

SYSTEM, HISTORY, AND A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

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[Through an investigation of the theology of ministry, the author seeks to illustrate convictions previously argued by Robert Doran about a systematic theology of history. He uses the general categories drawn from Doran's articles in this journal to examine briefly certain aspects of the history of ordained ministry in order to develop an hypothesis concerning the threefold order to bishop, presbyter, and deacon. He also discusses and compares approaches to the question of the relationship between history and theology as articulated by Hans Küng and John Milbank.]

ROBERT M. DORAN has presented in two recent articles a new paradigm for systematic theology drawing upon the work of Bernard Lonergan.¹ In the first article Doran argues for the necessity of developing a systematic theology of history. His own monumental work, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, is a major contribution to that task, exploring and developing as it does the general and special categories needed for an explanatory account of history.² In the second article he pushes the analysis farther by arguing that not only does systematic theology pertain to history, but in particular it should pertain to its own history. Consequently, systematic theology should be able to give an explanatory account of the history of theology. Doran links this explanatory history with the aims of Lonergan in Chapter 17 of *Insight*, "Metaphysics as Dialectic"³ as well as his own difficult explorations in Chapter 19 of *Theology and the Dialectics*

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¹ Robert M. Doran, "Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) 567–607, and "System and History: The Challenge to Catholic Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 652–78.

² Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990).

³ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works

of *History*, “The Ontology of Meaning.”⁴ Doran eschews any idealist, Hegelian reading of this proposal as simply a “history of ideas,” since the history that Doran envisages includes reference to concrete historical communities whose social and cultural dialectics are an admixture of progress, decline, and redemption. Doran’s account of his project, however, remains necessarily heuristic with little given by way of concrete example. My purpose in this note is to propose an outline for a theology of ministry that would illustrate Doran’s project.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

The theology of ministry presents itself as a suitable candidate for a number of reasons. Firstly, Lonergan drew a close connection between ecclesiology and a theology of history, noting that the “department of theology [in which] the historical aspects of development might be treated . . . may possess particular relevance to a treatise on the mystical body of Christ.”⁵ A theology of ministry finds its proper expression within ecclesiology. An explanatory account of ministry would find its proper place within a fuller explanatory account of the mission of the Church. Still the material elements of the history of ministry and the various theologies that have been developed in respect to ministry are readily available.⁶

Secondly, the theology of ministry illustrates most clearly the complex interrelationship between theology and history that Doran is seeking to explicate. Suppose we ask what a theology of ministry seeks to do. The classical adage “faith seeking understanding” might be our starting point. But what is it that we are seeking to understand? Ministry as it is currently constituted? Ministry as it was constituted in the early Church? Or the whole sequence of changing forms of ministry from the beginning of the Church until the present? Surely a systematic theology of ministry would do well if it could explain the historical development of ministry, beginning with the witness of the New Testament, working through the patristic era to the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the councils from Trent to Vatican II. Such a history would not be the history envisaged in the first phase of Lonergan’s theological method, the functional specialty called “History.”

of Bernard Lonergan 3, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992) 553–617.

⁴ Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* 592–629.

⁵ Lonergan, *Insight* 763.

⁶ To this end I shall draw almost exclusively on the work of Kenan Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1988). While a fuller study would require a broader range of sources than this brief outline, Osborne’s work provides sufficient material with which to ground my proposal.

