



For Such a Time as This: Conflict, Community and the Courts in the South African Church¹

Jonathan May

jonathan@cott.co.za

ABSTRACT

The recent, well-publicized, conflict in the Diocese of Pretoria raises questions about the Church as an institution within the new constitutional and democratic South Africa. The analysis of the conflict reveals that all parties exhibit institutional responses which, when considered with reference to Scripture and Tradition, render the organization, structure and authority of the Church anachronistic and, in their promotion of internal community strife, reveal the need for reform that reflects the gospel imperative to embrace incarnational relationships.

KEYWORDS: Anglican Church of Southern Africa, Anglican Diocese of Pretoria, incarnation, leadership, South Africa

Introduction

In the context of a post-apartheid and democratic South Africa a recent conflict in the Anglican Diocese of Pretoria raises significant questions with regard to the nature of the Church. In this conflict, the actions of the diocesan structures, particularly the bishop, invite reflection on the nature of the Church as an institution, whilst those of the laity direct attention to the relationship of the church and the world, particularly whether Christians should embrace the methods of political protest or have recourse to secular courts in dealing with internal community conflicts. In considering the issues raised by this conflict, it is important to draw on the teaching of scripture and tradition, and to reflect on how such conflict impacts the mission of the Church.

1. Dr Jonathan May is a lecturer at the College of Transfiguration, Grahamstown, South Africa.

A Church for the Future?

In the introduction to his 2007 work, *A Church for the Future*,² Harold T. Lewis quotes an unnamed South African bishop as stating that the Southern African Church has 'a pivotal and prophetic role to play in the healing of the present divisions in our communion, and particularly in our African context'. This statement reflects the argument of Lewis's study which reviews and analyses the history of the Anglican Church in South Africa in order to establish that it offers an example of how the Anglican Communion can move forward amidst current divisions.³

In the light of Lewis's argument, the recent conflict in the Diocese of Pretoria is of more than provincial concern. This is particularly the case when attention is given to how the ecclesiology of the South African church has been shaped by its history, particularly in the struggle against apartheid. Lewis contends that the incarnational foundation of social action meant that the church 'in the name of Christ, [could] oppose the government, raise questions about political practices, and wade into society's troubled waters with impunity'.⁴ In these respects, and over time, and in the context of apartheid, the South African church proved itself to be a missionary institution, looking beyond its own members to the common good of all South Africans.

This is not to say that the South African church always got things right. As Lewis notes, the church's engagement in the struggle against apartheid and its injustices was hampered in the mid-twentieth century by the tendency to embrace at one and the same time both the ideology of segregation and the ideal of non-racial justice.⁵ This reflected the inability to think and act beyond the normative patterns of the dominant system, that of apartheid, with its colonial, imperialist and capitalist roots. Through the embrace of prophetic action rooted in the Gospel, together with Africanization and indigenization, the church was able, in time, to move beyond the normative patterns of the system and act as the moral conscience of the community.⁶

2. Harold T. Lewis, *A Church for the Future: South Africa as the Crucible for Anglicanism in a New Century* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007), p. xiv.

3. The designation 'South African church' is used throughout this article, as in Lewis's work, to designate that portion of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa which is located within the territorial boundaries of the Republic of South Africa.

4. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, p. 31.

5. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, p. 38.

6. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, pp. 40-41.

The struggles against injustice and for democracy during the apartheid period left an indelible mark on the ecclesiology of the South African church, placing particular emphasis on mission, justice and tolerance. Lewis illustrates this point with reference to the debates on the ordination of women and latterly the issue of homosexuality.⁷ However, he is also careful to draw attention to how the patterns of relationship promoted by the commitments to mission, justice and tolerance continued to be utilized beyond the internal workings of the church through such processes as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁸

In turning to consider the conflict in the Diocese of Pretoria, one wonders how a church with an ecclesiology so marked by mission, justice and tolerance can become so divided even while its representatives, including the Bishop of Pretoria, continue to engage in conflict resolution within the wider society which involves consultative and participative processes.⁹ In the changed context of non-racial constitutional democracy the church continues to find its voice in relation to the societal injustices of the day, but in reflecting on the conflict within the Diocese of Pretoria it will become clear that the South African church has yet to adapt to how this changed context might impact the internal relations of its members, whether lay or ordained, and how this lack of adaptation could undermine its ability to act as the moral conscience of society and fulfil its mission to those not its members.¹⁰

Looking from the Outside

The situation arising in the Diocese of Pretoria has been well publicized in the South African media and has also had some coverage overseas,¹¹ and was allowed to run for over 12 months before a Provincial task team was established in terms of Canon 21.3 to investigate the conflict and make recommendations on how it might be resolved.¹²

7. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, pp. 66, 104.

8. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, p. 73.

9. See, for example, 'Unrest in Marikana – Archbishop Urges President Zuma', <http://dsc2.newclearads.co.za/unrest-in-marikana-archbishop-urges-president-zuma/> (accessed 8 March 2013).

10. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, p. 31.

11. E.g. in *Pretoria News*, *Sowetan LIVE*, *Times LIVE*, *Church of England Newspaper*.

12. Canon 21.3: 'When the Synod of Bishops becomes aware of events, developments or reasons which indicate to it that in its opinion the affairs of a Diocese merit an inquiry or investigation in relation to possible support, or remedial action that might need to be taken by the Diocese or the Province or both, it shall

This intervention followed the escalation of the conflict in May 2012 by way of the bishop closing the cathedral to its parishioners. Ostensibly, the media reports reveal that the conflict lay between the Cathedral Parish, the Diocesan Structures, and the Bishop of Pretoria.

Looking in from the outside on the basis of the information available in the public domain,¹³ the apparent cause of the initial discord relates to the bishop's treatment of a curate at St Alban's Cathedral. This situation seems to have begun in November 2010 with a straightforward discussion of the performance of the curate in his position at the Cathedral and, consequently, his suitability for redeployment within the diocese. However, in the subsequent communication, between the bishop and the curate, and then the bishop and the Cathedral Council, whether written or face-to-face, a level of misunderstanding and misrepresentation seems to have taken root as the situation escalated to the point that the bishop perceived that the trust between him and the curate had been broken. The curate eventually took the bishop to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA),¹⁴ disciplinary proceedings were instituted against the Dean of the Cathedral in a move widely perceived as a response to the Dean's support for the curate and, over the following months, members of the Cathedral parish adopted various methods of protest, ranging from picketing to disrupting services.¹⁵

(Footnote continued)

have the power to appoint a task team to inquire into or investigate these matters at the cost of the Common Provincial Fund. The task team shall report its findings and recommendations directly to the Synod of Bishops. The Synod of Bishops shall make whatever decision it feels appropriate in the circumstances in consultation with the Diocese concerned'.

13. The report of the task team remains confidential at this time (see 'Media Release from the Synod of Bishops: Further Update on the Diocese of Pretoria', <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?ItemID=485&tname=tblComponent1&oname=News&pg=front>, 10/12/2012 [accessed 19 February 2013]).

14. The CCMA is an independent body established to address disputes falling under the South African Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995.

15. See N. Makhubu and M. Magome, 'Top-level Probe into Diocese', *Pretoria News*, 7 June 2012, <http://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/top-level-probe-into-diocese-1.1313642#.UTmmx9aJqSo> (accessed 19 February 2013); M. Magome, 'Fired Priest Fights Back', *IOL News*, 1 July 2011, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/fired-priest-fights-back-1.1091860#.UTmnddaJqSo> (accessed 19 February 2013); N. Makhubu, 'Bishop Nailed over City Church Discord', *Pretoria News*, 18 October 2012, <http://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/bishop-nailed-over-city-church-discord-1.1406007#.UTmn6daJqSo> (accessed 19 February 2013).

