

THE STRUCTURE OF A SYSTEMATIC ECCLESIOLOGY

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[Drawing on the classical understanding of theology as faith seeking understanding, the author explores the structure of a systematic ecclesiology, arguing that such a theology must be empirical, critical, normative, dialectic, and practical. He further maintains that such a goal requires the critical engagement of the social sciences. His position is illustrated through an analysis of the emergence of structures of ministry in the early Church, viewed especially through 1 Clement and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch.]

ECCLESIOLOGY COMES IN various shapes and sizes. Compared with other theological topics it seems less clear what ecclesiology, and especially a systematic ecclesiology, seeks to achieve. Ecclesiological works will focus on a number of areas—biblical, patristic, or Vatican II—usually with an eye to the current state of the Church. Some writers seem to despair of the possibility of any one systematic account of the Church, preferring to view the Church through the lenses of various models,¹ while others view the current state of the subject as a clash of various root metaphors, each seeking dominance as the “true” form of ecclesiology.² The question that I seek to address is what should a systematic ecclesiology seek to achieve? My answer is that systematic ecclesiology should be empirical/historical, critical, normative, dialectic, and practical. I explore the import of each of these qualifications.

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¹ For example, Avery Dulles's classical work, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1978). His revised, expanded edition, published in 1987, seeks to overcome the eclecticism of the earlier edition with an additional model, that of discipleship, which combines features of each.

² For example, the methodological article by Pedro Rodriguez, “Theological Method for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church*, ed. Peter Phan (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000) 129–56.

However, so as not to leave this discussion at the level of methodology alone, I seek to illustrate the goals of a systematic ecclesiology with a concrete example. My example comprises a topic that is the focus of diverse studies leading to equally diverse evaluations, the topic of the emergence of ministry as an institutional form in the early Church. This will act as a test case to see if the current proposal is indeed of value. If some light is shed on this difficult topic, then the current proposal may be expanded into a project with commensurately higher goals. Such a project draws its inspiration from the foundational writings in ecclesiology of Joseph Komonchak³ and the contribution to the theology of history provided by Robert Doran.⁴

The overall structure of my article is as follows. The first two sections present the argument that a systematic ecclesiology should be structured according to the requirements that it be empirical, critical, normative, dialectical, and practical. This leads to a further two sections that examine the categories needed for ecclesiology, in particular the critical appropriation of the social sciences in order to develop proper categories for the task. The next four sections represent an interlacing of theological and sociological themes required to analyze the emergence of the structure of ministry in the early Church, as documented in *1 Clement* and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Before concluding, a final section contrasts the present approach with that of communion ecclesiology.

THE RANGE OF DATA: ECCLESIOLOGY AS EMPIRICAL AND CRITICAL

Theology, according to long-standing consent, can be thought of as “faith seeking understanding.” Ecclesiology, the theology of Church, seeks to understand the reality called Church. Systematic ecclesiology seeks a systematic understanding of Church, one that integrates its diverse aspects within a single comprehensive framework. Immediately we are faced with two problems: (1) What is the range of data we are seeking to understand when we understand the “Church”? and (2) What is the type of understanding proper to this range of data? I now consider each of these problems in turn.

What are we seeking to understand when we understand the Church? Is it the Church as we find it today with its vast and complex institutional forms, ranging from local parish communities to the transnational networks of ecclesial bureaucracy, authority and agencies, from “home masses” to

³ See Joseph Komonchak, *Foundations in Ecclesiology* (Boston: Boston College, 1995).

⁴ Specifically, Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990).

huge public liturgies in Roman basilicas? Or is it the early Church snuggling within various cities around the Mediterranean, established by missionaries such as Paul and Barnabas, tracing its origins to the mission of Jesus, the crucified Messiah? Or is it an idealized Church making only tangential contact with these historical realities, a Church whose structures exist only in some idealized sense, whose operations rarely impinge on anyone's life, a Church that never really knows change because, in its idealized world, it is already complete and perfect?

