

FROM CONFIDENCE TO CONFUSION IN MORAL
TEACHING: EPISCOPALIANS, PLURALISM AND
GENDER, 1892-1997

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GENDER, 1892-1997**

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Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,

Praise him all creatures here below.

Praise him above, ye heavenly host,

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

PREFACE

Liberal and moderate Protestant churches are in trouble. An important part of their task in American society is to provide moral teaching, certainly for their own members and perhaps for the larger society as well. They are having a hard time doing that. The most contentious issue at the end of the twentieth century is homosexuality, but there are others, such as the legitimacy of premarital sexual activity. Debates about sexuality can overshadow all other issues when certain denominations hold national assemblies or conventions. The stakes are high for members of these churches, for groups that seek approval long denied to them, and perhaps for the society as a whole. But Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and possibly other churches, too, find it hard to speak a clear word on the issues.

Why are these churches so conflicted, so confused? Theologians can assess fidelity to basic sources of religious teaching; moral theologians can reflect on methods of ethical reasoning and warrants for moral judgments. Sociologists analyze social forces and cultural dynamics like secularization, disestablishment, and cultural conflict. The historian can make a contribution, too. The historian's task is to put the issues in a larger timeframe than most inquiries would do, and to look for patterns of change over time.

This project looks at the moral teaching of one church, the Episcopal Church, between 1892 and 1997, and seeks to discover, with respect to sexuality, why the moral teaching of this church has all but collapsed. When I say that the teaching has collapsed, I do not mean that it has taken a direction of which I disapprove. No, it has collapsed: there is no consistent message at all with respect to such important matters as the moral status of same-sex relationships. Many Episcopalians have definite views, of course, but the church as a whole has nothing coherent to say. Between 1892 and 1997, confidence in moral teaching gave way to confusion.

In 1892, and for decades afterwards, leaders of the Episcopal Church did have a moral message. They understood sexuality in terms of a vision that integrated nation, state, society, church, marriage, and family. They believed in an indissoluble marriage with distinct roles for the husband and wife. They preached that this family was the indispensable foundation for church and society alike. They also insisted that their own Episcopal Church had an important role to play in the nation; some even hoped that Episcopalians could help America's many Christians to unite in a single national church. At the end of the twentieth century, this dream is in ruins, but it continues to haunt the Episcopal Church -- and similar dreams may trouble other American Protestant churches. The Episcopal Church cannot make up its mind about sexuality, not only because the issues are so complex, but because the church is deeply confused about its identity and its proper role in a radically pluralistic society. The Episcopal Church is nothing like a national church, yet still longs to be "inclusive," still yearns to

address every social question. The Episcopal Church seems to have taken leave of the indissoluble marriage and the patriarchal family of the past, yet at the operational level it has yet to figure out what to do when the family is no longer the basis of the church. The issue beneath the issue of sexuality is the question of the identity and mission of the church.

These are large claims, and it is the purpose of this study to try to make a case for them. The first chapter argues for the importance of moral teaching. A review of much social science literature indicates that religious teaching can influence both attitudes and actual behavior. But the Episcopal Church is often unable to provide the sort of teaching that might do that. The second chapter takes up theological and sociological accounts of the ferment and friction over moral teaching, and concludes that the most serious problems are pluralism and conflicts over sexuality and gender roles -- both of which undermine the vision of a national church based on a certain kind of family.

In the third chapter, the focus is on the current controversy over homosexuality. It examines the ecclesiastical trial of a bishop brought into the dock because he ordained a noncelibate gay man; the bishops judging the case concluded that there was no doctrine or discipline that barred the bishop from acting as he did. This chapter canvasses the difficulties the issue of homosexuality creates for the Episcopal Church, for other American Protestant churches, and for other churches in the Anglican Communion.

The fourth chapter investigates the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church. In the twentieth century the Episcopal Church provided moral teaching

in a variety of forms. This study moves beyond earlier treatments of Episcopalian teaching to identify the Book of Common Prayer, canon law, and officially authorized books containing the “church’s teaching” as important sources of moral direction. The deepest roots of Episcopalian moral teaching are found in the traditional Anglican attempt to unify a nation and provide for the edification of its people. The Episcopal Church tried to do this in twentieth century America, but by the end of the century there were many signs that the church was losing the will and capacity to provide moral direction for the nation or even for its own members.

In the fifth chapter, a case study of the Episcopal Church’s treatment of contraception brings the problems of its moral teaching into view. When Episcopalians first dealt with birth control, they struggled with a conflict between their national-church aspirations and their true condition as a threatened, ethnic denomination. They also sought to preserve a certain vision of marriage and family life. After World War I, leaders of the Episcopal Church resisted contraception -- primarily because they saw the restriction of births as a threat to the social position of their church and their ethnic group. By 1961, church leaders had changed their mind about contraception -- because they now saw it as a support for the church-family-nation structure they so deeply valued. Just a few years later, that social fabric was in tatters. The Episcopal Church lost the loyalty of many of its young people, surrendered its opposition to divorce, and by 1982 actually endorsed the use of contraceptives by anyone, married or not. The pattern of change with respect to teaching on contraception reveals the

disintegration of the marriage/family/church/nation model long cherished by leading Episcopalians.

The sixth chapter moves beyond models of marriage and the family to consider the Episcopal Church's desire to lead the nation. This denomination developed out of the established Church of England, and inherited the ideal of a single national church that unifies all the people. Under the very different conditions that prevail in the United States, Episcopalians have longed to unite the many churches and religious traditions into one church; failing that, Episcopalians have tried to address the nation as though they were an established church. This unrealistic ambition has undermined the church's moral teaching. Rather than accept the diversity of American religious life and stake out its own position, the Episcopal Church has given up coherence in teaching in the hope that it can still "include" everyone. But few people are interested, and calls for "reconciliation" simply divert attention from the need to make decisions. The struggle over moral teaching is a sign that the Episcopal Church needs to redirect its sense of identity and mission.

This study of the Episcopal Church is a multi-disciplinary inquiry. At the core of the project is an historical investigation. The writer examines written primary sources to discern patterns of change over time in the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church. At many important points the study is informed by previous treatments of the Episcopal Church by historians and other scholars. Yet the study relies on other fields of inquiry, too. This is especially true with

respect to the formulation of the problem for investigation and with the underlying motivation for the entire undertaking.

The subject of this study is the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church; its goal is a deeper understanding of the difficulty some late twentieth-century churches have in making up their moral minds and sticking to what they have decided. This struggle has been of great interest to some sociologists and many church leaders. The effort to discover why church teaching is confused is largely framed in terms of sociological treatments (e.g., culture wars, pluralism, and secularization). Thus the fundamental statement of the problem for investigation owes much to sociology.

Even more important than the use of sociological works are the author's motivations and presuppositions. This study is the work of one who is not only a historian by training and occupation, but also an ordained minister of the Episcopal Church who has worked in parish and hospital ministry, in Christian education and in clinical pastoral education. The issues explored here do not live only in books or convention resolutions; they arise in the lives of individuals and families who often look to the clergy for comfort and direction. The moral chaos in the Episcopal Church has disturbed many individuals and congregations, and makes pastoral work difficult. The fundamental concern of this author is with the integrity of the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church. That teaching is muddled and conflicted, and this writer wants to know why.

Although this writer is deeply concerned about the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church, the present inquiry is not about what the church's teaching

ought to be. It is primarily a *historical* study of changes in that teaching in the twentieth century. The strength or weakness of the study will be determined largely by its historical accuracy. Do the documents say what the author thinks they say? Do they mean what he thinks they mean? Is his thesis the best explanation of the historical data, or should we look for another? With respect to such matters, the author fully accepts the canons of historical scholarship.¹

The study should be subjected to another test as well: its usefulness as a guide to action. There is much truth in John Dewey's pragmatic understanding of knowledge. For Dewey, "the value of knowledge is subordinate to its use in thinking."² Thinking is a thoroughly practical affair. It happens because all experience includes a degree of trial and error. As we do something and find that it doesn't work, we try other approaches until we hit on one that is more effective. Thinking brings order and discipline into this experimentation: it is "the intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous."³ Dewey believed that "scientific method is the only authentic means at our command for getting at the significance of our everyday experiences of the world

¹ On the implications of religious faith for scholarship, and on ways in which Christian scholars can and should respect the requirements of academic disciplines, see George M. Marsden, The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

² John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: Free Press, 1966; first published 1916), 151.

³ Dewey, Democracy and Education, 48.

in which we live.”⁴ Although such unlimited confidence in science is surely unwise, there is a need for much more scientific thinking when churches try to understand their situation and provide moral direction. They need to do thinking that pays attention to “the sense of a problem, the observation of conditions, the formulation and rational elaboration of a suggested conclusion, and the active experimental testing.”⁵ If the present study makes a contribution to the historical literature on American religion, good; if it helps churches to improve their moral teaching, so much the better.

Best of all would be a contribution that meets the basic test of ministry. Valuable though Dewey’s understanding of knowledge may be, this author cannot accept his philosophical naturalism.⁶ The ultimate reality with which

⁴ John Dewey, Experience and Education, in Jo Ann Boydston, ed., John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 13: 1938-1939 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991; first published 1938), 59.

⁵ Dewey, Democracy and Education, 151.

⁶ Dewey’s naturalism was in large part the result of his rejection of the dualism characteristic of much philosophy, a dualism often found also in theology. Dewey believed that his “method of empirical naturalism...provides the way, and the only way...by which one can freely accept the standpoint and conclusions of modern science.” Dewey, “Preface to the Second Edition,” Experience and Nature, rev. ed., 1929 (Ls Salle, IL: Open Court, 1929), xiv. Dewey held that philosophers transformed desirable states of affairs “into fixed traits of real Being.” Dewey considered this move to be “*the philosophic fallacy*” (Experience and Nature, 27). The result was that people had to contend with two realities, and acquire extraordinary skill in coordinating the two. Much better, Dewey thought, to contend with only one reality. Very well. But Christian theology is not necessarily dualistic in the way Dewey finds objectionable. For Christian theology, God is not out there somewhere; God is also present within the natural and human reality that concerns us – “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14, New Revised Standard Version).

people have to do is not material or social but spiritual; the ultimate reality is God. The purpose of the church and of its ordained ministry is to connect transitory human lives with the eternal life of God. The true function of Christian moral teaching is not simply to keep individuals out of trouble or to make society function smoothly. The church's moral teaching should serve the great pastoral task of lifting up human lives to God -- as the early Christian theologian Gregory Nazianzen declared, "the scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God."⁷ If this study makes a historical contribution, good; if it proves a guide to action, better; if it helps even one soul acquire wings and ascend to God, best of all.

If the structure of this inquiry is multi-disciplinary, so is the content. While the core of the study is an historical investigation of church teaching, it often draws on the work of sociologists and other social scientists. On other occasions, judgments are offered as to the proper interpretation of the Scriptures and the theological understanding of the nature of the church. These elements are appropriate in a work written by one who, at ordination, received a Bible "as a sign of the authority given to you to preach the Word of God,"⁸ but they are not historical assertions, and the historian *qua* historian is certainly not obliged to endorse them. The work also makes occasional reference to the author's own

⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration II, "In Defence of his Flight to Pontus," 22, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).

⁸ "The Ordination of a Priest," Book of Common Prayer 1979, 534.

experience as a student of theology and a pastor. Because such personal and anecdotal material is not the best historical evidence, it is usually presented in footnotes that supplement the historical inquiry presented.

The multi-disciplinary character of this project reflects recent changes in the nature of historical scholarship. For many historians, the starting point for scholarship is to find a gap in existing historical knowledge or a shortcoming in the prevailing explanations. An overview of American historical scholarship by Michael Kammen has shown how fruitful that orientation can be, yet Kammen acknowledges that “the firmament of possible categories could be extended considerably if we construed *histoire probleme* more expansively to include social problems of the past few decades that have served as notable stimuli to scholarship.”⁹ He also notes that the social sciences have greatly influenced the formulation of problems for historical study in the last three decades.¹⁰ The present study takes its departure from a set of contemporary social problems and relies on key concepts articulated and investigated by sociologists. Such a study seems appropriate today. Another historian has borrowed from William James a metaphor that compares pragmatic liberal discourse to a hotel corridor with many different rooms.¹¹ Perhaps we may extend the metaphor: this study takes place

⁹ Michael Kammen, “An Americanist’s Reprise: The Pervasive Role of *Histoire Probleme* in Historical Scholarship Concerning the United States Since the 1960s,” Reviews in American History 26 (March 1998), 5-6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

¹¹ Marsden, The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship, 45-46.

in a room marked history, but there are communicating doors to other rooms with names like philosophy, Christian ethics, and sociology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. RELIGIOUS MORAL TEACHING AND CONFUSION IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH	1
Religion, Society and Moral Teaching	2
To Hellfire and Back: Religious Morality and Behavior	10
Moral Conflict and the Peril of Schism	36
2. SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND CONFUSION: PLURALISM AND CULTURAL WARFARE	46
Winds of Doctrine and the Specter of Cultural Captivity: Theological Appraisals	47
Secularization and its Discontents	61
A Market Made for Morality, not Morality Made for the Market	76
Culture Wars: New Lines of Cleavage In American Religion	83
Church Families, Pluralism and Gender	90
3. HOMOSEXUALITY, THE RIGHTER TRIAL, AND THE DANGER OF SCHISM	102
Water Pistols and Church Discipline: Gay Ordinations In the Newark Diocese	103
No King in Israel: People do as they please	116
Trouble Ahead? Kuala Lumpur and the Anglican Communion	129
Presbyterian Predicaments: Justice-Love And Gay Ordinations	142
Lutherans, Methodists, and Others	163
Unresolved Issues in Sexual Ethics	177
Episcopal Church Struggles in Historical Perspective	179
4. MORAL TEACHING IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH	182
The Forms of Moral Teaching	183
Moral Teaching in the Twentieth Century	191

Pastoral Letters	191
General Convention and Moral Teaching	197
The Church's Teaching	198
The Lambeth Conference	204
Canon Law	208
The Book of Common Prayer	215
Limited Moral Teaching	244
5. CONTRACEPTION: A CASE STUDY IN TEACHING	251
Marriage, Family and Divorce	255
The Herodian Sin: Contraception and the Episcopal Church in the 1920s	267
The Indian Summer of the Episcopal Church: Changes In Birth Control Teaching, 1948-1961	292
Ecclesiastical Amnesia: Contraception and the Episcopal Church, 1967-1982	300
Birth Control and the Collapse of Moral Teaching	315
6. THE ILLUSION OF A FUTURE: RECONCILIATION, INCLUSION, AND THE IDEA OF A NATIONAL CHURCH	318
The Notion of a National Church	319
The Implosion of the "National Church"	352
The Ideology of Reconciliation	364
SOURCES CONSULTED	386
APPENDICES	436
APPENDIX I -- STATEMENT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY (THE "KUALA LUMPUR STATEMENT")	436
APPENDIX II -- LINCOLN, NEBRASKA EXCOMMUNICATION STATEMENT	437
APPENDIX III --THE SECULARIZATION OF THE PRODIGAL SON	438
APPENDIX IV -- SECULARIZING THE MESSAGE OF AMERICAN PROTESTANTISM: ISSUES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SERMONS	441

APPENDIX V -- WORSHIP AND ETHICS	447
APPENDIX VI -- TWO NEW PRAYERS IN THE 1892 <u>BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER</u>	451
APPENDIX VII --LIBERAL ACTIVISTS IN PROTESTANT CHURCHES	452
APPENDIX VIII -- TELL IT TO THE MARINES: A FRONT IN THE CULTURE WAR	455
APPENDIX IX -- CONTRACAPTION AND CATHOLICS IN QUEBEC	457
APPENDIX X -- RELIGION, AROUSAL THEORY AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOR	460

Chapter One

Religious Moral Teaching and the Confusion in the Episcopal Church

One morning before I started work on my dissertation, a newspaper headline grabbed my attention: “Gay Ordination Not Heresy, Bishops Say.” An Episcopal Church court ruled that no church doctrine prohibits the ordination of homosexuals, and so there could be no charge of heresy against a bishop who had ordained a gay man. On the same page there appeared another story, “Excommunication Order in Effect for Unrepentant.” A Roman Catholic bishop in Nebraska planned to excommunicate Catholics who belonged to groups that opposed Roman Catholic teaching on abortion. A tale of two churches, it seemed, one ready to carry out a sanction which the newspaper described as “the spiritual equivalent of the death penalty,” the other apparently unable to discipline a leader who plainly violated a 1979 resolution.¹

Do mainline Protestant churches like the Episcopal Church have clearly defined positions on moral questions?² If they have explicit moral teachings, do

¹ Tulsa World, May 16, 1996, A-7. The ecclesiastical court decided that the resolution was not binding.

² The mainline Protestant churches include the American Baptist Churches in the USA; the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Church. This list is provided by historian Thomas C. Reeves, The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity (New York: Free Press, 1996), 1. Sometimes lists of the mainline churches exclude the Lutherans, mainly because of the complex ethnic origins of the Lutheran churches in the United States. The term “mainline” is unfortunate because it suggests that the far bigger Roman Catholic and conservative Protestant churches are of marginal importance. But the term

their members attach any meaning to them? Do church leaders expect members to follow such teachings? Do these churches offer their moral directives to the larger society as guidelines which all people ought to follow? With respect to moral matters, can bishops or anyone else be held accountable? Some church members fear that the answers to all of these questions must be in the negative. A recent book prepared by professors of Christian ethics carried the title The Crisis in Moral Teaching in the Episcopal Church. The contributors agreed “that there are limits to disagreements among Christians. That is to say, while there are reasons for moral judgments, those reasons are limited.” When they considered the official teachings of their own church, all these moral teachers found “current attempts on the part of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America to formulate moral teachings” to be inadequate.³

I. Religion, Society and Moral Teaching

When a church is muddled about its moral teaching, the confusion may affect the larger society as well as members of the denomination. At the end of the twentieth century, many Americans still expect churches to provide guidance on urgent moral questions. It is not unusual for public intellectuals to argue that

“mainline” is widely used in studies of certain churches, and we will accept that term in our own study.

³ Timothy F. Sedgwick, “Introduction,” in Timothy F. Sedgwick and Philip Turner, eds., The Crisis on Moral Teaching in the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1992), 10.

American society is in a critical state, and to look to “religion” to provide a way out.⁴ Robert Bork maintains that “the coming of trouble in our culture coincided with a decline in the influence of religion.” Nineteenth-century religion, in both Britain and America, was the principal “source of the ethics of self control.”⁵ Bork thinks that a society has two choices: it can embrace intellectual and moral relativism, possibly accompanied by nihilism, or it can adopt religious faith.⁶

⁴ On the role of “public intellectuals” in America, see Russell Jacoby, The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe (New York: Basic Books, 1987). Jacoby thinks that American public life is becoming impoverished because very few intellectuals today play a broad and critical public role. But William Dean locates the problem in the decline of “public philosophy.” He contends that Americans once shared a public philosophy based on the belief that America was an exceptional, providentially grounded nation, a conviction which has been shattered since the 1940s. William Dean, “Religion and the American Public Philosophy,” Religion and American Culture 1 (Winter 1991): 47-72. If America has lost its exceptional status, or if the nation has severe problems which no one can solve, some Americans might well hope for a *deus ex machina*, or at least call religion to their rescue. For an appraisal of Dean and others with similar concerns, see Richard B. Miller, “Religion and the American Public Intellectual,” Journal of Religious Ethics 25 (Fall 1997): 369-392.

⁵ Robert H. Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 273.

⁶ Bork, Slouching Toward Gomorrah, 277. According to Bork, philosophy is able to analyze moral codes, but cannot create them in the first place (276). “Only religion can accomplish for a modern society what tradition, reason, and empirical observation cannot” (278). He does not reject tradition, reason, or empirical inquiries, but simply notes the limits to what they can do. Bork’s critique of liberalism is balanced by a recognition that liberalism has done much good, but becomes destructive when it no longer must contend with other authorities and traditions (4). Bork’s view of liberalism is similar to the appraisal of a professor of religion and philosophy: the “liberal spirit” is confident that reason can “ascertain the good, the true, and the beautiful,” and it

Political scientist Guenter Lewy, an acknowledged agnostic, contends that many deep social ills in the United States are rooted in a weakening of religion in public life. "I am convinced," Lewy writes, "that the moral regeneration and repair of a frayed social fabric that this country so badly needs will not take place unless more people take their religion seriously." In his book Why America Needs Religion, Lewy argues "for the central role of religion in providing society and its members with a moral anchor."⁷

If a church cannot decide where it stands on pressing moral issues, that church can hardly influence the larger society. Yet it is not so easy for a church to make up its collective mind and enforce discipline on its members, let alone shape the thoughts and actions of outsiders. The most remarkable thing about a Roman Catholic bishop's threat of excommunication for pro-abortion activists is that such a threat is uncommon today.⁸ If any church has a strong tradition of

has made valuable contributions. But the liberal spirit was constructive only when it did not have the cultural world to itself. "The liberal spirit was healthy and positive as long as it had the substance of Western Judeo-Christian civilization to criticize, alter, reform, and 'enlighten'.... Without the substance of tradition to reform, it becomes increasingly empty and impotent to guide either personal or public life." Robert Benne, Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 7, 8.

⁷ Guenter Lewy, Why America Needs Religion: Secular Modernity and its Discontents (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), xii.

⁸ Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz is an unusual figure in the American episcopate. He is one of just two bishops who still prohibit girls to assist at Mass. Some church-law experts objected to his excommunication order. See "The Wrath of the Bishop," Time 147 (May 27, 1996).

authority and discipline, it is the Roman Catholic Church. Yet even on a matter as important as abortion, church leaders cannot be sure of the loyalty of church members.⁹ If a bishop did excommunicate such activists, how effective would the action be? In a large country, defiant individuals could continue to receive the sacraments where their status is not known. They could leave their church and join another, or enter the ranks of the unchurched, and no bishop could stop them.

The Nebraska bishop's warning may well be a sign of institutional weakness rather than strength. According to Andrew Greeley, a prominent sociologist of religion, Roman Catholics in the late twentieth century United States are much less accepting of church authority than they were a generation ago. In 1963, Greeley reports, 70 per cent of American Catholics believed that the pope exercised an authority given by Christ to the apostle Peter and his successors; some 68 per cent were sure that the pope's judgment on certain matters was infallible. "In 1974 these percentages had declined to 42 and 32 per cent, respectively, and in 1980, in a study of Catholics under 30, to 20 per cent."¹⁰

⁹ The excommunication order applies to members of some thirteen organizations, including Planned Parenthood, Catholics for a Free Choice, and the Hemlock Society. For the text of the excommunication order, please see Appendix II.

¹⁰ Andrew Greeley, Religious Change in America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 18. Over the years, attendance at mass has declined even though participation in the Sunday liturgy is still mandatory. According to the Chicago Tribune, 93 per cent of Catholics under the age of 20 attended mass every week in the 1950s. By 1972, the figure was 40.4 per cent; in 1990, it was down to 13.2 per cent. Polls also show that Catholics do not support official

Greeley attributes the change to a strong reaction against one official teaching, the 1968 papal encyclical Humanae Vitae, which prohibits artificial means of contraception.¹¹ A study of contraceptive practices provides some support for Greeley's contention. In the 1960s, Protestants were more likely than Catholics to use contraception or sterilization, but by the 1980s there was virtually no difference between the two religious groups. There has also been a steep decline in the percentage of Catholics relying on the rhythm method of contraception (from 32 per cent in 1965 to just 4 per cent in 1988).¹² The authors conclude that the Catholic Church influenced contraceptive practices in the 1950s and 1960s, but no longer does so.¹³ In addition, a study of Catholics in the Detroit area suggests that Greeley may be right. Douglas B. Koller found that Catholics were far more ready to question church teachings in 1971 than in 1958 (there was no change for Protestants in these years). Koller proposes that two events, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the birth control

teachings on sexual matters. For example, 56 per cent of Catholics under age 30 approve of premarital sex. Swanson Stevenson and Vincent J. Schodolski, "Latin American Immigrants alter Face of the Church," Chicago Tribune, December 13, 1996 (retrieved from Chicago Tribune Online, July 15, 1997).

¹¹ Greeley, Religious Change in America, 18.

¹² Calvin Goldscheider and William D. Mosher, "Patterns of Contraceptive Use in the United States: The Importance of Religious Factors," Studies in Family Planning 22 (March/April 1991), 104.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105.

encyclical, were the principal reasons for the change.¹⁴ The same factors seem to have influenced church participation by Roman Catholics in Quebec.¹⁵ The Roman Catholic Church has problems with its moral teaching, too. There is principled dissent as well as non-compliance.¹⁶

In the United States, religious groups that seek to provide strong moral guidance must contend with both pluralism and individualism. There is no Church in America; there are churches. There is no single brand of religious moral teaching, but there are varieties of moral teaching. As has already been noted, a person could leave one church for another. The willingness of at least some Americans to do that is a sign of individualism: in modern America, individuals often put their ideas, attitudes, and desires ahead of institutional policies, traditions, and guidelines. Individualism may be fundamental to American culture, as Robert Bellah and his colleagues have maintained; Americans “believe in the dignity, indeed, the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, make our own

¹⁴ Douglas B. Koller, “Belief in the Right to Question Church Teachings, 1958-71,” Social Forces 58 (September 1979): 290-304.

¹⁵ See Roger O’Toole, “Religion in Canada: Its Development and Contemporary Situation,” Social Compass 43 (1996), 119-134, and Martha E. Beaudry “Birth Control and the ‘Public Good’: From Criminalization to Education for Family Planning” (M. A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1994), 41-45. For a summary of this research and a comment on a French parallel, please refer to Appendix IX, “Contraception and Catholics in Quebec.”

¹⁶ Although this study concentrates on the Episcopal Church, we shall consider the Catholic Church and the debates about its moral teaching at several points.

decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious.”¹⁷ Persons who think that the individual is sovereign will not easily accept the attempts of religious groups to tell them how to think or what to do.¹⁸

Under such circumstances, churches could abandon the attempt to formulate moral teachings, or modify controversial teachings to accommodate their members and potential sympathizers. If they did so, would these religious bodies still be churches? A prominent moral thinker in the Episcopal Church suggests that a *church* cannot abandon authoritative moral teaching:

a church is a church precisely because it does have some ability to shape the mind and life of its membership. When a church is no longer able to do that ... we are left with a *voluntary association* and not a church. Another name will have to be found for such a grouping, and for the moment denomination will serve as well as any.¹⁹

¹⁷ Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 142.

¹⁸ Of course, such persons will end up being directed by other institutions and cultural forces, often without noticing it. Individualism is itself a social construct, and the present writer considers it to be one of the most insidiously imprisoning of all ideologies. It deceives a person into imagining that he or she is sovereign, and cuts the person off from the critical thinking and social support that could open the way to a richer communal existence.

¹⁹ Philip Turner, Sex, Money and Power: An Essay in Christian Social Ethics (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985), 4, italics added. Although Turner makes an important point here, and his judgment may well be sound, this writer will use the terms “church” and “denomination” interchangeably.

Such language suggests that some American religious organizations have departed from their proper identity and task, perhaps in order to keep members from leaving voluntary associations.²⁰ Occasionally social scientists hint at apostasy: consider the recent book title All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message In American Protestantism.²¹ The combined pressures of pluralism, culture, and religious markets may make it difficult, if not impossible, for American religious organizations to maintain clear and demanding moral teaching.²²

²⁰ Strictly speaking, all American churches are voluntary associations. There are no legally established churches in the United States. Even though membership and participation in churches is voluntary (at least for adults), churches may have a powerful influence on their members' attitudes and behavior, as some of the research reviewed below will indicate. For the moment, we may note this observation by three political scientists: "As voluntary associations of individuals bound by strong affective ties and regular social interaction, churches constitute genuine communities that are well suited to the transmission and maintenance of group norms." Kenneth D. Wald, Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel S. Hill, Jr., "Churches as Political Communities," American Political Science Review 82 (June 1988): 532. The really important point Turner makes is that some churches may have lost the capacity to shape their members' views. It is a *theological* conviction that makes him doubt that such voluntary associations should still be called churches. The strictest American churches are voluntary associations, too, if considered sociologically and legally.

²¹ Marsha G. Witten, All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). The book is a sociological study of religious language in the Presbyterian and Southern Baptist churches. For a discussion of this book, please refer to chapter two, below, and to Appendices III and IV.

²² The present study focuses on moral teaching rather than on the doctrine of God. Some observers of the Episcopal Church see the danger of apostasy at that deeper theological level, too. See Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., "A Crisis of Apostasy," The Living Church (July 21, 1991): 8.

II. To Hellfire and Back: Religious Morality and Behavior

But is it true that American churches have abandoned clear moral teaching? Or is it the case that Americans simply ignore what the churches have to say? Although this study focuses on moral teaching itself, and not on behavior, such questions deserve a brief look. If church teaching has no influence, a study of it might well be senseless.

As it happens, there is a significant literature relevant to the question of the effectiveness of church teaching, most of it produced by sociologists of religion, criminologists, and investigators of drug and alcohol problems. This literature does not examine the specific, official pronouncements of any one church, but tries to determine the relationship between more generalized religious teaching and various forms of deviance and criminal behavior. The basic inspiration for these inquiries comes from the Durkheimian tradition in sociology, which sees religion as promoting social integration and limiting deviance.²³ It is also the case that a concern for social order in modern America motivates some of this research.²⁴ Sometimes social scientists conclude that

²³ In Emile Durkheim's own work, integration and regulation were two different things. Since 1976, however, many scholars follow Whitney Pope, who contends that they amount to the same thing (Whitney Pope, Durkheim's Suicide: A Classic Reanalyzed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). See Steve Stack, "The Effect of the Decline in Institutionalized Religion on Suicide, 1954-1978, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 22 (1983), 241.

²⁴ Consider, e.g., what David Leege has written in an effort to persuade social scientists to pay more attention to religion in studies of the electorate: "Churches inculcate beliefs and shape

only a renewal of religion can rescue society from its problems. Such social scientists may draw on the works of other scholars to support their views.

Political scientist Guenter Lewy has reviewed much of the literature on the relationship between religion and deviance and crime, including many of the studies that will be discussed below. His conclusion is that committed Christians behave differently than nominal church members: "Whether it is juvenile delinquency, adult crime, prejudice, out-of-wedlock births, or marital conflict and divorce, there is a significantly lower rate of such indicators of moral failure and social ills among believing Christians."²⁵ The kind of literature cited by Lewy

worldviews. They provide plausibility structures – i.e., ways of dealing with life's puzzles – and they offer social norms." David C. Leege, "Religion and Politics in Theoretical Perspective, in David C. Leege, and Lyman A. Kellstedt, eds., Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 3. Religion is "the glue that holds society together, legitimates social change, and defines many of our expectations of the social order" (8). "The function of culture is social control," and religious ideas and groups are fundamentally important for culture (8, 9). Leege is concerned not only with religious ideas, but also with the power of religious communities: "People become something more than ordinary when they share a sacred community. People become empowered, they develop the self-confidence to act in concert. Religions specify what actions to take, and religious beliefs create the obligation to act" (10).

²⁵ Lewy, Why America Needs Religion, 112. Lewy's concern is more than Durkheimian. Like some other social scientists, he seems to share a desire as old as English society in North America for a religiously grounded social and moral order: "Much of our current concern for criminal deviance is a by-product of the unstated assumptions of our society. Historically, a central element in Puritanism, upon which much of our modern conception of crime and delinquency is based, has been the zeal to guarantee individual salvation as well as that of the community. This view has continued to the present time. The delinquency of children and criminality of adults were held to be products of community failure and neglect." Richard D.

seldom specifies exactly what is meant by “religion,”²⁶ although it is safe to say that researchers have in mind organized, institutional religion as it is found in the

Knudten and Mary S. Knudten, "Juvenile Delinquency, Crime, and Religion, Review of Religious Research 12 (Spring 1971): 131.

²⁶ Sociologist Thomas Luckmann describes religion as “a particular part of human existence – the part that is concerned with the supernatural, with the ultimate meanings of life, with transcendence.” Religion can take various social forms. One possibility is that specialized institutions will monopolize religious functions; these institutions “maintain and transmit the social construction of transcendent reality, in ever-increasing separation from the transmission of the other parts of the social stock of knowledge.” This development occurs in complex societies; in western civilization, Christian churches became specialized religious institutions. But the institutional specialization of religion is somewhat unstable. Because no one institution directs all aspects of life, there is a personal or private sphere in individual lives. Religion may become privatized as individuals are left to organize much of their lives without the overt direction of institutions. Under modern conditions, the churches compete with other organizations and cultural forces in the “social construction of various kinds of transcendence.” Thomas Luckmann, “The New and the Old in Religion,” in Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman, eds., Social Theory for a Changing Society (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 171, 174, 175, 176, 177.

But perhaps there is no single phenomenon or institution that can be called *religion*. Edward Reeves contends that what Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and many others called *religion* “has turned out to be a huge array of cultural systems which cannot be comprehended from a single theoretical viewpoint. For example, some scholars hold that religion is evidence of mental structures, others analyze how religious beliefs help human populations to adapt to their ecological circumstances, and still others hold that religion mitigates the existential anxieties of individuals so that their participation in social roles is not thwarted.” Reeves himself focuses on one aspect of religion, its function as a “cultural model” which “defines situations and confers legitimacy, and therefore power, on those who have access to it and are able to manipulate it.” Edward B. Reeves, The Hidden Government: Ritual, Clientism, and Legitimation in Northern Egypt (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 3. This present investigation, concerned as it is with moral teaching about sexuality, is probably most concerned with religion in the second sense of helping groups manage their ecological circumstances. However, an important part of our investigation will consider authority, so we will also touch on the fourth form of religion that Reeves identifies.

United States, where congregations and denominations are common forms of religious organization.²⁷ Scholars may mention specific denominations, or they may rely on very broad categories like “Protestant” or “skeptics.” Most studies define “religiosity” at least partially in terms of self-reported church-attendance. Some pay attention simply to religious affiliation. Other investigations are more demanding: they may consider family structure and religious involvement, salience of religion for the individuals included in the sample, and religious activities in addition to weekly church attendance. With respect to crime and deviance, most studies rely on self-reporting on questionnaires. Nearly all recent studies control for race, social class, and gender.²⁸

²⁷ Anthropologist James Hopewell writes, “Common as they are in several religious traditions, congregations have never dominated the totality of the world’s local religious organizations. Human groups more frequently express their faith through corporate forms other than the congregation.” And what exactly is the congregation? Hopewell offers this definition: “A congregation is a group that possesses a special name and recognized members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practiced worship but who communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of conduct, outlook, and story. James F. Hopewell, Congregation: Stories and Structures (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 12, 12-13. The many studies that use attendance as a measure of religiosity have in mind regular participation in such congregations.

²⁸ Before the 1970s, much research was methodologically flawed. One reviewer of research on the connections between religion and behavior commented, “Most research fails to meet the minimal standards for valid inference, much less for canons of causal inference.” Gary D. Bouma, “Assessing the Impact of Religion: A Critical Review,” Sociological Analysis 31 (Fall 1970), 172. See also Richard D. Knudten and Mary S. Knudten, “Juvenile Delinquency, Crime, and Religion,” Review of Religious Research 12 (Spring 1971): 130-152.

Does religion actually curb deviant behavior? In 1969, two sociologists shocked their professional colleagues when they claimed to have shown that it does not.²⁹ If they are right, a study of religious moral teaching might be interesting, but would have little practical import. Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark surveyed junior high and senior high students in California, inquiring about religion and deviant behaviors; the investigators also reviewed police records on boys included in the original sample. Their conclusion was that neither doctrine (e.g., belief in the Devil or punishment in a future life) nor religious participation (church attendance) had any impact on behavior.

Children who attend church are no more likely than non-attenders to respect conventional authority; they are much more likely to believe in the literal existence of the Devil and a life after death. Those variables affected by church attendance, however, are unrelated to the commission of delinquent acts, while those variables strongly related to delinquency are unaffected by church attendance.³⁰

This was not what the authors expected to find, but the conclusion seemed unavoidable. Stark, believing that the study had closed the case, abandoned the topic for several years.³¹

²⁹ Travis Hirschi and Rodney Stark, "Hellfire and Delinquency," Social Problems 17 (Fall 1969): 202-213.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

³¹ Rodney Stark, "Religion and Conformity," Sociological Analysis 45 (Winter 1984): 274-282.

Other investigators continued to explore the relationship of religion and delinquency. Although Steven Burkett and Mervin White confirmed some of Hirschi and Stark's findings, they introduced an important distinction.³² While Hirschi and Stark had looked for "offenses against persons and crimes," the new investigation also considered "victimless" crimes, and it found "a moderately strong relationship between religion and the use of marijuana and alcohol."³³ According to Burkett and White, the earlier study assumed that society condemns all delinquent acts equally, but they disagreed: although some "influential secular spokesmen" condoned delinquent acts related to alcohol and marijuana, churches condemned them.³⁴

There is substantial support in the literature for Burkett and White's finding that religion influences some kinds of behavior, especially the use of alcohol and drugs.³⁵ An earlier investigation had distinguished between "anti-social" actions

³² Steven R. Burkett and Mervin White. "Hellfire and Delinquency: Another Look," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 13:4 (December 1974): 455-462. Like Hirschi's and Stark's project, this was a study of high school students, but in the Pacific Northwest.

³³ Ibid., 455.

³⁴ Ibid., 456.

³⁵ It is interesting to note that few studies mention a specific teaching by any church that condemns the use of alcohol or drugs. Perhaps the various authors simply assume that all churches reject the use of alcohol. This was never the position of the Roman Catholic Church, or, for that matter, of the Episcopal Church. While some Christian groups do prohibit the use of alcoholic beverages, an investigation of the links between religion and deviance should pay closer attention to the actual stance of specific religious bodies.

and “anti-ascetic” actions, including drinking. Religious believers were more likely than religious skeptics to disapprove of, and refrain from, anti-ascetic behaviors, but there was no difference between the two groups with respect to anti-social behaviors.³⁶ According to Burkett, the more involved a youngster and the child’s parents are in religious activities, the more likely the child will be to hold religious beliefs that reject the use of marijuana and alcohol.³⁷ A study of Mormon teenagers found that church strictures against the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs clearly influenced behavior.³⁸ Another investigation of adolescents considered denominational differences, and reported that young Mormons are much less likely than Protestants or Catholics to report drinking, drunkenness or smoking; the authors suggested that scholars should look at the variety of moral messages presented by different denominations.³⁹ In a study of

³⁶ Russell Middleton and Snell Putney, “Religion, Normative Standards, and Behavior,” Sociometry 15 (June 1962): 141-152.

³⁷ Steven R. Burkett, “Religion, Parental Influence, and Adolescent Alcohol and Marijuana Use,” Journal of Drug Issues 7 (Summer 1977): 263-273.

³⁸ Stan L. Albrecht, Bruce A. Chadwick, and David S. Alcorn, “Religiosity and Deviance: Application of an Attitude-Behavior Contingent Consistency Model,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 16 (September 1977): 263-274.

³⁹ Gary F. Jensen and Maynard L. Erickson, “The Religious Factor and Delinquency: Another Look at the Hellfire Hypothesis,” in Robert Wuthnow, ed., The Religious Dimension: New Directions in Quantitative Research (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 157-177. Although the authors said that denomination was important, they effectively treated “Protestants” as a single denomination alongside Roman Catholics and Mormons.

adults, a team of researchers found that the impact of religiosity on alcohol use is greatest in denominations which strongly oppose the use of alcohol.⁴⁰ More recent scholarship supports these earlier findings: an investigation which found much of the relationship between religion and delinquency to be “spurious” nevertheless acknowledged that the relationship is still significant for the use of substances like alcohol and tobacco.⁴¹

A number of studies have looked for connections between religion and sexual behavior. A longitudinal study of University of Wisconsin students in the 1960s found that friends had the most powerful influence on students’ sexual behavior, but researchers also discovered that students’ religious values limited premarital sexual activity.⁴² In the 1970s, a team of researchers interested in the transmission of values from parents to children studied families from Baptist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic households. The researchers concluded that denominations have somewhat *more* influence than parents do in the formation

⁴⁰ E. Wilbur Bock, John K. Cochran, and Leonard Beeghley, “Moral Messages: The Relative Influence of Denomination on the Religiosity-Alcohol Relationship,” Sociological Quarterly 28 (Spring 1987): 89-103. Episcopalians are superlative drinkers: 87 per cent of them imbibe, holding a slim lead over Roman Catholics, of whom 86 per cent enjoy a drink. Among Presbyterians, only 78 per cent are drinkers (95).

⁴¹ John K. Cochran, Peter B. Wood, and Bruce J. Arneklev, “Is the Religiosity-Delinquency Relationship Spurious? A Test of Arousal and Social Control Theories,” Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 31 (February 1994): 92-123.

⁴² Barbara Schulz, George W. Bohrnstedt, Edgar F. Borgatta, and Robert R. Evans, “Explaining Premarital Sexual Intercourse among College Students: A Causal Model,” Social Forces 56 (September 1977): 148-165.

of children's religious and moral values.⁴³ A study of college students found a negative relationship between religiosity and sexual experience for both males and females.⁴⁴ Another college study found that students' sexual behavior was influenced by what they thought their friends were doing, although religiosity also had some impact.⁴⁵ Freshmen attending colleges affiliated with the Churches of Christ were the subjects in still another investigation. Available data indicate that Americans became more accepting of premarital sex between the 1960s and the early 1980s, but the students included in this study turned out to be very different in their religion and their sexual behavior from most previous samples. Many of them participated in religious activities more than once a week. For the sample as a whole, rates of premarital sexual activity were lower than those reported in most surveys. The investigators found that a number of factors were involved:

⁴³ Dean R. Hoge, Gregory H. Petrillo, and Ella I. Smith, "Transmission of Religious and Social Values from Parents to Teenage Children," Journal of Marriage and the Family 44 (August 1982): 569-580. With respect to sexual ethics, however, the adolescents were far more liberal than their parents and, presumably, far more permissive than their churches. A more recent study looks at the intergenerational transfer of religiosity, and finds that three variables affect that transmission: the religiosity of parents, the quality of family relationships, and a traditional family structure. Scott M. Myers, "An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context," American Sociological Review 61 (October 1996): 858-866.

⁴⁴ E. R. Mahoney, "Religiosity and Sexual Behavior among Heterosexual College Students," Journal of Sex Research 16 (February 1980): 97-113.

⁴⁵ Alan R. Sack, James F. Keller, and Denise E. Hinkle, "Premarital Sexual Intercourse: A Test of the Effects of Peer Group, Religiosity, and Sexual Guilt," Journal of Sex Research 20 (May 1984): 168-185. The authors suggest that religion might have shown a stronger influence if they had used different measures for religiosity (181-182).

the students' religious views and behavior were important, but so was the degree of religious involvement by their parents.⁴⁶ A study of students at a small Southern Baptist college found evidence that students were probably more conservative on sexual matters than their counterparts at public universities; the research also found church attendance to be related to sexual attitudes and behavior.⁴⁷ Another study of students at a university with a Baptist affiliation reported that "church attitudes" had no impact on sexual attitudes and behavior or contraceptive behavior.⁴⁸ But the research design was flawed; the authors acknowledge a "failure to consider the subjects' devoutness."⁴⁹ Studies of this sort normally employ measures of religiosity.

Very significant for the present investigation is a study that investigated a link between religion and contraceptive practices by unmarried teenagers. The researchers found that adolescents with strong religious commitments were less likely than other youths to engage in premarital intercourse. But when such youths did engage in premarital sex, they were *less* likely than adolescents who

⁴⁶ J. Timothy Woodroff, "Premarital Sexual Behavior and Religious Adolescents," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 24 (1985): 343-66.

⁴⁷ Michael Young, "A Look at Sexual Mores in a Church-Related College," Health Education 10 (January/February 1979): 20-22.

⁴⁸ Linda R. Daugherty and Jerry M. Burger, "The Influence of Parents, Church, and Peers on the Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors of College Students," Archives of Sexual behavior 13 (1984): 351-359.

⁴⁹ Daugherty and Burger, "The Influence of Parents, Church and Peers," 357.

seldom attended church to employ an effective, medical method of contraception. The authors suggest that highly religious adolescents may avoid contraceptive methods that require advance planning because they have trouble acknowledging to themselves their intention to violate religious moral standards.⁵⁰ A study of college students in Israel looked for relationships between religiosity and sexual behavior, and found that females “were sexually active and used contraception in inverse relationship to their degree of religiosity. There was no parallel finding for males.”⁵¹ Among adults in the United States, religious affiliation and activity are related to contraceptive practice, even though the fertility rates and contraceptive practices of various groups are converging.⁵² In the 1960s, Protestants were more likely than Catholics to use contraception or sterilization, but by the 1980s the rates were essentially the same, yet there are

⁵⁰ Marlena Studer and Arland Thornton, “Adolescent Religiosity and Contraceptive Usage,” Journal of Marriage and the Family 49 (February 1987): 117-128. A later sociological study found that adolescents who regularly attended religious services and teens who considered religion important in their lives “tended to be more opposed to birth control” than other youths. Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker, “Adolescent Attitudes Towards Parental Sex-Roles, Family Size, and Birth Control (Ph. D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1996), 56.

⁵¹ Netta Notzer, David Levran, Shlomo Mashiach and Sarah Soffer, “Effect of Religiosity on Sex Attitudes, Experience and Contraception among University Students,” Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy 10 (1984): 57-62.

⁵² Calvin Goldscheider and William D. Mosher, “Patterns of Contraceptive Use in the United States: The Importance of Religious Factors,” Studies in Family Planning 22 (March/April 1991): 102-115.

still differences between the groups with respect to contraceptive methods and to the levels of male and female sterilization.⁵³

A 1991 study found that religious heritage influences pre-marital sexual behavior among white youths. Young people from “institutionalized sects” (mostly Pentecostals, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses) were the least likely to engage in premarital sex. Fundamentalists and Baptists were more likely to do so, but not nearly as likely as Mainline Protestants.⁵⁴ These findings are consistent with earlier studies that showed Mormons to be more likely than others to disapprove of and avoid premarital sexual intercourse.⁵⁵ Another recent study examined the links between sexual behavior, church attendance, and moral beliefs about sexual activity. This study of single men and women (mostly college students) found a most interesting relationship. Among persons

⁵³ Goldscheider and Mosher, “Patterns of Contraceptive Use,” 104-105.

⁵⁴ Scott H. Beck, Bettie S. Cole, and Judith A. Hammond, “Religious Heritage and Premarital Sex: Evidence from a National Sample of Young Adults,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 30 (1991): 173-180. This study is one of the few that claims that religious *affiliation* has a significant effect on behavior. But the definition of affiliation seems to include an assumption about active participation: “Most likely, what appears to distinguish the Institutionalized Sects from Baptists and other Fundamentalists, as well as from Mainline Protestants and Catholics, is the level of commitment and social integration engendered by experiences, expectations, and involvement that may generally create higher levels of adherence to principles of faith” (179). The study relies on 1979 and 1983 data from the national Longitudinal Surveys of Youth.

⁵⁵ See Wilford E. Smith, “Mormon Sex Standards on College Campuses, Or Deal Us Out of the Sexual Revolution,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 10 (1976): 76-81; and Harold T. Christensen, “Mormon Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 10 (1976): 62-75.

who both attended church at least once a week and strongly disapproved of premarital sexual activity, such behavior was relatively rare. But there was also a group of regular churchgoers who believed that sex with affection was morally acceptable, and for this group premarital sexual activity was relatively high.⁵⁶ One implication of this study is that scholars should consider moral beliefs as well as church attendance; one must not assume that all churchgoers share a single view of sexual morality. The significance of church teaching is also suggested by an investigation that asked about the sexual behavior of Mormon adults, comparing it to that of Catholics, Jews, Conservative Protestants, and Moderate Protestants. The Mormon Church strongly condemns sexual activity apart from marriage; the study showed that Mormons disapprove of premarital sex and are much less likely to engage in it than are members of other religious groups.⁵⁷

A number of studies have examined the views of various religious groups on sexual morality. A political scientist investigating the relationship between religious beliefs and political attitudes found that sex and gender issues might be

⁵⁶ Larry Jensen, Rea J. Newell, and Tom Holman, "Sexual Behavior, Church Attendance, and Permissive Beliefs Among Unmarried Young Men and Women," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 29 (March 1990): 113-117.

⁵⁷ Thomas B. Homan and John Harding, "The Teaching of Nonmarital Sexual Abstinence and Members' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors: The Case of Latter-Day Saints," Review of Religious Research 38 (September 1996): 51-60. The broad religious-group categories were based on the typology presented by Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney in American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

important enough to Evangelical Christians to “constrain” their political attitudes. For Evangelicals, the issues of marriage, feminism, and abortion are closely related, but this is not always the case for Catholics and mainline Protestants.⁵⁸ Two sociologists reached a similar conclusion when they denied that America is now divided into conservative and progressive theological-political camps. The division is real enough with respect to education, abortion, sexuality, and gender roles, but does not extend to questions of racial or economic justice.⁵⁹ Another investigation found that evaluations of President Clinton during his first year in office were strongly influenced by a “traditional family values perspective.” This

⁵⁸ Ted G. Jelen, “Religious Belief and Attitude Constraint,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 29 (March 1990): 118-125. Jelen’s interest was in the broad issue of *attitude constraint*, the “internal consistency among issue attitudes [which] has long been regarded as a measure of belief system sophistication” (119). He wanted to determine whether voters responded to the broad political programs embodied in Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and Joseph Cardinal Bernardin’s notion of a “consistent ethics of life.” Using data from the NORC General Social Survey for 1988, Jelen divided the sample into Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Evangelical Protestants (120). His chief conclusion was that “there was little evidence that membership in a general religious tradition is a meaningful source of attitude consistency” (124). The only exception was the marked tendency of Evangelicals “to regard sex outside of marriage, feminism, and abortion as part of the same general issue area” (122).

⁵⁹ Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson, “Are the Rumors of War Exaggerated? Religious Orthodoxy and Moral Progressivism in America,” American Journal of Sociology 3 (November 1996): 756-787. See also Nancy J. Davis and Robert V. Robinson, “Religious Orthodoxy in America: The Myth of a Monolithic Camp,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 35 (September 1996): 229-245. But a study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that the more religious people are, the more politically conservative they are likely to be, not only on social issues like abortion or homosexuality, but even on issues such as international security. Ted Olsen, “Religiosity Often Equals Conservatism,” Christianity Today 40 (August 12, 1996), 61.

perspective, usually grounded in religious fundamentalism, was often the main reason why people defined themselves as political conservatives.⁶⁰ Still another recent study by two sociologists found that conservative Protestants who attend church regularly have remained steadfast in their views about premarital sex while other social groups have changed theirs. Conservative Protestants who attend church regularly were just as critical of premarital sex in 1993 as they were in 1972, but support for traditional beliefs declined among mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Conservative Protestants who rarely go to church.⁶¹ The authors propose that both plausibility structures and belief systems are important: church-going conservative Protestants belong to communities that insist on clear moral teaching and provide strong social support for that teaching.⁶²

⁶⁰ Stephen D. Johnson and Joseph B. Tamney, "The Political Impact of Traditional Family Values," Sociological Focus 29 (May 1996): 125-134.

⁶¹ Larry R. Petersen and Gregory V. Donnenwerth, "Secularization and the Influence of Religion on Beliefs about Premarital Sex," Social Forces 75 (March 1997): 1071-1089. The study is based on the NORC General Social Surveys for the years 1972 to 1993 (1086). For these authors, Conservative Protestants are members of Baptist, Church of Christ, Assembly of God, and Nazarene churches. Mainline Protestants include the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Disciples of Christ (Christian) churches (1077). Their findings apply only to whites; the authors eliminated blacks because conservative black Protestants turn out to be much more liberal than whites with respect to premarital sex (1086).

⁶² The concept of "plausibility structures" was introduced into the sociology of religion by Peter Berger to make the point that people need social and institutional support to remain loyal to religious ideas. For a summary of Berger's concept, see Petersen and Donnenwerth, "Secularization and the Influence of Religion on Beliefs About Premarital Sex," 1072-73.

A study of Florida churches in the 1980s found that churches have a powerful influence on the formation of political outlooks.⁶³ Churches allow the communication of political messages in many different ways, some direct (“sermons, pastoral messages, adult education classes, poster displays, and church publications”), others indirect (e.g., “attitudes toward authority, knowledge, the requirements for salvation”). In addition to these official influences, church members influence one another’s political thinking “through conversation and other modes of social intercourse.”⁶⁴ The study found that the “theological climate in the churches” contributed “strongly to the members’ political conservatism over and above the personal commitment of respondents to traditional Christian values and a variety of social and attitudinal variables.”⁶⁵ An important part of this research was the classification of responses on a “moral conservatism” scale. Of the ten questions asked, nine deal with gender roles, sexuality, family matters, or pornography.⁶⁶ This study seems to provide further

⁶³ Kenneth D. Wald, Dennis E. Owen, and Samuel S. Hill, Jr., “Churches as Political Communities,” American Political Science Review 82 (June 1988): 531-548.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 533.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 531.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 546-547. The questions deal with the banning of objectionable books and movies; the availability of birth control devices to all who want them; equality of legal rights for men and women; objections to television shows disparaging of traditional family values; the happiness of women who stay home to raise children; miscegenation laws; the legitimacy of abortion; the moral evaluation of cohabitation; and the rights of homosexuals to engage in consensual

evidence of a close relationship between church participation and attitudes on this cluster of issues.

The literature on religion and behavior has treated other topics as well. Two investigators reported a relationship between religion and rape: the higher the percentage of Catholics in a given population, the lower the incidence of rape.⁶⁷ A number of studies have looked for relationships between religion and suicide, a natural focus given the important contribution of Durkheim to the study of self-slaughter. Rodney Stark and two colleagues found that religion has a potent effect on suicide rates in the United States, and argued that the religious effects cannot be reduced to social integration alone.⁶⁸ A study conducted in Germany found that support for suicide drops with church attendance and with a Roman Catholic affiliation.⁶⁹ Another investigator provided evidence of a significant decline in institutionalized religion in the United States between 1954 and 1978, and found a sharp increase in the suicide rate for the same period.

relations. The only exception to this pattern is a single question about the legal status of marijuana.

⁶⁷ Steven Stack and Mary Jeanne Kanavy, "The Effect of Religion on Forcible Rape: A Structural Analysis," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 22 (March 1983): 67-74.

⁶⁸ Rodney Stark, Daniel P. Doyle, and Jesse Lynn Rushing, "Beyond Durkheim: Religion and Suicide," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 22 (1983), 120-131. See also Stark, "Religion and Conformity," 278.

⁶⁹ Michael Siegrist, "Church Attendance, Denomination, and Suicide Ideology," Journal of Social Psychology 136 (October 1996): 559-566.

The greatest increase in the suicide rate was for persons between 15 and 20 years of age, the very group that showed the steepest decline in church attendance. This study also considered unemployment and military participation. Suicide rates increased with unemployment and dropped with military participation; even allowing for these factors, the relationship between religion and suicide stands out.⁷⁰

Although Hirschi and Stark argued in 1969 that there is no link between religion and deviance, we have seen that many subsequent studies found a connection. In 1984, Stark modified his position and sought to explain why it was that researchers could miss the association. Stark proposed that only a strictly *sociological* investigation could find the link, while a psychological inquiry would miss it. Religion does produce conformity, the older and wiser Stark contended, yet it does not do so “through producing guilt or fear of hellfire in the individual.” Instead, “religion gains its power to shape the individual only as an aspect of groups.” Stark now maintained that it makes no difference whether an individual youth attends church or believes in the reality of hell. “What is critical is whether the *majority* of the kid’s *friends* are religious.” If most children in a community are religious, delinquency levels will be low even for non-religious kids. If the majority of young people are not religious, “religion will not inhibit the behavior even of those teenagers who personally are religious.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Steven Stack, “The Effect of the Decline in Institutionalized Religion on Suicide, 1954-1978,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 22 (1983): 239-252.

Stark's revised position could have major implications for the effectiveness of church moral teaching. If he is right, then such teaching can influence even non-members, but only where religion is a dominant force. When religion is a minority force, even religious youths are not influenced in their behavior by religious teachings.⁷² For the purposes of this investigation, the important thing to note is that Stark is one of several scholars whose work points to the importance of social phenomena.⁷³ If religious moral teachings have any impact

⁷¹ Stark, "Religion and Conformity," 274, 275. But there is some evidence that individual religious attitudes *do* influence behavior. In 1964, a researcher reported on the strategy of parental control over children through "coalitions with God." Parents tell children that God will punish them if they misbehave; these coalitions have an effect on the child's personality and behavior. The researcher argued that parents who resorted to divine coalitions were usually ineffectual within their families and relatively powerless within the larger society. Clyde Z. Nunn, "Child-Control through a 'Coalition with God,'" Child Development 35 (1964): 417-432. Twenty years later, two researchers largely confirmed Nunn's findings, except that they did not find that use of the coalition techniques was associated mostly with powerless parents. However, fundamentalists were more likely than others to appeal to God. Hart M. Nelsen and Alice Krociczak, "Parental Use of the Threat 'God will Punish': Replication and Extension," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 23 (1984): 267-277.

⁷² A very different view of the influence of religion has been proposed by Charles R. Tittle and Michael R. Welch, who contend that religious constraints have the greatest effect when secular controls are *minimal*. Charles R. Tittle and Michael R. Welch, "Religiosity and Deviance: Toward a Contingency Theory of Constraining Effects," Social Forces 61 (March 1983): 653-682. John K. Cochran has argued, with respect to alcohol and marijuana use, that Stark's view is more accurate. John K., Cochran, "The Effects of Religiosity on Adolescent Self-Reported Frequency of Drug and Alcohol Use," The Journal of Drug Issues 22 (Winter 1992): 91-104.

⁷³ One of the successor studies to Hirschi's and Stark's 1969 article proposed that regional variations might affect research findings. The Hirschi-Stark article was based on a California study; a later investigation in Georgia came to somewhat different conclusions. See Paul C.

on behavior, they do not achieve their effects by influencing isolated individuals. Most of the studies reviewed here have focused on religious participation, usually measured by church attendance, rather than mere affiliation.⁷⁴ Some have stressed different factors such as the individual's involvement in activities in addition to Sunday worship and the influence of parents and peers, while other studies have found that denominations and/or religious traditions influence individual attitudes and behaviors.⁷⁵

Higgins and Gary L. Albrecht, "Hellfire and Delinquency Revisited," Social Forces 55 (June 1977): 952-958. Rodney Stark and two colleagues accepted this suggestion. See Rodney Stark, Lori Kent, and Daniel P. Doyle, "Religion and Delinquency: The Ecology of a 'Lost' Relationship," Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 19 (January 1982): 4-24. For a very different perspective, one that interprets deviance in terms of "arousal theory," please see Appendix X, "Religion, Arousal Theory and Deviant Behavior."

⁷⁴ Some thirty years ago a sociologist warned that research on religion runs into problems if it assumes both that theology is the principal source of religious behavior and that individuals go through life trying to apply their theological views to their attitudes and actions. Richard H. White, "Toward a Theory of Religious Influence," Pacific Sociological Review 11 (Spring 1968), 24. When researchers classify someone as a Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, they "are, in effect trying to ascertain the theological doctrine of the individual." When they look for indicators of commitment, the underlying assumption is "that theology is the primary source of religious influence *and* that the strength of commitment to that theology leads the individual to discover its implications for other areas of life and to act accordingly" (24, 25). But White believes researchers would do better to employ "an interaction model of religious influence." Religion is primarily "a group phenomenon." Every group has "a particular *normative* structure." The norms are "enforced by sanctions." Members enforce these sanctions, "*in interaction with one another*" (25, 26). The basic point is that research on religion should pay attention to "the normative pressure of interpersonal expectations" (28).

⁷⁵ It would take us too far afield to investigate all the ways in which religious groups may shape behavior. Two sociologists have suggested that there are four processes that may lead to behavioral conformity in religious groups: (1) Religious training may result in the internalization of important norms. (2) Religious groups may function as reference groups for their members. (3)

Religion does not merely influence deviant behavior: it also affects how some people attempt to prevent or respond to deviance. One group of researchers studying juvenile court personnel found that Christian fundamentalist ideas are often associated with racial and gender stereotypes. This combination affects a person's orientation toward punishment: court employees with this conservative orientation⁷⁶ are more likely than others to favor a strict juvenile court and to support the death penalty for serious offenses.⁷⁷ Another study,

Behavior that violates community standards, may cause embarrassment, or even invite formal sanctions. (4) When people are heavily involved in religious activities, they may not have many opportunities for deviance. See Christopher G. Ellison and Darren E. Sherkat, "Is Sociology the Core Discipline for the Scientific Study of Religion?" *Social Forces* 73 (June 1995): 1255-1266. Two psychologists have suggested that religion restricts deviant behavior in individuals in several ways: (1) Participation in religious activities involves an individual in conventional activities and sanctioning networks, and so reinforces personal controls. (2) Religious teachings encourage "an awareness of moral issues and of standards for appropriate conduct." (3) Religious teaching about God can influence control: the God of love deserves emulation, while the God of wrath punishes wrongdoing. (4) Emotional religious experience may "generate a devoutness or reverence resulting in an obedience orientation." John Rohrbaugh and Richard Jessor, "Religiosity In Youth: A Personal Control Against Deviant Behavior," *Journal of Personality* 43 (March 1975): 137.

⁷⁶ The word "conservative" is used frequently in the article. Perhaps this is a rhetorical trick designed to associate political and religious conservatives with racism and sexism.

⁷⁷ Michael J. Leiber, Anne C. Woodrick, and E. Michelle Roudebush, "Religion, Discriminatory Attitudes and the Orientations of Juvenile Justice Personnel: A Research Note," *Criminology* 33 (August 1995): 431-449. On the links between fundamentalism and discrimination against certain groups, see Sam G. McFarland, "Religious Orientations and the Targets of Discrimination," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28 (1989): 324-336. Fundamentalism was correlated with discriminatory attitudes toward blacks, women, homosexuals, and communists – although Biblical teaching of human equality tended to counteract discriminatory attitudes toward blacks.

following up an earlier finding that some people consider crimes of many kinds to be equally wrong morally, found that such “nondiscriminators” are usually conservative Protestants. These are individuals for whom religion is very important, and whose ideas include belief in the literal truth of the Bible and the reality of the Devil.⁷⁸

Conservative Protestants want to prevent deviant behavior in the first place, and they are apparently more willing than others to use corporal punishment when disciplining children. A sociologist reviewed major conservative Protestant writings on child-rearing practices and found that they recommend corporal punishment, though not for very young children or adolescents, and not apart from love and nurture of young persons.⁷⁹ A team of researchers found clear evidence that parents who hold conservative scriptural

On fundamentalism and discriminatory attitudes, see also Lee A. Kirkpatrick, “Fundamentalism, Christian Orthodoxy, and Religious Orientation as Predictors of Discriminatory Attitudes,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 32 (September 1993): 256-268. Kirkpatrick distinguishes between “fundamentalism” and “Christian orthodoxy,” and finds that only fundamentalism is positively related to a number of discriminatory attitudes.

⁷⁸ Theodore R. Curry, “Conservative Protestantism and the Perceived Wrongfulness of Crime: A Research Note,” Criminology 34 (August 1996): 453-464.

⁷⁹ John P. Bartkowski, “Spare the Rod..., Or Spare the Child? Divergent Perspectives in Conservative Protestant Child Discipline,” Review of Religious Research 37 (December 1995): 97-116.

views use corporal punishment more often than do parents of less theologically conservative views.⁸⁰

Unfortunately, there have been hardly any studies that ask how well informed church members are about the specific moral teachings of their denominations, or seek to determine how influential those teachings are with respect to actual behavior. Two social workers have proposed that religious attitudes about sexuality are relevant to clinical practice, and they suggest that “ecclesiastical statements regarding sexuality provide a beginning knowledge base for assessment of client attitudes.”⁸¹ Regrettably, the authors did not seek to discover “how or to what extent policy statements affect sexual behavior among adherents;” they simply “assumed that assessing the influence of religious policy on a case-by-case basis is part of the clinician’s professional responsibility.” They also point out that denominational policy statements change, sometimes frequently.⁸² Clearly these researchers cannot help us to find a relationship between official teaching and behavior.⁸³

⁸⁰ Christopher G. Ellison, John P. Bartkowski, and Michelle L. Segal, “Conservative Protestantism and the Parental Use of Corporal Punishment,” Social Forces 74 (March 1996): 1003-1028.

⁸¹ Ronald K. Bullis and Marcia P. Harrigan, “Religious Denominational Policies on Sexuality,” Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services 73 (May 1992), 304.

⁸² Bullis and Harrigan, “Religious Denominational Policies on Sexuality,” 306.

⁸³ There are significant research possibilities. An investigation could identify church teachings on sexual issues and survey church members to determine the level of members’ knowledge of those teachings as well as members’ attitudes and behaviors. At present, I am not aware of any

Much more helpful is a sociological study that considers “how institutionalized myths and rituals of ecclesiastical authority influence members’ behavior and attitudes toward organizational policy.” Hierarchical and decentralized polities take different approaches to informing members about church policy.⁸⁴ Mike McMullen examined Roman Catholics and members of the United Church of Christ; the first church has an episcopal polity and a hierarchical structure, while the second has a congregational polity and a decentralized structure.⁸⁵ In a study conducted in the Atlanta area, he found that

studies of this kind. One investigation of denominations in American Judaism concluded that there are “substantial differences between the denominational groups in the ethno-religious behavior and orientations of their affiliates.” Michael I. Harrison and Bernard Lazerwitz, “Do Denominations Matter? American Journal of Sociology 88 (September 1982), 369. But this research was not focused on sexual attitudes or behavior. A comparative study involving both Australia and the United States found that religious involvement influenced some sexual behaviors by women, and was associated with much lower rates of marital infidelity. Robert R. Bell, “Religious Involvement and Marital Sex in Australia and the United States,” Journal of Comparative Family Studies 5 (Autumn 1974): 109-116. One clinical case report considers how religious views contribute to some problems of sexual functioning and occasionally influence the course of therapy. Only six cases are involved, however, and there is no reference to specific denominations. William S. Simpson and Joanne A. Ramberg, “The Influence of Religion on Sexuality: Implications for Sex Therapy, Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic 56 (Fall 1992): 511-523.

⁸⁴ Mike McMullen, “Religious Polities as Institutions,” Social Forces 73 (December 1994), 709.

⁸⁵ McMullen says that the United Church of Christ (UCC) has a congregational polity, but that may not be exactly right. The UCC is the result of a 1957 merger that made ecumenism the base of the new denomination. The merger was somewhat difficult because one party to it had a history of localized power, the other a tradition of centralized power. Gretchen E. Ziegenhals, “Unity Theme Triumphs at UCC Synod,” Christian Century 106 (July 19, 1989), 676. A recent book about the UCC argued that the keys to its polity are ecumenism and “covenantalism,” a bold vision about how to share power and authority in evangelical ways, so that the voices of ‘center

denominational polity influences the degree to which members become aware of organizational policy.⁸⁶ McMullen made two significant discoveries. First of all, faith was more important in the personal lives of Catholics than it was in the lives of UCC members; Catholics were more committed, and more loyal, to their church.⁸⁷ Secondly, the nature of church participation is very different for the two groups. Catholics were more likely to have represented their church at a meeting beyond the parish level, and were also more likely to have participated in a parish-level discussion of social issues. But UCC members were more likely to have been involved with local committees and organizations, and more likely to have held a church office within the previous five years.⁸⁸ These differences correspond to differing views of church authority: "In every case, Catholic respondents attribute much more authority to the upper levels of their church

and margin' may communicate in trust and responsiveness," Walter Brueggemann, [Review of] United and Uniting: The Meaning of an Ecclesial Journey by Louis H. Gunnemann, in Theology Today 45 (July 1988): 236-239.