In taking his situation to the CCMA some nine months after the initial communication from the bishop, the curate was in effect suggesting that the institutional systems available within the church had failed him in his quest for justice, while in media reports the bishop was reported as suggesting that 'the church had its own systems for dealing with such matters'.¹⁶ Indeed, the CCMA recognized the point made by the bishop when it concluded that it had no jurisdiction in this case, leaving the curate with no option but to rely on the institutional, hierarchical and legal processes of the church that had to this point, from his own point of view (one shared by at least some of the Cathedral parishioners) proved unsatisfactory.

The conflict and discord initiated by the perceived treatment of the cathedral's curate, and the inability of the church's structures to deal with this situation led, predictably, given the history of South Africa and the present political climate, to alternative methods of objection and protest being employed by some of the cathedral parishioners as they sought to stand up against injustice.¹⁷ These actions eventually precipitated further action on the part of the bishop, such that his episcopal ministry to the Cathedral parish was suspended in September 2011. This was followed in October by the institution of proceedings against the Dean in an action which has been found to have been marred by irregularity, a lack of consultation, and the misuse of cathedral funds.¹⁸ The disciplinary processes were incomplete at the time of the Dean's death early in 2012, which was followed by the unfortunate spectacle of two memorial services being held after the bishop initially refused to agree to allow such services to take place in the Anglican Cathedral,¹⁹ reflecting a failure of compassion on the part of the hierarchical structures of the church.

In a conflict which had now been running for over 14 months, further escalation was perhaps inevitable in the absence of concrete efforts towards resolution, management or transformation. The continued employment of the methods of political protest by cathedral parishioners and the intimidating atmosphere this created led the

16. Magome, 'Fired Priest Fights Back'.

17. See K. Seanego and Z. Venter, 'Faithful Flock to St Alban's after Court Puts Paid to Strife', *Pretoria News*, 21 May 2012, <http://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/faithful-flock-to-st-albans-after-court-puts-paid-to-strife-1.1301376#.UTmq39aJqSo> (accessed 19 February 2013); Makhubu and Magome, 'Top-level Probe into Diocese'.

18. Makhubu, 'Bishop Nailed over City Church Discord'.

19. The first service was held at the Roman Catholic Cathedral. See Makhubu and Magome, 'Top-level Probe into Diocese'.

bishop to close the cathedral without giving its congregants due warning in May 2012. The bishop's response to the situation led to further media headlines as the Anglican Church found itself the latest South African church to be taken to court.²⁰ Urged on by Judge Winston Msimeki, the two parties eventually reached an agreement which was made an order of court and allowed the cathedral to be reopened and the congregants to gather there for Sunday worship as normal.

The closure of the cathedral and the subsequent court action led to the appointment of a Provincial Task Team which reported to the Synod of Bishops in September 2012.²¹ In a statement taking its theme from Est. 4.14 ('For Such a Time as This') the crisis situation in Pretoria was mentioned in passing in a section reflecting on the various national crises affecting South Africa at the time, and the recognition that the Church finds itself 'struggling with not only economic, but also social, collapse'. The statement goes on to suggest that '[m]uch of this crisis ... reflects a desperate need both for principled leadership in church and society, and for Christians to live out their faith in community in ways that set the common good of all above the selfish desires of greed and personal self interest'.²² The reference to leadership is subsequently taken up in connection with Est. 4.14 in order to argue for 'Christian leadership that will stand in solidarity with all of God's people ... prophetic voices that will speak God's word with boldness ... [and the need for] faithful people willing to be conformed to the purposes of God rather than to the ways of the world (Romans 12.1-2)'. Flowing from these points the Synod has identified the need to develop and nurture leadership in the church, and specifically, to address the 'formation and training of new bishops, and ways in which we could better guide and mentor those experiencing difficulties within their dioceses'.²³ While these general points are no doubt well intentioned, given the very public

20. T. Monama, 'St Albans Fights Bishop - Court Order to Hold Service', *Sowetan LIVE*, 21 May 2012, <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2012/05/21/st-albans-fights-bishop-court-order-to-hold-service> (accessed 19 February 2013).