This third option is perhaps the most common in works on ecclesiology. They provide often inspiring but idealized models of church life based on profound notions of *communio*, *perichoresis*, *mysterium*, and *diakonia*. They describe a Church that we would all want to belong to. But when we look at the Church as an historical concrete reality we may wonder about the discrepancy between the idealized form and the historical facts. Have the authors described a merely Platonic ideal? Should we perhaps distinguish between the Church as a spiritual reality, pure and spotless, and the pilgrim Church here on earth, *semper purificanda*? But have we really understood the Church or just some ideal representation? Perhaps John Milbank is correct in suggesting that the range of data with which ecclesiology deals must be concrete, "not simply with the imagination of an ecclesial ideal."⁵

The second option is popular with authors seeking to ground the nature and existence of the Church in the experience of the early Christians.⁶ Their detailed and often conflicting exegeses of Scripture and reconstructions of historical events provide them with the needed conclusions either to ground or criticize the practice of the current Church. The early Church alone is thought to be normative in its structures. These are used, often in polemic fashion, either to deconstruct the history of the Church as a history of decline,⁷ or to view the present as the direct expression of the past contained in embryonic form.⁸ Both approaches are clearly ideological in intent and mask a myriad of theological assumptions, particularly about the

⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1990) 380.

⁶ The standard work in this regard is that of Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), a book which has been reprinted countless times and still regularly appears in ecclesiological bibliographies.

⁷ For example the contributions of Rudolph Sohm in the classical debate between Sohm and Harnack, see James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (New York: Cambridge University, 1992) 82–94.

⁸ This is the traditional Catholic response to the problems raised by historical development, for example, Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984).

problem of historical change and the sources of normativity. While the historical data of the New Testament is an essential element in ecclesiology, to focus on it alone is to leave too many questions unanswered, particularly methodological questions.

The first option is admirable in its concreteness, focusing our attention on the data of the present Church. But it too raises the same methodological questions. For the fundamental data of ecclesiology is indeed concretely historical, but not of the present to the exclusion of the past, nor of the past to the exclusion of the present. The data of ecclesiology encompasses the whole history of the Church, from its beginnings in Jerusalem to its present transnational structures. This is the range of data with which ecclesiology must deal. Clearly this is an enormous task. One needs only consider the present multi-volume work in progress, *History of Vatican II*, to recognize the extent of the problem ecclesiology faces.⁹ Of necessity ecclesiology is a collaborative exercise drawing on multiple disciplines in theology: biblical studies, church history, and beyond. As Lonergan once noted, modern theology has become “largely empirical,” and so, now we may conclude that ecclesiology must become “largely historical.”¹⁰

Systematic ecclesiology will have a narrative structure. It will tell a story of the Church from its origins until the present, with perhaps intimations into the future. This narrative will not be a naïve apologetic history that takes sources at their face value, but rather a critical history that recognizes perspectives and interests, agendas and polemics in its sources. Ecclesiology must be not only thoroughly empirical, but thoroughly critical in its handling of the historical data. Anything less than this would be a betrayal of intellectual integrity by the ecclesiologist. In terms that may be more familiar to some, a systematic ecclesiology will subsume the results of the first and positive phase of Lonergan’s theological method, the functional specialties of research, interpretation, history, and dialectics, in order to tell the critical history of the Church.¹¹

Two clarifications are required from the outset. In talking about the historical data of the Church, to which Church are we referring? Here again I find myself in agreement with Milbank who argues that ecclesiology must deal “with the actual genesis of real historical churches.”¹² However,

⁹ *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo; English ed. Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995–2000). To date three of five projected volumes have appeared.

¹⁰ Bernard Lonergan, “Theology in Its New Context,” in *A Second Collection: Papers*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 58: “. . . theology was a deductive, and it has become largely an empirical science.”

¹¹ For this and subsequent references to Lonergan’s theological method, see, his *Method in Theology* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1972).

