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## A MORE TRUE “DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY”: TOWARD A MISSIONAL POLITY FOR THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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There is no reason in the world wherefore we should esteem it as necessary always to do, as always to believe, the same things; seeing every man knoweth that the matter of faith is constant, the matter contrariwise of action daily changeable, especially the matter of action belonging unto church polity.<sup>1</sup>

### Context, Polity, and the Episcopal Church

The polity of the Christian church is always contextual. From the early church’s adaptation of leadership roles from the first-century synagogue, to the incorporation of Roman models of office into the Constantinian church, to Calvin’s use of the assembly system in Reformed Geneva, Christians have always taken organizational and leadership structures from local cultures and transformed them for church use.<sup>2</sup> In the process, they have sought to integrate these structures with biblical and theological norms. The contextual nature of polity reflects the incarnational nature of the gospel and the church’s life—Christianity is always embodied in local cultures, embracing, calling into question and transforming the norms and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), 120. Hooker (1553/4-1600) is the classic early exponent of Anglican polity.

<sup>2</sup> See James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

presuppositions of those cultures.<sup>3</sup> As the quotation from Richard Hooker suggests, polity is dynamic and must adapt to the church's changing contexts in order to serve, rather than constrain, God's mission.

The current polity of the Episcopal Church (USA) reflects three major contextual influences: the established state church of the English Reformation and Colonial eras; American representative democracy; and modern corporate bureaucracy. The twenty-first century American context of the Episcopal Church is shifting dramatically, however, calling for a critical appraisal of the assumptions and norms embedded in its polity. This paper seeks to explore the contextual influences (both theological and cultural) that underlie the organization of the Episcopal Church today in light of the realities now facing the church. Anglicanism has historically cherished a balance between continuity and discontinuity, universality and locality—carrying forward core values and traditions from the past, while allowing flexibility for local adaptation and responsiveness in light of changing circumstances. It is in this spirit that I will offer a preliminary sketch of some principles for re-conceiving Episcopal polity in an emerging missional era.

#### *Establishment and the Legacy of Christendom: Sixteenth-Eighteenth Century Roots*

The Episcopal Church began as the Church of England in colonial America, where it was the established state church in the southern colonies. As such, the basic underlying assumptions of sixteenth and seventeenth century England were transferred across the Atlantic. These include the integration of church and state, the division of territory into geographical domains (parishes and dioceses) ruled by monarchical rector (derived from the Latin *rex*, or king) and bishops, and the assumption

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<sup>3</sup>“[T]he gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied.” Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 4.

that everyone was, nominally at least, Christian. The church was at the center of society, reflected in the taxation that funded its activities and the “commissary” who oversaw the church at the behest of the bishop of London, under whose charge the colonial English churches lay.<sup>4</sup>

The classic Anglican compromise of uniformity (required use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, for instance) and flexibility (a diversity of pieties and theological commitments) came alive as Anglicanism began to take fresh forms on American soil. Since there were no Anglican bishops in America until Samuel Seabury was consecrated in 1784, a lay governance system evolved in the colonies that differed significantly from England. In Virginia and other southern colonies, vestries comprised of prominent lay people (usually the landed gentry) exercised much greater control over local clergy and the affairs of the church than had been known in England.<sup>5</sup> This would lead to an important modification of the monarchical rule by clergy that was more typical of the church in England and New England. The roots for a more collaborative, lay-involved polity had been laid.

In America, the parish system took root only tenuously.<sup>6</sup> Unlike in England, where residents of a particular parish were expected to attend that parish church, the American preference for freedom of choice eventually led to looser practices of domain. This was particularly the case in those colonies where the Anglican Church was not established—as in New England. The trajectory of American religious life was headed increasingly in a voluntary direction, shaped in part by the settling of the continent by people who had resisted England’s expectations of religious conformity.

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<sup>4</sup> David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck, *The Episcopalians* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 1999), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 191-2.

Nonetheless, the parish concept remains deeply influential in Episcopal polity to this day, even though it has never functioned very effectively.

*The Late-Eighteenth Century Democratic Synthesis*

At the time of the American Revolution, the Church of England in the colonies faced a major crisis. Anglicanism was directly and symbolically linked to the imperial power that the revolutionaries sought to overthrow (prayers for the king were included in the liturgy) and the distinguishing feature of its polity—bishops—represented exactly the kind of monarchy that Americans were rejecting in favor of democratic rule. While many Anglicans, especially in New England, openly sided with the Tories (including Samuel Seabury), the Revolution presented a dramatic opportunity to re-contextualize Anglicanism in America.

The process for revising the polity of the colonial Church of England to serve a disestablished Anglican church in the new United States involved considerable negotiation between the low-church southern Anglicans and high-church northerners such as Samuel Seabury. Its most notable feature, however, is the integration of historic Anglican norms with the representative democracy so valued by the revolutionaries. It is probably no coincidence that the crafting of the original *Constitution and Canons* of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States took place parallel to the development of the United States Constitution in Philadelphia. William White, rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia and chaplain of the Continental Congress, proposed the synthesis in *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered* (1782). White argued for retaining the historic orders of bishop, priest, and deacon alongside a democratic governance structure in which clergy and laity both participated in church councils at the local, regional, and national levels.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William White, *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered* (Philadelphia: Church Historical Society, 1954).

Democracy has remained a defining feature of the Episcopal Church's polity. On the one hand, it represents a move toward contextualization that still resonates strongly today with American cultural values. The monarchical, autocratic hierarchy reflected in the Church of England at the time was modified in a more collaborative direction, establishing greater local autonomy and checks and balances to authority. However, the synthesis of hierarchical conceptions of office and democratic conceptions of majority rule took place primarily along *cultural*, rather than theological, lines. That is, the rationale for this integration was primarily one of *fit* with the emerging democratic nation, rather than clear biblical or theological reasoning. White argued pragmatically and provisionally, occasionally invoking historical authorities such as Hooker and Cranmer, but making no attempt to develop a sustained biblical or theological argument for the polity innovations he introduced. Anglican theology since Hooker has made a theological case for flexibility in response to changing circumstances for the church; the changes that are introduced, however, are not always proposed on theological grounds.

This has led to a somewhat contradictory tendency deep within Episcopal polity today—the affirmation of the authority and legitimacy of hierarchical offices alongside an abiding cultural mistrust of hierarchy and authority. On the one hand, Episcopal polity suggests a hierarchical succession of orders (from lay people to deacons to priests to bishops) in its conceptions of ordination; on the other hand, all four orders are expected to govern the church collaboratively.

Another legacy of democracy is its tendency to foster factionalism and coalition politics. Since the Elizabethan settlement, Anglicanism has wrestled with how to reconcile the varying theological sensibilities present in its midst. The great conflicts with the Puritans and Roman Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Evangelical/Anglo-Catholic battles of the nineteenth century, and today's culture wars over

sexuality all speak to a repeated pattern of internecine conflict. Democracy tends to lead to political maneuvering in order to attain the victory of majority rule. The minority party who loses, however, can be disenfranchised in the process. Discernment of the Spirit and consensus building, while not prohibited by democracy, are also not necessarily encouraged by it.

