambeth Conferences a “constitutional expression.” Paul Avis also discusses conciliarism in his most recent book, *Becoming a Bishop: Theological Handbook of Episcopal Ministry* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015). This work is distinctive because it locates the theological foundation of conciliarism in baptism. By virtue of baptism “all Christians are incorporated into Jesus Christ’s threefold messianic identity as prophet, priest, and king.” (p. 56). Anglicans affirm that because they share in the Royal Priesthood of Jesus “all the baptized are mandated to play their part in the governance of Christ’s Kingdom.” (p. 56).

After serving as Rector of the Church of the Advent in Boston for sixteen years, Charles Grafton was elected as the second Bishop of Fond du Lac in Wisconsin, in November 1888. He arrived in his diocese to find that, out of thirty-three clergy, only eighteen were actively engaged in ministry. Twenty parishes or missions were without clergy. In the whole diocese only nine parishes were self-supporting, and forty-odd were at mission status and needed support. Fond du Lac's cathedral was forlorn following a terrible fire. There were clear reasons for this disaster. Bishop Grafton wrote that "poverty was everywhere."<sup>81</sup> The diocese was in a region of economic decline. Lumber barons had built up small towns and paid for and run their small Episcopal churches. But the timber barons departed taking their money and leaving behind poverty. Belgian and Czech immigrant labor had been imported into many small towns to work cutting the wood and in the lumber mills. But the immigrant population could hardly cope when the lumber jobs moved. The result of all of this was that there was little or no tradition of Christian faith or stewardship left. Grafton wrote: "The duty and privilege of giving to God, in the way of supporting His Church, was little appreciated."<sup>82</sup> What Grafton faced describes the economic and demographic decline faced by many dioceses of The Episcopal Church today, the context in which the Church is being asked to "re-imagine" and "re-think" its governance structures today. Above all Bishop Grafton speaks to our time because he, like us, "realized the Church needs to go to those on the margins of society and not expect them to come to church for help — an insight as true in the twenty-first century as in the nineteenth."<sup>83</sup>

The ecclesiology that most influenced Grafton in seeking to express this missional identity of the Church for the new context of an industrial, democratic society was that of E. B. Pusey. As one of the three leaders of the Oxford Movement, Pusey took many actions from 1833 to 1882 to express a recovered communal dimension of Anglicanism through (1.) a revival of Eucharistic worship linked to a campaign for building parish churches in the new industrial cities of England, (2.) through the re-establishment of religious orders in the Anglican Communion, and (3.) through a return to conciliarism as the necessary model of church government for such a social context.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *A Journey Godward of a Servant of Jesus Christ* (Milwaukee: Young Churchman, 1910); p. 154. The ideas in this section were first presented by me in two lectures, "Bishop Grafton and the Identity of The Episcopal Church in the Twenty-First Century," first at the Cathedral of St. Paul, Fond du Lac in August 2013, and then at Nashotah House Seminary in February 2014. Portions of these lectures appeared as "Bishop Grafton and the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Church" in *The Living Church*, Vol. 248, No. 10, May 25, 2014; pp. 9-12, and as "The Bishop's Identity and Tasks," in Paul Avis, *Becoming a Bishop* (forthcoming). I want to thank Canon Matthew P. Payne, Archivist and Historiographer of the Diocese of Fond du Lac, for his extensive advice and counsel on preparing these lectures and adapting them as articles.

<sup>82</sup> Grafton, *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>83</sup> Eldridge H. Pendleton, SSJE, *Press on, the Kingdom* (Cambridge: The Society of St. John the Evangelist, 2014); p. 175.

<sup>84</sup> I discuss the communal dimension of Puseyism in my article, "Pusey and Worship in Industrial Society," *Worship*, Vol. 57, No. 5, 1983; pp. 386-411.

Following the American Civil War, Grafton traveled to England, where he remained until 1870. He is best known for founding the Society of St. John the Evangelist, the Cowley Fathers, during these years along with Richard M. Benson and Simeon O'Neill, which was a direct expression of this revived Christian communalism of Puseyism. But Grafton also went to England to learn the missional model of Puseyism for the parishes, particularly its Christian social side of creating communities of justice for those on the margins of society, which he believed to be a new and effective purpose for the parish church in an industrial, democratic society. The revival of the catholic dimension of the liturgy was a necessary part of this mission. (He also brought Old Catholic Belgian and Czech parishes into the Episcopal Church and allowed them liturgical variations).