¹² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 380. While agreeing with the proj-

to do so means making choices between actual existing historical churches. I choose to focus on the Catholic Church. Others may seek to pursue the same type of project for other churches.¹³ It may be helpful to contrast this orientation to a Catholic ecclesiology, with the suggestion of Roger Haight that the “object of the discipline of ecclesiology is the whole or universal church,”¹⁴ not just some segment of it. While I agree with Haight that any particular church cannot automatically claim to be identified with the “universal Church,” I do not agree with his contention that the proper object of ecclesiology is the “whole or universal Church.” In fact there is a real danger that such an object becomes an idealization. While the churches may be united eschatologically, in the here and now they are divided on many scores, and it would be methodologically unsound not to recognize this.¹⁵

The second clarification concerns the distinction between the history of the Church, and the history of reflection on the Church. The history of Church ultimately becomes intelligible only by including a history of theological reflection upon Church. That reflection does not seek simply to understand Church as it is empirically constituted. It is not just empirical but also attempts to be normative, spelling out not just how Church actually is but how it should be, at least in the theologian’s understanding. The norms may draw on what is best in the actual praxis of Church in a given era as well as elements of the tradition. These ecclesiologies will feed back into the actual praxis of Church by presenting a theoretical model to be followed, imitated, and praised. A truly systematic ecclesiology must take into account not only the praxis of Church but also the history of ecclesiology itself and the ways they have shaped that praxis. The story of the Church will include the story of the stories of the Church. The range of data must include both these aspects.¹⁶

ect as identified by Milbank, I do not agree with his method which eschews the social sciences, nor does he actually contribute to such a project himself.

¹³ Here I would concur with Lonergan that the starting point does not matter, since, “the method is designed to take care of the matter,” that is, wherever one starts the same basic issues will be raised and require resolution. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 150.

¹⁴ Roger Haight, “Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Science et Esprit* 45 (1993) 253–81, at 256.

¹⁵ Of course a normative and dialectical analysis of the causes of these divisions in their historical particularity will be of great interest to ecclesiology as conceived in this article.

¹⁶ This point is well made by Joseph Komonchak, “The Significance of Vatican II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church*, ed. Peter Phan, 69–92. As applied to all theology the point is more fully explicated by Robert Doran, “Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998)

ECCLESIOLOGY AS NORMATIVE, DIALECTICAL, AND PRACTICAL

If the range of data for ecclesiology is the history of the Church, including the history of theological reflection on the Church as one moment in the constitution of that body, then the question that arises is: what type of understanding is appropriate for such diverse historical data? This is undoubtedly the fundamental methodological question that all ecclesiology needs to face, if a systematic ecclesiology is not to be reduced to the production of a critical history of the Church. To seek the systematic intelligibility of such vast historical data is nothing less than to ask for a philosophy and a theology of history itself, and this is a daunting task.¹⁷ Further my conviction is that this will inevitably involve serious engagement with the social and human sciences.¹⁸

The Church is a human community significantly constituted through the actions, intentions, and decisions of a multiplicity of human beings from Jesus through to Peter, Paul, James, John, and others during the apostolic era, through to the actions, intentions, and decisions of the present pope and all the faithful. This is, of course, not to deny the divine origins of the Church, since the actions, intentions and decisions of Jesus are those of the divine subject of the Word of God, incarnate as a human being living in obedience to the Father. The Spirit of that selfsame Jesus is a principle of authenticity operating in the life of the Church, through its members. Nonetheless it remains that the Church as a historical community is significantly constituted by human actions, intentions, and decisions. What renders these intelligible is their proper orientation to the goal or purpose of the Church itself, the goal that Jesus identified and expressed heuristically in the symbol of the “kingdom of God.” I argue that the Church is

567–607, and “System and History: The Challenge to Catholic Systematic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 652–78.

¹⁷ As Komonchak notes: “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 history” (*Foundations in Ecclesiology* 81). It is significant that both Komonchak and Doran, the major inspirations for this article, are Lonergan scholars. Lonergan’s early involvement in the problems associated with the “philosophy of history” have been recently documented by Patrick Brown, “System and History in Lonergan’s Early Historical and Economic Manuscripts,” *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis* 1 (2000) 32–76, available only on the Web at www.mun.ca/jmda/.