21. T. Thakali, '“Peacemaker” Bishop's Fate Still Undecided', 29 September 2012, *IOL News*, <http://www.iol.co.za/news/special-features/mining-crisis/peacemaker-bishop-s-fate-still-undecided-1.1392641#.UTmst9aJqSo> (accessed 19 February 2013).

22. 'Statement issued by the Synod of Bishops on Wednesday, 26th September 2012: For Such a Time as This', 26 September 2012, ACSA Synod of Bishops, <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?ItemID=478&tname=tblComponent1&oname=News&pg=front> (accessed 19 February 2013).

23. ACSA Synod of Bishops, 'For Such a Time as This'.

crisis in the Diocese of Pretoria, not to mention other internal crises emanating from other dioceses within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, this statement falls far short of being an adequate response and shows little evidence of the 'damning' report delivered at the Synod in relation to the situation in Pretoria.²⁴ The appointment of a committee of bishops to 'follow up the decisions reached by the Synod of Bishops, and to communicate the Synod's response to the Task Team's report to the parties concerned' demonstrates the desire of the Synod to resolve this conflict, and in its emphasis on discussion suggests that a consultative approach has been adopted. However, in both statements the only conclusions made public related to financial allegations made against the bishop and the diocese. It is important for the church to address these unfounded allegations; though, once more, it points to an institutional response and one that is more concerned with conflict resolution than conflict transformation.²⁵ The various causes of the conflict in which the bishop was a prime mover are not even acknowledged, even though they are already in the public domain. In a welcome move the committee appointed by the Synod made the Task Team's report available to the Cathedral Council in the 'interests of openness and transparency', although this was done on a confidential basis, and without any intention of making it a public document. Subsequent media reports reflecting the contents of the Task Team's report suggest that the official actions of the church were once more deemed to be inadequate in the democratic context of South Africa where whistle-blowing and transparency are valued by all sectors of society bar those on the receiving end of negative publicity.²⁶

Evaluating the Pretoria Case

In his article 'Bishops: Legacy from the Past or Hope for the Future?' John Suggit asks the question 'How can the Christian gospel be

24. Thakali, ' "Peacemaker" Bishop's Fate Still Undecided'.

25. As Carolyn Schrock-Shenk illustrates ('Introducing Conflict and Conflict Transformation', in C. Schrock-Shenk and L. Ressler, *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation* [Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1999], pp. 25-37) the language of conflict resolution promotes 'the need to finish conflict, to wrap it up and put it behind' whereas that of conflict transformation 'begins with and focuses ... on the people involved and their relationships with each other' (p. 35).

26. Makhubu, 'Bishop Nailed over City Church Discord'.

commended to a divided world by a divided church?' as he reflects on the growing irrelevance of the gospel and the anachronism of the church in the nineteenth century.²⁷ While at the time of writing Suggit saw this challenge answered in the growth of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, this question remains apt in relation to the events which have taken place in Pretoria, especially if, with Cyprian, we consider each bishop to represent the episcopate as a whole, and the local church to manifest the church catholic.²⁸ As Lewis's review has shown, the actions of the South African church during apartheid addressed the question of the gospel's relevance, as over time the church came to provide the moral conscience of the movement for liberation,²⁹ struggling out from under anachronistic structures which reflected earlier incarnations of the institution rooted in colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. In the new and changed context of post-apartheid South Africa the church and its episcopal leadership have continued to provide leadership on the relevance of the gospel in, among other things, the struggle for economic justice and the fight against HIV/AIDS. As already highlighted, the church's engagement with national crises affecting South Africa has been prominent in the period of the Pretoria conflict such that the Bishop of Pretoria was referred to in media reports as the 'peacemaker' bishop.³⁰ However, it is far from clear that such a positive answer can be given when considering whether the church is an anachronistic institution.

