

DAVID A. ROOZEN & JAMES R. NIEMAN, EDITORS

CHURCH, IDENTITY, AND CHANGE

THEOLOGY AND DENOMINATIONAL
STRUCTURES IN UNSETTLED TIMES

A Primacy of Systems: Confederation, Corporation, and Communion

William H. Swatos, Jr.

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CHURCH, IDENTITY, and CHANGE

*Theology and Denominational Structures
in Unsettled Times*

Edited by

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Contents

Introduction	1
<i>David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman</i>	
"More Than Evangelical": The Challenge of the Evolving Identity of the Assemblies of God	35
<i>Gary B. McGee</i>	
Charisma and Structure in the Assemblies of God: Revisiting O'Dea's Five Dilemmas	45
<i>Margaret M. Poloma</i>	
The Challenges of Organization and Spirit in the Implementation of Theology in the Assemblies of God	97
<i>William W. Menzies</i>	
A Short History of the Association of Vineyard Churches	132
<i>Bill Jackson</i>	
Routinizing Charisma: The Vineyard Christian Fellowship in the Post-Wimber Era	141
<i>Donald E. Miller</i>	
Theological Perspective and Reflection on the Vineyard Christian Fellowship	163
<i>Don Williams</i>	
Anglican Mission in Changing Times: A Brief Institutional History of the Episcopal Church, USA	188
<i>Ian T. Douglas</i>	
A Primacy of Systems: Confederation, Corporation, and Communion	198
<i>William H. Swatos, Jr.</i>	
Crisis as Opportunity: Scandal, Structure, and Change in the Episcopal Church on the Cusp of the Millennium	227
<i>Jennifer M. Phillips</i>	
Structuring a Confessional Church for the Global Age: Admission to Communion by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	253
<i>Paul Marschke</i>	
Fellowship and Communion in the Postmodern Era: The Case of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	263
<i>David L. Carlson</i>	
The Theological Meaning and Use of Communion: The Case of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	294
<i>Eugene W. Bunkowske</i>	

Contents

How Firm a Foundation? The Institutional Origins of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.	327
<i>Quinton Hosford Dixie</i>	
The National Baptist Convention: Traditions and Contemporary Challenges	336
<i>Aldon D. Morris and Shayne Lee</i>	
Becoming a People of God: Theological Reflections on the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.	380
<i>David Emmanuel Goatley</i>	
The Reformed Church in America as a National Church	400
<i>John Coakley</i>	
National Engagement with Localism: The Last Gasp of the Corporate Denomination?	410
<i>Donald A. Luidens</i>	
No Longer Business as Usual: The Reformed Church in America Seen through Its Mission Statement	436
<i>Steve Mathonnet-VanderWell</i>	
The United Church of Christ: Redefining Unity in Christ as Unity in Diversity	458
<i>Barbara Brown Zikmund</i>	
Strategy and Restructure in the United Church of Christ	466
<i>Emily Barman and Mark Chaves</i>	
Faith and Organization in the United Church of Christ	493
<i>Roger L. Shinn</i>	
Methodism as Machine	523
<i>Russell E. Richey</i>	
Leadership, Identity, and Mission in a Changing United Methodist Church	534
<i>James Rutland Wood</i>	
Practical Theology at Work in the United Methodist Church: Restructuring, Reshaping, Reclaiming	565
<i>Pamela D. Couture</i>	
National Denominational Structures' Engagement with Postmodernity: An Integrative Summary from an Organizational Perspective	588
<i>David A. Roozen</i>	
The Theological Work of Denominations	625
<i>James R. Nieman</i>	
Contributors	654

A Primacy of Systems: Confederation, Corporation, and Communion

William H. Swatos, Jr.

The phrase “the national church” is among the standards of Episcopalian discourse. One might think, therefore, that its meaning was similarly standardized; that is, that everybody knew what everybody else meant when she or he talked about the national church. Yet that is hardly the case. “The national church” refers to several bodies, loosely joined together, some incorporated, some not, with uncertain ties to dioceses, parishes, and interest networks that in turn produce uncertainties about the roles to be played by the different levels in creating and sustaining the mission of the church. Many parishioners and clergy, as well as some bishops, use the phrase disparagingly, suggesting that “the national church” is out of touch with the actual life of the church nationally, even problematic to it. Yet, as historian Pamela Darling points out, “[a]lthough most Episcopalians have little direct contact with these organizational units” that more or less encompass “the national church” as the phrase is used by most Episcopalians, “the development and implementation of legislation and program at the national level establishes the framework in which all diocesan and local parish life takes place” — even if that be in setting an agenda for controversy.¹ Thus, to examine the Episcopal Church at the organizational level denominated by the phrase “the national church” is to engage a crucial dynamic in the shaping — for better or worse — of “Episcopalianism” at the turn of the third millennium.

The Episcopal Church per se has no incorporated status. One evidence for this came in the late 1990s when a group of conservative Episcopalians took the full historical title, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, and actually did proceed to incorporate and domesticate it across the United States (hence the “PECUSA, Inc.” incident). Although the incorporation

1. Pamela W. Darling, *New Wine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1994), p. 3.

effort was subjected to secular adjudication and was thereby foiled, it makes the point with backhanded precision. The official corporate name for the entity to which everyone who speaks of *the* Episcopal Church refers is the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, usually abbreviated DFMS. Although the DFMS today is in effect only a holding company for the Episcopal Church as an unincorporated association, nevertheless by canon "all persons who are members of the Church"² are included in the DFMS's membership. The PECUSA, Inc. incident, however, clearly points to conflicts that surround the status of "the national church" and what "the Episcopal Church" means.

After a descriptive exposition of the Episcopalian organizational complex, we will turn to a recent and specific denominational crisis. Here I use the social drama model of Victor Turner both to analyze this crisis and to suggest how the diffuse organizational structures and competing strategic visions of the church actually allowed for creative, healthy resolution of this breach of trust between the church at the national level and its local constituents.³

It is surely not the DFMS per se to which Episcopalians refer when they

2. Canon I.3.1.

3. Data for this case study and Jennifer Phillips's theological essay that follows were gathered primarily through fifty-five extended, semistructured interviews with a wide range of leadership in the Episcopal Church, drawn in snowball fashion. About two-thirds of the interviews were conducted by telephone, one-third in person. I conducted all the phone interviews. Most of the interviews conducted in person were done by Phillips and me together. The length of the interviews averaged about an hour, but there was considerable variation. Interviewees were both encouraged to elaborate upon answers to the initial uniform set of questions and also invited to comment on areas they thought were salient but did not seem to be captured in this set.

Subjects included present and retired bishops, particularly those who had served in administrative positions in connection with the Episcopal Church's New York offices, and included both the present and prior presiding bishops. Also included were members of present and past Executive Councils, both clergy and lay; deputies to the church's General Convention (including three presidents of the House of Deputies); and present and past national staff employees, both clergy and lay, from secretaries to chiefs of staff. In addition, we conducted a variety of informal interviews during a meeting of the Executive Council, which we attended in its entirety. This meeting, as well as several visits to the Episcopal Church Center, including one that coincided with a meeting of the presidents (and/or vice presidents) of the church's nine provinces, which I attended in full, also gave us opportunities to observe the actions of virtually all the principals of current Episcopal Church operations in interaction with one another.

We conducted additional informal interviews, both by phone and in person, after the chapters were in their initial drafts. These interviews included consultations with assistants to the presiding bishop and an extended meeting of the research team with one of those persons. We are especially grateful to Bruce Woodcock, who adroitly managed our contacts in this process. Of course, no one other than Phillips and I should be held accountable for the errors that may still be in our work, nor for the conclusions we have drawn.

speak of "the national church." This phrase comprehends much more. For some it is the General Convention, which meets triennially; for others it is the Executive Council, which is simultaneously the Executive Council of the General Convention *and* the Board of Directors of the DFMS; not to be forgotten, however, are the Church Pension Fund and the Episcopal Church Foundation, each of which has been involved at some level in policy, organizational, and financing decisions that have made a contribution to the image of the national church. Each of these groups has some level of staff located in New York City, with everything but the Pension Fund operating out of the Episcopal Church Center, popularly known from its street address as "815." The "program" staff at 815 constitute another image of the national church. Cutting across all these groups, although least so the Pension Fund, is the role and person of the presiding bishop, often referred to as the PB, who not only represents the Episcopal Church officially both nationally and internationally but also is ultimately responsible for the *management* of the bulk of the 815 staff. The work and person of the presiding bishop provide the crucial opening to a window on the national church as it exists today. A pastor of systems, as the present incumbent has described his understanding of the episcopate, is increasingly important in a world of increasingly uncertain organizational ties. The movement from confederation through the difficulties of the corporate into an emergence of a deep communion that is yet to be fully revealed describes the organizational trajectory of the recent history and contemporary reality of the Episcopal Church.