¹⁸ See Bernard Lonergan, who argues that the Church must become “not only a process of self-constitution but also a fully conscious process of self-constitution. But to do so it will have to recognize that theology is not the full science of man, that theology illuminates only certain aspects of human reality, that the church can become a fully conscious process of self-constitution only when theology unites itself with all other relevant branches of human studies” (*Method in Theology* 364).

“missionary by its very nature”¹⁹ and that this teleological orientation is central to a systematic ecclesiology.

This element gives ecclesiology theological depth, ensuring that it is not reduced to being simply a critical history of the Church. It adds something new, for the introduction of an explicit teleology based on the kingdom of God provides us with norms for evaluating the life of the Church.²⁰ Thus a systematic ecclesiology must be not only empirical and critical, but also normative and hence evaluative. It must allow us to judge whether this change, this new structure, teaching, or program contributes to the purpose of the Church or it does not. Ecclesiology does so by seeking an answer to the question whether this change, structure, teaching, or program is properly oriented to the goal of the Church, the incremental realization of the kingdom.²¹ Certainly this renewed appreciation of the kingdom of God is one of the major achievements of modern ecclesiology, though it is rarely used as the basic norm for evaluating the whole of the history of the Church. Its use remains more or less heuristic and foundational in understanding the mission of Jesus.

Again in reference to Lonergan’s theological method, the import of what has been argued is that a systematic ecclesiology must take into account his functional specialties of foundations and doctrines. Foundations will be needed to provide the basic categories to give an account of the kingdom, as well as to control the meaning of those categories through the foundational reality of the theologian’s converted subjectivity. Later I shall ex-

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio* no. 5. This emphasis on mission stands in some contrast to contemporary communion ecclesiologies, a point I take up later in this article.

²⁰ While I use the language of “final cause,” what I have in mind is more like what Lonergan refers to as “finality,” a “dynamic orientation towards completeness that becomes determinate only in the process of completion” (*Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992; orig. ed. 1958] 470).

²¹ Some might view this as a stance where “the message is no longer understood totally in terms of eschatology, but also in terms of salvation history” and presents a “de-eschatologized Gospel.” See John Fuellenbach, *Ecclesiastical Office and the Primacy of Rome: An Evaluation of Recent Theological Discussion on First Clement* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1980) 131. After nearly 2000 years of “delayed parousia,” one might wonder why this should be a problem. As Louis-Marie Chauvet notes: “to balance the ‘already’, and the ‘not yet’ inevitably opened up space for a theology of the sacramentality of the Church, which was the only one that could be adapted to the in-between time whose duration was revealing itself to be more and more indefinite” (*Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Peter Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont [Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995] 171).

pand on the question of categories. The theologian must also take into account the outcomes of doctrines, both ecclesial and theological, that is, judgments pertaining to the reality of the Church, its divine origins, its sacramental forms, and most particularly its complex relationship to the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus.

Can we not ask that our ecclesiology be empirical, critical, and normative? Achieving these goals alone would be a major feat. However, by raising the problem of normativity, ecclesiology must exploit another opportunity. Norms, as we know, are not always achieved. The actual history of the Church will diverge then from these norms in a variety of ways. This divergence might resemble the random divergence from a statistical frequency, noteworthy in itself but requiring no further analysis. Or it might be a more systematic divergence based on a failure to grasp the nature of the Church's goal. For example, one might conceive of the Church's goal to be the salvation of souls, conceived in a Platonic sense.²² This would be a major distortion of the actual goal of the kingdom of God. A truly systematic ecclesiology will seek to understand the ways in which such systematic breakdowns can occur. In doing so, ecclesiology will become dialectical. It is perhaps clear now what a vital role the data of past ecclesiologies provide in this process, because these are fundamental articulations of the Church's understanding of the nature of its goal. Distortions in this understanding will have ramifications in church practice and history.

This brings us to the final type of insight proper to the task of ecclesiology. An analysis that is normative and dialectical will also be practical. It will guide action, propose possible courses of action, and outline their likely outcomes. It will diagnose a sickness, and supply the prescription for the needed medicine. Just as social analysis leads to social policy, so too ecclesiology will have its practical ramifications. By merging into pastoral planning and practical theology, it will anticipate the concerns of the functional specialty of communications. Of all the theologies, ecclesiology must be the most practical.

