

DAVID A. ROOZEN & JAMES R. NIEMAN, EDITORS

CHURCH, IDENTITY, AND CHANGE

THEOLOGY AND DENOMINATIONAL
STRUCTURES IN UNSETTLED TIMES

Crisis as Opportunity: Scandal, Structure, and Change in the Episcopal Church on the Cusp of the Millennium

Jennifer M. Phillips

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CHURCH, IDENTITY, and CHANGE

*Theology and Denominational Structures
in Unsettled Times*

Edited by

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Contents

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

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

Crisis as Opportunity: Scandal, Structure, and Change in the Episcopal Church on the Cusp of the Millennium

Jennifer M. Phillips

The shipwright who made the Ark left empty a place for a nail in it, because he was sure that he himself would not be taken into it. When Noah went into the Ark with his children, as the angel told him, Noah shut the windows of the Ark along with him as he went into it, and when Noah blessed the Ark the Devil found no other way but the empty hole which the shipwright had left unclosed, and he went into it in the form of a snake; and because of the tightness of the hole he could not go out nor come back in, and remained like this stuck until the Flood ebbed; and that is the best and worst nail that was in the Ark.¹

Like a number of other denominational and faith groups in the United States, the Episcopal Church recently weathered a large and notorious scandal. In 1995 national treasurer Ellen Cooke, the wife of a priest in active service, embezzled from the church large amounts of money — in the neighborhood of \$2.2 million over five years — and was subsequently discovered, convicted, and jailed. “Don’t write about that incident,” urged someone at a conference of the Executive Council when my sociologist colleague William Swatos and I were observing and interviewing there. “It was just an aberration, just the behavior of a mentally ill individual.” And so we might have concluded at the beginning of our research. After some seventy-five interviews of national staff, bishops, and veterans of General Convention, however, it seemed to us that the malfeasance many referred to as “the Ellen Cooke incident” was some-

1. Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, ed. and trans., *A Celtic Miscellany: Translations from the Celtic Literatures* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 304.

thing of a catalyst for structural change and relational change that has helped to reorient the way national church components operate and to set useful directions for further change.

Wherever in the denomination there were already feelings of conflict or mistrust toward “the national church” (however individuals defined this entity), this incident was read as the confirmation that there was some “rottenness at the core.” Individuals variously laid the blame at the door of the presiding bishop, the Church Center staff in general or particular portions of it, the ineffectiveness of General Convention governance, or the inadvisability of having any large, bureaucratic central organization in a denomination that is largely a federation of dioceses. Others saw it more as an aberration that showed some weaknesses of a generally sound structure. Others still saw it as no one’s fault but Ms. Cooke’s own.

The Cooke event still sends shudders through national Church Center staff and brings forth from those recalling it descriptions like “tragic,” “shocking,” “deeply embarrassing,” “heartbreaking,” and “knocking us off our pins.” As we listened and conversed with church leaders and support staff at many levels, from the past and present presiding bishops to long-term secretarial workers, we began to assess the Cooke incident as not simply an unprecedented disaster for our church but also as the crisis that provided opportunity for new health and growth. One metaphor that arose for us was “lancing a boil,” so that much long-standing systemic poison can drain out and the attention of the whole body of the denomination can be focused on the need for better health maintenance and care. It seems well within our Anglican way of thinking to look at a painful episode in the life of the church to discern how God might be acting, even there, for renewal.

Theological Context

The denomination’s reactions to the Cooke crisis or any crisis arise from a complex and distinctive heritage. The Episcopal Church, and the Anglican tradition that gave rise to it, was birthed in the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe. Since then, the emerging churches of the Anglican Communion have remained both Catholic and Reformed, refusing to jettison either portion of their heritage in complete favor of the other, and characterized by the tension of holding together disparate extremes and steering a muddy and wavering course down the middle. Anglicans have long spoken of our tradition as the “Middle Way.” We consider ourselves catholic with a small *c* as a strand within the braid of

the one universal church of Jesus Christ, as though from the perspective of other parts of that church we are schismatic. We retain an episcopacy in the apostolic succession, although some other parts of the church consider us to have breached that succession by the consecration of women bishops. We retain and have strengthened in modern times a baptismal and eucharistic focus of worship and believe that Christ is truly present in the sacrament. We are configured in geographic dioceses in a largely voluntary relationship with one another.

We are at the same time Protestant and Reformed. We rejected the magisterium in favor of making the Scriptures available to all persons in their vernacular languages and recognizing the gift of the Holy Spirit in raising up teachers among all orders of ministry. We developed a synodical form of governance. In the Episcopal Church in the United States, triennial General Conventions receive deputies, bishops, and legislative issues emerging from the dioceses, each with its own diocesan convention. Our bishops expect obedience from their clergy but have almost no power to command obedience from lay members. Their teaching authority depends on the willingness of the membership to receive their words. Our archbishops and primates have limited power to direct the member churches of the Anglican Communion to do anything, and the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church has less autonomous power than most of his Anglican peers.

On nearly every issue in the Episcopal Church there is a spectrum of opinions and positions voiced. We argue a lot about authority and identity. We do not share a confession as a basis for our life together. Individual conscience, formed and practiced in the praying congregation, is expected "with a meek, candid, and charitable frame of mind" to "consider . . . what Christianity is, and what truths [note the plural] of the Gospel are," and then pass this learning on to others.² In recent General Convention legislation, a perceived need to define more clearly our shared authority led to two resolutions declaring that "the Discipline of the Church shall be found in the Constitution, the Canons and the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer" and "the Doctrine of the Church is to be found in the canon of Holy Scripture as understood in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and in the sacramental rites, the Ordinal and Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer."³

The Reformed theological voices among us tend to begin from an empha-

2. Jeremy Taylor, "The Great Exemplar," in *Collected Works of Jeremy Taylor*, ed. Reginald Heber (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1850-59), 2:1ff.

3. Resolutions A013a and A014a, *Journal of General Convention* (Philadelphia, 1997), p. 784.

sis on Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross for a fallen humanity within fallen creation as well as the individual's need to accept this rescue by an act of faith. The Catholic voices among us tend to begin with a focus on the whole incarnation — God's love for the entire creation which is renewed and sanctified in Jesus Christ's birth, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Spirit.

From one set of roots we develop an ecclesiology that tends to see the church as the little band of the elect for salvation called to extend the lifeline of Christ to convert the perishing world, defending the purity of the church and the honor of God against the world's corrupting influences. Into this ecclesiology individuals enter by often sudden and complete conviction of their sin and of the chaos of the world and by an experience of the saving hand of Jesus Christ accepted as Lord and Savior.