Underlying modern American democracy are Enlightenment ideas of personhood that are being questioned by theologians today.<sup>8</sup> As reflected in the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution, these ideas of personhood tend to be highly individualistic, conceiving of freedom as freedom *from* constraint by others, rather than freedom *for* one another or, as Jürgen Moltmann puts it, the freedom of lordship rather than love.<sup>9</sup> Individuals in modern democracy tend to focus more on *rights* than obligations to others or the good of the whole, and there has been a tendency in recent years within the church to frame debates in terms of civil rights rather than theological categories.<sup>10</sup> While it has been argued that modern democracy's roots lie in covenant ideals from the Hebrew Bible,<sup>11</sup> American democracy has tended to eclipse the key actor in that covenant process—God.

### *Modern Corporate Bureaucracy: The Twentieth Century*

The Episcopal Church grew in numbers and influence as it gradually recovered from the aftermath of the Revolution and reasserted its place in nineteenth century American life. In the early twentieth century, the church increasingly began to adopt the organizational forms and

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<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 215.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in 2003 V. Gene Robinson, the openly gay bishop of New Hampshire, told the media that his ordination to the episcopate was a matter of civil rights.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Judah Elazar, *Covenant & Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations & Jewish Expressions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995).

assumptions of the modern bureaucracies that were in ascendance in corporate America at the time. This trend occurred across mainline American denominations, as churches embraced the new “scientific” management principles espoused by Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, Max Weber and others as a way of organizing an increasingly complex world along rational lines.<sup>12</sup> It is during this period that the Episcopal Church developed a centralized administrative and program bureaucracy in New York City, which grew large enough that a new denominational headquarters at 815 Second Avenue in New York City was acquired in 1960, with triple the space of the previous offices. It is also at this time that the office of presiding bishop became a full-time job.<sup>13</sup>

Modernist bureaucracy as an organizational form was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a means to organize the complexity of mass industrial production. It is based upon a number of assumptions characteristic of Enlightenment modernity and a Newtonian cosmology, including predictability and linearity, command-and-control, hierarchy and interchangeable parts. In the church, this became expressed in a new emphasis on running the church “like a business,” as denominational, diocesan and congregational boards and committees multiplied, centralized planning came into vogue, and organizational charts with clear lines of control proliferated across the American religious landscape.

One of the major features of the modern corporate understanding of church is the professional paradigm for clergy. The roots of this idea lie in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s designs for the new University of Berlin in 1810, in which he asserted a place for theology in the Enlightenment-era university by treating it as a

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<sup>12</sup> Craig Van Gelder, “From Corporate Church to Missional Church: The Challenge Facing Congregations Today,” *Review & Expositor* 101, No. 3 (2004).

<sup>13</sup> Prichard, *History of the Episcopal Church*, 234.

profession, like medicine or law.<sup>14</sup> While the idea that Anglican clergy should be well-educated (university and/or seminary trained) and devoted full-time to their pastoral work had long been held, in the nineteenth century there emerged a more clearly *professional* understanding of the priest's vocation.<sup>15</sup> The professional ideal was strengthened and reiterated in the mid-twentieth century in America by such authors as H. Richard Niebuhr.<sup>16</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, this professional paradigm developed three expressions: 1) the counselor/therapist (1970s); 2) the manager (1980s and 1990s); and 3) the technician (1990s).<sup>17</sup> In each case, the priest or pastor is understood as a professional (like doctors, lawyers, psychologists and other specialists) with unique training and skills, to whom one goes for expertise in spiritual matters, or who is charged with managing a non-profit corporation that provides services to its members and the community.

The legacy of the modern corporate bureaucracy and its accompanying professional view of clergy are deeply reflected in the current polity of the Episcopal Church. The process for the selection, screening, training, and ordination of clergy has become a bureaucratic labyrinth requiring many years, much paperwork, and a major investment of resources to navigate. The layers of screening (medical, psychological, marital and background examinations) reflect corporate liability concerns on the part of the church and its associated bodies (i.e., the Church Pension Group). It is common to hear talk today, not only from the Pension Group, but

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<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> R. David Cox, *Priesthood in a New Millennium: Toward an Understanding of Anglican Presbyterate in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Church Publishing, 2004), 4.

<sup>16</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry; Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper, 1956).

<sup>17</sup> See Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 196-98.



also from local bishops, about *clergy wellness* that sounds very similar to secular corporate wellness programs.

Moreover, the mechanistic concept of interchangeable parts shapes the deployment of clergy, who are understood to be capable of functioning in (practically) any context in the church. When candidates for the priesthood and diaconate begin the training process and are deployed subsequent to ordination, most dioceses prohibit them from returning to the congregation in which their call to leadership was first discerned. Like employees of modern corporations, clergy are expected to relocate at the will of the corporate system. While Anglicanism's understanding of ordination as being for the whole church, not just a local congregation or diocese, seeks to avoid provincialism and affirm the church's catholicity, it also severs leaders from the indigenous missionary and relational contexts out of which they emerged.

The denomination, dioceses, and even congregations have multiple boards, commissions, and committees around which they organize their activities. These are reflected in the current canons as well. Denominational offices across America have come under increasing stress in recent years, and it is not clear how long the corporate, bureaucratic paradigm of organizational life can persist. It should be noted that in recent years the corporations upon which American denominations modeled themselves in the early part of the century have streamlined their bureaucracies, eliminated layers of hierarchy and adopted more flexible organizational models, such as networks, in order to adapt to today's dynamic global context.<sup>18</sup> As is typical, the church lags a generation or two behind in making organizational changes.

When the Episcopal Church, like other mainline denominations, began a period of steep decline in the

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<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Ronald N. Ashkenas, *The Boundaryless Organization: Breaking the Chains of Organizational Structure*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

mid-1960s, the denominational and diocesan corporate bodies sought to reassert legitimacy by shifting into a regulatory mode.<sup>19</sup> This last phase of the modern corporate paradigm is alive and well in the Episcopal Church today. It is significant to note that Title IV, the disciplinary canons, constitutes the largest of any of the sections of the 2003 *Constitution and Canons*. Proposals were considered at the 2006 General Convention for expanding the disciplinary canons to encompass the work of lay people in addition to just clergy. While the impulse behind this expansion was a legitimate one—protecting the vulnerable from abuse by lay, as well as ordained, church officials—it also reflects the current tendency of recourse to regulation and control. Many bishops today find their schedules and budgets consumed more and more by lawyers, liability concerns, battles over control over dissident congregations (and their property), and the licensing and credentialing of laity and clergy. Embedded in this activity and these polity provisions are lingering hierarchical conceptions of ministry from the Church of England, alongside modern corporate bureaucratic notions of command-and-control.