In summary, a consideration of the range of data leads to the conclusion that ecclesiology must be empirical and critical, that is, it must provide us with a critical history both of the Church and of prior reflections on the Church. Consideration of this type of understanding leads to the conclusion that a truly systematic ecclesiology must be normative, dialectical, and practical.

²² Such a suggestion might be made of those neo-Scholastic ecclesiologies that viewed the beatific vision as the telos or final cause of the Church. See Dennis M. Doyle who identifies this as common teaching among neo-Scholastics (*Communion Ecclesiology* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000] 41–42).

CATEGORIES: SOCIAL SCIENCES IN ECCLESIOLOGY

I have noted that the biblical symbol of the kingdom of God acts heuristically as the goal or purpose of the Church. Should we leave our discussion at the level of a heuristic symbol or should we seek greater specification? If the latter, what type of specification should we be seeking?²³

My first point is that it will not be sufficient to restrict ourselves to biblical language, no matter how rich it might be. The precise specification of the symbol of the kingdom will require drawing categories from a range of disciplines that are accustomed to dealing with the full scope of human historical and social existence. Commonly this will involve engagement with the human sciences. My second point is that such an engagement will not take the existing understandings of the human sciences simply at face value. Rather it will involve a reorientation of the human sciences, theologically motivated, but drawing on their own natural dynamism.

This suggestion will doubtlessly draw criticism from both sides of the equation. Some theologians will inevitably object that the use of the social sciences is a “sociological reduction” of ecclesiology. Theology has its own proper language and categories and these should be sufficient. A more radical critique, coming from Milbank, would be to cast a pall of suspicion over the whole of the social sciences as ways of “policing the sublime,” in the name of heterodox or pagan conceptions of creation. Without seeking to engage Milbank’s critique in detail, I note only that its theological basis lies in an understanding of the grace/nature debate that “supernaturalizes the natural,” effectively eliminating the theological category of nature. The tautly maintained distinction between grace and nature remains, however, an essential element of a Catholic theology, and as such not only allows but necessitates the use of natural reason, including the social sciences, in the study of theology. The Council of Nicea could not have spoken of the unity of Father and Son without evoking the general philosophical category of “substance,” transforming the category in the process.²⁴ So too, ecclesiology cannot speak of the existence of the Church in history without drawing

²³ For example, in his magisterial work, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998) Fuellenbach spells out the variety of ways in which contemporary exegesis and theology considered the kingdom, identifying no less than eight different models (62): the kingdom as future hope; as inner spiritual experience: the interior kingdom; as mystical communion: the heavenly kingdom; as institutional church: the ecclesiastical kingdom; as counter-system: the subversive kingdom; as political state: the theocratic kingdom; as Christianized culture: the transforming kingdom; as earthly utopia: the utopian kingdom. Each of these models seeks to specify something more than a mere heuristic symbol, which might too easily become an empty cipher. What is of interest for the present investigation is the type of categories needed to fill out our heuristic symbol.

²⁴ See for example, Bernard Lonergan, “The Origins of Christian Realism,” in *Second Collection* 239–62.

on appropriate categories that seek to explain processes of social structure, cultural identity and historical change, again transforming these categories in the process if needed.

Sociologists might in turn be at best amused at the suggestion that theologians have anything to contribute to their discipline. At worst it could be viewed as an unwarranted intrusion of faith into a scientifically “objective” discipline. Such an objection, however, fails to note the significant difference between the social and physical sciences.²⁵ The social sciences seek to understand human society, which is in significant part the product of human actions, intentions, and decisions. What the social sciences may fail to allude to is that some human actions, intentions and decisions may lack central elements of intelligibility needed for them to be “understood.”²⁶ Put simply the human sciences must deal with the problem of sin and evil, and hence have a theological dimension not found in the physical sciences. The failure of many approaches in the human sciences to grasp this theological dimension of their work means that they require a theological reorientation, not as an intrusion of faith into science but precisely in order to make them properly scientific.