From the other set of roots we see the church in images of the inclusive banquet table of God's reign or the hospital of souls where all are invited in and loved, and the church's task is to discern in every life where God is at work calling, forgiving, transforming, and gathering into community. In this view creation still shines with its original, God-manifesting loveliness, though tarnished by sin. The foundational religious experience of this perspective tends to be a gradual enculturation and formation into an awareness of the goodness of creation, despite its being smirched by sin, steadily drawing toward its author as revealed by the saving and nurturing activity of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Tension between these foundational religious experiences and the differing emphases to which they give rise makes for a church with a lot of argument, a love of debate (though not without fear), liturgical richness, and a tendency to try to resolve differences by what look like very secular means (votes, referenda, collections of position papers, and diverse essays). We have few volumes of systematic theology. We have dozens of little books of essays, poetry, novels, plays, and papers from symposia. Much of our best theology, therefore, is conveyed through the arts (including liturgical forms), which are more spacious and allusive, evocative, and less tidy than theological tomes.

With this strong heritage of flexibility we often find ourselves uncomfortable, and there are regularly calls from the more traditionalist parts of the church to lock down and limit our doctrine and discipline more tightly. So far, these have not received the assent of the majority of General Conventions. We maintain the myth of a "common prayer" increasingly challenged by multicultural currents, still "seeking to keep the happy mean between too much stiffness in refusing and too much easiness in admitting variations in things once advisedly established" — although these days we argue hotly about what was

“once established.”⁴ This is not a new phenomenon. Nineteenth-century theologian Jeremy Taylor wrote, “Such being the nature of men, that they think it the greatest injury in the world when other men are not of their minds; and that they please God most when they are most furiously zealous, and no zeal better to be expressed than by hating all those whom they are pleased to think God hates.”⁵

Richard Hooker, arguably our preeminent founding theologian besides Thomas Cranmer, wrote to establish a middle ground between Calvinist Puritans and Roman Catholics, with the Holy Spirit leading human beings into truth primarily through reason. The Bible, he argued, is the first pillar of authority in the church (including the Apocrypha, although these texts hold less authority than the rest). Reason is another pillar, and this understood as an educated, well-formed faculty developed and tested not privately but in the worship and life of the church. Church tradition is the third pillar, with generally the greater authority resting in the more ancient traditions, although Hooker acknowledged that no era was without its errors and excesses. The three together constitute a structure of authority Anglicans have often pictured as a three-legged stool. Our more Protestant members are quick to remind us that the Bible leg is longer and more primary than the others, while our Catholic members insist that even the Bible is apprehended through reason (which contemporary Anglicans tend to define as including experience).

Along with Roman Catholic and Reformed elements, Anglican theology draws upon Celtic and Eastern Orthodox strands of tradition — and the Celtic strand was much influenced by the Orthodox. Both include a rootedness in creation, a domestic piety and asceticism, an anthropology that is optimistic in light of the incarnation, and strong trinitarianism. The persons of the Trinity are seen as conversing endlessly with one another in love, a circle of pillow talk: “see . . . the Father kissing the Son in the white dew,” wrote the Welsh poet Saunders Lewis. Into that conversation, humankind — starting with the church — is drawn to listen and to speak. “All around me the most beautiful music plays: the songs of birds, the lowing of cattle, the leaves rustling in the wind, the cascade of the river . . . it is the music of Christ himself, given freely.”⁶

Because of this diverse heritage, Anglican theology is always discursive, communicated by a plurality of voices. One might imagine this as a *schola*, a little polyphonic singing school, or perhaps as a jazz combo. Now one, now an-

4. Preface written in 1789 for *The Book of Common Prayer*, still included as preface to the 1979 book, pp. 9-10.

5. Taylor, “The Great Exemplar,” pt. ii, sec. xii, 2:329.

6. Saunders Lewis, “Ascension Thursday,” in *Selected Poems*, trans. Joseph Clancy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), p. 35.

other voice may rise to the fore, or sometimes all may sound equally together. There can be discord as well as harmony, and both are fitting. Leadership may shift with flexibility, though there tends to be a designated head and convener. The music is ephemeral and changeable, but a lasting value is created. Tradition and change are incorporated along with many diverse influences. Rhythm and pace are coherent but not uniform. There is a recognizable aesthetic and ethos that aims to create something beautiful and truthful pointing to a transcendent dimension and drawing its hearers and members into it.

The jazz combo can even have a new iteration in the medium of the electronic, virtual network. Via the Internet, radio, and satellite, musicians from around the world have collaborated to make music together, gathering in sounds from their various corners of creation, along with recorded bits from other times and places, and circulating these back and forth in a jazz performance. This might be a provocative new metaphor for our Anglican performance as church.

Given the pluralism composing the Episcopal Church, it is to be expected that we respond to institutional crises not only with a diversity of voices and movements but also with certain underlying principles. As Christians rooted in the incarnation, we place considerable importance and some trust in the operation of the physical and social world to right itself after a catastrophe. We perceive that God acts through those physical and social remedies and the self-righting tendency of living systems. Just so, God acts through the church structures we create, although they will not always be congruent with God's desire since such structures are rendered imperfect by sin. To maintain our unity, it is essential that our lay and ordained leaders be well formed in this breadth of tradition, especially since the majority of Episcopalians grow up in other religious denominations.

The Incident

There seems to be consensus that over a period of years Ms. Cooke concentrated power and financial information in her own hands, rebuffed questions from fellow staff, estranged herself from colleagues, and exploited the loyalty of the presiding bishop who had committed himself to advancing the ministries of women at every level of the church. She is described as having encouraged the belief that she was the only one who understood the inner workings of the finances of the church and could keep it all in operation. Having "built an empire for herself," she maintained that the presiding bishop knew and approved of her actions. A senior cleric active in the governance of General Convention

noted that from her very arrival on the job, Ms. Cooke began to dismantle checks and balances and to displace employees who had continuity and long service.

Ms. Cooke functioned as the volunteer treasurer of the General Convention Office, which manages the triennial governance assembly of the Episcopal Church and its various interim committees and commissions. She also was elected by the General Convention as salaried treasurer of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (DFMS), the incorporated entity to which every Episcopalian belongs (most without knowing it) and which is the core corporation of the Episcopal Church. She was thereby manager of Executive Council's funds. In these roles Ms. Cooke had connections with virtually every part of the Church Center and oversaw the budget for a large part of the national church from the time she was hired in 1986. She managed the committees that oversaw the many trusts managed by the DFMS, committees that depended on their staff support. Many staff describe years of abuse and manipulation at her hands, distorting the ideal of the national staff work as rooted in servant ministry. Some felt Ms. Cooke was doing a tough job tidying up loose financial systems of the past that needed repair, but that she was heavy-handed in doing this. More than a few spoke their concerns aloud despite being scolded for doing so.