Background

The Episcopal Church is a residual of the American Revolution. That is, when the United States successfully gained its independence from Great Britain, there were still people in the United States who wished to continue worshipping according to the forms of the Church of England, which was established by law in England but disestablished in the United States as a result of the Revolution. Ironically, the American Revolution created the Anglican revolution, because it was as a result of the creation of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America that the Church of England was in effect denominationalized.⁴ In that process the Episcopal Church nevertheless also retained certain distinctive qualities that set it apart from most of its American denominational counterparts. One of these was the historic episcopate; another was a

4. I have discussed this process at greater length in William H. Swatos, Jr., *Into Denominationalism* (Storrs, Conn.: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1979).

transorganizational cultural identity that at least in part includes a tradition of social honor among lay leaders — what Max Weber refers to as *honoratiores* — who stand in a unique relationship to rank-and-file constituents.⁵ Some measure of “state-churchiness” remained in the Episcopal Church well into the twentieth century. Ian Douglas refers to this as “the national church ideal.”⁶

Like most of the mainline denominations in the United States, however, the Episcopal Church made a transition to its present organizational structure in the early twentieth century. Although the groundwork for the DFMS, for example, was in place by 1821 and the title of presiding bishop was used at the General Convention of 1795 (having been added to the *Book of Common Prayer* by action of the convention in 1792), neither one took on the significance it did after the watershed year of 1919, when the most important changes were made to the Episcopal Church’s structure since Independence. First, a National Council, which also simultaneously became the Board of the DFMS, was empowered to carry out the work of the church during the triennium between conventions. Second, the office of the presiding bishop was dramatically altered: the PB was no longer simply the bishop who by seniority presided over the House of Bishops’ meeting during General Convention (and such times when it met apart from General Convention), but an elected presiding bishop of the *church* — a title that brought Presiding Bishop Thomas March Clark resounding criticism when, less than two decades earlier, he had slipped and used it for himself.⁷

5. See Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978 [1921]), pp. 1007-64; cf. S. Charles Bolton, *Southern Anglicanism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983); William H. Swatos, Jr., *Mediating Capitalism and Slavery* (Tampa: USF Monographs in Religion and Public Policy, 1987).

6. The history of the development of the national organization of the Episcopal Church is covered comprehensively in Ian Douglas, *Fling Out the Banner* (New York: Church Publishing, 1996). Constitutional and canonical issues are assayed with equal thoroughness in Edwin Augustine White and Jackson A. Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America Otherwise Known as the Episcopal Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

7. See Ronald Foster, *The Role of the Presiding Bishop* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 1982), pp. 50-51. The presiding bishop issue was filled with ironies. On the one hand, Bishop Clark did favor the idea of an elected presiding bishop of the church, while his successor Daniel Sylvester Tuttle, who was presiding bishop at the time the legislation actually passed, opposed it. Furthermore, there was a lack of clarity in the church generally about what it meant, as witnessed by the fact that for about six months after the passage of the new canons on the presiding bishop and council, *The Spirit of Missions*, the quasi-official Episcopal Church (i.e., DFMS) monthly, began to refer to Bishop Thomas P. Gailor of Tennessee as presiding bishop, whereas Bishop Gailor had been elected pro tempore president of the council to serve until the first elected presiding bishop should take office, since Bishop Tuttle in fact remained presiding bishop. Following Bishop Tuttle’s death in 1923, there was a rapid succession of several presiding

Over successive conventions, two further developments occurred, one with reference to each of these 1919 innovations. First, the name of the council was changed from the National Council to the Executive Council in 1964. While there may have been many motives in this change — some see it simply as a recognition of the internationalization of the Episcopal Church as extraterritorial missionary dioceses were added — Ian Douglas, following Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler, sees it as a move from the council serving primarily administrative functions to the council as a regulatory agency.⁸ Second, the PB's office was enlarged in two ways. In the 1940s the decision was taken at General Convention that the PB should resign his territorial see (diocese). This created a new creature for the global Anglican Communion, since heretofore all archbishops, to which role the PB's office is the closest analogue, also had diocesan responsibilities. In the 1970s the PB was given the authority to enter dioceses for sacramental and preaching ministry, for consulting with bishops, and for related purposes. This extends to the PB *extraordinary jurisdiction* (or "metropolitan authority"), and might theoretically be said to "papalize" the PB's role. In 1982 the PB was also given the title "primate"; however, by no means do all Anglican primates have the extrajudicial authority that pertains within the purview of the PB's office within the Episcopal Church.⁹

At the same time, there is a "flip side" to this increasing concentration of authority; namely, the Episcopal Church continues to be a *confederation* of dioceses, each technically an independent body:

The P.B.'s chair is an honored spot,
But O my friends that seat is hot.
In the House of Bishops you can come to grief.
It's a tribe in which each man is a chief.¹⁰

bishops due to difficulties of the succession process on the one hand and untimely deaths on the other. The office did not stabilize until Bishop Perry's accession in 1930.

8. See Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, "The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation," in *The Organizational Revolution*, ed. Milton J. Coalter et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), pp. 307-31; Ian Douglas, "Whither the National Church? Reconsidering the Mission Structures of the Episcopal Church," in *The Future of Theology*, ed. Robert Slocum (New York: Church Publishing, 1999), pp. 60-78.

9. The title of presiding bishop is unique to the Episcopal Church in the United States among the bodies of the Anglican Communion; the primate of Canada now shares with the presiding bishop in the United States a see-less office.

10. Doggerel verse composed by Bishop Richard S. Emerich of Michigan on the occasion of the retirement of Henry Knox Sherrill; see Henry Knox Sherrill, *Among Friends* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962).

Although claims are often made, for example, that the Constitution of the Episcopal Church is “modeled” on that of the United States, in fact it is less like the Constitution than like the Articles of Confederation.¹¹ Dioceses accede to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, and in so doing align themselves with the General Convention, but in theory any diocese may withdraw from this union. Today there would probably be legal challenges, particularly regarding property rights, the relative success or failure of which would likely be determined by secular courts on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, the 1998 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion’s bishops again reaffirmed the integrity of diocesan boundaries, hence the centrality of the diocese to the church’s characteristic “disbursed authority.”¹²

The integrity of the diocese as the basic unit of the American church has been recognized in a number of ways, though it has also been tested and limited. The extraordinary jurisdiction of the PB, for example, is one theoretical incursion across diocesan boundaries. In fact, it is unrealistic to think that a PB could actually successfully intervene in a diocese without a strong base of support within the diocese setting the stage for his action. On the other hand, the right of each diocese to equal representation at General Convention, though often challenged, has never been altered. The relationship between the diocese and the national church is mirrored in that pertaining between each diocesan bishop and 815. The diocesan bishop is strategically placed to filter communications in both directions. Nevertheless, dioceses can — and do — withhold money from “the national church” program, and the national church has no mechanism to force the diocese to pay its assessments. Specifically, there is no *ad limina* in the Episcopal Church that gives “teeth” to the papalization of the PB’s office, such as characterizes that of the bishop of Rome.

It is true that there is a system of checks and balances between the diocese and the rest of the American church. Among others, every newly elected bishop must obtain approval for consecration from a majority of both the standing committees (elected bodies in every diocese consisting of laity and clergy) and the current diocesan and coadjutor bishops before the PB can “take order” for that person’s consecration. Similarly, errant bishops can be brought, via the PB’s office, before an ecclesiastical court of bishops for a process of trial and potential dismissal. It is not clear, however, what power the church at the national level could exercise to enforce these prerogatives if a diocese were determined

11. Presbyterians also like to make the claim that their organizational structure has affinities to the Constitution, and this is more likely accurate.