Lawrence Miller's work on organizational lifecycles offers a provocative lens on these dimensions of the church's life. Miller charts six leadership roles that characterize the phases of an organization's life, from founding to death: the prophet, the barbarian, the builder, the administrator, the bureaucrat and the aristocrat.<sup>20</sup> When an organization reaches the administrator phase, decline begins. The tighter the emphasis on control and regulation that follows, the deeper into the death cycle an organization has progressed. The fact that many Episcopal churches and dioceses are living off of endowments as their

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<sup>19</sup> Van Gelder, "From Corporate Church to Missional Church," 436-37.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence M. Miller, *Barbarians to Bureaucrats: Corporate Life Cycle Strategies: Lessons from the Rise and Fall of Civilizations*, 1st ed. (New York: C.N. Potter, 1989).

membership dwindles may be interpreted as an ominous sign of the aristocrat phase.

### Today's Changed Context

The context for the Episcopal Church in the United States bears little resemblance to the Christendom world that shaped Episcopal polity from the English Reformation to the 1950s. The Episcopal Church has consistently viewed itself through the lens of establishment even after it ceased being established, priding itself on being the church of America's socioeconomic elite.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars argue that establishment was the hallmark feature of Anglican identity through its early history, and when this began to dissolve, Anglicanism found itself in an identity crisis that pervades the church today.<sup>22</sup> This conception of an ecclesiastical identity at the center of society simply does not accord with reality. The Episcopal Church accounts for a very small and shrinking percentage of the American population.<sup>23</sup> Its influence is diminishing along with its membership. Where it once spoke to the centers of power and expected to be heard, its voice today is generally disregarded.

Since the Revolution, American society has progressed through several stages of disestablishment, from the initial separation of church and state, to the increasing presence of Roman Catholics and Jews alongside Protestants, to today's individualistic and highly pluralist society.<sup>24</sup> Basic acquaintance with the Christian

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<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Kit Konolige and Frederica Konolige, *The Power of Their Glory: America's Ruling Class: The Episcopalians* (New York: Wyden Books, 1978).

<sup>22</sup> William L. Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See also Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> In 2004, average Sunday attendance for the whole Episcopal Church (including non-domestic dioceses), was 801,652, out of a total U.S. population of over 298,000,000 (sources: [www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org) and [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), accessed May 17, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 48-53.

story can no longer be assumed on any level. This is particularly the case with emerging postmodern generations. Moreover, the Christendom division of geography is being challenged on several fronts. The parish, or neighborhood church, system around which Episcopal dioceses are typically organized in America is increasingly irrelevant. The American experiment in reorganizing church as a voluntary association has led to people choosing where to go to church, even if they cross from one side of a city to another and pass multiple congregations of their denomination on the way. The ideas of domain that have long been hallmarks of Anglican conceptions of the episcopate are also under attack, with international and missionary bishops (i.e., from Africa or the Anglican Mission in America) asserting oversight over disaffected conservative congregations in liberal dioceses.

#### *Mission Assumptions of Current Polity*

While the church's missionary context is changing beyond recognition, the current polity of the Episcopal Church reflects Christendom-era mission theory assumptions. The underlying mission paradigm in Episcopal polity is a Christendom expansion or colonial model—that is, mission is primarily understood as extending the church's geographical domain into foreign lands. Historically, this meant extending western European culture and political rule alongside the gospel, whether across the American frontier in the twentieth century or overseas through foreign missions. Since 1835, Episcopal polity has provided for a parallel classification of *missionary bishops* and *missionary dioceses* alongside ordinary bishops and dioceses.<sup>25</sup> Examples of such missionary bishops include Jackson Kemper, missionary bishop of the Northwest, who sought to establish the church across a huge territory in the Midwest in the middle of the nineteenth century. The assumption is that missionary bishops function in that capacity only so long

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<sup>25</sup> Hein, *The Episcopalians*, 70.

as it takes to set up a proper diocese. Then the missionary function ceases and the bishop and diocese graduate to regular status. A similar distinction pertains between *mission* congregations and full-fledged *parishes*.

The role of missionary bishops has also historically reflected a high Christology more than a Trinitarian conception of mission. Mission efforts, particularly among evangelical Anglicans even to this day, have generally proceeded from obedience to the Great Commission.<sup>26</sup> Just as Christ commands his followers to make disciples, the monarchical bishop charges the church to go forth into the mission field for the same purpose. While Great Commission obedience is a biblically valid understanding of mission, it represents only a narrow dimension of the biblical narrative's treatment of mission. Perhaps most significantly, it does not take into consideration the major developments in ecumenical mission thinking since the 1950s.

### *The Copernican Revolution in Mission and Ecclesiology*

In the mid-twentieth century, a paradigm shift began to take place in missiological circles regarding the relationship between the church, mission and God. Drawing from the biblical theology movement, the influence of Karl Barth and fresh attentiveness to the doctrine of the Trinity, combined with a growing awareness of the problematic legacy of the colonial approach to mission, leading mission theologians sought to reground mission in the doctrine of God, and specifically the Trinity. This was expressed subsequent to the International Missionary Council meeting in Willingen, Germany in 1952 as *missio Dei*—the idea that God is a missionary God.<sup>27</sup> The Father sends the Son, the Father, and Son send the Spirit, and the Father, Son and

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<sup>26</sup> For a recent example, see Claude E. Payne and Hamilton Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Practical Model for Transforming Denominations and Congregations*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

Spirit send the church into the world in mission. Mission is thus not a church-centered activity, but rather a God-centered activity and the essential nature of the church itself.<sup>28</sup> Mission is *God's* initiative, in which the church participates. Vatican II in *Ad Gentes* affirmed this missional ecclesiology: "The church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>29</sup> It is the global Christian consensus today, reflected in documents of the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

While the polity of the Episcopal Church generally reflects the colonial/Christendom expansion paradigm of mission, there is one interesting exception. While other American denominations were creating ancillary missions societies in the nineteenth century as para-church organizations, in accordance with the view that mission was an activity done by specialists within and on behalf of the church, the Episcopal Church chose to go another route. Bishop Charles McIlvaine of Ohio anticipated the twentieth century revolution in missional ecclesiology when he argued, "The Church is a Missionary Society, in its grand design, in the spirit and object of its Divine Founder."<sup>30</sup> The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, created in 1820 to support evangelism in America, became the official legal name of the denomination itself in 1835, so that "the Episcopal Church was itself a missionary society to which every Episcopalian by virtue of his or her baptism belonged."<sup>31</sup> To this day, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary

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<sup>28</sup> See Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Austin P. Flannery, ed., *Documents of Vatican II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 814.

<sup>30</sup> Hein, *The Episcopalsians*, 69.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Society remains the Episcopal Church's legal corporate name, registered in the state of New York.

A missional ecclesiology calls for rethinking many basic underlying assumptions about the church and its participation in God's mission. For one, the Christendom idea of domain, in which the church controls certain areas in order to provide sacramental service and pastoral care to settled Christian populations, collapses under the much more expansive horizon of God's mission to bring restoration to all creation. The church is turned inside out—instead of focusing inward on tending to its members' needs, its purpose and primary activity lie in the world as it participates in God's redeeming work as a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God.<sup>32</sup> “Missionary” and non-missionary territories, organizations and roles can no longer be distinguished—*everything* the church is and does must be missionary in character. In this light, the United States, just like the rest of the world, is a mission field. It is a mission field not just in the sense that Christianity has lost its dominant influence and the gospel needs to be reintroduced, but because all of God's creation is the field of God's redeeming activity in which the church is called to share. We can no longer portion off mission as a subordinate activity or program of the church; mission is the very reason of the church's being and its lifeblood.