Rather it would be an explanatory history, built on the special and general categories developed in the functional specialty of foundations and taking the historically emerging doctrines on ministry as what it seeks to understand, understanding them precisely as historical events. This illustrates the point made in Doran's first article in *Theological Studies*. A truly systematic theology of ministry must be included within a theology of history, of cultural and social change, of progress, decline, and redemption operative within human history and in particular within the history of the Church.⁷

However, as Doran argues in his second article, that history includes the history of theological reflection as well. The history of ministry ultimately becomes intelligible only by including a history of theological reflection upon that ministry. This theological reflection does not seek simply to understand ministry as it is empirically constituted. Often such reflection is not just empirical but also normative, spelling out not just how ministry actually is but how it should be, at least in the mind of the theologian. The norms may draw on what is best both in the actual praxis of ministry in a given era and in the elements of the tradition. These theologies of ministry will then feed back into the actual praxis of ministry by presenting a theoretical model to be followed, imitated, and praised. A systematic theology of ministry must take into account not only the praxis of ministry but also the history of the theologies of ministry and the ways they have shaped that praxis. It should provide an explanatory account of these developing theologies in light of the developing praxis of ministry. It would be not just a "history of ideas" detached from the praxis of ministry or from the broader history in which that praxis is embedded. This, I think, illustrates the point that Doran makes in his second article. (Parenthetically, one might note that often major contact with the praxis of ministry throughout church history is through the reflective lens of the theologies of the day.)

The sources for the norms that drive a theology of ministry raise methodological problems. Some would seek the sources in the canon of the New Testament or some other stage of the tradition, which may provide what Lonergan called "special categories." Others might draw on modern sociological accounts of community leadership which may provide what Lonergan called "general categories." This is done mostly in an uncritical manner. The methodology Doran is proposing does not accept a simplistic "correlationist" position that would correlate religious tradition and secular situation. He argues that such an approach is based on a static concep-

⁷ In relation to ecclesiology such a position has been consistently argued by Joseph Komonchak. "In its full range, soteriology is a theology of history. And as concretely articulated, soteriology requires a theology of the Church as an event within the endless struggle of the three historic principles of progress, decline and redemptive recovery" (*Foundation in Ecclesiology* [Boston: Boston College, 1995] 81).

tualist error, while his own proposal recognizes the complexity of interaction between “the situation” and “the tradition.”⁸

The third point that I would make to justify focusing on the theology of ministry is a glaring problem at the heart of most theologies of ministry that has seemed intractable according to traditional approaches. This is the problem of providing an explanatory account of the three orders of ministry, episcopal, presbyteral, and diaconal. For example, Hans Küng would see the distinction as arbitrary, a matter of juridical interest only.⁹ It is not uncommon to find theologies of ministry that focus almost entirely on presbyteral ministry with little attention to the interdependence of presbyteral and episcopal ministry. A truly systematic theology of ministry will define the three orders of ministry in terms of their relationships to one another, and in such a way as to render more transparent the historical emergence of these orders. Anything less will be simply descriptive but not explanatory. I have suggested elsewhere, and will further argue here that Doran’s framework as detailed in *Theology and Dialectics of History* allows one to construct at least an hypothesis that would account for the threefold order of ministry.¹⁰

Since the constitutive elements of Doran’s proposed theology of history have already been spelled out in his own recent writings, I do not intend to rehearse any of this material except by way of the briefest of summaries. The key elements are as follows: the hierarchical scale of values—in ascending order, vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious; the analogy of dialectics in the social, cultural, and personal dimensions of human community; the healing and creating vectors in history with their creative movements up and healing movements down the scale of values; general categories drawn from philosophy, metaphysics, and the social sciences, and special categories drawn from the religious tradition with each critically appropriated by the religiously, morally, intellectually, and psychically converted subject.

Within this framework Doran envisages the mission of the Church as the transformation of the present situation to a new situation that more closely

⁸ For a summary of Doran’s position, see my article “Quarrels with the Method of Correlation,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996) 707–19.

⁹ Hans Küng, *The Church*, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1978) 429–30. One conclusion Küng draws from his historical investigation is that the threefold system of offices, of bishop, presbyter/priest, and deacon “is not simply *the* original way in which ministries were ordered and shared out” and that it is impossible “to draw clear theological and dogmatic line of division” among the three offices. The creation of such a dividing line should be left to the canon lawyers, not theologians.

