

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

BY THE ECCLESIOLOGY COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

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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.”¹ 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.

¹ 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.²

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.

² 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.

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

offered by the

Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops

revised 2015

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 that Council. There is an unproven tradition that British bishops attended 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 105th 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.¹

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,² 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

¹ 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>)

² 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 developments as well as doctrinal struggles, 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 Convention³ 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.⁴

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.⁵

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

⁴ *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.

⁵ “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 unique, 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 (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

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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.

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

⁶ 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>

⁷ 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.

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”.⁸ 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 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-

⁸ 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.

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 Arles is held in 314, with the bishops of Lincoln, London, and York 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 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 2000 resolution D-039, not a new rite of Holy Matrimony; House of Bishops calls for the appointment of an Ecclesiology Committee.

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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.¹ 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.² 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

¹ 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.

² 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 God³, 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*.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ St. Augustine was equally clear about the implications of this ecclesiological reality in a

³ 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.

⁴ Cf. Ephesians 4.1-6; Galatians 3.26-29.

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

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

⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ It is from this perspective that, for the Orthodox, schism is the worst sin in or

⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo*, 272.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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 Church¹¹ 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*.¹²

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

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

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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?¹³ 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?”¹⁴ 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?”¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

¹³ Cf. Paul Avis, “Becoming a Bishop,” unpub. MS, 2014.

¹⁴ 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.”

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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

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.

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

Horace C. Boyer.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ The Pauline perspective disallows any one denomination to claim to be the whole,²⁰ which in turn highlights the error of denominationalism that makes it divisive.²¹ 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.²² 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

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

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

²¹ 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.

²² 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.²³ 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, knows²⁴ 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).²⁵ 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"²⁶. 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

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), p. 794ff.

²⁶ 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,²⁷ and then draw clearly the lines from that point to the theology of the Church. Why God became human²⁸ 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

²⁷ 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".

²⁸ 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?”²⁹ 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*.³⁰

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?

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

³⁰ 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.³¹ 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,”³² 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 sacrament³³ 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

³¹ Cf. Ephesians 1.22; 4.15; Col. 1.18; 2.19.

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

³³ “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."³⁴ 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.³⁵

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"³⁶ between the present and past can serve as

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

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸

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.³⁹

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

³⁷ 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 16th 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.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹*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.⁴⁰

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.

⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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

⁴¹ See Richard Hooker, *Laws*, 1.1-3,5-8.

⁴² 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.⁴³ 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,

⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ In the Christian tradition, there are two predominant classical models for understanding Trinity: the Augustinian “psychological model”⁴⁵ (especially in the West) and the Greek Patristic model (especially in the East).⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ 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."⁴⁷ 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

⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹ One of the central points of both creation stories in Genesis is that God is a God of order.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ Genesis 1 – 2.

⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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.⁵³

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

⁵² Genesis 1.26-27. Note especially the "Let us make..."

⁵³ 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."⁵⁴ 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.

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

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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

⁵⁵ 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).

⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.”⁵⁸

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

⁵⁸ 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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CONCILIARISM AND THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

An educational piece issued by the Joint Nominating Committee for the Election of the Presiding Bishop in August 2014 concluded with these words in its two final paragraphs: “The work, initiation, projects, and leadership of the Presiding Bishop are always subject to the constitution and canons and other directions of the General Convention.¹ The General Convention sets the course of the Church. It is the duty of the Presiding Bishop to function as pastor, executive, and prophetic voice whose statements will always be consistent with those of General Convention.”

These words produced reactions, questions, and comments. One bishop wrote: “These last two paragraphs seem to equate the Church with the General Convention and that is a theological leap for me. Yes, ‘General Convention sets the course of the Church,’ but that does not equate them and certainly does not set the General Convention above the Church.”