⁸⁶ McMullen, "Religious Polities as Institutions," 710. McMullen sought to discover "how polity, as an institution, differently mobilizes individual interest in, and knowledge of, a denomination's policy on economic injustice." In 1986, Roman Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter entitled "Economic Justice For All." In 1985, the General Synod declared the UCC to be a "Just Peace Church."

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 716.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

hierarchy than do their UCC counterparts. Apparently, Catholics acknowledge organizational authority, and UCC members recognize local church autonomy."⁸⁹

Church members may pay attention to the official teachings of their denomination, but it seems that their awareness of such teachings depends on church structure, or polity. Moreover, the kind of structure found in a church seems to influence members' views of ecclesiastical authority. For some kinds of Christians, all ethics may be local, while for others moral guidance comes from a respected hierarchy.

The literature reviewed here does not show a consensus on very many points. It is safe to say, however, that nearly all studies have found that religious communities and traditions influence at least some behavior, especially with respect to sex, alcohol, and marijuana.⁹⁰ In some cases, researchers found that particular denominations influence both attitudes and behavior. Given the reality of such influence, it should be well worth our while to ask exactly what churches teach on moral topics and to inquire how they arrive at such teachings. And so we return to the issue with which we began, the capacity of American churches to formulate clear moral teachings.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 717.

⁹⁰ For a brief survey of the broad impact of religion on social life, see Ellison and Sherkat, "Is Sociology the Core Discipline for the Scientific Study of Religion?" They mention sociological studies which show that religion frequently promotes mental and physical health.

III. Moral Conflict and the Peril of Schism

The most divisive moral questions in mainline Protestantism today have to do with sexuality and gender. Does it matter that a church cannot make up its mind on a matter such as this? Would confusion in one area be all right if there is a moral and theological consensus in other matters?⁹¹ Disagreements over sexuality matter a great deal because churches can exercise strong discipline on some of the moral issues. Sociologist Mark Chaves points out that one part of a denominational organization is its "religious authority structure," which "performs the basic function of controlling access to religious goods."⁹² Building on Max Weber's treatments of religion, power, and denomination, Chaves argues that "at the heart of religious organizations is *not* religion but religious authority,"⁹³ which is "a social structure that attempts to enforce its order and reach its ends by

⁹¹ There may indeed be a consensus on many important points. When the treasurer of the Episcopal Church embezzled a large sum of money in the early 1990s, no one made excuses for her, and she went to prison. The commandment "Thou shalt not steal" is not under attack in the Episcopal Church. There is probably unanimity on certain convictions about human equality, too. It is hard to imagine that Episcopalians today would agree to any view that some groups of people are inferior to and/or naturally subordinate to others (women to men, slaves to masters, Africans to Europeans, and so on).

⁹² Mark Chaves, "Intraorganizational Power and Internal Secularization in Protestant Denominations," American Journal of Sociology 99:1 (July 1993), 8.

⁹³ Mark Chaves, "Denominations as Dual Structures: An Organizational Analysis," Sociology of Religion 54:2 (Summer 1993), 148.

controlling the access of individuals to some desired good, where the legitimation of that control includes some supernatural component, however weak.”⁹⁴

Churches control access to at least two valued things: ordinations and church weddings. In the Episcopal Church, entry into the ordained ministry is difficult. An individual’s sense of calling is but a first step; the call must be confirmed through the church at the local and diocesan levels, and the prospective priest or deacon must satisfy numerous requirements spelled out in church law.⁹⁵ The Episcopal Church exercises a certain amount of discipline with respect to marriage, too, generally requiring pre-marital counseling or preparation, and making the remarriage of divorced persons subject to the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149. Chaves’s concern is quite different from ours in the present study. He distinguishes between two aspects of a denomination, its “religious authority structure” and its “agency structure,” which deals with material resources (“Intraorganizational Power and Internal Secularization,” 9). According to Chaves, the phenomenon of “internal secularization” has to do with a struggle for control over material resources; over time, the religious authority structure tends to lose its control of resources to an agency structure, which manages resources such as pensions, Sunday School materials, and the like. To some extent, this analysis makes sense of certain developments in twentieth century American Protestantism. In the last twenty years, for example, a crucial aspect of the battle for control of the Southern Baptist Convention was the struggle to control the denomination’s powerful agencies. But this is not the main issue in the Episcopal Church. The most acute conflicts are over access to “religious goods,” and most concerns about “secularization” have to do with threats to the integrity of church teaching. Even in the Southern Baptist case, the battle to control the agencies seems to have been driven by a desire to make sure that they endorsed the religious message of the new conservative leadership.

⁹⁵ On the requirements of for ordination, see the Church’s Constitution and Canons, as revised by the 1997 General Convention, Title III, Canons 4-9. Cited hereinafter as Constitution and Canons 1997.

approval of a bishop.⁹⁶ No one has a “right” to be married in the church; an ordained minister may refuse to perform a marriage.⁹⁷ Nor are marriage and ordination the only “religious goods” over which the church may exercise control. There are many leadership positions in the church that may be closed to persons who violate sexual norms. Exclusion from the fellowship of the church itself is a possibility.⁹⁸

Church discipline with respect to marriage and ordination is likely to be more effective than in other areas such as stewardship, not to mention on-the-job ethical performance, because the church can enforce its requirements, refusing ordination to some, and nuptial blessings to others. Confusion in sexual matters is a very serious problem: a church without both clear moral teachings and effective policies is unable to act precisely where a religious authority should

⁹⁶ In the Episcopal Church, marriage is governed by Title I, Canons 18 and 19 in Constitution and Canons 1997.

⁹⁷ “It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage.” Title I, Canon 19, Constitution and Canons 1997.

⁹⁸ Formal excommunication would be most unusual today, but informal sanctions, especially at the local level, are not. My own pastoral experience has taught me that. Cohabiting couples often won’t attend church, believing that their relationship status will make them unwelcome. They could be partly right. On one occasion, a person in such a relationship wanted to serve in a position which required an endorsement by the Vestry, the local governing body; I had to advise the couple that this endorsement was unlikely unless they married. Marry they did, and the endorsement was granted. In most congregations I have served, only the closet would be a secure place for a gay or lesbian person, yet such individuals certainly exist in the families of active church members.

have the greatest capacity for action. Not only does the church control the access of its own members to “religious goods,” but it may also influence non-members who attend special ceremonies, especially weddings. A church without clear boundaries on sexual matters may be unable to function as a moral guide to anyone at all.⁹⁹

The outcome of the trial of Bishop Walter Righter suggested that the Episcopal Church might have no coherent teaching with respect to homosexuality.¹⁰⁰ The official position of the Episcopal Church has been that

⁹⁹ Legal scholar Mary Ann Glendon has called attention to what may be called the “teaching function of the law.” American lawyers usually assume that law is effective only when it reflects a normative consensus, she says, and so they assume that law should be revised to make it correspond to social reality. Mary Ann Glendon, Abortion and Divorce in Western Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 58. But Glendon says this is a mistake. It is not necessary to wait for a consensus to write laws: “Law itself often assists in the formation of a consensus, by influencing the way people interpret the world around them as well as by communicating that certain values have a privileged place in society. We need only think here of the roles that the equality principle and the enactment of civil rights legislation have played in shaping our moral attitudes about racial discrimination” (51). What Glendon says about the law applies equally well, I suspect, to church teachings (and canon law). Moral teachings hold up certain patterns of life as normative, and persons inclined to heed the teaching authority of the church are likely to take these teachings in mind as they decide how to think or act. The lack of clear guidance may send the message that it does not really matter what one thinks or does.

¹⁰⁰ This trial is treated in chapter three, below. In brief, what happened was this: in 1995, ten bishops of the Episcopal Church filed a presentment against another bishop, Walter Righter, charging that he had contradicted church doctrine and broken his own ordination vows when he ordained a man whom he knew to be a non-celibate homosexual. An ecclesiastical court ruled in May 1996 that no church doctrine forbade such an ordination, and no church discipline barred it, either. On several occasions the Episcopal Church has stated that only celibates or married heterosexuals can be ordained, but the court found that these statements were only recommendations, and not binding policies.

ordination is closed to non-celibate members unless they are married to persons of the opposite sex. Bishop Righter disregarded this policy, claiming that it was only a recommendation, and the ecclesiastical court could find neither a denial of church doctrine nor a violation of church discipline. Yet no positive action by the Episcopal Church has ever authorized homosexual activity, marriages between persons of the same sex, or the ordination of persons sexually active apart from heterosexual marriage. On various occasions, the Episcopal Church has identified heterosexual marriage as the normative setting for sexual relations. As recently as 1991, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirmed its traditional position, but with a most important qualification: there is a “discontinuity” between the traditional teaching and the “experience” of many church members.¹⁰¹

Disagreements over homosexuality became so great that by 1997 responsible Episcopalians believe that they could lead to a schism. Stephen Noll, a professor at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Pennsylvania, wrote a short book in which he resolutely opposed same-sex marriage, or anything resembling it, as completely contrary to Biblical teaching and church tradition.¹⁰² How important is disagreement about homosexuality? “The division over this issue is, finally, a matter of spiritual warfare,” Noll contended. “There is no way

¹⁰¹ Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Teaching of the House of Bishops to the Church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 1995), 12.

¹⁰² Stephen F. Noll, Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Marriages. Solon, OH: Latimer Press, 1997.

to split the difference on this issue: both sides know this deep down."¹⁰³ Timothy Sedgwick, a professor of ethics at another Episcopalian seminary, believed that the church could legitimately bless same-sex relationships – and he, too, saw the possibility of division over the issue. One may hope that the church will arrive at a common understanding, Sedgwick declared, but such agreement is not always possible in this world.¹⁰⁴

In the absence of agreement, Sedgwick maintained, the management and resolution of conflict is the work of governance. Could adroit governance finesse such deep divisions? Not according to Sedgwick: "Regardless of the outcome, some individuals and communities will very likely find that as a matter of conscience they will have to separate themselves from the larger church."¹⁰⁵ The danger of division was evident also to observers of the Episcopal Church such as journalists Kenneth L. Woodward and Anne Underwood of Newsweek; shortly before the church's 1997 General Convention, they wrote that "Episcopalians are perilously close to ecclesiastical chaos." The most controversial issues were those concerned with sexual morality, especially the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁴ Timothy F. Sedgwick, "The Transformation of Sexuality and the Challenge of Conscience," in Charles Hefling, ed., Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1996), 27-42. With respect to the blessing of same-sex relationships, Sedgwick writes, "if what is normative in sexual relationships lies in covenants of love formed by a life together and not necessarily the ends of procreation and progeny, same-sex relationships may be blessed and celebrated" (36).

¹⁰⁵ Sedgwick, "The Transformation of Sexuality," 38

blessing of same-sex relationships. In a number of dioceses, schism was a distinct possibility.¹⁰⁶

If the dispute over homosexuality should lead to a parting of the ways, the result might be a church, or churches, with a clear position on this issue. Yet not even a schism could ensure that the Episcopal Church would provide clear moral guidance. In the only comprehensive study on the Episcopal Church's moral pronouncements, Robert Hood observed that this church is hardly systematic in its approach to moral teaching.¹⁰⁷ Moral teaching can come from the House of Bishops or from the church's triennial General Convention, but both bodies have always lacked "a tradition or historical awareness of being accountable to previous teachings and statements in matters of social concern."¹⁰⁸

When the Episcopal Church meets in synod, it "relies on predilection rather than recollection."¹⁰⁹ Moreover, this church does not make much use of its trained ethical thinkers. Episcopal Church synods "separate its seminary theologians

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth L. Woodward and Anne Underwood, "A House Divided: The Episcopal Church Struggles over Gay Marriage, Adulterous Clergy, and its own identity," Newsweek July 14, 1997. Obtained from Newsweek Online, July 10, 1997. The article mentions other causes of division, including tensions between "doctrinally indifferent Episcopalians and those who have been influenced by surging evangelical and Pentecostal movements within the church."

¹⁰⁷ Robert E. Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

from its corporate manager-pastors, i.e., the bishops, whose inclinations tend toward programs, crisis management, and action rather than careful deliberations and time-consuming, considered discussions about social teachings for the church.”¹¹⁰

Homosexuality may be an exceptionally difficult issue. The church is currently divided over proposals to modify, or even jettison, a traditional condemnation of all homosexual activity. There have been tough issues before, however. On a number of topics, the church has revised its moral teaching in the twentieth century. Once resolutely opposed to divorce, the Episcopal Church now allows the remarriage of divorced persons, subject to the approval of a diocesan bishop. After World War I, leaders of the Episcopal Church strongly opposed contraception, but the church eventually endorsed birth control as a morally appropriate practice for married couples.¹¹¹ If one allows that teachings may legitimately be revised, there could still be a problem with the way in which some

¹¹⁰ Ibid., xix.

¹¹¹ In 1961, the General Convention approved the following resolution: “Because these two great purposes of Christian marriage [conjugal love and procreation] inform each other and form the focal points of constructive home life, this General Convention holds that family planning, ‘in such ways as are mutually acceptable to husband and wife in Christian conscience, and secure from the corruptions of sensuality and selfishness, is a right and important factor in Christian family life’” (“Christian Marriage and Population Control,” Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1961, page 328). The quotation marks within the resolution identify words taken from a statement issued by the Lambeth Conference of 1958, a gathering of Anglican bishops. The teaching of the Episcopal Church on contraception is discussed in chapter five, below.

revisions occur. For example, the 1961 endorsement of birth control came after a forty-year struggle over the issue, and it restricted contraception to married couples. Just two decades later, acting without reference to the earlier discussion, the General Convention effectively endorsed the use of contraception by any individual, married or not.¹¹² At no time between 1961 and 1982 did the Episcopal Church specifically approve of sexual activity by unmarried persons. The 1982 resolution seemed to mark an unexplained and unjustified (not necessarily unjustifiable) break with the church's own tradition. Even when it is not obviously divided, as it is over homosexuality, the Episcopal Church often fails to provide coherent and reasoned moral guidance. As we shall see, the situation is not always much different in other mainline churches, especially the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.¹¹³

Why is the Episcopal Church's teaching on issues related to sexuality so conflicted, so confused? Why does it seem to be so much more confused and conflicted than it was as recently as forty years ago? That is the major question

¹¹² In 1982, the General Convention approved a resolution which endorsed the practice of contraception by individuals: "*Resolved* . . . That as a means of world population control this 67th General Convention of the Episcopal Church reaffirm the right of individuals to use any natural or safe artificial means of conception control ("Control of Conception," Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America--otherwise known as the Episcopal Church, 1982, p. C-154). The General Convention "reaffirmed" a right which the Episcopal Church had never previously acknowledged.

¹¹³ Please see *infra*, chapter three.

under investigation in this study. There are many possible answers. Only a few treatments of some of the issues are available from historians. For one thing, many of the twists and turns came in the fairly recent past, and do not yet appear on every historian's retrospective radar screen. For another thing, some of the relevant topics are relatively new ones for historians: this is true of sexuality and birth control.¹¹⁴ As for the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church, this subject has been the preoccupation of moral theologians, not historians. To investigate moral teaching in the Episcopal Church, we will need to draw heavily on the work of sociologists and moral theologians. We will consider some of their explanations of the muddled state of moral teaching. But our overall goal will be to provide an historical explanation: to examine moral teaching over a considerable period of time (a little more than a century), looking to see how it developed and how it changed, and asking what might account for the changes we discern.

¹¹⁴ James C. Mohr points out that just thirty years ago, historians barely touched on topics like sexuality, contraception, and abortion. The work done to date should be seen as "tentative and exploratory." James C. Mohr, "Sexuality, Reproduction, Contraception, and Abortion: A Review of Recent Literature," Journal of Women's History 8 (Spring 1996), 172, 173.

Chapter Two

Sources of Conflict and Confusion: Pluralism and Cultural Warfare

Both theologians and sociologists have examined changes in moral teaching. Theologians usually try to evaluate the legitimacy of shifts in a church's moral pronouncements. Sociologists are more likely to explore the social and cultural dynamics that may account for changes, but some sociologists also offer a normative perspective on alterations in church teaching. Both theological and sociological perspectives can provide important clues in an historian's quest for the roots of current controversies.

Some critics complain the Episcopalians and other mainline church leaders are merely trendy, responding to every new development in society. This view is mistaken; liberal church leaders are more consistent than that. Other observers think that the churches struggle because they have conceded too much of their distinctive identity in the course of secularization. But many churches in America seem to have grown stronger with the advance of secularization. The real problems of the churches lie elsewhere. They are troubled by the inescapable pluralism of American society and by acute cultural conflict about the nature of moral authority and about the institutions of marriage, family and gender.

I. Winds of Doctrine and the Specter of Cultural Captivity: Theological Appraisals

Changes in teaching could be due merely to trendiness, a pitfall as old as Christianity itself (the Epistle to the Ephesians counsels believers to avoid being “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine”).¹ Given Robert Hood’s account of how the Episcopal Church neglects its history and ignores its own moral theologians, it is conceivable that the church might tack this way or that, needing neither theological inquiry nor the services of a weatherman to know which way the wind is blowing.² But this explanation will not work. The changes in teaching about sexuality seem to move in a particular direction, toward greater and greater personal latitude in relationships.³ Contraception used to be a sin for everyone, but now anyone may decide to use it. Sex used to belong only within heterosexual marriages, but now other contexts may be acceptable, too. With respect to a number of issues, other observers have found that the Episcopal Church does not respond to every change of public opinion in the country. Historian Thomas Reeves reviews the adventures of liberal

¹ Ephesians 4:14, New Revised Standard Version.

² Robert E. Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), xvi.

³ Kenneth L. Woodward and Anne Underwood write, “the drift of the church for the last 25 years has been toward relaxed sexual standards for clergy as well as laity.” “A House Divided: The Episcopal Church Struggles over Gay Marriage, Adulterous Clergy, and its own identity,” Newsweek July 14, 1997. Obtained from Newsweek Online, July 10, 1997.

churches since the 1960s and concludes that their leaders, far from being trendy, are “stuck in the sixties.”⁴ The historian needs to look at the *direction* of change in order to determine the best possible explanation of the pattern.⁵

Have some churches become “captives” of the surrounding culture, or have they simply chosen to conform to it, even at the expense of consistency with their own fundamental doctrines? Changes in teaching could reflect nothing more than unprincipled (and possibly unconscious) adjustments to social attitudes and practices.⁶ This charge is often made – so often, in fact, that it is somewhat suspect as an explanation. If one is accused of cultural conformity, the best response may be *tu quoque!* (you’re another).⁷ Theologians

⁴ Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 159.

⁵ Concerning contemporary liberalism, William Kristol has written: “At the core of late-20th century liberalism are two impulses: ratcheting government up, and defining deviancy down.” Kristol, “Clinton is the Issue,” *The Weekly Standard*, May 25, 1998, 18. Whether one agrees with the changes or not, the modification of Episcopal teachings on sexual matters generally defines as acceptable what used to be considered deviant, if not completely intolerable.

⁶ The prophet Hosea recognized that religiously corrupt practices may result from ignorance of theological truth as well as from deliberate disobedience. Hosea present’s Yahweh’s response to Israel’s ignorance in these words: “She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal” (Hosea 2:8 New Revised Standard Version). Adjusting to a fulfilling life in a good land, the people worshipped the false gods of Canaanite culture without realizing that such devotions betrayed their heritage and broke their covenant with Yahweh.

⁷ This is exactly what happened during the debate over a Presbyterian study of sexuality in the early 1990s. The authors of the study called for radical changes in church policies concerning sexuality, and indicated that those who maintain traditional views “are actually endorsing

acknowledge that such charges may sometimes be true, but point out that every Christian group is in danger of confusing its theological convictions with cultural conventions.⁸

Moreover, it is not so easy to draw a clear line between permanent Christian truth and transitory cultural phenomena. Human beings cannot think about any subject at all without employing language, and all human languages are cultural constructions.⁹ As the theologian H. Richard Niebuhr observed over half a century ago, the evidence of history and sociology is not simply “that our

historically relative, middle-class white norms as divinely sanctioned.” Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice. A Document Prepared for the 203rd General Assembly (1991), 9. But a harshly critical article in Newsweek suggested that the report was itself the product of a different sort of cultural conformity: it “reads like a sermon on Eros prepared in the heat of politically correct passion.” Kenneth L. Woodward, “Roll Over John Calvin: The Presbyterians rethink the sexual revolution,” Newsweek, May 6, 1991, 59.

⁸ See, for example, Miroslav Volf, “Fishing in the Neighbor’s Pond: Mission and Proselytism in Eastern Europe,” International Bulletin of Missionary Research 20 (January 1996): 26-31. Since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, foreign Protestants have rushed in to evangelize the peoples of formerly Communist lands, even though many of them are at least nominal members of Orthodox churches. Foreign Protestant missionaries often contend that the Christianity they find in place has become too intertwined with local culture. Volf points out, however, that Protestant Christianity in the United States also makes unholy compromises with society and culture; he uses the example of Pentecostal capitulation to racial segregation (30-31).

⁹ For the biblically oriented, there is no escape from linguistic relativism, for no less an authority than God has confused the languages of the earth. Cultural relativism may also be implicit in the story of the ill-fated tower – “Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9 New Revised Standard Version).

reason is . . . in space-time” but also that “time-space is in our reason.”¹⁰ If people speak of Christ at all, they do so in a particular social and cultural setting, and they employ the cultural resources available to them. Indeed, theologians often insist that theological reflection become *intentionally* involved with the cultural situation, rather than pretend to stand outside of it. For example, the evangelical Protestant theologian Miroslav Volf says that contextual theology is a necessity: “our own context requires that we preach the one Gospel in our own language and think with our own heads how the Gospel interacts with the specific cultures in which God has placed us.”¹¹

The proper relationship between Christian faith and culture is a complex issue that must be left to explicitly theological inquiries.¹² What the historian should notice is that the relationship is troublesome. Historical inquiry should pay attention not only to the social and cultural setting of church teachings, as historians normally do, but should also be alert to the theological *arguments* about the interaction between theology and culture. Such awareness may even lead to a kind of historical hypothesis testing: has this church changed its relationship to culture over time? Does an analysis of its documents show a

¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 7.

¹¹ Volf, “Fishing in the Neighbor’s Pond,” 28.

¹² The relationship of theology and culture was a central concern of H. Richard Niebuhr, not only in The Meaning of Revelation but also in such other major works as Christ and Culture (1951) and Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (1960).

preoccupation with issues that may not be exclusively, or even primarily, theological?¹³ Can the historian detect changes in the way a church appropriates, or ignores, its basic sources of theological insight?

“Cultural conformity” is probably too broad a term to be useful for analysis. It is better to ask what *aspect* of culture, and what *particular groups* in society, seem to be most influential when a religious body formulates moral teaching. Robert Bork maintains that a “politicization” of many churches was under way even before the 1960s, a process with a social foundation: “Clergy and church bureaucrats are members of the intellectual class and look to that class for approval, an approval they cannot win through their merits as religionists, but only through their political attitudes and political usefulness.”¹⁴ There is more to it than conventional party politics. Church leaders are allegedly influenced by

¹³ For the possibility that Christian faith may provide useful hypotheses for scholarly investigations, see Glenn Tinder, “Exercising a Christian Intellect,” Christian Century 114 (July 2-9, 1997): 626-629. Tinder’s article is a review of George M. Marsden, The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship, in which Marsden contends that Christian scholars should integrate their faith and their intellectual work because to do so would enrich scholarship. An example of the integration of historical scholarship and theological conviction may be found in Steven J. Keillor, This Rebellious House: American History and the Truth of Christianity (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996). A reviewer found that Keillor’s book makes good use of modern historical scholarship, and sometimes offers fascinating insights; the weakest feature of the book is not the use of theology *per se*, but the inadequate theological framework actually employed. See Mark Noll, “American History through the Eyes of Faith,” Christian Century 114 (May 21-28, 1997): 515-518.

¹⁴ Robert H. Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 282.

something Bork calls “the elite culture. The most striking manifestation of that is, of course, the ordination of practicing gays and lesbians as denominational ministers. That is a flat rejection of biblical principles for a secular, egalitarian, and therefore permissive, outlook.”¹⁵ Bork’s thesis applies to the leaders of churches, and not to all their members: “The Protestant mainline denominations are out of touch with the people in the pews because the churches’ leadership changed, moving well to the left of their membership.”¹⁶ If this is right, the confusion in mainline church teaching is due to an effort by liberal leaders to make their churches conform to the political and cultural concerns of “elite culture,” an adjustment which some church members continue to oppose.¹⁷

Bork’s analysis recalls the assessment offered a decade earlier when sociologist Benton Johnson sought to account for the recent membership decline in the mainline Protestant churches.¹⁸ Johnson says that the trouble began when

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 292-293.

¹⁷ Theologian Stanley Hauerwas seems to agree with Bork about the political views of many members of the clergy. Commenting on the reception of one of his own books, Resident Aliens, Hauerwas has written, “Clergy between forty-five and sixty, trained in the theological era which told them that the great virtue is to be open, accepting, and affirming, tend to hate the book. Their ministry, after all, has been built on trying to transform the church into the left wing of the Democratic Party.” Stanley Hauerwas, In Good Company: The Church as Polis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 56.

¹⁸ Benton Johnson, “Liberal Protestantism: End of the Road?” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 480 (July 1985): 39-52.

Reinhold Niebuhr incorporated the social gospel into a theology which replaced the discredited optimism of liberal theology with a more sober appraisal of human sinfulness and social injustices. Niebuhr believed that serious Christians should support oppressed groups in their struggles for liberation.¹⁹ This call for radical political praxis “was opposed to the class interests and the class ethos of the constituency of the liberal churches,” but Niebuhr hoped that the churches would play a constructive social role anyway.²⁰ In the 1950s, many religious leaders influenced by Niebuhr began to attack popular piety and middle-class religion.²¹ They wanted churches to take controversial stands on social questions, even if these positions conflicted with the interests of church members. The influence of Niebuhr has endured: “The Niebuhrian legacy made Protestant liberals particularly sensitive to criticism from allegedly progressive elements and particularly willing to think well of them and do their bidding.”²² In other words,

¹⁹ Ibid., 46.

²⁰ Ibid., 47.

²¹ Ibid., 48.

²² Ibid., 51. On liberal activists in the churches, see Harold E. Quinley, The Prophetic Clergy: Social Activism Among Protestant Ministers (New York: John Wiley, 1974); James R. Wood, Leadership in Voluntary Organizations: The Controversy over Social Action in Protestant Churches (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981); Leo Driedger, “Doctrinal Belief: A Major Factor in the Differential Perception of Social Issues,” Sociological Quarterly 15 (Winter 1974): 66-80, Fred Schindeler and David Hoffman, “Theological and Political Conservatism: Variations in Attitudes Among Clergymen of One Denomination,” Canadian Journal of Political Science 1 (December 1968): 429-441). Appendix VII provides a summary of these works.

many church leaders define themselves in terms of a “progressive” intellectual and political agenda.²³

The observations of two Newsweek writers also provide some support for Bork’s analysis. Kenneth Woodward and Anne Underwood contend that the Episcopal Church “has lost the moderation it once exuded.” In the 1960s, church leaders plunged into the civil rights movement and called on church members to engage in social action, too.²⁴ Later there came a significant liturgical change, the introduction of a new version of the Book of Common Prayer in 1979. Along the way, the church softened its opposition to divorce, and began to ordain women. For many Episcopalians, these journalists suggest, the acceptance of homosexuality is a final straw. But these observers do not posit a straightforward conflict between liberal leaders and more conservative members, as Bork seems

²³ Liberal views are not confined to the clergy, however. A study of activists favoring and opposing the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s found that opponents of the ERA were usually conservative Protestants or fundamentalists. Among supporters of the ERA, a slight majority had no religious affiliation, but there were numerous liberal Protestants in this group, too, as well as some Jews. Kent L. Tedin, “Religious Preference and Pro/Anti Activism on the Equal Rights Amendment Issue,” Pacific Sociological Review 21 (January 1978): 55-66. At least some members of mainline churches actively support “progressive” causes. The activist clergy are not necessarily out of touch with all church members.

²⁴ Even severe critics of the liberal leadership of the mainline churches have positive things to say about the churches’ role in the Civil Rights Movement. Thomas Reeves, for instance, has written, “The mainline churches were active in the struggle of racial equality,” and they had “an impact on the civil rights movement in which they may always take pride.” Reeves, The Empty Church, 135. But the development of the Movement led to acute conflict within the Episcopal Church. See Reeves, 135ff, and John Booty, The Episcopal Church in Crisis (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1988), 55-65.

to do. They point to other factors as well. One of these is that more than half of the current members of the church, and two thirds of its seminarians, were raised in other religious traditions. The Episcopal Church is confused: "What ails Episcopalians most is not the loss of moderation or toleration but a lack of clear identity."²⁵ The problem, then, may not be cultural conformity, but a cultural cacophony. What brings people into the Episcopal Church today? What does it mean to be an Episcopalian?²⁶ In America's pluralist society, moral teaching is a difficult task for a group with no clear sense of identity.

When charges of cultural conformity are made, an underlying assumption may be that *any* change in church teaching is *ipso facto* illegitimate. Changes in teaching must be a sign that someone is trading in theological truth for a more transient cultural imperative.²⁷ Bork is quite explicit: "If a church changes

²⁵ Woodward and Underwood, "A House Divided."

²⁶ A few years ago, Episcopalians announced that the 1990s would be a *decade of evangelism*. Nothing much has been said on that subject since early in the decade. Stephen Noll observes that "the Decade of Evangelism in the Episcopal Church has seemed more like the Decade of Sex." Noll holds that the church is engaged in a "worldview crisis," which is another way of saying identity crisis. Stephen F. Noll, Two Sexes, One Flesh (Solon, OH: Latimer Press, 1997), 13. Evangelism is possible only for a church sure of what it is and what it has to offer – "we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1: 3 New Revised Standard Version). To what fellowship does the Episcopal Church draw people? The Episcopal Church may want to welcome you, but it needs to decide what it will welcome you to. On conflicting views of evangelism within the Episcopal Church, see Gardner H. Shattuck, Jr., "Should the Episcopal Church Disappear? Reflections on the Decade of Evangelism," Anglican Theological Review 73 (Spring 1991): 177-187.

doctrine and structure to follow its members' views, it is difficult to see the value of that church and its religion. Religions must claim to be true and, in their essentials, to uphold principles that are universal and eternal."²⁸ In opposing any move to bless same-sex relationships, Episcopalian Stephen Noll identifies "two very different attitudes toward biblical authority. One attitude seeks to understand and *obey* the Bible as God's word to his people yesterday, today, and forever. The other attitude finds the biblical worldview embarrassing and offensive, and seeks to *salvage* the Bible by radically reinterpreting it or simply calling it wrong."²⁹

A position like Noll's has a number of implications. He believes both that the teaching of the Bible is clear and that it is directly applicable to the situations the American churches encounter today. These assumptions are questionable. In a recent study of New Testament ethics, Richard Hays contends that there are four different tasks involved in discerning the implications of the New Testament for contemporary situations: descriptive, synthetic, hermeneutical, and

²⁷ The apostle Paul feared that one of his congregations was abandoning the gospel he had brought to them: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7 New Revised Standard Version). If there is an immutable Christian gospel, there may also be unchangeable moral truths. Whether moral teachings are subject to revision, and the relationship of moral teachings to basic Christian doctrine, were among the issues in the 1995 Righter trial.

²⁸ Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah, 293.

²⁹ Noll, Two Sexes, One Flesh, 40.

pragmatic.³⁰ The descriptive task is exegetical, asking about the message of individual portions of the canon.³¹ Once this work is done, it is necessary to look for a synthesis of the various writings in the New Testament (Hays believes this is possible, while some scholars say the biblical material is too diverse).³² But these two steps are not sufficient, because there remains a “temporal and cultural distance between ourselves and the text.” The bridging of this gap is the hermeneutical task: “How do we appropriate the New Testament’s message as a word addressed to us?”³³ There are no precise rules that can tell us how to make this move. One must make some use of the imagination; “whenever we appeal to the authority of the New Testament, we are necessarily engaged in metaphor-making, placing our community’s life imaginatively within the world articulated by the texts.”³⁴ Finally, there is the pragmatic task, which consists of “embodying Scripture’s imperatives in the life of the Christian community,” where Scripture must shape the character of both persons and communities.³⁵ Each of these four steps is difficult, and all of them can lead to disagreements.

³⁰ Richard B. Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Some interpreters find that the Bible is not as univocal in its teaching as Noll would have us believe, or even as consistent as Hays hopes it will be. In a study of the place of the Scriptures in decision making by the church, biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson argues that the New Testament creates a distinctive identity for the church, but does not furnish a uniform treatment of all the issues it considers. The various books of the New Testament agree in describing “the meaning of life before God in the light of a crucified and raised Messiah.”³⁶ However, these same writings (in their interpretation of the Old Testament) provide “examples of ways in which authoritative texts can freely be reread in light of new experience and the working of the Spirit – without thereby ceasing to be normative.”³⁷ On some important topics, such as the relationship of Christians to the state, the various strands of the New Testament simply do not agree. This lack of consensus implies “is that the New Testament actually legitimates a healthy pluralism of practice within the same basic identity.”³⁸

When the church makes use of Scripture, Johnson contends, “we enter into a conversation with these diverse views and opinions expressed by the New Testament.” Individuals and Christian communities may engage in practices that do not match any of the New Testament options; for example, they could even

³⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 40.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

reject the explicit teaching of Jesus against divorce. When Christians do this, they are not necessarily repudiating Biblical authority. Christians must consult the Scriptures seriously. Once a Christian community does that, Johnson maintains, it may legitimately adopt a position in conflict with some part of the New Testament, although it is necessary both to give clear reasons for doing so and to “find *authorization* for our position somewhere else in these writings.”³⁹ For Johnson, then, differences of opinion about the moral meaning of the Scriptures are inevitable, because the Scriptures themselves are not uniform in their moral teaching. “Every Christian community, like every Christian, stands to one degree or another in disagreement with some part of the New Testament. Anyone who claims otherwise is simply lying.”⁴⁰

From Hays we learn that some changes in moral teaching may be justified. The four steps of interpretation can produce new readings of familiar passages. If Johnson is right about the plurality of perspectives in the New Testament, Christian communities may legitimately adopt a variety of practices, even if some of these contradict some portion of the Scriptures. Not everyone who differs with Stephen Noll is necessarily “radically reinterpreting [the Bible] or simply calling it wrong.”⁴¹ An investigation of moral teaching should pay attention

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴¹ Even the very cautious Roman Catholic Catechism seems to allow some room for changing interpretations of the Church’s faith. The Catechism states bluntly that there will be no new revelation after Jesus Christ, then adds this qualification: “Yet even if Revelation is already

to the ways in which different groups interpret Scripture, and other resources for Christian moral deliberation.⁴²

Noll assumes not only that the Bible's message is clear and that he has read it correctly; he also supposes that there is no fundamental difference between yesterday and today.⁴³ There is no need for a truly new moral message. Not every thoughtful Christian agrees with that. In Arguing About Sex, moral theologian Joseph Monti contends that the church "can in principle say new things," and in doing so meet its "obligation to be faithful in the age in which it finds itself." Too often, church pronouncements on sexual matters rely on "past

complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries." Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York: Doubleday, 1995), §66. The Catholic Church, recognizing the need for interpretation, reserves authority to its Magisterium: "the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome" (Ibid., §81). There would be no need for this exercise of authority if all possible questions had already been settled for all time.

⁴² Most participants in debates within the Episcopal Church agree that Scripture is authoritative, although they differ on how to interpret it, and how to coordinate what they learn from Scripture with church tradition, modern knowledge, and experience. For a discussion of the authority of Scripture within the Episcopal Church, see J. Robert Wright, "The Official Position of the Episcopal Church on the Authority of Scripture, Part I: Present Teaching and Historical Development," Anglican Theological Review 74 (1992): 348-361.

⁴³ Episcopalians have long recognized that the Scriptures themselves reflect the historical circumstances within which they came into being. As early as 1880, a Pastoral Letter of the House of Bishops urged the clergy to study the Scriptures in the original languages and to acquaint themselves with the fruits of biblical criticism. See George Reuben Metcalf, "American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters of the House of Bishops," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 27 (1958), 25.

modes of moral rhetoric and argument.”⁴⁴ Modernity is more radically pluralist than church thinkers usually recognize, so much so that “reality is multidimensional.” It is important to recognize that “the experience of the realities of committed and steadfast love are not necessarily limited to how they have appeared and been experienced in the past.”⁴⁵

It turns out, then, that “cultural conformity” is too vague a term to describe changes in the moral teaching of contemporary churches. We need a more precise social analysis if we are to understand the confusion and conflict over religious moral teaching. It is important to identify the cultural processes and social groups that affect, or seek to influence, that teaching. We need to consider the possibility that churches today are dealing with problems different from those faced by any earlier generation. They may even face a situation in which there is no single, generally recognized, cultural or even natural “reality.”

II. Secularization and its Discontents

One way to explain the struggles of American churches is to attribute them to the effects of *secularization*, a long-term process that alters the relationship between religious institutions and other parts of society, and also produces changes within religion itself. There are many theories of secularization, but

⁴⁴ Joseph Monti, Arguing About Sex: The Rhetoric of Christian Sexual Morality (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 40.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

sociologist Olivier Tschannen has argued that some of the most important ones share certain central concepts in such a way that one may speak of a secularization *paradigm*.⁴⁶ Despite the many differences between the theories, all rely on the concepts of “differentiation, rationalization, and worldliness,” as well as “a number of logically subordinated exemplars, most notably autonomization, privatization, generalization, pluralization, and collapse of the world view.”⁴⁷

The fundamentally important concept is differentiation. Over time, religion becomes differentiated from other aspects of social life, and becomes “a very specific institutional domain within a new type of social structure,” alongside other institutions dealing with politics, education, the economy, and so on.⁴⁸ Each institution operates on the basis of criteria appropriate to its social functions. The economy, for instance, begins “to work in a rational way dictated by its own inherent logic (*rationalization*).” As religion interacts with other social institutions, religion itself becomes more worldly, and religious organizations seek to meet their members’ psychological needs.⁴⁹ Religious organizations such as

⁴⁶ Olivier Tschannen, “The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 30 (December 1991): 395-415. He includes the theories of Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson, Martin Fenn, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Bellah.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 401.

denominations become more preoccupied with the size of their flock and with social problems than with spiritual problems *per se*.⁵⁰

As other institutions become autonomous, religion “loses its power of social control and guidance over the rest of society.”⁵¹ The nature of religion and its social function change in the process. Religion becomes privatized because individuals, living as they do in multiple institutional spheres, need to develop their own interpretations of the world.⁵² Paradoxically, religion becomes generalized at the same time, appearing as “civil religion” or the “spirit of capitalism,” or in some other disguise. Thus religious entities compete with other institutions even with respect to “religious” functions.⁵³ Moreover, religious

⁵⁰ Olivier Tschannen, “Sociological Controversies in Perspective,” Review of Religious Research 36:1 (September 1994), 72.

⁵¹ Tschannen, “The Secularization Paradigm,” 401.

⁵² For an informative discussion of the problem that individuals face in interpreting the social world, see Jean Porter, The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics (Louisville Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 69-82. All societies incorporate a variety of roles, and there are normative expectations about the ways in which one is to fulfill them. Because humans must play a number of different social roles, “the social fabric must also include ideal narratives that tell how a typical human life, which incorporates more than one basic role, will be lived.” In a complex society, there are many coordinating narratives (79). In order to function in society, “each of us must make one of them his or her own, or it will be done for us, by the informing pressures of the community around us.” These narratives provide outlines for “inclusive life-plans.” They are flexible, and allow for some revision (80). What Porter describes here is the impact on the individual of social differentiation. Individuals have to make some choices about what to believe and what to do, whether or not they think that some sort of individualism is desirable in itself.

pluralism emerges when the state no longer enforces religious monopolies.

Finally, “as a result of the churches’ loss of social control, religious practices and affiliation decline.”⁵⁴

Secularization theory might be able to explain some of the struggle of the churches with respect to moral teaching. We noted that individualism could be a barrier to effective moral teaching. Individuals may make their own judgments, not only because they cherish some notion of autonomous decision-making by individuals,⁵⁵ but also because the very nature of social life requires individuals to think and act for themselves as they negotiate the various demands made upon them. Individuals may, and indeed must, choose from a variety of religious institutions, or decide not to belong to any of them; this pluralism is not just a function of American law, but a product of the differentiation of social realms. Secularization theory holds that religion becomes worldlier as its practitioners contend with a social world in which religious ideas and institutions do not explain or control everything; if this is the case, then church teaching might well show signs of “cultural captivity.” Moreover, the pluralism brought by secularization forces religious organizations to compete with each other (and even with non-

⁵³ For an insightful analysis of the ways in which political and economic ideas sometimes disguise theological claims, see M. Douglas Meeks, God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), especially chapter two.

⁵⁴ Tschannen, “The Secularization Paradigm,” 401.

⁵⁵ Bellah et al, Habits of the Heart, 142.

religious institutions) in a market-like situation.⁵⁶ Voluntary associations in a secularized society may need to rid themselves of unpopular ideas and demands.

Secularization theory provides the framework for a recent sociological study which strongly suggests that America's Protestant churches have sold their souls to a secular culture.⁵⁷ An examination of this work helps us to see the limits of secularization as an explanation of changes in modern American Protestantism. Marsha Witten acknowledges that there are many signs that religion is flourishing in the United States, but observes there are also "indications that modern Protestantism in the United States has been greatly influenced by general trends toward secularity, specifically by tendencies toward individualism, trust in psychotherapy, ideological relativism, and reliance on rational procedures that mark our culture as a whole."⁵⁸ Witten realizes that religion is not simply declining, as secularization theorists once expected, but she notes that some scholars think that "secularity is affecting the inner contents of religion – its ideology, speech, and practice – forcing it to undergo serious changes."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Peter Berger has emphasized the debilitating effects on religion of market pressures. For a very brief summary of his ideas, see Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm." 398, 409-410.

⁵⁷ Marsha G. Witten, All is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

Witten studies religious speech, scrutinizing sermons by pastors of two denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in order to see “how religious speakers use the various styles of speech available to them ... in attempts to resolve the dilemmas of religion in modern American life.”⁶⁰ In sermons from both denominations, she claims to find much evidence of accommodation to secular culture, and to individualism in particular. In many sermons, she notices, “God is portrayed exclusively or predominantly in terms of the functions he serves for men and women.” Particularly important is God’s therapeutic role: “God relieves negative feelings, especially anxiety and doubt.”⁶¹ A majority of the sermons, she says, showed the effects of privatization, one of the leading effects of secularization. The religious speech she studied dealt almost entirely with matters of private concern, only rarely mentioning social questions. When sermons treat the subject of sin, they usually

⁵⁹ In other words, some observers think that the religious response to secularization has been one of *accommodation*. But Witten believes there are two other ways in which religious practitioners can respond to the challenges of secular culture. One possibility is *resistance*, a determined “denying, debunking, or neutralizing [of] the influences of modernity.” The third possibility she calls *reframing*, in which religious figures significantly redefine religion, separating symbols from traditional meanings in order to give them new definitions (Witten, *All is Forgiven*, 6).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5. Witten focuses on speech because she believes that survey sampling, even though it provides useful information, “masks the complexity of the speech involved” because the demands of statistical analysis make it necessary to “reduce the themes to simple categories.” In any case, “speech has been neglected as a topic in the sociology of religion”(9, 10).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

present wrongdoing “as violations of personal satisfaction or family values, rather than as violations of community norms.”⁶²

If Witten is right, American Protestantism does not suffer from a politicization of the mainline church leadership, but rather from a tendency to keep the customer satisfied by modifying the product. We seem to have a kind of church that dares not “shape the mind and life of its membership,”⁶³ but alters itself to match the existing mindset of its members. Under such circumstances, demanding moral teachings would be extremely vulnerable to dilution. But is she right?

Witten’s case is far from persuasive. She studied sermons delivered in a three-year period (1986 to 1988), all of them based on a single text (Luke 15:11-32, usually known as the story of the Prodigal Son). She makes the astonishing assumption that her choice of a text will not shape the results, and claims that this particular passage is “a text with no obvious interpretation.”⁶⁴ The passage she chose tells the story of a wayward son returning home to an extravagant welcome by his father. There is not a word of reproach for this young man who has squandered his entire inheritance in dissolute living in a distant land. The father’s view of the situation is expressed clearly in the words, “But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to

⁶² Ibid., 130, 131.

⁶³ Philip Turner, Sex, Money and Power (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications), 4.

⁶⁴ Witten, All is Forgiven, 13.

life; he was lost and has been found.”⁶⁵ All is Forgiven, Witten’s book title, could easily be the title for this passage.⁶⁶ It would have been striking if Witten had found easy forgiveness as the theme of sermons on a passage like Matthew 25:31-46, which anticipates a judgement of the nations in which righteous sheep are separated eternally from unrighteous goats. A passage like that also suggests social themes, rather than purely individual concerns (“for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me”).⁶⁷

The study has other problems, as well. It is based on just forty-seven sermons.⁶⁸ Witten solicited these homilies from pastors of congregations with 800 or more members, a decision she does not adequately justify,⁶⁹ and one that could have distorted the results. Most Protestant congregations are much smaller than the churches she contacted, an important consideration because the size of a congregation significantly influences the relationship between the

⁶⁵ Luke 15:32 New Revised Standard Version.

⁶⁶ Witten is mistaken when she denies that the passage has an obvious interpretation. Please see Appendix III, “The Secularization of the Prodigal Son.”

⁶⁷ Matthew 25: 35 New Revised Standard Version.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of some of the issues involved in studying sermons, please see Appendix IV, “Secularizing the Message of American Protestantism: Issues in the Interpretation of Sermons.”

⁶⁹ William R. Garrett, Review of All is Forgiven, in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 33 (December 1994), 396.

pastor/preacher and the congregation.⁷⁰ Witten herself points out that her research design resulted in the exclusion of women preachers. The Southern Baptist Convention generally does not ordain women. The Presbyterian Church does, but very few are pastors of large churches. This fact alone might suggest that gender should be included in an analysis of sermons, but Witten's book maintains a consistent silence on gender.⁷¹ On the whole, a book that seeks to show that American Protestantism is obsequiously accommodating of secular culture fails to make the point. The sample is too small, the choice of a text gravely compromises the results, and the author's analysis avoids consideration of alternative explanations such as gender. It may well be true that some preachers pander to their parishioners' psychological concerns – but it is also true, as we have seen, that many observers believe mainline church leaders are significantly out of step with the members on various social issues.⁷²

⁷⁰ Arlin Rothauge has written that “few factors influence the shape of a congregation more than size.” The key to size is the number of adults in attendance on the average Sunday. For the purposes of analysis, churches come in four sizes: a “family church” has no more than fifty active members, a “pastoral” church has between 50 and 150; a “program church” has 150 to 350, and the large “corporation church” has more than 350. Arlin J. Rothauge, Reshaping a Congregation for a New Future (New York: Episcopal Church Center, 1985), 11.

⁷¹ The question of gender is surely important both to a discussion of the Biblical text and to an analysis of the sermons Witten read. The story itself tells of a father and his sons, and mentions no women. Witten finds that 32 per cent of the sermons that focus on God speak of God “as standing at the head of his ‘family’ of human children, not in divine majesty but in domestic familiarity, with his tie loosened and his shirt sleeves rolled up” (36). This image suggests a companionate form of patriarchy.

The problems with this book are not entirely due to the unfortunate errors of an author; they are attributable also to the secularization thesis itself. As sociologist David Martin has pointed out, secularization theory requires modification if it is to correspond with social reality.⁷³ The very science of sociology is the product of a secularization process, because this discipline “represented the autonomous study of Man in Society.” Born into a (European) society in which new inquiries were establishing their independence from religious supervision, sociology “gave an absolutely central place to the problem of secularization and encased that problem in an ideological frame, derived in part from the philosophy of history.”⁷⁴ Sociologists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim thought that modernity meant a transition from religious to secular thinking, yet reality turned out to be more complicated. Not every country took the same course -- “In North America, after all, church practice [*increased*]

⁷² Witten contends that other researchers support her findings (Ibid., 15). She directs attention to Andrew Greeley, Religious Change in America; the Gallup Organization (“How Can Christian Liberals and Conservatives be Brought Together? Princeton, NJ, 1984); and James Davison Hunter, American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983). And Witten can claim some distinguished company. William Willimon contends that many Christian preachers have become too attentive to contemporary culture – “The Bible doesn’t want to *speak* to the modern world; the Bible wants to *convert* the modern world.” William H. Willimon, “This Culture is Overrated,” Christianity Today 41 (May 19, 1997), 27.

⁷³ David Martin, “Sociology, Religion and Secularization: An Orientation,” Religion 25 (October 1995): 295-303.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 295.

steadily through the whole period of modernization from 1800 to 1950.”⁷⁵ Since the 1960s, secularization theory has been subjected to much criticism. Martin suggests that pluralism and differentiation are important trends, but it is much less clear that rationalization and secularization are advancing in all modern societies.⁷⁶

Secularization theory is hardly dead, and it can still make sense of many social and religious phenomena. Two sociologists have defined secularization as “a multifaceted concept that connotes declining social significance for religion.” They point out that there is evidence that religious traditions have lost some of their significance in the United States – more Americans are telling pollsters that they have no religious preference. In 1957, 2.7 per cent gave the “no-preference” response; in 1982, 7.1 per cent answered that way.⁷⁷ Moreover, the reasons for being a “religious none” are not the same as they were decades ago. Structural reasons used to be the most important factors (geographical isolation from churches, or social-class estrangement), but now cultural reasons are more important: the nones of today are likely to be persons who reject the key beliefs of the major religions.⁷⁸ It was in the 1960s that cultural reasons become more

⁷⁵ Ibid., 296.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 295.

⁷⁷ John C. Condran and Joseph B. Tamney, “Religious Nones’: 1957 to 1982,” Sociological Analysis 46 (Winter 1985), 415.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 419.

important than structural ones in producing religious “nones.”⁷⁹ Survey research in the 1970s showed that such persons were “supporters of new cultural values.”⁸⁰

But is “secularization” the best way to explain the emergence of the religious “nones”? It might be, particularly if research also showed that commitment to religious beliefs and practices is diminishing among other groups. In the United States, however, the evidence is quite different. Many religious groups seem stronger than ever before. It could be that *pluralism* is a better description of the situation: there are numerous religious bodies, and alongside them a category of persons affiliated with no recognized religion.

Because the United States is very different from Western Europe, and because secularization theory seems inadequate, sociologist R. Stephen Warner has proposed that the sociological study of American religion is undergoing a paradigm shift.⁸¹ The central insight of the new perspective is that “organized religion thrives in the United States in an open market system.”⁸² For decades, sociologists thought of religion as “a property of the whole society.”⁸³ There were

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 421

⁸¹ R. Stephen Warner, “Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 98:5 (March 1993): 1044-1093.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1044.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1046.

two possibilities for religion in a society that was becoming more pluralistic: religious values could become more generalized, and so belong to everybody, or they could remain particularistic, in which case they would survive only in a marginal, private realm.⁸⁴ But, says Warner, religion was never the property of the whole society; “religion in the United States has typically expressed not the culture of the society as a whole but the subcultures of its many constituents.”⁸⁵

Movement toward a new paradigm began as sociologists reflected on the stubborn fact that the percentage of the US population belonging to churches increased greatly between 1800 and 1950.⁸⁶ Many sociologists of religion now focus on “the disestablishment of the churches and the rise of an open market for religion.” Disestablishment, however distressing it may have been at first, resulted in “a far higher level of religious mobilization than had existed before.”⁸⁷

Despite the use of terms like *market*, Warner contends that economic imagery is not the key to the new sociological paradigm; what really counts is that *disestablishment* is the norm. Even today, many sociologists (he mentions Peter Berger) consider that the normative situation is one in which the state establishes religious monopolies; disestablishment leads to trouble because

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1046-1047.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1047.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1049.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1051.

churches must now market themselves.⁸⁸ But Warner thinks pluralism is not a problem for most American churches – they have already lived with it for two centuries. He suggests that the Episcopal Church might be the only one that has had to adjust to a pluralistic environment.⁸⁹ Nor does Warner concede that pluralism forces churches to betray their own norms: “the concept of a competitive religious market entails neither that religious denominations pander to a lowest common denominator of spiritual commitment nor that religious consumers constantly compare competing suppliers’ response to their fixed demands.”⁹⁰ Religious organizations may be entrepreneurial in seeking out members, but this does not mean that their leaders are insincere -- “Quite the contrary,” says Warner.⁹¹

The pluralism of American religion is a problem -- for some sociologists, and for Christian ethicists, for whom “[u]nity is a normative ideal.” Yet American religion has always been “associated with societal differentiation, and pluralism has tended in this society to take on a religious expression.”⁹² In America,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1053.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1054.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1057.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1057-1058.

⁹² Ibid., 1058.

religion is “a fundamental category of identity and association.”⁹³ But the older sociological paradigm is ill at ease with the diversity of American religious groups, and religious ethicists do not like it, either: “Religious prophets scorn the social functions of particularistic religious participation in the United States and they long for signs of religious unity.”⁹⁴

According to Warner, then, secularization is not the story of American religion. *Pluralism* is the central theme, and disestablishment has allowed many different religious groups to flourish. It seems that, for Warner, the well being of many groups is a sign of the health of American religion. But it is necessary to take a closer look at this pluralistic scene. Warner is unsympathetic to Christian thinkers (like H. Richard Niebuhr) who worry about the implications of pluralism for the church. Warner, however, does not explore all of the implications of his own position, one of which could be a complete moral relativism in which no group could evaluate the moral teaching of any other group. As we have seen, some Americans still hope that churches will supply moral leadership for the nation. If Warner’s analysis is sound, there may be no possibility of such guidance. Not only that, church members would deceive themselves unless they admitted that the truth is not in us. They would have to say, We believe what we believe because we belong to this group, but there is no other warrant for even a word of it.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1059.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1060.

When Warner says that religion is closely associated with group identity, one might also suspect that some sort of cultural conformity is the result. Even though Warner doesn't think that market conditions lead to a dilution of the religious product, the danger cannot be discounted. And so we turn to a body of sociological work that frankly applies market analysis to the dynamics of disestablished religion in America.

III. A Market Made for Morality, not Morality Made for the Market

In 1992, sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark published a provocative book in which they describe the history of American religion in terms of market dynamics.⁹⁵ The fundamental argument of The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy is that a supply-side analysis provides the best account of the development of religion in the United States over more than two centuries. Where secularization theory would predict a decline in religion, the American experience is exactly the opposite. In the eighteenth century, few Americans participated in organized religion; by the 1990s, two-thirds of all Americans were involved in it. How did this happen? Not by the selling of a secular message cunningly packaged as Protestantism but by

⁹⁵ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

the persistent activity of “aggressive churches committed to vivid otherworldliness.”⁹⁶

Finke and Stark rely on a “key analytical device: religious economies.”⁹⁷

An economic analysis accounts for the success and failure of religious organizations. The fate of religious bodies “will depend upon (1) aspects of their organizational structure, (2) their sales representatives, (3) their product, and (4) their marketing techniques. Translated into more churchly language, the relative success of religious bodies ... will depend upon their polity, their clergy, their religious doctrines, and their evangelization techniques.” Finke and Stark hasten to say that the content of religion is extremely important, and cannot be replaced by canny marketing methods.⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, the content (religious doctrine) is decisive for the success or failure of religious organizations: “as denominations have modernized their doctrines and embraced temporal values, they have gone into decline.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1. The six words quoted from Finke and Stark rebut Witten's thesis of an accomodationist and worldly religion. The preponderance of the evidence seems to support Finke and Stark.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 18.

These sociologists do not deny that religious demand is important,¹⁰⁰ but for them the supply side is decisive. In America, the state does not regulate religious markets (through restriction or through subsidy); where “a religious economy is unregulated, pluralism will thrive.”¹⁰¹ It is relatively easy for new organizations (in traditional sociological terms, sects) to create places for themselves in a large market place. According to Finke and Stark, they do not manage this by making things easy on their members, but by making them hard: demanding that people accept the stigma of belonging to an unpopular organization and meet exacting standards of participation and behavior.¹⁰² Why does this work? When religious organizations demand much, they can give much; when they demand little, they can offer but little in the way of benefits. The basic reason for this is that “religion is a *collectively produced commodity*.” Many of religion’s emotional and psychic awards are the result of doing things (such as singing hymns) together. Because many religious benefits are promised for a distant tomorrow, it is important that interactions with other people

¹⁰⁰ Finke acknowledges the importance of demand in a more recent essay. Religious demand is very diverse, and no one religion can satisfy all of it, he says. Roger Finke, “The Illusion of Shifting Demand: Supply-Side Interpretations of American Religious History,” in Thomas Tweed, ed., Retelling U.S. Religious History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 110.

¹⁰¹ Finke and Stark, The Churching of America, 18.

¹⁰² Ibid., 238. They write, “*religious organizations are stronger to the degree that they impose significant costs in terms of sacrifice and stigma upon their members*. Herein lies the key to the trends noted throughout this book. People tend to value religion on the basis of how costly it is to belong.”

today reinforce the desire to belong.¹⁰³ Strong commitment is essential, because “free riders” undermine religious organization – “Free rider problems are the nemesis of any form of collective action.”¹⁰⁴ Demanding religious organizations, then, secure the enthusiastic and steady participation that makes them grow.¹⁰⁵

Church growth and decline is not, of course, our main concern here; our focus is on moral teaching, and the current confusion in religious bodies like the Episcopal Church. What we have learned so far from Finke and Stark is relevant in two ways. First of all, religious pluralism is inevitable in an unregulated religious economy like that of the United States. This means that no one church can possibly reach and satisfy everyone; it also means that a church is free to define itself and its standards for membership. Second, if Finke and Stark are correct, the stricter, more demanding churches will do a better job of attracting and keeping members than fuzzy, less demanding denominations. Confusion in moral teachings, then, is not just spiritually or intellectually troubling, it is organizationally debilitating.

¹⁰³ Ibid., , 252.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰⁵ It is not certain, however, that “strictness” is the quality that makes certain churches grow; in fact, there is some evidence that strictness in moral matters is unappealing even in conservative Protestant congregations. For an argument that what counts is an authoritative message delivered by a confident preacher, rather than an insistence on obedience, see Joseph B. Tamney and Stephen D. Johnson, “The Popularity of Strict Churches,” Review of Religious Research 39 (March 1998): 209-223.

If all this is true, why don't struggling churches realize it, revise their teaching, toughen their demands, and begin to grow again? Finke and Stark are well aware that church leaders do not simply evaluate prospective markets and make plans for them. These sociologists are, in fact, revising the venerable church-sect thesis according to which sects, which have a very tense relationship with the surrounding culture, tend to become churches, which have a much more accommodating relationship with culture; Finke and Stark write, "the *sect-church process is always under way*, and the less regulated the religious economy, the more rapidly and thoroughly the process will occur."¹⁰⁶ Yet there is more here than dispassionate analysis; there is a morality play as well. The authors' message seems to be that sects are better than churches because they grow; the corollary is that good religious messages are the ones that produce church growth, and bad messages are those that fail to produce growth.

One reviewer of The Churching of America recalled H. Richard Niebuhr's awareness "that there was, in economic terms, a huge market niche for theological refinement, professionalism, and ethicalism. A demand-side perspective would stress this point." And, in fact, Finke and Stark recognize that both clergy and laity in many churches want an up-to-date religion.¹⁰⁷ Churches that are not growing could be performing a valuable service to their members,

¹⁰⁶ Finke and Stark, The Churching of America, 237.

¹⁰⁷ R. Stephen Warner, Review of The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy, by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 32 (September 1993), 297.

and even to the larger society. It is important, too, to ask whether a widely accepted message is also a truthful proclamation. Finke and Stark correctly point out that seminary professors often teach a version of the faith that departs from received traditions.¹⁰⁸ But so what? The inherited ideas may not be the best ones available, and the traditionally minded person may not be the most faithful one.¹⁰⁹ Widely accepted ideas, even if they make strict demands and promote “religion,” may be profoundly wrong. Once a single religious figure stood opposed to four hundred and fifty other religious leaders, the king, and the queen. According to the Scriptures, however, the truth was with the unsuccessful solitary one, Elijah the prophet.¹¹⁰ Moreover, there are cases that do not seem to fit the Finke-Stark thesis that strict demands encourage church

¹⁰⁸ See The Churching of America, 187ff. They are discussing the Southern Baptist Convention and its seminaries, but similar observations could be made of many other Protestant churches.

¹⁰⁹ Anglican bishop Richard Holloway has written perceptively of the nature of orthodoxy and heresy. Orthodoxy does not consist of precise formulae carefully preserved from the past. The true function of the creeds of the church is to warn people away from the dangers that come with too much, not too little, precision. The full experience of Christ “was too wide and too overwhelming ever to be captured in words. The great heretics, however, were like temperance reformers who wanted to control and rationalize this wild and extravagant claim [that Jesus makes God visible to people].... A good heresy is always a neat thing, purged of all paradox and wildness. We tend to think that heretics are daring and adventurous men, held back by the timid conformity of the orthodox. This is just about as complete a reversal of fact as you can get. It is precisely the *width and excitement* of orthodoxy that offends the narrow unimaginativeness of the heretic.” Richard Holloway, Beyond Belief: The Christian Encounter with God (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 79. Italics added.

¹¹⁰ See I Kings 18:20-39.

growth. The publication of Humanae Vitae in 1968 certainly raised the cost of being an obedient Catholic, but it is associated with a decline in church participation, not an increase.¹¹¹ Finke and Stark attribute that drop to *decreasing* demands in other areas, but the evidence is ambiguous at best.¹¹²

Even though there may be problems with the case Finke and Stark have made, and despite the fact that their concern with church growth is not ours here, their book raises important questions for this study of church teaching. The American religious economy promotes pluralism.¹¹³ What is it about certain churches that makes them apparently ineffective in this pluralistic environment? The religious economy seems to reward clear, demanding teaching; why do some churches fail to give a clear message, but “go limping with two different opinions”?¹¹⁴ The authors contend that religious organizations flourish when they are sects existing in a tense relationship with American culture. But one reviewer

¹¹¹ On contraception and the Catholic Church, please chapter one, above.

¹¹² Finke and Stark, The Churching of America, 260-261. R. Stephen Warner points out that in making other changes cited by Finke and Stark, such as the ending of meatless Fridays, “the church abandoned not so much strictness as distinctive identity markers” of Catholic culture. Review of The Churching of America, 296.

¹¹³ Not everyone agrees with the Finke-Stark thesis that the de-regulation of religion leads to religious pluralism. Some argue instead that pluralism leads to de-regulation. For an argument that this was the case in Canada, see Peter Beyer: “Religious Vitality in Canada: The Complementarity of Religious Market and Secularization Perspectives,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 36 (June 1997): 272-288.

¹¹⁴ The words are Elijah's. I Kings 18:21 New Revised Standard Version.

pointed to a different possibility, namely, that Catholics and Southern Baptists, the subjects of extensive treatment in the book, may not have been in tension with *secular* culture but rather with a dominant religious-and-secular culture, Yankee Protestantism.¹¹⁵ Markets, after all, are not mere systems, but sets of relationships between human beings. People who participate in religious markets do not belong only to churches, but also to ethnic groups, cultural groupings, and social classes. To understand the problems of mainline churches, it is necessary to see where they fit into the social and theological spectrum of American Christianity, and to ask just why pluralism can be so difficult for them.

IV. Culture Wars: New Lines of Cleavage in American Religion

Religious pluralism is nothing new in American history: there have always been competing religious groups, and sometimes the conflict between them has been exceedingly bitter. As we seek to understand why some churches have difficulty with their moral teaching at the end of the twentieth century, we need to ask whether old quarrels of the past are the main reasons for friction today. According to James Davison Hunter, conflicts between Catholics and Protestants or between Christians and Jews are largely a thing of the past – not really because Americans are more “tolerant” than they used to be, but because a new

¹¹⁵ Warner, Review of The Churching of America, 297.

cultural war has superseded earlier antagonisms. The culture war occurs within the older denominations, rather than between them.¹¹⁶ Observers of late twentieth-century America recognize that there are furious disagreements over the family, education, law, electoral politics, the media and the arts. Hunter contends that these battles reflect a deeper division of moral authority between two perspectives, “orthodox” and “progressivist.”

Cultural conflict consists of “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.” The differences are not limited to academic debates, but are the subject of a struggle for power: “The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others.” The root issue is *moral authority*, “the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on.”¹¹⁷ The majority of Americans do not subscribe *in toto* to either of the competing visions, but they cannot avoid the conflict between them,¹¹⁸ because

¹¹⁶ James Davison Hunter, Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹⁸ Charles Taylor shows why no one can escape the conflict between fundamentally different moral visions when he points out that, “Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.” It is not possible for a human being to function without some sense of good and bad, right and wrong. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3. Even though much of modern moral philosophy wants to ignore the issue, moral perspectives include “an ontology of the human” (5). Most of the time, we do not articulate the ontology we live by, and may prefer not to do so (9), because “the pluralist nature of modern society makes it

articulations of these visions are “*polarizing impulses or tendencies* in American culture.” Social-issue organizations and their public representatives are usually the most polarizing forces.¹¹⁹

What, then, are the two perspectives on moral authority? One of them is orthodoxy, and it entails “*the commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority....* It tells us what is good, what is true, how we should live, and who we are. It is an authority that is sufficient for all time.”¹²⁰ There are differing candidates for the ultimate authority (Torah, Bible, church teaching, and natural law); the important point is that some such authority exists. It is different with progressivism, for which “moral authority tends to be defined by the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism.... From this standpoint, truth tends to be viewed as a process, as a reality that is ever unfolding.” Progressivists may identify with a religious heritage, but they will tend “to translate the moral ideals of a religious tradition so that they conform to and legitimate the contemporary *zeitgeist*.”¹²¹ Traditional sources of moral authority (like the Bible) no longer have an exclusive claim to truth. “Rather, the

easier to live that way” (10). People may be unprepared to make a once-for-all choice between secular and theistic ontologies, a problem which is “an essentially modern predicament” (10). If Hunter’s analysis is right, polarizing debates will continually press people in the middle to choose one perspective or the other.

¹¹⁹ Hunter, Culture Wars, 43.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

binding moral authority tends to reside in personal experience or scientific rationality, or in either of these in conversation with particular religious or cultural traditions.”¹²²

Hunter’s description of the competing visions sounds a little like Witten’s account of the tension between Protestantism and secularization. There are some important differences, however. For one thing, certain *secularists* can be orthodox, for example, those who are committed to some version of natural law.¹²³ For another, Hunter’s claims are much better grounded than Witten’s, resting as they do on a study of several contentious issues and on interviews with representative advocates of various causes. With Hunter we get more than a conflict between a religion (Protestantism) and a social process (secularization). We get two different ways of being religious, and two different ways of being secular, and the difference affects public policies, religious organizations, and personal lives.

For our purposes, the most important point may be Hunter’s insistence that the new cultural conflict is no respecter of denominations; it occurs *within* the denominations, and threatens to substitute new lines of cleavage for old ones.