¹⁰ See my articles, “Towards a Systematic Theology of Ministry: A Catholic Perspective,” *Pacifica* 8 (1995) 74–96, and “Church, Anti-Types and Ordained Ministry: Systematic Perspectives,” *Pacifica* 10 (1997) 331–49.

approximates the kingdom of God on earth, through the promotion of a self-sacrificing love that overcomes the evils of the present through redemptive suffering. The mission of the Church is then conceived in terms of the restoration of the integrity of the scale of values through the mediation of grace found in the redemptive self-sacrificing love of Church members. Since the Church is concerned with the integrity of the whole scale of values, its mission will embrace activities not only at the level of religious values, mediating grace, but also at the personal, cultural, and social levels of value. It will be an agent of personal, cultural, and social change, as it seeks to move history toward a new situation that more closely approximates the kingdom of God on earth.¹¹

Doran does not go so far as to spell out the role of ecclesial ministry within the mission of the Church. Toward the end of my study, I present a proposal that seeks to specify the role of ecclesial ministry in a way congruent with Doran's approach, one that may act as an explanatory framework of the type I have spoken of above. First I give an outline of the history of Christian ministry. Such a presentation is summary and dependent in its historical detail on the research of others. As Lonergan and Doran argue, theology is a collaborative enterprise.

It might be objected that ecclesiology and the theology of ministry present a soft target for the illustration of Doran's proposals. In a sense this is true. However, in thinking concretely, one realizes that all Church doctrines are historical events in the life of the Church and so would be subsumed within a truly historical ecclesiology, as would all theologies dealing with those doctrines. To present some examples one could draw attention to the essay, "The Origins of Christian Realism" by Bernard Lonergan,¹² in which he argues that the emerging trinitarian and christological doctrine of the Church were culturally transformative, since they transcended the dominant Stoic and neo-Platonic philosophies of the day and evoked a dogmatic, and eventually a critical, realism. Similarly the oft-quoted work of Eric Peterson¹³ seeks to demonstrate that "the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines [of the early Church are] expressions of a spirituality and revelatory transformation of values at odds with Roman political religion."¹⁴ In these cases we can grasp the potentially transfor-

¹¹ This paragraph is a summary of my struggle to come to grips with Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, Chap. 5.

¹² Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism," *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 239–62.

¹³ Eric Peterson, "Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem," *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel, 1951) 49–147. The work is cited in several books on the Trinity, including those of Walter Kasper, Anthony Kelly, Jürgen Moltmann, and John J. O'Donnell.

¹⁴ Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 139.

mative impact of Christian belief on culture and social institution. A theology of theologies must take these matters within its explanatory ambit.

THE HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

For various reasons I begin not with the initial period of the Church and the so-called “institutionalization” of ministry. This would require a more nuanced discussion, though I have done so in a monograph not yet published. Instead I begin with the second century and the theology of ministry espoused by Ignatius of Antioch. In the *Letter to the Magnesians* Ignatius speaks of the threefold order of ministry in the following terms: “Be eager to do all things in godly accord, with the bishop set over you in the place of God, and the presbytery in the place of the council of apostles, and the deacons, most sweet to me, entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ Similarly in the *Letter to the Trallians* he states: “[L]et everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, and also the bishop who is a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and as the band of the apostles.”¹⁶

Here is an initial attempt to provide some type of explanatory framework for the distinction that exists within the three orders of ministry. Ignatius did so by drawing on the special categories provided by the tradition, with bishops = God the Father, deacons = Jesus Christ, and presbyters = the apostles. Several things should be noted about this theological attempt. Firstly, it served the needs of the Church at the time for a strong model of episcopal ministry. It did not simply reflect practice but sought to shape it. Secondly, it used entirely special categories. It drew on no larger framework whether metaphysical or sociological, within the limits of the era.¹⁷ Thirdly, the correlations drawn were arbitrary. Why does the bishop stand in the place of the Father, the deacons in the place of Jesus, and the presbyters are the successors to the apostles? One could think of any number of other permutations of correlations. One could appeal to the Holy Spirit or not only to the Twelve but also the Seventy sent out by Jesus (Luke 10:1–12).¹⁸ The increasingly arbitrary nature of these correlations

¹⁵ *Magnesians* 6.1. The translation is taken from the critical text and commentary by William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 112.