Both of these, the revival of monasticism, and the revival of the catholic tradition of the liturgy in parishes were brought to Fond du Lac and adapted to an American, Midwestern setting. Likewise, Grafton followed Pusey's call for the revival of conciliarism. But this revival of conciliarism also had to speak to American society and culture. Grafton did this by clearly and specifically defending the authoritative role of the General Convention as continuing in the New World the apostolic heritage of church government. Grafton wrote:

In the Anglican Church I heard a living Voice, declaring the ancient Faith, and possessed of the priesthood, the Sacraments, and the ancient worship of the Church. Thus I was led to adopt these two principles for my religious guidance. I believed wholly in Christ ... and in His Church, because it was the living organism through which He spoke and communicated Himself to us.<sup>85</sup>

Unlike Dr. Pusey, who was negative concerning the authoritative role of the laity in the General Convention and the General Convention itself, in his *Addresses and Sermons* published in a collection in 1914, Grafton comes to the defense of our General Convention as a valuable adaptation of apostolic conciliar practice to the specific missional needs of the modern Church. Grafton's defense of the General Convention encompasses five points:

1.) The Government of The Episcopal Church is Apostolic and Balanced:

Another characteristic of our Church is seen in her government and the balanced distribution of powers of her officers. To say she is an Episcopal Church gives but a very superficial account of her organization. There are Episcopal Churches and Episcopal Churches ... If we look at the Mother Church of Jerusalem, which gave the type to which the Church in her growth naturally conformed, we find there a locally resident and presiding Apostle or Bishop St. James, a body of Elders or Ministers of a second or

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<sup>85</sup> Grafton, *A Journey Godward*, *op. cit.*, p. 59.



subordinate order, and also a number of deacons. Here too the Apostles representing the whole Church assembled in council, and the decrees they made ran in the name of no one as Supreme, but of all the Apostles, elders, and brethren. We find here the principle of the solidarity of the apostolate, and the coordinated authority of the several orders of the ministry.<sup>86</sup>

2.) The Conciliarism of the Government of The Episcopal Church Insures this Balanced Form of Authority that Modern Society Needs:

There is a double tendency respecting governmental powers found in human society and in all nations: one to the centralization of authority in a single head; one to its distribution among the people ... In the Church, the one expresses itself in Papalism, the other in Congregationalism ... So between the dangers of the two extremes, of Papal centralization ... and on the other hand, of individualism with its rationalist rejection of authority and traditional government and worship, the Church preserves with balanced wisdom all her inherited powers in due and regulated subordination to each other, under Christ, her living and ever-present Head.<sup>87</sup>

3.) The Apostolic Heritage of Conciliarism in the General Convention Combines for the Future the Best of a Variety of Church Polities, and Thereby Leads to Unity:

If we examine the government, we see the Church is not thus under an absolute monarch, but has her own free government, in which the rights of the clergy and laity and bishops are preserved. She combines in herself the advantages of the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopal systems, and the latter, thus modified, has come down to us from Apostolic times.<sup>88</sup>

4.) The General Convention As It Is Constituted Makes Possible the Collective Authority of the Bishops to be Made Manifest:

[The Episcopal Church] believes that the government of the Church is vested in the bishops and those under them. No one bishop is independent of the others. His authority lies in his being a true exponent of the whole body of the episcopate. We believe thus in the solidarity of the Episcopate.

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<sup>86</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *Addresses and Sermons* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914); pp. 412-414.

<sup>87</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *Ibid.*, pp. 413-414.

<sup>88</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *Ibid.*, p. 403.

The authority that lies behind the individual bishop is the corporate knowledge and consciousness of the whole undivided Church.<sup>89</sup>

- 5.) In Contrast to Pusey's Conciliar Model, Grafton Believed that Laity Must Also Be Present in Councils in Order to Discern the Mind of God, Such Discernment Being the "Whole Purpose of Councils."

In a letter to the Editor of *The Living Church* of December 28, 1901, Grafton offers advice to be seriously considered today:

We are governed, or seek to be governed in Church affairs, by the Mind, and Will of God. To this end the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and presides in its councils. What a Church council seeks by its debates and votes to ascertain as certain is, not the mind of the majority of its Church members, but the Mind of the Spirit.... It is by the agreement of the Bishops, the clergy, and the laity, acting separately, that this mind is shown. The plan of proportionate representation, in order that the voice of the majority may be learned, is then based upon false principle. It is the endeavor to reconstruct the city of God upon the earthly principles of the city of Babylon.<sup>90</sup>