¹²² Ibid., 44-45. One reviewer manages to state Hunter’s case even more concisely and elegantly than the sociologist himself: “Modernists, inspired by life rather than revelation, begin with the everyday and tailor their creed to adjust to its pressures. Fundamentalists, who reverse the priority, begin with an ethic and are determined to shape modern life to fit its requirements. For the orthodox, authority is external to the individual. For the progressive, it is internal to the individual.” Alan Wolfe, “Politics by Other Means,” New Republic 205 (November 11, 1991), 40.

¹²³ Ibid., 45.

The orthodox members of a Protestant church could have more in common with orthodox Catholics or Jews than they do with progressivist members of their own denomination (Hunter gives telling examples of pro-life activists finding exactly this to be the case). If the two perspectives are irreconcilable, as Hunter insists, one may expect bitter conflicts within denominations over certain moral issues. The disputes will involve more than differing moral prescriptions or proscriptions: they will entail confrontations between fundamentally different conceptions of authority. Among Protestants, some will do battle for the Bible, while others will insist on modifying teaching as social realities change. We shall see that exactly such confrontations do occur in the arguments about sexuality.

As he builds his case for the importance of the culture war, Hunter identifies three reasons why it has become so significant.¹²⁴ Since the 1950s, “the longstanding Judeo-Christian consensus in American public life has collapsed.”¹²⁵ This is Hunter’s way of pointing to a new disestablishment. Two other simultaneous trends are important, a decline in denominational loyalty and a great increase in the number of parachurch organizations.¹²⁶ Pluralism in

¹²⁴ Hunter is well aware of the nineteenth century roots of the culture war; he discusses the responses of churches to both social and intellectual issues (*Ibid.*, 77ff.) and recalls the battles between modernizers and fundamentalists, symbolized by the Scopes trial in 1925. “Though not politicized, by the 1950s the essential lines of division between orthodox and progressive forces in America’s main faiths had been drawn” (85).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

every direction! There have long been various denominations, but now people are not so sure they need to stay in the denomination that is currently theirs. Other organizations are doing religious work, too, not just the local church or the national denomination. In the nation's public square, religious voices can at best share the space with competing claims and visions. And within the churches themselves, there is no unity on the fundamental question of how, in principle, one might arrive at truth.

Hunter's book has won praise from most reviewers for the even-handed way in which he describes the two perspectives, although some reviewers detect (rightly, I think), a bias toward the orthodox side.¹²⁷ More telling are criticisms that the book has not treated groups and issues that might point to different lines of cleavage. For example, Hunter does not discuss African-Americans or race problems. To do this might complicate matters considerably, because African-Americans side with progressivists on a number of national issues, but often agree with the orthodox on matters of personal morality.¹²⁸ As one critic complains, Hunter says "little or nothing about actual war, the workplace, economic inequality, race, science, or technology."¹²⁹

¹²⁷ See, for example, the review by John J. Pauly, Journal of Communication 44 (Winter 1994), 148-150, or D. G. Hart, "Defining America: Politics, Religion, Worldview," Christian Century 110 (January 20, 1993), 59.

¹²⁸ Hart, "Defining America: Politics, Religion, Worldview," 61.

¹²⁹ Pauly, Review of Culture Wars, 149.

One reviewer has questioned whether the culture war actually exists (“Hunter sometimes seems to want more consensus about values in American society than my family can muster around the dinner table”), and suggests that both sides in the supposed war are ignoring the truly important issue, “the individualistic, materialistic, consumer-driven values that dominate the way we live.”¹³⁰ Even if Hunter’s conflict exists, there is a question as to how national it truly is, and another question about its capacity to promote religious realignment. Andrew Greeley notes that cultural “conflicts in Texas are not the same as those in Massachusetts.” He grants that members of different religious groups may cooperate on certain social issues, but is far from convinced that such cooperation will become systematic.¹³¹

Some of the objections are well taken. The “culture war” does not include all social and political questions (or, if it does, Hunter has not shown that this is the case). It is premature to speak of realignment on America’s religious and cultural stage. But the clash between progressivist and orthodox perspectives is real enough,¹³² and it accounts for much of the trouble over moral teaching in the

¹³⁰ Douglas Jacobsen, “What Culture War? The View from the Center” Christian Century 112 (November 15, 1995), 1084. Jacobsen is reviewing another book by Hunter (Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War, published in 1994), but devotes considerable attention to the earlier Culture Wars.

¹³¹ Andrew Greeley, “With God on their Sides,” New York Times Book Review, November 24, 1991, 14.

¹³² A most interesting discussion of the culture-war issue took place in the Marine Corps Gazette in the mid-1990s. Please see Appendix VIII, “Tell to the Marines: A Front in the Culture War.”

mainline churches.¹³³ Even in liberal churches like the Episcopal Church, the dominance of the progressivist perspective is not (yet) complete. This internal debate, combined with the continuing presence of many denominations and the disestablishment of mainline Protestantism, means that these churches have to confront pluralism of several kinds when they try to decide what their moral teaching will be.

V. Church Families, Pluralism and Gender

In American Mainline Religion, sociologists Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney portray six “families” in modern American religion, describe the impact of the events of the 1960s on the American religious scene, and investigate the moral outlooks associated with various religious groups.¹³⁴ In late twentieth century America, denominational boundaries are neither as clear nor as important as they used to be; the boundaries that matter most today “are those

¹³³ A study of the developing debate over homosexuality among Roman Catholics, United Methodists, and Southern Baptists found that “it is the granting of authority to either the Bible or science that determines one’s place in [a] continuum of attitudinal categories...: rejecting-punitive, rejecting-nonpunitive, qualified acceptance, and full acceptance.” Thomas Furman Hewitt, “The American Church’s Reaction to the Homophile Movement, 1948-1978,” Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1983, abstract. Hewitt’s categories of Bible and science seem to anticipate Hunter’s distinction between orthodox and progressivist views of authority.

¹³⁴ Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, American Mainline Religion: Is Changing Shape and Future (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

distinguishing one ideological cluster or division from another.”¹³⁵ They recognize the continuing importance of the modernist/traditionalist division within Protestantism: “The liberal wing sought to accommodate modernity by redefining religious truth in ways that minimized conflict with science and biblical higher criticism and by developing Social Gospel ministries in response to new needs arising from urbanization and industrialization. In contrast, the conservative wing insisted upon the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the primacy of religion over science, and concern with individual salvation.”¹³⁶ Even today, denominations usually fit within one camp or the other.¹³⁷

The classification scheme doesn’t work as neatly as one might hope – Roof and McKinney speak of six religious families, but end up with eight categories altogether.¹³⁸ The six families are Roman Catholics, 25 per cent of the US population; Moderate Protestants, 24.2 per cent;¹³⁹ Conservative Protestants, 15.8 per cent;¹⁴⁰ Black Protestants, 9.1 per cent;¹⁴¹ Liberal

¹³⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 80.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 81-85.

¹³⁹ Among the Moderate Protestants are Methodists, Lutherans, Northern Baptists, the Reformed, and Christians (Disciples of Christ).

Protestants, 8.7 per cent;¹⁴² and Jews, 2.3 per cent. The two categories that do not fit into the family scheme are persons with no religious preference, 6.9 per cent, and “all others,” some 8 per cent. Included among the “others” that do not fit the scheme are members of one of America’s most distinctive, fastest-growing religious organizations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This exclusion suggests that there may be something inadequate about the Roof/McKinney scheme, but for our study of the Episcopal Church it will serve well enough.

The Episcopalians belong to the small family of Liberal Protestants, a standing they share with the Presbyterians and the United Church of Christ. These churches stand out from the rest because of their history, their social status, and their present-day moral outlook. Historically, these are the “Colonial big three.”¹⁴³ Although never identical in polity, worship, or theology, these

¹⁴⁰ The Conservative Protestant category includes Southern Baptists, the Churches of Christ, “Evangelicals/Fundamentalists,” Nazarenes, Pentecostal/Holiness churches, Assemblies of God, Churches of God, and Adventists.

¹⁴¹ This category includes Methodists, Northern Baptists, and Southern Baptists. A full accounting of Black Protestantism should include Pentecostals as well. For an orientation to African American Christianity, see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹⁴² The Liberal Protestant family includes Episcopalians, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterians.

¹⁴³ Roof and McKinney, American Mainline Religion, 85. The United Church of Christ, the product of a 1957 merger, includes the Congregationalists.

churches are all rooted in the sixteenth-century Reformation. All have been inclined to emphasize nurture more than conversion.¹⁴⁴ In the twentieth century, modernists triumphed in all three churches (Roof and McKinney do not mention how tumultuous that conflict was for Presbyterians). They responded to modern, industrial America with charitable and educational activities and with Social Gospel ministries. Moreover, these churches “shared a strong Anglo-American identity and a culturally established status which gave them power and influence beyond their numbers. Both their theology and their social standing encouraged an ecumenical and public concern.”¹⁴⁵ In the 1980s, these churches retained much of their status and power, and were “disproportionately represented among the nation’s civic and corporate elite,” as well as in the United States Congress.¹⁴⁶

The history and social standing of these churches set Liberal Protestants apart from other Americans, and so do their moral views. Until the 1960s, Roof and McKinney write, “the role of religion in maintaining respect for the traditional understandings of family life and sexual behavior ... remained fairly constant,” but “in the 1960s the ties between religion and traditional patterns of family life and personal moral values were increasingly challenged.”¹⁴⁷ Roof and McKinney

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

review survey data on a variety of issues pertaining to the rights and roles of women, then select three issues to construct a scale for measuring commitment to “women’s rights.”¹⁴⁸ Liberal Protestants are far more committed to women’s rights, as defined in their book, than are any other Protestants except Northern Baptists. Episcopalians are the most supportive of those rights, closely followed by the United Church of Christ, Presbyterians, Northern Baptists, and Roman Catholics.¹⁴⁹ A similar pattern emerges when Roof and McKinney examine “new morality” prescriptions for sexual behavior, specifically, premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexual sex. “Those with no religious preference, Jews, and Unitarian-Universalists are most open to extramarital, premarital, and homosexual sexual relations. Liberal Protestants are slightly more liberal on extramarital and homosexual relationships, while moderate Protestants generally resist new morality positions.”¹⁵⁰

Roof and McKinney find, in other words, that Liberal Protestants, including Episcopalians, differ significantly from most other American Christians on issues

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 204-208. The scale is based on three issues: “approval of a woman working in business even if her husband is capable of supporting her; disagreement with the statement that men are better suited emotionally for politics than are women; and disagreement with the statement that women should take care of their homes and leave running the country to men” (208).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 208-209. The strongest supporters of women’s rights were the Unitarian-Universalists, who belong to Roof and McKinney’s “other category,” where two more “others,” Christian Scientists and Mormons, join them. Also strong supporters of “women’s rights” are Jews and non-affiliates.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 213.

having to do with gender roles and sexual morality. Those issues are, of course, key battle grounds in Hunter's culture war. Episcopalians, along with members of the Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ, are more likely than most American Christians to support departures from traditional roles and rules. Are their attitudes related to Hunter's two competing sources of moral authority? American Mainline Religion is not altogether clear on this point (it was published four years before Culture Wars), but Roof and McKinney do suggest that personal autonomy and an acceptance of moral relativism are powerful factors in the Liberal Protestant churches.¹⁵¹ Progressivists emphasize individual and scientifically based choices, rather than adherence to an unchanging external authority, so it seems that most Episcopalians belong to the progressivist camp. The fact that some Episcopalians do not is one reason for the continuing struggle over moral teaching.

With their description of families of denominations, Roof and McKinney clearly emphasize religious pluralism. They recognize that pluralism has always been a fact of religious life in America, but they believe that its full impact was felt by leading Protestant churches only in the 1960s.¹⁵² In that decade, "the old civil faith that once unified Americans around the celebration of national values and purpose was deemed by many to be hollow and deceitful."¹⁵³ A number of

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 227.

¹⁵² Ibid., 7, 9.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 13.

developments made the reality of pluralism unmistakable. A Catholic won the Presidency in 1960. Catholics were not only numerous but they were gaining rapidly in education, income, and status. The US Supreme Court began to dismantle the informal connections between churches and schools.¹⁵⁴ The percentage of Americans declaring no religious affiliation increased.¹⁵⁵ And in this decade of conflict, somewhere around 1965, liberal churches stopped growing -- and began to experience an actual decline in membership.

To what extent was this decline due to spiritual or moral factors? Roof and McKinney accept the thesis, first articulated by Dean Kelley in 1972, that American churches can be placed on a continuum from "exclusive" to "ecumenical;" the more ecumenical a church, the less likely it is to grow, the more exclusive, the more likely it is to gain members.¹⁵⁶ Liberal and moderate Protestant churches were confused in the 1960s. An important reason was the recent experience of the 1950s, when religion and American culture enjoyed an exceptionally close relationship: "A vital synthesis of beliefs, values, and ideals existed, sustained by a cold war ideology and close links between civic piety, national visions, and self-understanding."¹⁵⁷ When this consensus collapsed, the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵⁶ Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 88-90.

¹⁵⁷ Roof and McKinney, American Mainline Religion, 27.

churches most closely associated with it were not sure what to say or do. Although Roof and McKinney do not put it this way, moderate and liberal Protestant churches may have fallen into “cultural captivity” in the 1950s, and thus have been inadequately prepared for the challenges of the next decade. These churches, along with American religion generally, experienced a new, cultural disestablishment in the 1960s.¹⁵⁸

The cultural upheaval of the 1960s thus forced churches to deal with a more radically pluralistic situation than they had faced before. In some respects, the Episcopal Church, like other liberal and moderate bodies, was unprepared for the new situation. But Roof and McKinney take pains to show how complex was the situation that led to declining membership in these churches. One cannot easily attribute the decline to radical new ideas, or to the lack of such ideas, because not very many people actually left these churches. “There was no massive exodus of old members from these institutions. Rather, after the mid sixties fewer young persons were joining the mainline churches, and fewer still chose to become active participants and faithful supporters.”¹⁵⁹

Would more young people have become active members if such churches had preached a strongly traditional message, perhaps more attuned to the “orthodox” side of American culture? If Roof and McKinney are right, that would not have helped things at all. They devote a significant part of one chapter to the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 22.

matter of “religious switching,” or movement from one denomination to another. They found that individuals do indeed switch between conservative and liberal churches, but in the process the liberal churches gain more members than they lose. When the moderate and liberal churches lose members, it is more often to the ranks of the unaffiliated than to conservatives churches.¹⁶⁰ The real problem with the switching game is that the switchers who join moderate and liberal churches do not become highly committed, active members.¹⁶¹ The overall condition of the liberal Protestants is not good, according to this study: “levels of orthodox belief are low, doubt and uncertainty in matters of faith common, knowledge of the Scriptures exceedingly low.” Congregational life has declined with an increase in individualism, and church attendance is low.¹⁶²

What Roof and McKinney seem to show is that the toughest problem for moderate and liberal Protestant churches is pluralism. With many options available, some religious and others secular, these churches do not manage to attract many new, active members. These churches occupy an uncomfortable place between conservative churches, many of which lean to the orthodox side of the cultural divide, and the secular world of the religiously unaffiliated, most of them clearly on the progressivist side. In their moral teaching, these churches have nothing definite to say. There is no reason to leave them if one is already

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 170.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 177ff.

¹⁶² Ibid., 86.

an active participant, but there may be no good reason to join them, either.

These churches seem to be deeply confused about their identity and social role.

VI. Pluralism, Culture Wars and the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is indeed muddled about its identity and its place in American society. It is not enough, however, to say that the church follows every trend, for there are some patterns in the confusion. Nor is it enough to assign all problems to the great march of “secularization,” for many American churches seem to fare quite well no matter how much secularization there may be. The keys to the situation are rather in pluralism and in certain aspects of the culture war. The Episcopal Church does not know what to do in a radically pluralistic situation, and many of its most difficult problems are bound up with the gender and sexuality aspects of the culture war.

Why should this be? The problem is that the Episcopal Church once aspired to be something very different from one option among many others. Rooted as it is in the established Church of England, the Episcopal Church wanted to be at least *primus inter pares* in a denominational society. The Episcopal Church longed to become a national church, or to be the catalyst for creating a national church.¹⁶³ The dream has died thousands of deaths, but lives on in visions of “inclusiveness” and in a desire to address every possible social

¹⁶³ The national-church aspirations of the Episcopal Church will be discussed below, in chapters four and six.

issue through resolutions of the triennial General Convention. The Episcopal Church simply does not know how to define itself as one religious body among others, one with a distinctive identity and doctrine that *exclude* as well as include.

If pluralism is a problem, so are the issues of sexuality and gender. The dream of a national church was integrated with a certain vision of marriage and the family.¹⁶⁴ Marriage was indissoluble, and the family was patriarchal; marriage, family, church, and nation lived or died together. Even as religious and cultural pluralism increased, challenges developed to the indissoluble marriage and the patriarchal family. On the surface, the Episcopal Church seems to have shed much of its patriarchal past: it ordains women, does it not? But the fundamental model of the church at the operational level has not changed. The church still tries to renew itself by marriage, procreation, and nurture, long after the family structures that can support such a program are gone. There is no national role to match the ambitions of this church, and there are not enough traditional families to fill its churches, either.

In our next chapter, we will document the incoherence of Episcopalian moral teaching by reviewing the ecclesiastical trial of Bishop Walter Righter. The church that supposedly wants to include everyone finds itself challenged to choose a side in the culture war. The central issue in the Righter trial was the moral status of homosexual activity. We will examine many of the reactions to that trial, and will compare the struggles of the Episcopal Church

¹⁶⁴ This theme will be developed below, in chapter five.

those of other American churches, and of Anglican churches in other lands. The Episcopal Church is not the only religious body confused about sexuality, but its apparent drift toward greater acceptance of gay and lesbian persons does threaten to split the church and create fissures in the Anglican Communion.

Chapter Three:

Homosexuality, The Righter Trial, And the Danger of Schism

Moral teaching was the critical issue in the ecclesiastical trial of Episcopalian Bishop Walter Righter. Early in 1995, ten bishops¹ brought a presentment against the retired bishop of Iowa, charging that Walter Righter had ordained a non-celibate homosexual, and thus disregarded the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church.² In a letter to the Presiding Bishop of the Church, Bishop William C. Wantland explained why the ten bishops took so drastic a step:

We are deeply concerned for the Episcopal Church. *Many question whether we really have any moral teaching*, and more doubt that we have the will to call to account those who openly violate the moral teaching we have. We are hopeful that this action may bring to a head, and then bring to a close, the practice of open disregard for order, authority and collegiality in the Body of Christ.³

¹ The ten bishops were William Wantland, Eau Claire; James M. Stanton, Dallas; Stephen H. Jecko, Florida; John David Schofield, San Joaquin; Terence Kelshaw, Rio Grande; James M. Coleman, West Tennessee; Jack L. Iker, Fort Worth; Maurice M. Benitez, Texas; Keith Ackerman, Quincy; and John Howe, Central Florida.

² At the time of ordination, every bishop makes the following promise: "I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church." In the same declaration, the bishop-elect affirms that "I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation" Book of Common Prayer 1979, 513.

The presentment, which led to the second heresy trial in the history of the Episcopal Church, was the result of a controversy that had been intensifying for nearly twenty years.

I. Water Pistols and Church Discipline: Gay Ordinations in the Newark Diocese

The trouble began in 1977 when the Bishop of New York ordained a lesbian who was not celibate. In the same year, the House of Bishops endorsed a report by its Commission on Theology declaring that the church could offer its nuptial blessing only to heterosexuals and could not ordain homosexual persons unless they were celibate. Two years later, the 1979 General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved a resolution concerning sexual behavior and ordination. Central to the resolution was this statement: “[T]he traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity [is] the standard of Christian sexual morality. Candidates for ordination are expected to conform to this standard. Therefore . . . it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage.” Yet already in 1979 some bishops dissented from this position. Twenty bishops signed a minority report, saying they would not exclude candidates for ordination on the basis of sexual orientation and activity

³ Cover Letter from William Wantland to Edmond Browning. Italics added. Browning was then the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.

alone.⁴ A pastoral letter from the House of Bishops is ambiguous. It says, “Most of the church cannot accept a homosexual liaison as an alternative lifestyle in the Christian and biblical tradition.” But the bishops also stated that “we have declined to legislate. Instead we have offered guidelines as to what the majority here believes is appropriate.”⁵

During the 1980s the Church’s Standing Commission on Health and Human Affairs examined sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular. In a report to the 1988 General Convention, the Commission said that major social changes provided a reason for reviewing sexual standards. The Commission held that marriage is the normative structure for sexual activity, and noted that a majority of the members of the Church favored traditional sexual standards. The report added that an active minority in the church wanted to consider new moral options for sexuality, although the document made no legislative

⁴ Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Teaching of the House of Bishops to the Church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality, 1994, Chapter 1. Also in 1979, the House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada issued guidelines on homosexuality, according to which “We accept all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, as equal before God; our acceptance of persons with homosexual orientation is not an acceptance of homosexual activity.” The guidelines reject the blessing of homosexual unions. With respect to ordination, the policy is that “we will not call into question the ordination of a person who has shared with the bishop his/her homosexual orientation if there has been a commitment to the bishop to abstain from sexual acts with persons of the same sex as a part of the requirement for ordination” (“Canada: House of Bishops Discuss Ordination of Homosexuals,” Anglican Communion News Service #1213, 15 April 1997. Obtained from Anglican Communion News Service website July 1, 1997).

⁵ “Toward Tomorrow: A Pastoral Letter from the House of Bishops,” cited from The Living Church, October 21, 1979, 13.

recommendations about homosexuality.⁶ A reporter observed that issues of sexuality dominated the 1988 meeting. The General Convention was “at best an Anglican standoff,” but more trouble could be expected; “an ever-growing polarization was evident, and it appears that an Episcopal battle for the Bible is shaping up for years to come.”⁷

Words gave way to deeds in 1989 when John Spong, bishop of the Diocese of Newark, ordained Robert Williams, knowing that the ordinand lived with another man and planned to keep on doing so. Bishop Spong has played a major role in this controversy. He is a gifted writer who is also skilled in the use of the media (many have encountered him as a guest on National Public Radio programs). As a young priest, Spong served in the South during the Civil Rights movement, and acquired a taste for confrontational methods for advancing what he believes to be just causes.⁸ The ordination that would bring Walter Righter into court also took place in Spong’s diocese, where Righter was serving as an assistant bishop.

The Williams ordination was a disaster. Shortly after his ordination, Williams publicly denigrated Christian traditions of monogamy and voluntary

⁶ Continuing the Dialogue, Chapter 1.

⁷ Julia Duin, “Episcopalians Tiptoe Along Moral Tightrope,” Christianity Today 32 (September 2, 1988): 46.

⁸ For a sympathetic portrayal of Spong, see Bruce Bawer, “Who’s On Trial – The Heretic or the Church?” New York Times Magazine, April 7, 1996: 38-42.

celibacy, and suggested that Mother Theresa might enjoy a richer life if she had sex.⁹ These remarks ignited a firestorm, and Williams was forced to resign his position with a diocesan ministry to homosexuals. He moved to Massachusetts, where he later renounced his priesthood, saying that his relationship with the church was like that of an abused spouse. Williams died in 1992 of complications related to AIDS.¹⁰

Official reaction to the ordination came quickly and seemed impressive. Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning and his unofficial Council of Advice issued a statement dissociating themselves from the ordination.¹¹ But a truer measure of the response to Spong's action was the struggle at a meeting of House of Bishops in October 1990. By a very narrow margin, the Bishops disapproved of Spong's action, voting "for a statement declaring ordination of noncelibate homosexuals 'inappropriate' and criticizing Bishop John Spong of Newark, New Jersey, for violating that policy." One bishop expressed the meaning of the

⁹ Williams made his comments at a convention organized by the Michigan chapter of Integrity, an organization of gay Episcopalians. Speaking on January 13, 1990, Williams said, "Monogamy is as unnatural as celibacy." In answer to a question about the possible benefits of sex for Mother Teresa, Williams said, "If she got laid? Yes, I believe the quality of anyone's life is significantly enhanced by sex." See Chris Bull, "Judas Priest? Gay Cleric's Coarse Talk About Mother Teresa Lands Him in Hot Water," The Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine 546 (March 13, 1990): 9-10.

¹⁰ On the Williams affair, see further "Gay Priest Resigns," Christian Century 107 (February 7, 1990): 119; "Knocking Monogamy," Time 135 (February 12, 1990): 55; and "Former Gay Priest Robert Williams Dies," Christian Century 110 (February 17, 1993): 170.

¹¹ "Gay Ordination Criticized," Christian Century 107 (March 7, 1990): 240-241.

action in these memorable words: "Some have said this is a gun pointed at the head of Spong. It's actually only a water pistol."¹²

As of 1990, then, the Episcopal Church officially opposed the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons, yet even the ordination of as controversial a figure as Robert Williams brought only a mild response. In 1991, the church faced the sexuality issue again when its General Convention met in Phoenix. The Convention approved a resolution which declared "that the teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous 'union of husband and wife in heart, body and mind.'" However, the Resolution also committed the church to "continue to work to reconcile the *discontinuity* between this teaching and the experience of many members of this body." The Resolution called upon the congregations of the church "to enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues."¹³

The 1991 General Convention certainly did not satisfy opponents of the ordination of homosexuals. Some found this convention disturbing for the suggestion that there might not be any discipline left in the Episcopal Church. Christianity Today commented that the Convention ended as it had begun, with Episcopalians "in a muddle about sexuality." A retired suffragan bishop of the

¹² Richard Walker. "Bishops Narrowly Reject Homosexual Ordination," Christianity Today 34 (October 22, 1990): 53-55. The resolution passed 80 to 76.

¹³ Continuing the Dialogue, chapter 1. Italics added.

Diocese of Texas remarked, " We are pastors not merely to one another but to the whole church. Can we be good pastors to the rest of the church if we can't discipline ourselves? Are the bishops of this House capable of self-discipline?" The magazine's verdict: "Apparently not."¹⁴ Nor did the 1994 General Convention sort out the mess. Carrying out a directive of the 1991 Convention, the House of Bishops produced a document on sexuality – but the foreword acknowledged what any careful reader would soon discover, that "there were several issues which could not be resolved by even the most carefully written statement."¹⁵

Out of this chaos came the Righter trial, an attempt by the presenters to restore a certain kind of order. Why Righter, and not Spong, or any other bishop who had ordained a gay or lesbian person? There is a statute of limitations for bringing charges against a bishop, and the Righter case was the oldest one. The presenters were prepared to bring more cases: "Should this matter be set for trial, it is our intention to file Presentments against the next most recent offender,

¹⁴ Julia Duin, "Episcopalians Fail to Resolve Sexuality Issues," Christianity Today 35 (August 19, 1991): 46-47.

¹⁵ Continuing the Dialogue, Foreword. This document was supposed to be a "pastoral teaching," but the House of Bishops, following a two-hour debate, downgraded it to a "study document." Michael Hirsley, "Bishops Retreat on Sexuality Issues: Episcopalians Approve Guidelines that Conflict on Homosexuality," Chicago Tribune, August 25, 1994; retrieved from Tribune Online Archives, July 6, 1997.

and so on, until we are current in bringing to trial all those have knowing violated the teaching of the Church.”¹⁶

The trial took place before a specially convened court of bishops.¹⁷ The charges against Righter were that the bishop, by his statements and actions, had taught doctrine contrary to that held by the Episcopal Church, and that he had violated his ordination vows when he performed the contested ordination.¹⁸ The court decided that its first task must be to determine whether any doctrine existed which Righter could have contradicted.¹⁹ According to the accusers, the case was about authority, order, doctrine, marriage, and faithfulness; the relevant doctrine was based on the Bible, the classic Christian creeds, and the Church’s Book of Common Prayer.²⁰ The Presenters submitted a statement on doctrine, arguing that doctrine is not confined to basic beliefs about God, but covers many other topics, among them Christian marriage. They identified key texts from the

¹⁶ Cover Letter from William Wantland.

¹⁷ The convener was the senior bishop on the court, Edward W. Jones (Indianapolis). The other judges were C. Cabell Tennis (Delaware); Arthur E. Walmsley (Connecticut, resigned); Frederick H. Borsch (Los Angeles); Donis D. Patterson (Dallas, resigned); Andrew H. Fairfield (North Dakota); Roger J. White (Milwaukee); Robert C. Johnson (North Carolina); and Douglas E. Theuner (New Hampshire).

¹⁸ Presentment Against Walter C. Righter, January 27, 1995.

¹⁹ “New Twist In Heresy Trial,” Christian Century 113 (February 21, 1996): 193.

²⁰ William L. Sachs, “Testing Church Doctrine,” Christian Century 113 (March 13, 1996): 284-285.

Old and New Testaments which bear on sexuality, including homosexuality. They referred briefly to the history of Christian doctrine from the first century through the Reformation, and outlined important statements by the Episcopal Church, including the marriage service in The Book of Common Prayer and the 1979 General Convention Resolution opposing the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals.²¹ The judges questioned many of the assertions, often interrupting with questions of their own.²²

Before the trial, many observers expected Righter's defense to make a case for the development of doctrine: over time, the church might expand its official theology, working out the implications of ideas present *in nuce* in key formulations of the faith. Instead, Righter's lawyer argued that there was no doctrine for him to contradict. Doctrine is confined to a handful of important matters like the incarnation or the inspiration of scripture, and does not include statements about sexuality. The moral and social teaching of the Church is different from doctrine, because this teaching can be modified, and often has been -- the church now allows divorce, and it has repudiated slavery.²³ As for the 1979 General Convention Resolution about ordination, it might deserve some respect, but it is not binding.²⁴

²¹ The Accusers' Position on Doctrine in the Heresy Trial of Walter Righter.

²² Sachs, "Testing Church Doctrine," 285.

²³ Brief of Respondent in Support of Answer to Presentment.

²⁴ Sachs, "Testing Church Doctrine," 285.

Righter won. In May 1996, the ecclesiastical court announced its decision, saying that it was ruling only on “the narrow issue of whether or not under Title IV a bishop is restrained from ordaining persons living in committed same gender sexual relationships.”²⁵ The Presenters’ view of doctrine was too broad: “We are not a confessional church which has carefully articulated and identified the entire scope of its teaching and the disciplinary consequences for the violation of its teaching.” The Episcopal Church does have doctrine, but Anglicanism relies primarily on what the court called “Core Doctrine,” which “arises out of the Gospel itself, and is rooted and grounded in Holy Scripture. It is the story of God’s relationship to God’s people.” In support of the claim, the judges referred to the Catechism in the current Book of Common Prayer and to a single scholarly work published decades ago.²⁶ The Court determined that “there

²⁵ The Court’s decision was not unanimous. Bishop Andrew Fairchild of North Dakota dissented.

²⁶ The Catechism, officially called “An Outline of the Faith,” occupies eighteen pages in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Interestingly, the Catechism as approved in 1979 does not claim for itself anything like the status of “core doctrine.” It is provided mainly for parish use; its purpose is “to give an outline for instruction. It is a commentary on the creeds, but is not meant to be a complete statement of belief and practice; rather, it is a point of departure for the teacher” (Book of Common Prayer, 844). The judges also relied on C. H. Dodd’s work The Apostolic Preaching, published in 1936. This is a classic of modern biblical scholarship, but it is in the nature of scholarship that no single work can be the last word on a subject. In 1997, however, the General Convention offered a definition of doctrine that includes the catechism. According to the Canons (Title IV: 15), “As used in this Title, the term Doctrine shall mean the basic and essential teachings of the Church. The Doctrine of the Church is to be found in the Canon of Holy Scriptures as understood in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds and in the sacramental rites, the Ordinal and Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer.” Constitution and Canons 1997.

is no Core Doctrine prohibiting the ordination of a non-celibate, homosexual person living in a faithful and committed sexual relationship with a person of the same sex.” Thus Righter committed no doctrinal violation.²⁷ And discipline? The Court found that the 1979 General Convention Resolution was recommendatory only, and concluded that “there is no discipline of the Church prohibiting the ordination” of non-celibate homosexuals.²⁸

The Presenters were outraged. In a statement released at a news conference they declared that the Episcopal Church had addressed the issues of gay and lesbian marriage and homosexual ordination, and had said no to both. These positions of the Episcopal Church, they maintained, are consistent with the Scriptures and the long Christian tradition. “We decry this Opinion as deeply flawed and erroneous. The Court’s disclaimer notwithstanding, its decision has swept away two millennia of Christian teaching regarding God’s purposes in creation, the nature and meaning of Christian marriage and the family.” They said there was neither precedent nor foundation for the distinction between Core

²⁷ In dealing with doctrine, the ecclesiastical court faced a difficult task. According to a study of canon law, it is not easy to determine what counts as doctrine in the Episcopal Church. “There is no detailed, authorized confession or statement to which one can point. The basic doctrinal appeal of any Christian body must be to the Scriptures.” But these are open to a variety of interpretations. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed provide guides to the interpretation of Scripture, although these creeds “do not present us with a theology; rather, they call our attention to the data of theology, to the realities with which the believer is engaged in faith.” Anglicans have not given equivalent authority to any doctrinal formulation, not even to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Daniel B. Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), 113.

²⁸ James M. Stanton et al. v. The Right Rev. Walter C. Righter. May 15, 1996.

Doctrine and other doctrinal teaching. “The very term, “Core Doctrine,” is a specious invention of the Court.” The Presenters also questioned the judicial process itself, claiming that it was “deeply compromised from the beginning,” not least because “three out of nine judges authorized or performed ordinations identical to the one in question – and a fourth declared his willingness to do so.”²⁹ One of the Presenters, James Stanton of Dallas, also said: “This decision signifies that we have left behind our roots in the Church of England. It also confirms that the bureaucracy of this church is in the hands of the revisionists.”³⁰ The Presenters decided against appealing the ecclesiastical court’s decision.³¹ Instead, they planned to seek passage of a canon law requiring that all clergy abstain from sexual relations outside of marriage. In addition, they would create a new fellowship of parishes and dioceses to assist congregations in those dioceses where “the bishop has departed from the standards and norms set forth by the Church’s teaching.”³²

Two organizations of traditionally oriented Episcopalians responded angrily to the Righter decision. A spokesman for the Episcopal Synod of America

²⁹ A Response to the Opinion of the Court for the Trial of a Bishop. May 28, 1996.

³⁰ Randy Frame, “Heresy Charges Dismissed,” Christianity Today 40 (June 17, 1996): 57.

³¹ Notice Concerning an Appeal to the Decisions of the Court: Presenters v. the Right Walter C. Righter, Respondent. Feast of St. Barnabas the Apostle (June 11, 1996). Obtained from the website of Episcopalians United, June 22, 1997.

³² “USA: Bishop Righter Objectors Seek New Canon,” Anglican Communion News Service #895, 19 June 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

(ESA) said that this organization would not recognize the ecclesiastical court's decision that no Episcopal Church doctrine prohibits the ordination of homosexuals. The decision could produce a break in communion between Episcopalians who reject it and those who accept it. "The court's decision amounts to an open rejection of the clear teaching of Holy Scripture that sexual intimacy is acceptable only between a man and a woman who are married to each other," the Rev. Samuel Edwards asserted.³³ In July 1996, the ESA stated in a formal resolution that advocates of ordaining non-celibate homosexuals have broken communion with orthodox Christians.³⁴ The Executive Director of Episcopalians United was also sharply critical of the Righter decision: "By demoting the Church's doctrine of marriage to what it called a 'doctrinal teaching,' this court has condemned the Episcopal Church to still more anarchy and conflict," the Rev. Todd H. Wetzel commented. The decision of the ecclesiastical court "serves as further evidence that the bishops are out of touch with both the Church universal and the overwhelming majority of faithful Episcopalians."³⁵

³³ "Episcopal Synod Rejects Court Decision." Statement by the Executive Director of Episcopal Synod of America, May 16, 1996. Obtained from Episcopalians United WebPages, June 22, 1997.

³⁴ "Communion Breached, Says Episcopal Synod." Statement released by the Episcopal Synod of America, 3 July 1996. Obtained from Episcopalians United WebPages, June 22, 1997.

³⁵ Todd H. Wetzel, "Absorbing the Righter-scale Shock Waves," United Voice (published by Episcopalians United), June 1996. Obtained from Episcopalians United WebPages June 22, 1997.

There were also positive reactions.³⁶ Bishop Righter told a reporter, "I did not ordain a gay male. I ordained a male who was eminently qualified for ordination who happened to be gay." The retired bishop hoped the court's decision would make it plain that "there are no outcasts in the Episcopal Church. All are welcome."³⁷ Journalist Bruce Bawer, writing for a gay and lesbian publication, hailed the Righter decision as well grounded in the theological tradition of Anglicanism, and no mere capitulation to interest group pressure. Bawer also took note of a new book in which more than a score of Anglican leaders take positions which seem favorable to full gay and lesbian participation in the church.³⁸ In Bawer's view, it is not theology that makes some oppose the ordination of homosexuals. "What they oppose is not homosexuality so much as openness about it. They don't want the Episcopal Church to be known as the 'gay church.'" They worry about the reactions of other churches, instead of asking the critical question, "What would Jesus do?"³⁹

³⁶ There was a special service of celebration at St. George's Episcopal Church in Maplewood, New Jersey, where Barry Stopfel is the rector. It was the ordination of Stopfel, who lives openly with his partner, Will Leckie, which occasioned the Righter trial. See Mubarak S. Dahir, "A Revelation," The Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine 710 (June 25, 1996): 40-43.

³⁷ Diego Ribadeneira, "Episcopal Court Clears Bishop Who Ordained Gay," Boston Globe May 16, 1996. Retrieved from Boston Globe Online Archives, July 9, 1997.

³⁸ Charles Hefling, ed., Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1996.

II. No King in Israel: People Do As They Please

Writing in the Christian Century, an Episcopal priest observed that the outcome of the Righter trial exposed serious problems with respect to doctrine in the Episcopal Church.⁴⁰ The Court's decision "left wide open the question of what the church's doctrine is and how it is established."⁴¹ The two parties in the confrontation had very different views about doctrine. One group believed that doctrine and church life can change as social conditions change, "even at the expense of historic views of sexuality." But the other group contended that church doctrine, *including teaching on sexuality*, though immutable, is now "under siege in a permissive age. Such a broad divide cannot be spanned through judicial procedure." The writer observed that the ecclesiastical court was unable to "determine how 'core' Christian doctrines give rise to coherent positions on sexuality and ministry. Thus the Episcopal Church stands before a

³⁹ Bruce Bawer, "What Would Jesus Do?" The Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine 711 (July 9, 1996), 72. Before the trial began, Bawer said that the presentment against Righter "represents a backlash not against homosexuality but against the honesty of gays who dare to come out." Bawer, "The Gentlemen's Club," The Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine 694 (November 14, 1995), 120.

⁴⁰ William L. Sachs, "Procedural Abyss," Christian Century 113 (June 19, 1996): 644-646.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 644.

procedural abyss. How do Episcopalians delineate and articulate belief?”⁴² We see here a case of conflict between James Davison Hunter’s “progressivist” and “orthodox” views of moral authority.⁴³ Hunter does not believe that there is room for compromise between them in American society. It is hard to see how the Episcopal Church can accommodate both perspectives.

Some years before the Righter trial, Richard Brookhiser sought to explain the confusion and conflict within the Episcopal Church.⁴⁴ He suggested that Episcopalians do not much like theology, but are more interested in history and worship. They have a further reason for avoiding theological debate: “To the extent the church prized its comfortable social position, it was reluctant to engage in vulgar controversies.” And there is something else, “the importance to the Episcopal psyche of the concept of bridging.” Since the Reformation, Anglican churches have tried to maintain unity despite serious divisions; commitment to the *via media* is a point of pride.⁴⁵ Brookhiser makes three important, and related, points. The Episcopal Church has a certain *ethos*; it has been a church much more interested in liturgy than in theological precision. Related to this doctrinal fuzziness is the history of the effort of Anglican churches to maintain

⁴² Ibid., 645.

⁴³ Hunter, Culture Wars, 44.

⁴⁴ Richard Brookhiser, “Are There Episcopalians in Foxholes?” National Review 43 (July 29, 1991): 24-28.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 28.

unity despite severe internal disagreements. The church's style may also be related to its social position: Episcopalians do not disgrace themselves by slugging it out over doctrine.⁴⁶ But if Brookhiser is right, something may have happened which makes the old approach less effective. Not only individuals but also entire congregations have left the Episcopal Church in recent years, with disputes over sexuality being a major factor.⁴⁷ For the Episcopal church, it is not a case of *e pluribus unum*; the trend is to bring many out of one.

Other observers have made observations similar to Brookhiser's. Writing for the New York Times Magazine during the Righter trial, Bruce Bawer pointed to the social prominence of the Episcopal Church: "Like its parent institution, the

⁴⁶ What exactly is the social position of the Episcopal Church? Though it is fairly small (about 2.5 million members in the 1990s), it sometimes appears to have influence far beyond what numbers alone would predict. Some years ago, Kit and Frederica Konolige wrote that the Episcopal Church is "the single most important denomination in the country—the richest and most generally prominent of any American sect." Episcopalians have established "institutions like church schools that are a distinct element of the group's hold on American power. In a subtler way, the Englishness, formality, grace, intellectuality, rationality, and fundamental conservatism of the Episcopal religion have nurtured and accompanied the development of a distinctively upper-class way of life and system of values that have dominated American business, law, and politics for 100 years." Kit Konolige and Frederica Konolige, The Power of their Glory. America's Ruling Class: The Episcopalians (New York: Wyden, 1978), 26.

⁴⁷ A Chicago parish left the Episcopal Church because the diocesan bishop ordained openly homosexual individuals. Douglas L. LeBlanc "Homosexual Ordinations Cause Parish to Leave," Christianity Today 38 (January 10, 1994): 44. Other Episcopalians have departed to join a new denomination, the Charismatic Episcopal Church, which grew from one congregation to more than 100 in less than two years. The Episcopalians who made the switch were troubled by the liberal policies of their former denomination. See "100 Churches Have Joined New Denomination," Christianity Today 38 (May 16, 1994).

Church of England, the Episcopal Church has always retained something of the character of a national church."⁴⁸ He also noted that the Episcopal Church has long experience with conflicting views. Many of its current members came to the Episcopal Church from other religious backgrounds, "and most joined the Episcopal Church because they recognized it as an institution that encouraged them to think for themselves." The writer notes, "Since Elizabethan times...Anglicanism has prided itself on its ability to negotiate a 'via media,' or middle way, between extremes."⁴⁹

Yet Bawer, too, suggests that some conflicts may be too much for even the Episcopal Church to handle; he compares the confrontation in the Righer trial to the cultural collision that occurred in the Scopes trial seventy years before. Moreover, Bawer describes his own attraction to the Episcopal Church in a way that implicitly makes coherent doctrinal and moral teaching untenable: "The Episcopal Church, I saw, recognized the individual mind as a gift of God, not a threat to institutional authority.... It did make demands, and hard ones: that I think independently, that I be true to my conscience and that I struggle sincerely to discern the will of the Holy Spirit in my life."⁵⁰ A skeptical reader might take

⁴⁸ Bawer, "Who's On Trial?" 38

⁴⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Elsewhere, Bawer has also celebrated "the traditional Anglican emphasis on the supremacy of individual conscience." "The Gentlemen's Club, 120.

Bawer's real meaning to be that the Episcopal Church makes the harsh demand that he think and act just as he pleases.⁵¹ We may recall the words quoted earlier from an Episcopalian professor of ethics: "a church is a church precisely because it does have some ability to shape the mind and life of its membership. When a church is no longer able to do that ... we are left with a voluntary association and not a church."⁵²

Bawer's article suggests that undisciplined individualism may be one explanation for the confusion in the Episcopal Church. Yet there could also be a principled and theological reason. A 1991 article in The Christian Century interpreted the clash over homosexuality in terms of a struggle to determine the nature of the church.⁵³ Ephraim Radner and George Sumner, Jr., said that a major factor in the struggle over homosexuality has been "Anglicanism's inherent incapacity for reshaping doctrine." Many Reformation churches produced comprehensive confessions of faith, but the Church of England did not. For these authors, the deep reason for Anglican reluctance to deal with doctrine was a conviction that fundamental doctrinal definitions must be the work of the whole Church, and not of any single branch of it. The definition of doctrine must be

⁵¹ Bawer is a gay man who, to his own surprise, found a home in the Episcopal Church when his lover introduced him to it. Bawer writes with an evident love of his church.

⁵² Philip Turner, Sex, Money and Power: An Essay in Christian Social Ethics (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985), 4.

⁵³ Ephraim Radner and George Sumner, Jr., "Waiting on the Spirit: Episcopalians and Homosexuality," Christian Century 108 (October 9, 1991): 910-913.

done by general and ecumenical councils, officially sanctioned gatherings of representatives from all local and national churches.”⁵⁴

What worked in the past does not work so well anymore. For one thing, the doctrinal relevance of Scripture is often questioned today; this was not so in the Reformation era, or for centuries afterwards. Arguments about Scripture are important in the debate over homosexuality; the way in which those arguments are conducted is a matter not just of technical exegesis but of ecclesiology (the fundamental understanding of the nature of the church). Radner and Sumner inquire, “Under what conditions could the church affirm sexual behavior that it has publicly condemned for centuries? The answer it will give to this question will determine what kind of church it will be, under what kind of authority and led by what kind of Spirit.”⁵⁵

Part of the trouble with homosexuality is that the occasional biblical passages which mention the subject seem to condemn homosexual activity. Radner and Sumner identify two main alternatives to taking the passages as definitive for all time. Some who favor accepting certain kinds of homosexual behavior say the Biblical passages “really addressed cultic ritual or pederasty rather than sex between consenting adults. This might be called a ‘revisionist’ tack.” Another possibility is more radical: it acknowledges that the Bible does reject gay sex, “but contends that the Spirit is leading the church to new insights

⁵⁴ Ibid., 911.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 910.

on the issues. We call this a 'pneumatic' point of view."⁵⁶ The pneumatic point of view, of course, allows for sharp breaks with tradition.

Until recently, as has been said, Anglicans generally believed that fundamental doctrinal change must be the work of the whole Church, properly convened in council. But there is a different view in the church today: "the notion of the Anglican (and this Episcopal) church as a progressive force in the unfolding of the Kingdom of God." A pneumatic church might claim an authority to move beyond the teaching of Scripture that no previous Anglican church would have been willing to exercise. With respect to gay sex, "a general council would not have the authority to declare Scripture's teaching void on this point, though it might declare that teaching unclear in some way and offer the church an interpretive refocus in a revisionist fashion."⁵⁷ But a pneumatic church could do whatever it believed the Spirit authorized. Then there would be not only a "battle for the Bible"⁵⁸ but a contest to determine the very nature of the church.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 911.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 912.

⁵⁸ Julia Duin. "Episcopalians Tiptoe Along Moral Tightrope," Christianity Today 32 (September 2, 1988): 46-47.

⁵⁹ Of course, not all advocates of the ordination of active homosexuals would agree that they are taking a "pneumatic" approach to church order. They often have carefully nuanced positions. In 1991, Bishop Ronald Haines of the Diocese of Washington, D.C., ordained a non-celibate lesbian, Elizabeth Carl, shortly before the General Convention. Haines acknowledged that there are "scriptural passages and historical teachings of the church that appear to be at odds with ordination of homosexuals and that cannot easily be put aside." But Haines also said that a

The uncertainty of discipline in the Episcopal Church received a critical look from several scholars in the 1990s when it seemed likely that the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) would approve a historic concordat.⁶⁰ The concordat would not be a merger, but it would put the two churches in full communion with each other. One of the topics examined was episcopacy, which Episcopalians understand to be an important sign, possibly even a guarantee, of the apostolicity of the church.⁶¹ Philip Turner, a

candidate's sexual orientation and lifestyle "are not the only determinative factors" and should not be "an absolute bar to ordination." See Rick Harding, "D.C. Episcopal Bishop Speaks Out on Ordination of Lesbian," The Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine 581 (July 15, 1991): 55.

There are also advocates who see in the ministry of Jesus full justification for what they believe. Thomas Shaw, the bishop of Massachusetts, believes that inclusiveness enriches the church: "The life of the church is always enhanced by including people that live on the margins of society – women, people of color, gay or lesbian people. They have something profound to say about the Kingdom of God and they are the people Jesus specifically included among his disciples." Diego Ribadeneira, "Engaging a World of Strife: Episcopal Bishop Plays Mold-Breaking Role," Boston Globe, June 9, 1996. Retrieved from Boston Globe Online Archives, July 9, 1997. According to Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest, "When it repudiates Jesus' example of unconditional love, the church shoots itself in the foot by denying loving acceptance to gay men and lesbians." Malcolm Boyd, "Was Jesus Gay?" The Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine 565 (December 4, 1990): 55.

⁶⁰ Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno, eds. Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

⁶¹ "Apostolicity" means continuity with the faith and practice of the earliest Christian church in the apostolic era. Officially, at least, Episcopalians and Lutherans want to maintain "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3, New Revised Standard Version). Lutherans seek to do this through fidelity to Scripture, with the assistance of historic Lutheran confessions. Episcopalians think that the office of bishop needs to be part of the church -- bishops "carry on

professor of ethics and former president of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University, raises questions about the capacity of the House of Bishops to maintain order and apostolic continuity.⁶² Over a quarter of a century and more, the House of Bishops responded feebly to three different challenges: the alleged heresy of a bishop, the irregular ordinations of women in 1974, contrary to prevailing canon law; and the ordinations of openly non-celibate homosexual persons.⁶³ Writing before the Righter trial, Turner commented:

the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church" ("Preface to the Ordination Rites," 1979 Book of Common

Prayer, 510). In the discussions between Lutherans and Episcopalians, the office of bishop was an important stumbling block, because Lutherans traditionally worried that insistence on such an office imposed unacceptable restrictions on the freedom of the Christian Gospel. On the episcopacy and the proposed Lutheran-Episcopal concordat, see R. R. Reno, "The Evangelical Significance of the Historic Episcopate," in Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno, eds. Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 76-92.

⁶² Philip Turner, "Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline," in Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno, eds. Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

⁶³ The first case was the notorious Bishop Pike Affair. In the 1960s, Bishop James Pike suggested that the church's traditional way of understanding the doctrine of the Trinity is not essential to Christian faith. The House of Bishops decided against a heresy trial, and turned the matter over to an ad hoc committee. Eventually the House of Bishops censured Pike, but neither limited his right to exercise his office nor condemned the theological statements he made (Turner, "Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline," 115-116). The irregular ordinations of eleven women came after consecutive General Conventions (1970 and 1973) rejected motions that would allow the ordination of women to the priesthood. There was no actual censure of the bishops who ordained eleven women in Philadelphia, although a resolution of the House of Bishops did "decry" their breach of collegiality (119ff).

Each reaction seems weaker and less effective than the one before. One must ask, therefore, about the prudence of a pattern of oversight and discipline that, in the face of obvious challenges to the doctrine and discipline, goes no further than an increasingly mild and qualified expression of disapproval. One must ask if this pattern does not signal both the decay of tradition and the decline of virtue within an entire church and a de facto break in its communion – an internal schism whereby warring factions make use of a single organizational structure but in fact do not seek to maintain communion by means of it.⁶⁴

If some fear future schisms, Turner worries that an unrecognized schism has already transpired.

For Turner, the fundamental problem is not with episcopacy itself, but with something even more serious, the “erosion of a moral tradition upon which the effectiveness of this and all other forms of oversight depend.” According to Turner, the church from the start believed that a certain kind of authority was necessary in order “to further common beliefs and practices.”⁶⁵ Persons in authority were to exercise it for the sake of *koinonia*, or communion in the church; those subject to authority had the right, even the duty, to dissent vigorously if the leaders consistently disregarded common practice or belief.⁶⁶ But in recent years a different view of “bureaucratic/prophetic” authority has challenged the older

⁶⁴ Turner, “Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline,” 131.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 113. Turner is clearly thinking, not of the Episcopal Church only, but of the tradition of Catholic Christianity which dates from the end of the apostolic era.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 113-114.

tradition. It assumes that pluralism makes *koinonia* impossible. Authority cannot guard common beliefs and practices, because there are none; the function of authority is “to ensure that all shades of opinion are allowed expression and provide access both to political office and to social benefits.” This is the bureaucratic face of authority. The new perspective sees social life as a continual power struggle in which the strong dominate the weak, so there must also be prophetic authority “to unmask the injustices of power.” Turner thinks this new view of authority is threatening to eclipse the older understanding. If that happens, when a situation calls for oversight and authority, the people with responsibility will not have enough popular support to act effectively; they will not even have available “a coherent set of ideas and virtues that make oversight either possible or intelligible.”⁶⁷

Under these circumstances, the Episcopal Church cannot maintain effective order because it does not have the capacity to exercise appropriate authority. Having bishops does not ensure order; getting rid of them would not help, either. What happens if the Episcopalians establish communion with the Lutherans, a confessional church? Turner suspects that the same problem may be lurking in the Lutheran Church, and that it may be necessary to hold to the older tradition of authority to support apostolicity in a confessional church, too.⁶⁸ For our purposes, Turner’s suggestion is an important one: the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 132.

bureaucratic/prophetic approach to authority seems likely to preclude coherent moral teaching in any kind of church.⁶⁹

Reflecting on the mounting chaos in the Episcopal Church after the Righter trial, David E. Sumner concluded that this denomination is in truth a *congregational* body. The name of the church makes a claim about polity, intimating that it has a corporate structure and an ecclesiastical discipline made possible by episcopal oversight. When Sumner joined the Episcopal Church in 1974, he expected a corporate church very different from the congregational Baptist polity he had grown up with. But the truth is quite otherwise:

⁶⁹ Stephen F. Noll has brought out an important implication of Turner's treatment of bureaucratic/prophetic authority. Those who subscribe to this understanding of authority rely on "prophetic assertion for reasoned dissent (when its practitioners are out of power) and bureaucratic control for legislative discipline (when they are in power)." Stephen F. Noll, Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Marriage (Solon, OH: Latimer Press, 1997), 85-86. Noll seems to be right. In 1995, as the House of Bishops failed to challenge the disregard of its own past statements on the ordination of homosexual persons, the House concluded that the ordination of women should be mandatory throughout the Episcopal Church. The 1976 legislation that authorized the ordination of women to the priesthood included a conscience clause; twenty years later, a handful of dioceses still decline to ordain women. Enough is enough, a majority of the bishops now say. In their September 1995 meeting, the bishops voted (122-17, 18 abstentions) "that equal access to ordination for men and women is "mandatory" throughout the church." It will still take an action of General Convention to establish such a policy. Telling, though, is the reasoning of Bishop Robert Rowley (Northwestern Pennsylvania), who chaired the committee that sought the resolution. He said it is all right for people to believe that women shouldn't be ordained, but you "cannot institutionalize your individual conscience" if it runs counter to the church's stated position. "Making equal access to ordination mandatory," Christian Century 112 (November 15, 1995): 1073. If the church opposes the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons, then prophetic authority authorizes defiance; if some object to the ordination of women, why, bureaucratic authority should force them to accept it. It must be that some promptings of conscience are more equal than others.

Bishops and dioceses do what they want without regard to national church policy or practice. Seminaries do what they want. Congregations do what they want and ignore the diocese, especially if they have a large enough endowment....

One of the implications of the ecclesiastical court's decision in the Bishop Righter case, I believe, is that no theological basis remains to argue about the corporate nature of the Episcopal Church.

Sumner does not lament this reality, but contends that Episcopalians should simply admit that they are indeed a congregational church. To acknowledge that would provide a way out of the muddle over sexuality: "If there is no official expectation that members of a congregation follow national church positions and policies, then the exodus of defecting congregations and individuals could cease."⁷⁰ It appears that Sumner is making a virtue out of necessity. The situation he describes sounds much like the chaotic circumstances noted in the biblical book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes."⁷¹

⁷⁰ David E. Sumner, "Face it – We're Congregationalists," The Living Church 214 (May 25, 1997). In a somewhat different way, William I. Sachs has also suggested that the Episcopal Church is largely congregational, although he does not use those theological fighting words. Sachs speaks instead of "localism." He thinks that a consensus about homosexuality will eventually develop "as church members scrutinize the effectiveness and integrity of the ordained persons whom congregations call to advance their ministries. In a profound sense, Episcopalians at the parish and diocesan levels are considering the meaning of "wholesome example," the life to which the ordination liturgy commits clergy." Sachs, "Procedural Abyss", 646.

⁷¹ Judges 17:5 New Revised Standard Version. Most interestingly, the Biblical context is not one of general sexual license. The main issues are idolatry and the priesthood! Judges 17:1-6 tells of a certain Micah who built a shrine and installed one of his sons as priest. There are, alas, no details about the ordination of this priest – or about the doctrinal basis for it.

III. Trouble Ahead? Kuala Lumpur and The Anglican Communion

The outcome of the Righter trial suggests that ordinations of non-celibate homosexual persons will continue in the Episcopal Church, and this puts the American church out of step with other churches in the Anglican Communion. Radner and Sumner are not the only ones to have commented on that. William Oddie, a former Anglican priest who converted to Roman Catholicism, writes that the Episcopal Church is a maverick within the Anglican Communion.⁷² The Episcopal Church, Oddie complains, "has shown a tendency to pre-empt decisions which ought to be taken by the whole Communion together."⁷³ Episcopalians get away with this, he suggested, because the Americans are rich, numerous and self-assertive, notably in the Lambeth Conferences which bring together Anglican bishops from all over the world.⁷⁴

No member church of the Anglican Communion has officially approved of same-sex unions or of the ordination of practicing homosexuals. The Church of England does not allow them.⁷⁵ Nor does the Anglican Church of Canada.⁷⁶

⁷² William Oddie, "Commonwealth of Churches," National Review 43 (July 29, 1991): 26-27.

⁷³ Ibid., 26. No doubt Oddie had in mind the ordination of women. The Episcopal Church may have led the way, but many other Anglican churches now ordain women.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁷⁵ Church of England policies are mentioned in the 1994 pastoral teaching Continuing the Dialogue and in The Accusers' Position on Doctrine in the Heresy Trial of Walter Righter.

However, there is nothing like unanimity in those churches. Following the Righter trial, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Runcie, acknowledged in a radio interview that he had knowingly ordained non-celibate gay men, although he had not knowingly ordained anyone living in a partnership as if it were a marriage. Runcie also said that he had sometimes approached ordinations “in a ‘don’t-want-to-know and why-should-I-inquire?’ way, and I never liked the prospect of inquiring into what happened in a man’s bedroom unless he was prepared to tell me.” Lord Runcie also referred scathingly to the current Church of England policy, which allows sexually active persons to be members of the church but bars them from ordination. “Now stated crudely it is...ludicrous.” Another retired English bishop said that he, too, had ordained non-celibate homosexuals, although he counseled them to be discreet.⁷⁷

The current Archbishop of Canterbury insists that the Church of England does not permit the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals. In November 1996, an English cathedral hosted a service celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. A statement issued by the Archbishop

⁷⁶ The House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada forbade homosexual unions in 1979. The bishops reaffirmed this stance in 1992, and allowed the ordination of homosexuals only where there is a commitment to celibacy. “Statement on Homosexuality,” House of Bishops, Anglican Church of Canada, 1979 (obtained from Anglicans Online! June 19, 1997); Statement on Homosexuality: A Clarification. House of Bishops, Anglican Church of Canada, 1992 (obtained from Anglicans Online! June 19, 1997).

⁷⁷ “England: Former Archbishop Admits He Ordained Homosexuals.” Anglican Communion News Service #889, 19 June 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

said the cathedral's decision to host the event was an independent one which did not involve the House of Bishops, and the scheduling of the service did "not reflect any change in the position outlined in the House of Bishops' Statement 'Issues in Human Sexuality' [issued in] December 1991." The statement added that "the House of Bishops is not about to change the position outlined in that Statement."⁷⁸

Nevertheless, a bishop of the Church of England preached at the service. The sermon did not explicitly endorse the blessing of same-sex relations or the ordination of lesbians and gays, but the preacher did say, "I believe passionately in an inclusive church." He noted that marriage in Britain is in a state of crisis, and suggested the institution needs an overhaul: "Family and household life need rebuilding in an inclusive way so that the needs of all – single people, old and young, gay and lesbian people, people with special needs – are brought within a community of support and care."⁷⁹ Leaders of other Anglican churches signed a public message congratulating the British group on its anniversary. Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Edmond Browning of the Episcopal Church,

⁷⁸ "Service in Southwark Cathedral on 15 November 1996 to Mark the Twentieth Anniversary of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement: Statement by Archbishop of Canterbury," Anglican Communion News Service #1026, 8 November 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

⁷⁹ Sermon Preached by the Right Reverend John Gladwin, Anglican Bishop of Guildford at Southwark Anglican Cathedral, 16 November, 20th Anniversary of the Lesbian/Gay Christian Movement, Anglican Communion News Service #1037, 19 November 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

Michael Peers (Primate of the Canadian Anglican Church) and Richard Holloway (Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church) signed the message which said, "On its 20th anniversary celebration, we recognise the valuable contribution made to the continuing debate on sexuality by the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, and we call upon the Churches to engage fully with this important question."⁸⁰

Some months later, a retired bishop of the Church of England called for acceptance of gay marriages in the church. Bishop John Baker was the chairman of the group that produced the 1991 report "Issues in Sexuality" which requires gay clergy to be celibate, but the bishop later changed his mind. In a lecture given at a London church, Baker said, "I cannot see that married heterosexual clergy have a right to deny their homosexual brothers and sisters the potential spiritual blessing of a sexual relationship when they themselves enjoy that blessing."⁸¹

In Canada, where the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions are controversial matters, a bishop strongly favored such actions in an address given in a Toronto church in 1996. Michael Ingham, Bishop of New Westminster, said that he has changed his mind on the matter. He still believes "that sexual activity achieves its highest expression in the

⁸⁰ "Britain: Church Leaders Speak out for Homosexual Christians," Anglican Communion News Service, 4 March 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

⁸¹ "England: Retired Bishops Speaks out on Homosexuality," Anglican Communion News Service #1214, 25 April 1997. Obtained from Anglican Communion News Service website July 1, 1997.

context of a sacrificial commitment by one person to another in a covenant of mutual love.” But he adds, “I no longer believe that only heterosexual people are capable of such sacramental relationships, and I no longer agree with the double standard our church has imposed on gays and lesbians as a condition of their inclusion within the Christian community.” He also noted that Anglicanism, like Orthodoxy, has never imposed celibacy on its clergy, except in the case of homosexuals.⁸² Since 1991, the bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada have been reviewing the 1979 guidelines that bar the blessing of homosexual unions and the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons. In April 1997, the House of Bishops issued a statement acknowledging a diversity of viewpoints among the chief pastors. The statement indicated, however, that some change should be expected: “The House of Bishops thereby commits itself to retaining the 1979 guidelines in principle, but intends to express them in a wider context of theological understanding and pastoral sensitivity.”⁸³

⁸² Michael Ingham. “For God so Loved the World.” Address by the Bishop of New Westminster, September 27, 1996, at St. Leonard’s Church, Toronto. Text obtained from Anglicans Online! June 19, 1997.

⁸³ “Canada: House of Bishops Discuss Ordination of Homosexuals,” Anglican Communion News Service #1213, 15 April 1997. Obtained from Anglican Communion News Service website July 1, 1997. The diversity of opinion among the bishops makes agreement difficult. A survey of the bishops conducted by a task force in the spring of 1997 found that ten wanted to retain the 1979 guidelines without change. Six bishops wanted to retain those policies, but only until new ones can be written to replace them. Eighteen bishops wanted to revise the guidelines to make them more flexible. On the specific issues of blessing relationships and ordaining homosexual persons, there was no consensus. Sixteen bishops favored recognizing same-sex unions, fourteen were against this change (“Canada: Bishops Surveyed on Changing Guidelines for

Yet Canada has its conservatives, too. In 1994, three organizations meeting in Montreal approved a statement entitled "The Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials." Two of the fifteen sections in the four-page document deal with sexuality and the family. The statement declares, "God designed human sexuality not only for procreation but also for the joyful expression of love, honour, and fidelity *between wife and husband*. These are the only sexual relations that biblical theology deems good and holy. Adultery, fornication, and homosexual unions are intimacies contrary to God's design."⁸⁴

In South Africa, Anglican leaders are reconsidering their views of homosexuality. Meeting in Capetown in March 1997, the bishops of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa apologized to homosexual people who have suffered from prejudice against them within the church. In a statement released to the press, the bishops said, "As a church we have been responsible over the centuries for rejecting many people because of their sexual orientation. The harshness and hostility to homosexual people within our church [are] neither acceptable nor...in accord with our Lord's love of all people." But the bishops condemned any kind of promiscuity. The bishops also acknowledged that there is no consensus about homosexuality among themselves or in the church at

Ordaining Homosexuals," Anglican Communion News Service #1222, 2 May 1997. Obtained from Anglican Communion News Service website, July 1, 1997).

⁸⁴ "The Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials," 21 June, 1994, Montreal, Canada. Italics added. The participating organizations were Anglican Renewal Ministries of Canada, Barnabas Anglican Ministries, and The Prayer Book Society of Canada.

large, and they called for further study of the issue.⁸⁵ South Africa's best-known Anglican leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, appears to be solidly in the ranks of those demanding change. In a foreword to a new prayer book produced for lesbians and gays, Tutu writes, "Why should we want all homosexual persons not to give expression to their sexuality in loving acts? Why don't we use the same criteria to judge same-sex relationships that we use to judge whether heterosexual relationships are wholesome or not?"⁸⁶

Outside of Britain, North America and South Africa, the debate over homosexuality can evoke puzzlement, concern, and even outrage. At a meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in October, 1996, the Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, noted that homosexuality is simply not an issue for some Anglican churches, while in Canada and the United States it is the most divisive contemporary concern.⁸⁷ An Episcopalian who taught at a university in Uganda has written, "In East Africa, at least, the American church's obsession with sexuality is observed with various mixtures of amusement, embarrassment, and

⁸⁵ "Southern Africa: Anglican Bishops Apologize to Homosexuals." Anglican Communion News Service #1166, 14 March 1997. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

⁸⁶ Desmond Tutu, Foreword to We Too Are Baptized, a prayer book for lesbians and gays (London: SCM Press). Cited from news release, Anglican Communion News Service #875, 22 April 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

⁸⁷ "Anglicans Seek 'Understanding and Insights' on Homosexuality," Anglican Communion News Service #1009, 4 November 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997.

horror.”⁸⁸ When she gave a talk at an Anglican seminary in Mukono, Uganda, nearly all the questions asked of her concerned sexuality; most of those present “felt that the American church was on the verge of apostasy.”⁸⁹

In a letter to the editor of the Church of England Newspaper in 1996, a South American bishop expressed concern about developments in the Northern Hemisphere. He objected to “the disproportionate influence of single pressure groups in the ‘North’ and the apparent willingness in some areas of Anglican influence to accept, without reference to the understanding and convictions of the whole Communion as a whole, innovations in teaching and discipline relating to homosexual practice.” Politely yet firmly, this bishop chided the advocates of change: “Those most influenced by the cultural and philosophical assumptions of the modern and post-modern ‘North’ badly need the corrective of Christians less conditioned by the idea that this can be treated merely as a matter of private choice, human rights or equal opportunity.”⁹⁰ In other words, do not act on your own, but accept the guidance of other churches in the Anglican Communion.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Bonnie Shullenberger, “What are the Bishops Really Telling Us?” in Charles Hefling ed., Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1996), 17.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 26n.