### **Episcopal Polity in Our Context: Foundations**

In order to begin reframing the organization and governance of the Episcopal Church in the twenty-first century in line with a missional ecclesiology, we must first delve more deeply into theological foundations. Two primary theological strands have dominated modern Anglicanism in the West. The first (and more influential in America) is Liberal Catholicism, a marriage of Broad and High Church concerns that emerged in the late nineteenth century. As articulated in such seminal texts as *Lux Mundi* (1889), a collection of essays edited by Charles

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<sup>32</sup> See Guder, *Missional Church*, 102.

Gore, Liberal Catholicism asserts the underlying unity of the Catholic faith and modern experience, stressing the doctrine of the incarnation.<sup>33</sup> R. David Cox has traced how the incarnational emphasis of Liberal Catholicism led to a *representative* understanding of ordained office.<sup>34</sup>

A competing strand is Evangelicalism, whose roots lie more in Reformed theology and which tends to emphasize the doctrine of the atonement.<sup>35</sup> Evangelicalism tends to be far less sanguine about human nature and modernity than Liberal Catholicism. These two strands can at times make such differing assumptions about human nature and the church that it can be difficult to reconcile them. That difficulty accounts for much of the partisanship and conflict in Anglicanism over the past century.

Recently, however, a *koinonia* ecclesiology rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity has gained prominence in ecumenical circles and entered Anglican theology.<sup>36</sup> It is reflected in the *Virginia Report* (1997) and the *Windsor Report* (2004), both produced by international Anglican Communion commissions.<sup>37</sup> Behind this ecclesiology lies the seminal influence of the Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas, an active participant in ecumenical dialogue over the past decades. His *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* re-conceptualizes human personhood and the nature and organization of the church through the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly as developed by the Cappadocians, stressing the social, *perichoretic* character of the Trinity as opposed to the economic emphasis typical in the West.

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<sup>33</sup> Sachs, *Transformation of Anglicanism*, 153.

<sup>34</sup> Cox, *Priesthood in a New Millennium*, 32-4.

<sup>35</sup> See Paul F. M. Zahl, *The Protestant Face of Anglicanism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> See World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement, Faith and Order Paper; No. 181* (Geneva: WCC/Faith and Order, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *The Virginia Report* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1997), Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2004).



A *koinonia* ecclesiology is particularly fruitful today for several reasons. The first is that it encourages us to move beyond the individualistic conceptions of personhood that have so problematically shaped modernity in the West. A more relational, interdependent sense of the self, based in the social Trinity, better reflects the worldview and assumptions of the biblical and patristic sources so cherished by Anglican theology. It also invites us into a fresh imagination about human interdependence and communion across racial, tribal, socio-economic, geographical, and cultural boundaries in an increasingly complex world. As the *Windsor Report* suggests, understanding the church and its diversity through the lens of *koinonia*, or communion, offers a rich theological framework for reconciled diversity in mission.

These emergent *koinonia* and *missio Dei* ecclesiologies have generally been treated separately in theological discussions today. Yet linking them provides a rich Trinitarian fabric for reconceiving holistically how the church's purpose is rooted in God's character as both a social *and* a sending God. It also presents an opportunity to reframe and enrich the theological debate within Anglicanism beyond the current polarities. An ecclesiology that stresses both communion and God's mission begins with the proposition that God creates the world out of the generative love of the Trinity for communion with Godself; it is through and into communion that God seeks to reconcile the world. The missionary character of God is evident through creation, the ministry of Christ, and the sending of the Spirit to lead the church in continued embodiment and proclamation of the reign of God. The content of salvation history cannot be understood apart from the communion that is constitutive of the divine life and thus of the church's essence and ministry. A missional *koinonia* ecclesiology sees communion as the destiny of creation toward which God is actively working.

*Koinonia* also presents a paradigm for understanding how the church's diverse structures, bodies, and offices can collaboratively serve God's mission, reflecting

reconciled diversity aligned in service to the reign of God. As an overarching metaphor, *koinonia* offers a theological framework for integrating leadership and participation, unity and difference, catholicity and autonomy. Attending more explicitly to the theological foundations of Episcopal polity will strengthen the church's participation in God's mission and serve perhaps in some small way to correct the historic Anglican tendency to make organizational decisions based first upon politics and then, if at all, on theology.

*From Mission to Ministry to Organization to Office*

Episcopal polity, as it has adapted itself to changing circumstances, has affirmed both continuities and discontinuities. So far, this essay has stressed the discontinuities—elements of Episcopal polity that date from contexts highly dissimilar to our own and thus warrant critical reflection. Yet there are also significant continuities, aspects of the current polity that remain pertinent and vital. It is my assumption, for instance, that democracy remains a relevant principle for our context and will continue to shape Episcopal polity significantly, just as it continues to shape American life today. Likewise, the historic Anglican balance between connectional unity and local autonomy, expressed in a variety of ways in the current governance of the Episcopal Church, is critical to faithfulness to biblical and theological sources and to effectiveness in mission. I also assume the continuing historical validity and usefulness for mission of the fourfold understanding of office in the church—layperson, bishop, priest and deacon—though I will offer a re-envisioning of those roles in light of a missional ecclesiology and fresh attention to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Given these assumptions, we must nonetheless begin with mission before proceeding to ministry, organization and office. Otherwise, we run the risk of limiting and inhibiting the church's participation in God's mission by the structures and roles we design or have inherited. As *Mission-Shaped Church*, a recent document from the

Church of England, says, “It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission that has a church in the world.... God is on the move and the church is always catching up with him. We join his mission. We should not ask him to join ours.”<sup>38</sup>

What then is the church’s mission? A missional ecclesiology suggests that the mission of the church is fundamentally the *missio Dei*—the Triune God’s mission to reconcile and renew all creation. The Prayer Book says, “The mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and one another in Christ.”<sup>39</sup> The church is created and called to continue Christ’s ministry of announcing and embodying the reign of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, inviting and drawing all peoples and all things into communion with the Father.

This challenges us to attend to the role of the Holy Spirit, which has been significantly underemphasized in the modern era, just like the doctrine of the Trinity. The Book of Acts and the New Testament Epistles repeatedly stress that the Holy Spirit is the animating force in the life of the church, not human power. Modernity has tended to place its confidence in the latter, neglecting the Spirit’s central role. When we consider the implications of this for polity, it is striking to note that the Holy Spirit is structurally extraneous to current Episcopal polity. That is, the current polity makes no explicit recognition of the Spirit’s governance of the church or provision for discerning the Spirit’s leading. This not to say that the church’s polity prohibits the Spirit from acting because this would give our structures of governance more power than they are due. Rather, the Spirit is ancillary, optional, an add-on that may or may not play a role.

If the mission of the church is the mission of God and thus a given, how can we understand the *ministry* of the church? From the perspective of a missional

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<sup>38</sup> Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 85-6.