I end this essay with Bishop Grafton because he clearly sought to articulate the adaptation of the conciliar tradition of The Episcopal Church forcefully to a renewal of mission so that our Church might be sustained for the future. It was not to deal with internal party division or end schism, toward which conciliarism had so often been looked to in the past, it was to lead to growth. Grafton was engaged in a mission of hope in the future, and pride in the form of Episcopal Church government was part of that hope. James O. S. Huntington is sure of this overriding purpose in his 1912 funeral sermon for Grafton:

... Bishop Grafton believed in the Church, in which he ministered as one of its chief pastors, as a part of the mystical body of Christ. He knew her failings and defects, and he grieved over them. But he never despaired of her, never doubted that God was with her ... To the last, as one of another of his clergy after an interview said farewell, he would send them out with the words ringing in their ears, 'Press on the Kingdom;' and the kingdom was for all mankind.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *The Lineage of the American Catholic Church* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914); p. 222.

<sup>90</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *Letters and Addresses* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914); pp. 199-200.

<sup>91</sup> James O.S. Huntington, *Bishop Grafton: Commemorative Volume* (Fond du Lac: 1913). The author of the most recent biography of Grafton, Eldridge H. Pendleton, supports this interpretation of Grafton's ministry by entitling the biography *Press on, the Kingdom*.

Such a zeal for mission ultimately should be our reason for studying ecclesiology, and then acting on it.

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## PROTO-CONCILIARISM IN ACTS 15

Midway through the Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 15, we find a fascinating tableau of the Church responding to conflict with conversation and compromise. While it might be overly simplistic to speak of the gathering in Jerusalem as a church council in the modern sense, certainly we can find there helpful information and even inspiration for us today as we approach divisive issues.

Following a series of tales of opposition to Barnabas and Paul's evangelistic inclusion of Gentiles, Acts 15 presents a different—less violent but no less virulent—picture of conflict. At the start of the chapter, the missionary duo face formidable opponents in a group best known as “Judaizers,” Jewish followers of Jesus who believed that Gentile converts could not truly be saved unless they went further and were circumcised, thereby becoming faithful, Torah-adherent Jews (vs. 1). Today's Christians, the vast majority of whom are non-Jews, might not be able to truly appreciate the magnitude of this particular conflict, although variations on the theme of inclusion have been evident throughout the centuries. Then, as since, there were some who feared that something precious would be lost if these Gentile newcomers were integrated into the Christian community without honoring the long-held traditions and identity markers of the Chosen People of God. Circumcision, and the life of faithful adherence to the Law of Moses to which the crucial rite of initiation pointed, had long differentiated the Jewish people from the surrounding nations that threatened either to assimilate or to annihilate them.

It should be remembered that Paul, or Saul when designated by his Hebrew name, had earlier dreaded the very notion of breaking down these identity-preserving boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Now a follower of Christ himself, Paul understood that if Christ was Savior, then he was Savior of all and, following this, any insistence on further requirements for salvation was not only distressing but erroneous. Paul and Barnabas decided to take their case to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Along the way, they told every believer they could find about the ways they saw the Holy Spirit at work among the Gentiles. They were well received by the members of the Jerusalem church when they first arrived, but quickly faced opponents who belonged to “the sect of the Pharisees” and demanded that the Gentile converts “be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses” (15:5). Luke notes that the apostles and elders debated the situation at length, until Peter himself stood up and addressed the gathering.

Peter's appearance in this council would be his last in the book of Acts, but it was a crucial role that he here fulfilled. He was, of course, the denier-turned-witness, the one who knew personally what the grace of God could do. He also was the one who saw that grace at work in the household of Cornelius, the Roman centurion.<sup>2</sup> Peter, who had

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<sup>1</sup> See Philippians 3: 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> See the whole of Acts 10.

exhibited strong initial resistance to the inclusion of Gentiles had himself been convinced that “in cleansing their hearts by faith, [God] made no distinction” between Jew and Gentile (15:9). Now he challenged his fellow leaders in Jerusalem not to burden the new converts with “a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear” (15:10). It is Peter’s final speech in Acts.

Peter was followed by Paul and Barnabas, who spoke of the signs and wonders they had seen God accomplish among the Gentiles. It is noted that the entire gathering was captivated with their presentation. Finally, after all had been reported, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, spoke up. James is, of course, to be distinguished from the two apostles who bore the same name, both the now-martyred son of Zebedee and the so-called James the Less. Known by his designation “the Just,” the James in Acts 15 is traditionally understood as the “brother of the Lord,” listed in both Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55 along with Joses, Judas, Simon, as well as unnamed and unnumbered sisters. It is interesting that the first word out of the mouth of James is “Simeon” as he referred to Peter’s experience with Cornelius. Using the Aramaic name, and not the Greek *Petros* or Peter, was perhaps an intentional and savvy move, as it served as a reminder that those to whom James was about to appeal were Jewish Christians. He continued by immediately quoting the Hebrew Scriptures, thereby appealing to the sacred text instead of to personal experience of the Holy Spirit’s work among the Gentiles, as Paul and Barnabas—and even Peter—did.