⁹⁰ A Letter to the Editor of the Church of England Newspaper, Friday 26 April 1996. Anglican Communion News Service #879, 7 May 1996. Obtained from the Anglican Communion News Service website June 21, 1997. The writer of the letter is Bishop Maurice Sinclair, Presiding Bishop, province of the Southern Cone of America.

Tougher words have come from the newest province in the Anglican Communion, the Province of South East Asia. Early in 1997, the bishops of this province announced that they would not be in communion with provinces that refuse to accept a "Statement on Human Sexuality" endorsed by the bishops.⁹² Popularly known as the Kuala Lumpur Statement, the declaration includes words obviously directed at the Episcopal Church: "we express our profound concern about recent developments relating to church discipline and moral teaching in some provinces in the North – specifically, the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions." The statement explains why these bishops are troubled: "We are deeply concerned that the setting aside of biblical teaching in such actions as the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions calls into question the authority of the holy scriptures. This is totally unacceptable to us."⁹³ The Province of South East Asia

⁹¹ There seems to be support in Brazil for an acceptance of homosexual persons in the life of the church. In a pastoral letter issued early in 1997, the bishops of the Anglican Church of Brazil said Anglicans should receive people of all cultures, races, social classes and sexual orientations with love. The bishops said they could not spell out definitive positions on ordination or homosexual marriage because there is no definition of these matters within the Anglican Communion. They also said that the Bible condemns homosexuality in some places, but they noted that God did not dictate the scriptures. The Bible contains divine revelation, but it comes packaged with the interpretations of authors influenced by their place in time and culture. "Anglican Bishops Recommend Dialogue with Homosexuals," Anglican Communion News Service #1212, 25 April 1997. Obtained from Anglican Communion News Service website July 1, 1997. But these bishops seem to believe that the Anglican Communion should act in concert.

⁹² David Kalvelage, "Distressed Anglicans," The Living Church 214 (May 25, 1997): 2.

is small; it contains only four dioceses. It is possible that Third World dioceses, especially in Africa, will hesitate to take a public stand in favor of the Kuala Lumpur statement, or to break communion with the Episcopal Church, because of the danger that valuable funding from the American church might be lost. However, the declaration quickly won the endorsement of six bishops in the Episcopal Synod of America, an organization seriously at odds with many current policies of the Episcopal Church. The editor of The Living Church, an influential independent publication for Episcopalians, suspects that it may have broader support than that.⁹⁴ Thus the drift towards acceptance of homosexuality in the Episcopal Church creates the possibility, not just of internal friction, but also of fractures within the Anglican Communion.

The issue simply will not die.⁹⁵ Disregarding national statements on marriage, the Diocese of Washington (D.C.) passed a resolution stating that lesbians and gays living together in monogamous relationships ought to be honored; the author of the resolution was Bishop Spong.⁹⁶ In the spring of 1997,

⁹³ Statement on Human Sexuality (The "Kuala Lumpur Statement"). Printed in The Living Church 214 (June 8, 1997). For the text of the Kuala Lumpur Statement, please see Appendix I.

⁹⁴ "Sexuality Statement Needs Serious Attention," The Living Church 214 (June 1, 1997).

⁹⁵ Yet some people are fed up with it. In a report prepared for the 1997 General Convention, a committee stated, "Mandated dialogue on human sexuality has run its course, and people are weary of being told they have to discuss this topic." Report to the 1997 General Convention, from Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality (1994-1997). Unofficial electronic copy obtained June 1997, from the General Convention Home Page of the official Episcopal Church website.

the Bishop of Washington, Ronald Haines, ordained a non-celibate homosexual. When four conservative parishes announced in advance that they would object to the ordination, Haines required them to do so in the parish hall, and not in the church.⁹⁷ It appears that Haines sought to marginalize these critics. Ordinations are performed in churches, not in parish halls, and the ordination service makes a place for objections. In the ordination liturgy the bishop is required to say to the congregation: "if any of you know of any impediment or crime because of which we should not proceed, *come forward now* and make it known."⁹⁸

The Episcopal Church's Standing Liturgical Commission prepared a report for the 1997 General Convention on the question of blessing same-sex relationships; the report listed for "Options the Church Might Consider," but offered no resolutions to the convention.⁹⁹ As the editor of The Living Church

⁹⁶ Gustav Spohn, "Episcopal Diocese Votes to 'Honor' Gay Unions," National Catholic Reporter 31 (February 17, 1995): 9.

⁹⁷ "Bishop Haines Ordains to Priesthood Another Non-Celibate Homosexual," The Living Church 214 (May 4, 1997).

⁹⁸ "The Ordination of a Priest," Book of Common Prayer 1979, 527. The same requirement exists in the services of ordination for bishops (514) and deacons (539). Italics added.

⁹⁹ "Report to the 1997 General Convention, from The Standing Liturgical Commission, Part 3: Report to the General Convention on the Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships." Unofficial electronic copy obtained June 1997, from the General Convention Home Page of the official Episcopal Church website. These four options are (1) to continue to emphasize that genital sexual relations belong within heterosexual marriage; (2) to instruct the Standing Liturgical Commission to develop rites of marriage which could be used by both homosexual and heterosexual couples; (3) to develop a rite for the blessing of same-sex unions which would be different from sacramental marriage; and (4) to accept that the present situation is ambiguous, and allow local pastors to respond to their parishioners' needs.

pointed out, however, the authors of the report are hardly neutral (Bishop Spong is one of the members), and there is reason to believe that a majority of the members of the Standing Liturgical Commission itself favor the blessing of same-sex unions.¹⁰⁰ In the spring of 1997, the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church approved a new policy that would provide the domestic partners of national church employees with spousal benefits.¹⁰¹ The Living Church published pro and con articles on the blessing of same-sex unions and on the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals.¹⁰²

The most controversial questions are those of ordination and the blessing of same-sex unions, but church institutions have addressed related matters as well. Although seminaries affiliated with the Episcopal Church are independent organizations, the decisions they make about campus housing and admissions

¹⁰⁰ David Kalvelage, "The Report on Same-Sex Blessings," The Living Church 214 (April 27, 1997): 2.

¹⁰¹ Jerry Hames, "Council Extends Benefits to Domestic Partners," Episcopal Life 8 (June 1997): 5. See also "Benefits Favored for Domestic Partners," The Living Church 214 (May 4, 1997).

¹⁰² The dean of St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle wrote in favor of the blessing of same-sex couples (Frederick B Northrup. "The Mystery of Creation," The Living Church 214 [June 15, 1997]: 12, 20). Writing in opposition to such blessings was a professor at Virginia Theological Seminary (David Scott. "The Fullness of God's Love," The Living Church 214 [June 15, 1997]: 13, 21). A retired bishop argued against the ordination of practicing homosexuals (C. Fitzsimons Allison, "Privatized Morality," The Living Church 214 [June 8, 1997]: 10, 12-13). The chancellor of the Diocese of Newark wrote in support of such ordinations (Michael F. Rehill, "No One Without Sin," The Living Church 214 [June 8, 1997]: 11-13).

can be controversial. General Seminary, located in New York City, revised its housing policy in 1994 to allow faculty members and students of the same sex to live together in seminary housing, as long as they have written approval from their diocesan bishops.¹⁰³ A change in policy at Virginia Theological Seminary, making issues of sexuality less decisive in the admissions process, has met with some angry reactions.¹⁰⁴

With respect to homosexuality, it is evident that the Episcopal Church has no coherent moral teaching. For moral guidance to be coherent, two things are necessary, a clear statement of position and a resolve to enforce the teaching when it is possible to do so. Is sexual activity by gay and lesbian persons ever morally acceptable? The 1991 General Convention approved a resolution affirming the teaching of the Episcopal Church that physical sexual expression is appropriate *only* within life-long monogamous marriage, yet the same resolution

¹⁰³ See "Seminary Alters Housing Policy," Christian Century 111 (February 16, 1994), 162, and Doug LeBlanc, "Episcopal Seminary Opens Housing to Same-Sex Couples," Christianity Today 38 (March 7, 1994), 45.

¹⁰⁴ The seminary's policy has been to forbid "sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage, adulterous relationships, and the practice of homosexuality." The new policy, entitled "A Call to a Holy Life," "respects the policies regarding sexual behavior maintained by bishops and other ministers with authority over individual seminary faculty and students." Members of the seminary community are to be "wholesome examples of persons called to a holy life." The statement says that the seminary expects "sexual discipline and responsibility," but does not prohibit particular sexual behaviors. James H. Thrall, "Virginia Seminary Revises Policy on Sexual Behavior," Episcopal News Service, February 13, 1997. Obtained from Christianity Online, July 15, 1997. For an angry reaction, see Russell J. Levenson, Jr. "Wrong Choice at Virginia Seminary," The Living Church 214 (April 13, 1997).

says there is a “discontinuity” between this teaching and the “experience” of many Episcopalians.¹⁰⁵ The message of the resolution seems to be: This is what we mean, except we don’t really mean it. The General Convention of 1979 opposed the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals, and no subsequent Convention has ever changed the policy, but such ordinations occur,¹⁰⁶ and a court of bishops finds no violation of doctrine or discipline. In its words, the church undermines its own utterances; in its actions, it subverts its own declarations. In thought, word, and deed the Episcopal Church is too divided about homosexuality to be able to teach anybody anything.

The Episcopal Church is at odds with itself and with some other churches in the Anglican Communion -- but is homosexuality a divisive issue only for Anglicans? Not at all. Other American churches have faced bitter disputes over the same issues: the blessing of same-sex relationships and the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons.

IV. Presbyterian Predicaments: Justice-Love and Gay Ordinations

Issues of sexuality have been as difficult for Presbyterians as they have for Episcopalians. In 1991, a major controversy erupted over a report on sexuality. Later attempts to deal with the issue of the ordination of homosexuals

¹⁰⁵ Duin, “Episcopalians Fail to Resolve Sexuality Issues,” 46.

¹⁰⁶ One writer has described bishops who perform such ordinations as “undisciplined disciples.” Robert Hancock, “Undisciplined Disciples,” The Living Church 216 (June 28, 1998), 13.

sparked conflict and threatened order and discipline, as general assemblies in 1996 and 1997 tried to find a formula which could unify Presbyterians.

The controversial document, Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice, was several years in the making.¹⁰⁷ The report adopted a liberationist perspective, and made extensive use of feminist ideas. It also called for drastic departures from traditional Christian guidelines on sexual matters.¹⁰⁸ The members of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality were not united; there was a minority report as well.¹⁰⁹ The Presbyterian General Assembly promptly rejected the majority report by a very wide margin.¹¹⁰ But Keeping Body and Soul Together deserves a close look; the report, and the controversy about it, can reveal a great deal about the contemporary struggle over Christian sexual morality.

The majority report sets the tone when it opens the first chapter with a quotation from the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel: Jesus enters the synagogue

¹⁰⁷ For the background, which included controversy over the appointment of members to a task force, see Pamela Schaeffer, "Presbyterians Reach Consensus," Christian Century 105 (July 20-27, 1988): 662-663.

¹⁰⁸ General Assembly Special Committee on Human Sexuality, Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice. A Document Prepared for the 203rd General Assembly (1991), 1991.

¹⁰⁹ Minority Report of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality. Prepared for the 203rd General Assembly (1991) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1991.

¹¹⁰ Randy Frame, "Presbyterian Assembly Rejects Sexuality Report," Christianity Today 35 (July 22, 1991), 37-38.

at Nazareth, where he reads a passage from Isaiah and proclaims its fulfillment.¹¹¹ Liberation-oriented preachers and theologians often favor this Lucan text.¹¹² The Presbyterian report quickly turns to a discussion of trends in social change, including the growing diversity of family structures; the lengthening of the human life-span; the disaster of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; commercial exploitation of sexuality; and sexual abuse and violence.¹¹³

The opening remarks could not be reassuring to persons worried about changes in family life, for the authors give no special honor to two-parent families with children.¹¹⁴ They write: "Although the two-parent two-child family is often idealized in our churches, in the 1980s married couples without children became

¹¹¹ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 1. The relevant Biblical passage is Luke 4:16-30. The scroll that Jesus reads combines Isaiah 61:1 and 2 and Isaiah 58:6: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 New Revised Standard Version). The use of this text is unique to Luke, although both Mark (6:1-6) and Matthew (13:53-58) also report a stormy visit Jesus made to his hometown synagogue.

¹¹² See the discussion of Luke 4:16-30 in Rebecca S. Chopp, The Power To Speak: Feminism, Language, God (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 46-70.

¹¹³ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 4-5.

¹¹⁴ One committee member has written a book highly critical of customary church models of family life (Janet Fishburn, Confronting the Idolatry of Family: A New Vision for the Household of God [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991]. Fishburn attacks a view of the church which links a certain model of family life with the notion of a Protestant America: "we will not be free from family idolatry – the effect of attributing ultimacy to 'the Christian family' on Protestant spirituality – unless we are free from illusions about 'a Christian America'" (13).

more numerous than married couples with children.” The report adds that “both men and women are acknowledging the limitations of traditional gender roles and are currently struggling – sometimes painfully, often with excitement and great courage to find more egalitarian modes of social and sexual relating.”¹¹⁵

According to Keeping Body and Soul Together, American culture faces a deep crisis over sexuality because of negative attitudes about sex and the body; oppression, abuse, and exploitation; and unjust power relations between women and men. “The crisis of sexuality we are experiencing is, in fact, a massive cultural earthquake, a loosening of the hold of an unjust, patriarchal structure.”¹¹⁶ Committee members note that there are various responses to the crisis. Some voices demand a “return to an ethic of social conformity,” including the limitation of sexual activity to heterosexual marriage. “Voices of conformity urge a return to a romanticized past of cultural homogeneity, populated largely by white, affluent, heterosexual protestants in nuclear families.” People who think this way are scared of sex,¹¹⁷ and they do not recognize that when they appeal to “absolute biblical, sexual norms, they are actually endorsing historically relative, middle-class white norms as divinely sanctioned.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 4-5

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁷ This charge is a common rhetorical trick employed by advocates of changes in sexual ethics because there is no satisfactory response to it. To defend oneself is to admit to the charge by becoming defensive about sex.

¹¹⁸ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 8, 9.

Conventional morality came under attack during sexual revolutions in the 1920s and the 1960s, which led to a cultural consensus that human fulfillment includes happiness and sexual pleasure. But libertarians “unwisely promote sex freed from all responsibility, ethical values, and social consequences.” Another consequence of the sexual revolution is that some liberally minded Christians acknowledge the value of the erotic, but they still want to confine it to lasting heterosexual relationships.¹¹⁹

For the authors of the majority report, none of the existing options will do, because traditionalists, liberals and libertarians all fail to provide “a compelling quest for sexual justice and integrity.” Traditionalists won’t make room for diversity (e.g., homosexuals and non-traditional families). Libertarians forget that true freedom is based on justice.¹²⁰ The church needs to mark out “a path between moral conformity and moral license,” but the authors will not do this simply by splitting the difference between existing options. Rather, the report introduces a fundamental principle: “No sexual ethic can be adequate if it is constructed upon – or continues to perpetuate – sexual injustice and the oppression of women and gay and lesbian persons.”¹²¹

The embrace of gay and lesbian concerns was one of the main reasons why Keeping Body and Soul Together provoked intense opposition.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 10.

The report recommends major policy changes affecting the participation of homosexual persons in church life. Gays and lesbians “would be received and accepted as full participant members in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).”¹²² In addition, the recommended policy would mandate that “ordination to church office be open to all members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), regardless of their sexual orientation and that celibacy not be a requirement for ordination.”¹²³ In addition, the Presbyterian Church would develop “worship resources for the recognition of committed same-sex relationships.”¹²⁴

The committee had much more in mind than changing the rules for gays and lesbians. The authors call for “An Ethic to Enhance Common Decency.”¹²⁵

¹²² Church membership per se was not at issue in 1991; the problem was eligibility to serve in important church offices. Previous Presbyterian statements had expressed cautious acceptance of homosexual persons while barring the path to ordination. In 1976 the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (UPCUSA), which is now part of Presbyterian Church in the USA, said, “We affirm once again that every person, without limitation, is the object of God’s gracious love in Jesus Christ.” The statement acknowledged that church positions sometimes change as God’s will becomes better known, for “God continues to reveal more of himself and his will in each succeeding age.” But this statement expressed doubt about the ordination of a homosexual, on the grounds that “many expressions of homosexuality are without question sinful in the eyes of God.” Social Policy Compilation, Presbyterian Church (USA), Chapter 11, “Sexuality and Human Values,” Obtained from official Online document archive, Presbyterian Church (USA), June 1997.

¹²³ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 166.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. The phrase comes from an article by a member of the committee (Marvin M. Ellison, “Common Decency: A New Christian Sexual Ethics,” Christianity and Crisis 50 [November 12, 1990]: 352-356).

A Christian sexual ethic must “operate with a single moral standard,” and the committee members are ready with that standard: “*Justice-love* or right-relatedness, and not heterosexuality (nor homosexuality for that matter), is the appropriate norm for sexuality. Our moral obligation is not to be all of one sexual orientation, but rather to seek mutuality with others and affirm our common humanity.” Although heterosexual marriage is valuable “as a place to secure loving and justice-bearing intimacy relations, *it is not the exclusive locus for responsible sexuality.*”¹²⁶

It was not only the ideas in Keeping Body and Soul Together that were disputed. There was much discussion also of the document’s grounding in Holy Scripture. Critics would say that the report rejected the authority of Scripture, but the authors of the report did not think they were doing that. Citing official Presbyterian Church statements on the authority and interpretation of Scripture, Keeping Body and Soul Together calls attention to trends in biblical interpretation. Presbyterians have moved away from an inerrantist view of Scripture, and are less explicit than they used to be in their appeals to biblical authority. Instead of relying on individual texts (a technique which biblical scholars disparage as “proof-texting”), they tend to look for the broader message of Scripture, often considering its social and historical context. Moreover,

¹²⁶ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 39. Italics added.

Presbyterians increasingly recognize that Scripture itself contains diverse perspectives.¹²⁷

In addition, as the committee members note, it is not always easy to interpret Scripture, especially for guidance on sexual matters, because “the historical distance between twentieth-century Christians and first-century Christians (and ancient Israelites) means we cannot simply borrow or easily replicate their conclusions about human sexuality.” The ancients did not write with us in mind.¹²⁸ In any case, “there is no single, consistent biblical ethic of sexuality. Diversity, not uniformity, is the character of the biblical witness.” Even so, the authors find some coherence in Scripture. First, they accept the Reformed theological conviction that Jesus Christ and the reign of God are at the heart of Scripture.¹²⁹ Second, they contend that God’s plan of redemption dramatically rearranges human relationships, breaking down racial, religious, and ethnic barriers.¹³⁰ What happened in the first century happens today as well. “The battles over inclusivity and gender, race, and sexual justice continue in the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 26. The report refers to a passage in which Paul writes about the effects of baptism into Christ Jesus, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, New Revised Standard Version). This text is often used today when issues of equality are under discussion. Dare one suggest that it functions as a proof-text for liberals and liberationists?

church.... Accordingly, our task is never simply to preserve texts and transmit traditions statically, but rather to evaluate and appropriate them in a discerning manner."¹³¹ For these authors, then, Scripture offers no final word for contemporary sexuality, but it does provide a rationale for including in the religious community those who have been excluded in times past. There is a kind of permanent revolution that begins in Scripture and continues in the church.

It would be misleading to say that the argument about the interpretation of Scripture in Keeping Body and Soul Together reflects only a gap between unsophisticated laity and a theologically trained leadership. There are significant disagreements among scholars, too. In 1995, a professor of New Testament Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary reviewed the portions of the Old and New Testaments that treat homosexual behavior.¹³² According to Marion Soards, there is not a great deal about homosexuality in the Bible, but the message of that material is clear: homosexuality is inconsistent with God's will. Homosexual behavior is both "a sin and evidence of sin, and there is no way to read the Bible as condoning homosexual acts."¹³³ Soards also denies that one can justify ordaining homosexuals today by referring to the acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian community long ago. The Old Testament anticipated

¹³¹ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 27.

¹³² Marion L. Soards, Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 24.

the salvation of the Gentiles, but never envisioned an acceptance of homosexual behavior.¹³⁴

The perspective of Keeping Body and Soul Together is progressivist, to use James Davison Hunter's term. Professor Soards writes from Hunter's orthodox vantage point. The report does not find in Scripture precise guidance for morality today, but Soards believes a single authoritative source, the Bible, has already covered all the bases.

The publication of Keeping Body and Soul Together prompted furious objections. Five members of the original committee submitted a minority report, dissenting from much of the majority document. For instance, they acknowledged that the critique of patriarchy had some merit, but held that the issue has been oversimplified: "Women as well as men can dominate and control the lives of those with whom they have established the most intimate of relationships." Moreover, people differ in their needs for power in relationships; for some folk, "mutuality does not mean equivalency."¹³⁵ The minority report found that Scripture and tradition uniformly oppose homosexual behavior, with the result that "we would need overwhelming reasons to depart from the historic stand of the church." Current scientific findings are neither conclusive nor entirely relevant to the "church's moral concerns with such behavior," and so

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

¹³⁵ Minority Report of the Special Committee, I.A.d (the minority report did not include page numbers for the first section).

there is no adequate justification for changing the Christian position about homosexual behavior.¹³⁶

Other reactions were not nearly so polite. The religion editor of Newsweek described the majority report as ‘a sermon on Eros prepared in the heat of politically correct passion.’ Christians had noticed before that the country’s sexual mores did not correspond to Christian moral standards, yet “until now no Christian denomination has seriously considered the wholesale rejection of traditional sexual ethics as outdated and oppressive – much less blessing homosexuality, fornication and other behavior it once found sinful.” The Newsweek writer also pointed out that the report did not link sexual intercourse to procreation -- “Indeed, pregnancy is barely mentioned except as something to be avoided through contraception or abortion.”¹³⁷

Writing in Christianity Today, a professor of religion called Keeping Body and Soul Together “a sustained apology for erotic empowerment in its manifold forms under the expression of ‘justice-love.’ It is a quantum leap from the biblical and Reformed heritage of the church.” How could this have happened? First of all, the report makes pluralism, and not Scripture, “the final arbiter of faith and morality.” The committee makes changing social conditions and the social sciences normative for Christian sexual morality, relegating Scripture and

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³⁷ Kenneth L. Woodward, “Roll Over John Calvin: The Presbyterians Rethink the Sexual Revolution,” Newsweek 117 (May 6, 1991): 59-60.

theology to subordinate roles. Moreover, the report is intensely ideological, more Marxist even than feminist, framed as it is in terms of struggles between oppressors and oppressed.¹³⁸ A critical appraisal in The Christian Century characterized the report as “a radical departure from the historic Christian position on sexual ethics.” But the worst thing about the proposed standards is that they are too abstract to provide effective guidance in real life:

Decisions about sexual behavior are not made solely by ethicists in the silence of timeless reflection. They must also be made by teens in a moment of heated passion. How can we in good conscience suggest that our advice to singles and adolescents consists of statements like ‘Where there is justice-love, sexual expression has ethical integrity’?¹³⁹

So widespread was the interest in the Presbyterian document that more than six months after its rejection by the General Assembly, The New Republic carried a rambling critique of it by Camille Paglia, who complained that it sought to blame all human problems on “an unjust social system, a ‘patriarchy’ of gigantic and demonized dimensions.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ James R. Edwards, “Eros Deified,” Christianity Today 35 (May 27, 1991): 14-15.

¹³⁹ Gary L. Watts, “An Empty Sexual Ethic,” Christian Century 108 (May 8, 1991), 520-521. The author also complained that the report had things backwards: it wanted to respond to a crisis in sexuality by changing moral standards, but much of the crisis was actually the result of not following the existing standards.

¹⁴⁰ Camille Paglia, “The Joy of Presbyterian Sex,” The New Republic 205 (December 2, 1991), 24-27. This article drew a strong rejoinder; see David Heddendorf, “A Pagan Protests Presbyterian Sex,” Christian Century 109 (February 26, 1992): 213-215. Paglia has never been a Presbyterian; she describes herself as a lapsed Catholic.

The report also had its defenders. An article in Christianity and Crisis pointed out that the use of scripture in Keeping Body and Soul Together was not all that controversial – in Presbyterian theological institutions. Unfortunately, theological debates about biblical interpretation were not widely known in the church as a whole, a failing of lay theological education.¹⁴¹ Another article in the same periodical observed that the fight about Scripture reveals that the early twentieth century battles over biblical interpretation are not yet settled. For the sake of tranquility, the Presbyterian Church has not told many of its members about current exegetical and hermeneutical methods.¹⁴²

The chairman of the special committee, John J. Carey, energetically defended the report.¹⁴³ According to Carey, the committee wanted to emphasize the diversity within the Presbyterian Church. Yet Carey also acknowledges that his denomination

is still 95 per cent white and middle to upper middle class. It is difficult for the majority constituency to recognize and affirm alternative values, aims and problems of minority cultures. That is at the heart of much of the controversy surrounding the report: majority culture church members resent its repudiation of

¹⁴¹ Vivian Linder-mayer, "Presbyterian Bravery Under Fire," Christianity and Crisis 51 (May 27, 1991): 163.

¹⁴² J. Gittings, "A Bonfire in Baltimore: Presbyterian Task Force Reports on Sexuality," Christianity and Crisis 51 (May 27, 1991): 172-177.

¹⁴³ See John J. Carey, "Body and Soul: Presbyterians on Sexuality," Christian Century 108 (May 8, 1991): 516-520, and John J. Carey, "Sexuality: What We Couldn't Say," Christianity and Crisis 51 (August 19, 1991): 258-259.

the hegemony of white middle-class culture, and especially its sensitivity to the legitimacy of other sexual lifestyles.¹⁴⁴

There is a puzzling situation here. If the church is predominantly white and middle-class, why exactly does the committee attack the culture of the middle-class whites who make up the church's membership? Keeping Body and Soul does much more than seek tolerance for small minorities in the church; it often seems to attack the primary culture of the denomination, as in sentences like this: "Voices of conformity urge a return to a romanticized past of cultural homogeneity, populated largely by white, affluent, heterosexual protestants in nuclear families."¹⁴⁵ This cultural homogeneity seems in truth to be the Presbyterian present.

For more than a decade, the numerical decline of denominations like the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. According to sociologist Benton Johnson, a principal reason for church decline is that church leaders themselves, beginning in the 1950s, have mounted ever harsher attacks on the churches they belong to, especially on what they considered to be shallow popular religion and popular theology. For these critics, and for the clergy they influence, middle-class religion is highly suspect.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Keeping Body and Soul Together, 8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Benton Johnson, "Liberal Protestantism: End of the Road?" Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 480 (July 1985): 39-52.

These leaders slight their own constituency without recognizing its positive features. The middle class is here to stay, Johnson suggests, and liberal mainline churches need to be more attentive to it. The leaders of liberal churches "will have to temper their criticisms with a frank appreciation of many of the values of the liberal bourgeoisie. They will have to tack in the direction of restoring to the middle class some way to articulate a respect for its own standards and its own historical accomplishments."¹⁴⁷

The Presbyterian report seems to contain exactly the sort of thinking that Benton Johnson brings into question. Keeping Body and Soul Together employs the framework of liberation theology, and it is worth asking why that choice should have been made. Liberation theology began in Latin America, where there are often appalling contrasts between wealthy, powerful minorities and the impoverished, powerless masses. Latin American liberation theologians themselves are not always sure that their work is directly relevant to North America or Europe.¹⁴⁸ American seminary professors are not poor, nor are the churches they supposedly serve. It seems unlikely that any mainline seminary

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Antonio Moser and Bernardino Leers, Moral Theology: Dead Ends and Alternatives, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990. First pub. Sao Paulo, 1987). These authors, writing in Brazil, evaluate changes in Catholic moral theology after World War II, but say of their own remarks: "These criticisms are not aimed primarily at renewed morality and the theologians who espouse it No, the criticisms are addressed far more to *those who live in the historical-social context of the Third World* and yet fail to hear the evangelical demands that spring from this context (29). Italics added.

professor will be dragged into a torture chamber or added to the ranks of the disappeared, yet liberation theology has a strong appeal for some mainline theological thinkers. It is important to ask what has happened in mainline Protestantism to make this theological import so attractive.

Even when mainline church leaders do not employ a liberation theology perspective, many are inclined to focus above all on distress, and make response to it their first priority. Indeed, this was one of the fundamental strategies of the Presbyterian committee. The Task Force “began by listening carefully to folks who felt alienated. These included gay and lesbian persons, of course. But their number also included young unmarried persons living together, and women trapped in – or newly broken free from – destructive marriages.”¹⁴⁹ The chairman of the committee writes that the report “tries to convey something of the pain and conflict felt by the diverse constituencies of our church.”¹⁵⁰ No doubt this decision can be defended as a decision to pay attention to people who could have been ignored. No doubt, too, it can be justified theologically by an appeal to the compassion of Jesus.¹⁵¹ But does this decision to concentrate on

¹⁴⁹ Gittings, “A Bonfire in Baltimore,” 173.

¹⁵⁰ John J. Carey, “Body and Soul: Presbyterians on Sexuality,” Christian Century 108 (May 8, 1991), 520.

¹⁵¹ Albert Nolan makes *compassion* the key to understanding the ministry of Jesus in his book Jesus Before Christianity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976). Jesus associated himself with John the Baptist, and then began his own unique mission, because he saw total calamity threatening his people: “Compassion is a response to suffering. The thought of an imminent catastrophe...must have shaken a man of such compassion and sensitivity” (28). As understood

pain also reflect something else, perhaps a “triumph of the therapeutic” in an understanding of the church and its ministry?¹⁵²

Finally, we may ask whether critics had a point when they labeled the majority report as a hymn to Eros rather than a sober and Christian ethical reflection.¹⁵³ The committee adopted as its own the proposal of one its members for an ethics of “common decency.” Spelling out his vision of that ethic, Marvin M. Ellison celebrates sex quite extravagantly: “We are invited to relish receiving

here, compassion has epistemological as well as emotional significance. Nolan writes, “Compassion is the basis of truth. The experience of compassion is the experience of suffering or feeling with someone. To suffer or feel with man, nature and God is to be in tune with the rhythms and impulses of life” (125). Nolan builds a powerful case. Nevertheless, it is possible to read the gospels rather differently. Mark’s Gospel, for example, begins with John the Baptist’s demand for repentance, and Jesus himself makes the same demand at the beginning of his ministry (Mark 1:15). Nolan wrote in South Africa in the 1970s when a vast majority suffered under the rule of *apartheid*, and oppressor and oppressed alike faced the possibility that fundamental change in South Africa might come only through appalling violence. In such a situation, compassion may be the key to knowledge and action. But in the self-indulgent culture which America’s mainline churches inhabit, compassion could be hijacked by self-pity.

¹⁵² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon have argued that contemporary churches tend to define their mission as “meeting needs,” when the real task is to enable people to worship God. Sometimes preparing people to do that requires confronting them with the unattractive truth about their lives and lies. In practice, church life is often governed by sentimentality, “that attitude of being always ready to understand but not to judge.” See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, “Ministry as More Than a Helping Profession,” *Christian Century* 106 (March 15, 1989): 282-284. What happens if this needs-meeting mentality is exported to ethical inquiries? There could be no end to the alienation or pain people want to express, and there might be no capacity left to say, “Enough!” or to challenge the stories people tell about themselves.

¹⁵³ Woodward, “Roll Over John Calvin,” and Edwards, “Eros Deified.”

and giving sexual pleasure.... Literally 'staying in touch' -- with our senses, with one another, with whatever moves us in delight, horror, or curiosity – is an open-ended sexual and spiritual project, full of surprises and challenges.” There can be few if any rules limiting sexual behavior. Certainly sexual exclusivity cannot be required even in marriage – “Some marriages may make room for additional sexual partners while others will thrive only by maintaining genital sexual exclusivity.”¹⁵⁴ At times Ellison’s proposals resemble this frankly libertine perspective offered in Cosmopolitan magazine: “Unfortunately, moral codes and legal demarcations complicate rather than regulate desire. And judgments like ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ only build barriers between people and encourage shame within individuals.”¹⁵⁵ Once again we must ask whether mainline Protestant churches still have the ability to shape the mind and life of the membership, or whether they readily import all sorts of ideas from the surrounding culture to keep people happy in undemanding voluntary associations.¹⁵⁶

The 1991 General Assembly rejected Keeping Body and Soul Together, but the church continued to struggle with many of the issues treated in that report, including the ordination of homosexual persons. In 1996, the church’s General Assembly passed “Amendment B,” a requirement of fidelity and chastity, the plain intent of which was to make the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals

¹⁵⁴ Ellison, “Common Decency,” 354

¹⁵⁵ Rebecca Walker, “Lusting for Sexual Freedom,” Cosmopolitan 219 (August 1995): 95-96.

¹⁵⁶ Turner, Sex, Money and Power, 4.

impossible.¹⁵⁷ If approved by a majority of the church's presbyteries, the amendment would be added to the church's Book of Order. And, in fact, the amendment did garner the necessary support, but lesbian and gay activists did not concede the battle. Some Presbyterians churches took steps designed to undermine the amendment; for example, a number of "More Light" churches pledged that they would ordain and call deacons, elders and ministers without considering sexual orientation.¹⁵⁸ And the vote was closer than it appeared. Although a majority of presbyteries ratified the amendment, the vote within the presbyteries was often very close indeed.¹⁵⁹

Then in June 1997, the General Assembly voted to replace the amendment passed only the year before. The new amendment contains much more flexible language. Church leaders must "lead a life in obedience to Jesus Christ under the authority of scripture," rather than live "in obedience to scripture." They must "be instructed by the historical confessional standards of

¹⁵⁷ The Amendment reads as follows: "Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage of a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament" (cited from "Voting on Fidelity and Chastity," Christian Century 114 [March 12, 1997]: 261).

¹⁵⁸ "Presbyterian Dissent," Christian Century 114 (May 7, 1997): 437-438. See also "Milwaukee Presbyterians Defy New Church Rule," Christian Century 114 (June 18-25, 1997): 585.

¹⁵⁹ John J. Buchanan, "Order and Freedom." Christian Century 114 (June 18-25, 1997): 580-581. At the time of writing, Buchanan was moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

the church,” but do not have to be “in conformity” to them.” Church leaders will need to “demonstrate fidelity and integrity in marriage or singleness, and in all relationships of life,” while the earlier amendment required them to live “in fidelity within the covenant of marriage of a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.”¹⁶⁰ The amendment to the church’s Book of Order could take effect only if the presbyteries ratified it – but they rejected it.¹⁶¹ No doubt issues related to homosexuality will contain to create conflict between Presbyterians.

For Presbyterians, then, as for Episcopalians, homosexuality has proved a most contentious issue. The controversy over Keeping Body and Soul Together was due in part to its endorsement of demands for unlimited gay and lesbian participation in church life, but the report was also controversial because of its relationship to scripture. The more recent struggle over Amendment B, which sought to exclude non-celibate homosexuals from leadership roles, revealed problems similar to those faced by the Episcopal Church. When Amendment B

¹⁶⁰ Jerry Van Marter, “Assembly Approves Fidelity and Integrity’ Amendment,” General Assembly News 97122. Obtained from Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) official website June 22, 1997. The new amendment reads as follows: “Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and instructed by the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to demonstrate fidelity and integrity in marriage or singleness, and in all relationships of life. Candidates for ordained office shall acknowledge their own sinfulness, their need for repentance, and their reliance on the grace and mercy of God to fulfill the duties of their office.”

¹⁶¹ The vote was 114 presbyteries opposed, 57 in favor. Jerry L. Van Meter, “Voting is virtually completed on constitutional amendments,” PCUSA News Note 4756, June 5, 1988. Retrieved from PCUSA web site June 30, 1998. See also “PCUSA Ordination Proposal Fails,” Christian Century 115 (April 8, 1998), 362.

won the support of the General Assembly and a majority of the church's presbyteries, its opponents mobilized to defy the ban. Dissident Episcopalians said the 1979 General Convention resolution, which forbade certain ordinations, was only a recommendation. Presbyterian opponents of Amendment B may have envisioned a still stronger challenge, an argument that the General Assembly lacks the authority to interfere with the process by which a church calls and ordains its own pastor.¹⁶² John M. Buchanan, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church, observed that the church "has historically affirmed two ideas that live in permanent tension: church order and individual freedom."¹⁶³ Writing some months before the 1997 General Assembly modified Amendment B, Buchanan took note of the emerging battle lines in the church: "Some Presbyterians are urging us to create a strategy to begin implementation and enforcement of the amendment. Others are signing covenants of dissent, declaring their intent to disregard the new provision." Some Presbyterians had already withdrawn from the church, and others might soon follow.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See "Presbyterian Dissent," 438.

¹⁶³ Buchanan, "Order and Freedom," 580.

¹⁶⁴ Buchanan, "Order and Freedom," 581.

V. Lutherans, Methodists and Others

In the 1990s, the most widely publicized battles over homosexuality have taken place among Episcopalians and Presbyterians, but other churches have faced the question, too. Significantly, one church which has been unable to resolve the issues is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).¹⁶⁵ This church is often classified among the mainline denominations, and is actively pursuing closer ecumenical relations with both Episcopalians and Presbyterians.¹⁶⁶ In November 1996, the ELCA's Church Council issued a "Message" on sexuality,¹⁶⁷ carefully noting that messages adopted by the Church

¹⁶⁵ Now the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the product of a merger of three Lutheran bodies in 1987. Two of those groups were themselves the products of earlier mergers, while the third was the result of a split in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod during the 1970s. See Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," in Edward L. Queen II, Stephen R. Prothero, and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., eds., The Encyclopedia of American Religious History (New York: Facts on File, 1996).

¹⁶⁶ Gustav Niebuhr, "Summer Agenda: Unity and Church-State Issues," New York Times Online July 5, 1997. Obtained Online July 5, 1997. The Lutherans are also considering closer relations with the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America.

¹⁶⁷ For some of the twists and turns as Lutherans have tried to formulate teachings on sexuality, see "Ministry and Sexuality," Christian Century 105 (May 4, 1988: 449; "More Reactions to the ELCA Sexuality Report," Christian Century 110 (December 22, 1993): 1296; "Lutherans Critical of Sexuality Report," Christian Century 111 (March 23, 1994): 306; "Lutherans Hail, Dismiss, Sexuality Task Force," Christian Century 111 (April 13, 1994): 377-378; "Lutherans Abandon Sexuality Study," Christian Century 111 (November 2, 1994): 1007-1008); and "ELCA Issues New Sexuality Statement," Christian Century 111 (November 23, 1994): 1105.

Council “are intended to focus attention and action on timely, pressing matters of concern for this church and society. *They do not establish new policy for this church*, but build upon previously adopted policy positions, especially from social statements.”¹⁶⁸ The preface to the Message notes that the ELCA once planned to consider a social statement on sexuality at its 1995 Churchwide Assembly, but postponed any consideration of such a statement because of acute disagreements over such issues as homosexuality.¹⁶⁹ And indeed the Message is silent on homosexuality. It addresses the broad theological themes of creation and sin, and briefly touches on singleness, marriage, procreation, and divorce. It identifies seven serious “misuses of sexuality,” only one of which (promiscuity) could readily be applied to certain forms of adult homosexual behavior. The Message carefully skirts the issue of sexual activity by the unmarried, saying only, “The church is to be a loving, supportive community for single persons. Language and practices that demean or exclude them are to be avoided. This

¹⁶⁸ A Message on Sexuality, as adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on November 9, 1996.” Obtained from the ELCA’s official webpage, June 1997. Italics added.

¹⁶⁹ The ELCA may be having second thoughts about preparing statements on controversial issues. In March of 1997, the church’s Division for Church in Society, which has developed statements for the ELCA, declared that “the study leading up to a statement is more important than the statement itself.” The ELCA Church Council retains the option of providing short messages that clarify the church’s position on a given issue (“ELCA Policy to Stress Study Over Statements,” ELCA News Service, March 17, 1997. Retrieved from ELCA Website, July 9, 1997). This decision may make it easier for the ELCA to postpone taking a public, and inevitably controversial, stand on homosexuality.

church seeks to be a place where, as sexual beings, single adults can find guidance for their particular spiritual, ethical, psychological, and social issues.” Marriage is defined as “a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman.”

That the Lutheran Church should have difficulty in defining a position on homosexuality is not surprising. The young church’s foundational social statement, The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,¹⁷⁰ describes the denomination’s approach to moral teaching, and some elements of that approach are likely to make resolution of complex, emotionally charged issues rather difficult. For one thing, the church has responsibilities for both healing and prophetic action: “As a reconciling and healing presence, this church is called to minister to human need with compassion and imagination.” There could be tension between that role and the prophetic task, which is “to name and denounce the idols before whom people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people.”¹⁷¹

Trouble is sure to come when the church looks for guidance in the Scriptures. “Scripture is the normative source in this church’s deliberation,” the statement affirms, but it goes on to acknowledge the difficulty of using Scripture for moral direction today. “Because of the *diversity in Scripture*, and because of

¹⁷⁰ The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective was adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 28-September 4, 1991, by more than a two-thirds majority vote.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Part D (“The Church’s Responsibility in Society”).

the contemporary world's *distance from the biblical world*, it is necessary to scrutinize the texts carefully in their own setting and to interpret them faithfully in the context of today."¹⁷² In any case, moral deliberation is not an exercise confined to scholars capable of detachment. "Deliberation in this church should include people...with different life-experiences, perspectives, and interests." The statement is quite specific about the sorts of people who should have a share in moral discussions: "those who *suffer and feel* with the issue; those whose interests or security are at stake; pastors, bishops, theologians, ethicists, and other teachers in this church; advocates; [and] experts in the social and natural sciences, the arts, and the humanities."¹⁷³

The Presbyterian document Keeping Body and Soul Together claimed that its unconventional interpretations were faithful to contemporary Presbyterian views of the nature of Scripture. The Lutheran statement just quoted allows some flexibility in interpreting biblical texts for contemporary use; Lutherans clearly are not bound to apply directly to present moral issues the apparently literal meaning of particular verses drawn from the Scriptures. The possible implications of The Church in Society may be seen in Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith, a study document produced as a step toward developing a social

¹⁷² Ibid., Section F ("A Community of Moral Deliberation"). Italics added.

¹⁷³ Ibid. Italics added.

statement on sexuality.¹⁷⁴ The study document discusses Romans 1:26-28, a passage in which Paul excoriates homosexual activity, then points out that Paul's primary concern in the passage is not to specify sexual sins but rather to demonstrate the sinfulness of Gentiles and Jews alike. That exegetical point might not be controversial. More challenging is the conclusion: "Even if we concede that Paul's judgment on same-sex acts is clearly negative, this *does not necessarily determine the significance of this text for us today*. Moralists of Paul's day (such as Seneca and Plutarch) viewed homosexual practice as essentially exploitative and driven by lust." If Paul was thinking that way, too, his words would not necessarily be relevant to "same-sex relationships in which there is mutual love and commitment."¹⁷⁵

The criteria for participation in moral deliberation are somewhat reminiscent of the Presbyterian document, too. The Presbyterian committee "began by listening carefully to folks who felt alienated."¹⁷⁶ The Lutheran requirement to include "those who feel and suffer with the issue" could lead to similar results. Indeed, Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith encourages a

¹⁷⁴ Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith: A Study for the Church's Reflection and Deliberation. Minneapolis: Division for Church and Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 23. Italics added. This Lutheran document is an excellent example of the way in which a church can make the yields of modern scholarship available to members of the church. While the discussion of Romans 1:26-28 is quite brief, the footnotes make available useful summaries of important scholarly debates about the passage.

¹⁷⁶ Gittings, "A Bonfire in Baltimore," 173.

move beyond strictly biblical and theological study: "It is important to listen to the personal stories of gay or lesbian people and their relationships."¹⁷⁷ And what should one do after listening? Philip Turner, we have seen, believes that the Lutheran Church may face a struggle over competing versions of authority like the battle in the Episcopal Church. Where a traditional view of authority might insist on observance of common beliefs and practices, the prophetic face of a newer view of authority could undermine efforts to establish both teaching and effective discipline.¹⁷⁸

The United Methodist Church has addressed sexuality issues, too. In 1992, the church reaffirmed a decision made in 1972 to prohibit the ordination of homosexuals.¹⁷⁹ But all is not quiet on the Wesleyan front. In a statement entitled, "The More Excellent Way: God's Plan Re-Affirmed," some forty seven Methodists proposed the advocates of homosexual ordination refrain from using the pulpits, agencies, educational institutions, and other church organizations as platforms to make their case. After all, claimed these Methodists, there is no reason to continue a "needles debate over an issue settled centuries ago and upheld throughout history by the unanimous witness of scripture and Christian tradition." But this group acted precisely because another group's document, "In

¹⁷⁷ Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith, 46.

¹⁷⁸ Turner, "Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline," 132.

¹⁷⁹ Jim Gittings, "Clergy and Sexuality: The Pot Still Simmers," Christianity and Crisis 52 (July 20, 1992): 250-252.

All Things Charity,” had recently stimulated the needless debate.¹⁸⁰ The continuing dispute within the Methodist Church can embroil other organizations as well. In the summer of 1997, the trustees of Emory University suspended same-sex commitment ceremonies in nondenominational chapels on Emory’s campuses, overruling at least temporarily a more permissive policy established by the University’s president. The Methodist Church, which founded Emory, still maintains strong ties with the prestigious institution.¹⁸¹

Controversies about homosexuality have occurred in other mainline denominations, too. At its biennial meeting in 1991, the American Baptist Convention dealt with a number of sexuality-related resolutions. Concerning homosexuality, the Convention voted 1124-539 with 46 abstentions to back a statement that said, “We do not accept the homosexual lifestyle, homosexual marriage, ordination of homosexual clergy or establishment of ‘gay churches’ or ‘gay caucuses.’”¹⁸² Three years later, however, conservative congregations were threatening to leave the denomination if national or regional leaders acted in ways that affirmed homosexuality, and some liberal congregations formed an association that welcomes lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons into church life.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ “Drop Gay Issue, Urges Methodist Group,” Christian Century 114 (March 12, 1997): 264-65.

¹⁸¹ “Emory Bans Gay Couples’ Ceremonies,” The New York Times On Line, June 20, 1997.

¹⁸² “ABC on Sexuality,” Christian Century 108 (July 24, 1991): 713.

¹⁸³ “Homosexuality Debate Strains ABC,” Christian Century 111 (July 27, 1994): 714.

In 1996, a regional association expelled four congregations because of their outreach to homosexual persons.¹⁸⁴ Disputes about homosexuality may have been a factor when the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) met in Tulsa in 1991. Michael Kinammon, the sole nominee, failed to win the denomination's top office when he did not obtain the required two-thirds majority vote. "Letters had circulated the denomination for months denouncing Kinammon's understanding of the authority of Scripture, his openness to gays and lesbians within the church, his association with the World Council of Churches...and his background as a seminary professor and dean rather than as a local church pastor."¹⁸⁵

The mainline church most hospitable to gay and lesbian concerns is the United Church of Christ (UCC), which appointed a national staff minister for these concerns in 1997, something no other mainline denomination has done.¹⁸⁶ The UCC is generally considered to be "one of the most theologically and socially progressive of all the churches within American mainline Protestantism."¹⁸⁷ But

¹⁸⁴ "Four ABC churches ousted over Gay Issue," Christian Century 113 (February 21, 1996): 193-194. The four Bay Area congregations belong to the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, which includes several dozen ABC congregations. In 1995, a regional jurisdiction in Ohio also expelled a congregation because of its outreach to homosexual persons. The Southern Baptist Convention and the Evangelical Lutheran Church have also expelled congregations for actions that ran counter to denominational policies with respect to homosexuality.

¹⁸⁵ Kris Culp, "The Disciples Vote: Discovering Politics," Christianity and Crisis 51 (January 13, 1992): 406-408.

¹⁸⁶ "UCC Appoints Minister to Address Gay Issues," Christian Century 114 (April 9, 1997): 369-370).

this church, too, faces internal challenges from critics who believe that it has strayed from its theological and spiritual roots, although these critics are concerned with doctrinal issues rather than moral teaching. In 1993, a number of prominent theologians and ministers warned that the church showed “indifference to Scripture.” They noted that efforts to replace the Trinitarian formula of “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” with the phrase “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier,” although defeated, had threatened to put the UCC “outside the boundaries” of the Christian community.¹⁸⁸

Calls for radical changes in sexual ethics generally get short shrift from Protestants outside of the mainline traditions. The Southern Baptist Convention approved a resolution in 1991 calling on “all Christians to uphold the biblical standard of human sexuality against all onslaughts.” The resolution said marriage relationships should exist only between “a man and a woman.”¹⁸⁹ The following year, the Convention denounced homosexual behavior as a “gross perversion.”¹⁹⁰ By 1997, the Convention was prepared for even tougher talk, and possibly action, voting for a boycott of Walt Disney Company and its subsidiaries.

¹⁸⁷ Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., “United Church of Christ, in Edward L. Queen II, Stephen R. Prothero, and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., eds., The Encyclopedia of American Religious History (New York: Facts on File, 1996), 686.

¹⁸⁸ “Calls for Change in the UCC,” Christian Century 110 (December 1, 1993): 1199-1200.

¹⁸⁹ “SBC Statements,” Christian Century 108 (July 25, 1991): 712-713.

¹⁹⁰ Jim Gittings, “Clergy and Sexuality: The Pot Still Simmers,” Christianity and Crisis 52 (July 20, 1992): 250-252

Disney offended messengers by providing health benefits to the partners of its homosexual employees, and by allowing its theme parks to host “Gay Days” organized by gay rights groups.”¹⁹¹

Outside of Protestantism, issues of sexuality have been important for other religious groups. Within the Roman Catholic Church, there have been challenges to traditional teachings about homosexuality, just as there have been in the mainline Protestant churches.¹⁹² However, disagreements over homosexuality have not been as central in the Roman Church as they have in Protestant bodies, because other related issues also claim attention. These issues are the ordination of women and the nature of the church’s teaching authority. Moreover, there is still discussion of the Church’s official condemnation of artificial methods of birth control.

A good indication of the situation within Roman Catholicism is the respectful questioning of the Vatican by members of the Catholic Theological Society of America. The specific issue involved is the ordination of women. In 1994, an apostolic letter by Pope John Paul II declared that the church could not ordain female priests. In 1995 the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faithful, which is led by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, declared that the faithful are obliged to give assent to the teaching that the church has no authority to ordain

¹⁹¹ Reuters News Report, June 18, 1997. Obtained Online, June 18, 1997.

¹⁹² For a brief summary, see Thomas C. Fox, Sexuality and Catholicism (New York: George Braziller, 1995), chapter three.

women. Catholic theologians in the United States have not challenged the Pope's apostolic letter, but they have questioned the action of the Congregation. In its 1997 meeting, the Catholic Theological Society of America endorsed a report, Tradition and the Ordination of Women, which raises a number of questions about the Congregation's declaration.¹⁹³

The paper itself does not call for the ordination of women. Instead, it questions the Congregation's determination that Pope John Paul II's teaching on the ordination question "pertains to the deposit of faith and...has been taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium." But because Cardinal Ratzinger has confirmed that the Pope did not intend to provide an *ex cathedra* definition on the matter, the paper Tradition and the Ordination of Women contends that what seems to be required is "a response of *religiosum obsequium*. Theologians have taken this to mean a sincere effort to conform one's judgment to the judgment of the Pope. Experience shows that such an effort may not suffice to overcome a person's doubts and bring one to sincere internal assent." The paper concedes that it has been traditional to exclude women from the priesthood and the episcopate, but points out that traditional arguments often relied on the conviction that women could not hold church offices because they were inferior by virtue of their sex and/or because they were

¹⁹³ Peter Steinfels, "Catholics Urge More Discussion of Ordaining Women," New York Times (Online) June 8, 1997. Obtained from New York Times Online June 21, 1997. See also Pamela Schaeffer, "Wary Scholars Urge More Study, Debate on Women Priests," National Catholic Reporter, June 20, 1997. Obtained from National Catholic Reporter Online, June 21, 1997.

socially subordinate. “To the extent that past teaching that women could not be ordained was based on these convictions which are not warranted by divine revelation, that teaching is open to serious theological reinvestigation.”¹⁹⁴

Tradition and the Ordination of Women raises questions about the appropriation of tradition and about teaching authority within the church. Thomas Fox, editor of the National Catholic Reporter, has written that moral issues are difficult to deal with because traditional teachings are “supported by a moral theology that for now appears intractable.”¹⁹⁵ The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) called for the codification of church law, but this task did not begin until 1904, and was completed only in 1917. The new code simplified and clarified many issues – “but it also did much to solidify church teachings on sex at the very time the world was beginning to experience change in the ways it looked at sexual intimacy and reproduction.”¹⁹⁶

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) brought much change into the Roman Catholic Church, but it did not treat sexual ethics. When the contraception question became urgent, Pope Paul VI removed it from the council in order to decide it himself. The result was Humanae Vitae, issued in 1968. The broader consequence was, in Charles Curran’s words, that “this area of

¹⁹⁴ Tradition and the Ordination of Women, a paper endorsed by the Catholic Theological Society of America, June 5, 1997. Obtained from National Catholic Reporter Online, June 21, 1997.

¹⁹⁵ Fox, Sexuality and Catholicism, 8.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

church teaching is still based on the neoscholastic understanding that prevailed before the Second Vatican Council.” There is no way to address the question of what church teaching should be without also engaging issues of authority: “the primary issue in developing a Catholic sexual ethic today is not in deciding the ethical questions themselves but in confronting the ecclesiological question of dissent.... Can and should the hierarchy allow theological and practical assent in these areas? Can and should the hierarchical office change its teaching in these areas?”¹⁹⁷

Because of the issues of authority and women’s ordination, homosexuality is not likely to play a central role in the Roman Catholic Church’s moral debates for some time. What is important to note here is that this highly centralized, traditionally disciplined church is also having difficulty formulating moral teachings. The Vatican speaks, but it cannot be certain that official pronouncements will be accepted; they may instead be subjected to very public questioning.¹⁹⁸ Even a prominent archbishop, now retired, has called for significant modifications in papal authority.¹⁹⁹ Once in a while a bishop may

¹⁹⁷ Charles E. Curran, “Roman Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Dissenting View,” Christian Century 104 (December 16, 1987): 1140.

¹⁹⁸ Such dissent is by no means confined to the United States. German and Austrian Catholics have conducted petition drives in a bid to open the church to greater lay authority and to authorize the ordination of women. See Ingrid H. Shafer, National Catholic Reporter 31 (August 25, 1995): 11.

¹⁹⁹ Archbishop John R. Quinn, the retired archbishop of San Francisco, called for substantial changes in a speech given at Oxford University in June 1996. Quinn held that in the

excommunicate tiresome activists, but it is not clear that this church, either, can present a coherent body of moral teaching²⁰⁰ that actually influences its members.²⁰¹

contemporary Roman Catholic Church, a political model of authority that seeks order and control has displaced ecclesial models that emphasize both communion and discernment. See Pamela Schaeffer, "Quinn Calls for Reform in Papal Authority," National Catholic Reporter, July 20, 1996. Obtained from National Catholic Reporter Online, June 20, 1997.

²⁰⁰ But Pope John Paul II continues the effort. In July 1998, he made changes in canon law in an effort to curb debate on such issues as euthanasia and the ordination of women. Alessandra Stanley, "The Pope Moves to Stamp Out Liberal Debate on Heated Issues," New York Times, July 1, 1998. Obtained from New York Times OnLine, July 15, 1998.

²⁰¹ There is not time here to evaluate other religious traditions such as Orthodoxy or Judaism. A summary of Orthodox moral teachings may be found in Stanley Harakas, "The Stand of the Orthodox Church on Controversial Issues," obtained from the official website of the Greek Orthodox Church, June 18, 1997. For a sense of the variety of perspectives within Judaism, see "Roundtable: A New Sexual Ethics for Judaism?" Tikkun 8 (September 1993): 61-68.

VI. Unresolved Issues in Sexual Ethics

If Americans look to their churches for moral guidance, there may be some churches with nothing meaningful to say to them. A fair amount of research indicates that religious moral teachings can influence the behavior of active church members,²⁰² but there can be no constructive influence where no direction is given. With respect to homosexuality, the Episcopal Church is unable to speak a clear word. Should gay and lesbian persons be able to form marriage-like relationships and obtain the church's blessing?²⁰³ Some say yes, some say no, and others simply do not know. Can gay and lesbian pastors who refuse celibacy ever be wholesome examples to a flock? Some say yes, some say no, and some others simply do not know.

One way to resolve such confusion is to leave the church, or to try to expel opponents. That can mean schism. Many participants in the controversy see the danger quite clearly. Some, like Stephen Noll, believe the issue is so important that the church may have to divide over it. Others, like Philip Turner, hint that the integrity of the church may have been compromised beyond the point of recovery. Some Anglicans outside of the Episcopal Church say they will not be

²⁰² Please refer to chapter one, above.

²⁰³ The blessing in question is actually God's blessing, but this blessing comes through the church.

in communion with a church that blesses homosexual relationships and ordains non-celibate homosexual persons.

In the controversy about homosexuality, there are certain critical issues at stake: the basis of moral teaching; the legitimacy of changes in that teaching;²⁰⁴ the question of the authority to formulate teaching; and the relationship between church and society. What is the basis of moral teaching? Nearly all mainline Protestants would acknowledge that scripture plays an important part in moral teaching; the trouble comes with determining the precise role it should play. Scripture must be interpreted, usually with some reference to its original historical and cultural context. Decisions must be made about the application of ancient texts to contemporary situations. And does scripture stand entirely alone? What about the “tradition” of the church? What about “reason (including philosophy and the biological and social sciences)? What about the “experience” of people living today?

Can teachings legitimately change? If churches once condemned usury, can they legitimately accept the charging of interest today? If churches once opposed contraception, can they change their minds without discrediting themselves? Advocates of changes in moral teaching believe that change has occurred many times in the past, and should happen again. Their critics say that at least some teachings are not subject to revision.

²⁰⁴ Here we encounter again the conflict Hunter describes between progressivist and orthodox views of the sources of moral authority.

If churches are to have moral teachings, who decides what they are to be? We have seen that the debate over sexual ethics in the Roman Catholic Church is bound up with issues of authority. This is also true in the mainline churches. Can General Conventions and General Assemblies determine moral teachings, and are those determinations in any way binding upon church members? Episcopalians say one thing and do another; sometimes their General Convention speaks out of both sides of its mouth, affirming a teaching while saying many people in the church do not believe it.

Participants in the moral conflicts frequently accuse each other of selling out to the "culture." The other side's position isn't genuinely theological or biblical; it is a capitulation to culture, whether that culture be radical liberationism or petrifying patriarchy. What is the proper relationship between church and culture? Is there a single pattern that holds for all times and all situations? Or are there a variety of patterns, with each one more or less fitting depending upon the circumstances? Closely related to this question of church and culture is the question of the purpose of moral teachings. Are they addressed to everyone, whether a church member or not? Or are they addressed only to the adherents of a faith tradition?

VII. Episcopal Church Struggles in Historical Perspective

The contemporary conflict over sexuality, and especially over homosexuality, did not come out of nowhere. Historical study may be able to

illuminate present-day controversies by studying earlier disagreements. The ecclesiastical court's opinion in the Righter trial held that the contested ordination did not deny the church's "core doctrine" or violate its discipline. Yet even if the fundamental doctrine of the Episcopal Church does not deal with sexual matters, the church has a substantial body of official teaching that addresses the subject. Our next task, which we take up in chapter four, is to identify the forms in which the Episcopal Church offers moral teaching. The Episcopal Church has addressed its own members and the broader society throughout the twentieth century.

Once we have described the forms of the Episcopal Church's moral teaching, we will look at a portion of it in some detail. In chapter five we will consider the issue of contraception, which was once highly controversial in the church. In 1919, Episcopalian leaders were no more accepting of contraception than their Roman Catholic counterparts. By 1961, Episcopalians were saying that the practice of contraception could be a good thing in married life. In 1982, the General Convention implicitly endorsed the use of contraceptives by the unmarried, too.

The birth control controversy makes for a good case study in Episcopal Church teaching. The question of contraception is obviously related to sexual behavior. It is bound up with understandings of marriage, family, and gender roles. It turns out to be related to questions of ecclesiology (the nature of the church), and of the relationship of church and culture. As we trace the history of the birth control question, we will discover the same kinds of issues that appear

in the homosexuality debate: First, what is the basis of moral teaching? As Episcopalians take stands on contraception, they use a variety of justifications. Second, can changes in moral teachings be justified, particularly in the light of changing conditions, or does one moral formula cover all times and all places? Third, who has the authority to define moral teachings? In 1919, the moral defining was the work exclusively of men, and predominantly of ordained men. By 1982, participation in decision-making was broader, although authority may have been less clear than before. Finally, there is the question of the church-culture relationship. In 1919, leaders of the church thought they should be concerned with the welfare of the entire society. Did they think so later on as well? Were there any changes in their sense of the relationship between church and culture? If there were changes, how did those changes influence efforts at moral teaching?

We will learn that the Episcopal Church offered moral teaching throughout the twentieth century, but became muddled in its message after 1960. The birth control question shows a collapse of teaching on a moral issue before the Righter Trial. We will discover how hard it would be to put the pieces together again.

Chapter Four

Moral Teaching in the Episcopal Church

In the twentieth century, the Episcopal Church furnished moral teaching on many subjects and in several different forms. The Church addressed both internal and external audiences, sometimes striving to instruct the conscience of a nation, at other times regulating its own affairs. After 1900, Episcopalians introduced new forms of moral teaching and modified existing ones as they sought to influence national affairs or to improve education within the church. Church teaching may be found in pastoral letters, General Convention resolutions, Lambeth Conference statements, canon law, volumes in The Church's Teaching and The Church's Teaching Series, and editions of the Book of Common Prayer.

A discussion of the forms of teaching helps us to understand why the church's teaching on certain subjects is so muddled at the end of the century. The number and variety of sources can cause confusion. Each form of guidance has difficulties that limit its effectiveness. To provide moral guidance for the Episcopal Church is a daunting task. The church considers numerous issues and wants to address the nation as well as its own members. At mid-century, the Episcopal Church possessed a significant body of moral teaching. By the end of the century, however, the church appeared to be losing the will and the capacity to provide ethical direction.

I. The Forms of Moral Teaching

The most comprehensive treatment of the Episcopal Church's moral teaching¹ is found in Robert Hood's highly informative study, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church. Social teachings, according to Hood, are "the theological ideas and models formulated by the Church's hierarchy intended to govern and influence the shaping of public policy, private conduct, and private thinking in the social arena."² This definition suggests that the church tries to influence national affairs (public policy) and individuals (private conduct, private thinking), which means that the church's moral teachings have at least two audiences in mind.³

When the Episcopal Church addresses public and private audiences, Hood writes, it uses four main forms of teaching and communication. The oldest

¹ In this study, the terms "moral teaching" and "social teaching" are used interchangeably. Although one could try "to distinguish between those ethical matters which have to do chiefly with the individual and those which concern groups of people ... the borderline may be somewhat blurred." John Macquarrie, "Social Ethics," in Dictionary of Christian Ethics, John Macquarrie, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 324. Or perhaps the distinction is simply artificial. "Sexual ethics, for example, appear to be interpersonal rather than social, yet sexual life is strongly influenced by its sociocultural context and in turn has a significant impact upon that context." Joseph L. Allen, "Social Ethics." In The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 592.

² Robert E. Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 1.

³ It will be argued below that the public-private distinction is inadequate for a study of the church's moral teaching.

form of official instruction is the Pastoral Letter issued by the House of Bishops.⁴ A second medium is “the official reports to General Convention and House of Bishops that are approved or incorporated in a pronouncement by General Convention.”⁵ A third form of official teaching is “the resolutions, motions, memorials, and other parliamentary devices approved at General Convention and, after 1926, the Executive Council ... which is authorized to speak for the Church between General Conventions.”⁶ The fourth source, which Hoods thinks is less important than others, “is the resolutions and teachings coming out of the Lambeth Conferences and occasional papers produced by the Public Issues (affairs) Office at the national church headquarters.”⁷ Each of these sources is indeed important in the formulation and expression of moral teaching, and the Lambeth Conference is more significant than Hood suggests. The resolutions of this gathering of Anglican bishops are not binding on any church, but they can be very influential. For the sake of simplicity, we may reduce Hood’s list of sources to three categories: (1) pastoral letters, (2) resolutions of the General Convention, including reports endorsed by the convention, and (3) Lambeth Conference statements.

⁴ Ibid., xiii.

⁵ Ibid., xiv.

⁶ Ibid., xvii.

⁷ Ibid., xviii.

Although Hood identifies several important sources of moral instruction, he overlooks three more: the Book of Common Prayer, canon law, and The Church's Teaching, a set of books issued by the Episcopal Church in the 1950s and replaced by a new set in the 1970s. The Prayer Book is a most significant source of social teaching. As one student of the American Prayer Book has observed, it "serves variously as a primer for spiritual development, a statement of both personal and corporate identity, and an arbiter of polity."⁸ Moreover, liturgical texts for marriage and baptism provide normative structures for human life. Anglican Prayer Books say who is eligible for marriage, and some of them describe the ends, or purposes, of marriage. Many Anglican Prayer Books understand baptism as a rite mainly for infants, but in the Episcopal Church the 1979 Book of Common Prayer treats adult baptism as the norm. Liturgical texts thus indicate the church's view of marriage, and the place of children in church life.

Canon law regulates the church's internal affairs. The Episcopal Church does not have "a complex legal structure,"⁹ and many Episcopalians today hold "a view of canon law as divorced from the living community of faith rather than canon law as an integral part of our common life."¹⁰ Nevertheless, canon law is a

⁸ Lesley Armstrong Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), ii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁰ Leigh Axton Williams, "Reflections on Canon Law and Liturgical Revision: Fostering a *Novus Habitus Mentis* in the Episcopal Church," in Paul V. Marshall and Lesley A. Northup, eds., Leaps

significant part of the church's moral teaching. It governs marriage, ordination, worship, and discipline. Canon law is important to the "religious authority structure," which "performs the basic function of controlling access to religious goods,"¹¹ including ordination and church weddings. The marriage canons, for example, can be important to an analysis of the church's moral teaching.¹²

An additional source is The Church's Teaching, a set of books sponsored by the Episcopal Church in the 1950s. These books did not provide definitive statements about theology, worship, or ethics, but they helped to shape the thinking of a generation of Episcopalians through their use in inquirer's classes, confirmation instruction, and adult education programs. In 1979, the Episcopal Church replaced them with a new set of books, The Church's Teaching Series. Both collections include discussions of marriage, family, sexuality and contraception, our topic in the next chapter. Hood is aware of these books, and refers to them on several occasions, yet does not denominate them as official sources of moral direction.¹³

and Boundaries: The Prayer Book in the 21st Century (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1997), 59.

¹¹ Mark Chaves, "Intraorganizational Power and Internal Secularization in Protestant Denominations," American Journal of Sociology 99:1 (July 1993), 8. Please refer to the discussion of Chaves's concept of a "religious authority structure" in chapter one, above.

¹² See Philip Turner, "The Marriage Canons of the Episcopal Church," 2 parts, Anglican Theological Review 65 (October 1983): 371-393 and 66 (January 1984): 1-22.

¹³ Hood does not say why he does not classify these volumes as sources of official teaching.