I propose to respond to these comments in this essay by relating the authority claimed by General Convention to the ecclesiology of conciliarism. The literature on conciliarism is vast and controversial, and the connection of conciliarism to Anglicanism and to the authority of the General Convention is complex. One way to understand this is to look at how several scholars have approached this topic.

In his *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory*,² Brian Tierney shows that “conciliarism” is a strand of ecclesiology that is the outgrowth of the role that councils played in the ancient church. Acts 15:2-6 describes a “Council at Jerusalem.” A layman, the Emperor Constantine, assembled bishops at Nicaea in 325 for the first ecumenical council to produce our creed. The fourth ecumenical council, assembled in 451 by another layman, the Emperor Marcian, issued regulations on doctrine and discipline governing the whole Church. There were equally important ancient general councils at Ephesus and Constantinople.

Tierney demonstrates that conciliarism as a coherent movement was the work of German, French, Spanish, and Italian canon lawyers in the 13th century. In the face of the rising claims of the monarchical authority of the papacy, these canon lawyers launched a counter-argument: that ultimate authority in the Church lies not with one individual monarchical figure but in a corporate body, a council, that is representative of the whole body of Christ. According to the medieval conciliarists, if a pope lapsed into heresy, he could be deposed by a council.

A practical test of conciliarism arose between 1414 and 1417, when the Western Church faced the crisis of three popes ruling at once. During these years another layman, the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, presided over a general council that met in the imperial city of

¹ See in this Report, “Proto-Conciliarism in Acts 15”, by Charles Robertson.

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995

Constance. By its own authority this council deposed popes and condemned as heretical the teaching of John Wycliffe (already dead) and John Huss (whom it had burned at the stake). The Council of Constance took further steps to reform the Church, and it was adamantly opposed to the doctrine of the absolute monarchy of the papacy.

It is not surprising that the papal bull *Execrabilis* of 1460 condemned conciliarism and forbade any appeals from papal judgment to a council. However, the ideals of conciliarism lived on in the revival of Christian humanism and then into the 16th century to influence both Protestant and some Catholic thought.

A second scholar, Raymond W. Albright, in his seminal article “Conciliarism in Anglicanism”³, narrates the complex process by which conciliarism shaped the granting of authority over the Church of England to the monarch and the English Parliament in the 16th century. As Henry VIII moved the Church of England out from under the absolute monarchy of the papacy in the 1530’s, he was attracted to the conciliarists’ ideal of an emperor presiding over a council as an alternate and valid model of church government.

Albright shows 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. Conciliarist theories of the Church as a communal corporation and the medieval jurists’ ideal of the legal incorporation of Church affairs into the laws of a city-state or nation supported this evolution. Through this process 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 exercised by the state over ecclesiastical affairs.

Albright argues that the modern legal structures of The Episcopal Church are ultimately rooted in and still shaped by this sixteenth-century incorporation of church into state.

Why was this so? Before the American Revolution in the colonies of New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, Anglican parishes were a part of the English state church. There were no American bishops. Ultimately the British monarch and Parliament possessed sovereign authority over the American Anglican parish churches.

With the American victory in the War of Independence, this Anglican establishment and this British sovereignty over the churches in the United States came to an end.

They did so with draconian effect. Stripped of its endowments, clergy, and institutions, perhaps no Church, until the Russian Revolution, would suffer such devastation as a result of political change as did the Church of England in America.

³ (CHURCH HISTORY 33 [1964], pp. 3-22)

Raymond Albright shows what happened next. After a series of three “conventions” in the 1780’s, there were promulgated by 1789 a constitution, canons, and an American Book of Common Prayer for the newly independent Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

The “primary architect” of these foundational documents was William White of Philadelphia, the Chaplain of the Continental Congress and later first Bishop of Pennsylvania and Presiding Bishop. As Cynthia McFarland describes him, he was “brilliant, diplomatic, adroit and gentle ... respected and loved by all in the young church.”⁴

It was White’s genius that he gave an American expression to the conciliarists’ concept of ultimate authority over the Church vested in a convention (a council) made up of the elected representatives of the faithful: elected (not appointed) bishops, priests, and laity.