¹⁶ *Trallians* 3.1, *ibid.* 140. The radical thesis of Joseph Rius-Camps that the hierarchical bias of passages such as these in the Ignatian corpus indicates the presence of a later interpolator, has not found much acceptance (*The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius, the Martyr* [Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1980]).

¹⁷ That such a sociological model could be used is illustrated by Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians in which the well-established sociological metaphor of the body is used to describe the Church.

¹⁸ Galot distinguishes between the sending of the Twelve and the Seventy as correlating with the distinction between episcopal and presbyteral ministry: “Jesus

suggests an uncritical stance. Fourthly, this same arbitrary nature perhaps explains why this approach gained no foothold in the tradition. In the third-century apostolic succession moved to and stayed with the bishops rather than the presbyters, and the presbyteral minister was later to be designated as *alter Christus*.

More successful in terms of its impact upon the tradition was the emerging theology of ministry as sacerdotal. Beginning with the bishop, as evidenced in the ordination ceremony in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, but later spreading to the presbyter, the orders of bishop and presbyter were increasingly seen as a form of priesthood, drawing parallels from the Book of Leviticus. Significantly deacons were not part of this process. The application of the category of priest to presbyteral ministry coincided with the emergence of that ministry from under the shadow of the bishop, as presbyters took on roles, such as the celebration of the Eucharist, because the whole community could not be housed in one Church, or because people in outlying regions could not attend the celebrations in urban areas with the bishop. At this same time diaconal ministry was not simply a stage toward presbyteral ministry, but was closely tied to the bishop. As Hippolytus notes, the deacon is ordained “to serve the bishop and to carry out the bishop’s commands.”¹⁹ As John Collins has observed, this close link between the deacon and the bishop is relatively constant in the tradition.²⁰

How are we to understand the application of the category of priesthood to episcopal and presbyteral ministry? For the history of religions, the priest is a figure of mediation between God and humanity. Mediation is not itself a religious or special category. It can occur in a variety of settings including secular settings as in conflict resolution. What gives it a religious sense is what is being mediated between whom, in this case, in one direction at least, grace from God to humanity. On the other hand, it is a category adopted within and blessed by the tradition to speak of the saving work of Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The complexity of this situation draws attention to the inadequacy of a correlationist stance here.²¹

wills, then, that the Twelve should be surrounded by many co-workers entrusted with a priestly task similar to their own. . . . The fact remains that only the Twelve received directly from Jesus the pastoral and priestly power intended to provide for the future of the Church” (Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood* [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984] 85–86). Galot is working entirely within the framework of special categories.

¹⁹ *Traditio Apostolica* 1.9; trans. and intro. Burton Scott Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1962; orig. ed. 1934) 33–34, cited in Osborne, *Priesthood* 125.

²⁰ John Collins, *Are All Christians Ministers?* (Sydney, Australia; E. J. Dwyer/David Lovell, 1992) 142.

²¹ A similar observation could be made about the use of the term “substance” to

The use of the categories of priesthood and mediator create a number of problems that the theology of ministry must address. The text quoted from First Timothy asserts that there is only one mediator, Jesus Christ. How then can episcopal and presbyteral ministry be spoken of as mediators and priests? In some analogous or extended sense? Or should we deny any mediatorial role, as some elements of the Reformation were eventually to do? Next, how is it possible to distinguish between the mediation of the bishop and that of the presbyter? Are they the same? Is episcopal ministry not distinct from presbyteral ministry? Is there a theological distinction between the two types of mediation? This is not simply a theoretical question. While it requires a theoretical analysis it clearly will have practical ramifications. The theology of ministry cannot be separated from its praxis.