<sup>39</sup> Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation and Seabury Press, 1979), 855.

ecclesiology, the ministry of the church is the service by which the church participates in God's mission in the world through practices that bear witness to the reign of God. Ministry takes place through four primary expressions of the church: the ministry of the laity in their daily vocations in the world, the ministry of congregations, the ministry of dioceses, and the ministry of the denomination. These four levels cannot be understood apart from one another but rather are interdependent and collaborative, mutually enriching, supporting and enabling one another to fulfill the larger purpose of mission.

While the metaphor of the Trinity should not be pushed too far in relation to the church,<sup>40</sup> it is possible nonetheless to construe the cooperative participation of these four expressions of church as a kind of communion, or *koinonia*, in which distinct, interdependent entities in a common life characterized by generative love and service reach out for the sake of renewing the world. The church as the laity dispersed into the world on a daily basis is unified on the local level in the congregation, on the regional level by the diocese, and on the national level by the denomination. Symbolically, this logic can be applied to the global level through the Anglican Communion as well.

Liturgically, the dispersed members of the "Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society" or assembly of called-out people (*ekklesia*) are gathered into an eschatological sign of unity in the weekly congregational Eucharist, at which the local priest serves as icon of unity in the liturgical narrative. This occurs on the regional level when the bishop as representative of the catholicity of the universal church celebrates the Eucharist, particularly at confirmations, ordinations and diocesan convocations, and at the General Convention, similarly in the Eucharist, with the presiding bishop as icon of unity of the denomination. Given the

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<sup>40</sup> On the limits of Trinitarian correlation, see Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 198-200.

centrality of liturgy in shaping Anglican theology, it is vital to note the *centripetal* movement of the liturgy, culminating in the Eucharist that always shifts in the dismissal toward a corresponding *centrifugal* movement into the world.<sup>41</sup>

*The Ministry of the Laity in the World*

Historically, due to the legacy of Christendom, the ministry of the laity in the world has been accorded the least attention relative to the ministry of the clergy. In part, this is because of the Reformation tendency to define the church not according to the four marks of the Nicene Creed (one, holy, catholic and apostolic), but rather, as a *place where* certain things happen, generally performed by clergy (i.e., preaching, administration of sacraments and, for the Reformed tradition, church discipline).<sup>42</sup> The Thirty-Nine Articles reflects this Reformation view when it defines the church as “a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments...duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”<sup>43</sup> As long as the focus remains on the *gathering* to the exclusion of the *sending*, the church will lose sight of its missionary character and the fact that the frontline missionaries are not intended to be specialists sent overseas but rather ordinary Christians in their daily spheres of influence.

What would it mean for Episcopal polity to assert a priority on the ministry of the laity in the world as the *primary* expression of the ministry of the church? To begin with, the other expressions of ministry (congregations, dioceses and denominations) would be invited to rediscover their purpose in supporting and equipping the laity for such service. Ephesians 4 speaks to this: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” It

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<sup>41</sup> See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 207.

<sup>42</sup> Van Gelder, *Essence of the Church*, 54-6.

<sup>43</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, 871.

is critical to note in this Ephesians passage that such equipping is not merely a technical matter (done by professional church experts), but rather has a larger eschatological purpose: “until all of us come to unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”<sup>44</sup> The church is to grow into a fully mature likeness of Christ in its capacity to announce and embody the reign of God; no member can be omitted from this maturation process if the church is to be the church and represent faithfully the *koinonia* of the Trinity. Moreover, that process is mutual, rather than one-directional; all the members share in building one another up.

### *The Ministry of the Congregation*

What is the ministry of congregations? Congregations are local expressions of the gathered church organized around core missional practices that enable all of their members to reach maturity in mission while at the same time serving as signs, foretastes and instruments of the reign of God in their own right. These core missional practices include the classical activities of worship (*leiturgia*), witness (*martyria*), fellowship (*koinonia*), service (*diakonia*) and proclamation (*kerigma*). One might also include stewardship. The congregation is a local manifestation of the reconciled diversity of the reign of God. It is rooted in and reflects the matrix of relationships, geography, local cultures and other particularities of a place as a force for the transformation and renewal of those localities.

Unfortunately, Anglican ecclesiology has tended to downplay the centrality of congregations in favor of dioceses (and bishops). Yet one of the well-documented realities of the Episcopal Church today is a turn toward congregations: “At its grass roots level, Episcopal life has moved from preoccupation with the intricacies of denominational life

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<sup>44</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13.

toward a practical focus on local community and mission.”<sup>45</sup> While threatening perhaps to diocesan and denominational structures, this may actually be a helpful development.

*The Ministry of the Diocese*

Congregations are connected together into the *koinonia* of a diocese, itself a regional representation of reconciled diversity. Dioceses might more appropriately be recast today from Christendom domains of hierarchical authority and regulation to apostolic *networks* serving to support, equip and unify local mission outposts. As an organizational paradigm, networks have increasing cultural relevance in our North American context. To begin with, the governing cultural metaphor for emerging postmodern generations is the Internet, a highly decentralized network in which resources, information and relationships are shared spontaneously and mutually across the world.

Networks have arisen in response to the dramatic increase in the pace of change in the global organizational environment in the twenty-first century. Networks facilitate rapid and continuous adaptation through multiple and dispersed information processing. As organizational scholar Mary Jo Hatch notes, “Relative independence of decision making allows experimentation and learning, and the product of this learning can be rapidly diffused through the network.”<sup>46</sup> This fosters the creation and diffusion of innovations. There are two challenges inherent in network organizations that must be attended to. The first is that networks depend upon teamwork and relationships that must be led, managed and facilitated. The second is that the diversity fostered by networks requires the intentional cultivation and maintenance of a unifying identity.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> William L. Sachs, Thomas P. Holland, and Episcopal Church Foundation, *Restoring the Ties That Bind: The Grassroots Transformation of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2003), 8.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 192.

<sup>47</sup> Hatch, *ibid.*

Just as beginning with the ministry of laity in the world as the primary expression of church shifts the emphasis from the hierarchy to the grass roots, so too does recasting dioceses as networks. The ministry of the diocese is to support, equip and empower local congregations and their members for mission through missional practices. For dioceses, these missional practices include leadership recruitment and development, resource sharing, partnership facilitation, teaching/interpretive leadership, oversight and accountability, and the sacramental expressions of unity traditionally reserved for the episcopate (confirmation, ordination, the consecration of churches, etc.).

### *The Ministry of the Denomination*

Building upon the overarching ecclesiological and organizational concepts of *koinonia* and network, the denomination links dioceses, congregations and church members on the national level for mission. Currently, the denominational-level structures in the Episcopal Church are facing an even greater crisis of legitimacy than diocesan structures.<sup>48</sup> The corporate emphasis that made so much sense fifty years ago seems increasingly disconnected from the local realities of congregations and their members. Since the 1960s, General Conventions have been occasions for bitter partisan battles—a trend that shows no sign of diminishing.