The authority of such a national council is laid out by White in his “Preface” to the American Book of Common Prayer in October 1789: “...what cannot be clearly determined to belong to doctrine must be referred to Discipline...by common consent and authority, may be altered, abridged, enlarged, amended, or otherwise disposed of, as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people....”⁵

In the Constitution of 1789 this elected national Convention which oversaw the “Discipline” of the Church was given sovereign authority over what were then called the state conventions, and only later referred to as dioceses in the United States. Of the conciliar sovereignty of this “General Convention”, the political scientist James Dator writes: “...there is no limit at all upon the Convention’s governing powers, unless it be the ancient canons and the necessity of conforming with the Catholic faith: but these are interpreted finally by General Convention alone.”⁶

White argues that the authority of God’s Word in Scripture is applied by the General Convention to changing circumstances by interpreting the Bible through the double lenses of tradition and reason. How are Scripture, tradition, and reason brought together? White understood that this happens when God’s people gather in a council. And like Richard Hooker in the 16th century, who in his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity* wrote that councils are assembled “by Gods owne blessed Spirit” (1:109:18), Bishop White understood the authority of the Holy Spirit to be present in such meetings.

Ultimately, the conciliar movement was all about this issue of sovereign authority. White wished that no diocese might pass a canon that contravenes the legislation of the General Convention. Ultimately every congregation in the Episcopal Church was required to accede to its authority.

⁴ <http://anglicanonline.org/resources/essays/misc/WmWhiteHighChPrinc.html> Accessed February 5, 2015.

⁵ Book of Common Prayer (1979), 9.

⁶ James Dator, with Jan Nunley, *Many Parts, One Body* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), 144.

The General Convention was given the authority to create new dioceses, interpret the ancient canons, promulgate and revise the prayer book, and set up courts for the trial of a bishop. The achievement of this conciliar form of church government had much to do with the stability of Anglicanism in the United States when it almost disappeared after the American Revolution.

It was the remarkable synthesis of the catholic structure of the Church with democratic processes -- perfectly suited to this young nation and this expansive continent -- that found its historic and natural expression in representatives of the body of Christ meeting in a council to govern the church.

White's skillful weaving of these two threads created a very American system of Church polity that placed ministry and liturgy within the constitutional forms of American republicanism. The origins of that ministry and liturgy were both apostolic and English. The conciliarist ecclesiology that made the synthesis possible was European and medieval. How appropriate that White found in joining them a way forward for a new church in a new land.

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THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Is subsidiarity the key theological concept underlying the polity of The Episcopal Church?¹ 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)²

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:

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

² 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

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.³

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.”⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.

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

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

⁵ 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.⁶ 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.”⁷

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

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

⁷ 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."⁸

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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."¹¹ 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

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

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

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ 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,¹² 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

¹² 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ The General Convention's powers are limited to matters of the whole, though those decisions within its purview can be

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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".¹⁶

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.

¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷

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.¹⁸

¹⁷ Quoted by Zenit Press. Accessed May 27, 2014, At www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/ZSUBSIDI.HTM

¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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,”²⁰ 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.²¹

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.²²

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.²³

¹⁹ See General Canons, Title IV.4 (b).

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

²¹ 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.

²² 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.

²³ 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ In order to understand the nature of the Church, however, these must always be considered together, as the Apostle himself did.²⁶ 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...²⁷

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.²⁸

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."²⁹ 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.

²⁴ See note 21 above.

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

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

²⁷ http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Communion_1549.htm Accessed on July 10, 2014.

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

²⁹ 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.³⁰

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.³¹ 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.”³²

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³⁰ *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).

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

³² From the Collect for Good Fridays and Ordinations.

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.¹ 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.² Peter, who had

¹ See Philippians 3: 5-6.

² 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.³ 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

³ 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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