As Suggit has pointed out, the representation and involvement of the laity improved considerably in the twentieth century with regard to lay involvement in the elections of bishops.³¹ However, these changes impact a relatively small area of the church's activities, that is, the election of bishops and voting at Provincial Synods, and the laity remain relatively excluded from the diocesan structures which impact them more directly. In the new context of the democratic South Africa it might have been expected that constitutional changes would be implemented to promote the involvement and representation of the laity within diocesan structures and avoid a perpetuation of the

27. John Suggit, 'Bishops: Legacy from the Past or Hope for the Future?' in F. England and T. Paterson (eds.), *Bounty in Bondage: Essays in Honour of Edward King, Dean of Cape Town* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1989), pp. 75-103.

28. Suggit, 'Bishops', p. 77; Cyprian, *de Unitate Ecclesiae*, 5.

29. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, p. 41.

30. Thakali, "'Peacemaker" Bishop's Fate Still Undecided'.

31. Suggit, 'Bishops', p. 83.

inherited hierarchical structures which lend themselves to institutional and mechanistic action with their tendency to rely on legalistic responses and the authority of an office.³²

The actions of the bishop and the diocesan structures reflect this institutional response in their reliance, albeit without due regard for the required processes,³³ on procedures laid out in the Canon Law of ACSA. The latter provides for the constitutional organization of the church and as such ought to provide the necessary checks and balances to guard against autocracy.³⁴ However, the failure to adhere to the canonical processes points to the inadequacies of these processes in a context where the diocesan structures are largely clerical and hierarchical, and where the incumbent bishop chooses to exercise his office on the basis of authority. The authoritative exercise of the episcopal office appears in this case to have performed the role of stimulus, one which expected an unconditional and acquiescent response.

In any case, positive law cannot be relied upon in a situation of necessity, and the conflict situation in the Diocese of Pretoria might well be defined as just such a situation. As Paul Avis points out, the natural law idea that 'necessity knows no law' goes back to classical Greece and has been influential in the Church's development, particularly with regard to the Conciliar tradition.³⁵ Indeed, in their engagement with conflict situations in wider society the leaders of the South African church recognize this principle in urging dialogue and consultation rather than reliance on the existing legal processes.³⁶ This episcopal engagement reveals that while the church embraces a form of leadership suited for engaging in the social issues of the society in which it ministers, it is presently unable to recognize that this shift in leadership styles is required in its own internal operations. The Synod's public response to the conflict in Pretoria indicates that rather than embrace a more democratic form of leadership, the South African church

32. In the reports relating to the Diocese of Pretoria this is reflected in references to lack of consultation, heavy-handed responses, and irregular proceedings. See Makhubu, 'Bishop Nailed over City Church Discord'.

33. See Makhubu, 'Bishop Nailed over City Church Discord'.

34. P. Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), p. 70.

35. P. Avis, *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 41.

36. See 'Archbishop Makgoba Condemns Lomnin Deaths, Calls for Strong, Measured Intervention', 17 August 2012, Office of the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/view.asp?ItemID=465&tname=tblComponent1&oname=News&pg=front> (accessed 12 March 2013).

continues to be led by an episcopacy which is more concerned with the institution. This is reflected in the way in which the public statements protect the bishop and diocese alone, leaving the precipitating causes of the conflict unaddressed and avoiding public condemnation of the bishop's actions.

However, as in any conflict, there is more than one side to the story. In appropriating forms of political protest the actions of some of the parishioners of the Cathedral may also be deemed anachronistic. This suggestion is not lessened by the fact that the church hierarchy failed to act as desired in the face of other more moderate forms of protest. Rather, this fact simply renders their action comprehensible in a national context wherein a deaf ear seems to be turned to all protests until they escalate to something close to anarchy.³⁷ The shift to the new constitutional democracy in 1994 represented a profound shift in many ways, but the continued violence and disrespect shown towards persons and property reveals the limits of the political transformation. In such a context the church, lay and ordained together, ought to model a new form of community, rather than embrace the anachronistic methods of the pre-transformation South Africa, even when such methods are taken up under the banner of justice.