Some, such as Lesslie Newbigin, have argued vigorously against the concept of denominationalism as a modern western cultural form that should be abandoned in a missional era.<sup>49</sup> Another stream of scholarship has asserted the continued relevance of denominations through their role in identity development and cultivation.<sup>50</sup> Within a missional ecclesiology in the

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<sup>48</sup> See Sachs and Holland, *Restoring the Ties That Bind*.

<sup>49</sup> Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 144-45.

<sup>50</sup> See Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Beyond Establishment: Protestant Identity in a Post-Protestant Age*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) and David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman, *Church, Identity, and*



American context, it seems to me that there remains a valid—though reconfigured—role for the denomination. As a network organized around missional practices that support the ministries of lay people in the world, congregations and dioceses, the denomination is uniquely positioned to build theological identity, facilitate resource sharing and link mission partners on a national and international scale. The core practices of the denomination lie in identity development, resource development and sharing, ecumenical relations for mission, global advocacy and relief work. These activities are best organized not within one massive central bureaucracy, but rather through a network of linked organizations. This is currently the case with the Church Pension Group and Episcopal Relief and Development, for instance, which are organizationally independent of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, yet retain a strong denominational identity and purpose.

Like other denominations, identity development and clarification is critical for the Episcopal Church's survival today. Given Anglicanism's current identity crisis, this is particularly important. Within the Christendom context of England or colonial America, unity was sustained through establishment, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the episcopate in a largely homogenous cultural context. Within a plurality of cultures and languages, with an episcopate weakened by its own legitimacy crisis, and reflecting the divisive culture wars of American society, the Episcopal Church today must tend to theology. The lingering class elitism that would construe Episcopal identity around establishmentarianism is not only contradictory to the gospel and sinful; it is also less and less functional as the church ages.

Re-conceptualized as a network of linked resources and institutions (including seminaries), the denomination has the potential to contribute significantly to mission in our context. However, it must tend directly to the

theological identity work the church has been so slow to embrace. Its purpose must derive directly from serving the mission of God through serving the ministries of the other expressions of church, rather than expecting congregations and dioceses to serve *its* purposes. Genuine responsiveness to the mission needs of the laity, congregations and dioceses would help the denomination deal with its legitimacy crisis and become relevant once more.

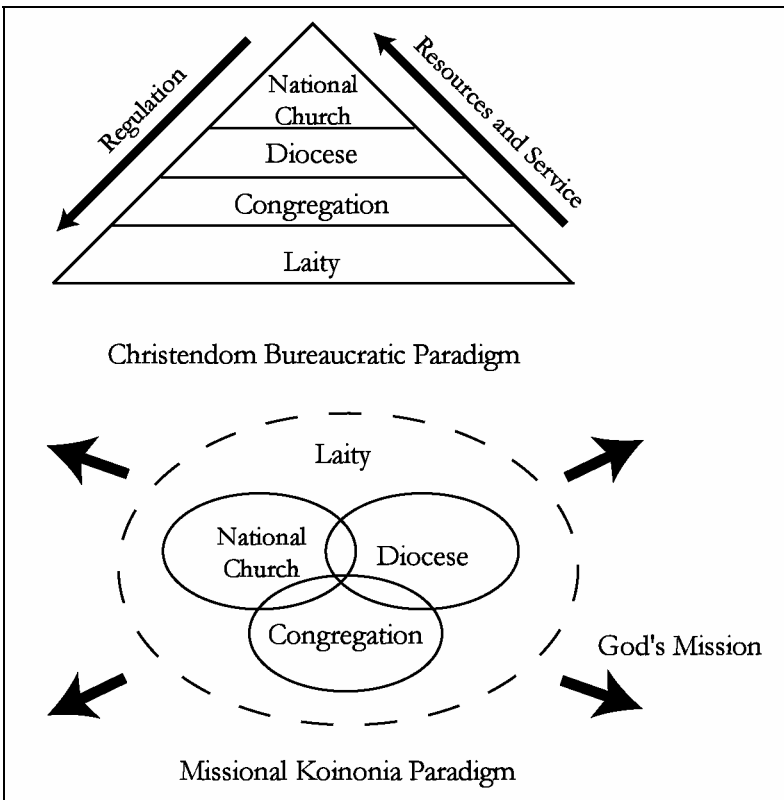
Recasting the Episcopal Church's various expressions as a Trinitarian *koinonia* of interdependent, mission-focused bodies who share resources and a common life would resolve the Christendom and bureaucratic legacy of conceiving the church's expressions as hierarchically ordered. As long as the church seeks to maintain the conception of the laity serving congregations, congregations serving dioceses, and dioceses serving the national church (in ascending levels of hierarchical importance and authority), the grass roots revolt will only grow stronger and diocesan and denominational structures weaker. Re-envisioned in the image of the Trinity and networked in mission, these expressions of church could discover a fresh sense of unity and purpose in God rather than unraveling in internal conflict.

*Figure 1: Organizational Paradigms for the Church*

In proposing this paradigm shift from corporate hierarchy to Trinitarian network, there remains the question of accountability and power. On the one hand, corporate hierarchies carry risks of domination, privilege and the concentration of power that flatter structures characterized by greater mutuality might avoid. On the other hand, Anglicanism has always cherished the principle of *good order* in its polity, worship and life, and the reality of human sin (both personal and corporate) must be reckoned with. To use Avery Dulles' typologies, the Episcopal Church has tended to stress "church as institution" above other models

of the church.<sup>51</sup> By suggesting a Trinitarian paradigm, I do not intend simply to swing to the opposite pole of “church as mystical communion” and reject the church’s institutional character. Rethinking Episcopal polity along these lines involves a careful integration of spiritual and structural accountability with greater flexibility and freedom that would empower all members of the church (particularly those on the margins of the church’s institutional life today) to participate and flourish in mission. The question is how the church’s institutional life can best embody the character and life of God.

**Figure 1: Organizational Paradigms for the Church**



<sup>51</sup> Avery Dulles, S.J. *Models of the Church*, Expanded Edition (New York: Image/Doubleday, 2002).

*The Leadership of the Laity*

A recent Episcopal Church Foundation study of leadership in the church discovered widespread “confusion about leadership roles” among laity and clergy.<sup>52</sup> The Catechism in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* lists the laity first among the ministers of the church,<sup>53</sup> yet the laity too often seem to be at the sidelines, rather than the center, of the Episcopal Church’s life and ministry. A missional ecclesiology calls for a rethinking of the leadership of the laity from complementing the rule of monarchical clergy to developing mission and ministry teams in the world. In Romans 12:8, leadership is listed among the spiritual gifts given by God to the members of the body of Christ. Throughout Anglican history, leadership has tended to be equated with office—primarily with respect to clergy, but also for the laity too (i.e. “lay leaders” in the congregation are understood to be the vestry and perhaps some committee chairs). Understanding lay leadership as restricted to membership on the governing board or overseeing an internal committee fails to recognize the missionary nature of the church.

In a missional polity, those lay people within the congregation who have the spiritual gift of leadership are encouraged and equipped to lead teams in mission in the world. This might take a wide variety of forms, from short-term mission/service trips and partnerships, to entrepreneurial initiatives of different types seeking to meet needs in the community. These mission teams are understood not to be extraordinary, occasional experiences in the life of the church and its members (as is the case presently), but rather ongoing, central dimensions of the church’s life. The multiplication and growth of the church and its impact in the world require the multiplication and growth of lay leaders.

