

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FROM INTERNAL TO EXTERNAL PLURALISM: THE ANGLICAN METAMORPHOSIS

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In my doctoral dissertation and earliest publications in the sociology of religion (1975, 1976, 1979), I focused on the process whereby the episcopate in the Church of England, which constituted a religious monopoly that united church and state, was transferred to the denominational world of the United States, a polity that Seymour Martin Lipset (1963) would name “The First New Nation.” A crucial player in that process was the Episcopal Church in Scotland, where a Presbyterian religious monopoly was somewhat inconsistently transgressed by Church of England chapels, including a Scottish Anglican episcopate. When the first American candidate for consecration, Samuel Seabury, was selected he had the advantage of having already studied medicine in Scotland; thus, when the English establishment balked at the question of ordaining bishops for service in the United States after the Revolutionary War, Seabury went to Scotland and received consecration there. That was sufficient precedent for English bishops to ordain two other men, and the Scottish and English lines then met in subsequent consecrations in the United States, giving full creditability to both the American episcopate and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.<sup>1</sup>

From that time until the late twentieth century, the Episcopal Church maintained a notable “unity in diversity.” There is no question that there were always some tensions underlying it, but these tended to be connected principally to specific bishops in specific dioceses at specific times. A relative point of pride among Episcopalians in discussing the organizational life of the Episcopal Church during the U.S. Civil War, for example, has been that those dioceses located in the Confederate States of America were allowed to

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<sup>1</sup> Formally “The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America,” though the word “Protestant” was not used in general discourse; rather it was intended originally to make a formal distinction between the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

leave the main body at the start of the Civil War and were allowed to reunite with the main body again at the time of the Union victory. No bishops or priests were deposed because they were on one side or the other.

At the parish level, different congregations adopted relatively different styles of worship, generally united by the texts of the Book of Common Prayer. A good barometer of the nature of the congregation would simply be the number of times Holy Communion was celebrated in the parish in a given year. The more celebrations, the more “high church” the parish would be considered; the less celebrations, the more “low church” the parish would be considered. Across time something approximating a “golden mean” appeared to jell in most dioceses where the majority of parishes offered an early celebration of the Eucharist every Sunday, with some alternation between the Eucharist and Morning Prayer and Sermon at the later liturgy. Midweek celebrations of the Eucharist became more and more common, though in most cases only on one or two days a week, rather than daily. The greater the number of weekdays on which there was a Eucharistic celebration, the more one could consider the parish “high church” or Anglo-Catholic.

A change began to set into this pattern toward the start of the twentieth century, when a third pattern of churchmanship generally called “broad church” began also to appear. Broad churches were particularly influenced by the wider Social Gospel movement, and while the issues of “high” and “low” churchmanship continued to be relevant, greater emphasis was placed on social or community involvement. The effect of this was specifically to bring “social issues” to the fore—including immigrant resettlement, poverty, racism and gender relations. Broad church parishes were less easy to characterize as “low” or “high” because they combined some elements of each, while at the same time rejecting some aspects of the distinctive theological positions of each. For example, Biblical texts were relativized to specific times and cultures, while sacraments were increasingly demystified and interpreted in current contexts of “meaningfulness” to the recipient. Theology was comparably downgraded in favor of social outreach. If Catholic ceremonial would reach out to some immigrants and bring them into a worshipping community, then Catholic ceremonial it was—not necessarily accompanied by Catholic theology. The same was true for the evangelical wing. If so-called “old fashioned” hymns brought in new people, then old fashioned hymns would be the order of the day, without too much worry about whether or not their theological content was consistent with that of the Book of Common Prayer. The broad church movement also was affected by larger societal population movements. As Americans became