The response of the theology of the Middle Ages to these questions is well known. Given its focus of ordained ministry in the power to celebrate the Eucharist that was common to both presbyteral and episcopal ministry, the Scholastic period found no real distinction between these two orders of ministry. As Osborne notes, “the episcopacy was seen as a dignity and office, and not as the ‘fullness of priesthood’” since the “fullness” was thought to be already present in the presbyterate.²² Osborne further claims that “this theory of a eucharistic priesthood dominated Western theology of priesthood down to Vatican II.”²³ Within this scheme diaconal and other so-called minor orders were simply stepping stones along the way to presbyteral ministry. This theology made no sense of the strong historical links between bishop and deacon.

Again this theology of ministry cannot be taken out of its historical context. The Middle Ages marks a low point in episcopal ministry. Bishops had largely become ranked among the feudal powers in the system of Christendom. They were caught up more in the affairs of state than in those of the Church. The theological stance of the Middle Ages reflects this reality. Whatever distinct role episcopal ministry should have, it was not being effective at this time, and the theology of the day did nothing to remedy the situation. A more detailed study would perhaps indicate that within this vacuum of episcopal ministry, more and more of its activities were taken over by the papacy. To justify such an observation would require a more precise delineation of episcopal and presbyteral activities than the theologians of the Middle Ages were able to provide.

describe the commonality of Father and Son. While once a purely “secular” metaphysical term it has long been taken into the tradition.

²² Osborne, *Priesthood* 209. It should be recognized, however, that this situation did not pertain in the East, where the bishop remained the focus of ministry.

²³ *Ibid.* 207.

Whatever the strengths of the medieval theology of ordained ministry its failure to ground a theological distinction between episcopal and presbyteral ministry must be considered from our present perspective a serious deficiency. This theology failed to give an explanatory account of why, historically, episcopal ministry was clearly primary, with presbyteral ministry emerging as a distinct eucharistic ministry only toward the end of the third century. By making presbyteral ministry its paradigm, this medieval theology could never account for the historical facts some of which, admittedly, it was unaware of. It presented at best a truncated account of ordained ministry, whose distortions became increasingly evident, when coupled with an extrinsicist theology of grace that separated grace from moral, cultural, and social transformation, in the high theology of priesthood in the French school. This movement represented a serious distortion in the direction of transcendence in the religio-cultural dialectic.²⁴

I have already noted the basic perspective of the medieval period continued until Vatican II. At the council a number of theological developments sought to overcome the limitations of the prevailing dominant paradigm. Commenting on an intervention by Archbishop Marty, Osborne raises three issues that the council sought to address: “(1) episcopacy is not simply an office or dignity beyond the priesthood, but the fullness of the priesthood itself. Moreover, (2) priests can only be understood in and through their relationship to episcopal ministry, but this likewise means that bishops can only be understood in their relationship to priestly ministry . . . (3) both episcopal and presbyteral ministry can only be understood in its apostolic relationship or dimension, which means its Christological relationship or dimension.”²⁵

This is what I have been arguing. A systematic theology of ministry must account for the primacy of episcopal ministry. Presbyteral and episcopal (and one might add diaconal) ministry must be understood in terms of their mutual relationships. And all ministry must be understood in terms of the broader mission of the Church that is ultimately christological. This is specified in terms of the threefold activities of teaching, sanctifying, and leading—prophet, priest, and king. Vatican II achieved the first of these goals by asserting the sacramental character of episcopal ordination

²⁴ Dialectically opposed evaluations of this movement can be found in Aidan Nichols who finds the climax of theological reflection on the priesthood in its “high doctrine of the priest as a living extension of the Word incarnate” (*Holy Order: The Apostolic Ministry from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council* [Dublin: Veritas, 1990] 115) and Edward Schillebeeckx who considers the movement “dangerous” (*The Church with a Human Face*, trans. John Bowden [London: SCM, 1985] 202). I share Schillebeeckx’s judgment on this matter.