The presiding bishop maintained a fierce loyalty to Ms. Cooke through the public announcement of her resignation effective January 31, 1995. By all accounts he was stunned by the revelation of her dishonesty, which was announced in the Episcopal News Service on February 15. He responded to this with immediate honesty and as much directness as the legal process would allow. In a poignant article for the May 16, 1995, issue of *Episcopal Life*, he wrote, "I still believe that, in this world of cynicism, suspicion and disbelief, trust is a necessity. . . . What did happen on my watch was a massive betrayal of trust. Ellen had strong support in many quarters. . . . However, I take full responsibility for hiring Ellen and keeping her on, even when I knew her working style was autocratic rather than the collaborative one I have tried to model." Bishop Browning went on to speak of the clear necessity of prosecution. "We pray for her contrition and repentance," he concluded, "and for our ability to forgive. . . . In the way hardship can bring a family together, I pray that this will bring us together as a church."

Eventually through criminal and civil process, the Cookes yielded most of their liquid assets and personal property. Along with insurance collected and some financial acceptance by banks of responsibility for failed oversight, this repaid most of the loss. Ms. Cooke made a claim in court that a cyclothymic mental disorder caused a memory loss about stealing the funds, but the judge handed down a stiff sentence of five years in prison, noting that stealing from a

church resulted in a loss of confidence in an institution “that performs an essential function in the care of the needy” and constituted a “flagrant . . . abuse of trust.”⁷ The sentence was upheld on appeal. She has not, to date, publicly owned culpability or remorse for the embezzlement.

In the aftermath, changes began to be made at once in business and administrative practices at the Church Center, along with changes in financial personnel, strengthening of the internal auditor, and a thorough outside audit of funds. The internal auditor had been reporting to the treasurer. At first this was changed to mandate reporting to the chief operating officer, and subsequently changed again to mandate reporting to the audit committee. The membership of this committee was modified to conform more exactly to canon. The Presiding Bishop’s Discretionary Fund, which had been excluded from audit during the Cooke tenure, was returned to the annual auditing process. Management and communications changes followed as well. Some of these would have likely come as a result of the changing times and climate of institutional structures. The Cooke crisis highlighted the problems and hastened the process.

Administrative Change

Several staff in the Episcopal Church Center, referring to the work of outside consultants, described the administrative structure during the Browning years as “silos.” This corporate structure was not uncommon and consisted of vertical columns of relationship, communication, and function within individual program areas or departments that were isolated from one another horizontally. In the words of one staff person, the silo structure was adopted to streamline the former set of “eighteen fiefdoms” under Presiding Bishop Allin. In a silo system, only a few top-level individuals (such as the treasurer and presiding bishop) linked one silo with another, and potentially these few persons had great regulatory power over information, communication, and the flow of resources. The silo system was thought to allow separate areas of corporate function to develop their particular gifts and internal relationships as well as to maximize efficiency, but it is clear from hindsight that such structure lends itself to unchecked exploitation by individuals at the top.

This model did not seem to fit the presiding bishop’s espoused model of administration. In Bishop Edmond Browning’s public discourse, his most frequent scriptural image for the church was Paul’s metaphor of the body and its

7. “Episcopal Church Treasurer Sentenced to Five Years for Embezzlement,” Episcopal News Service, July 1997.

members. From his first acceptance speech upon election at General Convention in Anaheim in September 1985, Bishop Browning used this metaphor to support his central declaration of mission, that in the Episcopal Church there would be "no outcasts." Over his years as presiding bishop, he reiterated this conviction in relation to debates over the place of gay and lesbian people in the church, the place of indigenous Indian ministries and other ethnic ministries, his antiracism initiatives, the role of women in the church, care for people with HIV infection and AIDS, his concern for the poor and for migrant and immigrant mission, and his stated commitment that conservatives would not be ignored or marginalized within a generally progressive denomination. Again and again, the church heard him quote, "the hand cannot say to the eye 'I have no need of you,'" "we are all members of one body," and the like.

The more science reveals about living bodies, particularly our human body, the more it is clear that mutual communication and adaptation take place between the many parts and systems of the body on every level, not merely from the brain down to the subsidiary systems and from the systems back again. New research shows that even the lowly cells of human blood vessels adjust to circulatory stress by switching genes on and off, by communicating to other cells to affect clotting, and by moving themselves away from areas of turbulence.⁸ Communication flows in many directions. The metaphor of the body therefore may need to evolve with our emerging understandings to correspond with the latest "network" model of structure.

Presiding Bishop Browning's twelve-year term ended at the end of 1997, a bit more than three years after the Cooke crisis. The mood of the church was changed. In his last address to General Convention 1997, Browning described the embezzlement as "one of the greatest personal challenges I have ever faced. . . . We have been touched by the power of Jesus Christ to redeem the most difficult and tragic of situations. . . . We have been wounded and examined our wounds. We have been called to forgive, and asked to be forgiven. . . . Scar tissue, they say, is the strongest tissue there is." Ms. Cooke was not mentioned by name. Browning spoke of laying a new foundation of trust. One notable sign of this new trust was the recommitment of the House of Deputies to being a church in mission, restoring funds and focus for this purpose. Another was the choice of a new presiding bishop who most felt had a good grasp of administration, theological articulateness, a progressive-centrist political reputation, and a pastoral heart.

8. Jonathan Knight, "Cunning Plumbing: In the Battle to Stay Healthy, the Complex Twists and Turns of Our Arteries May Be the Best Weapons We Have," *New Scientist* (London), no. 2172 (February 6, 1999): 32.

As a witness to that General Convention, it was my experience that much of the assembly felt chastened by the experience of a major scandal, satisfied that due process had occurred, and ready for systemic change to tighten up oversight and improve the workings of the Church Center. We were also ready to receive the contrition of top leadership and to trust incoming leaders to prevent a recurrence of malfeasance. We were receptive to structural change but not panic-driven toward it.