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<sup>52</sup> L. Ann Hallisey, et al, “The Search for Coherence: Soundings on the State of Leadership among Episcopalians,” (New York: Episcopal Church Foundation, 2003), 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, 855.

Presently, most lay people in the Episcopal Church who have the spiritual gift of leadership exercise that gift to great effect in their daily jobs or through other community roles without necessarily being equipped to reflect upon and align their leadership with the gospel and the reign of God. It is the church's responsibility to help them do so. Lay leadership must be understood not only as pertaining to explicit congregation- or diocesan-based mission initiatives, but also to the exercise of Christian leadership in whatever vocation and sphere of influence a leader is placed. In this sense, the Catechism is more missional than the Canons when it states: "The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world..."<sup>54</sup>

Lay people have a critical role to play in the governance of congregations, dioceses and the denomination, but their leadership must be understood holistically and collaboratively. They are partners on an equal basis with clergy, and their sphere of influence must not be restricted to mere fiduciary oversight over the institution and its property. Like other leaders in the church, they have fiduciary responsibility for the *gospel* and the church's mission. Lay people, whether serving on a congregational, diocesan or denomination staff, or as elected representatives, must be equipped to exercise the spiritual leadership the church so desperately needs.

### *The Leadership of Bishops*

The centrality of bishops to Anglican ecclesiology, while a given on one level, is also somewhat disputed. Historically, there has been a tendency among Low Church, Evangelical Anglicans to assert that bishops are of the *bene esse* (well being) of the church.<sup>55</sup> On the other

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Paul F.M. Zahl, "The Bishop-Led Church: The Episcopal or Anglican Polity Weighed, Affirmed and Defended," in *Perspectives on Church*

hand, High Church Anglicans have more typically stressed that bishops are necessary (*esse*) for the church to be the church. In mission history, this first position played out in the practice of the Church Missionary Society, under the influence of Henry Venn, to see the raising up of indigenous bishops as one of the final stages of the missionary endeavor. Anglo-Catholics, however, tended to begin with bishops going out in mission, as in the practice of sending missionary bishops across the American frontier.<sup>56</sup>

Historically, the three primary functions of bishops may be described as teaching, sending/developing leaders, and governance/oversight. While these are reflected in the Catechism's description of the ministry of a bishop, current realities are heavily weighted toward the governance/oversight function. While bishops in the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, have issued a series of significant teaching statements in the past decades that address various aspects of life (social, ethical and otherwise) in our context, it has been argued that the House of Bishops, like the General Convention, generally does not speak coherently on matters of theology, ethics and discipleship.<sup>57</sup>

The role of bishops within a missional polity is critical. Bishops in the Episcopal Church have the authority to lead system-wide change, creating what organizational scholar Ronald Heifetz calls a "holding environment" to facilitate adaptation on the part of members of the system to a changed context.<sup>58</sup> Within a missional polity, the episcopate must be shed of its regulatory, bureaucratic weight and freed up for a focus on mission. This means that dioceses should cease trying

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*Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Titus Leonard Presler, *Horizons of Mission* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2001), 99.

<sup>57</sup> See Timothy F. Sedgwick and Philip Turner, *The Crisis in Moral Teaching in the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 104.

to safeguard or maintain institutional identity through regulation and control and instead focus on cultivating it through *interpretive leadership*.

Interpretive, or sense-making, leadership has its roots in the work of Philip Selznick in the 1950s, who understood leadership as the definition and articulation of organizational identity and mission.<sup>59</sup> Recently, it has come into sharper focus within the field of organizational studies through such writers as Karl Weick.<sup>60</sup> The paradigm shift from a Newtonian cosmology, with its corresponding modernist bureaucracy, to a quantum cosmology has led organizational scholars to question the premises of command-and-control. Instead, attention has shifted to the leader's capacity to help others make meaning and define identity in a changing, adaptive environment.<sup>61</sup> Bishops would do well to reclaim their apostolic teaching role as interpretive leaders who help the church make sense out of its place in a postmodern world by linking the biblical narrative to the lives of church members today.

Bishops also ought to shift from seeing themselves as pastoral care givers to the clergy (*pastor to the pastors*) and instead reclaim more directly an apostolic leadership development role. The bishop can cultivate relational communities of leadership formation, creating a dialogue and learning space in which established and budding leaders can reflect together theologically and biblically on what God is doing in the world and how the church can align with it. There will always be a certain amount of administration that dioceses must engage in; however, bishops should delegate this to a great extent to gifted

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<sup>59</sup> Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Evanston, IL: Row, 1957).

<sup>60</sup> See Karl E. Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995). For a recent exploration of the interpretive dimension of church leadership, see Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> See Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 147-50.

and competent administrators and focus instead on leading teams of missionary leaders.

This is where the complementary understandings of the social and sending Trinity offer a fruitful framework for re-imagining the episcopate. On the one hand, the bishop's identity is defined relationally by her or his participation in the community (*koinonia*) that is the church, and particularly by collaboration with a team of leaders for mission in a particular area. On the other hand, the bishop's role is one of *sending* (*apostollein*) in mission. This Trinitarian conception provides both for leadership (teaching and sending), and for partnership (sharing the work). It is a way of re-conceptualizing the monarchical episcopate that moves the participation of others from mere democracy or counter-balancing authority to interdependent, collaborative partnership.

### *The Leadership of Priests*

Currently, priests are still predominantly trained to be professional chaplains, catering to private spiritual needs. When they get into the parish, they find they are also expected to be institutional managers, a role for which they are generally ill equipped. Both of these understandings of the presbyterate reflect deep Christendom assumptions—that the ministry of priests takes place largely in settled congregations whose greatest need is pastoral care, and that the church is primarily an institutional, non-profit voluntary society providing religious goods and services to its members and the community.

R. David Cox has described the prevailing view of the priesthood in Anglicanism as a *ministerial representative* model, tracing it back to the Liberal Catholic Victorian theologian R.C. Moberly (1845-1903).<sup>62</sup> Working from an incarnational ecclesiology, Moberly understood the priest to represent the collective priesthood of all believers in a concentrated way, “to Godward for man, to manward for

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<sup>62</sup> Cox, *Priesthood in a New Millennium*, 33-70.



God.”<sup>63</sup> Added to this is the ideal of service (ministry). It is striking to note that the “representative” language appears in the Catechism of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* as the first function listed for *all orders of ministry*.<sup>64</sup> It is not restricted to priests. Moreover, service is characteristic of all disciples’ of Christ, who are encouraged to follow his kenotic (self-emptying) example by washing one another’s feet.<sup>65</sup> The concepts of representation and service fail to distinguish the presbyterate from the other orders of ministers.