To add these sources to Hood's list is not simply to increase the number of texts to consult in a search for moral instruction. It is also to question the view of moral teaching implicit in Hood's selection of sources. Hood appears to view it as a set of prescriptions addressed to particular topics: here is what the church says about sex or war or unemployment. For Hood, the church's social teaching aims to "govern and influence the shaping of public policy, private conduct, and private thinking in the social arena."¹⁴ It is concerned with public affairs and with individual attitudes and actions. Hood does not treat the organization of the church or the education of its members, but these are important matters. The church is a public body whose policies govern its own affairs and whose practices may shape the attitudes and actions of its members.¹⁵ The use of the Prayer Book creates and reinforces Anglican identity.¹⁶ The church's word and witness can also influence people who do not belong to it. To leave out the

¹⁴ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 1.

¹⁵ A study of canon law points out that it is a mistake to think "that laws and community structures apply solely to outward conduct, leaving inward motives and attitudes untouched. While it is true that a community is made what it is by the character of its members, it is also true that people are made what they are by the institutions of the society in which they live." Daniel B. Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), 4.

¹⁶ "Anglican identity, including the identity of the Episcopal Church in the United States, is formed and reformed as people called Episcopalians gather to worship God through the use of the Book of Common Prayer." John Booty, "Anglican Identity: What is this Book of Common Prayer?", Sewanee Theological Review 40 (1997), 137.

liturgy,¹⁷ canon law, and the teaching programs of a church may be to overlook its most distinctive moral policies and practices.

Yet in overlooking the life of the church itself, Hood is in good company. Many other theologians and church leaders do the same; thinking it is their job to seek justice in the social order, they apply Christian principles to social and moral problems. But theologian Stanley Hauerwas has labored for the last quarter of a century to focus Christian moral teaching first and foremost on the church.¹⁸ He views the “church as a distinct society with an integrity peculiar to itself.”¹⁹ In truth, “The primary social task of the church is to be itself.”²⁰ The church needs to be separate from society, even if it wishes to be of service to society.²¹ The

¹⁷ Non-members often attend church services, especially weddings and funerals, and sometimes other liturgies. As Bishop Stephen Bayne has written, “For good or ill the Church’s liturgies...provide a unique introduction to the Church’s teaching, for the non-Christian. This is apart from the role they play in guarding and transmitting the fulness of the Christian Tradition, although both roles are clearly inter-related.” Stephen F. Bayne, “What the Proposed Liturgy Should Proclaim,” St. Luke’s Journal of Theology 12 (May 1969), 25.

¹⁸ A Methodist layman, Hauerwas taught at Notre Dame for fourteen years before joining the theological faculty at Duke. In many ways his work is a theological cousin of the philosophical enterprise of Alasdair MacIntyre in After Virtue and subsequent books.

¹⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

church is a particular kind of community: "As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church *is* a social ethic."²²

Hauerwas contends that most approaches to Christian social ethics try to conform to the conventions of the American social and political system. In this country, no religious group can have any special legal status. Many religious groups function in this land, but public policies must be justified on non-religious grounds.²³ Much recent Christian thought about social ethics derives from "the largely unexamined axiom that Christians should engage in politics to secure a more nearly just society." Christian social ethics often serves as a "means to rule and control society."²⁴ Not only church leaders but also public intellectuals, some of them agnostics, expect churches to provide moral direction for Americans.²⁵ Hauerwas rejects this focus for Christian ethics, insisting that the

²² Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99, italics added.

²³ Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵ Robert Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 273, 277; Guenter Lewy, Why America Needs Religion: Secular Modernity and its Discontents (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), xii. For a discussion of Bork, Lewy, and the relationship of religion to social behavior, please refer to chapter one, above.

church's "more profound political task" is rather "to challenge the moral presuppositions of our polity and society."²⁶

It is not necessary to agree entirely with Hauerwas in order to appreciate the points he is making. The most important one, for the purposes of this study, is that the church is a distinctive society, even a polity; no examination of its ethics can be complete that does not consider how the church manages its own life and tries to influence the attitudes and actions of its members. As an Episcopalian student of canon law has written, the church "is a community with undeniable political characteristics, but it is not primarily a political community devised to serve man's proximate ends." Instead, the church exists to order human life under God.²⁷ Canon law, liturgical texts,²⁸ and educational programs are no less important than pastoral letters, General Convention resolutions, and Lambeth Conference statements. Indeed, liturgy, law and education may be the most significant forms of moral direction. Now that we have identified these six kinds of moral teaching, we may consider their development, particularly in the twentieth century.

²⁶ Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 73.

²⁷ Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook, 4.

²⁸ Hauerwas contends that the fundamental task of the church is to be a community that is capable of worshipping God. This basic task of the church determines its ethics. The insistence on grounding ethics in worship is not unique to Hauerwas. Please see Appendix V, Worship and Ethics.

II. Moral Teaching in the Twentieth Century

Some forms of moral teaching were new in the twentieth century, while others underwent modification as the Episcopal Church tried to carry out an ambitious agenda. Bishops began to issue pastoral letters early in the nineteenth century. The Lambeth Conference became a generator of teaching with its first meeting in 1867. In the twentieth century, General Convention resolutions and the work of special committees and commissions added to the church's moral teaching. Episcopalians revised the Book of Common Prayer in 1892, 1928, and 1979. The church modified its canon law to allow the remarriage of divorced persons and to permit the ordination of women. It introduced the Church's Teaching in the 1950s, replaced it with the Church's Teaching Series in the 1970s, then abandoned the teaching field in the 1990s, allowing an independent publisher to produce a "New Church's Teaching Series."

A. Pastoral Letters

The device of the Pastoral Letter allows the chief pastors of the church to address all members. The first such epistle appeared in 1808. Since 1820, canon law has mandated the reading of pastoral letters during worship in all churches.²⁹ At first, the writing of the letter was the responsibility of the senior

²⁹ Hood, Social Teachings of the Episcopal Church, xiii.

bishop (the “Presiding Bishop”); indeed, the first thirteen letters are from the pen of just one prelate, William White (1748-1836). Most pastoral letters, however, have been the work of committees.³⁰ These letters are normally written during meetings of the House of Bishops; they are not the results of years of study and revision, as is the case with some pastoral letters from Roman Catholic bishops.³¹

How representative are the pastoral letters, and how much weight should they carry in the life of the church? An article which surveyed all of the pastoral letters from 1808 to 1953 argued that the letters do not reflect unanimity: “It can only be said that a majority of bishops officially subscribed to each published letter.”³² The authority of the letters is somewhat uncertain. Robert Hood notes that the Episcopal Church, following the American Revolution, did not want “anything resembling an archbishop or metropolitan who might function as a

³⁰ Ibid. See also George Reuben Metcalf, “American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters of the House of Bishops,” Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 27 (1958), 17.

³¹ The widely discussed Roman Catholic Pastoral Letter on economic justice that appeared in 1986 was the result of a six-year process. The bishops reviewed drafts of the letter in 1984, 1985, and 1986 before publishing the final version. Nothing like this has ever been undertaken by the bishops of the Episcopal Church. See Economic Justice For All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986).

³² Metcalf, “American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters,” 18.

central authority in the church.”³³ Such authority as a letter may have derives from the House of Bishops, and not from the Presiding Bishop alone. According to a 1964 resolution of the General Convention, pastoral letters have authority in the church along with several other items, although all of them are subordinate to Scripture, the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the Prayer Book, and the Church’s Constitution and Canons.³⁴ These letters, it seems, are of some significance, but share authority with other possible sources of teaching.³⁵

George Reuben Metcalf studied the pastoral letters to see how they were related to developments in American religious philosophy. The pastoral letters (at least up to 1953) were the work of the older leaders of the church. Most writers were about sixty years old, and some were over seventy; younger bishops almost never wrote pastoral letters.³⁶ These older leaders did not reflect the latest philosophical thinking in their letters. Rather,

³³ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, xiii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 184. The subordinate forms of authoritative statements are (i) resolutions, actions and statements of the General Convention, (ii) statements by the House of Bishops, (iii) statements issued by the Presiding Bishop and the Executive Council between conventions, and (iv) actions of the Executive Council’s officers and staff taken to implement decisions made by the Executive Council on issues where General Convention has not acted.

³⁵ Some observers of the Episcopal Church fear that it no longer recognizes the overriding authority of Scripture as the 1964 resolution did. A conservative cleric contends that a liberal majority in the Episcopal Church does not in practice recognize any higher authority than the General Convention. See David Ousley, “Unity and Authority,” Churchman 104 (1990): 147-155.

³⁶ Metcalf, “American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters,” 18.

the religious philosophy underlying the Pastoral Letters published in a given generation nearly always corresponds to that expressed by American philosophers during the preceding generation, is rarely that favored by representative philosophers of the same generation, and is never that expressed in American philosophers in the following generation.³⁷

In other words, Episcopalian bishops are not intellectual pacesetters. American bishops are usually pastors and administrators, seldom scholars; their inclinations “tend toward programs, crisis management, and action rather than careful deliberations and time-consuming, considered discussions about social teachings for the church.”³⁸ When they write, bishops may be expected to draw on what they learned when they were young. If they are “trendy,” the bishops do not whistle the latest top-forty tune, but hum along with the intellectual oldies station. Historian Thomas Reeves’s verdict that many mainline church leaders of the 1990s are “stuck in the sixties” is no surprise.³⁹ At moments of acute social and intellectual conflict, the leaders of the church may not be very well equipped to deal with the newer issues at hand.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸ Hood, *Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church*, xix.

³⁹ Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 159. See the discussion on “trendiness” in chapter two, above.

⁴⁰ The 1995 trial of Bishop Righter put on display the limited intellectual capital of the church’s leadership. As we saw in chapter three, the bishops who decided the case relied on a single scholarly study published when they themselves were children, or even mere gleams in the eye of God.

Metcalf's survey of the pastoral letters includes other significant observations. Late twentieth century defenders of traditional views of sexual morality assert that these are scripturally based. As we have seen, though, modern biblical scholarship often raises significant questions about the meaning and the relevance of biblical texts. As early as 1880, a pastoral letter urged the clergy to study the scriptures "in the original tongues" and to acquaint themselves with "the results of the ripest criticism."⁴¹ However, Metcalf also found that subsequent pastoral letters in 1889, 1894, and 1895 appealed to Scripture in ways that modern scholarship now made questionable. It seems that the "battle for the Bible" described by a reporter in the 1980s⁴² is at least a century old.⁴³ The Episcopal Church never provided a home for fundamentalists,⁴⁴ and

⁴¹ Journal of the General Convention 1880, 348, cited in Metcalf, "American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters," 25.

⁴² Julia Duin, "Episcopalians Tiptoe Along Moral Tightrope," Christianity Today 32 (September 2, 1988): 46.

⁴³ On the role of "Broad Churchmen" like Philips Brooks and William Reed Huntington in making a place for biblical scholarship in the church in the second half of the nineteenth century, see C. G. Brown, "Christocentric Liberalism in the Episcopal Church," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 37(March 1968), 24-29.

⁴⁴ The fundamentalist controversy of the early twentieth century had some significance in the Episcopal Church, but did not produce a major battle as it did in some other churches. Fundamentalism never established a strong presence in this church. On the controversy, see Robert A. Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 206-211.

accepted much of the work of modern biblical scholarship,⁴⁵ even if some Episcopalians remain unconvinced by that scholarship. The most important point for this investigation is that acceptance of biblical scholarship by church leaders is not something altogether new in the post World War II period. Prominent Episcopalians have relied on modern biblical scholarship for more than a century.

In his discussion of late nineteenth century pastoral letters, Metcalf points to “a new religious concern for the social group, with attention given to nations and social classes.”⁴⁶ Metcalf’s interest is in religious philosophy, but what he observes is a sign of the intense interest of Episcopalians in social problems. Industrial development and urbanization brought many changes to the United States in the late nineteenth century, and Episcopalians took note. Church historian Robert Prichard observes that Episcopalians “responded more quickly than any other American religious body.”⁴⁷ Episcopalians provided many charitable and educational services in the cities, and were leaders in the Social Gospel movement.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Nor did the Episcopal Church have a major fight over biblical interpretation. See Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 186.

⁴⁶ Metcalf, “American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters,” 26.

⁴⁷ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 175.

⁴⁸ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 175-180; Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 66-71; Leonel L. Mitchell, “The Episcopal Church and the Christian Social Movement in the Nineteenth Century,” Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 30 (1961): 173-182.

B. The General Convention and Social Teaching

In the nineteenth century, official statements on social questions came from the House of Bishops, but rising interest in social problems led to innovations in the Episcopal Church's moral teaching. Early in the twentieth century, the Episcopal Church developed additional mechanisms for evaluating social and moral questions. The General Convention created both joint commissions and committees, instructing them to study issues and prepare reports for the Convention.⁴⁹ The General Convention itself began to offer social teachings, both by endorsing some of the reports submitted to it and by approving resolutions and memorials on controversial matters.⁵⁰ In 1901, the General Convention created a Joint Commission on Relations of Labor and Capital. A Joint Commission on Marriage and Family Life, created in 1916, became a source for official positions on marriage, the family, and birth control; the work of this commission will claim our attention in chapter five. Even without the work of a commission, the General Convention can provide moral teaching simply by passing resolutions. Social questions now occupy much of the

⁴⁹ The General Convention of the Episcopal Church has a bicameral structure. The House of Bishops includes only senior pastors, or bishops, who exercise jurisdiction in geographically designed dioceses; the House of Deputies consists of other ordained ministers and laypersons elected by the dioceses. A Joint Commission consists of members from both Houses. Commissions generally include bishops, priests, and laypersons.

⁵⁰ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 73-75.

attention of the triennial General Convention. The 1997 General Convention, for example, considered more than thirty resolutions on social and ethical issues, ranging from violence in East Timor to school choice in the United States, from genital mutilation of women to investment in South Africa, from gun control (five resolutions) to the abolition of nuclear weapons.⁵¹ As Hood has observed, and as we shall see in the case of birth control, such resolutions are often “lacking the considered theological substance frequently found in Pastorals and joint commission reports.”⁵²

C. The Church's Teaching

At mid-century the Episcopal Church introduced a new source of official teaching as it addressed the question of Christian education for its parishes. The Church's Teaching, a set of six volumes, was unlike any resource the Episcopal Church had known before. It included a treatment of the moral life which will claim our attention in the next chapter when we deal with the issue of contraception.⁵³ But official moral teaching was not the primary reason for publishing these books.

⁵¹ “General Convention: Official Documentation,” Official Episcopal Church Website, consulted on June 15, 1998.

⁵² Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 75.

⁵³ Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., Christian Living. Vol. 5, The Church's Teaching. Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1957.

During the Second World War, some military chaplains were troubled by the religious illiteracy of many military personnel, even those who came from Christian homes. College chaplains after the war made the same observation.⁵⁴ Church leaders also saw a need to improve Christian education. The General Convention of 1946 promoted the Christian Education Division to departmental status and increased its budget. The next year Presiding Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill appointed a department head, the Reverend John Heuss, who had built a large Christian education program in an Illinois parish.⁵⁵ Under the leadership of Heuss, the Department developed the "Seabury Series," a national resource for Episcopal parishes.⁵⁶

The intense concern with Christian education, which would persist for at least five general conventions,⁵⁷ was something new in the twentieth century Episcopal Church. A student of the church's educational ministry has observed:

Only once in the Episcopal Church's twentieth century did it direct the symbols and substance of power and authority in our culture – men, organization, and money — toward Christian education. That was during the 1950s-1960s in the creation of what today would be called a "state of the art" curriculum.... It was at

⁵⁴ Carmen St. John Hunter, Christian Education in the Episcopal Church, 1940s to 1970s (New York: Episcopal Church Center, 1987), 1.

⁵⁵ David E. Sumner, The Episcopal Church's History: 1945 to 1965 (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1987), 74-75.

⁵⁶ John Booty, The Episcopal Church in Crisis (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1988), 28.

⁵⁷ Hunter, Christian Education in the Episcopal Church, x.

the time the most professional, skillfully designed Christian education curriculum possible, the product of the most creative minds in the Episcopal Church.⁵⁸

Director Heuss decided that an important initial step would be to develop a document outlining what the church believed about scripture, doctrine, church history, Christian life, worship, and church mission. He convened a meeting of scholars and church leaders, who formed an author's committee. Their collaboration led to The Church's Teaching.⁵⁹

The six books in the collection became ecclesiastical best sellers, selling more than 500,000 copies. Developers of the children's curriculum perused them and adult classes studied them. The set was unique in the Anglican Communion, the only up-to-date summary of basic teaching based on the church's best current scholarship.⁶⁰ Though not intended as definitive statements of belief (like a Protestant Confession or the Roman Catechism), they helped to shape the mind of a generation of church members.⁶¹ The books turned out to be more important than the Seabury Series itself, which never

⁵⁸ Joanna B. Gillespie, "What We Taught: Christian Education in the American Episcopal Church, 1920-1980," Anglican and Episcopal History 56 (1987), 45.

⁵⁹ Hunter, Christian Education in the Episcopal Church, 8.

⁶⁰ Hunter, Christian Education in the Episcopal Church 9; Sumner, The Episcopal Church's History, 77.

⁶¹ In the late 1970s these books were still included on a recommended reading list for students planning to enter the Master of Divinity program at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

reached more than one third of all Episcopal congregations, and was abandoned in the late 1960s when leaders of the church turned their attention to social issues in the United States.⁶²

At the end of the 1970s, the Episcopal Church produced a successor to the Church's Teaching, this time calling the collection The Church's Teaching Series.⁶³ It contained seven books, including one on ethics.⁶⁴ In a brief introduction included in all volumes, Teaching Series Committee Chairman Alan Jones writes that "it is neither possible nor perhaps even desirable today to produce a definitive set of books setting forth the specific teachings of a particular denomination." He describes the new collection as "one resource among many for the purposes of Christian education," and acknowledges that Episcopalians hold different opinions about what the church teaches and about how to communicate that teaching. Jones almost denies that the books can speak for the Episcopal Church: "The new series makes modest claims. It speaks not so much *for* the Episcopal Church as *to* it, and not to this Church only

⁶² Hunter, Christian Education in the Episcopal Church, 28-29; Sumner, The Episcopal Church's History, 79-82; Gillespie, "What We Taught," 74-77.

⁶³ These books did not have quite the impact of their predecessors. "The volumes were in fact not aimed at an examination of Anglican teachings, but at basic Christian teachings in their different subjects. They were not as easily read as the volumes in the first series, were written mostly by seminary professors, and reflected the latest critical scholarship." Booty, The Episcopal Church in Crisis, 132. Booty himself contributed a volume on church history to this new set of books.

⁶⁴ Earl H. Brill, The Christian Moral Vision. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

but to Christians of other traditions, and to those who wait expectantly at the edge of the Church.”⁶⁵

Although Jones downplays the official standing of these books, they enjoy official sanction none the less. They were published by the Episcopal Church’s own publishing house, Seabury Press.⁶⁶ The title page of the volume on moral teaching identifies the author in a carefully qualified way: “Written by Earl H. Brill with the assistance of a group of editorial advisors under the direction of the Church’s teaching Series Committee.” Brill did not write autonomously, but in consultation with others functioning in an official capacity. Facing the title page is a list of the seven volumes in the series, along with the words “Prepared at the request of the Executive Council of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.”⁶⁷ In the late 1970s, the Episcopal Church still offered official teaching through these books.

⁶⁵ Alan Jones, “Introduction,” in Brill, The Christian Moral Vision, vii. Jones’s words could express a generous ecumenical spirit – or they could reflect a growing uncertainty about the identity of the Episcopal Church. As we saw in chapter two, many of today’s Episcopalians grew up in other traditions, and some observers believe that the church is deeply confused about its identity. Kenneth L. Woodward and Anne Underwood, “A House Divided: The Episcopal Church Struggles over Gay Marriage, Adulterous Clergy, and its own Identity,” Newsweek July 14, 1997; obtained from Newsweek Online, July 10, 1997.

⁶⁶ The Seabury Press came into existence in 1952 as a publisher of Christian education materials. Later it added other kinds of titles. In 1983, the Episcopal Church sold the money-losing operation to a Minneapolis publisher, which later sold it to Harper and Row. See Sumner, The Episcopal Church’s History, 83-84.

⁶⁷ Brill, The Christian Moral Vision, title page.

At the end of the twentieth century, however, there is no longer any semblance of such authorized church teaching. In 1997, the independent Cowley Publications⁶⁸ introduced “The New Church’s Teaching Series,” a set of books that will ultimately include a dozen volumes. The new books are in no way official church documents. The publication information includes the following acknowledgment and disclaimer: “The title *The Church’s Teaching Series* is used by permission of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society [the official name of the Episcopal Church]. Use of the series title does not constitute the Society’s endorsement of the work.”⁶⁹ James E. Griffiss, the editor of the new series, states bluntly that the new series differs from both of its predecessors: “it has no official status, claims no special authority, speaks in a personal voice, and comes not out of committees but from scholars and pastors meeting and talking informally together.”⁷⁰ Not only that, the books are not necessarily concerned with the Episcopal Church per se. Griffiss says that the books are intended for “adults who are not ‘cradle Anglicans,’ but who come from other religious

⁶⁸ Cowley Publications is a division of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopalian monastic order. A member of this order, Thomas Shaw, is Bishop of Massachusetts.

⁶⁹ James E. Griffiss, *The Anglican Vision*, Vol. 1 of *The New Church’s Teaching Series*, Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997.

⁷⁰ James E. Griffiss, “Preface: The New Church’s Teaching Series,” in Griffiss, *The Anglican Vision*, ix-x.

traditions or from no tradition at all, and who want to know what Anglicanism has to offer.”⁷¹

To date, no treatment of Christian ethics has appeared in the new series. The publisher’s plans call for two different books on the topic. One will carry the title “The Christian Social Witness.” Concerning the other volume, there has already been a change in plans. When the first book in the series appeared in 1997, it included “The Moral Life” among the future titles. But in 1998 this projected volume was replaced by a work entitled “Ethics After Easter,” by a different author.⁷² In any event, these future volumes can do no more than offer the personal perspectives of their authors. If the Episcopal Church continues to provide moral teaching, we will no longer be able to find it in an official teaching series.

D. The Lambeth Conference

The Lambeth Conference is another source for moral teaching in the Episcopal Church, even though the Conference has no legal authority over the

⁷¹ Griffiss, The Anglican Vision, x. A visit to the website of Cowley Publications reveals, however, that the series is supposed to deal with the Episcopal Church, and not the (even more) amorphous entity of Anglicanism. “Cowley Publications is pleased to announce the publication of a new teaching series for the church that will present and explore basic claims and questions about the Christian faith and the Episcopal Church.” Cowley Web Site, June 13, 1998.

⁷² Cowley Publications Web Site, June 13, 1998.

Episcopal Church.⁷³ The Lambeth Conference brings together bishops from all parts of the Anglican Communion, “an association of national episcopal churches, provinces, and dioceses historically associated with the British Isles.”⁷⁴ The Conference meets by invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, usually at ten-year intervals; the number of participants has grown from seventy-six bishops at the first conference in 1867 to more than seven hundred in 1998. From the first, the Lambeth Conference has declined to function as a Synod. “It has no right to pass decrees that will be binding on any Church; its resolutions carry no more than the weight of their own spiritual authority.”⁷⁵ Commenting on the 1930 Conference, T. S. Eliot noted that a Conference Report is very different from a Papal Encyclical. Disappointment awaits those readers of Lambeth reports “who hope for the voice of absoluteness and the words of hard precision.” The Lambeth Conference does not provide “an absolute decree on questions of faith and morals,” Eliot warns. “The Report, as a whole, is rather the expression of the

⁷³ After the American Revolution, Anglicans in the United States organized the Protestant Episcopal Church, an autonomous religious body. On this reorganization and its consequences, see Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook, 57-62.

⁷⁴ Michael McFarlene Marrett, The Lambeth Conferences and Women Priests: The Historical Background of the Conferences and their impact on the Episcopal Church in America (Smithtown, NY: Exposition Press, 1981), 1.

⁷⁵ Marrett, The Lambeth Conferences and Women Priests, 64. See also J. Robert Wright, “The Authority of Lambeth Conferences, 1867-1988,” Anglican and Episcopal History 58 (1989): 278-290.

ways in which the Church is moving, than an instruction to the faithful on belief and conduct.”⁷⁶

Bishops of the Episcopal Church have been active participants in every Lambeth Conference. At times, the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference have influenced the official teaching of the Episcopal Church.⁷⁷ In recent years, Lambeth Conferences have often faced difficult issues related to gender, marriage, and sexuality. Every Lambeth Conference since 1920 has considered the question of the ordination of women.⁷⁸ The 1988 Lambeth Conference, addressing an issue very important for many African churches, ended a century-old ban on the admission of polygamists to the churches.⁷⁹

Despite -- or perhaps because of -- its lack of formal authority, the Lambeth Conference has significantly influenced the many churches within the Anglican Communion. As one study observes, the main link among the various churches in the 1860s was the venerable 1662 edition of the Book of Common Prayer. The English tongue is also a force for unity. At the first Lambeth

⁷⁶ T. S. Eliot, “Thoughts after Lambeth,” in Paul Elmen, ed., The Anglican Moral Choice (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1983), 109, 110.

⁷⁷ For example, Lambeth Conference resolutions influenced the teaching of the Episcopal Church on contraception. Please refer to chapter five, below.

⁷⁸ Marrett, The Lambeth Conferences and the Ordination of Women, 65.

⁷⁹ David Skidmore, “Sexuality most volatile of tough issues facing Lambeth Conference,” Episcopal News Service #2172, May 18, 1998. Polygamists may now receive baptism and confirmation, but they must not marry again as long as their present wives are still living.

Conference, English was the first language of all participants. In the twentieth century, that has not been the case, but English has become an international language that still helps to link together the Anglican communion.⁸⁰ In addition, an important symbol of unity is provided by the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral,⁸¹ endorsed by the Lambeth Conference of 1888, which outlines the basis on which Anglicans believe a reunion of the divided Christian churches could take place.⁸² A late twentieth-century observer notes that reports and advisory statements from the Lambeth Conference can be influential, but suggests that the greatest impact of the conference “may come simply through the effects of dialogue and debate among bishops of vastly different experiences.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Owen Chadwick, “The Lambeth Conference: An Historical Perspective,” Anglican and Episcopal History 58 (1989): 266.

⁸¹ The Lambeth Resolution submits that a re-united Church needs to include the following elements, none of which is unique to Anglicanism: the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; the Apostles' and Nicene creeds; the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the historic episcopate, adapted to local conditions (Resolution #11 of the Lambeth Conference of 1888, as found in The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1977), 877-78. The Quadrilateral is discussed in chapter six, below.

⁸² Marrett, The Lambeth Conferences and Women Priests, 65.

⁸³ James H. Thrall, “Lambeth Conferences uphold continuity, reveal change in Anglican Communion,” Episcopal News Service #2171, May 18, 1998.

E. Canon Law

Canon law is that “body of rules which the Christian community makes for the government of its own internal affairs and the conduct of its members.”⁸⁴

Some definitions emphasize the institutional authority behind such law, speaking of “a formulation of rules, a decree, or a constitution that has been drawn up by the highest ecclesiastical authority,”⁸⁵ and other definitions hint at its possibly burdensome character, describing it as that “body of ecclesiastical rules or laws imposed by authority in matters of faith, morals, and discipline.”⁸⁶ The roots of such church law can be found in the New Testament, in “informal behavioral codes” which “set the pattern for a more developed corpus of rules later on,”⁸⁷ and in “the early practice of calling councils of church leaders to settle matters of uncertainty and dispute.”⁸⁸ Canon law reached its most complex development in

⁸⁴ John Macquarrie, “Canon Law,” in James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

⁸⁵ “Canon Law,” Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics, ed. R. K. Harrison. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987.

⁸⁶ “Canon Law.” The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3d edition, E. A. Livingstone, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

⁸⁷ “Canon Law,” Encyclopedia of Biblical and Christian Ethics.

⁸⁸ Gordon A. Catherall, “Canon Law.” In The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, rev. ed., J. D. Douglas, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978.

the Roman Catholic Church, but all churches have some equivalent regulations, although Protestants do not use the term “canon law.”⁸⁹

In the nineteenth century, canon law received considerable attention in the Episcopal Church. Some seminaries had chairs in Canon Law, held by active scholars.⁹⁰ That is hardly the case at the end of the twentieth century.⁹¹ In 1965 a book on canon law observed that all Episcopalians are familiar with the Prayer Book, the Hymnal, and the Bible, but few are even aware of the church’s Constitution and Canons.⁹² Another observer in the late 1990s claimed that “many picture law today, not as an instrument of justice for all people, but simply as a device to be manipulated for personal gain or protection by anyone with sufficient influence and financial resources to do so.” This assessment of the civil law has encouraged a view of canon law as something apart from the “means by which we govern ourselves and our relationships with other people.”⁹³

The Episcopal Church has canon law, of course, and regularly makes revisions and additions to it. Priests and bishops frequently consult this law

⁸⁹ Macquarrie, “Canon Law.”

⁹⁰ Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook, vii.

⁹¹ General Theological Seminary in New York established an endowed professorship in Ecclesiastical Polity and Law in the 1860s, and filled the job in 1869. But the professorship has been vacant since 1946. Williams, “Reflections on Canon Law and Liturgical Revision,” 195n.

⁹² Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook, 3.

⁹³ Williams, “Reflections on Canon Law and Liturgical Revision,” 59.

when they deal with such matters as marriage and ordination. Indeed, canon law may actually enjoy considerable respect in the church – but it is still true that canon law is not the first thing to come to mind when Episcopalians think of ethics.⁹⁴ The index in Robert Hood's Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church makes no reference to it.⁹⁵ Perhaps most Episcopalians would agree with the respected theologian John Macquarrie: "Much of canon law is concerned with ecclesiastical questions that have no particular ethical significance, e.g., rules about ordination and admission to the sacraments."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ As a seminarian, this writer was required to take two semester-long courses in Christian ethics, but cannot recall any mention of canon law in those courses. The writer easily satisfied the readers of his General Ordination Examination in 1982 without ever referring to the canons. No question from the diocesan bishop, the Standing Committee, the Commission on Ministry, or the examining chaplains in Massachusetts (the largest diocese in the church) checked for a familiarity with canon law, let alone an ability to apply it to moral questions. In three years of seminary education between 1979 and 1982, the writer can only recall two occasions on which the canons were mentioned. In a seminary class on church administration, a professor read aloud certain sections of the canons, but only in one class session. In a conversation, the Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts said that he assumed I was becoming familiar with the canons. And that was all. My father, who attended a different seminary between 1958 and 1961, had essentially the same experience. The subject of canon law came up only tangentially in a class on parish administration during the senior year. "We had a copy [of the canons] and looked at it from time to time, but it was peripheral at best." The class did review briefly the marriage canons. Conversation with Charles W. Tait, June 18, 1998.

⁹⁵ In Hood's well-documented book, only three footnotes make references to the canons. Interestingly, Hood thanks his former student assistants, all of whom were *lawyers* before they entered seminary, but Hood does not discuss church law. Evidently canon law simply did not strike Hood as an important area for investigation. Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church vii.

⁹⁶ Macquarrie, "Canon Law."

Yet surely Macquarrie is mistaken here. One of the most contentious issues in the recent history of the Episcopal Church has been access to ordination, first for women, then for lesbian and gay Christians. The misconduct of pastors who have sexually exploited parishioners has created enormous headaches for many churches, including the Episcopal Church.⁹⁷ Regulations dealing with the selection of the church's ordained leaders are very significant morally. Access to the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist is hardly a small matter, either, given the church's conviction that these sacraments are "given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive...grace."⁹⁸ Marriage, according to the Prayer Book Catechism, is a "sacramental rite."⁹⁹ For much of the twentieth century, Episcopalians have argued about who may marry in the church. Once divorced persons could not marry anew in the church; now they can. Today, gay and lesbian couples want the church's blessing on their relationships, but usually cannot obtain it.¹⁰⁰ Canon law regulates the "religious

⁹⁷ On this issue, see Marie M. Fortune, Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

⁹⁸ The Book of Common Prayer 1979, 857.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 860.

¹⁰⁰ As of 1998, no liturgical texts provide for the blessing of unions between persons of the same sex, but some such blessings occur nonetheless. As I was working on this section of the study, I noticed a newspaper report of the blessing of a union between two men in New Jersey. "Gay Episcopalians Exchange Vows," Daily Oklahoman, June 22, 1998.

authority structure”,¹⁰¹ determining the boundaries of the church and deciding who may enjoy its religious benefits.

Canon law may function best as a moral teacher when it is allied with moral theology, the discussion of the principles regulating Christian behavior and the application of those principles to particular cases. An English moral theologian notes that Christian communities need minimal standards of conduct for their members; in specifying these “the moral theologian overlaps the canonist.” Another important concern of moral theology is with the proper administration of the sacraments, including marriage, which are governed in part by canon law.¹⁰² But if canon law has suffered an eclipse in the Episcopal Church, moral theology seems to have fallen into a black hole. The most recent Anglican work on this subject published in the United States appeared thirty years ago, and its author has said that it may be impossible to write an adequate Anglican textbook on moral theology.¹⁰³ If traditional moral theology is not

¹⁰¹ Chaves, “Intraorganizational Power and Internal Secularization,” 8.

¹⁰² R. C. Mortimer, “Moral Theology.” In Dictionary of Christian Ethics, John Macquarrie, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 218, 219.

¹⁰³ The author in question is Lindsay Dewar, whose book An Outline of Anglican Moral Theology was published in 1968. See Thomas Wood, “Anglican Moral Theology/Ethics,” in The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 26. Moral theology, which is grounded in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, has a distinguished history in Anglicanism, but has not flourished in the last two centuries. After World War I, the British scholar and bishop Kenneth Kirk sought to renew the discipline, but has had little enduring impact, at least in the Episcopal Church (Ibid., 25-26). For an argument that such moral theology has no claim to being normative for Episcopalians, see Timothy F. Sedgwick, “Revising Anglican

available, Episcopalians may need another way to relate canon law to moral concerns, lest both moral teaching and canon law lose respect in the church.

A recent appeal for greater regard for canon law came, most significantly, from a contributor to a volume on Prayer Book Revision. The Book of Common Prayer is the primary symbol of and force for unity among Anglicans, and it is related to the church's canon law. Leigh Axton Williams remarks, "Law in its secular context is conceived as providing the framework of a community's common life."¹⁰⁴ Perhaps it does, but in a voluntary association like the Episcopal Church, there must be some consensus about the nature of that common life before law can have much effect. In the United States, as in other modern societies, the separation of state and church has brought about a disconnection of canon law and civil law,¹⁰⁵ with the result that "the authority of

Moral Theology," in Paul Elmen, ed., The Anglican Moral Choice (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1983): 121-140.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, "Reflections on Canon Law and Liturgical Revision," 60.

¹⁰⁵ Once connected, civil law and canon law are hard to separate. In France, for example, the Catholic Church once served as the registrar of marriages, births and deaths. Through its legally established position, the Church could enforce its own marriage requirements on the entire population. During the French Revolution, the state assumed control of marriage laws and the registration of marriages, births, and deaths, but the Church retained control of its own sacramental life, to the deep chagrin of families who sometimes found that the Church refused to bury a loved one who committed suicide or rejected the priest at the moment of death. See Francois Furet and Denis Richet, trans. Stephen Hardman, French Revolution (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 18, and Ralph Gibson, A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 158. In the United States, leaders of the Episcopal Church were

canon law depends on the free consent of the Christians who belong to the community in which this law holds."¹⁰⁶ In the Episcopal Church, there is not a large body of canon law. Canon law student Daniel Stevick points out that the church's legal structures do not *create* Christian community; they merely help it to *function* effectively: "Mutual trust and the existence of a common inheritance and a common mind must be presupposed."¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, however, a "common mind" cannot be presupposed in the Episcopal Church of the late twentieth century. Philip Turner, who wrote that "a church is a church precisely because it does have some ability to shape the mind and life of its membership,"¹⁰⁸ also suggests that recent disputes within the Episcopal Church may reveal "an internal schism whereby warring factions make use of a single organizational structure but in fact do not seek to maintain communion by means of it."¹⁰⁹

appalled to discover a growing divergence between civil and canonical laws on marriage. Commenting on permissive divorce laws in 1892, the bishops of the church said "The Church of God can have no regard for such legislation; it has no more respect or validity in her consciousness than the legislation on the same subject of Turkey or the customs of Dahomey." "Pastoral Letter," Journal of the General Convention, 1892, 429-430.

¹⁰⁶ Macquarrie, "Canon Law."

¹⁰⁷ Stevick, Canon Law: A Handbook, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Philip Turner, Sex, Money and Power: An Essay in Christian Social Ethics (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1985), 4.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Turner, "Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline," in Ephraim Radner and R.

Now it is possible for *civil* law to function without a complete consensus behind it. Indeed, law may encourage changes in beliefs as well as conformity in behavior. Legal scholar Mary Ann Glendon holds that the law has a “teaching function,” and points out that enforcement of civil rights laws helped to increase the commitment of Americans to racial equality, despite much initial opposition.¹¹⁰ But law cannot function well when there is too little consensus, as America’s experience with prohibition suggests. If canon law is in partial eclipse in the Episcopal Church, the reason may well be that there is not sufficient agreement about the nature of the church and its mission to allow canon law to play a significant role in moral teaching.

F. The Book of Common Prayer

The most widely known feature of Anglican Christianity is The Book of Common Prayer, a volume which provides the precise words to be used in the services of the church¹¹¹ and many directions on the proper conduct of worship.

R. Reno, eds. Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 131.

¹¹⁰ Mary Ann Glendon, Abortion and Divorce in Western Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 51, 58.

¹¹¹ The provision of the words to be used in worship serves “one of the primary functions of a prescribed liturgy, which is to *guard and enable the corporate conscience of the Church*. No individual, no congregation, no generation for that matter, has more than a fragmentary understanding of the immense range of our Lord’s loving concern for humanity.” The use of

The first Prayer Book appeared in England in 1549, a product of the English Reformation. Outside of England, churches belonging to the Anglican Communion have their own versions of the Prayer Book.¹¹² The Episcopal Church authorized editions of the book in 1789, 1892, 1928, and 1979. The Book of Common Prayer is a complex and ambitious document. It is complex because it coordinates the use of scripture and church tradition in the life of the church, providing for daily worship, baptism, communion, marriage, ordination, and much more. It is ambitious because it tries to incorporate as many people as possible in a common way of life and worship.¹¹³

As a source of moral teaching, the Prayer Book is not as easy to analyze as the forms of teaching considered so far. A pastoral letter, Lambeth Conference statement, or General Convention resolution is likely to address a specific issue and take a position on it. Books included in The

prescribed prayers may “jolt us out of our accustomed categories” and expand our faith. Bayne, “What the Proposed Liturgy Should Proclaim,” 23-24. Italics added.

¹¹² As an international language, English helps to unify the Anglican Communion, but not without some difficulties in worship; “English as an international language is not the same in feeling as the language spoken, and still more read, by the English people or the American people.” It is hard to find “a universally acceptable form of English Bible,” and variations in language may also lead to regional variations in liturgy. Chadwick, “The Lambeth Conference: An Historical Perspective,” 267.

¹¹³ “Orthodoxy” is often misunderstood to mean only correct doctrine. For many Anglicans, however, orthodoxy means right worship or right praise, not doctrinal purity. They do not necessarily disparage doctrine, but they are likely to say *lex orandi lex credendi*, the law of worship is the law of belief. Doctrine spells out the implications of worship.

Church's Teaching and The Church's Teaching Series provide reasoned reflection on carefully defined topics. Canon law mandates certain actions and proscribes others. But the Book of Common Prayer is designed for the use of large numbers of people in public worship. Much of what it contains is not intended to provide precise answers to such questions as, "What does the church teach about contraception?"

Even so, the Prayer Book is indispensable in a comprehensive study of moral teaching because of its role in church life:

The Episcopal Church in the United States is neither a confessional denomination molded by a formal statement of belief nor a prescriptive one bounded by a complex legal structure. Rather, it includes both these paradigms; while its canons and constitutions are basic and easily accessible, its faith stance – and a large part of its law – is embodied in the Book of Common Prayer.¹¹⁴

It is necessary to consider how the Prayer Book treats marriage and how it includes children in church life. It is important to see what kinds of prayers are included, and to notice what sort of material is included in catechisms. The Prayer Book endeavors to shape the mind and life of church members, and it provides many clues as to how the church views its place in the nation. The Prayer Book also reveals much about the Episcopal Church's relationship to the Church of England and to other Christian churches.

¹¹⁴ Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, i.

1. The Book of Common Prayer in England

The initial Book of Common Prayer was primarily the accomplishment of the sixteenth century liturgical genius Thomas Cranmer,¹¹⁵ who reworked much traditional liturgical material into an English-language book that had four broad purposes. It was to be firmly grounded in scripture. It would be faithful to the practices of the early church. It was to unify the realm. Finally, it must promote the edification of the people.¹¹⁶ The last two of these concerns are important to our investigation of the church's moral teaching.

The English Reformation was the work of the state. While church leaders like Cranmer were inspired by Luther, Calvin, and other Continental Reformers, the opportunity to reform the church in England came only with control of the state. Unable to secure an annulment that would allow him to marry again,¹¹⁷ Henry VIII broke the links between the English church and the papacy, and made himself the head of the Church of England.¹¹⁸ Seven bills passed by Parliament

¹¹⁵ Booty, "Anglican Identity: What is this Book of Common Prayer?", 138.

¹¹⁶ Marion J. Hatchett, "The Anglican Liturgical Tradition," in Richard Holloway, ed., The Anglican Tradition (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1984), 47-49.

¹¹⁷ Henry's purpose was to secure a male heir to the throne.

¹¹⁸ It is a gross misunderstanding to say that Henry VIII founded the Church of England. Christianity took root in the British Isles more than a millennium before Henry's marital troubles; Roman Christianity came to Britain with the mission of Augustine of Canterbury in 597. It would be more accurate to say that the Tudor monarch hijacked the Church and reshaped it to serve purposes of state.

between 1532 and 1534 effected the separation. According to church historian John Moorman, the legislation maintained that England was a sovereign state and that "*the king is supreme head of both Church and State.*" This assertion is "the fundamental principle of the English Reformation."¹¹⁹

Because Henry VIII opposed radical liturgical change, the full effect of the Protestant Reformation was not felt in England until after his death in 1547. As church historian John Booty has observed, "If the chief end of King Henry's reign was the establishment of royal supremacy, the major concern of those in power during the reign of Edward VI was for the achievement of religious uniformity."¹²⁰ In the newly favorable political climate, the 1549 Book of Common Prayer was made mandatory throughout the land by means of an *Act of Uniformity*.¹²¹ In medieval Christianity, there was little uniformity because liturgical texts and customs varied from place to place.¹²² The introduction of the 1549 Prayer Book was thus a major departure in English life:

Those in power in church and state hoped to bring together a heterogeneous group of people, and one of the means used would be a uniform liturgy.... The

¹¹⁹ John R. H. Moorman, A History of the Church in England, 3d. Ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1976). 167. Italics added.

¹²⁰ John Booty, "Introduction: The Basic Theme," in John Booty, ed., David Siegenthaler, and John N. Wall, Jr., The Godly Kingdom of Tudor England: Great Books of the English Reformation (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981), 9.

¹²¹ Moorman, A History of the Church in England, 184.

¹²² Hatchett, "The Anglican Liturgical Tradition," 50.

Book of Common Prayer was designed to establish one *common* liturgy as opposed to the various regional or parochial uses. It was designed to establish a pattern of liturgical life *common* to clergy and laity alike.... This liturgy would also be one of the means used in the effort to establish English, the language of the city of London, as the language of the whole of the king's realm.¹²³

It is difficult to imagine a more ambitious program for any book of any kind. The language of worship changed from Latin to English. Traditional services underwent revision. Entirely new services of Morning and Evening Prayer (distilled from the more numerous monastic offices) made their appearance. The gap between ordained religious leaders and the Christian masses was narrowed. Moreover, the Prayer Book was to be a critical tool in the building of a stronger state. If there was one realm with one king, there must be one pattern of worship, one language -- and one book.

In addition to unifying the realm, the new book had the task of edifying the people. Its rites "were designed to be comprehensible, relevant, instructive, effective in building up the church and in establishing the people in godliness."¹²⁴ The means to be employed were several: daily morning and evening prayer; the systematic reading of scripture; preaching; exhortations; and the study of a catechism provided in the Prayer Book.¹²⁵ Alongside of the Prayer Book there

¹²³ Ibid., 51.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹²⁵ After Martin Luther published the German Catechism in 1529, the catechism genre became an important form of teaching for both Protestants and Catholics. It remained central to much Protestant Christian education well into the nineteenth century, when the Bible became the focus

were other important official publications, including the English Bible, a translation of Erasmus's Paraphrases of the New Testament, and a Book of Homilies.¹²⁶ The introduction of the Book of Common Prayer was plainly based on the conviction that "a church is a church precisely because it does have some ability to shape the mind and life of its membership."¹²⁷ In this case, however, the boundaries of church and society, of church and state, were one and the same. The church must organize the moral life of the nation as well as the spiritual life of individual Christians:¹²⁸ "one in faith and doctrine, one in charity."¹²⁹ Here we see the deep roots of the Episcopalian ambition to influence national affairs.

The 1549 Prayer Book was short lived, but the idea that a single book should pursue the goals of unification and edification endured. At the end of the

of Sunday School instruction. B. L. Marthaler, "Catechism," in Iris V. Cully and Kendig Brubaker Cully, eds., Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 101-103.

¹²⁶ Booty, The Godly Kingdom of Tudor England, 9, 10.

¹²⁷ Turner, Sex, Money and Power, 4.

¹²⁸ England's reformers also took an interest in social justice. Some were troubled, for example, by the hardships produced by the enclosure movement. See Booty, The Godly Kingdom of Tudor England, 32 ff. American liberals of the 1960s were not the first Anglicans to think that the church must attend to the consequences of social and economic change.

¹²⁹ "Onward Christian Soldiers," in The Hymnal 1982 (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985). The words quoted, though written in the nineteenth century, express well the goal of England's sixteenth century reformers.

sixteenth century, Richard Hooker defended the Church of England, the Prayer Book, and the intertwining of church, state, and nation by arguing that the church has a mission to the entire nation. The church must be a national institution that seeks to influence all aspects of national life.¹³⁰ In this work, the Prayer Book was indispensable. Parliament introduced a second edition of The Book of Common Prayer in 1552, and later authorized new versions in 1559 and 1662.¹³¹ Over the centuries, some of the original principles informing the Prayer Book have been modified, “either by law or by common consent.” Strict uniformity is no longer required, as Anglicans allow room for “differing attitudes – the sacramental and the prophetic, the corporate and individual, simple austerity and rich splendor, the other-worldly and the this-worldly.”¹³² To relax the demand for

¹³⁰ Frank E. Sugeno, “The Establishmentarian Ideal and the Mission of the Episcopal Church,” Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 53 (December 1984), 285-286. Hooker’s Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, a deeply learned study of law, theology and ecclesiology addressed to late sixteenth century conflicts, has made him more influential than any Anglican save Cranmer.

¹³¹ The 1662 edition marks the re-establishment of the Church of England following the English Civil War. As it happens, the Civil War itself was, in part, an indirect result of a Prayer Book controversy, the disastrous attempt in 1637 to impose a version of the Book of Common Prayer in Scotland. The 1662 Prayer Book remains the official version of The Book of Common Prayer in the Church of England, because Parliament has never approved a revision; Parliament rejected a revision proposed in 1928. The 1662 Prayer Book remains in use today, although many liturgies in England are now based on the Alternative Service Book first authorized by church authorities in 1980.

¹³² R. C. D. Jasper, “Anglican Worship,” in The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, ed. J. G. Davis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 21.

uniformity is, however, to retain the master goal of unity. Moreover, the system of daily worship by clergy and laity alike was unworkable. Most practicing lay Christians have worshipped only on Sundays.¹³³ Even so, Anglican Prayer Books include daily Morning and Evening Prayer to this day, upholding an ideal of ordering daily life under the sovereignty of God.¹³⁴

2. The 1789 Prayer Book

When Anglicans settled in North America in the sixteenth century, they brought the Prayer Book tradition with them. After the United States achieved independence from Great Britain, Anglicans faced a crisis. The Church of England retained episcopacy, but English bishops, as officials in the established Church of England, could not provide oversight in the new republic.¹³⁵ Nor could

¹³³ Ibid., 22.

¹³⁴ As recently as the 1960s, some American schools affiliated with the Episcopal Church maintained this ideal in a modified fashion. The writer attended St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, where daily chapel attendance was compulsory. From Monday through Saturday, there was a brief service each morning with prayers and scripture. On Sunday, two services were required, Morning Prayer or Communion in the morning, and Evening Prayer at the end of the day. St. Paul's has produced a number of important national leaders, among them Frank Griswold (1955), now Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church; John Lindsay (1940, former Mayor of New York; Archibald Cox (1930), the Watergate special prosecutor fired by Richard Nixon; and Senator John Kerry (1962) of Massachusetts. Their schooling was very much in the spirit of the Prayer Book tradition.

¹³⁵ They did not provide *effective* oversight in the colonial period, for that matter.

Americans continue to use the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, which was replete with references to the British crown. Church historian Frank Sugen points out that Anglicans generally believed the church should be a national institution; the logical step was for Anglicans in the United States to form an autonomous church,¹³⁶ and this they did. In 1789 the Episcopalians adopted a constitution and promulgated a new edition of the Prayer Book. The book deleted references to the monarch, the royal family, and Parliament, replacing them with prayers for Congress and the President of the United States.¹³⁷

With respect to strictly liturgical matters, the Prayer Book of 1789 made only a few revisions in the 1662 English book.¹³⁸ The Preface to the American Book explicitly affirms continuity with the Church of England, making reference to the “Church of England, to which the Protestant Episcopal Church in these States is indebted, under God, for her first foundation and a long continuance of nursing care and protection.” Following the 1662 Book, the 1789 Preface distinguishes between doctrine and discipline. Doctrine is not subject to revision, but matters assigned to discipline “by common consent and authority, may be

¹³⁶ Sugen, “The Establishmentarian Ideal and the Mission of the Episcopal Church,” 286-87.

¹³⁷ E. Clowes Chorley, The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 66.

¹³⁸ Some of these liturgical changes were significant, especially the changes in the eucharistic prayer based on the “wee bookies” produced by dis-established Episcopalians in Scotland. G. J. Cuming, “Books, Liturgical: Anglican,” in The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, J. G. Davies, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 162. For a summary of other changes, see Hatchett, “The Anglican Liturgical Tradition,” 68.

altered, abridged, enlarged, amended, or otherwise disposed of, as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people.”¹³⁹

Like its English predecessors, the 1789 edition of the Prayer Book was a product of national politics. A change in regime necessitated a revision of the Book of Common Prayer. In the United States, it is true, there would be no establishment of religion, yet it was precisely this constitutional fact that required Anglicans to revise their liturgical book. The King had to go. As Episcopalians revised their Prayer Book, they incorporated a concern for affairs of state by providing prayers for Congress and the President. One might think that the Episcopal Church, its reputation tarnished by association with Loyalists during the War of Independence, would give up thinking in establishmentarian terms. Yet even in 1789 the Episcopal Church could imagine itself as a national institution. In the republic there might be no king, but the best known Episcopalian was George Washington, a political fact which made it possible to retain an establishmentarian ideal in a new political environment. Even without the possibility of legal establishment, the Episcopal Church would soon seek a unifying national role.

¹³⁹ Preface to the Book of Common Prayer of 1789, cited from Paul V. Marshall, Prayer Book Parallels: The Public services of the Church arranged for comparative study (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989) 59.

3. The 1892 Prayer Book

The 1789 Book of Common Prayer remained in use for a century, not because it was a magnificent achievement but for lack of a consensus to support even modest alterations.¹⁴⁰ Already by 1789 the language was somewhat archaic, and the services were far too long.¹⁴¹ For much of the nineteenth century, the General Convention debated liturgical questions.¹⁴² As early as 1826, Bishop John Henry Hobart of New York proposed certain revisions and enrichments, but withdraw the proposals three years later because of intense opposition.¹⁴³ Another major initiative came in 1853 with the Muhlenberg Memorial, a petition addressed to General Convention by the Rev. William A. Muhlenberg and others. Although a commission studied his ideas between 1854 and 1856, no liturgical change grew out of its deliberations.¹⁴⁴ Only in the 1880s

¹⁴⁰ The full story of the process that led to the 1892 Prayer Book is described in Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer.

¹⁴¹ Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 86.

¹⁴² Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 31.

¹⁴³ Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 32-33; Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 86-87.

¹⁴⁴ On Muhlenberg and the Memorial, see Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 150-153; Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 40-46; and Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 87-89.

did effective movement toward a new Prayer Book begin, and even then the process required twelve years. In 1880, the widely known and respected clergyman William Reed Huntington¹⁴⁵ persuaded General Convention to pass a resolution establishing a committee to consider whether

in view of the fact that this Church is soon to enter upon the second century of its existence in this country, the *changed conditions of national life* do not demand certain alterations in the Book of Common Prayer in the direction of liturgical enrichment and increased flexibility of use.¹⁴⁶

Huntington knew, as Episcopalians had recognized for decades, that the services were too long, and that the 1789 Prayer Book was full of uncorrected errors.¹⁴⁷ He also wanted to make Episcopalian worship accessible to the populace of the late nineteenth century. Proposals advanced by Huntington in 1883, but not adopted, “would have provided prayers for industrial workers, short daily offices suitable for midday services, and a greater variety in worship.”¹⁴⁸ Huntington’s overriding concern, however, was for church unity.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Concerning Huntington, see Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, 187-190 and Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 66-81.

¹⁴⁶ *Journal of the General Convention, 1880*, as cited in Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 7. Italics added by present author.

¹⁴⁷ Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 86.

¹⁴⁸ Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, 190.

¹⁴⁹ Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 86.

The Episcopal Church worked in the context of a dynamic religious pluralism. The disestablishment of religion by the Constitution did not diminish religion but encouraged its expansion.¹⁵⁰ In New England, the heirs of the Puritans responded to disestablishment with an extraordinary commitment to social reform as well as church planting and soul winning.¹⁵¹ The Second Great Awakening stimulated the growth of evangelical Protestant Christianity. Later on, massive immigration between 1844 and 1853 greatly increased the number of Roman Catholics in the United States. In this pluralistic sea, Episcopalians began to think that their church had a special mission to transform the denominational chaos into a religious condition of *e pluribus unum*. In 1835, the Episcopal Church created something new in Anglican Christianity, the missionary bishop who went to the frontier to establish Episcopal churches. This new land

¹⁵⁰ See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) on the growth of Christian churches after 1776.

¹⁵¹ See especially Robert H. Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994). Also Steven Mintz, Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950); Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); and Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers: 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). Many Episcopalians also believed that the Early Republic faced a profound moral crisis. See Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 106-109.

needed the Episcopal Church, for “Episcopalians believed that maintaining the worship and discipline of the catholic church was the unique missionary calling of the Episcopal Church.”¹⁵² When Muhlenberg submitted his Memorial to the General Convention of 1853, his dominant concern was to make it easier for Episcopalians to work with members of other Protestant churches. He hoped for more flexible services and for steps toward “a comprehensive (Protestant) church institution for which the Episcopal Church would provide apostolic succession.”¹⁵³ Huntington, the initiator of the next effort at liturgical reform, was also especially concerned with unifying America’s many churches, as we shall see later when we discuss the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.¹⁵⁴ The critical thing to notice is that a concern with unifying the nation’s religious life was the most powerful stimulus for change in the Book of Common Prayer. The four principles informing Thomas Cranmer’s work in 1549 still inspired leading American Episcopalians more than four hundred years later.

In the end, the 1892 Book of Common Prayer made only modest changes. A generation later, a historian of the Episcopal Church heaped scorn upon this book:

¹⁵² Ian T. Douglas, Fling Out The Banner! The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1996), 36, 37.

¹⁵³ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 151.

¹⁵⁴ Please refer to chapter six, below.

It was never satisfactory. The Convention which adopted it was not only conservative, but timid. It hesitated to embark upon a liturgical adventure. Revision was reduced to a minimum. Archaic expressions were retained and much of its theology savored of the middle ages.... The consequence was that the Church outgrew her own Prayer Book.¹⁵⁵

But a more recent study of the 1892 Prayer Book takes issue with that verdict. Lesley Northup acknowledges that the 1892 book incorporated few of the major recommended changes.¹⁵⁶ What is really important, though, is “the truly significant fact that it was adopted at all.”¹⁵⁷ The very fact of a revision established that revision could be done. “More importantly, the idea that the prayer book needed to speak to the faithful – however faintly -- in terms of their own time and circumstances, while barely implemented in 1892, was nonetheless firmly established as a basic liturgical principle underlying all future revisionary activity.”¹⁵⁸ Northup is right about that. A somewhat bolder revision would soon follow (in 1928), and a much more ambitious revision somewhat later (in 1979). For our purposes, it is especially important to note that a fascination with the religious life of the nation, and not only the liturgical interests of Episcopalians, sparked the move for Prayer Book reform. The 1892 Prayer Book

¹⁵⁵ Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 100.

¹⁵⁶ Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 166.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, i.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

included a new prayer for the President of the United States, and a new prayer for the great Anglican concern of unity.¹⁵⁹

4. The 1928 Prayer Book

Within a generation the 1892 Prayer Book was gone, replaced by a somewhat bolder mutation in 1928. Once again, the process of revision took more than a decade, beginning in 1913 and continuing through five triennial reports to the General Convention. This book achieved greater flexibility and shortened services, reforms sought for more than a century.¹⁶⁰ It also made changes that affected the church's moral teaching. Some of these pertain to marriage and the family; they will be treated in the next chapter.¹⁶¹ The new book reflected the influence of liberal theology¹⁶² and the Social Gospel.¹⁶³ The new book made optional the use of imprecatory psalms, so that Episcopalians

¹⁵⁹ Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 96, 97. For the prayers, please see Appendix VI.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

¹⁶¹ The 1928 Prayer Book made important changes in the vows exchanged in marriage and introduced new prayers for religious education and family life.

¹⁶² On liberal theology, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, Vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975): 224-249.

¹⁶³ Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 73. On the Social Gospel, see Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, Vol. 2, 250-273.

would no longer have to ask God to inflict grave harm on their adversaries.¹⁶⁴ The 1928 Prayer Book eliminated “exaggerated and therefore, to that extent, unreal expressions of penitence for sin,” particularly language referring to “the utter worthlessness of man.” One of these changes was the excision from the exhortation in the baptismal liturgy of the words “forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin.”¹⁶⁵ The new book modified the use of the Decalogue in the communion liturgy,¹⁶⁶ which suggests a movement away from the emphasis on the Ten Commandments characteristic of Protestantism since the very beginning.

The 1928 Book of Common Prayer, like its predecessors, concerned itself with all aspects of personal and social existence. It gave greater emphasis to social justice.¹⁶⁷ One new prayer, “For Our Country,” subtly reflects both the traditional Anglican interest in national unity and the contemporary concern of American elites with the assimilation of recent immigrants: “Defend our liberties, and *fashion into one united people* the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues.”¹⁶⁸ The 1928 Prayer Book paid greater heed to national

¹⁶⁴ Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 104.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 105, 111.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 122-124.

¹⁶⁸ Cited from *Ibid.*, 122. Italics added.

affairs, adding a collect and biblical readings for Independence Day and prayers for the Army and the Navy.¹⁶⁹ These changes are consistent with the longstanding Anglican commitment to the nation-state. They also reflect the emergence of the United States as a global power after the completion of the 1892 Prayer Book. The Spanish-American War of 1898 made the United States a major power in the Pacific. The late entry into World War I and Woodrow Wilson's triumphal visit to Europe after the Armistice demonstrated a new American ability to influence events in Europe through war and diplomacy.¹⁷⁰ Even in the supposedly isolationist 1920s, the US pursued an internationalist policy by every means other than alliances and direct military action. Episcopalians enthusiastically supported the expansion of US power,¹⁷¹ and the 1928 Prayer Book institutionalized a commitment to the new order. But the Prayer Book does not simply conflate Christian prayer and the national cause, for it also includes a prayer for the Family of Nations.¹⁷²

Clearly the 1928 Book of Common Prayer is an important source of moral teaching. It addresses national affairs, concerns itself with social justice, and

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-123.

¹⁷⁰ Pastoral Letters in 1917 and 1918 endorsed the "righteous cause" of the Allies, and a 1919 pastoral still looked back with pride on the recent American participation in the war. Metcalf, "American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters," 29.

¹⁷¹ See Douglas, Fling Out The Banner!, 93-94.

¹⁷² Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 122.

modifies the marriage vows. It retains the Anglican commitment to national unity and the edification of the people, while responding to the effects of industrialization, immigration, international conflicts, and changes in the relations between men and women.

5. The 1979 Prayer Book

In 1979 the Episcopal Church adopted a new edition of the Book of Common Prayer, endorsing more extensive revisions than ever before. Writing for the church's Standing Liturgical Commission, Charles Price acknowledged that there are many changes, although "we believe that they do not depart at any *essential* point from the doctrine, discipline, or worship of our forebears."¹⁷³ The adoption of the new book came after twelve years of experimentation with a number of liturgies.¹⁷⁴ The new book itself had been in trial use since 1976. Price identifies important alterations, among them the use of contemporary language; a new and more wide-ranging catechism; and a shift away from terms like "man" to words that do not appear to exclude women.¹⁷⁵ In response to

¹⁷³ Charles P. Price, for the Standing Liturgical Commission, Introducing the Proposed Book: A Study of the Significance of the Proposed Book of Common Prayer for the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Episcopal Church (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1976), 15.

¹⁷⁴ Hatchett, "The Anglican Liturgical Tradition," 75.

¹⁷⁵ Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 23; 24-26; 26-27.

changed conditions of marriage and family life, the new Prayer Book made adjustments. These changes may be briefly noted, as they will receive more attention in the fifth chapter. The baptismal liturgy makes adult initiation, not infant baptism, the norm.¹⁷⁶ The revised “marriage service intends to recognize the cultural changes which are taking place, provided that they do not contradict the Christian understanding of marriage as a life-long and monogamous union.”¹⁷⁷ There are new provisions for personal and family devotions – “Family Prayer, though eloquent, presupposes a more leisurely pace of life. More suitable material had to be found.”¹⁷⁸

An important principle in the new book is “that all worshippers should be actively involved.... The emphasis on the liturgical ministry of the laity is strong in these services.”¹⁷⁹ While this is indeed a new emphasis, it is consistent with the Prayer Book tradition. The 1549 English Prayer Book aimed to unite the clergy and the laity in a life of common prayer; its forms for daily morning and evening prayer replaced monastic offices in which the laity seldom participated.¹⁸⁰ The 1979 Book’s emphasis on the laity undoubtedly reflects also the ongoing

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸⁰ See Hatchett, “The Anglican Liturgical Tradition,” 51.

democratization of American life. Prayer Book Revision began in the 1960s, when many groups excluded from power and status in America demanded a place for themselves. The new Episcopal Prayer Book expanded the role of laypersons in worship without radically changing the ordained ministries of bishops, priests and deacons.¹⁸¹

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer contains other changes that can be significant for the church's moral teaching. It stresses the doctrine of creation. Previous Anglican Prayer Books gave a prominent place to this doctrine, but not in the service of Holy Communion; as the celebration of the Eucharist became the main event in more and more parishes, the emphasis on creation found in the daily offices was obscured.¹⁸² New eucharistic prayers celebrate creation and the new order for baptism views creation with "a much more positive attitude."¹⁸³ The 1979 Prayer Book moves still further away from penitential language than did the 1928 revision. All English Books and the first American Book were "deeply penitential" in tone, but Price notes that the "language strikes many serious Christians of the twentieth century as exaggerated." American prayer

¹⁸¹ Some decades ago, it was not unusual to attend a service in which the priest presiding at the liturgy took virtually every speaking part. A popular saying had it that ordinary church members were to "pay, pray, and obey." In the 1979 Prayer Book, the rubrics indicate clearly which parts of services should be performed by laypersons, and which are proper to the three ordained ministries. And no one expects the laity to be content only to pray, pay, or obey.

¹⁸² Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 37.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 38.

book revisions “have tended to mitigate this tone of unrelieved penitence and unworthiness.”¹⁸⁴

Price makes it clear that Prayer Book revision was done with one eye on contemporary society. Twentieth century revisions of the Prayer Book “have introduced more variety, because life in the United States has become increasingly complex and the membership of the Church has become increasingly diverse.”¹⁸⁵ This sentence deserves very close attention. It reveals that the Commission in charge of Prayer Book revision still thought in national terms; the venerable dream of unifying a nation lives on in its work. Even more important is the claim that the membership of the church has become more diverse. No examples are given, no documentation provided, in support of this statement. No doubt Commission members assumed that the membership of the church was “increasingly diverse,” but that may not have been the case. By the time Price wrote, mainline churches had been losing members for more than a decade. The biggest change may not have been in the types of people belonging to the church but in the opening up of the councils of the church (parish vestries, General Convention, and ordained ministries) to women and others long excluded or marginalized. The big change was that more of the fewer now had a say.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 27.

Price points to additional concerns about contemporary American society. The new book emphasizes Christian community: "It has been said that as assurance of immortality was the acute spiritual need of the early Church, and assurance of forgiveness the acute need in sixteenth century Europe, community is the acute need in our time."¹⁸⁷ The Commission seems to have read the signs of the times correctly here. Sociologist Joseph Tamney has found that American church members desire personal freedom yet crave community even more: "people are turning to churches more for community than for freedom...because churches play a secondary, compensatory role in modern society."¹⁸⁸ Political scientist Robert Booth Fowler contends that American religion is "an *alternative* to the liberal order, a *refuge* from our society and its pervasive values." American religion does not radically oppose social values or structures, however; the retreat it offers "is only temporary."¹⁸⁹ The Standing Liturgical Commission

¹⁸⁶ As recently as 1983 this writer attended a meeting of the bishop and priests in the Diocese of Kansas at which all of the participants were white men. As more and women enter the ordained ministry, leadership groups will become more diverse, but the diversity of total church membership need not be changing at all. It could be simply a case of church members moving from one category to another. The process may be unsettling to long-time leaders, and shifts in leadership may affect the entire church in various ways, but they do not by themselves point to a change in the membership as a whole.

¹⁸⁷ Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 43-44.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph B. Tamney, The Resilience of Christianity in the Modern World (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 102.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Booth Fowler, Unconventional Partners: Religion and Liberal Culture in the United States (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 4.

responded to a problem in modern American society, but may not have distinguished the church's vision of community from popular aspirations as clearly as it needed to do.¹⁹⁰

The 1979 Prayer Book expands the number of prayers dealing with state and society. It provides prayers for sound government, for local government, for elections, and for those who influence public opinion.¹⁹¹ There are new thanksgivings for national life and for heroic service.¹⁹² Now available are new prayers for peace, for the human family, for enemies, for social justice, and for times of conflict, as well as a thanksgiving for the social order.¹⁹³

But there is no simple identification of the church with the social order or the nation. According to Episcopal Church Historian E. Clowes Chorley, the 1928 Prayer Book already offered "a significant recognition of the new Internationalism" by including a prayer for the Family of Nations.¹⁹⁴ In his study of Pastoral Letters, George Reuben Metcalf found a major shift in the view of war

¹⁹⁰ On the importance of defining *Christian* community see Robert M. Cooper, "Moral Formation in the Parish Church," Anglican Theological Review 69 (July 1987), 276-279.

¹⁹¹ Marion J. Hatchett, Commentary on the American Prayer Book (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 559, 564.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 570.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 557, 559, 570.