²⁵ Osborne, *Priesthood* 316.

and by recognizing the collegial character of the order. The third goal was achieved by effectively sublating the traditional focus on Eucharist by putting it within a fuller context of preaching and leading. The second goal perhaps got somewhat lost as the debate shifted more to the question of the relationship between the priesthood of ordained ministry and priesthood of the laity, a task made more difficult by giving the laity a share in the activities of teaching, sanctifying, and leading. To distinguish between the mediations of episcopal and presbyteral ministry one needs to distinguish between those two ministries as well as the ministry of the laity, while at the same time relating all three to the mission of the Church.

It is not clear that post-Vatican II theology has satisfactorily realized the agenda proposed by the council. The dominant strand has understood ministry in terms of leadership. From leadership, the other functions of ministry are then said to follow. Again leadership is a general category, not specific to the religious tradition. Its application in this setting has allowed for a variety of models of leadership, often drawn from the secular world. Questions can be raised about its impact on the religious vision of ministry. One is still left with the problem of distinguishing between episcopal and presbyteral ministry. If leadership is the paradigm of ministry, how does the leadership of the bishop differ from that of the presbyter? Is the bishop simply at a higher level of organizational system, like a bigger version of the parish priest? If so, one is basically back to the vision of the medieval theologians, but from below rather than from above.

A THEOLOGICAL HYPOTHESIS

I would now like to sketch a proposal that draws upon the framework elaborated by Doran that can act as a theological hypothesis for understanding the theology of ministry. The categories are those I outlined as the scale of values, healing and creative vectors, etc. It locates ministry within the theological understanding of the Church's mission as articulated by Doran and developed by me in my two articles in *Pacifica*.

The mission of the Church may be understood in terms of the mediation of grace that seeks to transform evil in all its manifestations into good, and to move human history incrementally toward the kingdom of God. Utilizing the scale of values one can identify three distinct and interdependent healing mediations. There is a mediation from the religious dimension to the personal dimension. This is the healing and elevating work of grace that provides a solution to moral impotence and grounds the possibility of personal authenticity. It can be thought of as priestly in the most direct sense. Secondly, there is a mediation from the personal to the cultural dimension through which persons of graced authenticity seek to transform

culture and restore the integrity of the cultural dialectic. This task could be characterized as prophetic in the most direct sense, but is also priestly in an analogous sense in that it involves a mediation of grace and its consequences. This second mediation is dependent upon the successful operation of the first mediation. The third mediation is from the cultural to the social dimension, through which a restored culture transforms the distortions in our human communities with their economic, political, technological elements and their basis in spontaneous intersubjectivity, to produce justice and peace for all. This mediation could be characterized as kingly in the most direct sense, but it is also priestly in an extended and analogous sense in that it concerns mediation of grace and its consequences. The third mediation is dependent on the success of the previous two mediations. One can also argue that there is an intra-ecclesial mediation that could be called ministry in the strict sense, and a mediation to the larger non-ecclesial world, that Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* identified as the arena of the mission of the laity: “the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, as well as the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media.”²⁶

It would not be difficult to offer the hypothesis that ordained ministry is concerned with the intra-ecclesial mediations of grace. Episcopal ministry finds its focus in the second mediation, from the personal to the cultural, as evidenced in the magisterial role of the episcopal college and the concern for apostolic succession and orthodox teaching that have been a responsibility of the episcopacy from its beginnings. Presbyteral ministry finds its focus in the third mediation, with its specific role in the lives of local church communities seeking to live the gospel and to promote justice and peace. Presbyteral ministry would be dependent on the successful mediation from the personal to the cultural that would provide a vision, a set of meanings and values that instantiate the gospel into the local culture. As the tradition has long held, diaconal ministry is not priestly, not concerned directly with mediation, but with assisting the bishops in the responsibilities of their ministry, “to serve the bishop and to carry out the bishop’s commands.”²⁷