Management Change

Students of organizational structure are presently intrigued with the discoveries and theories of contemporary post-Newtonian science that suggest some fresh approaches to management and structure. Management consultant Margaret J. Wheatley highlights some learnings from physics and chaos theory in particular that seem of particular significance for Episcopal approaches to structure and which have influenced the management theory of our new presiding bishop.⁹ In brief, some of these are:

- An emphasis on the system as system and on the relationships that constitute it, not reducible to bits or to cause-effect phenomena.
- A realization that dissipative processes are not just about decay but that “living systems . . . respond to disorder (non-equilibrium) with renewed life,” that chaos and order fluctuate in balance, and that organizations are living systems, conscious entities continuously renewing themselves and having an inherent orderliness beyond their chaotic behaviors.
- Management should be based on a belief that motivation for work comes not only or primarily from extrinsic rewards but also from human longing for community, meaning, dignity, love, generativity, and the joy of the work itself.
- Structures and forms are temporary solutions to changing environments, but within an organism, mission remains congruent over time.
- Leadership should not be about a set group of people muscling chaos into a set order, but about allowing informal leadership to arise as needed, looking for underlying order, facilitating the interconnectedness of people within and beyond a system, thinking and acting quickly rather than investing great energy in rigid long-term plans, improvising, and exercis-

9. Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1992), pp. 9, 11, 13, 16, 21, 39, 105.

ing strong relational skills. “Love in organizations, then, is the most potent source of power we have available.”

- “Acting locally is a sound strategy for changing large systems.” Small changes can lead to quantum jumps of massive change. Not every member of an organization must understand a change in order for the whole group to change, and one cannot predict just how or when such large change will occur.
- Information is the key ingredient in creating structure and must be continuously generated — the more and the freer-circulating, the better. “Let it procreate promiscuously,” and liveliness will result.

The Episcopal pattern of loosely tied task groups that can arise independently to meet particular needs within the organization may be an ideal dynamic system for allowing informal networks of relationship to adapt and solve problems as they arise. Among such groups are the Church Pension Group, the Episcopal Church Foundation, the Prayer Book Society, the Episcopal Women’s Caucus, and the Episcopal Council for Global Mission. Rather than trying to untangle and tidy up the complex interrelationships between all our groups and their lines of authority, we might instead expect that their changeable interconnectedness and fluid evolution or demise will be creative and fruitful. The new management of the church expresses a desire to accept and support places of energy for the gospel wherever they arise. Our denominational experience (along with other faith groups) that members prefer to undertake much of their work and invest most of their resources locally rather than centrally might be understood in this cognitive frame as a natural and positive force for change.

Our set hierarchy of leadership may fit Wheatley’s insights more uneasily. Our deep tie to and identity in a structure of bishops, priests, deacons, and laity will, I suspect, be with us for the long haul. Even so, change is evident in the redefining of roles, functions, and interrelationships and in the shifting investment in the authority of these roles. Also pointing to change are the experiments in locally ordained non-seminary-trained priests, mutual ministry congregations like those of northern Michigan, and quarrels about whether to allow “flying bishops” and nongeographical dioceses to accommodate Episcopalians who dissent from the majority views on women’s ordination, liturgical reform, and homosexuality.

In light of changes consistent with new scientific knowledge and theory, perhaps the most helpful response of leaders may be to remain nonanxious, to lead in as light and noncontrolling a fashion as possible, to allow experiments and reconfigurations and to trust that the inherent patterns of chaos and reordering will be held within bounds by the underlying orderliness of the cosmos

and life systems God has created, including the church. The strongest leaders will be those who think on their feet, trust in life and God, and love deeply and responsibly so as to create a climate of love in the systems they pastor. We Americans need to remind ourselves that we are not pursuing a squishy, feel-good, anything-goes sentimentality, but a love that is firm, faithful, brave, respectful, and trustworthy, as Scripture so often describes.

The free flow of communication will ultimately be fruitful and energizing, say scientists. One instance of this might be in looking at the way the least-establishment, most "underground" publication of our recent General Conventions (which are reported out to participants in at least four different print journals as well as by electronic media) has been crucial in generating debate that moves the assembly forward. Instead of greeting new informal information sources with suspicion and restriction, we should trust that the ferment of ideas and opinions will ultimately serve everyone, and that all members and leaders would be well advised to scan information from as many sources as possible, including those from groups with whom they deeply disagree. With the proliferation of information, we must also develop habits of discernment about the source and veracity of information. From congregations to the national church, there are constant complaints of poor communication. Science suggests leaders not worry about formalizing communication channels but open the gates to more unrestricted information (including ambiguous, complex, or apparently useless information) and let it spark new ideas, while attending to the big picture of how information is giving rise to thoughts and new forms.

The Cooke incident may have been a catalyst for a significant change, such as physicists describe. Many small changes in behavior resulted from that incident and are moving the entire organization to a new level and a new self-understanding. That event marked a threshold from which it became clear to people across the church that there could be no going back into old ways but that some new order and structure was emerging.

If there is ambiguity in the minds of most Episcopalians about what the national church actually *is*, with all its parachurch organizations and parts, there is clarity about what it is *not*: a monolithic monument fixed in time and form. It is a living, breathing, dying and renewing, sinning and repenting, metamorphosing community into which God calls us together and into which we invite God to dwell, finding God already delighting to dwell with us as we pray. In the economy of God, our failure and sin is recycled into the unfolding divine design. Our energy for mission springs from the nexus of our gatherings in which the Holy Spirit moves and breathes.

Fiduciary Change

In an effort to make the national budget clearer, the process toward a democratized, accessible, transparent, unified budget, funded by a formula producing diocesan requests based on income, had already begun at the 1994 General Convention. Instead of separate budgets — the General Convention Expense Budget (prepared by the treasurer) and Program Budget of the national church (prepared by Executive Council with the treasurer's assistance) — the two were combined by resolution.

In the Cooke era, much of the initial budget refinement process was done by the treasurer herself. She controlled much of the information available to staff and some of what was disseminated to the wider church. The unified budget served her ends of controlling information. The treasurer prepared and presented to the General Convention portions of the two-tiered budget, while the Executive Council prepared the program budget, aided by staff and including input from the treasurer. Even matters like parochial reports, from which come the baseline data about the membership and financial contributions of all the congregations and dioceses of the church, were gathered by Ms. Cooke.

During this same period, Church Center staffing performance review was done by the "Hay" system common in corporations, in which the larger the staff and budget under one's supervision and control, the higher one's salary. Ms. Cooke was reportedly willing and eager to take on additional responsibilities, expand her staff, and thereby increase her pay. At the same time, according to denominational executives, the number of people around the senior executive table shrank until it was primarily the presiding bishop, the treasurer, and Diane Porter, the senior executive for program. There were complaints about this, according to several staff, about which the presiding bishop chose not to act.