¹⁹⁴ Chorley, The New American Prayer Book, 122.

after World War I; even during World War II, a 1943 Pastoral Letter said that war could not make people free.¹⁹⁵ In the 1949 Pastoral, Metcalf noticed “the appearance of a view of the Church as the transcendent God’s continuing, redeeming presence in the world.”¹⁹⁶ The 1979 Prayer Book emphasizes the mission of the church in ways that do not ineluctably bind it to the nation-state.

The Baptismal Covenant includes a promise “to strive for justice and peace among all people.”¹⁹⁷ The Prayer Book Catechism extends the mission of the church to the entire globe: “The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.”¹⁹⁸ Before Prayer Book revision began in 1967, the Vietnam War had shattered the consensus among American elites in favor of the Cold War and liberal internationalism. The new Prayer Book may reflect a tentative movement toward an *ecclesial* internationalism that is unwilling to identify uncritically with a nation-state.

A major feature of the new Prayer Book is its catechism. Compared to the catechism in the 1928 Book, this one “is longer and fuller,” and it covers more

¹⁹⁵ Metcalf, “American Religious Philosophy and the Pastoral Letters,” 34.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹⁷ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 305.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 855.

topics.¹⁹⁹ The expansion of the catechism might suggest a determination to teach, to contribute to the edification of the people, one of the basic goals of the first Prayer Book in 1549. Yet church leaders seem to have been of two minds about the catechism and the teaching ministry. Charles Price acknowledged:

There has been some resistance to including a catechism in [the book], in view of the considerable weight of opinion that the learning of answers by rote is not an effective way of communicating either knowledge or faith. It is in fact not intended that this Outline of Faith should be committed to memory. Its very length almost precludes such an approach.²⁰⁰

The new catechism is entitled “An Outline of Faith commonly called the Catechism.”²⁰¹ The introductory rubrics say the catechism is mainly intended for use by clergy and lay catechists. It offers “an outline of instruction,” but not “a complete statement of belief and practice; rather, it is a point of departure for the teacher.” The Outline of Faith does contain authoritative teaching: “The second use of this catechism is to provide *a brief summary of the Church’s teaching* for an inquiring stranger who picks up a Prayer Book.”²⁰² So there is teaching, but it is not definitive; there is instruction, but no one is expected to commit it to memory. With the catechism we find the same kind of ambivalence encountered

¹⁹⁹ Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 112.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁰¹ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 845.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 844. Italics added.

in The Church's Teaching Series, also issued in 1979. As we saw, the introduction included in all of those books soft-pedaled their official character. The Prayer Book catechism is official, but it is hard to know how much weight it should have.²⁰³

Further evidence that the Standing Liturgical Commission was ambivalent about teaching authority can be found in a major commentary on the new Prayer Book. Written by the distinguished liturgical scholar Marion Hatchett, the commentary includes a foreword by Bishop Chilton Powell, who chaired the Standing Liturgical Commission throughout the revision process. Powell writes that the Standing Liturgical Commission planned "to compile an authoritative study of the sources of the various liturgical formularies included in the 1979 Prayer Book." When the Commission discovered that one its own members was already working on a commentary, "it decided to forego any possible duplication and to entrust the project to Dr. Hatchett."²⁰⁴ In addition to a new Prayer Book, we have what may be understood as a semi-official commentary on the book. The Standing Liturgical Commission deferred to an individual scholar in the 1970s; two decades later the Episcopal Church handed over its teaching ministry to individual writers of The New Church's Teaching Series.

²⁰³ The General Convention of 1997, acting in the wake of the Righter Trial, made the catechism an official source of doctrine for the Episcopal Church. "The Doctrine of the Church is to be found in the Canon of Holy Scriptures as understood in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and in the sacramental rites, the Ordinal and Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer." Title IV, Canon 15, Constitution and Canons 1997.

²⁰⁴ Chilton Powell, "Foreword," in Hatchett, Commentary on the American Prayer Book, xii.

We have seen that the 1979 Prayer Book continues to contribute to the church's moral teaching in many ways, from the catechism to the marriage service, from baptism to the addition of new prayers. The Standing Liturgical Commission avers that the new edition "is still recognizably an Anglican Book of Common Prayer."²⁰⁵ Marion Hatchett writes that "it is firmly based on the principles that were spelled out in regard to the first Prayer Book of 1549."²⁰⁶ When Hatchett expands on this remark, however, we find subtle shifts. He claims that the 1979 Book "is unifying." By this he means that many clergy welcome it, that it ends some previous liturgical battles in the church, and that "it has brought us closer liturgically to Roman Catholics and to Protestants who have been affected by the Liturgical Movement."²⁰⁷ Missing here is the theme of *national* unification which Hatchett identified as one of the four purposes of the first Anglican Prayer Book in 1549.²⁰⁸ That initial book was also to facilitate the edification of the people of the land, but when Hatchett states that the 1979 Book is strong on edification, he makes no reference to the nation.²⁰⁹ By 1979 the

²⁰⁵ Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 13.

²⁰⁶ Hatchett, "The Anglican Liturgical Tradition," 75.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 52, 77.

Episcopal Church was no longer quite sure of its relationship to American society or the American nation-state.

III. Limited Moral Teachings

We have described six different types of moral teaching in the Episcopal Church: Pastoral Letters, General Convention resolutions, Lambeth Conference statements, canon law, The Church's Teaching and The Church's Teaching Series, and The Book of Common Prayer. They provide guidance on many moral topics. Robert Hood has investigated church teaching in four areas: war and peace; race and racial affairs; marriage, family, and sexuality; and economic issues.²¹⁰ If someone wants to know, "What does the church teach about an issue?" it is possible to look for an answer in these sources.²¹¹ If we reject a preoccupation with moral quandaries, as Stanley Hauerwas does,²¹² and accept his judgment that a "community and polity is known and should be judged by the kind of people it develops,"²¹³ we still have somewhere to turn. In the Book of Common Prayer 1979, for example, the Baptismal Covenant identifies a way of life in which Christians follow the teaching of the apostles, break bread together

²¹⁰ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, chapters 4-7.

²¹¹ Hood provides brief summaries of church teaching about marriage, family and sexuality and about economic issues. See Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church. 153-154 and 173-174.

²¹² Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 4.

²¹³ Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 2.

and pray; they resist evil and repent of their sins; they strive for justice and peace.²¹⁴ The Prayer Book provides direction for the lives of ordained ministers as well: a priest, for example, is “to love and serve the people among whom you work, caring alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor.”²¹⁵

The variety of sources, however, makes it difficult to know just where to look, and just what to think about what one discovers. All Episcopalians are familiar with the Prayer Book, and we have shown that it is a significant source of moral teaching. Of the six forms of moral guidance, the Prayer Book is the most carefully developed. It took twelve years to produce the 1892 Book, fifteen to develop the 1928 edition, and another dozen to prepare the 1979 Book. The Prayer Book has a strong claim on the loyalty of all church members. Nevertheless, it has certain limitations as a source of moral teaching. The fact that it undergoes periodic revision is enough to show that the book is not immutable; the distinction between Doctrine and Discipline²¹⁶ means that not all Prayer Book material is irrefragable. Moreover, the book cannot be expected to have the same authority as Holy Scripture.

²¹⁴ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 304-305.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 531,

²¹⁶ This distinction is made in the Preface to the 1789 Prayer Book, and appears also in the 1979 Book on page 9.

The Prayer Book undoubtedly contains moral teaching, though it may not be as specific as one might like. When introducing the 1979 Prayer Book, Charles Price cautioned that it is not easy to specify what a liturgy says about doctrine. People with differing theological views have always used Anglican Prayer Books, interpreting liturgical texts in terms of their own convictions. “It is simply impossible to state *the* theology of existing Anglican Prayer Books; and it is equally impossible to state *the* theology” of the 1979 Book.²¹⁷ It is unlikely, then, that the Prayer Book will contain completely comprehensive, unambiguous moral teaching. Indispensable though it is, the Prayer Book cannot by itself carry the full burden of moral instruction.

Volumes included in The Church’s Teaching and The Church’s Teaching Series had official standing in their day, but were not intended to define precisely all that is required in thought, word, or deed. The books themselves sometimes acknowledge that church teachings on moral questions have changed, or indicate that church members disagree on certain matters. Undoubtedly these volumes provided moral guidance in the past, but the Episcopal Church has effectively decommissioned them by allowing an independent publisher to issue its New Church’s Teaching Series,

Canon law governs many aspects of church life, and plainly has some moral significance. We have seen, however, that canon law requires moral theology, or something like it, as a companion. Lambeth Conference statements,

²¹⁷ Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 17.

coming as they do from the world-wide leadership of the Anglican Communion, deserve attention. But these declarations are not binding on the Episcopal Church. They need to be endorsed by the General Convention, or possibly by a Pastoral Letter, before they become an integral part of the church's official teaching.

The General Convention, which includes bishops in one house and elected lay and clerical deputies in the other, governs the Church and approves numerous resolutions with moral content. It also endorses the reports of special commissions from time to time. It is safe to say, though, that few Episcopalians know much about these resolutions. Pastoral Letters must be read to congregations, but there is no such requirement for actions of the General Convention.²¹⁸ In any case, the actions of General Convention are of limited value. The Convention meets for a few days every three years, and considers hundreds of issues, not all of them dealing with moral questions. This frenzied legislative setting is not conducive to reflection or precision, particularly because a significant percentage of the lay and clerical deputies are there for the first time. Special commissions have more time to think things through, but we will discover in the next chapter that they do not necessarily make the most effective use of that opportunity. General Convention thus provides some moral teaching, but it is of questionable quality.

²¹⁸ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, xiv.

What about the bishops? The House of Bishops meets more frequently than does the Convention, and its members work full time in the leadership of the church. The 1979 Prayer Book says that a bishop's job is to "carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church."²¹⁹ The bishop is "called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church."²²⁰ Through Pastoral Letters, the bishops can address the church at regular intervals. We have seen, however, that the bishops are far from united on important questions, and are less and less able to exercise any discipline even among themselves.²²¹ Most bishops are more oriented to action, administration and crisis management than to sustained theological and ethical reflection.²²² Pastoral Letters are not the result of years of deliberation, but the products of short-term committee work. The Pastoral Letters provide some more guidance for the Church, but it, too, is of uncertain quality.

The analysis offered so far might suggest that difficulties in moral teaching in the Episcopal Church are, in principle, not hard to correct. The House of Bishops could change its ways and commit itself to an in-depth study of moral issues, making use of scholarly resources from the church and the academy.²²³

²¹⁹ "Preface to the Ordination Rites," Book of Common Prayer 1979, 510.

²²⁰ "The Ordination of a Bishop," Book of Common Prayer 1979, 517.

²²¹ See chapter three, above, on the Righter trial.

²²² Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, xix.

The Episcopal Church could commission a new, official teaching series. The church's seminaries could integrate canon law with the study of Christian ethics and moral theology. But there is good reason to think that none of these steps would get to the root of the church's difficulty in moral teaching.

The Episcopal Church wants to address issues ranging from the character of its ordained leadership to the justice of the Gulf War, from the remarriage of divorced persons to the structure of the US economy, from the baptismal liturgy to gun control. East St. Louis and East Timor, Easter and East-West relations, all seem to fall within its purview. We have seen that the ambition to address so many issues is deeply rooted in the Anglican tradition. In the twentieth century, the Episcopal Church made a major effort at moral teaching. It revised the Prayer Book in 1892, 1928, and 1979. The church frequently modified its canon law. Bishops continued to write Pastoral Letters, and participated actively in the Lambeth Conferences. The General Convention, through its own resolutions and through endorsements of commission reports, became a source of social teaching. In two sets of books, the Episcopal Church provided official direction. In its moral instruction, the Episcopal Church addressed two audiences, the American nation and its own membership. It sought to shape the conscience of the nation and to regulate marriage, membership and ministry within the church.

²²³ For suggestions on how the bishops might proceed, please see Timothy F. Sedgwick, "Crisis of Authority and the Need for an Ecclesial Ethic," Anglican Theological Review 72 (Winter 1990), 125-126.

At the end of the twentieth century, however, the moral teaching of this church was in disarray. Bishops still wrote Pastoral Letters, and General Convention continued to churn out resolutions. But the church abandoned the teaching ministry it once provided in The Church's Teaching and The Church's Teaching Series. The Righter Trial revealed that the church lacked a coherent message on sexuality. What went wrong?

The roots of the problem lay in the attempts to provide guidance for a church and for a nation at the same time. Under the conditions of radical pluralism and the culture war, it proved impossible to be unifying and edifying for both audiences. A study of one issue, contraception, can reveal not only how the church changed its position over time, but also how the church's attempt to welcome everyone ended up satisfying no one. In late twentieth century America, moral teaching can edify, but cannot simultaneously unify, a church and a nation.

Chapter Five

Contraception: A Case Study in Teaching

In this study we are concerned with the ability of the Episcopal Church to provide coherent moral teaching, clear and official ethical guidance that is enforced when enforcement is possible. We have learned that religious moral teaching can influence both attitudes and behavior.¹ We saw that the Episcopal Church has trouble with moral teaching because of its incapacity to master the challenge of pluralism and to resolve the conflicts contained in America's culture war.² We noted that many Episcopalians in the 1990s wondered if their church had any moral teaching or the will to enforce it; the outcome of the Righter trial indicates that there is no unequivocal church teaching on certain critical matters.³ Next we observed that the Episcopal Church provided much moral teaching in various forms earlier in the twentieth century.⁴ Something seems to have transpired that makes the church unable to decide what it believes, and unwilling to enforce what it has required in the past. In this chapter, we conduct a case

¹ Please refer to chapter one, above.

² Please see chapter two, above.

³ Please refer to chapter three, above.

⁴ Please see chapter four, above.

study of church teaching on one subject, contraception, in order to see what has happened to the Episcopal Church's moral teaching.

Contraception makes for an excellent case study in the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church. The church addressed the topic officially on a number of occasions between 1919 and 1982. Many of the pronouncements came in brief official reports or in resolutions approved by the triennial General Convention. There were also explicit treatments of birth control in statements by the Lambeth Conference and in volumes included in The Church's Teaching and The Church's Teaching Series. Because nearly all official statements by Episcopalians have come in the context of discussions of marriage and family life, a full understanding of contraception requires some attention to church teaching on those matters, including discussions of pastoral letters and the Book of Common Prayer, and a reference to canon law. An investigation of contraception thus includes all of the sources of social teaching.⁵ Moreover, the Episcopal Church has significantly changed its official position on contraception during the twentieth century, making the subject appropriate for an historical study of change over time.

Contraception is a useful case study because it brings into view questions of sexuality, marriage and the family without requiring a detailed investigation of

⁵ The Episcopal Church's canon law is relevant because it governs marriage. This law does not attempt to regulate contraception. The church can enforce its policies on marriage and ordination, but could never hope to monitor the contraceptive practices of millions of members.

that entire field of topics.⁶ At the end of the twentieth century, contraception is a non-issue for Episcopalians, but it was a contentious question earlier. We can learn from the church's struggle over contraception without having to revise our findings every time bishops assemble or General Convention convenes. As a legal issue, too, contraception is no longer at the forefront in the United States. Supreme Court decisions guaranteeing it to married couples and individuals have not occasioned nearly as much discord as the 1973 abortion decision *Roe v Wade*. There remain unsettled public policy questions, especially the actual provision of contraceptive devices to minors, but the voltage is much lower than in the abortion struggle. With contraception, then, one can gain enough emotional distance from contemporary controversies to engage in scholarly inquiry and sober reflection.

At the end of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church stands almost alone when its official moral teaching rejects contraception by any artificial means. Most American religious bodies appear to have accepted the practice of birth control by married couples. A recent study of ecclesiastical statements on controversial social questions discusses nine topics, ranging from apartheid to genetic engineering, but ignores contraception, an indication that for most Protestant churches there is little controversy about it.⁷ Immediately after World

⁶ Robert Hood has surveyed church teachings on marriage and the family in chapter six of Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990).

⁷ Mark Ellingsen, The Cutting Edge: How Churches Speak on Social Issues. Grand Rapids, MI.: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.

War I, however, other Christian churches in the United States also opposed contraception, among them the Episcopal Church. In the years when Margaret Sanger began to bring the question of birth control to public attention, leaders of the Episcopal Church rejected contraception as a menace to family, church, and society.

Leaders of the Episcopal Church opposed artificial contraception in the 1920s, approved its use by married couples in 1961, and implicitly supported its use by unmarried individuals in 1982. Because most teaching on contraception is found in discussions of marriage and family life, we will begin our story in 1892 with a pastoral letter's cry of alarm at recent changes in American marriage and family life. Then we will turn to the first period in which contraception itself became a major issue; from 1916 to 1931, Episcopalians frequently addressed the topic. They returned to it between 1948 and 1961, significantly changing the position adopted after World War I. Finally, between 1967 and 1982 the church's teaching on contraception changed again, anticipating by a few years the near breakdown of church policies that denied ordination to non-celibate gays and lesbians.

Although the Episcopal Church modified its stance on contraception between 1920 and 1961, there was significant underlying continuity in church teaching. When we consider statements about birth control in the context of marriage and family life, we discover that up to the 1960s leaders of the Episcopal Church shared a moral vision in which marriage, family, church, society, state and nation were intimately and harmoniously related. Church and

state alike rested on the foundation of the family, which had clear roles for men, women, and their children; the family in turn was grounded in an indissoluble marriage bond. The acceptance of contraception for married couples in 1961 was not a liberalizing shift⁸ but a conserving one aimed at consolidating marriage and the family. Soon afterwards, the integrated vision fragmented as America's elites divided over foreign policy, America's masses headed for the divorce courts, marginalized social groups demanded expanded roles in American institutions, and young people joined in a sexual revolution. When the vision of family, church and nation dissolved, clarity in moral teaching faded, too. The church's moral teaching could not cope with the pluralism and cultural conflicts of late twentieth-century America.

I. Marriage, Family and Divorce

The Episcopal Church had no official word to say about contraception until 1919, but had already shown intense interest in marriage and the family. The bishops addressed these matters in a Pastoral Letter in 1892. An important unofficial source, the Episcopal Church Congress, shows the persistence of the concerns expressed in 1892 for the next three decades. The 1892 Pastoral

⁸ On this point the present writer disagrees with Kathleen Tobin-Schlesinger, who locates the change in the 1930s and attributes it to a modernizing shift in doctrine. The Episcopal Church's full acceptance of birth control comes only well after World War II, and is more a conserving than a modernizing change. See Kathleen Tobin-Schlesinger, "Population and Power: The Religious Debate Over Contraception, 1916-1936" (Ph. D. diss., University of Chicago, 1994).

Letter and the proceedings of the Church Congress provide essential background for understanding the church's statements on contraception.

A. The Pastoral Letter of 1892: The Family as the Basic Social Unit

In their pastoral letter of 1892, the bishops of the Episcopal Church reserved their most passionate prose for a question both social and religious, the condition of the American family. No social institution could be more important: "The family is the root germ of the Church and the root germ of the State. Both are safe while the family is safe. When the family is wrecked, neither Church nor State is worth preserving." The bishops believed that the family was in grave danger because "the sanctity and permanency of the marriage bond has been outraged and broken by the lawless legislation of so many of our States." Angry about divorce, the bishops did not ask why states passed relatively permissive divorce laws, nor did they inquire into conditions that fostered marital discord. They simply rejected statutes allowing divorce: "The Church of God can have no regard for such legislation; it has no more respect or validity in her consciousness than the legislation on the same subject of Turkey or the customs of Dahomey."⁹

The reference to Turkey and Dahomey indicates that ideas about divorce were related to a broader understanding of church and culture and of relations

⁹ Pastoral Letter 1892, 429-430.

between church and state. Because Turkey was neither Anglo-Saxon nor Christian and Dahomey had nothing more to its credit than "customs," the cultures of both were regarded as inferior. The bishops of 1892 believed that the state and the Christian church had complementary responsibilities, and that recent American legislation was falling short of what was required: "To guard the sanctities of the home is the highest duty of the State. To re-consecrate those natural sanctities by the blessing of holy prayer and solemn rite, and throw over the home the shield of God's Law in its power, is the plain duty of the Church."¹⁰ This is a strongly establishmentarian understanding in which the church is essential to the social order,¹¹ carrying out particular responsibilities which complement the role of the state.¹² The pastoral letter of 1892 shows the

¹⁰ Pastoral Letter 1892, 431.

¹¹ On the establishmentarian outlook of the Episcopal Church, see Frank E. Sugen, "The Establishmentarian Ideal and the Mission of the Episcopal Church," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 53 (December 1984), 285-292, as well the discussion in chapter four, above. We return to this theme in chapter six.

¹² The Episcopal Church was not, of course, a *legally* established church, as was (and is) the Church of England. But the relationship between church and state in western civilization has been so close since the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity in the fourth century that legal dis-establishment of the Church is only a small step toward separating the institutions of church and state or limiting the cultural influence of the churches. The bishops of 1892 understood quite well that church and state were legally separate, but could not imagine a healthy society in which the two were not closely and harmoniously related. This problem is not unique to English-speaking Protestant Christianity. Consider the situation of Jews in early nineteenth-century France: they enjoyed full citizenship under law, but they frequently found that they could not effectively exercise their citizenship rights unless they accepted Christian baptism. Jay R.

persistence of the Anglican tradition according to which a single liturgical book aims to unify the realm and edify the people.¹³

The 1892 Pastoral Letter identified additional threats to marriage and the family. The bishops rejected "the first falsehood which considers the individual as the unit of human society;" they insisted that "the family is the unit, and the well-being of the individual can be rightly sought only in and through the well-being of the family."¹⁴ They lamented "the decay of family piety." The pressures of modern life (its fast pace, the rigors of business, and the eagerness for material gain) keep people away from public worship and also "have been held to justify the overthrow of the family altar, the abandonment of Household Prayer."¹⁵ In a modernizing society, the family was not functioning as the bishops thought it should. Family members were thinking of themselves as individuals, and their many activities undermined both public and private (family) prayer.¹⁶

Berkovitz, The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-century France (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 111-116.

¹³ Please refer to the discussion of the 1549 edition of the Book of Common Prayer in chapter four, above.

¹⁴ Pastoral Letter 1892, 430.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 431.

¹⁶ The bishops thought that the problem was individualism. It might be more accurate to say that life was increasingly organized into compartments by such distinctions as public and private, male and female, adult, adolescent and child, work and home. The bishops' idea of family prayer may have been unworkable because the family was not, in fact, the basic social unit any longer. Its

The Pastoral Letter called on parish ministers to pay attention to children, and not to leave the care of the young entirely up to Sunday school personnel. The bishops asked, "Does the Sunday School teacher, at his best, or the Sunday School superintendent, at his best, quite fulfill the office of the pastor?" The clergy should continue "to teach the old Church Catechism as the central norm and expression of faith and duty and the Bible as the Word of God."¹⁷ The Sunday School was probably growing in importance as the average size of congregations increased, making necessary a more complex division of labor within the congregation,¹⁸ but bishops resisted the erosion of pastoral responsibility and authority.¹⁹ The bishops' concerns about family prayer,

members were not so much individuals as members of social groups which overlapped in the home.

¹⁷ Pastoral Letter 1892, 427, 428.

¹⁸ Between 1880 and 1920, the size of the average congregation increased by 55 per cent. Robert W. Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 183. It is interesting that the bishops fail to draw a connection between the growth of Sunday schools and the perceived decay of family prayer. The church, too, was acquiring its specialists, leaving the family less and less work to do.

¹⁹ It is possible that Sunday School teachers were predominantly women, although I do not currently have evidence on this point. If most Sunday school teachers were female, the bishops' concern could also reflect a desire to retain the religious authority of men in an institution increasingly operated by women. The bishops of 1892 offered qualified acceptance to some of the ministries then exercised by women: they endorsed the work of deaconesses who dedicated "their lives to the service of Christ in ministering to the helpless and the ignorant." They gave thanks for "the great work done by the Woman's Auxiliary Society to the Board of Missions." But none of this was as important as the life of the home, "where the child learns to say 'Our Father' at the mother's knee, and the growing boy stands by his father's side" to affirm the faith of the

Sunday school and the Catechism indicate that a cherished model of the relationships among pastor, congregation and family was in danger of breaking down.²⁰

The bishops believed that their model of the church was biblically grounded, yet they offered a very limited scriptural case for their position. When they called upon clergy to teach young children, they referred to Christ's admonition, "Feed my lambs." These words are found in the Gospel of John, where they are the heart of the post-Resurrection commissioning of Saint Peter; only indirectly (at best) do the words apply to the instruction of children.²¹ The bishops' remarks about marriage contained allusions to the teaching of Jesus and to the Epistle to the Ephesians, but did not refer *directly* to any Biblical text

creed (Pastoral Letter 1892, 433). The language of the Pastoral provides a fascinating study in normative views of gender roles: deaconesses serve the suffering, the woman's organization plays an auxiliary role, while in the home little children learn how to pray while sitting on their mother's knee, but the *growing boy* soon *stands* by his father's side to affirm the Christian faith.

²⁰ The bishops' reference to the catechism suggests that the venerable Protestant institution of instruction by catechism was in decline among Episcopalians. On the catechism in religious education, please refer to chapter four, above, and to B. L. Marthaler, "Catechism," in Iris V. Cully and Kendig Brubaker Cully, eds., Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 101-103.

²¹ See the Gospel of John 21:15-19. The threefold repetition of the instruction to feed the sheep recalls Peter's threefold denial of Jesus before the crucifixion. The passage goes on to suggest that Peter's ministry will lead to death. But the bishops of 1892 did not call their clergy to martyrdom.

dealing with marriage.²² When they insisted that the Scriptures "are full of the doctrine of the family and its relations," the bishops did not mention any Biblical texts at all, but based their claim on a simplistic social interpretation of the Christian deity.²³ Faced with disturbing social changes, the leaders of the Episcopal Church showed little appetite for Biblical exegesis and limited aptitude for the incorporation of Scripture into moral teaching.

In their observations about marriage, parish life and pastoral relationships, the bishops of 1892 appear as a group of leaders determined to set firm limits to social change. This conservative orientation is evident, too, in their remarks about the new Book of Common Prayer approved by the General Convention that year. The bishops acknowledged that there had been some irregularities in worship during the process of revision, but they expected strict regularity now that "a Standard Book of Common Prayer has been canonically established to remain, we trust, unchanged for many years to come."²⁴ With their concern for

²² The Bishops wrote of the "awful sacredness of home, the one man and the one woman, who are not two but one, whose union is a great mystery, like the union of Christ and His Church" (Pastoral Letter 1892, 430). The reference to "the one man and the one woman" recalls the words of Mark 10:6-9, a passage in which Jesus interprets the book of Genesis. The "great mystery" is an allusion to Ephesians 5:31-32, where the writer compares the relationship between Christ and Church to that between husband and wife.

²³ The bishops wrote, "God reveals Himself under a family name. He is a Father; in the Godhead itself there is Father and Son; He has a household in heaven and earth, a great family and many children" (Pastoral Letter 1892, 431). Just where women might fit into this picture, the bishops did not say. Interestingly, they left out the Holy Spirit, too.

²⁴ Pastoral Letter 1892, 423.

liturgical uniformity and for edification, the bishops exhibited the spirit of the first Prayer Book of 1549. With their references to divorce law, Turkey and Dahomey, they showed an awareness that the world might not remain friendly to their kind of church, their kind of culture. It did not occur to them, however, to modify the teachings of the church to fit a new situation. They believed that they were right, and that the church must stick to its job even if the state became lax about some of its obligations. Indeed, part of the church's job was to remind the state of its duties.

B. The Episcopal Church Congress

In this study our topic is the *official* teaching of the Episcopal Church, but there is at least one unofficial source of moral reflection that deserves our attention. This is the Episcopal Church Congress, held annually from 1874 to 1934, whose purpose was to provide public discussion of important theological, social, intellectual and moral issues.²⁵ The initiative for the Congress came from priests who wanted to move the church beyond the tired controversies between high and low church parties and focus attention on the social order as well as

²⁵ The following description of the Episcopal Church Congress is based on Richard M. Spielmann, "A Neglected Source: The Episcopal Church Congress, 1874-1934," Anglican and Episcopal History 58 (March 1989), 50-80, and Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 184-188.

internal church issues.²⁶ The organizers planned each meeting so that very different points of view would be represented. No votes were taken at any session. For these reasons, the remarks made at sessions of the Congress cannot be considered as representative of the opinions of church members. But the choice of topics for the Congress helps identify the issues that seemed most important to influential Episcopalians, and the papers and speeches exhibit many of the ideas and intellectual techniques available to Episcopalians as they developed social teachings. The participants often took positions similar to official ones, but some contributors pointed to other roads not traveled.²⁷

The Episcopal Church Congress of 1903 devoted one of its sessions to divorce, hearing six presentations (one by a bishop, another by a layman, and four by priests).²⁸ Like the bishops of 1892, all the speakers were opposed to divorce, although they offered different proposals for dealing with the problem.

²⁶ The Congress was modeled on a similar institution in the Church of England which dated from 1860, another sign (along with the Prayer Book and the Lambeth Conference) of the close relationship between the Episcopal Church and both England and the mother church.

²⁷ The Church Congress probably had considerable influence. Both religious and secular newspapers gave it extensive coverage. The proceedings of the Congress were published promptly, in inexpensive editions, and received wide circulation within the church. These publications may have reached a wider audience. The present writer owns a copy of the 1924 proceedings that once belonged to the Bangor (Maine) Public Library. The book still contains the "date due" slip, which reveals that the book was checked out nine times by 1930, and three more times later, most recently in 1964.

²⁸ All of the speakers were men. We defer the discussion of gender in the Congress and in official church leadership groups until the next chapter.

Several speakers used the rhetoric of crisis, much as the bishops had done. Only occasionally did the speakers take note of the painful effects of marital discord on the unfortunate families involved.²⁹

The papers showed much greater intellectual sophistication than the 1892 Pastoral Letter. The lone bishop, William Crowell Doane of Albany, New York, offered an exegesis of key New Testament texts dealing with divorce,³⁰ including a discussion of the meanings of hard-to-interpret Greek words.³¹ He concluded that Scripture supports the indissolubility of marriage, and added that Roman Catholic and Anglican tradition does so as well.³² George Clarke, a priest from Cincinnati, showed his familiarity with modern biblical scholarship when he put the New Testament texts in historical context, referring to first-century divorce practices among Jews.³³ Clarke also consulted the social sciences, learning from anthropologists that there were many marriage patterns among primitive peoples, but finding also that monogamy is the norm in most of the world.³⁴ Both

²⁹ Papers, Addresses, and Discussions at the Twenty-Second Church Congress in the United States. New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1903. Hereinafter cited as Episcopal Church Congress, 1903.

³⁰ The relevant passages are Mark 10:2-9 and its parallels, Luke 16:18 and Matthew 19:3-9, as well as Matthew 5:31-32 (a portion of the Sermon on the Mount).

³¹ Episcopal Church Congress, 1903, 27.

³² *Ibid.*, 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

Doane and Clarke employed the rhetoric of crisis, the bishop denouncing the remarriage of divorced persons as “a legalized polygamy”³⁵ and Clarke averring that all “serious-minded people” believed divorce was a grave threat to the nation.³⁶ Each of them briefly referred to the policies of some other Christian groups.³⁷ Another clerical speaker noted that denominational pluralism presented a practical problem because divorced persons denied an Episcopal Church wedding could seek out a more accommodating Protestant church.³⁸ Five of the six speakers agreed that firm church policies must prevent new marriages by divorced persons, but there were no specific proposals for cooperation with other religious groups in the United States to tackle this moral and social emergency.

The records of the 1903 Congress indicate that most of the Church’s unofficial leadership agreed with the bishops of 1892 that divorce was wrong and remarriage unacceptable. It is evident that at least some ordained ministers brought to their study of Scripture “the results of the ripest criticism,” as the bishops of 1880 had urged.³⁹ One speaker was also familiar with the new social

³⁵ Ibid., 24.

³⁶ Ibid., 31.

³⁷ Ibid., 25, 32.

³⁸ Ibid., 43.

³⁹ Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (1880), 348, as cited in George Reuben Metcalf, “American Religious Philosophy and

science of anthropology, and he saw the relevance of the emerging social sciences to moral reflection. But neither the bishops of 1892 nor the speakers of 1903 provided a social analysis to account for the rise in divorce in America. Several speakers referred to developments in England, a sign of the continuing ties of the Episcopal Church to Britain. The Congress speakers, like the bishops, were concerned about conditions in their own country, but did not think of cooperating with other denominations. One nation, one church: this was the model that informed their moral thinking.

After 1903, the Church Congress returned to marriage, the family and related issues on several occasions. In 1911, two speakers dealt with the subject of woman suffrage; the next year, several presentations addressed the topic of "The Sanctity of Marriage." In 1917, several participants addressed the conference theme of "The American Home as Endangered by Modern Conditions and Agitations."⁴⁰ But by then, marriage and the family were once again the focus of official concern.

the Pastoral Letters of the House of Bishops," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 27 (1958), 25.

⁴⁰ Spielmann, "A Neglected Source: The Episcopal Church Congress," 67, 68.

II. The Herodian Sin: Contraception and the Family in the 1920s

In 1916 the General Convention took note of "serious changes in the conditions and home life of the people of the United States during the present generation," and called for the appointment of a Commission on Home and Family Life. Its task was "to study the whole question of the present status and condition of the home and family life of the people of these United States in its relation to religion and morals." The Commission's membership consisted of five bishops, five priests, and five laypersons, all men.⁴¹ Once again, leading Episcopalians were thinking in national terms, planning a study of the people of the whole United States. The resolution recognized a particular part of national life for which the church was responsible, religion and morality.

A. The Commission's First Report in 1919

When the new Commission submitted its first report to the General Convention of 1919, the opening sentence rang a tocsin, just as the 1892 Pastoral Letter had done: "Whatever attacks the American home is a menace to

⁴¹ "Report No. 5," Journal of the General Convention, 1916, 263. The House of Bishops concurred with this action of the House of Deputies ("Message No. 42," *Ibid.*, 279).

the national life."⁴² The Report resembles the Pastoral Letter of 1892 in its application of the Trinitarian names to human families and in its claim that the family is the basic social unit. The authors immediately introduced an image of the family, declaring that "God has set the sacred names: `Father,' `Mother' at the center of His commandments. In the home the child is to be taught obedience to his earthly father that he may learn to reverence his Father in Heaven." This statement was frankly patriarchal, linking the authority of the human father to the majesty of God the Father. The report also said that God's Trinitarian Name is a family name, and added that the father, mother and child of the human home "form the earthly trinity, counterpart of the heavenly Trinity." The authors declared that the family was the fundamental unit of society: "Church and state are built on the family.... When the home is wrecked, Church and State totter to their ruin." The quality of a home will decide whether parents "are bringing up Christians or atheists, patriots or Bolshevists to be future citizens of the United States."⁴³ The Commission addressed its report to the Episcopal Church, but its concern seems at first to have been with the fate of a nation.⁴⁴

⁴² "Report of the Joint Commission on Home and Family Life in Its Relation to Religion and Morals," Journal of the General Convention, 1919, 593. The sense of foreboding was there at the end, too; the penultimate paragraph declared, "We utter the solemn warning to the men and women of America. This Nation will decay and finally perish when American homes cease to revere God" (Commission Report of 1919, 599).

⁴³ Ibid., 593, 594.

⁴⁴ The report presupposed a social order in which the church is an essential component, along with the family and the state: "The home is the circle drawn close around [Christ]. The Church is

The time-honored Anglican interest in the edification of the people and the security of the realm appears once again.

The report identified certain threats to the well being of the family, beginning with "industrial conditions" that affected many immigrants; these conditions were "inimical to the maintenance of the Christian standard of family life." Poorly paid girls supplemented their earnings "with the wages of shame." Men who did not have enough money to marry when they should resorted "to vicious courses." Children went out to work, and pregnant women did physically strenuous tasks up to the time they give birth. The Commission briefly noted some social solutions to the crisis, echoing the language of Progressive reformers with a demand that child labor be abolished or sharply restricted, and reaffirming an ideal of gender relations which did not fit the realities of working-class life --"the ideal of the family which rests upon the bread-winning labors of the husband and father." But the report quickly moved beyond "sociologic and economic conditions" to stress that "the final remedy for all is the bringing of the home under the dominion of Christ." The authors held that all evils "finally yield to the resolute advance of the Christian conscience." Make the home Christian, and all economic problems will eventually be solved.⁴⁵

the larger circle including many homes. The State is the largest circle including all mankind. This is not man's arrangement, but God's appointment" (Ibid., 593-594). All society is Christian society. The only difference between family, church, and state is the size of the circle.

Commission members may have been confident that making all homes Christian could easily solve social and industrial problems, but they saw numerous obstacles in the way of such a program. They called for Church-sponsored religious education in the public schools even though they expected opposition to such a policy. It was important to ensure that young people who grew up without direct religious influence would acquire "some knowledge of at least the Bible and the rudiments of Christian teaching." The church must take its message into the public schools so that all young people may hear it – after all, an Anglican church must provide moral instruction for the entire nation. The commission members also demanded "the enactment of a National law providing for uniform marriage and divorce throughout the United States."⁴⁶

American society was in trouble, the commission warned, because there was not enough religion in the home. Many people devoted their Sundays to extra sleep, the Sunday newspapers, or family outings in the car. The authors

⁴⁵ Ibid., , 594. The authors did not say how bringing homes "under the dominion of Christ" would end child labor or ensure good wages for men. They believed that moral reforms could easily solve all social problems: "The great curse of Drink is being throttled. Commercialization of Vice is passing. Even War is going the way of human Slavery, Polygamy and other creatures of the night" (Ibid.). Such optimism seems astonishing, especially in church circles, after the catastrophe of World War I. In Europe, Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans appeared in 1919, rejecting all hope in human progress, and looking for salvation to an utterly transcendent God known only through God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. But Americans were spared most of the horrors of World War I, and retained their hope in progress. The same kind of confidence expressed by the Commission Report of 1919 can be found also in John Dewey's Reconstruction in Philosophy, published in 1920.

⁴⁶ Commission Report of 1919, 595, 596.

feared that the United States might be "actually developing into a non-Christian nation." An insistence upon discipline could restore order in the home. Parents must exercise authority and take their children to church; no social agency could replace parental discipline. "Not by juvenile courts or probation officers, but only by the power of religion, will be restored to American homes that lost Paradise of parental control."⁴⁷

In the portions of the commission's report considered so far, the focus was on national conditions, but a different agenda came into view when the report turned to the question of birth control. The Commission found a deadly threat to the American home in the "Herodian sin" of killing off the next generation. The Commission members could "only hint at" a threat to "the very existence" of the American family:

The purpose of marriage is to create a family. The highest glory that can come to any woman is maternity. But marriage in America today does not always mean children. Were it not for our foreign population the death rate would exceed the birth rate. Motherhood seems to be going out of fashion among those best able to support children.⁴⁸

This is the earliest reference in official Episcopal Church documents to contraception. The focus is on gender roles, the menace of immigration, and the prospects of the Episcopal Church.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 597.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 597.

The authors protested first against women who failed in their responsibility to be mothers: "Some women must dance and play `Bridge'--they cannot have children."⁴⁹ The report did not review any of the reasons other than a fondness for bridge why a woman might want few children or none at all.⁵⁰ For the members of this Commission, family life was in jeopardy because some women would not perform their assigned role in the social and theological order. Such women failed to complete the work that God has given them -- "The Virgin and Child must be held up before the American people as the sanctification of motherhood The father represents God, the earthly Providence; he is the priest at the head of his household. The mother is queen of love and sacrifice."⁵¹

The Commission's anxiety about women and childbirth did not derive solely from an abstract model of domestic relations, for there was also an urgent practical concern. At stake was the future of Anglo-Saxon culture in America, and of the Episcopal Church itself:

Old American stock is dwindling. The English-descended population of America is becoming relatively more scanty, less important each year as compared with

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ The members of the Commission were all men. If they consulted any women, there is no indication of such consultation in their report. It is likely that they did not. While they were at work, the Episcopal Church Congress of 1917 invited only men to speak at a session on the home.

⁵¹ Commission Report of 1919, 598. Although they rejected contraception, commission members did not follow through on the logic of their reference to the Virgin and demand immaculate conceptions.

foreign-language peoples. What right have we to expect to hold the United States to Anglo-Saxon traditions if we refuse to populate it? Can we imagine that we shall hold this continent for the white race if we let it wither away?⁵²

Here one root of the Commission's concern about national life becomes apparent. It was not only that industrial conditions disrupted families, or even that some children were growing up without proper religious instruction; the deepest worry was about the future of the Anglo-Saxon culture in the United States. Although they attempted to deal with broad social problems, the authors were leaders of an ethnic church frightened by the non-Anglo-Saxon immigration of the early twentieth century. For these Episcopalians, the issue of birth control was one of group survival, at least in part.

The commission complained that Sunday schools in Episcopal churches were very small. It was time to fill them up, for "unless the homes of our people are replenished with children, or we convert in larger numbers, the more fruitful immigrants from other lands, the future of our Church is dark indeed."⁵³

Episcopalians were still establishmentarian in their thinking, and they wanted to address national problems. In the case of the family, however, the church's attempt after World War I to formulate social teachings was largely shaped by the fear of losing its position in a changing nation.

The Commission continued its work after 1919. The next year it got something new to think about. The Lambeth Conference of 1920 also took a

⁵² *Ibid.*, 598.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 597.

strong stand against contraception, reinforcing the conviction that birth restriction was a grave moral wrong.

B. The Lambeth Conference of 1920 and the Later Commission Reports

From 1922 to 1961, the Episcopal Church relied on statements by the Lambeth Conference as it worked out its own teachings about contraception.⁵⁴ The Lambeth Conference initially rejected artificial contraception, but finally accepted its use by married persons. In two cases, American bishops who participated in Lambeth discussions played major parts in shaping Episcopal Church teachings.

At the Lambeth Conference of 1920, Anglican bishops condemned artificial, or unnatural, contraception:

The Conference, while declining to lay down rules which will meet the needs of every abnormal case, regards with grave concern the spread in modern society of theories and practices hostile to the family. We utter an emphatic warning against the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of conception.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The Lambeth Conference of 1908 had already rejected contraception: "The Conference regards with alarm the growing practice of the artificial restriction of the family, and earnestly calls upon all Christian people to discountenance the use of all artificial means of restriction as demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare." Resolution #41, 1908, in Randall T. Davidson, ed., The Five Lambeth Conferences (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920), 327. But the Episcopal Church's teaching makes no reference to this 1908 resolution.

⁵⁵ Resolution #68, Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion, 1920 (New York: Macmillan Company, 1920), 44. Hereinafter referred to as Resolution #68, Lambeth 1920.

The bishops opposed “the deliberate cultivation of sexual union as an end in itself,” and put forward a view of the principles which should govern Christian marriage:

One is the primary purpose for which marriage exists, namely, the continuation of the race through the gift and heritage of children; the other is the paramount importance in married life of deliberate and thoughtful self-control.⁵⁶

In this view of marriage, procreation came before any other consideration. The implication was that a married couple could prevent the conception of children only through self-control, that is, through sexual abstinence or some procedure which did not require use of any artificial means.

This Lambeth Conference Resolution significantly influenced the Episcopal Church in the 1920s. The chairman of the Episcopal Church’s Commission on Home and Family Life, Bishop William Hall Moreland of Sacramento, was also a member of the Lambeth committee that examined questions of marriage and sexual morality. When the commission revised its 1919 report for the 1922 General Convention, its new report cited the Lambeth Conference’s rejection of birth control.⁵⁷ The new version of the report now contained a statement of the purposes of marriage:

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Appendix XXI, “Report of the Joint Commission on Home and the Family Life in its Relation to Religion and Morals.” Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1922, 701. Hereinafter cited as Commission Report of 1922.

Boys and girls should be taught as early as possible that the highest purpose of marriage is the perpetuation of the race, involving the begetting and education of children for the work of the world.... Marriage is not to be regarded solely or chiefly as a means for happiness or physical pleasure.⁵⁸

Contraception was wrong because the chief purpose of marriage was procreation.⁵⁹ As in 1919, concern for group survival overshadowed all other issues.

In 1925 the Joint Commission submitted its final report to the General Convention.⁶⁰ The authors again mentioned social conditions that harmed family life: child labor; the employment of women in industry; divorce; "impatient attacks on the social order;" crowded apartments; and congested cities. They added that some social problems were not due to individual failings but to an economic system which left many poor and made a few rich.⁶¹ Once again, however, the Commission quickly abandoned social and economic commentary to concentrate on divorce, family relations, and contraception. It used Census data to show that

⁵⁸ Ibid., 702.

⁵⁹ But procreation was not an unqualified good. The 1922 General Convention called for "the enactment of laws for regulation of the marriage of those who are physically or mentally defective," on the grounds that "[s]uch marriages result in the birth of children physically or mentally defective, tending to an increase of misery or crime." "Message No. 83," Journal of the General Convention 1922, 114.

⁶⁰ Appendix XII, "Report of the Joint Commission on the Home and Family Life." Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1925, 575-579. Hereinafter cited as Commission Report of 1925.

⁶¹ Ibid., 576.

divorce increased twice as rapidly as population after 1876. The Commission warned that the public increasingly accepted divorce: "Thousands of young people in the United States, knowing that the law permits a consecutive polygamy, enter the marriage state with the deliberate purpose of breaking it off, should the first attempt be unsatisfactory."⁶² The reference to polygamy echoed the complaint of Bishop Doane at the Church Congress of 1903 that remarriage after divorce constitutes "a legalized polygamy."⁶³

The report added that parents were no longer doing their job: "Many American parents are resigning to the schools a large part of the moral direction of their children," a task for which schools were unqualified.⁶⁴ In 1892, bishops worried that Sunday School teachers were usurping the pastor's functions; a generation later, members of the Commission complained that the public schools were encroaching on parental prerogatives. Once again, church leaders resisted modernizing tendencies that made the family simply one social unit among many, and not the fundamental building block of society.

The Commission's work was hardly impressive. Its reports showed little capacity for biblical interpretation or theological reflection. The second report did incorporate the 1920 Lambeth Conference Resolution on contraception and added a new statement on the purposes of marriage. Commission members

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Church Congress of 1903, 24-25.

⁶⁴ Commission Report of 1925, 577.

learned enough about American society to cite divorce statistics from the census and to project the demographic eclipse of their church, but the level of social analysis is very limited. The original charge to the Commission was to study the conditions of marriage and family life in the nation, a task in keeping with the Anglican tradition of concern for national unity and the edification of the population. Instead, the members of the Commission became alarmed about the prospects for their own denomination in modern America. The Commission did not try to find out why couples limited their procreation, but simply condemned them for doing so. Endorsed by the General Convention, the Commission's reports provided official teaching. But even in the 1920s, the content of these reports suggested that the Episcopal Church would not find it easy to address a complex nation and provide moral direction for its own members at the same time.

C. Fresh Breezes: The Church Congress , The Prayer Book, and Lambeth 1930

While the Commission on Home and Family Life was still at work, the unofficial Episcopal Church Congress returned to the questions of marriage and morality. The Congress of 1924 divided its discussion of marriage into three sub-topics: Divorce and Remarriage; the Standards of the Modern Home; and Eugenics. The first speaker on the subject of divorce and remarriage took rather traditional positions. Milo Hudson Gates, a priest serving Trinity Church in New York City, began by attacking a contemporary suggestion that a marriage should

be dissolved when it was no longer "real;" this approach he stigmatized as "precisely the theory of the Oneida Community" and also "the theory of the jungle." Gates endorsed a resolution recently presented in the United States Congress calling on Congress to determine for the entire nation what would be permissible causes for divorce. It seemed odd to Gates that the U.S. Constitution does not deal with marriage and divorce; he thought the reason must be that "the wholesome traditions inherited by the early colonists made divorce to be almost unknown among them."⁶⁵

Other speakers at the 1924 Congress presented markedly different ideas. One of them was Katharine Davis, a doctor affiliated with the Bureau of Social Hygiene sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, and a Congregationalist, not an Episcopalian. Davis criticized Christian churches for initiating ideas about sex that made many people think the sexual relationship was shameful. One result of such attitudes was that many women, at least, entered marriage with no knowledge of the physical realities of the marriage relationship.⁶⁶

More provocative even than her basic message was the approach Davis took to the Bible and to the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer. She attacked the teaching of St. Paul, saying that he was "very largely responsible for the disrepute into which the sex relation fell in very early days of the Church, and

⁶⁵ Charles Lewis Slattery, ed., Honest Liberty in the Church [Church Congress of 1924] (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 140-142. Hereinafter cited as Church Congress of 1924.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 152, 153, 154.

in which it has persisted;" she suggested that Paul "must have had some terrible experience with some woman," and she objected to Paul's "emphasis upon the inferior position of woman in the marriage relationship." In addition, Davis took exception to the theme of original sin in the Episcopal Church's baptismal liturgy, contending that it was presented in such a way as to indicate that the sexual relationship of marriage was sinful.⁶⁷ Davis plainly rejected any notion that Scripture always provides unquestionable moral guidance. She believed in fact that some texts in Scripture were simply wrongheaded. Davis herself relied on unstated moral views and on both impressionistic and scientific research. She learned from discussions with judges and lawyers that the basic problem in many failed marriages was an unsatisfactory sexual adjustment between the partners. In Davis's own research, the data from a survey of college-educated married women was analyzed according to statistical principles. She found that women who were unhappy in their marriages were more likely than other wives to have begun married life ignorant about sexual matters.⁶⁸

With Dr. Davis, clinical and scientific considerations figured more prominently than moral ideas based on Scripture or theological reflection. She was not unique in this respect, for the Congress also listened to a priest who presented himself as one well versed in psychology and sociology.⁶⁹ Percy

⁶⁷ Ibid., 153, 157, 154.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 155-157.

Gamble Kammerer objected to the first presentation by Gates on the grounds that it made no references to the work of sociologists, psychiatrists, or psychologists. Kammerer maintained that it was no longer acceptable to rely solely on traditional texts: "all of us who are interested in the question of Christian ethics must recognize the conflict between the textual statements and the results of modern investigation."⁷⁰ This sort of discordance could create very serious problems for developing moral teachings, but Kammerer did not indicate how the difficulties might be addressed.

Both Davis and Kammerer believed that modern research pointed to a need to revise some familiar moral teachings. A fourth speaker who held degrees in both law and divinity made a similar point about changes in marriage and divorce. Samuel D. McConnell noted that many observers believed an increase in the number of divorces to be a sign of declining moral standards, but he argued that the greater number of divorces probably resulted from *higher* standards. Women initiated most divorces, he said, and this was a good thing:

One of the most extraordinary facts of modern times is the arrival of the woman at the consciousness of her own personalityShe has established, as the result of that consciousness, her place in the political world, in the economical world, in the social world.

⁶⁹ Kammerer held a Ph.D., although the Congress proceedings do not indicate the field in which he earned it. Kammerer noted that he had studied psychology and sociology, and that he himself had "made one or two slight contributions in the field of study of the unmarried mother and the illegitimate child" (Ibid., 163).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

More and more people, he added, would come to think of marriage as a contract.⁷¹ Since 1892, many leading Episcopalians had considered divorce a deadly danger for church and state alike. The first speaker at the 1924 Church Congress considered marriage a sacrament, and the marital union indissoluble, but McConnell could tolerate the notion of marriage as a mere contract, and regard the increase in divorce as a sign of moral progress.

The Church Congress was not an official organization, and it made no attempt to achieve a consensus among Episcopalians. Its function was precisely to present conflicting views. One cannot, therefore, take the remarks of the last three speakers as representative of the Episcopal Church in the 1920s (particularly because one was not even an Episcopalian). However, a review of the remarks made at the Church Congress of 1924 shows very clearly that the teaching of the Commission on Home and Family Life did not precisely reflect the views of all Episcopalians.⁷² Commission members, like official and unofficial leaders before them, used the rhetoric of crisis. Their concern was not only with

⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

⁷² Of course, the disagreement of some church members does not invalidate an official teaching. The present study is primarily an historical inquiry, and so does not seek to specify exactly what tests a teaching must pass to be authoritative. We may presume that it must derive from an appropriate official source and that it must be consistent with scripture and with other norms for moral and theological judgment. We point out that some Episcopalians differed with the leaders of the 1920s because our purpose in this historical work is to discover why the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church became incoherent later in the twentieth century. The issues raised by some of the speakers at the 1924 Church Congress did not get adequate attention at the official level in the 1920s, but they could not be evaded indefinitely.

the nation, but also with the parlous position of the Episcopal Church in American society. But only one speaker at the 1924 Congress clearly expressed horror at growing numbers of divorces. Other speakers, relying on the social sciences and clinical experience, were willing to accept much of the social change so offensive to official leaders of the church. While official leaders tried to protect the institution and the Anglo-Saxon race, the speakers at the 1924 Congress pointed out at least two different roads the church might travel. For Gates, the church should distinguish itself sharply from state and society in order to practice and proclaim its own ideals. The other speakers wanted the church to work more harmoniously with American society, and to pay more attention to the findings of clinicians and social scientists.

Even though some of the 1924 speakers offered bold suggestions, the Congress as a whole was not particularly radical or innovative. Of the six presenters at the session on marriage and divorce, only one was a woman, and she was not an Episcopalian. Two more speakers in a subsequent session addressed the topic, "The Standards of the Modern Home." Both were men, and one, incredibly enough, was the headmaster of an institution which removed children from their homes to educate them at an all-male boarding school.⁷³ Even when speakers at the Congress differed from the views of the Commission on Home and Family Life, those divergences may have been less radical than they initially appear to be. Speakers like Kammerer and McConnell took a

⁷³ This was Samuel Drury, the Rector of St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire.

positive view of modern culture and suggested that the church should revise its teachings when they conflict with certain modern ideas, a perspective which appears very different from the Commission's desire to retain Anglo-Saxon predominance in the United States. But the accommodating strategy can also be seen as an inverse image of the traditional establishmentarian one: if it is not possible to rule over the whole society, it may be possible to include most people by accepting into the church the ideas and the practices of society. The proposals of Kammerer and McConnell thus can be viewed as attempts to pursue establishmentarian goals in a new form. Both official and unofficial church leaders tried to square the circle by making a small and ethnic church a national institution.⁷⁴

In 1928 the Episcopal Church revised its most important document and symbol when it approved a new version of the Book of Common Prayer.⁷⁵ This

⁷⁴ Philip Turner has written about the Episcopal Church's struggle with its identity in U.S. society: "The Episcopal Church may no longer be able to set the moral and spiritual tone for a nation but it can do the next best thing. It can be a church for everyone by making a place for people who have vastly different beliefs and vastly different 'life styles.' Rather than being a religious and moral teacher promoting the unity of a nation, we can become a church that includes the diversity of that nation. In a secular and pluralistic society like our own, this is as close to establishment as one can come." Sexual Ethics and the Attack on Traditional Morality (Cincinnati, OH.: Forward Movement Publications, 1988), 3. Turner has in mind the situation of the 1980s, when "inclusiveness" became the watchword of many influential church leaders. It is proposed here, however, that "inclusiveness" has a long pedigree, and that something very much like it was the goal of some Church Congress speakers in 1924.

⁷⁵ Please refer to the discussion of this Prayer book in chapter four, above.

Prayer Book reflects some accommodation of social change, especially in its views of the relations between husbands and wives. A significant adjustment is found in the marriage service's view of the status of the married woman. In the 1892 Prayer Book, the vows of husband and wife differed markedly. The man promised his wife that he would "love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep . . . only unto her," as long as the two should live. The woman promised her husband to "*obey him, serve him, love, honour and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him,*" as long as they both should live.⁷⁶ Such vows implied a hierarchical relationship in which the wife obeyed and served the husband, who did not serve or obey her. The 1928 Book of Common Prayer was quite different. For the first time in an Anglican Prayer Book, the vows of husband and wife were the same. Each promised to love, comfort, honor, and keep the other, "in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep" only unto her or him, so long as both should live.⁷⁷ With respect to the relationship between husbands and wives, the new Prayer Book's marriage service reflects the outlook of one of the speakers at the 1924 Church Congress: "One of the most extraordinary facts of modern times is the arrival of the woman at the consciousness of her own personality She has established, as the result of

⁷⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1892. Cited from Paul V. Marshall, Prayer Book Parallels: The public services of the Church arranged for comparative study. Vol. 1, Anglican Liturgy in America (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989), 444. Italics added.

⁷⁷ The Book of Common Prayer 1928 (New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1945), 301.

that consciousness, her place in the political world, in the economical world, in the social world."⁷⁸

In other respects, however, the new Prayer Book remained very traditional. It provided primarily for infant baptism, which meant that it assumed the Episcopal Church would continue to replenish its ranks through the procreation of its own members.⁷⁹ This church would not seek to evangelize the increasingly non-Anglo Saxon society of the United States. Implicitly at least, the new Prayer Book assumed that the family remained the basic unit of church and society: although Episcopalians had grumbled since the 1890s about the decline of family prayer, the new book included a section entitled "Forms of Prayer to be Used in Families." There was still no special provision for prayers for industrial workers, a change proposed by a church commission as far back as 1883. This Prayer Book was designed primarily to serve the traditional constituency of the Episcopal Church, not to reach out in new ways to a changing nation.

D. A Grudging Acceptance: Lambeth 1930

The Lambeth Conference of 1930 considerably modified the Anglican stance on contraception. The bishops now acknowledged that sexual relations in marriage serve purposes other than procreation alone: "intercourse between

⁷⁸ Church Congress of 1924, 165.

⁷⁹ Book of Common Prayer 1928, 273.

husband and wife as the consummation of marriage has a value of its own within that sacrament, and...thereby married love is enhanced and its character strengthened.” But the bishops still believed “the primary purpose for which marriage exists is the procreation of children,” and said that “this purpose as well as the paramount importance in married life of deliberate and thoughtful self-control should be the governing considerations in that intercourse.”⁸⁰

By 1930 the bishops believed that there might be compelling reasons to avoid parenthood, and they cautiously opened the door to contraceptive practices:

Where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse (as far as many be necessary) in a life of discipline and self-control lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly-felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception-control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Resolution #13, The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with Resolutions and Reports (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), 43. Hereinafter cited as “Lambeth Encyclical Letter 1930.”

⁸¹ Resolution #13, The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with Resolutions and Reports (London: SPCK, 1930), 43-44.

The bishops did not spell out the “Christian principles” that should govern decisions about parenthood, but they did abandon their earlier blanket condemnation of birth control.

This statement is often seen as a turning point in Christian teaching, and it was indeed a departure from earlier pronouncements. The effects may have been more liberalizing than the bishops intended. When T. S. Eliot reviewed the 1930 Lambeth Conference, he welcomed the declaration but regretted “that the bishops have placed so much reliance upon Individual Conscience.”⁸² Couples should have been counseled to seek spiritual guidance on such a matter, and not left to rely solely on their own sense of the direction of the Holy Spirit. For Eliot, “to allow that ‘each couple’ should take counsel only if perplexed in mind is almost to surrender the whole citadel of the Church.”⁸³ The Lambeth resolution provided moral direction, but Eliot feared that the guidance was so weak as to dilute the teaching authority of the church. Certainly the resolution meant that couples were answerable to no person other than themselves; if birth control seemed right to a husband and wife, Christian conscience need not further disturb them.

Weak or not, did the Lambeth declaration of 1930 become part of the official teaching of the Episcopal Church? Writing decades later, Bishop Stephen

⁸² T. S. Eliot, “Thoughts After Lambeth, in Paul Elmen, ed., The Anglican Moral Choice (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow 1983), 116.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 117.

Bayne assumed that it did, but the present writer has found no mention of the Lambeth resolution in any official Episcopalian document prior to Bayne's contribution to The Church's Teaching.⁸⁴ In 1931 a report issued by an Episcopal Church Commission on Marriage and Divorce showed no signs of influence by the Lambeth Conference. The commission declared that "we need an increasing realization of the necessity of children in the home. The obvious end of sex is the procreation of children, and unless children are born the normal purposes of marriage are not fulfilled. It is a serious and dangerous thing to thwart them." Although this commission did not specifically reject contraception, it agreed with the 1925 report that procreation is the main purpose of marriage. The Commission also said "marriage like every great human relationship must be based on the spirit of self-sacrifice rather than that of self-satisfaction."⁸⁵

Even if the Episcopal Church never endorsed the 1930 Declaration, Bayne's assumption that it did points to the peculiar character of the Conference. Its statements can acquire significant informal authority without further official action. Conference statements have no automatic standing in any of the churches in the Anglican Communion, yet bishops cite them, official documents mention them, and ecumenical documents refer to them.⁸⁶ We may recall T.S. Eliot's

⁸⁴ Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., Christian Living (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1957), 88.

⁸⁵ Appendix XI, "Report of the Joint Commission on Marriage and Divorce," Journal of the General Convention, 1931, 481.

⁸⁶ Gervaise Duffield, "The Lambeth Conference: Its Origins and its Future," Churchman 82 (1968), 107.

observation about the nature of the Lambeth Conference Report, that it is “rather the expression of the ways in which the Church is moving, than an instruction to the faithful on belief and conduct.”⁸⁷ The Episcopal Church was moving slowly toward greater official acceptance of contraception, and the Lambeth Conference of 1958 would move well beyond the position adopted in 1930.

E. Marriage, Family and Contraception, 1892-1931: A Summary

Between 1892 and 1931, Episcopalians upheld a model of marriage and the family in which church, marriage, and family were inseparable. The bishops of 1892 said that state and church alike are based on the family -- “When the family is wrecked, neither Church nor State is worth preserving.”⁸⁸ A generation later, the Commission on Home and Family Life wailed, “When the home is wrecked, Church and State totter to their ruin.”⁸⁹ Many of the documents insist on strictly defined and different roles for the husband and wife, and relate these job descriptions to a crude image of God. Thus the Commission of Family Life writes of fathers and their children, “In the home the child is to be taught obedience to his earthly father that he may learn to reverence his Father in

⁸⁷ Eliot, “Thoughts after Lambeth,” 110.

⁸⁸ Pastoral Letter 1892, 429.

⁸⁹ Commission Report of 1919, 593.

heaven."⁹⁰ As for the mother, she is "queen of love and sacrifice."⁹¹ The Episcopal Church taught that indissoluble marriage and the normative family order were essential for the nation as well as the church. The bishops of 1892 railed against state laws allowing divorce. The Commission on Home and Family Life called in 1919 for religious instruction in the public schools and federal legislation to standardize marriage and divorce law throughout the United States.⁹² With respect to marriage and family life, the Episcopal Church had clear moral teachings in this period, and still sought to provide a vision for an entire society.

When the Episcopal Church took up the question of contraception, however, its leaders had trouble maintaining their focus on the nation. They spoke as threatened Anglo-Saxons who were being out-birthed in their own land by recently arrived immigrant groups. Episcopalians fretted that there were not enough Episcopalian babies to fill the Sunday Schools. They noticed that some marriages had few children or none at all, and concluded that married couples were failing to realize the basic purpose of marriage, procreation. In 1930, the Lambeth Conference gave limited approval to contraception, but the Episcopal Church did not explicitly endorse this new position. The Episcopal Church provided teaching birth control in the 1920s, but an analysis of its teaching shows

⁹⁰ Ibid., 593.

⁹¹ Ibid., 598.

⁹² Ibid., 595, 596.

that church leaders had difficulty maintaining a national focus when they dealt with this issue, and were deeply disturbed by changes in marriage and family life.

In the 1920s there were some signs of a new outlook in the church. At the unofficial Church Congress of 1924, speakers on marriage and family issues made more use of the social sciences and clinical findings than did the speakers in 1903. One of the speakers insisted that divorce could be a good thing if a modern woman refused to tolerate the kind of treatment her grandmother suffered in silence. The 1928 Book of Common Prayer provided a marriage service in which husband and wife entered their new partnership as equals, exchanging identical vows. When Anglicans returned to the issues of marriage, family, and contraception after World War II, these fresh breezes of the 1920s would continue to change the air in the Episcopal Church.

III. The Indian Summer of the Episcopal Church: Changes in Birth Control Teaching, 1948-1961

“Our daddies won the war, then they came home to our moms. They gave ‘em so much love that all us kids were born,” the country-singing Bellamy Brothers remembered, and indeed there were many kids of the baby boom.⁹³ The decade or so after World War II was highly unusual in American marriage and family life. Americans married younger than they did at any other time after

⁹³ David Bellamy, “Kids of the Baby Boom.” Bellamy Brothers Music, ASCAP.

1890, the fertility rate increased, and the divorce rate dropped.⁹⁴ With many wives serving as full-time homemakers and mothers, this was a time when the Episcopal Church's vision of the family matched much social reality. Men and women who exchanged vows under the 1928 Prayer Book played separate, if ostensibly equal, roles in the home and the church, and they usually avoided divorce. But even for these families, there were limits to the blessings of procreation. In the late 1950s, leading Episcopalians discerned that contraception could be a very good thing indeed for married couples.

The post-war period also saw a changing of the imperial guard. After two devastating world wars, the sun set on the British Empire and the United States replaced Britain as the leading global capitalist power. As African and Asian colonies won their independence, Europeans and North Americans noticed how many people there were in these new nations, and began to worry about global over-population. Birth control became more attractive as the affluent countries of the North looked at the population explosion in the Southern Hemisphere.

There were also changes in the lives of women. Meeting at Lambeth for the first time since 1930, Anglican bishops in 1948 commented on marriage and the social roles of women:

The Conference, recognizing that marriage and motherhood remain the normal vocation of women, urges the importance of fostering in girls the sense of the dignity of this calling and the need to prepare for it. At the same time it welcomes

⁹⁴ Andrew J. Cherlin, Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Revised and Enlarged edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6-8, 18-27.

the great contributions now being made by women in many walks of life, and urges that girls and young women be given the fullest possible opportunities for vocational training.⁹⁵

Very much in the spirit of Janus, these bishops upheld the primary role of wife and mother for women even as they endorsed new vocational roles that would soon subvert the domestic order favored by Episcopalian moral teaching.

In 1949, the General Convention amended the Episcopal Church's marriage canons to require that couples sign a declaration containing a statement of the purposes of marriage:

We, A.B. and C.D., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife.... We believe it is for the purposes of mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, for the safeguarding and benefit of society.⁹⁶

This statement referred to the marriage relationship first, before turning to procreation and the interests of society. The purposes of "mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding" became important alongside procreation. In this respect, the 1949 canon displays new thinking in the Episcopal Church's official moral teaching about marriage. In the insistence on lifelong union, however, the declaration continues the church's steadfast opposition to divorce.

⁹⁵ Resolution #48, The Lambeth Conference 1948: The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with Resolutions and Reports (London: S. P. C. K., 1948).

⁹⁶ "Canon 17, Sec. 3," Journal of the General Convention 1949, 166.

The statement is entirely consistent with the times, too. American couples in the 1950s made an enormous emotional investment in their marriages, and were very reluctant to let marriages end in divorce.⁹⁷

When Bishop Stephen Bayne wrote about Christian morality for The Church's Teaching, a set of books published in the 1950s,⁹⁸ he mentioned the 1949 canon in his discussion of marriage and family. According to Bayne, the declaration means procreation is *not* the most important goal of marriage; more consequential are the needs of the couple and the interests of society.⁹⁹ The couple's needs go well beyond momentary sexual pleasure: "Sexual experience and pleasure," Bayne wrote, "are not ends in themselves." In animals, the sexual drive serves the end of procreation, but there is more at stake in human sexuality: "Our whole selves are involved; and satisfaction means, necessarily, the full meeting and interchange between whole selves."¹⁰⁰ Sexual activity is appropriate only within marriage. Bayne regarded pre-marital and extra-marital sexual intercourse as sinful; it takes place "between persons who cannot give

⁹⁷ See Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 183-207.