12. The phrase “disbursed authority” is credited to Edward Norman in a lecture delivered on behalf of the Ecclesiastical Law Society during the 1998 Lambeth Conference; see Dorsey Henderson, Jr., “Lambeth Diary,” *Living Church*, August 30, 1998, p. 8.

to obtain or retain a bishop against the national will. That this is so is in some ways a continuing legacy of the historical position of the Church of England as a state church, on the one hand, thrown into juxtaposition with American religious pluralism, hence voluntarism, on the other. In practice, it has never been tested to this point, and church members remain generally compliant with the existing order or choose to exit on their own.

The Presiding Bishop

The life of the Episcopal Church as a national body today is wound, albeit loosely, around the work and person of the PB. The “modern” exercise of the duties of the PB may be dated from the assumption of the office by Henry Knox Sherrill in 1947. Prior to accepting the office, Bishop Sherrill had been bishop of Massachusetts, one of the largest dioceses in the Episcopal Church, hence a diocese that had a history of influential bishops. Each PB from Sherrill forward has served for approximately a decade, with the exception of Arthur Lichtenberger, who followed Sherrill and resigned after only six years for reasons of health. In the past fifty years the PB has been increasingly present throughout the life of the Episcopal Church as a national body.

The nature of the office is such that it carries enormous office charisma (in the Weberian sense), but it is also one in which the personal character of the incumbent can strongly influence the image and function of “the national church” in specific, concrete directions. This is so because the PB has multiple roles to play simultaneously and because “the national church” is diffusely defined. The office charisma of the PB is a unique characteristic of the Episcopal Church among the denominations in the ORW (Organizing Religious Work) study. We find no other denomination where the official head is for example regularly, liturgically remembered *by name* Sunday by Sunday (and weekday by weekday, where there are weekday liturgies, which is a widespread practice in Episcopal parishes) throughout most of the church. Among major Western churches in the United States, only Roman Catholic parishes have a similar practice. Because the PB is elected only by the other bishops, and by them only within certain guidelines, it is virtually assured that the incumbent will be a person relatively skilled in human relationships and gifted in genuine leadership (though that leadership *style* may differ dramatically from one PB to another). It is at the same time virtually certain that no PB will be able to attend to all the potential functions of his office equally, just as will no parish rector.

First, the PB retains the historic role bestowed on the office from 1789 forward of actually presiding over the House of Bishops during sessions of the

General Convention. The PB is thus the president of one of the two houses of the body that makes the rules in which and through which the mission of the church is to be carried forward, including the budget priorities for that. Unlike the House of Deputies, which is composed of clerical and lay deputies from each diocese elected specifically for this event, the House of Bishops continues throughout the triennium.¹³ In other words, when a General Convention is over, the members of the House of Deputies are done with their work and go home unless they are appointed members of “interim bodies” (usually called standing commissions), which continue to work during the triennium; lay members are appointed by the president of the House of Deputies, bishops by the PB. The House of Bishops, however, continues to meet as a body throughout these years, usually semiannually. The PB has a considerable role in setting the agenda for these meetings.

In addition, the PB retains the role of “taking order” for the consecration of new bishops, hence at least shepherding the ever changing composition of the house. Although the PB cannot block the consecration of any bishop who has received the necessary consents, the PB can influence the degree of the bishop’s participation in the work of both the house and the interim bodies specifically through the power of appointment. “Taking order” for the consecration of bishops does not mean that the PB must consecrate every new bishop, but that the PB has the *right* to do so. Edmond Browning, presiding bishop from 1986 through 1997, who spent almost 80 percent of his time out of the Church Center, made the exercise of this right one of his priorities. The present PB, Frank Griswold, has indicated that he does not intend to exercise this right to the same extent, since the role of chief consecrator is a largely symbolic one. It brings the PB into high ceremonial profile but in itself allows the PB relatively little opportunity for significant conversation (a favorite word of Bishop Griswold) with constituents, including even the new bishop. In this Bishop Griswold is following the advice of Bishop Sherrill given to Bishop Allin, his successor once removed: “Stay at home and run the place.”

In a similar role, the PB is also the chief liturgical officer of General Convention. Although the actual liturgical forms and roles are often delegated, the PB has final authority over all the official liturgical observances while General Convention is meeting. This role, like that of chief consecrator, enhances the office charisma that becomes important symbolic capital to the way the PB is able to negotiate other roles, not least the ability successfully to enter dioceses

13. Technically the House of Bishops is the “junior house” of the convention, since the 1785 General Convention met as priests and laity, as the House of Deputies (the “senior house”) is now constituted.

for more intense interaction with constituents, especially in times of conflict. The PB does not simply come as another bishop but as *the* presiding bishop. The PB is derivatively the chief liturgical officer of the Executive Council when it meets. In any denomination where liturgy is a paramount activity, as is the case in the Episcopal Church, and a liturgical manual is the principal confession of faith, determination of what happens in specific liturgies is an item of no little significance. The symbolic value of liturgical action is likely to be read closely by constituents.¹⁴

Where the office charisma of the presiding bishop pays the incumbent the greatest dividends, but also sets up the greatest dangers, is in the very uncharismatic role of being the simultaneous chair and president of the Executive Council, and derivatively president of the DFMS. In this role the PB has tremendous power to influence both the church itself and the image of the church on both international and national levels. The agenda for the life of the church that the PB sets is largely the official agenda of the Episcopal Church. This is especially so inasmuch as the PB technically hires every person who works at 815. Of course, much staff hiring is done at lower levels, and while there is no formal tenure system, at the lower levels people tend to be retained from one administration to another (as long as funds hold out).

Some might object that this strong a claim for the PB ignores the role of General Convention — i.e., that it is really General Convention that sets the agenda for the triennium. Such a view of General Convention ignores at least three realities: First, and most simply, General Convention goes home when its meeting ends. Although the Executive Council is strictly speaking the Executive Council of General Convention, representing and responsible to the General Convention, it is virtually impossible for the council to oversee the day-to-day operations at 815 because the only place it can reasonably receive information about these operations is from 815. Second, General Convention has had a tendency to put forth so many resolutions, sometimes even contradictory resolutions, that it is similarly virtually impossible to address all of them equally. If we think of General Convention's resolution production as a kind of smorgasbord, it has often been so large that one person after another can go to it, all can come back with their plates absolutely full, and yet some things can be left untouched. The PB can channel resolution consumption patterns. (An effort has been made at recent conventions to correct this resolution glut by, on the one

14. Following the General Convention of 2000, for example, there was an extended series of letters in the *Living Church*, an independent Episcopalian weekly (and the only weekly targeted to Episcopalians), offering conjectures as to the meaning of the fact that during at least one major eucharistic celebration at the convention the presiding bishop wore his stole over his chasuble rather than under it.

hand, requiring more sponsors of resolutions coming to the floor, and on the other, trying to get resolutions and funding more closely tied.) Third, however, no matter which resolutions get passed, the operation of them is put into the hands of specific persons who contextualize and interpret them. These are people the PB hires, retains, empowers, directs, and so on. These people give operational definitions to words like “ministry,” “sexuality,” “women’s concerns,” “peace and justice,” “stewardship,” and “evangelism.” Other than legal background checks, there is no formal system of checks on these people and their work except the system the PB decides there should be. During a PB’s term, which historically has varied between nine and twelve years (and is currently nine), always thus far followed by retirement, the PB basically has charge over how “the ministry and mission of the Church,” or “the work,” is conceived and operationalized.

When Your Checks Don’t Balance

Nowhere was this dynamic more clearly displayed than in the administrative discord and subsequent scandal that surrounded Ellen Cooke during Bishop Browning’s tenure. Cooke was ultimately convicted and jailed for embezzlement, but the embezzlement was really only the tip of the iceberg of the damage the church suffered at her hands. How did it come to be so?