After the shake-up of the Cooke crisis, each body constructing the budget seems to have turned to its task with more attention and less willingness to rubber-stamp decisions. For a number of reasons, there had been a reduction of funds flowing into the national budget from dioceses, although the shortfall was larger in perception than in reality. Some dioceses found their own funds from congregations reduced. Some withheld funds out of anger about the national church's stance on social issues like human sexuality. Some were angry and mistrustful after the revelations about malfeasance at the highest levels of their church. Applying the language of "covenant commitment" to funding requests was no quick fix for any of these causes for withholding. Only the gradual rebuilding of trust and confidence under new personnel has begun to give flesh to the idea of covenant relationship between dioceses and the national

church. Future General Conventions will reveal whether the trend is positive in this regard.

A New Theological Emphasis, a New Presiding Bishop

The belief among many that Presiding Bishop Browning had lapsed in prudent oversight of Ms. Cooke and his other staff and finances prompted a series of questions about the office and role of presiding bishop. Other questions were emerging simply because of changing times and understandings of authority, and because of perceived shrinking financial resources. It is not easy to sort out which questions were prompted by which causes.

The 1997 General Convention asked whether the role of the presiding bishop needed to be clarified. The Joint Commission on the Structure of the Church answered yes, reporting to the General Convention the evolving issues about the presiding bishop's role.

By Canon the Presiding Bishop is the Chief Pastor and Primate of the Church, and is presently vested with responsibility for leadership in initiating and developing the policy and strategy of the church and with the ultimate responsibility for the implementation of such policy and strategy. Thus, this church has called the Presiding Bishop to be the President of the House of Bishops; the Chief Pastor to the Church, its people, clergy, and especially its bishops and their families; the Church's Primate as to the Anglican Communion, sister Christian churches, other ecumenical bodies, and the world; and to be the church's chief executive, operating officer, and management officer.¹⁰

The committee quoted commentators from 1926 to the present who voiced concern that the pastoral role of the presiding bishop and indeed every bishop was being weighed down by organizational tasks. The ambiguous expectations of the role were acknowledged, along with the consensus that the presiding bishop *not* exercise archiepiscopal or metropolitanical authority over the church and the disagreements over his authority to be a spokesperson for the whole church. The committee's resolutions defined the role and left him free to appoint staff as needed to fulfill it. The General Convention voted to accept the commission's proposal, slightly paring down the presiding bishop's responsibility for implementation of policy.¹¹ There was debate at the convention over whether a chief

10. *Report to the Seventy-Second General Convention*, p. 484.

11. Resolution A183, *Journal of General Convention*, p. 194.

operating officer should be nominated by, appointed by, and accountable to the Executive Council or the presiding bishop. The convention seemed content to entrust operations management to the good shepherding of presiding bishops, leaving the appointment and accountability in his hands and the Executive Council in a role of advice and consent. In so deciding, they perhaps concluded that the weak area of one particular bishop need not be cause for abridging the prerogative of all presiding bishops to appoint administrative staff.¹²

Should the presiding bishop remain the distinct head of the national church, or should the president of the House of Deputies (alternately an elected lay or ordained person) be a coequal leader with similar staff and salary? The General Convention in 1997 said it is reasonable for the president of the senior house (Deputies) to have a chancellor paid to give legal advice, but did not add an expense line for that position to the budget allotment for the president of the House of Deputies.¹³ The church voiced its preference for the presiding bishop to remain in a solo leadership role as a spiritual and administrative head.

Conservative church leaders along with self-avowed liberals seem to agree that the presiding bishop should be a pastor first of all, not a CEO. In March 1998, shortly after the investiture of the new presiding bishop, *United Voice*, the publication affiliated with the conservative Episcopalians United, ran an article by the Reverend Todd Wetzel headlined "The Church Needs Shepherds — Not CEOs." Wetzel decried "consumer Christianity" in which clergy have lost their calling and feel like "employees" and laity like "customers," with bishops functioning as "managers" rather than servants. Wetzel voiced optimism that the new presiding bishop will "help us find more responsive, less expensive, less monarchical ways that free bishops from the vise of the CEO model, clergy from the bonds of the employee mentality, and laity from the grips of consumerism — and into the baptismal covenant of ministry."

While the average Episcopalian may be critical of his or her own bishop and quick to see that person's clay feet, we retain a reverence for the office and charism of episcopacy, although less so than some generations of our forebears. Several laypeople with whom I spoke used similar words: "We need to be able to look to a spiritual leader who in his person reminds us of who and how we are to be." He is expected to incarnate the "Episcopal *us*," to represent in some measure our passions and interests but as centered and balanced in God. Since these are wildly diverse and in tension, he (maybe someday she) must hold this tension together in himself.

12. Resolution A189s, *Journal of General Convention*, p. 193.

13. Resolution A194 (rejected), *Report to the Seventy-Second General Convention*, p. 494.

Presiding bishops have defined their roles and style differently. A bishop interviewed offered the opinion that though the church at large might forget structural debates and changes within a year or two, what most people would remember was the way the personality of a presiding bishop set the tone for his tenure. It has not been uncommon for a presiding bishop to take the lead in issues of social justice, though some have focused more on administration and structure, others have exercised quiet diplomacy, and still others have raised insistent prophetic voices of advocacy for change, as did Bishop Browning.

Implicit in the 1960s to 1980s was a theology that a fully engaged people of God could make substantial strides to building the reign of God on earth, restoring the lost justice of society along the way. There was little talk in that era of the way human beings and enterprises are constantly ensnared by sin and fall short of God's glory. Today, the Episcopal Church seems tired after its decades of wrangling about tough social issues yet to be resolved, sick of destructive partisanship (though not quite ready to stop practicing it), and intolerant of sloppy, inefficient, corrupt systems. In these things Episcopalians share much with American society at large. The Cooke crisis brought to a head some of the frustration and anxiety about the direction of the church, and has played a role in our choice of a presiding bishop with a track record of effective administration and staffing, systems acumen, a theologically reflective and sophisticated mind, and a dedication to prayerful listening and conversation that takes precedence over other issues and partisan concerns. Whether we will be forgiving of his clay feet remains to be seen.

Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold began his tenure in 1998 by offering his favored metaphors for his ministry. They are:

- Pastor of systems. "The whole idea — that within a force field of constantly moving particles there is an underlying order or structure which in time will reveal itself — has taught me to let loose of control and to allow the energy within the system to order itself. This approach has helped me to be much more patient with seeming ambiguity and contradiction."¹⁴
- A church called at every level to *conversation*, which leads to conversion and communion with careful listening and mutual respect. This is a task of *hospitality*, rooted in the Pauline understanding that we are members of one another.¹⁵

14. Interview in the *Journal of Anglican Musicians*, September 1997.

15. Address to Diocesan Convention, Chicago, 1993.

- A church whose mode of theology is as a contemplative exercise in which prayer corrects tendencies toward being arrogant and self-serving.¹⁶
- Repairing and rebuilding the church, not as an object or institution to be fixed but as a relationship of communion as “living stones” by baptism into Christ, being “caught up into solidarities we have not chosen” (words of Bishop Rowan Williams) through “a costly and excruciating process of conversion.”¹⁷

Griswold used the living stones metaphor again in his sermon at the Lambeth Conference of 1998 at Canterbury Cathedral, saying about that great building and the church community: “One portion is added to another, and the ever-expanding whole is bonded and knit together through dynamic of stress and counterstress, by one stone pressing against another and thereby producing an overall state of equilibrium and concord.”

At a “Future Search” conference in St. Louis in the winter of 1998-99, a lay educator participant said, “We want the PB to lead us out of his strengths,” a hope shared, I suspect, by many. Over the years we have begun to have an inkling of how our presiding bishops and other leaders have led us out of their weaknesses in ways just as valuable to the life of the church. The snake in the ark was the worst and the best nail, as the Celtic story maintains.

Other Structural Issues

The usefulness and necessity of changing church structures are inherent in Anglicanism. Richard Hooker wrote in the sixteenth century, “The Church hath authority to establish that for an order at one time, which at another it may abolish, and in both do well.”¹⁸ The Commission on Structure stated six general principles for the Episcopal Church that governed its recommendations to the 1997 General Convention:

1. This church is a national church participating fully in the Anglican Communion.

16. Sermon at the “Liturgy Unbound” conference, January 1999.

17. Sermon from the Investiture of Frank Griswold as Presiding Bishop, Washington National Cathedral, January 10, 1998.

18. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: And Other Works by and about Mr. Richard Hooker*, bk. 5, ed. J. Keble, R. W. Church, and F. Paget (Ellicott City, Md.: Via Media Publications, 1994), p. 33.

2. This church is one diverse community of Christ's reconciling ministry in the world.
3. This church will commit to the dioceses and provinces only that mission and ministry which cannot be accomplished effectively by parishes and congregations.
4. This church will commit to national structures only that mission and ministry which cannot be accomplished effectively by dioceses and provinces.
5. The form of this church will follow function, and the structure of this church will follow ministry and mission.
6. This church must be structured at all levels so that structures do not inhibit deliberate change.

The description of the principles went on to acknowledge the hierarchical nature of the church and its pitfalls in creating "vertical monopolies," and called for the church at all levels to live out the baptismal covenant by fighting evils, spreading the kingdom of God, uniting and reconciling all in Christ, and exercising wise stewardship of creation and ourselves, so that none of these efforts would be compartmentalized.¹⁹ Within this text lies the painful shadow of the silo model of organization that came to an abrupt end in the Cooke crisis.

After the 1998 General Convention, the Executive Council restructured itself to create a Standing Committee on Planning and Development. This group made four- to five-day visits to eighteen selected dioceses, two "dissimilar" ones in each province, to meet with lay and ordained leaders and ask, "What is the mission of the church?" One of the recommendations gathered by this body about the Church Center staff was that staff see one of their primary roles as providing "networking/facilitating and resourcing" to dioceses and congregations, with emphasis on small congregations. From the Diocese of West Virginia they carried back the comment, "Many people are not aware of who the program staff at 815 [the Church Center address in New York City] are or how to contact them . . . of the diocesan linkage person program or its goals." The need for upgraded communications systems was stated by the Diocese of San Diego, and other help with emerging technologies for networking was requested by Upper South Carolina and West Missouri. A more relational General Convention was the hope of Central Pennsylvania. Montana called for "re-establishing and renewing the corporate identity of what it means to be an Episcopalian." Ten out of twelve recommendations focused in some way on

19. Report of the Commission on Structure, in *Report to the Seventy-Second General Convention*, p. 454.

strengthening communications and connectedness.²⁰ The end of the silo mentality era was clear. The desire for closer contact across the national church was eloquent. At a time when one might have expected emphasis on accountability, cleaning up, and discipline from the dioceses, the bottom line was a plea for improved *relationships*.

The Executive Council as a leadership body has also begun to have a redefined role. Bishop Griswold encouraged them beyond just holding administrative, program, and planning responsibility:

A member of Council is an ambassador . . . of the church, who by virtue of participating in the life of the Council is called to be a carrier of the life of Council — beyond the sub-basement — back into your province, your diocese; and conversely, you are to serve as an ambassador from your diocese and province back to the Council. . . . [B]e very intentional about that. . . . Council is not simply a conduit for information or a body to carry out tasks; but also . . . an experience of being the church. . . . Executive Council is a fractal. . . . [T]he way we deport ourselves, the way we interact with one another, the way we listen to one another, the way we make our decisions, the way we give space, the way we pray together, all those things are integral to what we carry out of here . . . a very important aspect of our being faithful.²¹

His intention seems to be that each constituent body of the church view itself as the church in microcosm. Under his leadership the staff has begun doing just this. They have a weekly brown-bag lunch together and are urged to attend the Eucharist that precedes this even if they cannot make the other daily services during the week. He has added a font of holy water and some soft furnishings to the chapel at 815, which serves staff, visitors, and neighbors. A staff member describes finding the presiding bishop humming to himself, turning out musty old books and vestments from drawers and tidying up the sacristy with relish and delight during his first week at the Church Center. Worship, conversation, and communal dining are to be at the center of the staff's life together. Wandering through the offices and dropping in on staff, wearing blue jeans and flannel shirts when not conducting public events, Bishop Griswold is setting the tone for an episcopate that he hopes will be accessible and informal, and link parts of the organization to each other by his visible presence. Although he is required to travel, his aim is that staff experience him as present at 815 "more often than not."

20. Report of the Executive Council's Standing Committee on Planning and Evaluation on the Diocesan Consultations, 1996.

21. Frank Griswold, remarks to Executive Council, February 12, 1999.

Risk, Sin, and Discipline

Like other faith groups, the Episcopal Church has been pressed to develop policies and procedures about every kind of professional misconduct by its employees. We have had our share of sexual and financial misconduct trials in many dioceses. As the society around us has withdrawn favored status from churches and become more questioning of people in authority, it has become impossible to continue injurious old practices of moving malefactors from place to place and ignoring complainants. Insurance liability has been a thick stick spurring legislative and behavioral change.