What would be the value of such an hypothesis? Firstly, it provides an explanatory framework that places the threefold order of ministries into a clearly intelligible relationship. It makes clear the absolute primacy of the first mediation that is sacramental grace, but also the relative primacy of

²⁶ *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 70. The issue here is really one of the control of meaning of the term “ministry.” As Thomas O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1999) notes, “when everything is ministry, ministry fades away” (190). Here I have sought to control the meaning of the word “ministry” by specifying its intra-ecclesial focus. Other controls are possible, such as O’Meara’s definition of ministry (150–51). The one I have adopted accords well with the tradition.

²⁷ See n. 19 above.

episcopal over presbyteral ministry and the dependence of the latter upon the former. It places diaconal ministry outside the framework of “priesthood” by placing it in a different relationship to the bishop from that of the presbyter. It incorporates key elements of the tradition in a constructive fashion. Secondly, it also provides a critical tool for an analysis of the history and theologies of ministry. Many of the aspects of the history of ministry and theologizing on ministry become more transparent from this perspective. It allows for a critical identification of strengths and weaknesses, limitations and permanent achievements. These have already been operative in the thumbnail sketch I have outlined. My proposal does not deny the achievements of the past, but as Doran notes, “any genuine and even permanent achievement that [the past] may attain is always likely to assume a different position and status in a later theology that grasps more than we do or that comprehends more deeply what we may grasp less adequately.”²⁸ Finally my proposal is not simply a matter of faith seeking understanding. It is at least potentially transformative. The actual praxis of ministry will bear a relationship of both identity and difference to the present proposal. My proposal requires ecclesial implementation which would be a contribution “to the emergence of a new cultural matrix”²⁹ within the Church at least and eventually lead to a new praxis of ministry.

Still such a suggestion remains a theological hypothesis. In Lonergan’s functional specialties, systematic theology is not concerned with certainty but with building understanding. In my judgment, Rahner failed to appreciate this fact in his criticism of Lonergan’s work on the psychological analogy of the Trinity.³⁰ As an hypothesis it must be tested against the historical data, it must be compared with other hypotheses, it must be placed in critical relationship to the tradition, but it remains an hypothesis that may be replaced or transcended at some later stage. What one might modestly observe is that at present there are few alternative hypotheses against which to compare it.³¹ Systematic theology of any style, let alone the rigorous ideal identified by Lonergan and Doran, is currently not much

²⁸ Doran, “System and History” 655.

²⁹ Ibid. 676. Though I would agree with Doran that one should not limit theology to such an intra-ecclesial cultural role, what he calls the “self-mediation of Christian constitutive meaning” (673).

³⁰ See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970) 118, esp. n. 44.

³¹ The closest I have seen to such a systematic interrelationship is to be found in the work of George Tavard, *A Theology for Ministry* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1983) chap. 4, “The Fourfold Structure” 75–92. However Tavard concludes that episcopal ministry is not essential to the structures of the Church, a position that some would think as difficult to reconcile with the tradition.

in favor.³² As Lonergan notes, “today’s scholars resemble twelfth-century compilers more than they do thirteenth-century theologians,” satisfying themselves with the necessary historical and exegetical studies preliminary to a truly historical systematization.³³

OTHER PROPOSALS REGARDING THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

Doran’s concern with a theology of history is not unique in the current theological climate. Other proposals have been put forward which bear consideration to clarify their mutual differences.