The practice had developed that the incumbent of “the treasurer’s office” is simultaneously treasurer of both General Convention and the DFMS. Although formally elected by General Convention, the treasurer is normally an appointee by the PB. This appointment practice is a matter of convenience, but it reveals the peculiar ways in which budgets and funds likewise simultaneously remain separate and commingle, and may be taken at this point as evidence of the relative clumsiness of General Convention as a practical administrative organ of the church. In this specific case, what happened was that coincidentally concurrent with the election of a new PB there was an election of a new president of the House of Deputies with whom, as a matter of fact, the PB did not see eye to eye. Complicating this, both the executive officer of General Convention and the treasurer of General Convention/DFMS retired. The treasurer had served over thirty years. The PB was strongly committed to the ministry of the laity and the ministry of women, and thus was happy to appoint Cooke, with a view toward a tighter operation of the office, upon the recommendation of at least two highly respected bishops for whom she had worked creditably.

What happened thereafter, however, shows the danger of the PB’s position. The consensus of those we interviewed for this study was that Cooke be-

gan to expand her power, isolate her staff from the program staff, issue reports to the Executive Council that were impossible to understand, and display arrogance toward all who questioned her, but she remained intensely loyal to the PB. He returned the favor, not without support of some commission and committee leaders who were apparently sufficiently impressed by her financial mystifications to excuse her personal offensiveness. In short, critic after critic, questioner after questioner of Cooke was rebuffed by the PB. She took refuge in the women's issue, and he defended her. This became most clear when, after the appropriate body refused to allow her nomination as treasurer of General Convention to go forward at General Convention in 1994, requiring instead a personal nomination from the floor, the PB directly intervened on her behalf with the nominating committee of the convention, and it placed her name on the ballot (as the sole candidate). He did this in spite of the specific dissent of Pamela Chinnis, the new president of the House of Deputies, with whom he was in other respects virtually a soul mate. Only six months later the embezzlement itself came to light. There can be no question that the charisma of the PB's office, combined with his unique executive management role, overrode prudential considerations that questions of fiduciary accountability might have engendered in other circumstances.

A similar, though less dramatic, set of circumstances also prevailed during the primacy of John Hines (1965-74) in connection with the General Convention Special Program (GCSP), a program to channel a relatively massive funding effort directly to community agencies working principally on behalf of ethnic minorities. There is undoubtedly a book to be written on GCSP, but the thesis here is a relatively simple one; namely, that GCSP and Hines's primacy became problematic within the life of the Episcopal Church. This was not because of its focus on minorities, which was already present in the Lichtenberger years, but for two other reasons. First, funds were channeled to local secular agencies without consultation with either diocesan authorities (principally the bishops of the dioceses involved) or church groups already involved in working with minority ministries. Second, the leadership of GCSP eschewed the leadership within the church already working on these issues. Again, this was allowed to occur first because of Hines's personal charisma (often referred to in his case as "prophetic leadership") in generating the funds, principally from the women of the church, and then because of the office charisma of the PB that enabled him to work unchecked.

In both the Cooke and Hines cases, however, brakes were applied. They came not in the first instance from the votes of General Convention but from the "green vote" (greenbacks from the grass roots): dioceses not paying their quota of national church (i.e., 815) support. Here is where the diocese as coun-

terweight comes down strongly: the major source of 815 funding is diocesan budgets. These are indirectly the product of local congregational giving and directly the product of diocesan conventions. Either or both may cause a downturn in revenue received at 815. The bottom line of “staff development” is no money. Two major reductions in staff have been taken in the last fifty years: one in the Hines era, the other (really in two steps) in the Browning era. The green vote, not the “priorities of General Convention,” has determined these. Only after the necessary accommodations were made to the crises did General Convention respond — for example, in those portions of the Structure Commission report adopted by the convention of 1997. Nevertheless, even here we can see the continued power of the PB, since the PB determines, directly or indirectly, who will go and who will stay among the staff, hence what priorities and constituencies are ultimately served — and in what ways. Even now, with a new PB and money flowing favorably, decisions about what “work” will continue, who will do it, how it will be done, what will be initiated and what dropped remain ultimately in his hands, regardless of the amount of conversation that takes place in the process.

The PB also has other roles. Increasingly significant and demanding of time is his presence within the wider Anglican Communion and in ecumenical relationships. The other representative role, which can also be controversial, is that of “spokesperson” not only to the church but also to “the world.” What this means is that the PB can, if he chooses, make politically charged statements. The canon is ambiguous about whether or not these statements have to reflect directly General Convention positions. While there is little doubt that the PB would be acting wrongly to contradict a specific General Convention position, there does not appear to be any limit on the PB speaking to other issues “as the representative of this Church and its episcopate in its corporate capacity.”¹⁵ In this respect the PB may speak to a host of geopolitical and socioeconomic issues in the name of the Episcopal Church. Bishop Browning’s stand on the Gulf War, frequently reported still as “opposition of the Episcopal Church to the Gulf War,” is an example. Such stands can similarly prove costly in the green vote, though not as costly as those that directly involve funding issues.

The Weberian distinction between prophetic and priestly ministerial roles is helpful in examining these crisis moments in Episcopalian leadership on the part of PBs. It can be plausibly argued that prophecy comes closer to genuine charisma, while the pastoral role makes use of the office charisma that represents a second-order “routinization” of genuine charisma. Weber makes it clear that ideal-typical charisma is not concerned about matters of administra-

15. Canon I.2.4(a, 1-2).

tion or administrative routine. In the strict sense, prophets are not concerned about profits. Given the internal contradictions of the PB's role, the evidence in practice is that when a PB has made the prophetic side of the position's multifaceted set of expectations a distinct priority, the routine tasks of administration have correspondingly floundered.

In both the Cooke and Hines cases, for example, accountability to church leaders was sacrificed. Given the voluntaristic nature of American denominationalism, this creates institutional costs in a double sense. Curiously, however, the built-in contradictions of the PB's role combined with the competing strategic visions for the organization serve as a counterweight that ultimately rights the sinking ship while simultaneously creating additional mechanisms toward pattern maintenance.

815

What happens at 815? One of our interviewees, a retired staff member with many years of service to the church, told us of a visit she made to a diocesan convention during some of the difficult years of the GCSP era. One woman came up to her during a break, obviously unhappy about how things were going in "the national church," and asked her, "Do staff persons have a parish of your own?" The staff person replied that she did as did others, told the inquirer something about her own parish and involvement in it, but then added, "Frequently if we're out traveling [on Sunday], or since I live in New York City, it's easy for me to go to church or service at 815," trying thereby to make the inquirer aware that the Church Center was also a place of worship with services every morning during the week. The listener was pleased but in a different way: "I prefer the early service myself," she replied approvingly, as if having found a kindred spirit.

When Episcopal clergy speak of "the national church," they are often referring to the staff at 815. Laity are only vaguely aware of 815's existence, possibly associating the church headquarters instead with National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., where the PB does in fact have his "seat." Within the staff at 815 there are three major operating divisions. One of these, largely uncontroversial, is the General Convention staff, whose primary responsibility is to keep the wheels of the convention turning between conventions, as well as to plan and execute the myriad details required to "pull off" a successful meeting. Another division, also uncontroversial until the Ellen Cooke incident, is administrative and involves all the work of the treasurer's office, plus human relations, building services, the mail room and bookstore, and so on. Here one might also put

such offices as clergy deployment and the bishop for the Armed Forces, Health Institutions, and Prisons, although these are in some ways quasi-independent functions while in other ways sliding toward program.

The third division of the 815 staff, however, and clearly the most controversial, is the program staff itself, particularly those whose work addresses domestic rather than global constituencies. The program staff is controversial because it is perceived as not related to specific tasks that keep the Center and the General Convention operating as institutions. Program staff are perceived as in themselves "good" people, but sometimes people who are out to create and implement agendas that may not be those of General Convention. These are seen by some as efforts at job preservation. They are also seen by some as ideologically driven by a particular view of the church that is not necessarily shared with grassroots understandings (e.g., evangelism) or even the unique specific constituencies (e.g., Native Americans, Asian Americans) that a specific program "desk" is supposed to serve. These problems are somewhat crosscut by the way some of these positions are funded, which is by either direct or indirect endowment. For example, the position of liturgical officer was at one time close to the ecclesiastical equivalent of an endowed chair in academe, though it has recently been placed into the budget. In other cases endowments may be reinterpreted from their original purpose to an allied intent. For example, endowments given in the 1800s for former slaves or slave children may be incorporated into the funding of the African American desk. Some of these moneys may not be directly a part of the General Convention budget, hence program staff have a greater role in the decision-making processes on how they are spent. Since these are staff of the PB, accountability flows primarily through the office of the PB, as distinct from General Convention.