The division of the church has been played out in the full glare of the media, bringing the gospel into disrepute as reflected in the various postings made in response to online coverage of events.³⁸ Perhaps inevitably, given that the conflict ended up before the courts, some of these posts referred to 1 Cor. 6.1-12. A careful socio-historical reading reveals that this passage is concerned with Christians taking one another before local civil magistrate's courts rather than all law courts, a differentiation based on considerations of justice since the former courts were open to abuse through the use of social networks and patronage. In the Pretoria case, both the curate's appeal to the CCMA and the parishioners appeal to have the cathedral reopened were premised on the idea that the justice denied through the church's own processes could be gained through secular processes. Whether this reflects a situation in which the church's processes are more akin to the local Corinthian courts where the outcome is subject to influence through social networks and patronage cannot be ascertained from the available evidence.

37. See H. Radebe, 'Small Towns Risk Violent Protests, Says Institute', 23 January 2013, BDLive, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2013/01/23/small-towns-risk-violent-protests-says-institute> (accessed 11 March 2013).

38. See the posts made in response to Monama, 'St Albans Fights Bishop'.

The point here is not to draw on the scriptural parallel to underline, once again, the need for the church to address its internal organization so as to be able to deal more appropriately with conflict in the future. Rather, in holding the present situation up against this scriptural passage, the intention is to highlight the need for the people of God to embrace a new way of being community together. While setting this passage in its first-century context removes the literalist tendency to conclude that Christians should not take one another to court, no matter what court may be envisaged, this same reading also demonstrates that, permissible or not, ending up before secular courts ultimately reflects the failure of the Christian community to live out its calling as the body of Christ. This failure involves the prioritization of personal rights over the interpersonal relationships fundamental to the new community founded in Christ. For such a time as this, reconnecting with this interpersonal, rather than institutional dimension, is necessary if the church is to be united in proclaiming a relevant gospel in the changed context of South Africa.

Church for a Changed Context

In his study of the conciliar tradition Avis notes that:

Anglicans have regarded it as perfectly normal that political principles, principles of governance, should be common to Church and State. They have not insisted that the Church, as an institution, is exempt from the ethical and political considerations that have been taken into account in the civil sphere.³⁹

The evaluation of the Pretoria conflict suggests that in terms of its own governance and organization the church may have something to learn, from both civil structures in the new South Africa and its own social engagement, particularly in times of crises and conflict, with authoritative structures and protesters alike. While we might agree with Suggit that 'the government of the church ... [depends] on the rule of God'⁴⁰ we may wish to go further than him in recommending the embrace of democracy in the South African church, recognizing that the 'will of the majority' is seen as a fit vehicle for the movement of the Holy Spirit in the context of elective assemblies. Further development of lay representation may be one aspect of embracing democracy, but the situation in Pretoria calls for a more profound shift in the understanding of the Church as an institution.

39. Avis, *Beyond the Reformation?* p. 176.

40. Suggit, 'Bishops', p. 89.

The Church's 'historical existence is inescapably that of an institution, with all that that implies about structure, organization and authority',⁴¹ and the shape it takes on is profoundly influenced for good and for ill by the contexts in which it has developed and how these have been embraced in its current context. The situation in Pretoria highlights the manner in which the South African church continues to operate according to a structure, organization and authority which has failed to adapt to the contextual changes that have taken place as a result of the successful struggle for liberation and the implementation of constitutional democracy. More than this, this conflict reveals that the church as institution has failed to adhere to the principles of natural law (distributive justice, equity and flexibility) that have played a formative role in the conciliar tradition, which in turn has shaped the Anglican tradition to which the South African church belongs. This suggests that in pursuing institutional reform, reform that promotes church government as existing for the common good of the church rather than the personal good of the Synod of Bishops, the church in South Africa might utilize the resources of the past to once again adapt to a changed and changing present.

