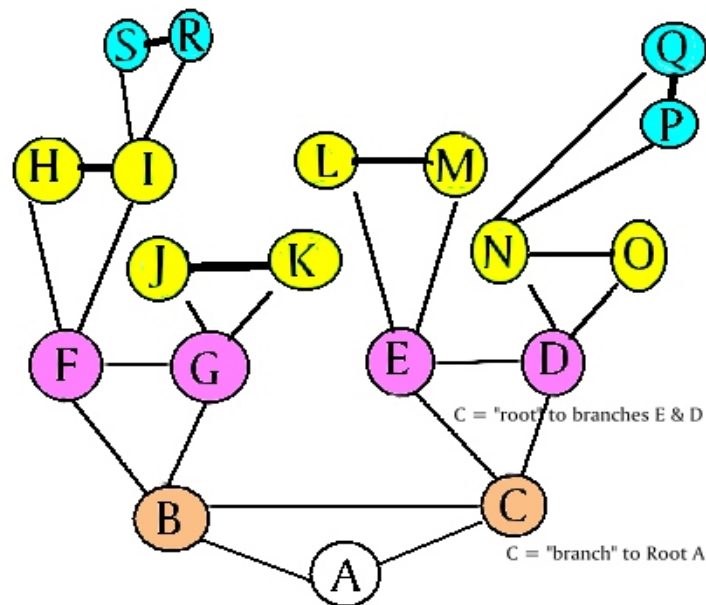


# Spiritual Community as Living Organism

Cells of support and communication for a living community of faith

- Assumptions
  - Individuals usually do not develop and grow without being accountable to someone for their growth
    - Accountability means that a person freely brings her intentions and goals for change to the attention of someone who cares about that person's development
    - Accountability does not mean judgment or review, in the negative sense
    - Common relationships of supportive, change-oriented accountability are student to teacher and patient to doctor.
    - Discipleship is ineffective apart from a relationship of accountability
  - Small groups can provide effective accountability for spiritual formation
  - The time available for small group work is limited
    - The larger a group the less frequently it can function
    - Smaller groups can manage time more flexibly
    - Two is too small; a group of two cannot extend its influence and learning throughout a community except as a single, serial chain, vulnerable to breakage
    - Three is the smallest group that can function and grow exponentially
    - The structure will be based on triads of participation
  - Central management of groups will prove unworkable. The structure must be able to
    - Grow itself
    - Communicate with itself
    - Repair itself
  - Covenants—promises held at the depth of one's commitment to whatever is holy—are essential to good function in a spiritual community.
- Basic practices of a participant in organic spiritual community
  - Participants gather as a threesome, or triad, at least once each month; this gathering is initiated from the base of the triad, who is called its "root"; the two other members are called "branches"
  - They engage in a spiritual practice together: meditation, prayer, scripture reflection, or some other practice that they find meaningful
  - After a spiritual practice is completed, the time together is spent in questions initiated by the root and put to the branches to help them articulate their goals and intentions for practice, their experiences and results from practice, their sense of what might help deepen their experience or strengthen them on their way.
  - The branches may put such questions to one another as well, and to their root; however, the branches are mainly *accepting* spiritual care in this interaction and the root is mainly *offering* spiritual care.
  - The root actively encourages each branch to discern whether s/he will begin to serve as a root for a new triad.

over



- Essential elements of the covenant of a participant in organic spiritual community
  - as the root
    - to take part as a branch of a second, separate triad
    - to hold in prayer and love the relationship you have with your branches
    - to cultivate an active, prayerful spirit of inquiry, learning, and support for the two branches of the triad;
      - release judgment
      - develop lively curiosity in what is becoming possible for the other
      - abandon belief that you are responsible for their happiness
    - to communicate clearly and timely both as a branch, "downward," and as a root, "upward"
    - if intending to withdraw, to communicate this intention to your own root along with the names and contact info of your branches, so that they do not get cut off
    - from time to time, to initiate gatherings of two or more triads; do this by communicating upward and/or downward through the system
  - as a branch
    - to hold in prayer and love the relationship you have with root and fellow branch
    - to respond effectively to invitations and communications from the root
    - to accept the question-asking relationship from the root, and answer as fully as seems appropriate
    - to be a student of your own potential for growth; let what you see about yourself, regardless how you judge it, become terms for new hypotheses about what is possible; articulate what you are learning, seeking to abandon self-judgment
    - if you are *not* also functioning as a root, to consider whether to begin this relationship of care and growth by
      - inviting someone to be a branch in a new triad; or
      - accepting someone into a triad whose name has been provided to you
    - if intending to withdraw, to be clear about this with your root and fellow branch