Staff size has fluctuated considerably across time. At the time we did our interviews, there were 240 total Church Center staff employees, including approximately 70 missionaries in the field.¹⁶ Those in-house are divided between about 60 percent who are support staff, typically paid on an hourly basis, and the remainder, who are program staff. Also in the building are a number of independent but church-related agencies. These involve another 28 people. The staff has numbered over 400 in the early 1970s and as few as 190 later in the same decade, to some extent reflecting church membership decline across the same period.

16. This number has increased since our visits and probably will be increasing slightly over the remainder of the triennium. That increase is unlikely to be more than 10 percent.

General Convention

While the PB and the 815 staff probably represent “the national church” to most clergy, two other interrelated meanings are more likely to be in the minds of laity. One is the most simple, direct literal meaning; namely, the church as it exists spread out across the fifty states (the “domestic dioceses”). In fact, this is the view for which the present PB advocates: “all of us together are the national church . . . this curious but grace-filled house.” This use does not refer to a specific organizational structure at all, but simply means something akin to “how we Episcopalians do things across the country.” For the majority of laity, this view is likely to be shaped by national secular media and by travel and residential mobility. Given that the Episcopal Church has had one of the lowest levels of member-retention loyalty, it can probably be inferred that there is considerable diversity in the national church defined in this way.¹⁷ (One could also, equally accurately, say there is a high degree of parochialism within the Episcopal Church; the two are not mutually exclusive.)

The second meaning is not unrelated to the first, since it too reflects the idea of the Episcopal Church spread across the nation. This meaning is the General Convention: that time every three years when deputies from all the dioceses — four clerical deputies and four lay deputies, whether the diocese has Massachusetts’s 95,000 communicants or Eau Claire’s 2,674 — as well as all the bishops,¹⁸ come together to spend two weeks debating “resolutions and memorials,” worshiping, adopting a budget that will keep 815 afloat for the coming triennium, and electing persons who will serve on national bodies — most significantly the Executive Council and the Board of the Church Pension Fund. General Convention makes rules to govern the church (the Constitution and Canons) and sets broad guidelines on church policy (resolutions). General Convention also either creates or is connected to the vast majority of other national bodies. One of our interviewees, a national staff member, stated quite directly, “The General Convention is the national church, really.”

Another of our interviewees, with a quarter-century of experience as a deputy, aptly described General Convention as consisting of “a representative cross-section of Episcopal Church activists.” That is, the General Convention

17. On membership retention, see Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

18. The phrase “all the bishops” means not only diocesan bishops, but also coadjutors, suffragans, assistants, and any other bishop, validly consecrated in the Episcopal Church, who has not been suspended or deposed, including all retired bishops. As with issues regarding the equal size of diocesan deputations, efforts are regularly made to change this compositional structure of the house, but again, none has been successful.

hardly reflects the average Sunday churchgoer. General Convention deputies are selected at diocesan conventions, whose membership in turn is selected by congregations. Although dioceses pay for the expenses of their deputies to convention, thus removing a direct basis for socioeconomic discrimination in deputy selection, the duration of the convention itself plus pre- and postconvention meeting expectations — not to mention possible appointment to an interim body — ensure that the majority of lay deputies are likely to be either people with excess leisure time or people with a cause. About one-third of the deputies at each convention are serving for the first time, although others have served as many as ten or fifteen successive conventions.

The convention of 2000 was unique in that over half the deputies were newcomers. The work of General Convention is itself a sufficiently complex process that relatively few first-time deputies have any significant involvement in it. A corollary of this is that among the lay deputies in particular a cadre of repeatedly elected deputies holds significant leadership clout. Some interviewees commented that among the lay leadership the same people are recycled through different committees and commissions, giving at least the appearance of the same group of people being in place who were there twenty years ago.

In theory, General Convention committees receive reports from the interim bodies and church boards and agencies. The interim bodies formally cease to exist during the convention, when legislative committees take over their work. Some members of committees may have been members of their analogue interim bodies or may subsequently be appointed to such bodies. Bishops are appointed to these committees and commissions by the PB, and clerical and lay members by the president of the House of Deputies, though there is normally consultation between the PB and the president, and also between each of them and their respective Councils of Advice. The membership of the PB's Council of Advice is set by canon, while the president may appoint a Council of Advice on a discretionary basis.

Particular note has been taken of the increasing role and presence of the president of the House of Deputies since the election of Pamela Chinnis. From the time Chinnis was elected vice president of the same body in 1986, Bishop Browning sought to include her in an enlarged leadership role, with strong encouragement from the Women's Caucus. For example, she was invited to attend meetings of Executive Council, of which she was not a member. Once Chinnis was elected president, Bishop Browning came close to treating her as a coequal, even inviting her to meetings of the House of Bishops, and having her give an address from the chair at Executive Council meetings (as the PB exclusively had done previously). Bishop Browning justified this as reflecting, again, both his view of the ministry of the laity and his commitment to the ministry of women

throughout the church. Her presence in these ways certainly did not go unnoticed, nor was it unremarked that she and Bishop Browning shared a common sociopolitical agenda that was not shared between the PB and her predecessor, Dean David Collins of Atlanta's St. Phillip's Cathedral, the nation's largest Episcopal congregation.

Indeed, over time the House of Deputies has become a somewhat less fluid body. Since the appointment of an executive officer for the General Convention in the 1970s, the house has a more distinct continuing character as a result of more professional administration. As late as the 1950s, for example, deputies (all men until 1970) sat in ganged folding chairs with no printed agenda, while much activity took place behind the scenes among a limited leadership cadre. Virtually all convention officers were volunteers, and many served what amounted to lifetime careers. At the same time, the question is now raised about the relationship between 815 staff and interim bodies, with claims being made in at least some cases that staff write interim body reports and largely direct their activities. Some interim bodies, particularly as related to Executive Council, appear to have a large degree of staff generation. The Commission on HIV/AIDS and the Committee on the Status of Women may both be taken as examples of this tendency to create agendas.

Nevertheless, the power of the General Convention to "set the course" for the Episcopal Church during each triennium is relatively limited, for reasons already cited. It lacks continuing existence, and its resolutions are subject to evaluation and interpretation by the PB and 815 staff on the one hand and the dioceses on the other. A recent move by General Convention to track the resolutions process has created an interesting data set for a statistical analysis of General Convention resolutions. Beginning in 1994, the General Convention office reported on responses from the dioceses to General Convention resolutions "referred to dioceses for action." In 1994 (reporting for the 1991 convention resolutions), before the Ellen Cooke crisis, there were forty-seven such resolutions. Particularly aggressive efforts to obtain data from the dioceses yielded reports from about 90 percent of the domestic dioceses. In this period, for example, all dioceses gave some consideration to resolution A069a, to Promote the Growth of Youth Ministry, but less than a third responded with any action on resolution B048, Commissions for Religious Freedom/Economic Liberty in Eastern Europe. Still, the majority of dioceses gave some form of consideration to 90 percent of the resolutions. By 1997 (reporting for the 1994 convention resolutions) the picture had changed. Only twenty-two resolutions were referred to the dioceses, but without the aggressive efforts employed in 1994 to obtain the data, only 58 percent of the dioceses complied with the reporting procedure. In addition, whereas only 6 percent of the resolutions in 1994 received no action

from any of the reporting dioceses, this proportion rose to 32 percent in 1997. It should be noted, furthermore, that these statistics do not measure favorable versus unfavorable action, but merely whether resolutions were considered at all and at what level — i.e., “completed,” “ongoing,” or “considered.” If we take the combination of considered (but not acted upon) and not considered at all, then the negative figure rises to 32 percent in 1994 and 45 percent in 1997.