First, there is a proposal of Hans Küng. In a number of works he has used the paradigm theory of Thomas Kuhn to identify six periods in the history of the Church in which a significantly different worldview or paradigm dominated the self-understanding and praxis of the Church. These are: the early Christian apocalyptic paradigm; the early Church Hellenistic paradigm; the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; the Reformation Protestant paradigm; the Enlightenment modern paradigm; and finally the contemporary ecumenical postmodern paradigm.³⁴ David Bosch has used this paradigm analysis in his magisterial work, *Transforming Mission*.³⁵ As Küng’s final paradigm suggests, the use of a paradigm analysis is thoroughly postmodern in approach. It assumes no grand theory of history but is purely descriptive. It does not attempt an analysis of how or why paradigms shift or whether these shifts constitute progress, decline, or redemption.

Though Küng’s approach attempts to be empirically based it is a far cry from Doran’s demand that theology also be normative and dialectic. Küng’s approach is deliberately relativist. While Küng would be wary of the dangers of a dominating ideology under the guise of a normative theology of history, there is in fact more danger in his own proposal. Given no overarching theology of history that would place Küng’s paradigms into an intelligible framework, they must be seen as arbitrary impositions that can be proscribed or countered by a sufficiently powerful group. Finally, Küng’s paradigms shed no light on the questions I have raised about the threefold order of ministry.

Another approach I would like to consider is that of John Milbank in his work *Theology and Social Theory*. Significantly, in terms of the project

³² One of the few genuine exponents of a systematic approach would be the Protestant theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg. However his approach is more in the classical sense than that proposed by Doran.

³³ Quoted in Doran, “System and History” 657.

³⁴ For an account of these paradigms, see Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

³⁵ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991).

suggested by Lonergan in his epilogue to *Insight*, Milbank is also concerned with a historical ecclesiology. For Milbank, the whole sweep of Church history is the proper object for the study of ecclesiology. Ecclesiology must be empirical through and through. It must deal “with the actual genesis of real historical churches, not simply with the imagination of an ecclesial ideal.”³⁶ However, in contrast to Lonergan and Doran who posit a positive contribution to this project from the social sciences, Milbank eschews the social sciences as heretical subversions of Christian faith. For Milbank, “there can be no sociology in the sense of a universally ‘rational’ account of the ‘social’ character of all societies”;³⁷ since “the Church is already, necessarily, by virtue of its institution, a ‘reading’ of other human societies, it becomes possible to consider ecclesiology as also a ‘sociology’.”³⁸

In Doran’s terms such an approach would eliminate all general categories from theological discourse. Theology would be self-sufficient and would be concerned only with the mediation of Christian constitutive meanings to the Christian community itself, drawing solely on the resources currently within the tradition. But as I have already noted, the tradition itself is a mix of general and special categories, and these cannot be separated out in some vain hope to be left with a “pure” tradition. Milbank’s position is based on his understanding of the grace-nature debate that in turn has its foundation in his commitment to “linguistic idealism.”³⁹ As Doran notes such a foundation tends “to reduce intellectual enterprises to a set of discrete and non-communicating strata of concepts.”⁴⁰ In Milbank’s case this leads to the supernaturalizing of the natural and the consequent supplanting of social sciences by ecclesiology. In terms of the theology of ministry this would bring us back to the position of Ignatius of Antioch, making arbitrary correlations between the orders of ministry and elements of the tradition, in the hope of stumbling upon some happy combination.

CONCLUSION

Doran has put forward a radical and demanding vision for systematic theology. It is a collaborative vision, one that demands the resources not only of exegetical and historical studies, not only of the social and other

³⁶ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 380.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 380–1.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 380.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 343. For a further exploration of Milbank’s linguistic idealism see my article, “It is Easy To See—The Footnotes of John Milbank,” *Philosophy and Theology* 11 (1998) 35–42.

⁴⁰ Doran, “System and History” 656, n. 10.

human sciences, not only of philosophy and metaphysics, but of profound personal conversion, of the self-appropriation of the religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic dimensions of human subjectivity. The purpose of my article has been an attempt to expand his proposal through a consideration of the theology of ministry, in order to illustrate his vision with a concrete example. The actual theological hypothesis developed may or may not succeed but at the least it is suggestive of the goal that Doran proposes for systematic theology.