Nevertheless, while the Church's 'historical existence is inescapably that of an institution', the 'life of the Church is grounded in a mystical vision of participation in God and sustained by beliefs and teachings that are derived from revelation'.⁴² This mystical vision reminds us of something which appears to have been lost in the situation which arose in Pretoria, the need for relationships within the church to go beyond those that occur between rulers and the ruled. The actions of both the bishop and diocesan structures, and the responses of the Cathedral Council exhibit a tendency towards an institutional type of relationship. On the one hand this involves resorting to canonical processes, while on the other hand it takes the form of political protest, neither of which captures anything approaching the type of relationship reflective of Paul's metaphorical use of the body in 1 Cor. 12.12-31. If then, the situation in Pretoria underlines the need for change in the church in South Africa, it calls for more than a shift in terms of structure, organization and authority.

Organizationally, institutions thrive on knowing where everything belongs and how everything relates one to another. As Ross argues, they reinforce the illusion of human control, and the lust for control, 'for secure, closed systems, [that feed] our fear of boat-rocking, our fear that

41. Avis, *Beyond the Reformation?* p. 1.

42. Avis, *Beyond the Reformation?* p. 1.

our illusion of safety and a static world will be destroyed'.⁴³ The institutional type of relationship is then reductionist, encouraging us to see one another, not as creatures made in God's image, but as objects identified by positions held, functions performed, or the labels used for ease of identification in an institutional context. Since perception plays a profound role in the way in which we relate to one another, overcoming patterns of relationship promoted by such objectification requires an openness to see who is before us. Mirroring the incarnation, this shift in perception requires that we step into the shoes of others and see the world from their own perspective, opening ourselves up to the need to redraw our own map of the world in the light of our engagement with the other.⁴⁴ Adopting this pattern of relationship involves embracing a humility which leaves us open to choose to respond with vulnerability and compassion,⁴⁵ rather than the presumption to control which so easily destroys the communion which we desire.⁴⁶

In the light of these considerations it is noteworthy that Paul, in dealing with the Corinthian Christians who are taking one another to court, eschews laying down a procedure. Rather, in his response, he continues to address the identity of those addressed, even as this has been at the heart of his message since the letter opening (1.1-9). Here in 1 Cor. 6:1-11 Paul is concerned that the Corinthian Church's identity could be

put at risk either by practicing manipulative strategies in full view of Gentile patrons or clever legal advocates, whom wealthy Christians might hire, and the Gentile world be exposed to the sight of believers obsessed with acquisition of property or of their 'rights,' as against the sacrificial service of others which truly identifies what it is to be 'of Christ' and to share in Christ's cross.⁴⁷

In arguing that the criticized behaviour is not in keeping with their identity in Christ, Paul is clarifying the type of relationship that ought to exist between believers. It is a relationship which ought to be able to find resolution through 'private face-to-face remonstrance',⁴⁸ with

43. M. Ross, *Pillars of Flame: Power, Priesthood, and Spiritual Maturity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. xli.

44. S. Clothier, *Bones Would Rain from the Sky* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2005), p. 48.

45. Ross, *Pillars of Flame*, p. 4.

46. Ross, *Pillars of Flame*, pp. 34-35.

47. A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 419.

48. Thiselton, *Corinthians*, p. 436.

arbitration by the community being a concession,⁴⁹ the use of which is seen as a moral failure in itself.⁵⁰ Rather, the relationship between fellow believers is characterized by a willingness to prioritize the relationship over one's 'rights', a point which Paul revisits in connection with the eating of food offered to idols (8.1-11.1). Every action then represents a choice between behaviour that will build up or compromise relationship, and while Paul's teaching on this point offers no recipe, it is clear that for Paul this relationship is rooted in the love described in 1 Corinthians 13, which in turn reflects the action of God in Christ, wherein God's ungraspingness is revealed (Phil. 2.5-11).⁵¹

This ungraspingness, exhibited in 1 Cor. 6.7 in the call to give up one's 'rights', reminds us that the South African Church cannot simply model itself on the democratic system which shapes and frames its current context. Rather, it must respond to this changed context drawing on the best that it has to offer – such as the commitment to justice for all, to accountability, transparency and participative representation – while offering prophetic models of community, informed by Scripture and Tradition, which call the Church and the world into the newness of life promised in Christ.