The low reporting rate for 1997 — barely over half, less than half if the nondomestic dioceses are included — combined with a “rejection rate” of almost half among those that did report suggests a considerable gap between General Convention’s priorities and those of the dioceses. This is doubly curious, because the representatives to General Convention are sent from the diocesan level and are canonically bound to report back to the dioceses, while the dioceses are canonically bound to make provision for these reports. Yet in spite of this, it appears that in the majority of dioceses the majority of General Convention resolutions fall on a deaf ear, and that this is increasingly so — in spite of a decrease by over half in the total number of resolutions referred.

The Executive Council

At one level Executive Council is itself an interim body. That is, it meets “for” General Convention and usually thrice annually, during the triennium when the convention is not in session. Its specific “duty” is to “carry out the program and policies adopted by the General Convention.” Thus it “shall have charge of the coordination, development, and implementation of the ministry of the mission of the Church.”¹⁹ This seems clear enough, and might well be were it not that the same canon that provides this definition for council also allows council during the triennium to “initiate and develop such new work as it may deem necessary.”²⁰ Council meetings can become field days for special interests on the part of either members, staff, or the PB himself.

Executive Council consists of forty members, including the PB and the president of the House of Deputies. Twenty members are elected directly by the General Convention, and eighteen are elected by the nine provinces of the church — geographical units across the country and abroad that consist of between five and twenty dioceses each.²¹ Provincial representatives ensure some

19. Canon I.4.1(a).

20. Canon I.4.2(e).

21. Nondomestic Province IX is the smallest of these; however, two domestic provinces have only seven dioceses each.

degree of geographical balance, since this is not required in the General Convention elections. As with General Convention, although Executive Council members have their expenses paid, they still must have the time to contribute a minimum of three weeks per year to the meetings, not counting extra service demands. Some more senior interviewees lamented the fact that longer council meetings and the increasing politicization of elections are bringing more professional (lay) church workers on to council rather than active lay congregants with expertise from secular callings. At the same time, others point to council as now being “more diverse” and “less defensive” than it once was.

The interface between council and staff is one of continuing negotiation, complicated in turn by that between council and the interim bodies. The major source of information that council has about the ongoing work of the staff is the staff itself. Unless a council member chooses in effect to make his or her position something like a full-time job, it is virtually impossible for the member to get an independent read on what’s going on. Staff thus both report to council and assist in shaping council’s agenda and the interpretation of its goals and priorities. Because council has the mandate to undertake new work, various innovations can be made at any point by anyone on council and indirectly by staff via the PB. Thus whole new areas of concern can be opened up, while original convention mandates may be back-burnered. Like General Convention, council meetings are not merely business meetings, but involve worship, reflection, and possibly various kinds of small-group activities that are not directly attentive to specific details of reports, resolutions, and so on. Council does “visioning” activity as well as fulfill canonical mandates.

Again, the role of the PB with respect to council is crucial and combines charisma of office with routine management functions, even though canons now provide for appointment of an “executive director . . . who shall be the chief operating officer” — apparently of “the mission and ministry of the Church” (the canon does not actually say *of what* the executive director is chief operating officer). The canon makes quite clear, however, that the executive officer “shall serve at the pleasure of the Presiding Bishop and be accountable to the Presiding Bishop” — not to council. Thus the PB’s role as having “ultimate responsibility for the oversight of the work of the Executive Council” remains unlimited.²² The

22. Canon I.4.3(a, d). Paragraph a. of this section of the canon says that the presiding bishop, as chair and president of Executive Council, “shall have ultimate responsibility for the oversight of the work of the Executive Council in the implementation of the ministry and mission of the Church as has been committed to the Executive Council by the General Convention.” Since the executive director reports directly to the PB and is accountable to the PB, the executive director is executive director and chief operating officer of “the mission and ministry of the Church.” This could perhaps be spelled out more clearly and effectively in subsequent legislation.

council is required to report to the General Convention, but for reasons already indicated, it will more likely be accountable to the green vote than to any specific General Convention body. Furthermore, because council members are elected for six-year terms, there is no way for a General Convention in effect to “clean house” if it does not like the way a particular council has behaved during the prior triennium. Furthermore, since 45 percent of council members are not elected by General Convention (nor do they need to be deputies to General Convention), agendas other than those of the convention may well be brought to council. Communication between provincial council representatives and their constituents varies dramatically both because of the varied natures of the provinces themselves and the inclinations of the individuals elected.

The Church Pension Fund

The idea of a dependable pension system for clergy applied throughout the church was innovated in the early years of the twentieth century, largely under the aegis of Bishop William Lawrence of Massachusetts. It replaced a voluntary system, into which the clergy (rather than the congregations) paid, which was then supplemented by grants to needy widows and orphans. Because every congregation with ongoing clerical ministry, hence the majority of Episcopal clergy as well, participates in this system, it also comes to be associated with the phrase “the national church.” More than once in difficult times the statement that “the Church Pension Fund (CPF) is the only thing holding the Church together” has been voiced. The CPF is the only major national church agency to which the PB has no statutory relationship, and its offices are physically separate from 815.

The CPF impacts the local congregation because pension assessments are required to be paid for all salaried clergy. The pension adds between 18 and 22 percent to the cost of clergy employment by the parish (depending on whether housing is paid as an allowance or provided in kind). In other words, the local congregation that offers its priest a stipend of \$24,000 per year plus occupancy of a home that it owns will pay the Pension Fund about \$5,280 in assessment. This assessment is frequently articulated as being paid “to the national church.”

Beginning in the early 1990s, however, another CPF agency, the Church Insurance Company (CIC), began to intervene in local congregational affairs in a more policy-oriented fashion. The CIC provides comprehensive fire, casualty, and liability insurance to approximately 70 percent of church properties. The loss of a major sexual misconduct suit in Colorado led CIC to mandate a stringent policy of background checks and training for all clergy and for lay workers who have specific administrative responsibility for activities involving minors

(e.g., Sunday school superintendents, DCEs, youth coordinators, camp directors), if a congregation wished to continue to receive CIC coverage. Although congregations are not required by national legislation to insure with CIC, the majority do (in some cases due to diocesan requirements), and these interventions within the life of the whole church gave to CIC a new and somewhat controversial prominence as a policy-making agency at the national level. Some of these extracanonial interventions have now been incorporated into the church's canons, but not without continued expressions of dissatisfaction. Clearly one of the agenda items for the Episcopal Church as it faces the third millennium is to develop a theology of risk to complement the putative theology of stewardship that underlay these decisions and others like them (e.g., approaches to church-building security that result in fewer churches being open continuously through the day to "enter, rest, and pray").

The Episcopal Church Foundation

The Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) is an independent organization founded by Bishop Sherrill during his primacy to provide for long-term development activities on behalf of the church. The PB is the chairman of the board of the ECF, but its self-perpetuating board is composed entirely of laypersons who are accountable to no one except themselves. The offices of ECF are housed at 815.

For many years the primary role of the ECF was grant making — either to churches or to individuals, in the latter case especially for graduate work at the doctoral level. In 1987, however, at the urging of Bishop Browning, the ECF began a new venture known as Cornerstone. This project, which has now developed cooperative ventures that include the Church Pension Fund and 815 clergy development staff, focuses principally on clergy and congregational wholeness or wellness, broadly conceived. Topics include not only physical and spiritual well-being, but leadership development, initiation of new pastoral relationships, and issues of "involuntary termination" in a pastoral relationship. More recently the ECF initiated the Zacchaeus Project, intended as the foundation's fiftieth anniversary "gift to the National Church." The project "explores what it means to be an Episcopalian in today's society and how they renew their sense of identity in communities of faith."²³

When placed in relationship to the increasing involvement of the Pension

23. *The Zacchaeus Project: Discerning Episcopal Identity at the Dawn of the New Millennium* (New York: Episcopal Church Foundation, 1999), p. 7.

