



GENERAL CONVENTION IN CONTEXT

RETHINKING CHURCHWIDE STRUCTURES
IN A NEW APOSTOLIC ERA

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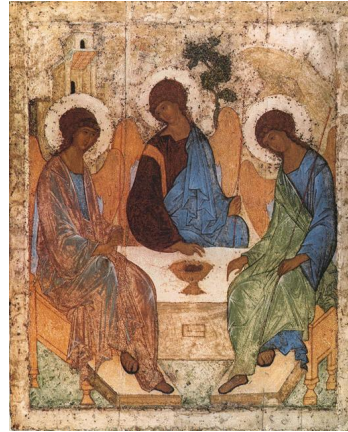
Church Organization is Contextual

- Incarnation means church always enfleshed in specific cultures
- Anglicanism has national, vernacular character
- Dynamic—culture always changing
- Requires faithful adaptation over time



Thinking Theologically about Polity

- What image of God is embedded in different forms of church organization?
- What assumptions are made about creation, humanity, evil, agency, power, etc?



Episcopal Denominational Paradigms

- **State church legacy** (1607-1789)
 - ▣ Establishment: Christian culture/society
 - ▣ Geographical domain/control
 - ▣ Monarchical leadership (monarchical view of God)
 - ▣ Primary challenges: governance; moral improvement of society



Denominational Paradigms, cont.

- **Democratic Federalism** (1789-c.1900)
 - ▣ Embrace of American representative democracy
 - ▣ Functional establishment (still basically Christian culture)
 - ▣ Constitutional confederacy of autonomous dioceses
 - ▣ Organization of Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (1835): strand of missional DNA
 - ▣ Unresolved tensions: clerical vs. lay authority
 - ▣ Primary challenges: unity; governance; mission as expansion of church across frontier and overseas



Denominational Paradigms, cont.

- **Modern Corporate Bureaucracy** (c. 1900-60s)
 - ▣ Peak of Episcopal Church's self-confidence, 'national church' ideal
 - ▣ Industrial age: standardization, command-and-control, rationalization of work
 - ▣ Era of rising multi-national corporations
 - ▣ Centralization of program, administration
 - ▣ Primary challenge: programmatic/franchise approach to mission (domestic and foreign)



Denominational Paradigms, cont.

□ **Regulatory Agency** (1960s-present)

- ▣ Collapse of 'national church' ideal
- ▣ Rise of postcolonialism
- ▣ Cultural upheavals, challenge to patriarchal white authority
- ▣ Disconnect between denominational staff/ assemblies and grass roots
- ▣ Loss of resources, culture wars, shrinking church
- ▣ Primary challenges: sustaining structures; unity; diversity



Floods of Cultural and Social Change



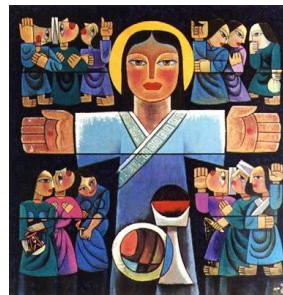
A Dislocated Church

- Cultural disestablishment of Christianity
 - ▣ Church cannot reshape nation from center
- Previous paradigms of denominational structure assume mission is somewhere else, not here
- If mission is primarily local, context is critical
 - ▣ Standardization doesn't serve diverse America well



Renewing Identity in God's Mission

- Episcopal Church faces post-establishment identity crisis
- Invites us deeper:
 - ▣ Mission is aspect of triune God, not just activity of church
 - ▣ Church's identity lies in participating in triune God's life and love for world ("restoring all people to unity with God and one another in Christ," BCP p. 855)
 - ▣ Every member is missionary in daily life, spheres of influence
 - ▣ Mission from everywhere to everywhere



Cultivating Christian Community

- Primary challenge facing church: *cultivation of Christian community*
 - ▣ Within existing congregations
 - ▣ With new neighbors, generations, populations
- “Mixed economy” church (Rowan Williams)