For Such a Time as This

In the wider context of the divisions which mark the Anglican Communion, the situation which has developed in the Diocese of Pretoria focuses attention on the Church's institutional nature. This institutional nature is informed and shaped by the contexts in which the organization, structure and authority of the Church has developed, and as such it is indebted to ideological systems which sit uncomfortably with the ideals of democracy, especially as these have developed in struggles for liberation such as that seen in South Africa during the twentieth century. This disjunction is seen in the style of leadership employed in the South African church's engagement with social issues as contrasted with the autocratic, hierarchical and legalistic engagement evidenced in internal community conflict such as that which took place in the Diocese of Pretoria.

49. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. James W. Leitch; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 105.

50. Thiselton, *Corinthians*, p. 436.

51. Ross, *Pillars of Flame*, p. 30.

In that conflict the tendency towards institutional responses was evident from both the Episcopal leadership of the church and the lay members who were involved in the situation. In the former case the dominance of an institutional perspective was demonstrated by the Synod of Bishops' failure to address publicly any concern other than that of clearing the bishop and diocese of financial wrongdoing, while on the part of the laity, it was demonstrated in taking up the methods of political protest in response to the actions of the bishop and the diocese. If the realization that organization, structure and authority in the Church is profoundly influenced by ideologies which are out of step with democratic and liberationist ideals is not enough to move the Church to face its anachronistic tendencies and embrace institutional reform, then perhaps this may be achieved by once again turning to the gospel imperative which calls forth the new community in Christ.

In the post-apartheid context of South Africa the pattern of institutional relationships which promotes the interaction of ruler and ruled inevitably leads to conflict as it reflects a disjunction with the experience of liberation which has led to the church's ecclesiology being marked by mission, justice and tolerance. However, for this recognition to lead to significant change the South African church must see the need for an incarnational approach to relationships, just as it has previously found such a foundation to be the basis for social engagement.⁵² Such an approach requires the willingness to set aside models of relationship and interaction which promote power and control, and to instead encourage each person to see one another for who they are, to stand in their shoes, and to be prepared to allow engagement with the other to open up, reframe and renew their vision of God and the world. Such change embraces the gospel imperative to 'shared power and collaborative ministry'⁵³ and the need to practise what we preach.⁵⁴

52. Lewis, *Church for the Future*, p. 31.

53. S.K. Pickard, 'The Collaborative Power of Christian Ministry', *Expository Times* 121.9 (2010), pp. 429-36 (432).

54. The following quotation from Henry Codman Potter, Bishop of New York, is illustrative of the Church's failure on this point: 'I do not think it would have been very strange if the colored race, after it had been freed, should have refused to follow the white people's God. It shows a higher order of intelligence and an acute discernment in the African race to have distinguished the good from the evil, in a religion that taught all men were brothers, and practised the opposite', in Willard Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1929* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1990), p. 275, cited in Harold Lewis, *Yet with a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 39.

This is a time in which the relevancy of the gospel is demonstrated in the church's engagement with social issues, even while it is undermined publicly by institutional relationships and responses which belong to another world. These relationships and responses reflect a system at odds with the society for which the people struggled, a democratic society in which the values of justice and transparency are upheld in a manner which is equitable and flexible. If the South African church is to be a church 'For such a time as this', significant interpersonal change will be required alongside the reform of its structure, organization and authority. Embracing such change while drawing on the resources of Scripture and Tradition, together with the past experience of shedding the normative patterns of the dominant system during apartheid, holds out the promise of modelling a community that promotes accountability and transparency rooted in the common baptismal identity of all believers, and in so doing, offers one way of being a church for the future which can enable healing in the Church and the world.