Fund and its affiliates in clergy and congregational life, ECF efforts suggest a newly evolving model of “the national church” — namely, of units apart from the 815 staff taking major responsibilities for organizing and reorganizing church life, particularly as it relates to the local congregation. One could argue that these CPF/ECF initiatives meet a need that 815 program staff has been insensitive toward or else impotent to act on. And the problems the CPF/ECF initiatives have sought to address existed *before* the Ellen Cooke fiasco, though that incident certainly did nothing to solve them. These initiatives throw into relief a long-standing gulf between practical needs at the congregational and diocesan levels and ideological questions, which sometimes appear to drive 815 staff efforts.

How the Executive Council and 815 program staff engage the emerging initiatives beyond their purview will be a major issue in the first century of the new millennium. There are models of successful engagement between 815 and other agencies, in particular the Episcopal Partnership for Global Mission (EPGM) that brings together over forty mission agencies and organizations in the Episcopal Church in relationship with each other and the executive-legislative bodies of the church through the Executive Council. But the uncertain ties that run through the national church may operate here in a proactive way: that is to say, like Cornerstone, the EPGM, and the emerging Episcopal Network for Evangelism, some programs for the life of the church may develop with or without the blessing of Executive Council and with or without the involvement of 815 staff, and yet prove fruitful.

Continuing Issues

“The national church” remains an uncertain term in the life of the Episcopal Church both because of uncertain ties between the parishes and dioceses and the various national bodies, and because of uncertainties about how these national bodies themselves interrelate. The symbolic capital and office charisma of the presiding bishop is the signal point of potential unity holding it all together. This places enormous responsibility on the PB to act on behalf of the whole church and to consider the downside potential of single-issue commitments, no matter how laudable in themselves. It can be seen clearly from past events that the Episcopal Church went into crisis whenever routine accountability was laid aside in favor of ideological commitments. Breach of trust knows no bounds of race, color, creed, sex, or national origin. At the center of the PB’s agenda must be structures and processes of accountability that can be easily and fairly applied across national staffing. Serious consideration may

need to be given to how many long-term staff members should be continued indefinitely, and how much there should be a clean break with the past. Although the expressions of staff people about the "abuse" from the Cooke years need to be recognized and honored, these wounds may also impede fresh approaches and sap enthusiasm for genuinely new directions.

General Convention remains an odd amalgam of business meeting, political convention, and liturgical celebration. Like much of the public life of the church, it seems dominated by such issues as sexuality, sexual abuse and exploitation, marriage and divorce, women's ordination, and so on. It is not clear that the interface between General Convention and Executive Council is a strong one, in spite of various efforts over the years to make clear the superordinate-subordinate relationship between these two bodies. How much of the work of General Convention is necessary to making the work of the church go forward remains unclear. The present PB reported, for example, that prior to his primacy at least, he experienced General Convention "largely . . . as a free-standing event" apart from the ongoing life of the parish and the diocese. He proposed that a concept of "Jubilee" or "rest" be built into the 2000 convention, so that the convention as "a community of faith" could "enter into a process of discernment rather than decision making." Certainly a corporate body needs to exist to generate representatives to serve on such continuing bodies as the Executive Council and the Board of the Church Pension Fund. Whether this body needs to meet for two weeks and generate resolutions on a wide variety of topics seems debatable. Do these resolutions do any good? Who listens to them, how often, and to what end?

The combined role of Executive Council as custodian of the ongoing work of General Convention, initiator of new ministries, and board of the DFMS gives it a particularly unclear character and focus. Basically anything *can* come before council without any warning. Yet at the same time, council's authority to *do* anything other than issue resolutions, except by the PB's leave, makes it a body uncertainly tied to convention. It is practically impossible for council to act as a watchdog for convention, nor is it clear what would happen if it did. Only in the budgetary process does council have leverage to take definitive action, and that only within limits of relatively large categories. Council cannot in itself hire or fire, nor can it direct the specific operation of task management.²⁴

24. Of course, a PB may choose to give this authority to council as a strategic move. This occurred, for example, for a period of years during the Allin administration. What is significant is how easily this may be altered. For example, during Bishop Allin's term 815 stationery read "The Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Executive Council of the General Convention." Bishop Browning changed it to read "The Office of the Presiding Bishop."

The collaborative activities of the Pension Fund and the Episcopal Church Foundation offer much potential, both in themselves and as a model for other bodies. Yet the role of the Church Insurance Corporation also waves a caution flag. Its move into the policy arena — though consistent with insurance practice generally (e.g., health care) — has serious practical and theological implications. At what point is the work of the church driven by considerations of risk avoidance? Does fear rather than faith become the metaphor of incarnational institutional church life? How do we distinguish between damned fools and fools for Christ's sake? For the church to be a hope-full place, it is important that congregations be shown positive alternatives within the body of Christ for accomplishing the historic works of mercy as well as the contemporary cure of souls.

Blest Be the Breach That Bridges

The role of the PB is sufficiently beset by contradictions that it is virtually ensured that the person in it will never please everyone within the church. This is not merely a matter of taking sides on the “hot” theological or sociopolitical issue of the day. Merely by deciding what clothes to wear each day, the PB will please some and disappoint others among his constituents. Yet if the PB were to go to the office wearing a bathrobe, it would in fact create a breach that would be severe enough to get everyone to take notice and begin to ask questions.

Because of the range of internal differences among Episcopalian constituencies, it was possible for systems of interaction both within 815 and between 815 and the larger church to grow unchecked since the upsizing/downsizing years of the Hines administration. It was not that one PB or another avoided criticism, but to a large extent the critics canceled each other out, while the day-to-day activities of parishes and dioceses simply became more removed from “national church” programming and structure. The national Christian education curriculum innovated in the 1950s, for example, was eliminated, and specific target-population ventures came to replace those directed to the broader constituency.

At the same time, the church was generally well served by dedicated volunteers and paid employees, most of whom saw their work as a “calling,” even if they differed as to what that calling entailed. A fiefdom system evolved, and leadership circles turned into vertical monopolies characterized most aptly as “silos,” which were joined only at the top. This highly bureaucratized, hierarchical system was not particularly effective for outreach and growth, but it had an inherent inertia that also for many years kept its worst possibilities in check.

By coincidence 1986 turned out to be a watershed year for the structure of the Episcopal Church. Simultaneously a new PB, a new president of the House of Deputies, a new executive officer/secretary of General Convention, and a new treasurer of the DFMS/General Convention came onboard within a year of each other. The treasurer's position was particularly critical, because the new appointee would follow an individual who served for over thirty years. This long-term service in an institution characterized by inertia, however, also meant that virtually no one in the system really understood how the work of the treasurer's office was carried out or what kinds of checks and balances had to be in place to see that the work was done appropriately.

As a result, when Ellen Cooke was appointed treasurer on the nomination of at least two bishops, but with no appropriate background checks, the possibilities for misconduct were legion.²⁵ These were heightened dramatically when the PB's chief of staff resigned relatively quickly, and the PB — acting in part on a consultancy report whose authors were engaged by Cooke — decided not to replace him. Although the PB was supposed in effect to do direct staff supervision, the result was that Cooke, with the PB's unwavering support, aggrandized more and more power to herself, and therein gradually undermined not only whatever effectiveness remained among much of the program staff particularly, but also morale in the Church Center as a whole.

The story of Cooke is only partially comprehended by the embezzlement that is a part of the public record. Much more significant is the effect her conduct had on the structures of the Episcopal Church — 815, General Convention, Executive Council, the office of the PB, statistical and financial record keeping even at the parish level, and on and on. Staff members and others speak of “the hurt,” “the pain,” and “the tragedy” that resulted through the career of Cooke and the PB's decision to support her for almost eight years in spite of very mixed reviews throughout the church — bishops, laypersons, even the presidents of the House of Deputies.