⁹⁸ Please refer to chapter four, above, for a discussion of the origins of The Church's Teaching and the place of these books in the official teaching of the Episcopal Church.

⁹⁹ Bayne, Christian Living, 86.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

themselves fully to each other, but can only give a part of themselves and share a fragment of common life."¹⁰¹

Although he limited the importance of procreation, Bayne greatly valued the family, which he called "the first church that a child knows, just as it is the first community that he knows." Like many Episcopalians before him, Bayne described the family as "the basic unit of the Church, just as it is the basic unit of all human society." Yet Bayne qualified this traditional claim, saying that "in the last analysis, the Church is the only complete family.... The kinship which is established in Holy Baptism is the deepest and truest of all relationships; and it is to this deep bond that family life and love seem to lead us."¹⁰² Unlike the bishops of 1892 or the commission of the 1920s, Bayne subjected the family to the claims of a higher ecclesial loyalty. In his reference to baptism, Bayne anticipated a liturgical reform that began in earnest with the start of Prayer Book revision in 1967.¹⁰³

When he turned to contraception, Bayne wrote that the only "Church answer" was the Lambeth Resolution of 1930.¹⁰⁴ That resolution gave very

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰² Ibid., 95, 96, 107.

¹⁰³ This liturgical renewal will claim our attention briefly later in this chapter, and again in chapter six.

¹⁰⁴ Bayne, *Christian Living*, 88. Bayne did not mention the birth control teachings of the 1920s. Perhaps he knew of them, but believed that the 1930 Resolution superseded them. It is more likely that he was unaware of these earlier statements. As Robert Hood points out, "the

limited approval to contraception, but Bayne wrote that things had changed since 1930:

What has changed in the intervening time has been the attitude of the Church toward the right order of the ends, the purposes, of marriage. No longer would it be taken for granted that the procreation of children was the primary purpose of sexual love.¹⁰⁵

Although Bayne termed the Lambeth Resolution the only “Church Answer” on birth control, he dismissed its view of contraception as too narrow, claiming that its idea of marriage was no longer dominant in the Episcopal Church. In a book written by an individual, such a statement would not be surprising, but it is somewhat startling to find it in this official publication. Perhaps Episcopalians no longer accepted the Lambeth teaching, but in 1957 Bayne could refer to no official change of teaching. His justification for disregarding the Lambeth declaration was a change in “attitude” among Episcopalians. If it troubled Bayne that the church could simply change its attitude on important matters, he did not say so. Bayne held to traditional views on questions like the restriction of sexual activity to marriage. Would he have granted that a change in attitude could invalidate those teachings, too? Bayne provided no guidance in this book on how to tell what changes are legitimate.

Episcopal Church, in spite of its language about *tradition*, does not in fact have a tradition of systematizing or codifying even its social statements and policies, let alone a deliberate tradition or codex for social teachings.” Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, xi.

¹⁰⁵ Bayne, Christian Living, 88.

In any case, Bayne himself would soon lead the way to changes in church teaching on contraception. Bayne was the chairman of the committee that examined contraception for the 1958 Lambeth Conference, and the Conference endorsed a statement on birth control that was much more favorable than the 1930 pronouncement.

The Conference believes that the responsibility for deciding upon the number and frequency of children has been laid by God upon the consciences of parents everywhere: that this planning, in such ways as are mutually acceptable to husband and wife in Christian conscience, is a right and important factor in Christian family life and should be the result of positive choice before God. Such responsible parenthood, built on obedience to all the duties of marriage, requires a wise stewardship of the resources and abilities of the family as well as a thoughtful consideration of the varying population needs and problems of society and the claims of future generations.¹⁰⁶

This statement shows awareness that large families are expensive and that the world may be getting too crowded, issues not considered in earlier Lambeth declarations. By 1958, Anglican bishops believed that parents were entitled to make their own decisions about contraception (in light of “Christian conscience”), and that the decision for contraception could be beneficial to society.

Three years later the General Convention of 1961 adopted the Lambeth statement as Episcopal Church teaching. The General Convention resolution

¹⁰⁶ Resolution #48, The Lambeth Conference 1948: The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with Resolutions and Reports (London: S. P. C. K., 1948).

noted that the Lambeth Encyclical letter emphasized conjugal love, as well as procreation, and stated:

Because these two great purposes of Christian marriage inform each other and form the focal points of constructive home life, this General Convention holds that family planning, "in such ways as are mutually acceptable to husband and wife in Christian conscience, and secure from the corruptions of sensuality and selfishness, is a right and important factor in Christian family life."¹⁰⁷

Only forty-two years after the Episcopal Church's Joint Commission on Home and Family Life condemned that "Herodian sin" of contraception, the Church's General Convention approved the practice of contraception by married persons.

Certainly the 1961 Resolution is very different in spirit and content from the commission reports of the 1920s. In place of dread there is confidence, in lieu of prohibition there is permission. A terrible sin is redefined as the right thing to do. Yet there is more continuity than change. Bayne's book, the Lambeth declaration, and the General Convention resolution all seek the well being of married couples and families; we have found these concerns in official and unofficial documents from 1892 onward. Episcopalians modified their views about what is good for the family; they still believed the family was the basic social unit. Contraception can serve the interests of family and society, but is still described in terms of Christian conscience and the duties of marriage, not in the language of rights. Unmarried persons should not have sex, so contraception was not legitimate for them. Because raising a family is expensive, parents may

¹⁰⁷ "Christian Marriage and Population Control," Journal of the General Convention 1961, 328.

The words in quotation marks come from the 1958 Lambeth declaration.

need to exercise careful stewardship of their resources and limit the number of children they have; because the world has a growing population, some contraception may be a good thing. The basic view of the family and of its place in church and society has not changed at all. The shift in birth control teaching should be seen as a conserving adjustment, designed to protect the indissoluble marriage and the family long treasured in Episcopalian moral teaching.

IV. Ecclesiastical Amnesia: Contraception and The Episcopal Church, 1967-1982

After 1961, no new teaching modified the endorsement of contraception for married couples. The Lambeth Conference of 1968 rejected the new papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which barred artificial methods of contraception.¹⁰⁸ As far as most Episcopalians are concerned, the issue of contraception for married persons is closed; if they think about the subject at all, it is only to dismiss as wrong-headed the teachings of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II that artificial means of contraception are morally wrong. The Supreme Court decision in *Griswold* ratified in national law what Episcopalians had already done in their

¹⁰⁸ Resolution #22, The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports (London: SPCK, 1968), 36. By 1978, contraception was no longer an issue for the Lambeth Conference, which turned its attention to the needs and interests of persons who are not married. The bishops called for programs at the diocesan level to promote the study and foster the ideals of Christian marriage and family life, and to examine the ways in which those who are unmarried may discover the fullness which God intends for all his children." Resolution #10, The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978 (London: CIO Publishing, 1978), 41.

moral teaching. And yet what may be the most interesting chapter in the birth control story remained to be written.

In 1967, the General Convention called for “studies to determine the attitude of the Church with respect to birth control, contraception, abortion, sterilization, illegitimacy, divorce, remarriage, pre-marital, post-marital, and extra-marital sexual behavior, sexual behavior of single adults and homosexuality.”¹⁰⁹ Some of these issues were undoubtedly due for a look, notably divorce, abortion and homosexuality. The surprising thing is that contraception appears on the list. Only six years had passed since the General Convention endorsed contraceptive practices by married couples. Bishop Bayne’s volume in The Church’s Teaching was still in use, still in print.

Fifteen years later, the 1982 General Convention approved a resolution that endorsed the practice of contraception by individuals without mentioning their marital status:

*Resolved...*That as a means of world population control this 67th General Convention of the Episcopal Church reaffirm the right of individuals to use any natural or safe artificial means of conception control.¹¹⁰

This resolution is truly remarkable, and for more than one reason. To begin with, it sought to “reaffirm” a right of individuals to practice contraception, but the Episcopal Church never previously affirmed any such “right.” The 1961

¹⁰⁹ Journal of the General Convention 1967, 492-493.

¹¹⁰ “Control of Conception,” Journal of the General Convention 1982, C-154.

Resolution concerned only the actions of married couples. Secondly, the 1982 resolution made no reference to Christian conscience or to Christian principles, as earlier statements by the Lambeth Conference and the Episcopal Church always did. The 1982 resolution simply endorsed "any natural or safe artificial means of conception control" which any individual might choose; it did not even require that the method be mutually acceptable to the partners. The language of individual rights supplanted the concern with Christian conscience. In these two resolutions, we have a case of ecclesiastical amnesia. In the first one, the church forgets what it said just six years before; in the second, it forgets that the church normally refers to Christian principles when it provides moral teaching.

How can one account for these two resolutions? Part of the answer lies in the customary carelessness of the Episcopal Church in its social teaching. As Robert Hood points out, Episcopalians do not keep track of their social teachings, and so may be unaware of previous declarations when they take up the topic of the day.¹¹¹ He points out that this institutionalized forgetfulness is especially characteristic of church synods – "generally, the Episcopal Church when meeting in synod (General Convention and diocesan conventions) relies on predilection rather than recollection."¹¹² Hood observes that General Convention's resolutions usually lack "the considered theological substance frequently found in

¹¹¹ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, xi.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, xviii.

Pastorals and joint commission reports.”¹¹³ But with the contraception issue, the problem is more serious than that. The 1967 resolution was not the result of a legislative scramble, but the product of three years of work by a joint commission.

A. The 1967 Report of the Joint Commission on Human Affairs

The 1967 resolution ordering up new studies on a host of topics was based on a report to the Convention by the Joint Commission on Human Affairs. This joint commission met four times from 1965 to 1967 and prepared a twelve-page report for the General Convention, much of it concerned with “Christian understandings of human sexuality.”¹¹⁴ The authors were modest, saying that their report “is not intended for general distribution, nor does it presume to state the official position of the Episcopal Church,”¹¹⁵ but the report deserves our attention as an indication of how prominent Episcopalians approached moral teaching after 1961. The commission took note of “the significant turbulence in society about the meaning of human sexuality and of the unusual cultural stresses to which people are subjected.” In this situation, the report counseled, “The traditional and often stereotyped attitudes of the Churches may no longer

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹⁴ “Report of the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs,” Appendix 22, Journal of the General Convention, 1967. Hereinafter cited as Human Affairs Commission Report 1967.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.4

provide adequate guidance for people today.”¹¹⁶ So much for tradition. The report did not identify any of those suspect “attitudes,” and it made no reference to any previous church statement of any kind. The commission had three years and four meetings in which to consider the subject, and it consulted with a seminary professor,¹¹⁷ but the report never mentioned the long record of church teaching relevant to human sexuality. There are no references to theologians or moral thinkers, no links to The Church’s Teaching or even to the Book of Common Prayer. There are only two references to the scriptures, both to the Old Testament.¹¹⁸

If the Commission neglected tradition, theology, ethics, and the Bible, what did it talk about? The report said the context in which people make decisions is not what it used to be, because “the development of anti-biotics, the pill, and the automobile, have freed people to make responsible decisions for themselves.”¹¹⁹ In a single paragraph it advanced the thesis that human sexuality is good (no mention of sin); in the next paragraph it grumbled, “Society has tended to focus attitudes about sexuality upon its limited aspects in genital

¹¹⁶ Human Affairs Commission Report 1967, 22.4

¹¹⁷ The professor was Albert T. Mollegen of Virginia Seminary.

¹¹⁸ One reference is to the creation of the human race as male and female (Genesis 1:27), the other to God’s instruction to humans to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28).

¹¹⁹ Human Affairs Commission Report 1967, 22.4. This is strange reasoning. People could make “responsible decisions for themselves” before any of these innovations existed. All that has truly changed is the ease with which one may contracept, treat a sexually transmitted disease, or go from place to place.

expression.”¹²⁰ The church’s job is “to help men and women to avoid exploitative, self-centered uses of sex, and to help them discover and develop satisfying, self-fulfilling, and responsible ways of expressing their sexuality.”¹²¹ Thin fare, this, theologically speaking, yet one can recognize at least two themes from earlier church teaching. There is a determination that sex should not be self-centered, a principle found in the Lambeth declarations; there is also a concern with the quality of human relationships, a consideration we have seen in the 1949 marriage canons and subsequent teachings. To help people with their relationships, the Commission called for training the clergy and other church workers for “personal counseling, and requisitioned a major educational effort including “[p]ublications, experiences in human-relationship training, and the services of professional consultants.”¹²² The Commission did not suggest including theologians, teachers of ethics, or biblical scholars in this work, nor did it propose any use of the social sciences; it thus slighted the traditional resources of the church and ignored the social sciences, a modern resource familiar to many Episcopalians throughout the twentieth century.

The Commission worried also about the world, especially the Malthusian conundrum of population growth and the supposedly static food supply: “The one

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 22.5

¹²² Ibid.

problem which overshadows all others in this last third of the 20th century is the explosive increase in world population.” The Commission projected, fairly accurately, that world population would reach a total of 5.5 to 7.5 billion by 2000.¹²³ It did not foresee the impact of the green revolution in agriculture, and shrieked that “catastrophic famine conditions will extend to nearly all of Asia, Africa, and Latin America by 1980,” unless “truly heroic measures are initiated now.”¹²⁴ In this context the commission made a very interesting theological observation. According to the Bible, human beings were called to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” The human race has fulfilled this commission to multiply, and technology has subdued the earth, making it a “spaceship” on which the human race now journeys.

After the earth has been filled with human beings, the rest of the injunction, “to be fruitful and multiply,” thus no longer applies. The old natural-law conclusion that the purpose of sex is reproduction will no longer apply. On a spaceship, both the natural law and the physical requirements for survival demand that *sex and reproduction be separated*. This will require *enormous moral and religious adjustments* all over the world.¹²⁵

This is strong stuff. The Commission found that part of the Bible has become irrelevant -- because people have already done what it required. Christians often reflect on what to do when people sin. They rarely wonder what to do if

¹²³ Ibid., 22-7.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 22-8.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 22.7. Italics added.

obedience to a divine mandate produces unexpected challenges. Presumably theological disciplines, the social sciences and the life sciences must be employed in a reappraisal of sex and population issues. The Commission briefly recognized the enormity of the challenge, but offered no theological guidance. Instead, it asked the church to reconsider its teaching on the laundry list of issues mentioned in the 1967 General Convention Resolution.

This commission report suggests that leading Episcopalians in the late 1960s believed they faced a novel social and theological situation in which traditional views and resources were useless. In 1967 the church began a process of liturgical experimentation that ultimately produced the 1979 version of The Book of Common Prayer. In the 1970s, the church also replaced its 1950s' teaching books with a new set of volumes in The Church's teaching Series. A review of these new resources will show that the church did reconsider much official teaching after 1967. We will also find that the 1982 resolution allowing individuals to decide for themselves about contraception, while unjustified, fits into an emerging pattern.

B. The 1979 Prayer Book and The Church's Teaching Series

In the 1920s the Episcopal Church changed the marriage service so that the man and the women exchanged identical vows. The 1979 Prayer Book retains these vows, but makes some significant alterations in the liturgy. The new book makes optional the "giving away" of the bride. It allows for the

question, "Who gives (presents) this woman to be married to this man?" It also permits a different question, "Who presents this woman and this man to be married to each other?"¹²⁶ The "giving away" is not only optional; it appears as a postscript to the marriage service, under "Additional Directions," not in the main text of "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage." The Standing Liturgical Commission gave two reasons for this change in the "giving away": "(1) it is not an essential part of Christian marriage; and (2) it is widely felt to be inappropriate that one person should be 'given' to another. That act could be interpreted as disregarding the personhood of the one who is given."¹²⁷ This Prayer Book more fully recognizes the equality of the woman and the man. The Standing Liturgical Commission's unease about the idea of giving away a person also suggests that it viewed the individual person as strictly autonomous, beholden and belonging to no one else.

The most important innovation in the 1979 Prayer Book may be that it provides a statement of the purposes of marriage. No earlier American Prayer Book included one. An ordained minister reads the declaration at the beginning of the service:

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and

¹²⁶ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 437.

¹²⁷ Charles P. Price, for the Standing Liturgical Commission, Introducing the Proposed Book: A Study of the Significance of the Proposed Book of Common Prayer for the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Episcopal Church (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1976), 90.

adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.¹²⁸

This declaration focuses on the marriage relationship before referring to procreation, and that is deliberate: "The order of the phrases is carefully chosen in the face of widespread misunderstanding of the Church's teaching. It intends both to affirm the third purpose--the procreation of children--and to deny first place to it."¹²⁹

In one other way the 1979 Prayer Book may reflect a changed understanding of the place of the family in the Church. The baptismal rite in the 1928 Prayer Book assumed that the typical candidate for baptism was an infant or a small child. The 1979 Prayer Book assumes adult initiation as the norm: "Though provision is made for the baptism of infants, adult baptism is restored as the model which manifests the meaning of the sacrament."¹³⁰ The main purpose of this change was to restore the ancient baptismal practice of the Church; it was definitely not a response to a surge of adults looking for baptism.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the change undermines the notion that the family is the basic unit

¹²⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 423.

¹²⁹ Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 90.

¹³⁰ Marion J. Hatchett, Commentary on the American Prayer Book (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 267.

¹³¹ The Standing Liturgical Commission was worried, however, by a drop in the number of baptisms and by evidence that 50 per cent of persons confirmed in the Episcopal Church became inactive within a few years. Price, Introducing the Proposed Book, 60.

of the Church. If the normative candidate for baptism is an adult, the church does not in principle depend on procreation by its members to replenish its ranks.¹³² In fact, it may not need, or want, the family at all. Certainly a church like this need not regard the family as its basic unit. The basic unit of the church is the baptized individual.¹³³

The change to adult baptism fits into a pattern of (hopefully) benign neglect of children and their concerns. After 1967, the Episcopal Church committed vast resources to social action under the inadequately conceived General Convention Special Program.¹³⁴ When angry Episcopalians reduced their contributions to the national program of the church, the church's Executive Council resorted to massive layoffs. By 1970, only one staff member remained

¹³² Theologian Jurgen Moltmann writes that infant baptism presupposes an understanding of the Church quite different from that of the earliest Christian period: "The primitive Christian churches (like all missionary churches) spread through calling men and women and through their being born again; but churches with infant baptism propagate themselves from generation to generation by means of birth and tradition: every one born of Christian parents is also born into the Christian church." The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 228.

¹³³ Canon law defines church membership in terms of baptism: "All persons who have received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are members thereof." Canon 17.1a, Constitution and Canons 1997.

¹³⁴ This program will be briefly discussed in chapter six, below.

to conduct an educational ministry.¹³⁵ The Seabury Series was dead, and so was the denomination's official commitment to the education of children. There has been no national replacement for the Seabury Series. The 1979 Catechism has many virtues, but it is in no way a child-friendly resource. In the national councils of the church, children are unseen and unheard of.

In 1979 the Episcopal Church also introduced The Church's Teaching Series, which dealt with marriage, family, and contraception. In the volume Liturgy for Living, Charles Price and Louis Weil offered a definition of marriage which rehearsed many familiar themes:

Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman for the creation and nurture of new life, and for mutual support and enjoyment.... It constitutes families as the basic unit of society, the context for expressing the deepest of human relationships, and the normal structure within which children are born and raised.¹³⁶

These authors still consider the family to be the basic social unit, although, as we have seen, the baptismal liturgy of the new Prayer Book undermines the notion that the family is also the basic ecclesial unit. But Price and Weil clearly had in mind the growing number of never-married parents and broken families when they carefully defined the family as "the normal structure for the birth and growth of children." Plenty of wriggle room there to accept other arrangements. Price

¹³⁵ David E. Sumner, The Episcopal Church's Ministry (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1987), 82.

¹³⁶ Charles P. Price and Louis Weil, Liturgy for Living, Vol. 5 of The Church's Teaching Series (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 249.

and Weil later took note of divorce.¹³⁷ Although the teaching of Jesus means that marriage is permanent, sometimes "the breaking up of a marriage may be the least of evils, but it is a defeat for the Christian vision of what marriage can be."¹³⁸

Another volume in the new series also addressed marriage and human sexuality.¹³⁹ In The Christian Moral Vision, Earl Brill pointed to changes in society which could affect the Church's teaching on sexual matters. "Pleasure, rather than procreation, has become the central value in sexual intercourse."¹⁴⁰ He noted that infant mortality had decreased, and the average family was smaller. "For many women, childbearing and childrearing are restricted to one segment of a lengthened life-span."¹⁴¹ In addition, women enjoyed a greater degree of equality with men, which sometimes was difficult for the Church; "the church has had to reconsider and revise positions that have been held throughout most of its history."¹⁴²

¹³⁷ In 1973 the Episcopal Church amended its canon law to permit divorced persons with living ex-spouses to remarry in the church.

¹³⁸ Price and Weil, Liturgy for Living, 252.

¹³⁹ Earl H. Brill, The Christian Moral Vision, Vol. 6, The Church's Teaching Series. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

Brill put forward a traditional Christian view of marriage and sexuality: "The Christian presumption is that marriage provides the proper context for the fullest expression of our sexuality."¹⁴³ Marriage should be permanent.¹⁴⁴ Concern with the marriage relationship was not new, he held: "interpersonal relationship is one of the most significant aspects of marriage. The earliest Prayer Books listed 'mutual society' as one of the purposes of marriage."¹⁴⁵ What was quite new was "[t]he conviction that the relationship of husband and wife should be founded on mutuality."¹⁴⁶

Brill rejected procreation as the main goal of marriage: "Christians presume that, ordinarily, a marriage will produce children But the procreation of children is no longer seen as the central purpose of marriage."¹⁴⁷ He said that "modern marriage calls for responsible family planning: how many children to have, when to have them, whether to have them at all."¹⁴⁸ Brill added a caution about matrimony. "There is evidence that we have oversold marriage in our society. Since it is a Good Thing, we have acted as if everybody ought to be married." He said that there was no need for every adult to help to maintain the

¹⁴³ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 98.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 101.

population. Since marriage was difficult in modern society, "many otherwise adequate and attractive adults may simply not be cut out for the married life. Thus we ought to accept and affirm the decision to remain single, just as we affirm the married state."¹⁴⁹

Brill did not explore the numerous possible implications of a view that many adults should not marry. If they did not, could one still claim that the family is the basic unit of society? Should single people remain celibate? Nor did he explore all the implications of rising divorce rates, and of second (even third) marriages in the Church. Under such circumstances, just what is the family unit?

In the 1979 Prayer Book and in The Church's Teaching Series we see a number of changes from the beginning of the period we are studying. Gone is the indissoluble marriage and the patriarchal family of the 1892 pastoral letter; the 1979 Prayer Book treats the marriage partners as equals when they make their vows, and The Church's Teaching Series recognizes the new reality that some who do not keep those vows will be able to marry again within the church. The norm of infant baptism gives way to a norm of adult initiation, which implicitly changes the basic church unit from the family to the individual. Brill's volume on Christian morality offers little effective guidance for unmarried church members. Some celebrate changes like these, others view them with horror. For our more analytical purposes, what matters is the shift toward a concern with the individual person rather than with the married couple and the family. In the context of the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 112.

new Prayer Book and the new teaching books, the 1982 resolution on contraception is not radically out of place when it says individuals can decide about contraception and remains silent about their marital status.

V. Birth Control and the Collapse of Moral Teaching

From 1892 to 1961, we find a uniform conviction that marriage is indissoluble, that all sexual activity belongs within marriage, that procreation is an important part of married life, and that the family is the basic unit of both church and society. In family, church and society alike, men and women, husbands and wives, adults and children, have different roles. It was in terms of this vision that Episcopalians evaluated contraception. If birth restriction seemed to threaten the familial/sexual order, officials condemned it. But if birth control could strengthen the sexual/familial order, the Episcopal Church embraced it.

By 1967 the familiar order was in trouble in both church and society. In the United States, divorce rates were climbing again. Baby boom children embraced the sexual revolution symbolized and encouraged by the pill, and many of them drifted away from the mainline churches they grew up in. In America, more women went to work; in the Episcopal Church, women began to attend seminaries and to present themselves as possible candidates for ordination. "The times they are a'changing," Bob Dylan sang, and in the Episcopal Church they certainly were. The 1967 General Convention resolution cut the church off from its moral past. The divorce canon, the ordination of

women, the 1979 Prayer Book, and the 1979 Teaching Series are all attempts to build a new moral order out of the ruins of the old. The new structure, often using flimsy materials assembled without adequate theological design, is continually buffeted by winds of doctrine from every direction.

Episcopalians have tried to remake their moral world, and with some success. The divorce reform has been widely accepted, and it shows a seriousness about marriage as well as concern for the couple, their former spouses, and their children.¹⁵⁰ The ordination of women is widely, though not universally, accepted. It is very unlikely that the church would reverse either of these changes. But so many questions remain to be answered.

- ◆ Does it make sense to restrict sex to marriage when sexual maturity comes earlier and earlier, and marriage later and later?
- ◆ Is a sexual relationship between two unmarried and divorced adults the same thing morally as the activities of two young teenagers who do not yet know the meaning of commitment in relationships?
- ◆ What about those who want to marry, but can't, or who could marry, but do not? If the church affirms the single life, does it really think this should also be a celibate life?

¹⁵⁰ Before solemnizing the marriage of a divorced person whose former spouse is still living, a clergy member must receive appropriate evidence that the previous marriage has been annulled or legally dissolved, and must instruct the parties to show continuing concern for the well-being of the former spouse and of children from that marriage. Moreover, a bishop must give approval for the new marriage. Constitution and Canons 1997, Title I, Canon 19.

- ◆ What about church members who cannot reasonably marry persons of the opposite sex because the magic of sexual attraction works in a different way for them? Must all such persons be celibate? What if some of them are capable of forming enduring relationships that perform at least some functions similar to those of traditional heterosexual marriages?

Underneath all of these questions is another one that has to do with the nature of the church. If the *normative* member of the church is a baptized adult individual, what should the church's sexual ethic be? The church's baptismal liturgy is silent on sexual orientation, sexual history, and sexual relationships. Exactly how should twenty-first century baptized adults carry out the baptismal vows in their sexual lives? It is useless to call for "traditional morality" when the vision that informed that morality is gone forever from the Episcopal Church.

So the Episcopalians are in an ethical chaos because they have not completed a transition from an old familiar/sexual/ecclesial order to a new one. But sexuality is still not the entire problem. In our review of the birth control teachings, we saw that the issue of the nation is often close at hand. It is not only the old familial/sexual order that has collapsed. In ruins, too, is the ideal of a church that can unify a nation.

Chapter Six

The Illusion of a Future: Reconciliation, Inclusion, And the Idea of a National Church

It is not right to call it a national cathedral, a traveler to the nation's capital complained. When he visited the Episcopal Church's Washington Cathedral, the tourist found it to be "a sublime achievement in architecture and art" but bristled at a brochure's description of the structure as "our Nation's Cathedral." In this vast and complex country, how can such a claim be made for an Episcopalian building?¹

The cathedral stands on a high hill in the District of Columbia.² Even when theological issues divided them, Episcopalians could agree on the building of cathedrals. Chicagoans built one in 1861 and New Yorkers broke ground for theirs in 1892, with J. P. Morgan among the backers of the project. Construction began in Washington in 1907 and in San Francisco in 1910. Church historian Robert Prichard remarks, "The Episcopal Church was a national church able to provide gracious and beautiful houses of worship for the American people."³

¹ Lawrence Petrus, "Is the Washington Cathedral Really 'Our Nation's Cathedral'?", New Oxford Review 64 (October 1997), 25.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

³ Robert Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 192.

I. The Notion of a National Church

The idea of a “national cathedral” is not simply a brochure writer’s exaggeration. In 1893, the US Congress provided the Episcopal Church with a charter to create a cathedral. President Theodore Roosevelt spoke at the laying of the cornerstone. Many important funerals have taken place in the cathedral, and President Woodrow Wilson is buried there.⁴ In the course of this study we have encountered references to the national and establishmentarian character of the Episcopal Church. During the 1995 ecclesiastical trial of Bishop Righter, for example, a journalist observed that “the Episcopal Church has always retained something of the character of a national church.”⁵ The late twentieth century traveler who questioned the cathedral’s national credentials observed that “many Episcopalians still feel that theirs is a *genuinely* American church with some sort of preferential status conferred on it by history.”⁶ The association of J. P. Morgan and Theodore Roosevelt with cathedrals in the nation’s financial and political capitals suggests the establishmentarian character of the cathedral project. There is much more to the Episcopal Church than its Washington cathedral, and far more to its ambitions than an edifice complex.

⁴ Petrus, “Is the Washington Cathedral Really ‘Our Nation’s Cathedral’?”, 25.

⁵ Bruce Bawer, “Who’s On Trial – The Heretic or the Church?” New York Times Magazine, April 7, 1996, 38.

⁶ Petrus, “Is the Washington Cathedral Really ‘Our National Cathedral’?”, 25.

A. Episcopalianism As Old As The Nation

As workmen laid the foundation for the Washington Cathedral, a certain George Hodges put the finishing touches on an article for the periodical Contemporary Review. Hodges contended that American history and Episcopalian history are inseparable: "From the date of the Jamestown settlement the Episcopal Church has had a continuous history in America." In 1607 "religion and civilisation" were already present in Canada and Florida, but we learn from this discourse on western plantings that those initiatives "were of the Latin type." It was a good thing that Englishmen came to Virginia:

The Latins stood for autocracy, the English for democracy. One was of the past, the other was of the future. Thus the men who came to Jamestown brought with them a new spirit, and began a contention for the mastery of the Continent....

After 1607 the next outstanding date in American history is 1759, the year of the taking of Quebec.

Lest we miss the point, Hodges declared that his account "sets 1620 in the background." Long before the 1930s, ingenious historical millers had turned the grains of New England religion into the flour of American history,⁷ but Hodges directed us to the Virginia mind as the true origin of America.⁸

⁷ A "filiopietist" school of New Englanders dominated the study of American history and literature far into 19th century. They credited Puritans with the American virtues of "thrift, hard work, moral earnestness, and a sense of social responsibility;" they said Puritan tradition led to religious and political liberty. Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias. eds., Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives, Vol. I, 6th ed., (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 29.

At the end of the twentieth century, an Episcopalian graduate student in American history might come to associate Jamestown with ill health and starving times, with Pocahontas and the London Company, with tobacco and American Indians, and with the emerging paradox of slavery and freedom. At the beginning of the century, however, Hodges declared that the “[t]he first act of the Jamestown settlers was to provide for the worship of God,” and they kept on using the form of Common Prayer even after their minister died. American history thus began with the Anglican worship of God. When the first representative assembly in America convened in 1619, it met in the church at Jamestown.⁹ American religion and American democracy, both rooted in Jamestown, both Anglican in their origins.

Hodges realized that his account of American and Episcopal history would come as a surprise to his readers, and he offered both historiographical and historical explanations for the obscurity of the true state of things. The historiographical factor was that “for the greater part of three centuries almost all

The later work of Perry Miller is of a very different kind, of course, but it may still reflect the dominance of New Englanders’ perspectives in the discussion of American history. The political supremacy of Virginians (Washington, Jefferson, Monroe, Madison) after 1789 and the intellectual achievements of men like Jefferson and Madison suggest that a heavy emphasis on New England obscures rather than illuminates early US history.

⁸ George Hodges, “The American Episcopal Church,” Contemporary Review 94 (1908): 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

the writers and speakers of the country lived in Massachusetts.”¹⁰ (Hodges was silent on the unfortunate implication that the Episcopal Church was therefore the church of the illiterati.) The historical reality, according to Hodges, is that Episcopalians lost their leadership role in religion and politics for two reasons. “The Church was disabled religiously by that fact that it had no bishop. It was disabled politically by its association with the losing side in the Revolution.”¹¹ It would take decades for Episcopalians to overcome the effects of their fall from grace.

The ambition represented by the building of a national cathedral made sense to Episcopalians, but not to all of their countrymen. Hodges set out to establish the bona fides of prominent Episcopalians. The same Bishop William White who organized the Episcopal Church after the war of independence “had been the chaplain of the Continental Congress.” White saw to it that the church, like the new republic, acquired a constitution. “The constitution of the Church and the constitution of the republic were signed in the same year, 1789, and in the same room in the State House at Philadelphia.”¹² By the time Hodges wrote in 1908, the Episcopal Church had thousands of clergy, and Hodges thought the church had come to “a new sense of its opportunity in the solving of the problem

¹⁰ Ibid., 17. If Hodges is correct, one may wonder how Washington, Jefferson and Madison learned to read and write.

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹² Ibid., 20.

of a Christendom grievously divided.” This church, both Catholic and Protestant, “perceives itself to have a mission of reconciliation.”¹³

B. Adumbrations of a National Church Ideal in Antebellum America

In just a few pages Hodges showed how much the Episcopal Church had advanced since 1789. As we saw in chapter four, the Episcopal Church inherited the Anglican establishmentarian ideal according to which a single national church should unify the realm and edify its people. In the early years of the Republic the Episcopal Church was in no position to carry out such a mission. The Preface to the 1789 Prayer Book frankly acknowledged the institutional pluralism of American religion:

But when in the course of Divine Providence, these American states became independent with respect to civil government, their ecclesiastical independence was necessarily included; and *the different religious denominations of Christians in these States were left at full and equal liberty to model and organize their respective Churches, and forms of worship, and discipline*, in such manner as they might judge most convenient for their future prosperity; consistent with the constitution and laws of their country.¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴ “Preface,” Book of Common Prayer 1789, cited from the Book of Common Prayer 1979, 10. Italics added.

The newly organized church had lost both clergy and revenue during the movement toward independence. Now it worked to consolidate its position on the eastern seaboard. Only in the 1840's did the Episcopal Church succeed in organizing dioceses and placing bishops in all of the original thirteen states.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the church paid attention to the western frontier and shared in the dynamism of early nineteenth century American Protestantism. By the 1820s Episcopalians were beginning to view their church as both different from and superior to other American religious bodies. Although they often disagreed among themselves, Episcopalians thought that church order and community unity were very important.¹⁶ They believed that "their church had a special vocation of carrying their church order throughout the land." Episcopalians participated in inter-denominational activities through such organizations as the American Bible Society and the American Sunday School Union, but they also sought to make the Episcopal Church more widely available: "The decent and orderly worship of the church, its sense of ministry to the total life of a community, its historically oriented and educated ordained ministry should, ideally speaking, be available throughout the nation." In the 1830s, the new missionary bishops were to be responsible for the total population in their

¹⁵ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 123.

¹⁶ Frank E. Sugeno, "The Establishmentarian Ideal and the Mission of the Episcopal Church," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 53 (December 1984), 287.

territories, not just for Episcopalians in them.¹⁷ In 1841, an Episcopalian minister published a book in which he argued that the Episcopal Church could provide “a basis of Christian and ecclesiastical unity to all the Christian people in our country.”¹⁸

Episcopalians also concerned themselves with growing cities in ante-bellum America. In 1846 William Augustus Muhlenberg (1797-1877) began a new ministry at New York’s Church of the Holy Communion. He promoted prison visitation, helped to start a church hospital, and supported various ministries to working class families.¹⁹ Muhlenberg emphasized the ritual worship that made Episcopalians different from many American Protestants, but he also favored closer ecumenical relations with those Protestants.²⁰ His ministry in New York taught Muhlenberg that the Episcopal Church as then constituted could not carry out all the ministries needed in his society.²¹ In 1853 Muhlenberg and others

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁸ Thomas H. Vail, The Comprehensive Church (Hartford, CT: H. Huntington, Jr., 1841), 62. Cited from Charles J. Minifie, “William Reed Huntington and Church Unity,” Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 35 (1966), 157.

¹⁹ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 152.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150, 151.

²¹ Muhlenberg was thinking about church unity as early as 1836, when he published an anonymous book, Hints on Catholic Union (New York: Protestant Episcopal Press, 1836). In this book he focused on seeking unity in doctrine, but he also proposed unity in worship and ministry. He thought that the Episcopal Church might be able to bring about the desired union. Minifie, “William Reed Huntington and Church Unity,” 156.

submitted to the General Convention a petition calling for a greater degree of ecumenical cooperation; the church should confer Episcopal orders on other ministers so that they could share in the church's urban mission.²²

The text of the "Muhlenberg Memorial" reveals a disquiet over religious fragmentation and a consciousness of social change:

*The divided and distracted state of our American Protestant Christianity; the new and subtle forms of unbelief, adapting themselves with fatal success to the spirit of the age; the consolidated forces of Romanism, bearing with renewed skill and activity against the Protestant faith; and, as more or less the consequence of these, the utter ignorance of the Gospel among so large a portion of the lower classes of our population, making a heathen world in our midst; are among the consolidations which induce your memorialists to present the inquiry whether the time has not yet arrived for the adoption of measures, to meet the exigencies of the times, more comprehensive than any yet provided for by our present ecclesiastical system.*²³

To use the language of a much later day, Muhlenberg hoped that the Episcopal Church would become more "inclusive." He wanted his church to lead the way in overcoming the "divided and distracted state" of American Protestantism. His social concern entailed unifying a diverse nation and providing for the edification of the people.²⁴ A more flexible Episcopal Church could unify Protestantism and

²² Sugeno, "The Establishmentarian Ideal and the Mission of the Episcopal Church," 291.

²³ The Muhlenberg Memorial of 1853, cited from Ian T. Douglas, Fling out the Banner! The National Church Ideal and the Foreign Mission of the Episcopal Church (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1996), 87. Italics added by present author.

blunt the advance of Romanism. But Muhlenberg's "prophetic vision" died a slow death in a study committee formed by the House of Bishops.

In the same year as the Muhlenberg memorial, a new book asserted that the Episcopal Church had a unique mission in the United States.²⁵ In The Genius and Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, Calvin Colton described the Episcopal Church as catholic in its theology yet also Protestant in character and republican in organization.²⁶ The Episcopal Church was a Protestant denomination that adhered to the "Catholic creeds and usages" and retained the episcopate.²⁷ An important part of the work of the Episcopal Church was "to preserve the integrity and soundness of the Catholic faith."²⁸ A great asset in doing this work was the Book of Common Prayer, and Colton saw evidence that other Christian groups were beginning to recognize the virtues of

²⁴ Frank Sugeno points out that Muhlenberg's social concern was strongly elitist. Muhlenberg and other upper-class Episcopalians assumed "that the dignified and refined piety of Episcopalians would impress their social inferiors and excite the lower classes to follow the good religious and moral examples set for them." Sugeno, "The Establishmentarian Ideal and the Mission of the Episcopal Church," 289.

²⁵ Calvin Colton, The Genius and Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. New York: Stanford and Swords, 1853.

²⁶ Douglas, Fling out the Banner, 91. It was Douglas's book that introduced me to Colton's treatise.

²⁷ Colton, The Genius and Mission of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 293.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

the Prayer Book in forming the mind of the church.²⁹ Colton looked back to the condition of the Episcopal Church after the American Revolution and rejoiced at how much ground it had gained. “She was as nothing in the beginning, doubting of her own ability to stand and rise. Now she is eminent.” It was the Episcopal Church’s mission “to hold up the Catholic faith, and maintain its integrity, in this western hemisphere. If she does not do it, who will?”³⁰ Here we have the vision of a national church, and even of an ecclesiastical manifest destiny.

C. Insurrection and Ecclesiastical Reconstruction

In the great sectional struggle over slavery before the Civil War, a number of American churches divided into northern and southern denominations.³¹ The Episcopal Church did not split before the war, but in 1861 Southern bishops followed their political leaders into ecclesiastical secession. The General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church continued to function. In the Confederacy, the General Council of the Confederate States of America provided governance for Episcopalians in the putative new nation. The two groups of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

³¹ On churches and the sectional crisis, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975), chapter 40.

Episcopalians were reunited in 1865, and all Southern dioceses had returned to the Episcopal Church by May of 1866.³²

Few chapters in church history are more revealing than this one. Earlier we observed that the English Reformation was the work of the state, and learned that one function of the English Book of Common Prayer was to unify the realm. The American Episcopal Church and the 1789 Prayer Book were also the result of changes in the structure and policy of the state.³³ Once the Union came into being, sectional antagonisms and the fight over slavery were not powerful enough to split this church,³⁴ but the political act of secession immediately led to the formation of a new church. The Civil War occasioned the first pastoral letter in which Episcopalian bishops spoke directly to a national crisis.³⁵ When the church's General Convention met in 1862 for the first time since the outbreak of hostilities, the bishops' pastoral letter remarked that ten bishops were not in attendance; their absence was due to "a stupendous rebellion against the

³² Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 145, 166n.

³³ Please refer to the discussion of the Book of Common Prayer in chapter four, above.

³⁴ Slavery had its Episcopalian defenders in the North. In 1861, Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont published a book defending slavery as biblically legitimate. By 1865, Hopkins was the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and he used his influence to ensure a quick return of Southern bishops to the Episcopal Church. R. E. Hood, "Does the Episcopal Church have Social Teaching?", Anglican Theological Review 70 (January 1988), 68.

³⁵ Robert E. Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 65.

organic law and the constituted Government of the Country, for the dismemberment of our national Union."³⁶ This insurrection had placed many of their brethren "in severance from our ecclesiastical Union, which has so long and so happily joined us together in one visible communion and fellowship."³⁷ A few pages later church and state appear together in a reference to the "alarming crisis of our national and ecclesiastical union."³⁸

The Pastoral Letter condemned secession in the strongest possible terms, quoting first from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

We have no need to go beyond the words of St. Paul, in the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans -- "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."³⁹

This is strong language, particularly when one recalls that there were personal, marriage and family ties linking Union bishops to their Confederate counterparts.⁴⁰ The letter spelled out the contemporary relevance of Paul's text:

³⁶ "Pastoral Letter of 1865," cited from Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 227-228. The pagination is from Hood's book.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

³⁹ The words quoted are from Romans 13:1-2.

⁴⁰ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 66.

Where, then, do we find those powers and ordinances to which, as “ordained of God,” we, recognizing the great truth that “there is no power but of God,” are bound, for His sake, to be subject? We answer, IN THE CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES. Under them, the people of all the States, now resisting them, were just as much bound to render obedience, when such resistance began, as we, whose allegiance is still unbroken.... The refusal of such allegiance we hold to be a *sin*; and when it stands forth in armed rebellion, it is a *great crime* before the laws of God, as well as of man.⁴¹

The link between church and state, divine law and human law, could scarcely be asserted more firmly than it is here.

In the English Reformation, the Prayer Book was linked to issues of state. So it was again during the American Civil War. The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States adopted its own version of the Book of Common Prayer in 1862. The Confederate church largely confined itself to political adjustments, altering all references to the “United” states to read “Confederate” states.⁴² When the fighting ended in 1865, ecclesiastical reconstruction provided milder even than Presidential Reconstruction. Presiding Bishop John Henry Hopkins invited the bishop of North Carolina to attend the 1865 General Convention, which he did, along with his nephew, the bishop of Arkansas.⁴³ Despite the tough language of the 1862 Pastoral Letter, the 1865

⁴¹ “Pastoral Letter of 1865,” 235.

⁴² Lesley Armstrong Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 50.

⁴³ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 166n.

General Convention passed no resolutions condemning slavery or secession. Even when the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, granting the vote to former slaves, the Pastoral Letter of 1868 was silent on slavery.⁴⁴ The Confederate church vanished, and the Confederate Prayer book became “just a liturgical curiosity.”⁴⁵

It is interesting to compare the Episcopalian experience in the sectional struggle with that of the Presbyterians.⁴⁶ Already divided in 1837 between New School and Old School groups, Presbyterians separated again over sectional issues. The New School split into Northern and Southern groups in 1857; the Old School, like the Episcopalians, divided only after the war began in 1861. The reunion of Northern and Southern Presbyterians took more than a century to accomplish. In 1983, the United Presbyterian Church of America (based in the North) merged with the Presbyterian Church in the United States (based in the South) to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Hood, “Does the Episcopal Church Have Social Teachings?”, 68.

⁴⁵ Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 51.

⁴⁶ The following discussion of Presbyterians is based on Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., “Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In Edward L. Queen, II, Stephen R. Prothero, and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., eds., The Encyclopedia of American Religious History New York: Facts on File, 1996), 523-526.

⁴⁷ The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is included in the discussion of sexual ethics in chapter three, above.

Episcopalians often pride themselves on their capacity to maintain unity.⁴⁸

The record of the church during and after the Civil War suggests that the strongest force for unity may be the link of the church to the state. When the state is unified, so is the church; when the state divides, so does the church; when the state is knit back together, the church is mended, too. Episcopalians in the 1860s were no less committed than Henry VIII to the unity of nation and religion, state and church. Their denomination was a national church in that its leaders equated national and ecclesiastical union.

D. William Reed Huntington and the National Church Idea

In May of 1865 a young Episcopalian minister named William Reed Huntington (1838-1909) spoke of church unity in an address to the American Bible Society. "We who are gathered here are friends of a Bible whose unity has been impugned," he said. "We who are gathered are also members of one holy Catholic Church whose visible unity has been broken."⁴⁹ Huntington would retain this interest in church unity until his death in 1909. Huntington's views deserve a close look because of his enormous contribution to the Episcopal Church of the late nineteenth century. It was Huntington's leadership that made it possible for

⁴⁸ On the importance of unity in the Episcopalian tradition, please refer to chapter three, above.

⁴⁹ William R. Huntington, "The Unity of the Scripture, the Unity of the Church and the Person of Christ," May 11, 1875, unpublished manuscript. Cited from Minifie, "William Reed Huntington and Church Unity," 159.

the Episcopal Church to produce a new Prayer Book in 1892.⁵⁰ Huntington's vision of church unity inspired a major ecumenical statement, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, first endorsed by American bishops in 1886, then embraced by the Lambeth Conference of 1888. He turned down many opportunities to serve as a bishop or college president, and devoted his life to parish ministry, writing, and the work of the House of Deputies in General Convention.⁵¹ Huntington was a member of some thirteen General Conventions, beginning in 1871.⁵² So prominent for so long, Huntington became known as the "first presbyter of the church."⁵³

When he addressed the American Bible Society in 1865, Huntington probably had in mind the denominational divisions of American Protestantism. But the Civil War had made a deep impression on him, as we discover when we turn to his book The Church Idea, first published in 1870.⁵⁴ In making a case for church unity, Huntington remarked: "there has been a great deal in the experience of our national life to make transparent the folly of calling disunion union and disorder order. We have learned that for all practical purposes the

⁵⁰ Northup, The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁴ William Reed Huntington, The Church-Idea: An Essay Toward Unity, 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928. First published 1870.

unity of a people is dependent on the visible unity of its government.”⁵⁵

Huntington believed that the “Church-Idea” was on many minds, and his book tried to give both theoretical and practical meaning to the notion of “catholicity.”⁵⁶

For Huntington, the visible, institutional church was inseparable from Christianity. The Son of God came not only to save individual souls, but also to bring the scattered sheep together. The Gospel has a twofold outlook: “in the one direction it fronts upon the individual; in the other it fronts upon society.”⁵⁷

Jesus spoke of the “Gospel of the Kingdom;”⁵⁸ by this he meant “the coming of a new and better social order.”⁵⁹ This new society was to be “established here on earth, a regenerate social order that shall dwell within the older order, while yet wholly independent of it.”⁶⁰ Where do we find this society? For Huntington the Kingdom was “the institution known in history as the Christian Church.”⁶¹

⁵⁵ Huntington, The Church-Idea, 113. When Episcopalians fought bitterly over ritualism in worship during the 1870s, Huntington “wondered that Episcopalians had not learned better the lessons for the church taught by the national disunity of the Civil War.” John Woolverton, “W. R. Huntington: Liturgical Renewal and Church Unity in the 1880’s,” Anglican Theological Review 48 (1966), 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ Matthew 4:23.

⁵⁹ Huntington, The Church Idea, 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Huntington's overriding concern was with the church in America. This nation was often referred to as a great experiment, but Huntington preferred to speak of "American experiments."⁶² The single most important American experiment was the "mutual independence of Church and State." The Americans "have dissolved a partnership which for fifteen hundred years the world held sacred."⁶³ The United States government "rests in theory, and must eventually rest in practice, upon a purely secular basis."⁶⁴ The United States was a Christian land because most of its people were nominally Christian, but it was wrong to claim that America had a Christian government, for Christ is no part of the U.S. Constitution.⁶⁵ The American government could be run as well by "Infidels, Jews, or Mohammedans" as by Christians.⁶⁶

The secular nature of the government did not disturb Huntington. He held that Americans had decided for a "utilitarian" arrangement in which the function of government is "to provide for the temporal well-being of all the governed. It professes no more."⁶⁷ Under these conditions the church can get about its own

⁶² Ibid., 93.

⁶³ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 104.

proper work more freely than ever before.⁶⁸ “The more thoroughly the State secularizes human life, the more earnestly ought the Church to labor to spiritualize and ennoble it.... Let it be understood that what the State leaves undone, it is the Church’s recognized privilege to do.”⁶⁹

America needed a church able to meet this great challenge: “We want a large-roofed, firmly founded spiritual dwelling-place, a Home of God, a shelter for a mighty people.”⁷⁰ This would be hard to achieve, Huntington granted, given the religious and ethnic diversity of the United States.”⁷¹ Hard, but not impossible, because in America “there is one race that contrives to keep, and for obvious reasons always will keep the ascendancy – the Anglo-Saxon.”⁷² Americans, after all, speak English. “By this weapon of language alone Anglo-Saxon ideas will be able to hold America against all comers.”⁷³

In America, the state left the church free to do its work. There was ethnic and religious division in the country, yet there was also linguistic unity and the leadership of the Anglo-Saxons. Under these

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 112.

circumstances, Americans could build a catholic church. It would not copy precisely the Anglican model, but would be more English than French or Italian.⁷⁴ Huntington wondered what could “make Anglicanism the basis of a Church of the Reconciliation,” and said that a first step must be to determine what is truly essential to Anglicanism.⁷⁵ Huntington boiled it all down to the elements of his “Quadrilateral”:

- 1st. The Holy Scriptures as the Word of God.
- 2d. The Primitive Creeds as the Rule of Faith.
- 3d. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ himself.
- 4th. The Episcopate as the key-stone of government.⁷⁶

These ideas became part of the policy of the Episcopal Church at its Chicago convention of 1886, and part of a declaration by the Lambeth Conference in 1888. The Episcopal Church has repeatedly endorsed the statement at General Conventions (1895,1907, 1922, 1949, 1961, 1973, and 1982); the Lambeth Conference also has endorsed it at many subsequent meetings (1920, 1930, 1948, and 1978).⁷⁷ The 1979 Prayer Book includes the original Chicago and

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 124.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 125-126. The creeds are the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed; the sacraments are baptism and holy communion.

⁷⁷ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church 190.

Lambeth declarations in its section on historical documents important to Anglicanism.⁷⁸

For our purposes, the really important thing to notice is the motivation for Huntington's proposal. It is obviously an ecumenical proposal, but he made it out of a concern for unifying the church in the United States. Huntington differed in some respects from England's sixteenth-century reformers in that he accepted the American ban on state establishment of religion. At the same time, he plainly believed that church and state had complementary functions. He presumed that a nation should no more have several churches than it should have more than one state. One nation, one state; one nation, one church – that is how things should be. He thought Episcopalians could lead Americans toward this happy condition, although they would have to jettison some of their English baggage, perhaps even the Prayer Book.⁷⁹

While he was willing to give up some features of Anglicanism, Huntington asserted the supremacy of Anglo-Saxon culture and the English language. In his defense of episcopacy, Huntington revealed his understanding of the interrelationship of different social institutions. "The Anglican principle insists upon governmental unity as an essential condition of oneness in the Church."

⁷⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 876-878.

⁷⁹ Huntington explicitly refused to include "uniformity in the mode of conducting divine service...among the essentials of unity." The Church-Idea, 161.

Why? "Headship is God's law," Huntington answered.⁸⁰ This principle of headship is found everywhere in life. "We find it in the constitution of the Family.... We find it in the Constitution of the State.... We find it in the Constitution of the Church, of which God's only Son our Lord is Head."⁸¹ Family, church and nation are all organized in the same way.

Huntington's understanding of the church was establishmentarian in spirit, though not in the letter of Tudor law. In his desire for church unity, and in his hope that Episcopalians could promote it, he was hardly alone. One student of Huntington's work concluded that he differed from earlier thinkers, not in substance, but in two other important respects. Huntington "stated his plan in clear precise language," and broke it down into "areas which he felt would be acceptable for the unity of the church. By doing so, Huntington enabled other men and denominations to discuss something tangible and straightforward."⁸² Huntington's establishmentarian outlook was shared by other leading Episcopalians, among them the influential theologian William Porcher DuBose, whose book Church for Americans (published in 1895) argued that Episcopalians were better suited than the far more numerous Romans Catholics to offer

⁸⁰ Ibid., 152.

⁸¹ Ibid., 153.

⁸² Minifie, "William Reed Huntington and Church Unity," 160.

national church leadership -- the Episcopal Church had representative government, but did not have ties to a foreign power.⁸³

The spirit of Huntington's proposals also informed official church leaders. The bishops of 1892 referred to the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral in their pastoral letter. We have seen that this letter linked church and state in a partnership, with both resting on the unity of the family.⁸⁴ For Huntington and the bishops, it is a package deal: church, state, family, nation, and Anglo-Saxon civilization go together. No matter how many denominations there may be, there can really be only one church in America, and the best way to get one is to let Episcopalians lead the way.⁸⁵

E. Revolution in Organization

The Episcopalian interest in national leadership was not farfetched. From 1830 to 1960, the total membership of the Episcopal Church grew in every decade, and in each decade but one the Episcopalians increased their share in

⁸³ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 188, 189.

⁸⁴ Please refer to the discussion of the 1892 Pastoral Letter in chapter five, above.

⁸⁵ Huntington himself seems to have had second thoughts about the capacity of the Episcopal Church to unify America's churches. Leslie Northup writes, "By the time he wrote A National Church in 1897, he had already abandoned his conviction that a united church should have as its nucleus the Episcopal Church." The 1892 Book of Common Prayer, 76. But he did not abandon either the Episcopal Church or the national-church vision.

the national population.⁸⁶ In 1830, the Episcopal Church had 30,939 communicants, one out of every 416 Americans. When Huntington published The Church-Idea in 1870, there were 321,591 Episcopalians, one out of every 166 Americans. In 1910, the year after Huntington's death, there were 930,037 Episcopalians, or one in every 99 Americans. The upward trend continued until 1960, when there were 2,095,573 communicants, one out of every 86 Americans. "Communicants" are adult members in good standing. If one counts the total baptized membership of the Church, by 1960 one American in 55 was an Episcopalian. Many Episcopalians have been national leaders. George Washington was the first. At the 1880 General Convention which accepted Huntington's proposal for Prayer Book revision, the lay deputies included fifteen past, present or future members of the United States Congress.⁸⁷ The pattern endured into the Bush Administration in the 1990s. President George Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell were all Episcopalians.

The expansion of the Episcopal Church put considerable strain on an organization which had a national structure in its triennial General Convention, but lacked a functioning national administration between conventions until 1919. The Episcopal Church's seminaries were financially hard-pressed, at least until

⁸⁶ The following figures are from The Episcopal Church Annual, 1966, as cited in Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 229.

⁸⁷ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 200n.

the 1880s, and sometimes had low academic standards. The Church had no way of providing continuing education for its clergy other than the annual sessions of the Episcopal Church Congress after 1874. The clergy of the Episcopal Church had fewer academic resources, and less leisure time in which to use them, than the ordained ministers of the Church of England. As a result, Episcopalians made few contributions to theological literature.⁸⁸ The intellectual weakness of the Episcopal Church affected the quality of its social teaching; we saw in the previous chapter that this teaching often left much to be desired.

Westward expansion, increasing numbers, and the effects of modernization eventually led to a reorganization of the Episcopal Church. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when no national organization existed between triennial meetings of the Church's General Convention, special-purpose societies and independent agencies provided support for such activities as Sunday schools and missionary work. In 1820, the General Convention approved the formation of "a general Missionary Society for Foreign and Domestic Missions," with officers appointed by the General Convention. Decades later, this society became the nucleus of the Church's modern, national bureaucracy, but throughout the nineteenth century, the Episcopal Church relied on this unit, and other similar (but uncoordinated) societies to carry out its work.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ James Thayer Addison, The Episcopal Church in the United States, 1789-1931 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 222-224.

⁸⁹ Pamela W. Darling, New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1994), 14.

Until the twentieth century, the only form available to provide occasional social teachings was the pastoral letter from the House of Bishops.⁹⁰ Early in the twentieth century, as we saw in chapter four, the Episcopal Church developed additional mechanisms for evaluating social and moral questions. The General Convention created both joint commissions and committees, instructing them to study issues and prepare reports for the Convention.⁹¹

After the First World War, the Episcopal Church reorganized itself.⁹² The General Convention of 1919 created a national administrative structure in which a National Council, headed by the Presiding Bishop, received the authority to act for the Episcopal Church between Conventions. The House of Bishops would now elect the Presiding Bishop; previously, the most senior bishop filled the role. The National Council was to manage three organizations which hitherto had

⁹⁰ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 72.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 73-75.

⁹² Pamela Darling says that the 1919 General Convention was inspired by "the tide of nationalism that the war had unleashed and buoyed up by the experience of unity in crisis which wartime efforts had brought to the mainstream of American society" (New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power, 44). The events of World War I may indeed have encouraged a national outlook, but a process of organizational change had been underway in the United States for decades. According to Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., a massive social shift occurred between 1840 and 1920 as an economic system characterized by personal relationships and market regulation gave way to an impersonal one directed by the visible hand of managers. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business (Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977). Perhaps one could see the reorganization of the Episcopal Church in 1919 as a response by a religious organization to the new cultural situation created by national economic organizations.

been separate: the General Board of Religious Education, the Board of Missions, and the Joint Commission on Social Service.⁹³ The official headquarters, like the unofficial headquarters before it, was in the nation's most important business and communications center, New York City. Now the church could coordinate national activities, and more easily address a national audience, as it had long aspired to do.⁹⁴ At the end of the twentieth century, despite membership losses and financial struggles, the church still has a similar national organization based in New York City.⁹⁵

F. On the Outside Looking In

With its new organization and its growing numbers, the Episcopal Church of 1919 might seem to be the kind of church Huntington and others had hoped for. Indeed the church did continue to grow in numbers and in market share. Yet the church of 1919 was not nearly the inclusive body favored by nineteenth-century reformers, or ostensibly sought by late twentieth-century leaders. The

⁹³ Darling, New Wine, 44-46.

⁹⁴ Hood remarks that "with the addition of canons providing for a National (now Executive) Council that was authorized to speak for the church between General Conventions, by the 1920s all structures were in place [to] shape church teachings dealing with social, political, and economic problems." Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 75.

⁹⁵ Despite cutbacks in the 1990s, "the number of national officers is still larger" than it was in 1965. Kevin E. Martin, "The Incredible Shrinking Church?", The Living Church 216 (April 5, 1998), 9.

official leadership of the church maintained an ideal of national, church and family life that left many Americans on the outside looking in.

The Muhlenberg Memorial of 1853 did not lead to immediate increases in ecumenical cooperation. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral did not produce any measurable results, either. Usually this failure is attributed to the stumbling block of episcopacy.⁹⁶ As recently as 1997, a proposed concordat between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America narrowly failed to win the necessary approval by the Lutherans; unease about episcopacy may have been the decisive factor. Yet there is reason to doubt that episcopacy has been the whole story. The Episcopal Church has always been much less “inclusive” than it pretended to be. The barriers have often been liturgical and ecclesial, certainly, because many Protestants reject the formal worship and the episcopal polity of the Episcopal Church. But there have also been barriers of social class, ethnicity, and gender.

In 1883, Huntington proposed that the next Prayer Book contain prayers for industrial workers, but the 1892 Prayer Book did not follow this recommendation.⁹⁷ Some of Huntington’s ideas were incorporated in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, although an authority on Huntington suggests that the changes came much too late. President Franklin Roosevelt admired that book’s prayer for the poor, homeless and neglected, but the prayer exhibits “a *noblesse*

⁹⁶ Minifie, “William Reed Huntington and Church Unity,” 165.

⁹⁷ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 190.

oblige attitude more in tune with the early Social Gospel than its later development in the New Deal.”⁹⁸ A church that could enlist J. P. Morgan and Theodore Roosevelt in its cathedral projects might not be a natural home for many of America’s working classes.

In the United States, of course, labor history is bound up with the story of immigration and ethnicity. Assertions of cultural or ethnic superiority may conceal class tensions as well. We saw that Huntington counted on “Anglo-Saxon” ascendancy to make his national-church dream achievable.⁹⁹ This was not every American’s idea of how things should be. For a Protestant born in Massachusetts and educated at Harvard, Huntington was quite magnanimous. Speaking in Boston in 1909 he remarked how astonishing were the changes he could see “when I look back upon the New England of my childhood and compare it with the New England of the present, when I observe how, in this capital city of the Puritan regime, John Cotton has been almost as effectually snuffed out as today John Calvin in Geneva.” In this vast social change, Huntington suggested, there might even be “a providential leading, a divine intent.”¹⁰⁰ For an Episcopalian, such language may seem generous and

⁹⁸ Woolverton, “Liturgical Renewal and Church Unity,” 186.

⁹⁹ Huntington, The Church Idea, 111.

¹⁰⁰ William Reed Huntington, The Four Theories of Visible Church Unity, An Address delivered at the Boston Session of the Church Congress, Friday May 14, 1909.

“inclusive,” but it would not have moved an Irish Catholic to switch to a national church under his leadership.

And Huntington was the Episcopal Church at its most inclusive, its welcoming best. Other Episcopalians were less hospitable. The 1919 Convention received the first report from the Commission on Home and Family Life established in 1916. The Commission warned: “Old American stock is dwindling. The English-descended population of America is becoming relatively more scanty, less important each year as compared with foreign-language peoples.”¹⁰¹ As we have seen, fear for the survival of the Episcopal Church and Anglo-Saxon culture led the commission to reject contraception.¹⁰² The Episcopal Church in the 1920s could not bring itself to reach out to the immigrant hordes, even if the 1922 General Convention did reaffirm the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Episcopalians wanted to lead the nation, but their church was in reality an ethnic denomination whose cultural identity affected its social teachings and excluded much of modern America. The reorganized church might be able to *speak* to the nation, but it could not *include* more than a fraction of that nation.

The reorganization of 1919 was significant also because of its implications for the participation of women in the church. Demands for women's emancipation emerged in antebellum America out of the abolitionist struggle. By

¹⁰¹ "Report of the Joint Commission on Home and Family Life in Its Relation to Religion and Morals," Journal of the General Convention, 1919, 598.

¹⁰² Please refer to the discussion of contraception in chapter five, above.

the late nineteenth century, a powerful yet controversial movement demanded the suffrage for women. In the Episcopal Church, women had no official role in the nineteenth century; they could not be ordained, nor could they be elected to the House of Deputies.¹⁰³ But women were very active in church life, raising money and doing much of the work of education and mission.¹⁰⁴ In 1871 a new canon permitted the creation of the Woman's Auxiliary.¹⁰⁵ By 1880, the Auxiliary held its triennial meeting at the same time as the General Convention, and Episcopalians regularly referred to it as the "Third House" of the General Convention, although its actions were not binding on the church.¹⁰⁶

Members of the Woman's Auxiliary did not have the opportunity to address either of the official houses of the General Convention. Ironically enough, Episcopalian women could address those all-male bodies only if they represented *unofficial* organizations not directly connected to the Episcopal Church.¹⁰⁷ Male deputies read the reports of the officially sanctioned Woman's

¹⁰³ The admission of women to the House of Deputies was initially approved in 1967 and ratified in 1970, the ordination of women in 1976.

¹⁰⁴ As of 1900, almost half of the trust funds available to the Episcopal Church's Board of Mission came from female donors. As of 1916, some 39 per cent of all Episcopal missionaries were women--not to mention the unpaid wives of male missionaries. Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 177.

¹⁰⁵ The canon did not create the Woman's Auxiliary. Its purpose was to make a place for various organizations which supported the work of the church.

¹⁰⁶ Darling, New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power, 17, 27, 28.

Auxiliary to the General Convention on their behalf.¹⁰⁸ Thus women had no direct role in the House of Bishops or the General Convention, the sources of official social teachings.

As the Episcopal Church prepared for the General Convention of 1919, members of the Woman's Auxiliary hoped that they might gain an official place in the church's national organization. They supported a proposal that would allow the Auxiliary's triennial meeting to elect eight members of the National Council. Most women attending the 1919 meeting departed before the Convention finished its work. After they returned home, they discovered that the final reorganization plan approved by Convention did not provide for women on the National Council but restricted membership to men.¹⁰⁹

The years after World War I were a time of intense concern within the Episcopal Church about marriage and family life, but women would have no official place in any of the discussions. This was the moment at which women acquired the franchise in the nation, but they had no standing in the Episcopal Church's decision-making bodies. A study of women's leadership in the Episcopal Church comments, "The explicit exclusion of women as equal partners in the new structure strengthened male privilege in the church, even though such

¹⁰⁷ Harriet Keyeser, for example, spoke to the bishops and deputies concerning industrial relations in 1901; she represented the unofficial organization CAIL (Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor).

¹⁰⁸ Darling, *New Wine*, 34, 35.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

privilege was gradually eroding in American society."¹¹⁰ The Episcopal Church's social teaching sought to define the proper roles of women, but the church allowed women themselves no say in that definition.

Many prominent Episcopalians, as we have seen, wanted their denomination to lead the way to a national church for Americans. One of their favorite words was "reconciliation." William Reed Huntington hoped to "make Anglicanism the basis of a Church of the Reconciliation."¹¹¹ In 1908, George Hodges wrote that the Episcopal Church "perceives itself to have a mission of reconciliation."¹¹² But reconciliation would have to take place on terms set by English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon men. The men who lead the Episcopal Church would not give up episcopacy, Anglo-Saxon culture, or the male monopoly on leadership. In the 1920s, this stance did not seem to be a problem. The U.S. Congress cut off the disturbing tide of immigrants with new legislation in 1921 and 1924. Women would not challenge their exclusion from leadership until the 1960s. The highly exclusive church leadership group of the 1920s could imagine itself to be inclusive while consigning many Episcopalians and even more Americans to another forty years in the wilderness.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 48-49.

¹¹¹ Huntington, The Church Idea, 124.

¹¹² Hodges, "The American Episcopal Church," 22.

II. The Implosion of the "National Church"

"The Church Triumphant" is historian Robert Prichard's title for his chapter on the Episcopal Church in the years 1945-1965. On the first page he provides a table showing the steady growth of the Episcopal Church from 1830 to 1960. Prichard notes that other churches flourished, too; "the percentage of Americans who claimed church affiliation reached an all-time high."¹¹³ So it did. After a slump in attendance among Protestants in the 1920s and 1930s, church going began to increase during World War II.¹¹⁴ The U.S. population grew by 19 per cent in the 1950s, but the number of persons involved in church and synagogue grew even more, by 30 per cent.¹¹⁵ Public-opinion surveys showed very high levels of belief in God.¹¹⁶

While there was no national *church* in the 1950s, there did seem to be something like a national *religion*. In 1954, the U.S. Congress voted to add the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance; the main purpose was to paint a contrast between godly America and the godless Soviet Union. In 1955,

¹¹³ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 229. The table is based on data from The Episcopal Church Annual of 1966.