We might begin to re-conceptualize the office of the presbyterate within a missional polity by focusing on the following three elements: *cultivating missional communities*, *interpretive leadership* and *leadership multiplication/sending*. Rather than the presbyter merely sharing with the bishop in the governance of the church, she or he should also share in the bishop’s *apostolic* function—teaching and sending leaders. One striking thing about the ministry of Jesus is the extent to which he focused on replicating his own leadership in a team of followers, whom he empowered with the Holy Spirit and sent to continue the announcement and embodiment of the reign of God that he began. The first apostles developed and multiplied subsequent generations of leaders in turn. In the case of priests in a missional twenty-first century Episcopal Church, that leadership multiplication process is primarily focused on lay leaders, who lead the mission and ministry teams through which most of the congregation’s service in the world is done.

The priest’s particular role is to cultivate the gathered and dispersed community through teaching and interpretive leadership that opens up the biblical narrative to engagement by the missional imagination of all of God’s people.<sup>66</sup> This narrative leadership role has three

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>64</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, 855-56.

<sup>65</sup> John 13.

<sup>66</sup> See Mark Lau Branson, “Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church,” in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop*

intersecting dimensions—a *modeling* role, in which the priest articulates the gospel story enfolded in the particularity of her or his own life; a *pedagogical* role, in which the priest teaches and interprets the gospel story through scripture and theology; and a *liturgical* role, in which the priest convenes and serves as the icon of unity within the sacramental telling of the story, in which the various orders of ministry collaborate to enact together the Eucharist and other celebrations as eschatological signs of the reign of God.

Cultivating missional communities requires developing the capacity of God's people to discern vocation on the personal and corporate (congregational or mission-team) levels. This means facilitating dialogue spaces in which attentiveness to the Holy Spirit and the biblical Word is placed at the forefront as people learn to listen to God and one another. A missional ecclesiology is by definition a *contextual* ecclesiology, and church members must be equipped to read their context. Local priests have important roles to play in convening such spaces and fostering such attentiveness.

### *The Leadership of Deacons*

The Catechism describes the ministry of deacons as “to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.”<sup>67</sup> As in the “representative ministerial” conception of priesthood referenced above, what is to distinguish the service of deacons from the missionary service of all of the church's members toward the needy? Even as it continues to be revived in the Episcopal Church today, the diaconate is ambiguous and calls for redefinition.

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*Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, Forthcoming 2007), and Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World, Leadership Network Series* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

<sup>67</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, 856.

For most of Anglican history, the diaconate was a transition period immediately preceding ordination to the priesthood, a kind of apprentice priest role. This conception, retained from medieval Catholicism, is still part of current polity, as those called to the presbyterate must first be ordained deacons (and solemnly swear that they are called to the diaconate!) for at least six months before ordination to the priesthood. Deep behind this idea is the progressive conception of orders, which reflects the Roman imperial career track.<sup>68</sup> In the twentieth century, the diaconate has seen a revival as a permanent order within Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and Methodism. In the Episcopal Church, it has primarily been construed as an order dedicated to serving the needy in the community, typically in a non-stipendiary capacity under the oversight of the bishop.

Recent scholarship has called this conception of the diaconate deeply into question.<sup>69</sup> Within a missional polity, the diaconate takes on a different role than the prevailing (mis) conception of care-giving service. Serving the needy in the community is indeed a ministry of the whole church, not just deacons; setting apart some through ordination for it only feeds the distortion that mission is an activity done by specialists. As Collins has pointed out, the biblical and apostolic understanding of the diaconate was much more missionary in character than today's prevailing conceptions. The *diakonos* was a role of significance in that important communications and executive authority were entrusted to such men and women. In the New Testament context, this included

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<sup>68</sup> Cox, *Priesthood in a New Millennium*, 314.

<sup>69</sup> See John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Through an extensive word study, Collins demonstrates that the term *diakonos* referred in the New Testament context to an attendant, delegate or emissary sent on a sacred commission. In contrast, the service of which *diakonia* is commonly understood to consist is more appropriate to a *doulos* (servant or slave). It was nineteenth century German Pietism, not the New Testament, that defined *diakonia* as care-giving service.

proclamation of the gospel. Deacons worked closely with bishops later in the early church as administrators of ministry in large areas. In the third century, for instance, there were seven deacons responsible for overseeing the church's ministry in various parts of Rome, including the treasury.<sup>70</sup>

Within a twenty-first century missional polity, deacons in the Episcopal Church may be fruitfully understood as mobile leaders who initiate, lead and facilitate the church's missionary witness in the world across congregational boundaries. As such, it is a highly entrepreneurial, connectional office linking ministry teams, congregations, community leaders, resources and partners to participate in mission.

The ordination liturgy for deacons speaks to the interpretive character of diaconal leadership: "As a deacon in the Church ... You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world."<sup>71</sup> Just as the bishop and priest exercise interpretive leadership overseeing the diocese and congregation, respectively, the deacon also assists the members of congregations and the diocese to interpret the mission of God in their context. Deacons bear the sacred commission of the gospel across boundaries within the larger diocesan mission field as emissaries of the bishop, facilitating the development of mission and ministry initiatives that might involve members of multiple congregations. Theirs is primarily a *regional* (or cross-congregational) ministry, while the priest's is primarily *local* (congregation-specific).

### *Rethinking Diocesan Conventions and General Convention*

Other than those who relish church politics, most Episcopalians approach diocesan conventions and

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<sup>70</sup> John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 116.

<sup>71</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, 543.

General Convention with apprehension, for coalition politics, parliamentary maneuvering, and divisiveness typically characterize these gatherings. Within the structure of these gatherings, Bible study and theological reflection are typically subordinate to the central content—the legislative process.

This approach to church assemblies reflects not only the downside of democratic rule, but also Christendom assumptions that the primary reason for the church's representatives to assemble on regional and national levels is legislative governance. Governance must take place; policy must be made; yet the spirit with which it is undertaken should reflect a larger missionary purpose.

To begin with, we might re-conceptualize such conventions as convocations of missionaries who gather first and foremost to cast vision, share best practices and build one another up in ministry. In such a model, prayer, Bible study and theological reflection would take center stage as the main event, with legislation relegated to the sidelines. This would begin to reshape the way in which the Holy Spirit is attended to in the councils of the church by placing discernment at the heart of things. Stories might be shared of mission experiences that would spark the imagination of those present. Collaborative networking for mission partnerships would be a key feature of such events.

### **A True Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society**

At its worst, Anglicanism's *via media* approach to ecclesiology leads to an undigested assortment of contradictory theological impulses that lacks clarity and cohesion. At its best, however, Anglicanism represents an integration of the richness of the wider Christian tradition—Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox; high, low and broad church. A missional ecclesiology and polity would leverage that richness as a living sign of reconciled diversity, an expression of *koinonia* whose identity is grounded first and foremost in the Triune God's mission to renew all creation. The ecumenical movement in the twentieth century petered out when it sought to discover

its unity in shared doctrine and polity, with lowest-common-denominator statements like *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* failing to do justice to the riches of any one tradition.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the future of ecumenical cooperation lies not in doctrine or polity, but rather in mission. The Episcopal Church, set within one of the most diverse and dynamic mission contexts in the world today, could contribute significantly to an emerging missional church in North America if it were to live more truly into the comprehensiveness it has historically claimed.

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<sup>72</sup> World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).