But to stop the story there is to miss the redemptive role of conflict and the opportunity that has been seized to redress long-standing dysfunctions in the system of action. In this section, using an analytical approach rooted in the work of Victor Turner, I want to show how the Cooke debacle — the *breach* that occurred as a result of the structural nakedness her misconduct uncovered — led the Episcopal Church to reexamine its organizational culture and begin to take steps, some of which may seem amazingly elementary to the outsider, to

25. Significantly, through an extensive career of church-related positions, apparently no one ever checked Cooke's credentials. Had there ever been a background check on her, her misrepresentations would have become immediately apparent.

remake itself into a healthier body that may be far better equipped to face the coming century than it might have been without this crisis.²⁶

The concept of *social drama* is at the center of Turner's work. Social dramas are units of aharmonic processes that arise in conflict situations. Social dramas represent the time axes of fields. A field is composed of the individuals or "actors" directly involved in the social processes under examination. Typically these show a regularly recurring processional form, or "diachronic profile," and follow an observable pattern of four phases, of which breach is the first. A breach occurs in regular norm-governed social relationships between persons or groups within the same social system. Whereas conflict had been mounting both within and without 815 over issues of administration throughout the Browning primacy as the result of Cooke, only with the public disclosure of her embezzlement can a breach be said to have occurred. Just as if the PB had shown up for work unclothed, so the regular norm-governed social relationships between persons or groups within the Episcopal Church's system of action were completely exposed to public view. The PB was aware of this and rose to the challenge of public disclosure. This situation was different from those that normally confront both his office and the work of 815 precisely because the treasurer's action completely crosscut all party lines. Liberal, centrist, and conservative money was equally in jeopardy.

The second step in the drama is that a period of mounting crisis or escalation follows the breach, unless the conflict can be sealed off quickly. Here the effects may extend to the limits of the parties involved. This second stage is always one of those turning points when a true state of affairs is revealed and hitherto covert and private factional intrigue is exposed — when, in Turner's words, "it is least easy to don masks or pretend that there is nothing rotten in the village."²⁷ Quickly upon the heels of the Cooke disclosures came calls for the PB's resignation. By his own estimate, 1995 was the worst year of his life, when he "almost lost it." The publicity surrounding the Cooke affair served to heighten the shrillness of the church's conservative factions and also galvanized disparate conservative groups into a more cohesive opposition. At the same time, it was far more difficult for the PB's supporters to defend him. Fortunately, the involvement of external actors — namely, various levels of law enforcement — actually served to slow the process and to introduce impersonal, "objective" processes into the crisis. The external system of action Turner calls

26. See Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 37ff. The summary of Turner's position given here is taken from William H. Swatos, Jr., and Loftur Reimar Gissurarson, *Icelandic Spiritualism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1996), pp. 24-28.

27. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 39.

the “arena.” It is “the social and cultural space around those who are directly involved with the field participants but are not themselves directly implicated in the processes that define the field.”²⁸ Arena is characteristically the group’s culture, but also includes territorial and political organization.

The third stage of the drama takes place as adjustive and redressive action is brought into operation by leading members of the social group. Presiding Bishop Browning addressed the concerns of his constituencies quickly, and a search also was quickly undertaken for a responsible treasurer. After an initially difficult phase, a new treasurer of impeccable integrity was onboard within approximately six months. Various outside agencies, both those associated with the criminal proceedings against Cooke and national accounting firms of high repute, were brought in to assess the damage. Bonding ensured that the financial loss was minimized, and over time a significant amount of the dollar loss was actually recovered through legal proceedings against Cooke and the discovery of procedural errors in the way banks processed some of the fraudulent transactions she had made, hence holding them partially accountable for the losses.

Less quickly healed was the larger damage Cooke’s behavior patterns had inflicted on both the Church Center staff and the image of the Church Center on the national stage. Some attempt to redress the latter was achieved through the 1997 General Convention’s action in accepting portions of the Commission on Structure’s recommendations for canonical changes. These involved more stringent internal and external auditing and the appointment of an executive director to oversee all 815 operations, with direct responsibility to the PB. It thus fell largely to Presiding Bishop Griswold to undertake the task of trust building both within 815 and between 815 and the larger church.

This process is still very much ongoing, but has now reached the fourth stage, in an apparently positive way — namely, reintegration of the disturbed social group, rather than social recognition of an irreparable breach or schism. For Turner this is the moment for an observer to compare relations that preceded the social drama with those following the redressive phase. The scope, range, or structure of the field will have altered. Yet, through all the changes — some crucial, others seemingly less so — certain norms and relations will persist. What can we see?

28. Marc Swartz, ed., *Local-Level Politics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), p. 11; see Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), p. 84.

Networks and Systems

First and foremost, the integrity of the office of the presiding bishop has survived. Beginning with an institutional sermon that stressed conversation, conversion, community, and commitment, Frank Griswold began dialogues with the larger church both through formal consultancy activities and through an interactive download teleconference on the occasion of the first anniversary of his institution. By his personal demeanor, his view of himself as a “pastor of systems,” and his intentional spirituality he distinguishes his ministry as oriented to the needs of the larger church. Whereas some bishops less than six months prior to his consecration were saying that schism was a question of “not if, but when,” this language seems to have all but disappeared within the episcopate. The very same bishops are in some cases lauding and welcoming the new spirit. Following upon this, conversation *is* taking place. The PB has achieved his own first goal as “facilitator of conversations.”

Uncertainty, however, still remains at two levels. There remain the suspicions between the local settings and national agenda that were exacerbated by the kinds of disjunctures that surrounded, albeit with different motivations, the administrations of the Cooke and Hines eras. And much more broadly, there are the changing nature of the world, globalization, and a need for a new organizational style for the new era. These two levels are not entirely independent of each other. The events of the past that created suspiciousness of national program and personnel cannot be separated from an administrative culture — corporate culture, broadly speaking — that in some ways was actually conducive to the dynamic of distrust. The culture of “the organization man” was imported into the denominations without significant theological reflection, and gradually became a culture unto itself apart from spiritual goals or values.²⁹ As this happened, denominations were decreasingly differentiated from other corporate structures as one after another “business method” was introduced into their operations. Yet the denominations continued simultaneously to articulate patently religious ideology that was inherently incompatible with the ideology of the rational-legal corporation. These two alternative self-expressions of identity created the context for the eruptions of distrust that manifested themselves both in regard to the General Convention Special Program and in the Cooke incident. In the former case, Presiding Bishop Hines attempted to move the Episcopal Church “prophetically” into religious activism without adequate attention to the grassroots core that constituted the “corporation.” In the latter case, Ellen Cooke

29. See Ben Primer, *Protestants and American Business Methods* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1979).

traded on the ideology of good will within the culture of the Episcopal Church to manipulate corporate structures for her own gain.

Beginning with the EPGM, the Episcopal Church has begun to endorse a new structural type, whether or not it recognizes it. It is the *network*. Beginning with the work of Michael York and continuing with that of Hizuru Miki, sociology of religion organizational theory has begun to understand contemporary religious innovations as involving networks, rather than corporate organizations as usually conceived.³⁰ What is happening in the Episcopal Church, at its best, is a move from (in Miki's terms) a traditional authority-oriented organization to a *traditional autonomy-oriented network*. This, as Miki points out, is a type that has no historic exemplars, hence it will of course be fluid, fragile, subject to moving in fits and starts, and extremely threatening to those who have most invested themselves in the corporate structure — or what might more accurately be termed the quasi-corporate structure of ecclesiastical bureaucracies. Not surprisingly, for example, within the narrow “national church” of 815 it is among holdovers from the corporate culture of the Episcopal Church's prior structure that greatest resistance to openness of communication and flow of information continues to manifest itself. Not surprisingly, either, within the larger Episcopal Church across the country it is those who see religion primarily as an authority structure who will most resist the idea of remaining united in a denomination that is an autonomy-oriented network rather than an authority-oriented organization. This is nothing less than the leap from modernity to postmodernity — the religious equivalent of moving from Newton to Heisenberg.³¹

If the present presiding bishop can lead what he has called this “curious but grace-filled house” with a “diverse center” that is the Episcopal Church in and through this process of movement from organization to network, from the authority orientation of a hierarchical church that “tends to foster passivity and blame” to the autonomy-oriented network of “discernment rather than decision making,” then it is just possible that this curious but grace-filled house can and will be the model for a new Christian religious expression for the twenty-first century. Precisely the fact that we do not know what “the national church” is, that the definition has remained forever fluid, may be the key to a new beginning, an open system.

30. See Michael York, *The Emerging Network* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993); Hizuru Miki, “Towards a New Paradigm of Religious Organizations,” *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 8 (1999): 131-59.

31. See David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).