Over the last nine years the Episcopal Church has radically revised its disciplinary canons regarding misconduct by clergy, bishops, and staff, creating a large body of revised canon law at General Convention 1994. Administrative practices have shifted as well. Background checks are now routine at every level of church employment from sextons to bishops, and training on misconduct and on drug and alcohol abuse is required of employees and volunteers with oversight of children. Each diocese bears responsibility for doing this in a way that satisfies the Church Insurance Company or other insurers. Dioceses increasingly press congregations to conform to standard business practices in the handling of money, property, and securities, and to have both in-house and professional audits regularly. Protective policies that substantially change clergy pastoral practice are largely accepted, though not without debate. Such changes in policy are by no means unique to the Episcopal Church and are driven at least as much by insurance requirements as by concern for the care of persons. The Cooke experience added impetus to a movement already under way. It has become increasingly clear to churches that if they did not effectively police themselves, society would impose constraints from outside.

Theological rationales for risk reduction procedures come after the fact, but they do come. We interviewed a self-avowed optimist on the national staff who spoke of "raising the bar of awareness" to "say more positively the ways we can exercise more competent hospitality in using our humanity, our malehood, our femalehood, our frailty, our sinfulness, you name the mix and match of what we are as religious leaders, to be more self-aware and more skilled when we interface with vulnerable people." An interviewee from the Church Insurance Company addressed the issue of risk management as "hospitality, creating a safe place for God's children, which is also good loss-prevention [policy] because when you don't injure people, you don't have law suits."

Traditionally, complaint procedures in cases of misconduct began from the early church practice of first making the complaint privately, then coming to the offender with a fellow Christian, and then bringing a group or the whole

community together to put pressure on the offender to answer for his or her behavior (Matt. 18:15-17). This is hardly a sophisticated enough procedure for dealing with the complexities of sexual misconduct or the realities of modern legal systems. There are now provisions for suspending priestly functioning of alleged sex offenders or others accused of professional misconduct or of felonies, while continuing to pay them unless and until guilt is established. There are victims' advocates available as well as judicial bodies within the church for hearing complaints and conducting investigations and church trials. Civil authorities tend to be involved early, setting the conditions under which accused offenders and their victims may communicate.

The Gospel of John's teaching to the disciples, traditionally read as "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, but if you retain the sins of any they are retained" (20:23), may be translated even more aptly as, "Of whomsoever you release the sins, they are released, but of whomsoever you seize/bind the sins, they are subdued." In establishing risk reduction policies, the discerning church must distinguish between those sorts of sins that can simply be exposed, responded to, and released, and those that are so destructive to the fabric of community that they need to be laid hold of, contained, and thoroughly constrained. Of this latter type are sins of professional misconduct, both sexual and financial.

Scripture is replete with testimonies that God cares particularly for the vulnerable, the weak, and victims of injustice. The Gospels add that as we treat the "least of these," Jesus' sisters and brothers, so we treat Jesus himself (Matt. 25:40). It is the great commandment that we love one another as Jesus has loved us (John 13:34), and "love one's neighbor as oneself" (Mark 12:31). Our loving God is inseparably linked to the concrete loving of our neighbors, especially our most vulnerable neighbors. For those vested with special authority and power, "Of those to whom much has been given, much will be asked" (Luke 12:48). Increased oversight, well-boundaried intimacy, and a humble understanding of universal sin and the limitations of our leaders as human beings may balance our Anglican optimism about human nature.

In the contemporary United States, the Episcopal Church included, we seldom quote the scriptural admonition not to sue our fellow Christians in courts of law (1 Cor. 6:1ff.). We may in fact be too quick to assume that the satisfaction of civil justice will accomplish the maintaining of justice, *koinonia*, and reconciliation within the church.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The destruction of trust in relationships was the most painful cost of the Cooke era among staff. Not only were relationships with Ms. Cooke injured, but also relationships between persons and departments on many levels, and between staff and members of the wider church. One staff member said, "In our culture there is already a suspicion of large systems which gets escalated by finding out about a large deception that's been going on for many years and is using your resources without your knowledge. . . . It goes right to the heart of what each of us fears and resents."

The national staff met together to do some healing work with each other in the months following Cooke's departure, but four years later the wounds still felt deep to many who remained. The new presiding bishop, Frank Griswold, took senior staff on retreat soon after his arrival in New York, and has continued the forums for working through and healing broken relationships and trust. This has been a slow process.

Ellen Cooke went to prison. A staff person overheard her saying, as she was escorted from the building, "I hate them all." How shall such wounds heal, for her or for others? How do our systems help or impair healing? Certainly not by "forgiving and forgetting"! In an Episcopal magazine, an inmate in California's Vacaville prison wrote eloquently:

Excusing and mitigating criminal behavior because of a person's background is nearly as dehumanizing, in a subtle way, as the current conditions within our prisons. It sends the message, "You are incapable of rising above your background. We don't expect more from you." Alternately, the system sends the message, "You don't want to change. We expect the worst from you." The first sounds patronizing, the second sounds harsh. Both extremes deny the dignity of accountability and remove the possibility of transformation. To have both justice and mercy, responsibility and reconciliation, we must find a middle ground.²²

If convicted by civil or ecclesiastical authorities, those guilty of professional misconduct in the church are punished, de-licensed, sent for rehabilitative treatment, and generally end up outside their religious communities completely — informally excommunicated. Sometimes in shame they excommunicate themselves. There they remain, outside. Or perhaps if they can come to terms with their own behavior, they relocate to another part of the church, slide into the back row of a place where no one knows their story, and

22. James R. Tramel, letter to the editors, *Witness* (New York), March 1999.

stay in the shadows. Victims leave their churches almost as often, I suspect, once trust in the structure and its leaders has been shattered.

In all the properly strict new processes for dealing with misconduct, the discourse about forgiveness seems to find little place, even in the church. What the victims' rights movement usefully has taught us is that forgiveness cannot be forced, hasty, or superficial, nor may it keep offenders from the painful consequences of their sin. Where abuse has happened, there are care and counseling to help victims and congregations come to terms with and heal from their experiences. There are public disclosure and censure. All to the good. Forgiveness, however, becomes a private, inner matter for the victims to work out with their therapists if they choose. Some persons find they are stuck in a permanent identity of "victim" in their own mind or the minds of others. Victims are shielded from confrontation with their offenders by regulations designed to protect them. Congregations mend as best they can and go on.