¹¹⁴ James Hudnut-Beumler, Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and its Critics, 1945-1965 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 29, 30.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

Congress required that the words “In God We Trust” be included on all US coins and currency. The next year Congress changed the national motto from “E pluribus unum” to “In God We Trust.”¹¹⁷ But Congress was lukewarm when compared to President Eisenhower, whom one writer describes as “the high priest of the popular return to religion.”¹¹⁸ Eisenhower went to church regularly, and made numerous references to religion in his speeches.¹¹⁹ The broadcast media seemed to be interested in religion, too. During the 1950s, about 39 million Americans heard the radio program “This I Believe” twice a week on major radio stations.¹²⁰ The Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen moved from radio to television in 1951, and more than one hundred ABC stations carried his program during prime time on Sunday evenings.¹²¹

Impressive though it was, the religious revival of the 1950s was not exactly a fulfillment of Huntington’s national-church dream. For Huntington and the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral he inspired, one of the essential features of the church is the fundamental doctrine contained in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. As a religious leader, President Eisenhower was not a stickler for

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 62-63.

creeds – he once said, “America is built on a strong religious faith and I don’t care what it is.”¹²² Many other Americans did not care much, either. One hundred of the radio essays broadcast in the “This I Believe” program were published. The contributors were high on toleration, believing that there were numerous paths to a single great goal. Many of their convictions were hardly biblical.

The contributors’ most often voiced sentiment...went something like this: ‘I believe that everyone is basically good. The key to the future of world progress is developing that which is good in each person.’ The next most frequently expressed belief was a version of the Shakespearean line, ‘To thine own self be true.’¹²³

As for the Pledge of Allegiance, the change made by Congress probably owed at least as much to fear of the Soviet Union as it did to the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.¹²⁴ Huntington prized the “mutual independence of Church and State.”¹²⁵ The official religion of the 1950s was quite different from what he had in mind. Even the prominence of religion in the broadcast media was the result of government action. Since the 1920s the Federal Communications Commission had classified religious programs as material

¹²² Ibid., 52.

¹²³ Ibid., 54.

¹²⁴ “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 1:7, New Revised Standard Version.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 94.

which broadcasters could use to satisfy requirements for public-service programming. When stations wanted help in finding religious programs, they looked to the Federal Council of Churches and its local affiliates. Organized in 1908, the Federal Council represented liberal and moderate Protestant churches, which recommended only their kind of religion for broadcast use. The council strengthened its hold on the broadcast media when it persuaded the national networks not to allow groups to buy time for religious broadcasts. For decades this “media cartel” kept conservative evangelical and fundamentalist programs away from the networks.¹²⁶

The apparent strength of the Episcopal Church at mid-century owed much to the actions of Congress, the President, and the restrictions on religion in the broadcast media. But the church also acted to improve its own position. New educational efforts – the Seabury Series and The Church’s Teaching Series – gave “a growing church an identity as a denomination both engaged in the problems of modern life and concerned with the proclamation of the gospel.”¹²⁷ The church moved its national offices into a new and much larger office building in New York. Seminaries expanded, too.¹²⁸ As long as one did not look too closely, the Episcopal Church had reason for great self-confidence in the 1960s.

¹²⁶ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 218-223.

¹²⁷ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 232.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

If a church is triumphant, what does it do for an encore? When Robert Prichard turns to the period from 1965 to 1980, he calls his chapter “Growing Pains.” But the story he tells is not one of growth. The chapter opens with the words, “In terms of baptized membership, the fifteen years between 1965 and 1980 were the most devastating for the Episcopal Church since the American Revolution.” Baptized membership dropped from an all-time high of 3.54 million in 1966 to 3.04 million in 1980. Prichard attributes the change to two different kinds of factors. One is demographic: the American birth rate dropped in the 1960s. The other is ecclesial; “a theological reorientation that alienated existing members.”¹²⁹

There is support for Prichard’s thesis that demographic changes account for part of the mainline decline.¹³⁰ The second part of his thesis is more dubious. We noted that one cannot attribute the numerical decline of mainline churches to a massive exodus by older members. The real problem was that “after the mid sixties fewer young persons were joining the mainline churches, and fewer still chose to become active participants and faithful supporters.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid., 249.

¹³⁰ See Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), chapter five, “The Demography of Religious Change.”

¹³¹ Ibid., 22.

Among Episcopalians at least, the present writer contends, this development is related to the disintegration of the church's moral teaching.

In the 1960s, an ambitious church tried to be a national force; when this effort failed, its leaders did not know what to do, and their pronouncements became less and less coherent; as a result, it was difficult to win new members to committed participation. The critical year was 1967. We have already seen that the 1967 General Convention discarded the church's tradition of sexual morality and began the process of Prayer Book revision; to join the church in this era was to enter a religious body in which everything was up for grabs. The General Convention also made a disastrous attempt to address some of America's most intractable social problems.

1967 was the year of the urban riot, with major disorders in Newark, Detroit, and other urban centers. Presiding Bishop John Hines set out to see for himself what was wrong in American cities, walking through slums in Detroit and Brooklyn, talking with residents as he went.¹³² At the General Convention in September, Hines called for a three-year program of assistance to community organizations trying to improve conditions in depressed urban areas.¹³³ The Convention responded by committing \$9 million to the General Convention Special Program (GCSP). Hines employed Leon Modeste, a social worker and an Episcopalian layperson, to make grants to organizations, most of which were

¹³² Sumner, The Episcopal Church's History, 46.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 47.

not part of the Episcopal Church.¹³⁴ The program quickly became extremely controversial. Some of the funded organizations appeared to embrace violence. In addition, the grants were made even if the diocesan bishop opposed them.¹³⁵ Because of these factors, and because Modeste hired many staff members who were “not often sympathetic to the traditional aims of the church...many clergy and laity perceived GCSP as something which was not really a part of the Episcopal Church.”¹³⁶ They were right. Church historian Prichard’s verdict is that the special program “moved too quickly, with too little popular support, and in the end had too few positive results.” The General Convention abandoned the program in 1973,¹³⁷ though not before great damage had been done. Parishes and dioceses enraged by the program cut back on their contributions to the national budget. One result was a 1970 decision by the Executive Council to lay off half of the employees of the Episcopal Church Center.¹³⁸ THE GCSP did not change America; it did undermine support for the church’s leadership, and it resulted in the destruction of the church’s national educational ministry.

¹³⁴ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 262.

¹³⁵ Sumner, The Episcopal Church’s History, 48.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹³⁷ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 263.

¹³⁸ Sumner, The Episcopal Church’s History, 53.

This is not the place for a full analysis of the General Convention's Special Program. What is relevant here is the attempt by the Episcopal Church's leaders to play a *national* role for which the church was poorly equipped. One could see Hines as an Episcopalian LBJ (Hines had been bishop of the diocese of Texas), and the GCSP as the Episcopal Church's Great Society initiative. But there were telling differences. Lyndon Johnson was President in his own right because of the largest electoral landslide in American history. He had the support of huge majorities in both houses of Congress. The federal government committed many *billions* of dollars to its social programs, and provided congressional oversight and bureaucratic control. John Hines was Presiding Bishop because the small constituency of his fellow bishops had elected him. The General Convention's deputies were elected, but they represented no more than three million Episcopalians, a small percentage of Americans. The Episcopal Church had only nine *million* dollars to spend. The decision to hand over the money to non-church organizations indicates, among other things, that the church lacked the capacity to spend and control money committed to this kind of national venture. In attempting a national initiative, church leaders bypassed diocesan and local organizations. In other words, they bypassed the church. It may no longer be true that all politics is local, but the main action in the Episcopal Church *is* local. The people, the money, the authority to act, are all concentrated at the diocesan and parish levels. There was no "national church" capable of taking on the problems of race and urban disorder.

The notion that the Episcopal Church should address national problems was not new in the 1960s. The interests of Muhlenberg and the later Social Gospel leaders in broad social ministries can be viewed as a sign of establishmentarian thinking – the Episcopal Church evidently believed that it must minister to large numbers of people outside of its own membership.¹³⁹ Such concern seems natural even today to people who live in the (still somewhat) Christian West. Long ago Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. When the Empire collapsed in the West, the Church became the only reliable social institution and assumed broad social responsibilities. In the chaos of late sixth-century Rome, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) reorganized the papacy's large landholdings to ensure food supplies for the population.¹⁴⁰ This sense of responsibility came naturally to Gregory, a member of one of Rome's prominent families who had been Prefect of Rome before embracing the monastic life.¹⁴¹ In Western Europe, the spirit of Gregory's social responsibility lasted until modern times. In pre-Revolutionary France, for

¹³⁹ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 198n.

¹⁴⁰ Margaret Deanesly, A History of the Medieval Church, 590-1500, 9th ed., (London: Methuen & Co., 1969; first published 1925), 21.

¹⁴¹ Gregory the Great is honored in the Episcopal Church calendar on March 12. This is surely appropriate – if any individual can be regarded as the founder of the Church of England, it is Gregory. In 597 Pope Gregory dispatched Augustine of Canterbury on the mission that introduced Roman Christianity into Britain. Moreover, Gregory's fusion of civic, social and religious roles provides an embodiment of the Church of England's idea of a unified religious, political and social order.

instance, the Catholic Church controlled most education, poor relief, and hospital services.¹⁴² The Church was able to meet these social responsibilities because it owned much of the land in France until the Revolution.¹⁴³

Episcopalians brought the establishmentarian conviction that the church is responsible for social welfare into the twentieth century. The church's Joint Commission on Relations of Capital and Labor recommended in 1904 that the Episcopal Church mediate industrial disputes.¹⁴⁴ The most widely used Christian education program in the Episcopal Church after World War I, the unofficial Christian Nurture Series, emphasized social service.¹⁴⁵ Many Episcopalians supported the Civil Rights Movement, some at great personal cost (an Episcopalian seminarian, Jonathan Daniels, was murdered in Alabama during the civil rights struggle in 1965).¹⁴⁶ But Episcopalians were not equipped to take on the toughest problems of a nation. Bewitched by the church's success in building "national" cathedrals, deceived by the "triumphant" advance of the denomination in the 1950s, the leaders of the Episcopal Church tried to correct

¹⁴² William Doyle, The Oxford History of the French Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36.

¹⁴³ When leaders of the Revolution decided to confiscate church-owned lands, they argued that the church had functioned as a trustee, administering those lands on behalf of the people. Doyle, Oxford History of the French Revolution, 132.

¹⁴⁴ Hood, Social Teachings in the Episcopal Church, 73.

¹⁴⁵ Prichard, A History of the Episcopal Church, 180.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

the nation's urban and racial problems with a modest spending program, even as they dismissed much of their own moral tradition as outmoded and irrelevant. What Gregory the Great could do in the sixth century for Rome, Episcopalians could not achieve for American cities in the twentieth. The Episcopal Church did not help the cities, but its ambition destroyed its own educational program, divided the church, and demoralized the leadership.

No subsequent General Convention has been quite as grandiose in its thinking as the 1967 General Convention. But the church's leaders have not abandoned the mentality behind the special program. Writing soon after he became Presiding, Edmond Lee Browning celebrated the Episcopal Church's achievements since 1945:

During these forty years, the Episcopal Church adopted a new Book of Common Prayer, a new hymnal, voted to welcome women into the fullness of ministry as deacons, priests and bishops. We've accepted the challenges and opportunities of the civil rights era, worked for peace with justice, and sought to further open our doors to all seeking to find a new life in America.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps. But Browning said nothing about the failure of the General Convention Special Program. He ignored the abandonment of Christian education at the national level. He passed over the muddled morality expressed in the 1967 General Convention Resolution and the 1979 Teaching Series. He referred only obliquely to the church's troubles when he credited his predecessor as Presiding Bishop with "a remarkable spirit of reconciliation" and the achievement of "unity

¹⁴⁷ Edmond Lee Browning, "Foreword," in Sumner, The Episcopal Church's History, ix.

when many social and ecclesial issues threatened to divide us.”¹⁴⁸ What church was Browning writing about?

A study of American politics contends that a “cultural civil war” broke out in the 1960s, and that it continued to shape the political process into the 1990s. There are three main areas of conflict: civil rights and race; the family and gender issues of feminism, children and sexuality; and America’s global role.¹⁴⁹ The same set of issues has created enormous problems for the Episcopal Church, too. We have seen how the church’s teaching on sexual matters has disintegrated. A national attempt to deal with urban and racial problems produced failure, division and demoralization. The church experienced conflict over foreign affairs, too.¹⁵⁰

It is not our purpose here to evaluate all of the disputes in the Episcopal Church, or to try to decide who is right and who is wrong on each of the specific contested issues. It has been our concern all through this study to discover why, in important areas, the church’s moral teaching has broken down. In the fifth chapter we saw that the church’s teaching on contraception disintegrated as Episcopalians moved away from an ideal of indissoluble marriage and the procreative/patriarchal family. In this chapter we have seen that leading

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ E. J. Dionne, Why Americans Hate Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 11.

¹⁵⁰ The record of the debate on resolutions concerning the Vietnam War takes up nine pages in the 1967 convention journal. Journal of the General Convention 1967, 509-518.

Episcopalians longed to forge a national church. In the acids of the 1960s, the church proved to be unequal to this ambition. Episcopalians have moved some distance away from the old model of family and gender relations, but have yet to abandon the national church idea. Until they do, they cannot resume constructive moral teaching.

III. The Ideology of Reconciliation

The national-church dream is deeply rooted in Anglicanism. The religious tradition from which the Episcopal Church developed took shape in the sixteenth-century in the nation- and state-building project of the Tudors. Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547) sought to harness the church to this undertaking; his more flexible daughter Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603) enjoyed considerable success. A liturgical genius provided the Book of Common Prayer for the church, and the learned Richard Hooker defended this national institution in On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. But even the Tudors found it hard to use religion to unify the nation. Puritans on one side and Roman Catholics on the other refused to abide by the terms of the “Elizabethan Settlement.”

In the long run, most European nation-states found that religion divides a nation more than it unites the people. Particularly since 1789, argues historian Hugh McLeod, western European nations have found religion to be primarily a force for division.¹⁵¹ Perhaps the most spectacular case is the French

Revolution. A demand by the Constituent Assembly in 1791 that the clergy swear an oath of loyalty led to a papal condemnation of the oath, a split in the French church, and a permanent polarization between French Catholics and anticlericals.¹⁵² McLeod finds much the same story elsewhere in Europe.

In the United States after 1787, the state disentangled itself somewhat from religious affairs by prohibiting the establishment of any national religion. This decision reflected the experience of religious diversity in the colonies and the memory of acute religious conflict in Europe. While religion has always played a crucial part in American politics, no church has ever succeeded in unifying the majority of Americans. In fact, some students of American religion argue that the basic story of American religion has always been pluralism, even if many sociologists, historians and theologians have a hard time seeing it that way.¹⁵³

After 1789, the Episcopal Church tried to be something which the Constitution does not allow, a national church, and something which America's diversity of race, class, ethnicity, religion and theology does not permit, an inclusive church. After the catastrophic failure of the 1960s, Episcopalians

¹⁵¹ Hugh McLeod, Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), v.

¹⁵² On the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the contested oath, see Doyle, Oxford History of the French Revolution, 139ff.

¹⁵³ Please refer to the discussion of R. Stephen Warner's "new paradigm for the sociological study of religion" in chapter two, above.

persisted in calling for an inclusive church and continued to use such favored words as unity and reconciliation. But the church “includes” fewer people than it did a generation ago, finds little “unity” in its life, and is unable to achieve “reconciliation” even among its own bishops.¹⁵⁴

In the relationships of church, state and society there are more possibilities than legal establishment or non-establishment. Where no church is legally established, one religion, or even a specific church, may play an important unifying role for the nation, or for key groups within it. Post-Revolutionary France exhibits one pattern: a no-longer-established Catholic Church continued to be an important force for social solidarity. Religious practice declined in many parts of France after the Revolution, but even people who did not fulfill their Easter duty or attend mass turned to the church at key moments in the life cycle: marriage, childbirth (baptism), and burial.¹⁵⁵ A “residual catholicism” was important in nineteenth century France because it was still the case “that nearly everybody made their ‘first communion’ in early adolescence, preceded by a period of instruction in the catechism.” First communion was not seen primarily as a spiritual event, but “for all French men and women, the obligatory rite of passage into adulthood,¹⁵⁶ like the acquisition of a driver’s license or graduation from high school in America today. The Catholic religion remained an important part of the

¹⁵⁴ On the lack of unity among the bishops, please see chapter three, above.

¹⁵⁵ Ralph Gibson, A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914 (New York: Routledge, 1989), 158-163.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 165, 166.

social cement of French society long after the Revolution broke the church's religious monopoly.¹⁵⁷

The United States was somewhat different. In the early nineteenth century, no single church dominated the life of the republic, but Protestant Christianity was a major source of both solidarity and social innovation. Historians sometimes attribute to the Second Great Awakening a major role in the organization of social life in the early republic.¹⁵⁸ Many of the reform movements in antebellum America were religiously inspired.¹⁵⁹ This was true also of the Progressive Movement in the early twentieth century. At the 1912 national convention of the Progressive Party, the delegates suddenly became a choir with a spontaneous rendition of the evangelical Protestant battle cry "Onward Christian Soldiers."¹⁶⁰ At mid-century the Civil Rights Movement drew inspiration and strength from America's black churches.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Already in 1787 the *ancien regime* extended limited toleration to Protestants for the highly principled reason that the royal government needed the help of Protestants in addressing a terrifying fiscal crisis. An early sign of trouble between the Revolution and the Church was the Assembly's refusal in April of 1790 to make Catholicism the official national religion.

¹⁵⁸ This is true of books which differ as greatly in topic, outlook and method as Lacy K. Ford, Jr., Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina UpCountry, 1850-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁹ See, for instance, Robert H. Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Religious Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁰ Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, Progressivism (Arlington Heights, IL: Harland Davidson, 1983), 23.

Over the course of American history, some churches have exercised more influence than others. The authors of American Mainline Religion contend that the “Colonial big three” – Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Congregationalists – have always “shared a strong Anglo-American identity and a culturally established status which gave them power and influence beyond their numbers. Both their theology and their social standing encouraged an ecumenical and public concern.” This pattern persisted in the 1980s.¹⁶² Other observers agree, but point out that Jews and Catholics can now gain places in America’s “power and cultural elites.”¹⁶³

The broadening of access to elite circles has affected institutions affiliated with the Episcopal Church, notably the distinguished boarding schools in the East. Schools like St. Paul’s (New Hampshire), Brooks (Massachusetts) and St. George’s (Rhode Island) have reduced religious requirements. Choate School (Connecticut), founded by a priest in 1890, has replaced daily chapel services with a single monthly service. Groton School (Massachusetts) is unusual: it still requires chapel attendance on five weekdays as well as Sundays (or an equivalent for Jewish and Roman Catholic students). Schools which once

¹⁶¹ Daniel J. B. Hofrenning, In Washington but not of it: The Prophetic Politics of Religious Lobbyists (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 2.

¹⁶² Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 86.

¹⁶³ James D. Davidson, Ralph E. Pyle, and David V. Reyes, “Persistence and Change in the Protestant Establishment, 1930-1992,” Social Forces 74 (September 1995), 157.

required courses in biblical studies now require courses in religion, but not necessarily in the Christian religion.¹⁶⁴

These changes reflect something more specific than a creeping secularization. At one time almost all students in these schools came from socially prominent Protestant families. Since the 1960s they have admitted growing numbers of Catholics and Jews, as well as students from less socially prominent families.¹⁶⁵ Schools which were once for boys only are now co-educational. Moreover, some twelve per cent of students in these schools now come from foreign lands.¹⁶⁶ As these changes have occurred, most of the schools have de-emphasized their Christian roots.¹⁶⁷

The distancing of many of these schools from the practice of Christian faith seems to be a result of their attempt to accommodate a more diverse student body. The schools have retained their traditional function of educating students for elite roles. In schools affiliated with the Episcopal Church,

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Oliver, "God and man at St. Grottlesex," National Review, December 31, 1997, 42-44.

¹⁶⁵ The present writer graduated from St. Paul's School in 1968. In our all-male class of about 100, there were three African Americans, one Chinese American, and many Roman Catholics. Many of these students came from wealthy and prestigious families, but not all. The father of one of the graduates drove a garbage truck.

¹⁶⁶ Oliver, "God and man at St. Grottlesex."

¹⁶⁷ The connections with the Episcopal Church at some of these schools were once very strong. At St. Paul's School in 1968, the headmaster and three faculty members were Episcopal clergymen. In the class of 1968, at least four of the graduates were the sons of clergymen, and two of the graduates became Episcopal priests themselves.

Episcopalianism has often been de-emphasized along the way. The kind of Christianity represented by the Episcopal Church is no longer a formative influence in elite culture. In these private schools, too, the Episcopal Church's ambition to be a unifying national church is in retreat. This church cannot unify even the nation's elites.

It is evident, then, that the Episcopal Church is not able to play the national role to which it has aspired for most of its history. We have seen many kinds of evidence. Instead of gaining in market share, the Episcopalians have been losing ground for three decades. Rather than strengthening their grip on positions in the power and cultural elites, they have been sharing more and more of them with Jews and Catholics since World War II. Many of their most exclusive private schools have become more inclusive of a diverse student body by reducing their institutional commitment to Christianity. The church's social engineering initiative of the 1960s was an unmitigated disaster. Under these circumstances, the national dream should have died, but it lives on, appearing under such slogans as "inclusiveness" and calls to "reconciliation."

We met that word "reconciliation" in Huntington and Hodges at the beginning of the century, and found it coming from Browning's pen near the end. The idea of reconciliation appears in an oft-quoted description of the church's mission in the Prayer Book Catechism: "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and with each other in Christ."¹⁶⁸ Can any decent or

¹⁶⁸ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 855.

reasonable person object to this? Yes, on both sociological and theological grounds.

In a number of articles written over a period of twenty years, sociologist Eugen Schoenfeld has explored the ideological functions of religious moral ideas. He is particularly interested in the contribution religion makes to social conflict -- both Marx and Durkheim are mistaken when they focus exclusively on the role religion can play in legitimating an existing pattern of social relations.¹⁶⁹ According to Schoenfeld, religious justifications can be offered for a variety of class interests, which means that religious beliefs "enhance and support class conflict."¹⁷⁰ For him, classes are not defined merely by criteria such as occupation or occupational prestige; they are "collectivities who share a common view of their social position -- that is, of their economic interests and social standing."¹⁷¹ Schoenfeld identifies four different classes, "ascending, descending, bourgeois, and...alienated," and a religious outlook corresponding to each of them.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Eugen Schoenfeld, "Militant and Submissive Religions: Class, Religion, and Ideology," British Journal of Sociology 43 (March 1992), 112.

¹⁷⁰ Eugen Schoenfeld, "Religion, Class Conflict, and Social Justice," in William H. Swatos, Jr., ed., A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 38.

¹⁷¹ Schoenfeld, "Religion, Class Conflict, and Social Justice," 40.

¹⁷² Schoenfeld, "Militant and Submissive Religions," 111.

American mainline religions are predominantly “the religions of the bourgeois and thus reflect the interests of this class.”¹⁷³ They acknowledge the supremacy of the state when they accept the separation of church and state. The state supports the economic interests of their members and avoids applying awkward biblical principles to economic life. Submission to the state also provides these churches with tax exemptions and political protection.¹⁷⁴ These churches emphasize love and charity. Such virtues have always been part of Christianity, but receive special emphasis in mainline churches because “both love and charity support the ideals of private property and the maintenance of the status quo.”¹⁷⁵ Such churches emphasize love, freedom and individualism more than social justice.¹⁷⁶ They also expect a certain style of behavior in church; bourgeois religion generally insists on “orderliness, the absence of emotional display and, above all else the display of rationality.”¹⁷⁷

Schoenfeld may have oversimplified a little – sometimes mainline church leaders criticize capitalism, for example, and his definitions of the four classes

¹⁷³ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 122, 123. Surely he is right about this. If it is difficult to envision Episcopalians behaving like David Koresh, it is even harder to imagine Janet Reno sending tanks against them and their children.

¹⁷⁵ Schoenfeld, “Militant and Submissive Religions,” 124.

¹⁷⁶ Schoenfeld, “Religion, Class Conflict, and Social Justice,” 44, 45.

¹⁷⁷ Schoenfeld, “Militant and Submissive Religions,” 127.

could be more precise. But he is basically correct in saying that the traditional ethical stance of mainline churches favors the social status quo and prefers love and service to confrontation and demands for justice. Reconciliation is an appealing term in the midst of conflict, particularly for those who seek to limit the amount of change in church or society. Persons who are determined to replace the previous teachings about marriage, family and sexuality often see calls to “reconciliation” as attempts to stop necessary change. An Episcopalian deeply engaged in the campaign to win acceptance for gays and lesbians in church life has written: “In Episcopalian circles, the defenders of the status quo stressed ‘reconciliation’ as the remedy to controversy. Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning has emphasized continually the need for reconciliation.”¹⁷⁸ She goes on to make this point:

Presiding Bishop Browning’s penchant for a so-called reconciliation (read: “compromise”) between the lesbian/gay community and their opponents avoids addressing the need for justice. The focus on being “good christians” and controlling and/or denying one’s needs ignores the wrongs committed against an entire group of people.¹⁷⁹

Given the deep division in the churches over issues of sexuality, calls to reconciliation may be little more than attempts to avoid conflict and decision.

¹⁷⁸ Anne Bathurst Gilson, Eros Breaking Free: Interpreting Sexual Theo-Ethics (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995), 49.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 55.

The Episcopal Church's interest in "reconciliation" can be questioned theologically, too. Take that phrase from the catechism: "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and with each other in Christ."¹⁸⁰ In this case, the catechism has assigned to the church a task which perhaps belongs to God and to Christ, rather than to the church. The epistle to the Colossians, for instance, celebrates the kingdom of God's beloved Son¹⁸¹ and says that "through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."¹⁸² God, acting through Christ, is the reconciler. Reconciliation requires, not endless church "dialogue" or even well placed welcoming signs, but the costly expenditure of blood on the cross.

No doubt a theological defense could be offered for the catechism. It could be said that the church continues the work begun in the ministry of Jesus, but such a move would have to overcome serious objections. Theologian John Macquarrie has written that "great care" is necessary when speaking of the church as an extension of the incarnation. According to Macquarrie, incarnation is a process which, in Christ reached consummation "at the point when Jesus utterly gave himself in the death of the cross and so manifested in the flesh the utter self-giving love of God." The church has not yet given itself up completely.

¹⁸⁰ Book of Common Prayer 1979, 855.

¹⁸¹ Colossians 1:14.

¹⁸² Colossians 1:20 New Revised Standard Version.

One may speak of it as an “ongoing incarnation,” but even then one ought not to “put it on the same level as Christ or to attribute to it an *exaggerated status or authority*. The Church is Christ’s body, but he is the head of the body. The incarnation which reached its completion in him is in process in the Church.”¹⁸³

An exaggerated status or authority: this is exactly what that Episcopal Church has long claimed for itself. It has wanted to be a national church for the American people, but has never been the kind of church that could fulfill that ambition. The American people are not interested, and the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, may not be interested either. As the pretensions of the church’s leaders have become less and less compatible with social reality, they have intensified their cries for unity, for reconciliation. It is the dream of a national church that they are trying to save.

The hope of unifying a nation that paralyzes the church in its moral teaching. For Christians, severe disagreement is nothing new. We find it in the New Testament,¹⁸⁴ we find it throughout the history of the church, and we find it in the Christian churches today. The Roman Catholic Church still disciplines its teachers and pastors. Protestants still create new churches when they believe

¹⁸³ John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology, 2d. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 389. Italics added.

¹⁸⁴ In one of his epistles St. Paul lambasted St. Peter: “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong” (Galatians 2:11, REB). Jesus himself was intolerant and mean-spirited, as he proved when he told his followers to write off any communities that would not listen to them: “As for those who will not receive you, when you leave their town shake the dust off your feet as a warning to them” (Luke 9:5 REB).

that existing ones have fallen irretrievably into error. But Episcopalians have a peculiar horror of schism. They might like to claim that they are motivated by a deep love for Christ and the Church. Our analysis suggests something far different. Since 1549, Anglicans have tried to unify a realm and edify a people. Even in the United States, this much too wild a dream has inspired many Episcopalians from the early republic to the late twentieth century. It is the deeply buried fear of a fracturing of the state that terrifies Episcopalians when they think of schism. Better to fudge all differences, better to abandon Christian education, authoritative teaching, and theological and moral clarity rather than to give up the delusion of inclusion.

The national church ideal has not fared well in Western Europe. It has never made sense in the United States. Although prominent Anglicans have defended the idea, it does not have so firm a foundation in the faith once delivered to the saints. The Old Testament frequently warns of the idolatry that follows when religious leaders make common cause with the political leadership; long before Episcopalians built cathedrals the inhabitants of Judah “erected shrines, sacred pillars, and sacred poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.”¹⁸⁵ The New Testament proclaims a kingdom not of this world.¹⁸⁶ Christians are baptized into Christ Jesus,¹⁸⁷ initiated in the name of the Trinity,

¹⁸⁵ I Kings 14:23, Revised English Bible.

¹⁸⁶ John 18:36; Matthew 4:8-10.

¹⁸⁷ Romans 6:3.

and not of any nation.¹⁸⁸ In the United States, with its ban on establishment of religion coupled with the incredible variety and volatility of religion, it is inconceivable that any church can, or should, unify the realm or provide edification for all the people.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem, people pointed out to him the great beauty of the Temple and the magnificence of the gifts offered there. His answer was, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."¹⁸⁹ It would be a blessing for Episcopalians if they heard these words and imagined them as directed toward their Washington cathedral. The Episcopal Church cannot teach morally until it gives up the national-church delusion.

¹⁸⁸ Matthew 28:10.

¹⁸⁹ Luke 21:6 New Revised Standard Version.

Afterword

The purpose of this study has been to discover why the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church on important topics has become incoherent. The explanation offered here is that parts of the church's teaching on sexual matters broke down because that teaching was based on a particular model of the relationships between marriage, family, church, society, state and nation. After intense resistance, the Episcopal Church adjusted piecemeal to some of the changes in marriage, family life and gender relations in American society, but did not come to a new understanding of marriage, family and sexuality. When leading Episcopalians continued to hope for a national role that could not conceivably be achieved, the desire for "inclusiveness" prevented the church from working out a coherent moral position.

Further than this the present investigation cannot go. However, it is important to take note of the limitations of the present study and to identify further research possibilities. It is also desirable to say something about possible futures for the Episcopal Church.

Limited Moral Breakdown

We have investigated homosexuality and contraception, and touched on other aspects of sexual ethics. With respect to homosexuality and contraception, it is fair to say that the church's moral teaching has disintegrated, and there are signs of deep confusion about marriage, sexuality, and the family. But it is

important not to exaggerate. Even in matters of marriage, family, and sexuality, the collapse of moral teaching is not complete. For example, most Episcopalians have accepted the church's decision to allow divorced persons to marry again, and the church has not treated this matter casually. The requirement that a bishop consent to such marriages is a sign that the church provides some oversight and guidance for its members, that it continues to insist that marriage never be "entered into unadvisedly or lightly."¹

For many Episcopalians, there are undoubtedly too many reminders of the church's patriarchal past. Even so, the church is irrevocably committed to at least formal equality between men and women. The marriage service assumes such equality, as does the openness of all leadership positions to men and women. There is still some opposition to the ordination of women, and there is greater opposition (at the parish level) to actually hiring women, but a return to the pre-1960s church is hardly imaginable.

Outside of sexual ethics, there is widespread agreement on many matters. In the early 1990s, the national treasurer of the Episcopal Church was found to have embezzled a significant sum of money. She went to prison, and church officials recovered as much money as they could from the treasurer and her family. "Thou shalt not steal" – Episcopalians do not reject that commandment. In truth, Episcopalians almost certainly recognize the authority of all of the Ten Commandments, although they might insist that additional guidance is needed

¹ "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage," Book of Common Prayer 1979, 423.

for the moral life. In very important areas of sexual morality the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church has collapsed, but a moral consensus remains on many other matters.

The Problem of Generalization

It is always fair to ask the author of a case study whether the research conducted allows for generalization. Is it possible to move from this study of the Episcopal Church to make statements about religion and morality in the United States, or at least about morality in the mainline churches? In some ways our findings are applicable outside of the Episcopal Church, but broad generalizations would only be possible on the basis of further research.

The thesis that confusion about sexual morality is due to a breakdown of a traditional conception of marriage and family life is surely applicable at least to other mainline churches. In chapter two we learned that America's churches take different positions in the "cultural war" about gender, marriage and the family. The authors of American Mainline Religion found that Episcopalians view "women's rights" in much the same way as do Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and some others (Northern Baptists, Roman Catholics, Unitarian-Universalists, and Jews).² In the 1990s a Presbyterian report disparaged such traditional norms as heterosexuality and sexual exclusivity in marriage. Although the

² Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 204-208. Please refer to the discussion of this book in chapter two above.

Presbyterian Church rejected this report, we saw that Presbyterians are not yet united on the issue of homosexuality.³ It is likely that some of the confusion in other mainline churches is due to a breakdown of the certainty that one marriage-and-family model fits all people all the time.

But it is much less easy to generalize about the second part of our thesis, the claim that the moral teaching of the Episcopal Church is paralyzed because of the church's refusal to abandon the impossible dream of unifying the nation. Do other churches think this way? The Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches also have sixteenth-century roots, which means that they emerged in a time when church and state were frequently bound together. In Massachusetts, of course, Puritans initially claimed a religious monopoly, and the Commonwealth disestablished religion only in the 1830s; establishmentarian ideas can live on long after the fact of legal disestablishment. Lutherans also have their roots in the sixteenth century, and there have been established Lutheran churches in Scandinavia and parts of Germany, although Lutherans have not generally maintained the establishmentarian tradition in the United States.⁴ Methodists appear on the scene in the eighteenth century, but they emerged from the established Church of England, a church which founder John Wesley never

³ Please refer to the discussion in chapter three, above.

⁴ A Lutheran scholar has written that Lutherans "have not been part of the great Protestant mainline that has shaped America; until recently they remained in rather isolated ethnic enclaves." Robert Benne, Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1988), 20.

repudiated. It is entirely possible, then, that these churches (and perhaps others) have tried to unify and lead a nation, and that this effort has undermined their moral teaching. But it would take considerable additional research to find out.

Another fruitful line of inquiry would be to study the Anglican church in other lands, especially Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It would be valuable to know how Anglican churches in these lands have worked out their relations to the state and how they have dealt with religious pluralism, social change, and moral teaching on sexuality, marriage and procreation. Studies of French Catholicism (in Quebec as well as France) could be illuminating, as would studies of Germany, where Protestants and Catholics have tried to influence social policy under imperial, liberal, and communist regimes.⁵

The Future of the Episcopal Church

This has been an historical investigation. It has not been our purpose to predict the future or to argue for particular principles or policies. It is reasonable, however, to outline some of the possible futures for the Episcopal Church, and to give some idea of this writer's view as to what ought to happen.

The Episcopal Church has adjusted to major changes in marriage, family life and gender relations, but it has not foresworn its national-church ambitions. Unless the church does this, it cannot define itself distinctively enough to attract

⁵ See, for example, Cornelia Usborne, The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

more than a handful of new members. The national-church dream is so deeply rooted in Anglicanism that Episcopalians may not be able to break free of it. In that case, we can anticipate an ongoing decline in market share and a continuing incoherence in moral teaching.

Episcopalians could acknowledge more frankly than they usually do that theirs is a specialized church occupying a particular niche in America's religious scene. William Reed Huntington foresaw this possibility:

If our whole ambition as Anglicans in America be to continue a small, but eminently respectable body of Christians, and to offer a refuge to people of refinement and sensibility, who are shocked by the irreverences they are apt to encounter elsewhere; in a word, if we care to be only a countercheck and not a force in society; then let us say as much in plain terms, and frankly renounce any and all claim to Catholicity. We have only, in such a case, to wrap the robe of our dignity about us, and walk quietly along in a seclusion no one will take much trouble to disturb.⁶

This may be the role the Episcopal Church actually plays in the lives of many of its members, if not in the minds of its ambitious leaders.

Then there is the possibility of a radical renewal of the church. If this happens, it would probably take place on the basis of a deeper appreciation of the church's changing view of Christian initiation. When it embraced adult baptism as the official norm, the church opened the way to a future in which marriage and the family need not be central to the church's identity. The church

⁶ William Reed Huntington, The Church-Idea: An Essay towards Unity (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1928), 169.

could ask what it means for an adult in the modern world to make the commitment implied in undergoing baptism, and ask what that commitment might mean for sexual ethics. There is no guarantee that the result would resemble either traditional morality or the muddle of today.

This writer prefers the third path. He rejects the national-church dream as a sociological impossibility and a theological sin -- idolatry. He considers that to embrace the second option is to become a religious club, not a church capable of forming the mind of its members. The third way is radically uncertain, but that is all right. This author agrees with Jurgen Moltmann who, writing against the background of church and society in Germany, declared, "I do not believe that we can cling any longer to the ancient concept of the *Volkskirche*, the 'established' church, which is thought to include everyone."⁷ What is wrong for Christians in Germany is not right for Episcopalians in America, either. Moltmann sees that the church in the modern world does not struggle simply because of social and cultural changes it cannot control. The deepest source of unrest is Christ and the power of the Spirit: "What is required today is not adroit adaptation to changed social conditions, but the inner renewal of the church by the spirit of Christ, the

⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; first published 1975), xiv.

power of the coming kingdom.”⁸ It is not necessary for traditional ethics or the Episcopal Church to survive if what takes their place is the Kingdom of God.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

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Appendix I

Statement on Human Sexuality (The "Kuala Lumpur Statement") Province of South East Asia

1. God's glory and loving purposes have been revealed in the creation of humankind (Rom. 1:18; Gen. 1:26-27). Among the multiplicity of his gifts we are blessed with our sexuality.
2. Since the Fall (Gen. 3) life has been impaired and God's purposes spoiled. Our fallen state has affected every sphere of our being, which includes our sexuality. Sexual deviation has existed in every time and in most cultures. Jesus' teaching about lust in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:27-30) makes it clear that sexual sin is a real danger and temptation to us all.
3. It is, therefore, with an awareness of our own vulnerability to sexual sin that we express our profound concern about recent developments relating to church discipline and moral teaching in some provinces in the North – specifically, the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions.
4. While acknowledging the complexities of our sexual nature and the strong drives it places within us, we are quite clear about God's will in this area which is expressed in the Bible.
5. The scriptures bear witness to God's will regarding human sexuality, which is to be expressed only with the life-long union of a man and a woman in (holy) matrimony.
6. The holy scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is sin. We are convinced that this includes homosexual practices between men and women, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage.
7. We believe that the clear and unambiguous teaching of the holy scriptures about human sexuality is of great help to Christians as it provides clear boundaries.
8. We find no conflict between clear biblical teaching and sensitive pastoral care. Repentance precedes forgiveness and is part of the healing process. To heal spiritual wounds in God's name, we need his wisdom and truth. We see this in the ministry of Jesus. For example his response to the adulterous woman "...neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more" (John 8.11).
9. We encourage the church to care for all those who are trapped in their sexual brokenness and to become the channel of Christ's compassion and love toward them. We wish to stand alongside and welcome them into a process of being whole and restored within our communities of faith. We would also affirm and resource those who exercise a pastoral ministry in this area.
10. We are deeply concerned that the setting aside of biblical teaching in such actions as the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions calls into question the authority of the holy scriptures. This is totally unacceptable to us.
11. This leads us to express concern about mutual accountability and interdependence within our Anglican Communion. As provinces and dioceses we need to learn how to seek each other's counsel and wisdom in a spirit of true unity, and to reach a common mind before embarking on radical changes to church discipline and moral teaching.
12. We live in a global village and must be more aware that the way we act in one part of the world can radically affect the mission and witness of the church in another.

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Appendix II

Lincoln, Nebraska excommunication statement

From the "Southern Nebraska Register" dated March 22, 1996

EXTRA SYNODAL LEGISLATION

All Catholics in and of the Diocese of Lincoln are forbidden to be members of the organizations and groups listed below. Membership in these organizations or groups is always perilous to the Catholic Faith and most often is totally incompatible with the Catholic Faith.

Planned Parenthood
Society of Saint Pius X
(Lefebvre Group)
Hemlock Society
Call to Action
Call to Action Nebraska
Saint Michael the Archangel Chapel
Freemasons
Job's Daughters
DeMolay
Eastern Star
Rainbow Girls
Catholics for a Free Choice

Any Catholics in and of the Diocese of Lincoln who attain or retain membership in any of the above listed organizations or groups after April 15, 1996, are by that very fact (*ipso-facto-latae sententiae*) under interdict and are absolutely forbidden to receive Holy Communion. Contumacious persistence in such membership for one month following the interdict on part of any such Catholics will by that very fact (*ipso-facto-latae sententiae*) cause them to be excommunicated. Absolution from these ecclesial censures is "reserved to the Bishop." This notice, when published in the Southern Nebraska Register, is a formal canonical warning.

By mandate of the Most Reverend Bishop of Lincoln.

(signed) Reverend Monsignor Timothy Thorburn Chancellor March 19, 1996

Transmitted: 3/27/96 3:57 PM EDT (Lincoln)

Obtained from National Catholic Reporter website, June 23, 1997.

Appendix III

The Secularization of the Prodigal Son

In her book All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism, sociologist Marsha Witten studies sermons based on Luke 15:1-32, and claims that this passage is “a text with no obvious interpretation.”³ This is simply wrong, as even a brief review of contemporary study Bibles and biblical commentaries will show. Many conservative Protestant churches use the New International Version (NIV), a recent translation of the Scriptures. The NIV Study Bible introduces Luke 15:11-32 with the title “The Parable of the Lost Son.” A note on verse 31 points to the love the father shows for both his sons, and suggests that this “parable might better be called the parable of ‘The Father’s Love’ rather than ‘The Prodigal Son.’” The New Oxford Annotated Bible,⁴ widely used in mainline Protestant churches, identifies the passage as the story of “[t]he lost son,” and a note on verse 24 reads, “The parable illustrates God’s acceptance of those who rebel and return.” Another note on verses 25-32 declares that “Jesus’ aim was to portray the difference between God’s loving forgiveness and the self-centered complacency that not only denies love but cannot understand it.”

The title provided for the story in The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version is “The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother.” In the New Jerusalem Bible, a product of Roman Catholic scholarship, the passage receives this ungainly heading: “The lost son (the ‘prodigal’) and the dutiful son.” A note on the passage observes that some parables are unique to Luke’s gospel; they “concern individuals and teach individual morality, often featuring an anti-hero.” Another note provides this interpretation of the passage as a whole: “To the forgiving attitude of the father, symbol of God’s forgiveness, is opposed in the elder son the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes who provide themselves on being ‘upright’ because they do not break any of the commandments of the Law.”

³ Marsha G. Witten, All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 13.

⁴ This study Bible is based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

How does the parable appear to biblical scholars? I. Howard Marshall, a Protestant, entitles the passage "The Lost Son." He notes that various interpretations are possible, yet remarks, "In its present context it is meant to illustrate the pardoning love of God that cares for the outcasts; the sinful son is welcomed home by the father and his former status is restored."⁵ Joseph Fitzmyer, a Roman Catholic commentator, entitles the section "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." Concerning the meaning of the parable, Fitzmyer writes: "As it now stands in the Lucan Gospel, the parable presents the loving father as a symbol of God himself. His ready, unconditioned, and unstinted love and mercy are manifested not only toward the repentant sinner (the younger son) but toward the uncomprehending critic of such a human being."⁶

Witten uses the sermons she studied to suggest that much of Protestantism has gone soft on sin, and that it concentrates on personal concerns as part of an accommodation with America's secular culture. But the biblical passage suggests that it is *God* who is quick to say all is forgiven. Moreover, the parable enters on an incident in the life of the family. It does not take a consumerist culture or a co-conspirator of a preacher to suggest that the passage could be relevant to family issues as well as to great matters of faith and ecclesiology. When a preacher hunts for Biblical references to support a pre-conceived thesis, the result is sometimes described

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 604.

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke, X-XXIV (Doubleday: New York, 1985), 1082, 1085.

as "a sermon in search of a text." In this book we may have a sociological thesis in search of a text.

Appendix IV

Secularizing the Message of American Protestantism: Issues in the Interpretation of Sermons

Marsha Witten's study of American Protestantism is based almost entirely on sermons.¹ There are serious methodological defects in her investigation—flaws so grave that her thesis cannot be supported by the research she has done. The problem is not in the use of sermons *per se*. Witten points out, correctly, that the sermon remains at the heart of Protestant worship. Pastors work hard at their preaching; most give careful thought to what they will say. Even though sermons are monologues, the content of a homily may reveal something about the audience, for most speakers are "sensitive to the pulse of the congregation."²

Other scholars have relied on comparable documents, and have made similar assumptions. An important study of Christian social teaching considered addresses given at Baptist conventions and Methodist conferences.³ Peter J. Paris sought to discover the principal social teachings of African American denominations by examining presidential addresses given at their annual gatherings. He reasoned that

basic communal values are legitimated and preserved by a community's religious institutions Thus, a presidential or episcopal address is always, in large part, ritualistic in both form and substance. That is to say, such presentations represent the community's most basic values in a way that is readily identifiable

¹ Marsha G. Witten, All Is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Peter J. Paris, The Social Teaching of the Black Churches (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

to that community The task of the speaker is to give new life to that tradition without changing its substance.⁴

In other words, speakers gave the audience what it expected to hear, so one may use the addresses as an indication of the leading ideas of the group. This claim is quite similar to Witten's assertion that sermons tell us about the mind of the congregation because preachers are usually sensitive to the congregation.

Significant works in American religious history, notably on the colonial period, have often relied primarily on sermons -- but some of this research has attempted to discover what the *congregation* thought and did, as well as what the preacher said. One inventive study explored the possibility of a gap between elite and popular culture (or between preacher and people) by evaluating some fifty-one statements of faith given by persons seeking church membership in Cambridge between 1638 and 1645. The investigator found that "these laymen displayed a remarkable knowledge of [their pastor's] theology of conversion. They made 1,200 references to salvific doctrines," mentioning not only basic ideas like conviction, but obscure points as well.⁵ But another scholar's examination of the same source revealed a more complex picture. Members of the congregation did not merely accept what their pastor said; "the servants, farmers, and housewives who filled [Thomas] Shepherd's congregation were in part the makers of their faith." What they said in their confessions shows that they were evangelical Calvinists, but in addition to Shepherd's preaching, they also emphasized some of their own concerns. "Repeatedly the people speak of their intense concern for family safety and well-being." They wanted to protect their families, and thought that church ordinances would help them do this. "This confusion of family, church covenant, baptism, and protection did not originate with the ministers, though they would more or less acknowledge its legitimacy. Ordinary people imposed

⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵ George Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638-1645," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, Third Series (January 1984), 39.

their own needs on the church." Official and popular religions were somewhat different, but not in fundamental opposition.⁶

These studies of New England suggest, first of all, that a study of sermons should be supplemented by an effort to discover what the audience did with the message presented to it. Witten has not attempted that, nor has she considered other forms of religious language.⁷ Second, the early New Englanders were deeply concerned about family matters; it is not just with "modernization" that such preoccupations shape religious belief and practice. Witten assumes that the concern with personal and family issues she studied was evidence of recent secularization, yet the same concerns are found centuries earlier.

Studies based on sermons can be shaped more than scholars realize by their initial selection of materials. Here again the New England example is instructive: Harry S. Stout made an important contribution when he turned away from published sermons, usually prepared for special occasions, and perused the kinds of sermons given week in and week out in all sorts of seasons. Stout observed that most previous studies of colonial preaching assumed published sermons were the best source, but he pointed out that nearly all published sermons began life as "occasional" sermons (perhaps for an election), and were revised for publication. Sermons like this occurred perhaps ten times in a year. It is far from certain that New Englanders ever read these published homilies, but virtually all New Englanders heard the regular Sunday sermons. "The most accurate guide we therefore have to what people actually heard are the handwritten sermon notes that ministers carried with them into the pulpit."⁸

⁶ David D. Hall, "Toward a History of Popular Religion in Early New England," William and Mary Quarterly 41, Third Series (January 1984), 52, 53, 54.

⁷ One reviewer of the book pointed out that sermons are indeed important in Protestant worship, yet "other elements of services, such as hymns, may use religious language differently and may create a more mixed experience for worshippers." Susan Coutin, Review of All is Forgiven, in Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 543 (January 1996), 193.

⁸ Harry S. Stout, The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 4, 5.

Witten's choice of materials largely determined what she would find. Witten examined just forty-seven sermons, all of them based on a single text, Luke 15:11-32. Although she assures us that the text has no obvious interpretation,⁹ a cursory review of contemporary Biblical scholarship shows that she is mistaken.¹⁰ Whether one consults Catholics or Protestants, theological liberals or conservatives, there is agreement: this passage in Luke's Gospel means there's a wideness in God's mercy, something Witten fails to see. The text *does* have an obvious interpretation.

Even if the text itself has an obvious meaning, it may be important to consider it in relation to other Biblical passages.¹¹ Such texts may bring out dimensions of meaning one could miss when reading a single passage by itself. Many Protestant churches use a lectionary, a cycle of readings appointed for particular Sundays in the church year. The pairing of texts in the lectionary often provides important clues for their interpretation. In the Episcopal Church, for example, Luke 15:11-32 is assigned to a Sunday in Lent, a placement which suggests that the passage should be interpreted in terms of repentance and rebirth as well as amazing grace. Moreover, the Episcopalian lectionary pairs the Gospel text with a reading from the Old Testament (Joshua 5:9-12) which speaks of Israel's first Passover in the new land, a time when the manna of the wilderness years is no longer necessary. This liturgical framing suggests that

⁹ Witten, All is Forgiven, 13.

¹⁰ Please see Appendix III, "The Secularization of the Prodigal Son."

¹¹ According to official Roman Catholic teaching, any passage of Scripture should be interpreted in the light of other parts of the Bible: "*Be especially attentive to 'the content and unity of the whole Scripture.'* Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God's plan." Catechism of the Catholic Church §113, italics in original. Theologian Stanley Hauerwas also insists that passages of Scripture must be understood in terms of the Scriptural canon—and in terms of the ongoing life of the Church. Commenting on the exposition of Paul's letters, Hauerwas says that the inclusion of these letters in the canon changes the interpretation of them: "they are no longer Paul's letters but rather the Church's Scripture." Other Biblical texts are relevant to interpreting them, as are the contributions of later Christian commentators. Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 20.

the story has implications for the formation of a people as well as for the forgiveness of wayward individuals. Witten decided not to consider sermons from mainline denominations other than the Presbyterian Church, even though she noted that “it is possible that, all other things being equal, a liturgical orientation could provide a relative degree of protection against secular influences.”¹² Quite an admission! Liturgical calendars and lectionaries shape the use of religious language in many churches, and a sound study of preaching needs to consider them. Witten declined to expand her investigation in a direction which could have threatened her thesis.

We have already noted that the passage Witten selected, taken by itself, emphasizes forgiveness and focuses on individuals. She wants to say that this is true generally of contemporary Protestantism. However, she simply “ignores significant countertrends, such as the social gospel and religious activists’ interpretations of the relationship between sacred and secular.”¹³ Nor does she consider programs of adult education which treat Scripture more thoroughly than any single sermon can. For example, a popular program in many mainline churches is Kerygma, which includes a thirty-session introduction to the Bible, and a separate thirty-session thematic study of the Scriptures. It would be instructive to find out how such programs treat the great theological themes of judgment and grace. Witten’s research design is so shaped that such possibilities of interpretation are excluded from the outset. Witten uses the sermons she studied to suggest that much of contemporary Protestantism is soft on sin, and that it emphasizes personal concerns as part of an accommodation with America’s secular culture. But this brief review shows plainly enough that it is the Biblical passage itself which suggests that

¹² Witten, All is Forgiven, 155n.

¹³ Coutin, “Review of All Is Forgiven, 193.

God is quick to say that all is forgiven. It is Witten's methods, and not the sermons she read, that imported a secular message into American Protestantism.

Appendix V

Worship and Ethics

Christian ethics is rooted in worship, in assigning appropriate worth to God. The basic task of the church is to be a worshipping community. Ethical reflection must begin with this reality. When it does not, the church loses its way, and gives up the chance to offer a distinctive witness in the world.

One theologian and ethicist who recognizes this starting point in worship is Stanley Hauerwas, who has written, "When everything is said and done, everything the church says and does is done because God matters."¹ The characteristic that "makes Christians Christian is our worship of God."² For Hauerwas, of course, "worship" is not simply attendance at a Sunday morning observance in a special building. The church is called "to be a community capable of hearing the story of God we find in the scripture and living in a manner that is faithful to that story."³ Hauerwas organizes an entire course in ethics around the actions included in the corporate worship of God.⁴

Episcopalian Harmon Smith, who taught with Hauerwas at Duke University, also grounds ethics in worship. A recent book by Smith has the revealing subtitle "Liturgy and the Moral Life." According to Smith, "Liturgy both reflects and *teaches us* the kind of people we are and are meant to be. It is both catechesis and celebration." To separate the two is to undermine the liturgy and the church, indeed, to practice hypocrisy, "which means appearing to be what you are

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 153-154.

³ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 1.

⁴ See *In Good Company*, 153-168.

not.”⁵ Another Episcopalian offers a book entitled Sacramental Ethics. For Timothy Sedgwick, “Christian ethics must begin with God.”⁶ As he develops the implications of this statement, Sedgwick begins to speak of worship, and remarks that “worship constitutes and establishes a way of life.” Christian ethics is much more than the consideration of moral quandaries; it is “more broadly part of the task of the cure of souls, sustaining and nurturing individuals and the community in their faith.”⁷

Church historian John Booty writes that Anglican identity “is formed and reformed as people called Episcopalians gather to worship God through the use of the Book of Common Prayer.”⁸ The Prayer Book does not merely speak of salvation but continually rehearses the story of salvation “in reading from scripture, in creeds, in preaching, in canticles and prayers, and in actions, as in the drama of the eucharistic liturgy.” The Prayer Book is characterized by a basic “rhythm of penitence and praise,”⁹ making people simultaneously aware of their sin¹⁰ and grateful for the goodness of God. As originally constructed, the Book of Common Prayer fused liturgical actions, social ethics, and personal relationships, as Cranmer envisioned “members of a parish

⁵ Harmon L. Smith, Where Two or Three are Gathered: Liturgy and the Moral Life (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1995), x, italics added.

⁶ Timothy F. Sedgwick, Sacramental Ethics: Paschal Identity and the Christian Life (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸ John Booty, “Anglican Identity: What is this Book of Common Prayer?”, Sewanee Theological Review 40 (1997), 137.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰ Stanley Hauerwas contends that “our sin is so fundamental that we must be taught to recognize it.” The Peaceable Kingdom, 30. The Prayer Book’s rhythm of contrition and praise is a powerful teacher.

church (the inhabitants of a given geographical area) coming together and recognizing they had wronged their neighbors and thus dishonored God."¹¹

Orthodox writers emphasize that liturgy changes things, that it makes of gathered individuals something they could not have been on their own. The original meaning of the Greek term *leitourgia* is "an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals."¹² The liturgy begins as Christians leave their own homes; it begins "as a real separation from the world."¹³ In the Eucharist, people realize the vocation for which they were created: "Man is a sacrificial being, because he finds his life in love, and love is sacrificial."¹⁴ Orthodox writers recognize that Christians have moral

¹¹ Booty, "Anglican Identity: What is this Book of Common Prayer?", 140.

¹² Alexander Schmemmann, For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy (NP: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

obligations in the world, but the church does not “confine her own truth and morality within the limits of social behavior and the conventional obligations which govern it.”¹⁵ It is not personal belief or conviction that makes a person a Christian, but only “the fact that he participates organically in the life-giving body of Christ, being grafted into the liturgical unity of the Church.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Christos Yannaras, The Freedom of Morality, trans. Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Appendix VI

Two New Prayers in the 1892 Book of Common Prayer

*A Prayer for the President of the United States and all in civil authority*¹

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite; have mercy upon this whole Land; and so rule the hearts of thy servants THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, *The Governor of this State*, and all others in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things seek thy honour and glory; and that we and all the People, duly considering whose authority they bear, may faithfully and obediently honour them, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. *Amen*

*A Prayer for Unity*²

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

¹ Cited from Paul V. Marshall, Prayer Book Parallels: The public services of the Church arranged for comparative study, Volume One (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989), 182.

² Cited from E. Clowes Chorley, The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 97.

Appendix VII

Liberal Activists in Protestant Churches

A number of studies have examined liberal politics and activist clergy. Harold Quigley surveyed ordained ministers in California in 1968 and found that “prophetic leadership was strong even among those clergymen who were most directly exposed to the constraints of a predominantly conservative Protestant laity”.¹ By the time the book was published in 1974, support for social action had decreased significantly in the churches, but liberal church leaders remained committed to it.² What motivates members of the clergy to push for social action against the views of church members? Quigley argues that science and historical scholarship have made it hard for modern people “to believe in the literal existence of an otherworldly realm,” with the result that much of traditional Protestantism doesn’t seem very significant. Religious institutions like churches “seem to have little claim to authority under such circumstances.” Modernist theology has compensated by focusing on human relationships, but this solution has proved troublesome, because it is no longer clear exactly why religious leaders and institutions are necessary.³ Quigley proposes that “religious modernism is most compatible with the prophetic, socially active tradition within Christianity. *Its perspective is highly secular*, as opposed to the otherworldly emphasis on salvation found in traditional Protestantism”.⁴ It seems, then, that the clergy in a modern society are not sure what to do, and some of them resolve this doubt by becoming involved in social action with a heavily secular agenda.

¹ Harold Quigley, Activism Among Protestant Ministers (New York: John Wiley, 1974), 1.

² Ibid., 2-3

³ Ibid., 38.

⁴ Ibid., 40. Italics added.

A different, and sympathetic, view of clergy activism is offered by James R. Wood, who argues that leaders of the Episcopal Church (and other denominations) entered the civil rights struggle because they believed that the policies they advocated were grounded in the fundamental values of the church. They realized that their actions could hurt their own organizations in terms of membership and financial strength.⁵ Wood, arguing against Robert Michel's thesis that organization inevitably produces oligarchy and selfish action by the leaders,⁶ says that "[p]olicies at variance with members' desires do not inevitably arise from leaders' vested interests, and majority will is not the only basis for legitimate leadership."⁷ Indeed, "policies out of line with members' desires may result from leaders' attempts to carry out their responsibility to direct the group in the implementation of its values."⁸ Wood offers a perspective quite different from Robert Bork's.⁹ If church leaders and church members disagree, it could be the *membership* that is more out of touch with the fundamental values of the religious tradition.

A sociological study conducted in Winnipeg found that doctrinal belief had a major impact on how members of the clergy perceived social issues.¹⁰ According to this investigation, "Absolutist clergymen with a doctrinally conservative other-worldly focus were reluctant to change society: they supported social control, personal morality, and considerable use of force by the

⁵ James R. Wood, Leadership in Voluntary Organizations: The Controversy over Social Action in Protestant Churches (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981), 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹ Robert H. Bork, Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. Bork's views are considered in chapter one.

¹⁰ Leo Driedger, "Doctrinal Belief: A Major Factor in the Differential Perception of Social Issues," Sociological Quarterly 15 (Winter 1974): 66-80.

power elite. Evolutionist, this-world clergymen who were more doctrinally liberal were open to change and focused more on issues such as civil liberty, minority rights, and welfare support.”¹¹ The clergy most supportive of social liberty and least oriented to social control were found in the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada.¹² The United Church of Canada, the product of a merger in 1925, includes Methodists, Congregationalists, and many Presbyterians; the Anglican Church, like the Episcopal Church, is part of the Anglican Communion. These two churches, then, correspond to America’s more liberal mainline denominations.¹³ A few years earlier, another Canadian study of Baptist ministers in Ontario and Quebec found significant relationships between a preference for the Progressive Conservative Party and both theological and political conservatism.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 66.

¹² Ibid., 76.

¹³ On Canadian churches, see Roger O’Toole, “Religion in Canada: Its Development and Contemporary Situation,” Social Compass 43:1 (1996): 119-134.

¹⁴ Fred Schindeler and David Hoffman, “Theological and Political Conservatism: Variations in Attitudes Among Clergymen of One Denomination,” Canadian Journal of Political Science 1 (December 1968): 429-441.

Appendix VIII

Tell it to the Marines: A Front in the Culture War

Sociologist James Davison Hunter holds that a cultural war now divides America over moral questions because Americans have incompatible views of moral authority.¹ A fascinating application of the notion of a “culture war” may be found in an exchange of views in the Marine Corps Gazette in 1994 and 1995. A trio of authors wrote that “our traditional, Western, Judeo-Christian culture is collapsing,” but not because it failed. Instead, “we have thrown away the values, morals, and standards that define traditional Western culture. Dominant in the elite, especially in the universities, the media, and the entertainment industry (now the most powerful force in our culture and a source of endless degradation), the cultural radicals have successfully pushed an agenda of moral relativism, militant secularism, and sexual and social ‘liberation.’”² Another article echoed some of these concerns.³ But another contributor to the magazine dismissed such talk: “It is simply not true that in the mid-1960s Americans threw away their values, and that cultural radicals are now steering us to the point where our national identity will crumble and the Nation will come apart at the seams.”⁴

More recently an article in the Atlantic Monthly described a growing chasm between the experience of active-duty military personnel and the rest of American society. “There is

¹ James Davison Hunter, Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America. New York: Basic Books, 1991. For a discussion of this book, please refer to Chapter Two.

² William S. Lind, John F. Schmitt, and Gary I. Wilson, “Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look,” Marine Corps Gazette 78 (December 1994), 37.

³ Michael D. Wily, “Fourth Generation Warfare: What does it mean to every Marine?” Marine Corps Gazette 79 (March 1995), 55-58.

⁴ Mark H. Bean, “Fourth Generation Warfare?” Marine Corps Gazette 79 (March 1995), 53.

widespread agreement that over the past few decades American society has become more fragmented, more individualistic, and less disciplined, with institutions such as church, family, and school wielding less influence. Whatever the implications of these changes, they put society at odds with the class military values of sacrifice, unity, self-discipline, and considering the interests of the group before those of the individual.”⁵

Perhaps the traditions of America’s armed forces lean more to the orthodox than to the progressivist side. At any rate, the Marines are concerned enough about the moral condition of recent recruits that they have added a new “core values package” to basic training.⁶ Individual Marines are thinking through some of the most complex debates in ethics, and one Marine has proposed that virtue ethics are more suitable to military conditions than the more familiar alternatives of deontological and teleological ethics.⁷

⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, “The Widening Gap Between the Military and Society,” Atlantic Monthly 280, July 1997, 74.

⁶ Daniel E. Liddell, “Instilling Marine Values,” Marine Corps Gazette 80 (September 1996), 54.

⁷ Reed R. Bonadonna, “Above and Beyond: Marines and Virtue Ethics,” Marine Corps Gazette 78 (January 1994), 18-20.

Appendix IX

Contraception and Catholics in Quebec

A “quiet revolution” significantly transformed Catholicism in Quebec during the 1960s, according to Roger O’Toole: “Occurring alongside the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the political modernization and transformation of this period sounded the death knell of the old, omnipresent ecclesiastical order.”¹ The state carries out functions once performed by the church. The church is “beset by a perpetual vocational recruitment crisis.” The participation and commitment of members has drastically declined – because of indifference rather than hostility. In the 1960s, 90 per cent of Quebec’s Catholics regularly attended church, but in the 1990s only 25 to 30 per cent do so. Nevertheless, some 86 per cent of Quebecois consider themselves to be Roman Catholics, although they may disagree with official teaching on such issues as premarital sex, birth control, and legal abortion.²

O’Toole mentions the Second Vatican Council and touches on contraception, two factors referred to by Andrew Greeley³ and Douglas Koller⁴ in studies of the United States. In addition, O’Toole refers to political modernization and social transformation. What he sees in Quebec may also be part of a transformation of the culture of French Catholicism in modernizing areas. Yves Lambert has examined religious change in a parish in Brittany where marked social change has occurred since World War II. Religious practice has declined dramatically, vocations have vanished, and there is evidence of both a crisis of belief and of the emergence of a new kind of

¹ Roger O’Toole, “Religion in Canada: Its Development and Contemporary Situation,” Social Compass 43 (1996), 122).

² *Ibid.*, 123.

³ Andrew Greeley, Religious Change in America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁴ Douglas B. Koller, “Belief in the Right to Question Church Teachings, 1958-1971,” Social Forces 58 (September 1979): 290-304.

Catholicism. Lambert compares the transformation to changes in other rural societies, including Quebec's, which suddenly enter the modern world.⁵ At the end of the twentieth century, the vitally "important practices in the church now are those relating to local life, prayers of intercession, and family occasions."⁶ The church is full only for services marking major rites of passage, especially funerals. There is also evidence that younger people do their own thinking, rather than follow church teaching: "Practising young couples want to make up their own minds about contraception, and the average number of children per household has fallen to less than three."⁷ In the early 1930s, the average family had six children.⁸

According to Martha E. Beaudry, official Roman Catholic opposition to contraception made Canadian politicians nervous about de-criminalizing contraception in the 1960s. They assumed that Quebec's Roman Catholic population supported the church hierarchy's teaching.

⁵ Yves Lambert, "From Parish to Transcendent Humanism in France," in James A. Beckford and Thomas Luckmann, eds., The Changing Face of Religion (London: Sage, 1989), 49.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

In truth, however, Quebec Catholics were using contraception, and by 1965 Quebec had the lowest fertility rate of all Canadian provinces.⁹

⁹ Martha E. Beaudry, "Birth Control and the 'Public Good': From Criminalization to Education for Family Planning" (M. A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1994), 41-45.

Appendix X

Religion, Arousal Theory and Deviant Behavior

Many social scientists have looked for relationships between religion and deviant behavior. They have considered social, psychological and regional factors as well as religious beliefs and religious activity.¹ More recently, a new approach has sought to explain the association between religiosity and behavior in terms of arousal theory. The basic idea is that the brain patterns of some persons make them seek more external stimulation than others find necessary. For those affected, churches are boring, so they avoid them; then they find the stimulation they crave in deviant acts, including "victimless" crimes.

Arousal theory could account for the observation, made many times, that low church attendance is correlated with higher levels of deviant behavior, especially "victimless wrongdoing."² Other researchers have found evidence that arousal theory does indeed account for much of the association between religiosity and delinquency, although the effect of religiosity remains statistically significant for the use of legal substances like alcohol and tobacco.³ The thesis is most interesting, but far from established. There are forms of religion, including charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, which provide a great deal of excitement, yet hardly any of the studies reviewed here have included such religious groups.

There is a need for studies of religiosity, morality and deviance in charismatic and Pentecostal communities – but such investigations cannot be part of an historical inquiry. Such

¹ For an overview of this research, please refer to chapter one.

² Lee Ellis. "Religion and Criminality from the Perspective of Arousal Theory," Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 24 (August 1987): 215-232.

³ John K. Cochran, Peter B. Wood, and Bruce J. Arneklev. "Is the Religiosity-Delinquency Relationship Spurious? A Test of Arousal and Social Control Theories," Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 31 (February 1994): 92-123.

research should compare charismatic and Pentecostal Christian groups with other Christian bodies, using measures for religiosity, deviance, and arousal needs. It might also be fruitful to determine how many people in the various kinds of Christian groups left behind a life of deviance or drug abuse as a result of a conversion that led them to join a particular. The presenter writer has noticed that many sermons by charismatics and Pentecostals refer to the problems of alcohol and drug abuse.

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