James led up to a decision that could rightly be called “the great compromise,” for it had something that appealed to both sides while, in the end, stopping short of either side’s full desire. On the one hand, James recommended that the leadership there “not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God” (15:19), meaning not force them to be circumcised, as the Judaizers demanded. On the other hand, he also suggested that the Gentiles should be clearly instructed to abstain from those things that were most obviously odious to faithful Jews. These included any items “polluted” by idols, any sexual acts associated with pagan ways, any dietary items most strenuously condemned by the Torah. This was not a random list. Rather, the Jerusalem leaders could, in essence, insist on some control over the ever-dreaded threat of intermingling. Indeed, what had preserved Hebrew identity and culture for so long had been the “set-apartness” of the Jewish people from those people and practices deemed unclean. To take seriously the restrictions James proposed would mean serious disengagement on the part of Gentile believers from their familiar relational networks. They could remain uncircumcised as long as they lived like they were circumcised.

The compromise was accepted by the gathering: in fact, they used the breathtaking words, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (vs. 28), and together they decided to send the message to the church in Antioch. The messengers would be Paul and Barnabas, along with two other Jerusalem leaders, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, the latter later becoming one of Paul’s key colleagues. The decision to send these two Jerusalem insiders with Paul and Barnabas is interesting. Earlier, Barnabas had been sent by the apostles to Antioch as their representative to check on the evangelistic activity that was occurring there. Now, inasmuch as both Barnabas and Paul were clearly

associated with Antioch, it was important for others more obviously connected with Jerusalem to accompany them, to carry the message from the apostles and elders to “the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia” (15:23).

The letter they took with them, and the oral report that accompanied it, offered both reassurance and recommendation. Gentile believers would not have to be circumcised, but they would need to refrain from “what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication” (15:29). The first three items on that list obviously concern Jewish dietary laws while the fourth, “fornication,” most likely refers not to sexual promiscuity in general but rather to a more specific practice of ritual prostitution.<sup>3</sup> The crucial point is that the prohibitions addressed the underlying fears on the part of those who cherished their Jewish roots and identity that without proper boundaries those roots and identity could be lost. The people welcomed what was said, and were encouraged by the words of Judas and Silas, who eventually made their way back to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching.

Alas, the conciliar compromise, though it may have been well-received, was far from perfect, as Paul would make clear years later in his letter to the Christians in Galatia. There, in the second chapter, he speaks at length about opposing Peter to his face in Antioch when the apostle, after showing no qualms about being at the table with Gentile Christians, suddenly withdrew and refused to eat with them when representatives from James and the Jerusalem leadership came into town. Apparently, the Gentiles’ acceptance of the Jerusalem Council’s recommendations could not overturn countless years of deeply ingrained prejudices and fears. Nevertheless, the hypocrisy which Paul confronted in the aftermath of the Jerusalem gathering does not negate the significant step forward represented by that proto-conciliar body’s work. What James, Peter, and company did there—hearing from the various conflicted parties, giving prayerful consideration to the different concerns and fears underlying the arguments, creating a compromise through the clear presentation of a reasonable solution by the leader which in turn is confirmed by group consensus—set the stage for healthy and effective future councils of the Church. Though Paul’s challenge in Galatians 2 points to the importance of following through on what has been enacted, the fact remains that what we see in Acts 15 is in many ways a model for carefully facilitated compromise in the face of conflict in the work of that proto-council.

No council since has declared its decisions to be those of “the Holy Spirit and us.” Nevertheless, churches since have seen their councils to be means by which the Spirit of Jesus leads them, even if those very human political means are not themselves infallible. Episcopalians, in particular, continue to meet in councils on the parish level, on the diocesan level, and on the churchwide level in the General Convention. Ordained and lay leaders together meet and pray, discuss and deliberate. And while the decisions that emerge may not be unanimous, and the follow up not always perfect, yet they move

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<sup>3</sup> For details, see my *Conflict in Corinth*, Peter Lang, 2001.

forward in faith, trusting that the Spirit that leads them is the same One who worked in the midst of others like James and Peter, Paul and Barnabas, long ago in Jerusalem.

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