In the Middle Ages, when church leaders strove to set up rules and systems for maintaining order, there were often elaborate procedures for dealing with infractions. Those causing public scandal by notorious sin might indeed be officially excommunicated, and this in a time and society in which most people deeply believed that outside the church one went straight to hell and eternal torment. To be restored after an offense, the sinner had first to confess, repent, and receive instruction. He or she might be required to stand outside the local church for months or years while others went in to worship. Then he or she might progress to kneeling in the church porch while the victim, the injured family, and the community of faith filed in and out. Only after months or years when the priest or bishop deemed penance sufficient would the offender be allowed into the back of the church and finally restored to communion.

History records how King Henry knelt and was scourged at the tomb of Archbishop Thomas Becket as a public penance for murdering him — and as an avenue for the people and the church to forgive him. As a victim, by the time you have walked past your offender week after week kneeling in humiliation in front of God and everyone, I suspect the hardness of heart and anger dissipate to the point that pity and forgiveness can find room. Our Puritan ancestors had a similar experience when they walked past malefactors held in the stocks on the town square.

We Episcopalians have no modern equivalent to such public penance that would enable the psychic and spiritual journey from rage to forgiveness for all those injured, the identified victim, and the offender, and thus allow the communion of the whole body to be restored. Concerning how often to forgive the offending church member, Jesus said, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:22). We have no idea how to accomplish this Herculean

spiritual task. We fear forgiveness as a form of expunging the bad behavior so as to dishonor the wounds of those harmed and deny the reality of the sin and hurt. In his interview with us, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold spoke of this process:

There's a distinction between forgiveness and amendment, and my sense is one always proffers forgiveness if it's sought for, and that's one of the difficulties in some of these instances, but there may be . . . historical consequences that then preclude the forgiveness being articulated in a way that simply restores the offender to whatever position they held in the life of the church. . . . The capacity of the community to accept you trustfully again has been so shattered by the historical reality of what happened that you can't [go back into your position again]. Though you can be forgiven and you certainly can be reconciled to the life of the body of Christ, you cannot exercise that ministry of trust and leadership again because of the pain suffered by the community.

Our ancestors in faith were wise in recognizing that there were a series of steps to move from injury to forgiveness, for both sinner and community. For the offender these included admission and confession of sin; contrition — looking backward and seeing the pain of the injury to others and being sorry; compunction — feeling the pain and sorrow of it; commitment to amendment of life; repentance — a willingness to make amends and turn again to Christ; penance — the making of amends by actual or symbolic humiliation, labor, and restitution; and receiving absolution and being restored to full communion in the community. The victims moved from outrage and grief at injury, to receiving restitution and witnessing penance — even to getting *tired* of witnessing penance and having it at last feel like *enough* — to confession of their own wrongdoing or complicity, to allowing the offender back into the margins of their lives to begin to rebuild trust, to final forgiveness and communion. The process took years. It took the collaboration of offender, victim, priest, and community staying in some relationship with each other to accomplish it. The ugly reality stayed right in front of everyone like the image of the yellow-striped, manacled chain gang cleaning up the roadside in a Southern town. I suspect such systems enabled genuine forgiveness in a way that neither our hygienic, politically correct, liberal-psychological systems nor our harsh banishing and executing conservative systems can do.

Twelve-step recovery programs have outlined an effective program for working through a sense of victimization, sinfulness, and the need to take responsibility and act to reconnect with community. One of the strengths of that

model, and also of our biblical tradition of universal sinfulness, is that not only the identified offender but also the identified victim and the whole community are called to mutual responsibility and reminded of shared frailty. Disciplinary approaches in our church often assume that the victim is naive, weak, and in need of complete protection, entirely innocent of any responsibility or the need to consider what brought him or her to the situation of victimization. Structures of the church and persons in authority within them tend to be cast in the role of rescuer and savior without regard to their own sinfulness and imperfection. The church community also tends to be regarded as offended against without consideration of its complex role in the shared web of sinfulness that led to an offense. Out of our common plight comes our call to common prayer to the One who is Savior and Reconciler.

On the part of all concerned, it takes courage — that old-fashioned cardinal virtue of fortitude in all its nuances — to accomplish forgiveness and reconciliation. It also first requires grace. We do not get there on our own, for on our own we remain stuck in anger, scorn, alienation, and despair.

In this matter of sin and forgiveness, I maintain that our *Book of Common Prayer* of 1979 needs augmentation. Episcopalians in nearly every Eucharist and daily office make a “Confession of Sin,” acknowledging sin in thought, word, and deed, things done and left undone, and (in the language retained from the previous prayer books) that we have “followed the devices and desires of our own hearts.” The prayer book also contains two forms for the “Reconciliation of a Penitent,” formerly called “Private Confession,” which use similar language and allow a penitent to name particular sins to God and a confessor, to receive direction and counsel, and absolution. The rite states that it is the presence of God in the heart and on the lips that makes confession possible. The rubrics for both rites require that the penitent “has given evidence of due contrition.” In one form of the rite the penitent must declare, “I firmly intend amendment of life and I humbly beg forgiveness of God and his Church.” The other form gives the penitent these words: “I have squandered the inheritance of your saints and have wandered far in a land that is waste. . . . I confess to you [God] and to the Church. . . . I turn again in sorrow and repentance,” and requires that penitents “turn again to Christ as [their] Lord” and “forgive those who have sinned against [them].”

What is lacking from these two forms for “Reconciliation of a Penitent” and from public, congregational “Confession of Sin” is a liturgical rite and pastoral practice that acknowledges the breach sin causes in the whole community and moves all the estranged parties through steps of restoration toward communal reconciliation. Episcopalians tend to believe that “as we pray, so shall we live.” The omission in our prayer becomes incarnate in a failure in our common

life to accomplish reconciliation beyond the private level. Sin is seldom private. It cuts to the heart of community and often needs communal remedy beyond forms our church has provided.

In a teleconference called "Come and See" that was downlinked across the Episcopal Church in 1998, Presiding Bishop Griswold said, "We are for one another's salvation. . . . I need the extension of the incarnation in concrete lives of those I've not chosen but God has given me as fellow members." If we are members of a church that is not a voluntary society but an extension of the incarnation convened by God, then it is a matter of great urgency that we attend to the methodology of reconciliation, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) and will surely go on doing so. In a denomination that stresses God's incarnation and atoning work in Jesus, the stories of our scandals and failures must be told as part of the living testimony of God's activity among us. We need not fear them. We would like them to fall into silence and avoid the further embarrassment their airing brings. They are crucial in our history, however, as stories of God's power over sin, stories of the resilience of Christ's body the church, and stories of resurrection and hope.