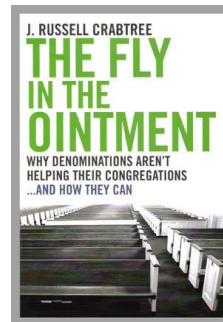
A Key Question to Ask

- *What does a missionary Episcopal Church need from its national organization?*
 - Networking for grass roots mission
 - Sharing of learning/innovation
 - Identity cultivation (theological reflection)
 - Governance (tending catholicity)
 - *What else?*



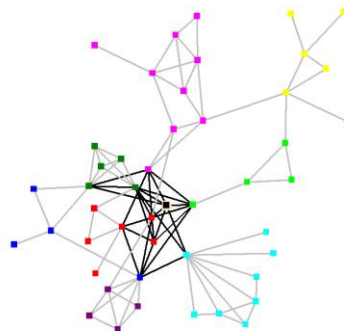
Limitations of 'Resourcing' Model

- From regulatory to resourcing
- Yet assumes problems are largely technical, answers are with denominational 'experts,' not at grass roots
- Typically relies on modern managerial methods
- Economically unsustainable in most places



Cultural Shift: A Network Age

- Rise of participatory culture
- Internet: primary cultural metaphor for 21st c. world
- Cultural co-creation
- New forms of collaboration
- Peer-to-peer communication

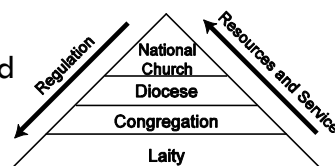


Network Denominations: A Vision

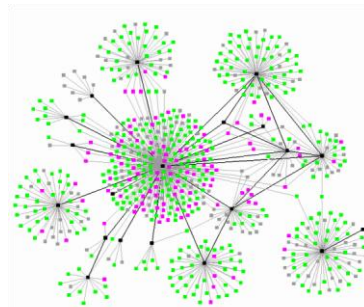
- If mission is from everywhere to everywhere and primarily local, how is God calling us to collaborate at the regional, national, international levels?
- Need for highly participatory, flexible structure
- Minimal institutional footprint
- Embracing freedom for difference
- Challenge of networks is *identity*
 - ▣ Must be cultivated through interpretive leadership, not regulatory control

Bureaucracies vs. Networks

- Bureaucracies:
 - ▣ Centrally planned, coordinated
 - ▣ Hierarchical authority
 - ▣ Center/margin dynamic
 - ▣ Expertise: at top
- Networks:
 - ▣ Decentralized
 - ▣ Distributed authority
 - ▣ Emergent/self-organizing
 - ▣ Expertise: at grass roots



Christendom Bureaucratic Paradigm



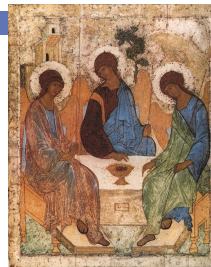
Episcopal Church in a Web 2.0 World

- Web 1.0
 - ▣ Server (provider of resources/info) → client (passive consumer)
- Web 2.0
 - ▣ Co-creative, mutually participatory (← →)
 - ▣ Adaptable from grass roots
 - ▣ Flexible, decentralized
 - ▣ Peer-to-peer



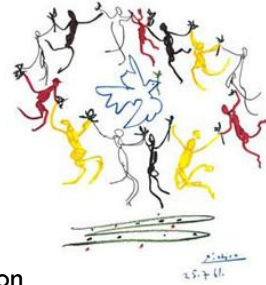
Thinking Theologically about Networks

- Trinity
 - ▣ Shared, distributed authority
 - ▣ Interdependent
 - ▣ Reciprocal/mutual
- Holy Spirit
 - ▣ Personal, public presence who makes God's power knowable
 - ▣ Unifies, reconciles, empowers
 - ▣ Alive among God's ordinary people



Reimagining General Convention

- What does TEC need from its national assembly?
 - ▣ Primary purpose is governance (democratic authority, deliberation)
 - ▣ What kind of public voice?
 - ▣ Could GC be a place for...
 - Sharing of innovation/learnings from grass roots
 - Spiritual formation—revival!
 - Theological interpretation/teaching/vision
 - Networking for collaboration?



Discussion