Here I draw attention to the work of Robert Doran, in particular his book *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, which provides a set of categories grounded in the writings of Bernard Lonergan—the scale of values, healing and creating in history, and dialectics—which can operate as an explication of the biblical symbol of the kingdom of God, and can effectively reorient the social sciences. Such an explication marks a transition from a merely descriptive account of the kingdom toward a truly explanatory framework. The burden of proof of these assertions lies beyond the

²⁵ I would argue that such a failure is evident in the work of Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987). Boff seems to take the scientific claims of the social sciences at face value, not recognizing the significant difference between the physical and human sciences.

²⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar point when he notes that “unintelligible actions are failed candidates for the status of intelligible action; and to lump unintelligible actions and intelligible actions together in a single class of actions and then characterize actions in terms of what items of both sets have in common is to make the mistake of ignoring this.” *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984) 209. A good example of such a social surd would be apartheid in South Africa, where people were systematically differentiated not on an intelligible distinction, but on an empirical distinction, the color of their skin. Similarly to make some distinctions simply on the basis of gender is strictly unintelligible. The question of the problem of evil means that conversion, identified as central to Lonergan’s theological method, is also central to the human sciences, because what one identifies as evil will depend to a large extent, on the presence or absence of conversion in its various modalities, religious, moral, intellectual, affective, and psychic.

scope of my present study, and has been attempted elsewhere.²⁷ However I include this comment here to make clear the difference between heuristic and descriptive accounts of the kingdom and what might be expected of an explanatory account.

STRUCTURE, IDENTITY, AUTHORITY, AND CHANGE

Given any human society which exists over historical time-scales there are four clearly identifiable and interrelated categories which need to be identified. These categories are structure, identity, authority, and change.

Structure concerns the nature and existence of institutions, specialized subgroups and classes, their interrelationships and purposes. In society at large we might think of democratic institutions, the judiciary, economic entrepreneurs and so on. In the Church we might think of the different orders of ministry, the nature of church councils, the fact of religious orders, the lay-clergy distinction and so on. A systematic ecclesiology will seek to understand the origin and nature of these structures, their purpose within the larger purpose or mission of the Church, which is specified heuristically as the kingdom of God. Such structures are intelligible in terms of their relationship to the kingdom, and conversely are unintelligible inasmuch as they hinder or undermine that mission.

Also every society is concerned with the question of **identity**. Are we a multicultural society? Are we a Christian society? Do we believe in democracy or tyranny? Such questions can give rise to the most rigorous and passionate debates within a society. Often this identity is expressed through powerful national symbols such as the flag, or institutions such as the presidency (USA) or the parliament (Australia/UK). The Church too has had a long struggle with the question of identity, the processes and institutions by which that identity is defined. Identity, within the Church, is grounded in divine revelation and the response of human faith. The symbols of that identity contain but are not exhausted by the dogmas of the Church. At their core the great dogmatic debates of the Church have been questions of identity and its definition. More generally, identity is related to structure but cannot be reduced to it. Identity concerns the meanings and values that define what the society is, be it secular or religious. Yet by what authority are these to be determined?

Next are raised questions of **authority**, considered as legitimate power,

²⁷ See my articles, "Towards a Systematic Theology of Ministry: A Catholic Perspective," *Pacifica* 8 (1995) 74–96; "Church, Anti-Types and Ordained Ministry: Systematic Perspectives," *Pacifica* 10 (1997) 331–49; and "Theology and the Social Sciences: The Contribution of Bernard Lonergan," not yet published.

and the structures that embody that authority.²⁸ Who in the community is authorized to identify and change the identity of the group, and what structures facilitate such a process? As Komonchak has argued, authority is inherently a relational category. Individuals have authority inasmuch as they can legitimately claim certain knowledge or power and that claim is socially recognized. Institutions or offices can claim authority inasmuch as there is an antecedent expectation that those who fulfil them will have the requisite personal authority. When this expectation is not fulfilled, institutions lose authority. Office in the Church makes a claim to a special type of authority, one that is divinely mandated.²⁹ What is the nature of these claims and how are they to be validated? In what ways if any is authority in the Church different from that in other human societies?

Finally there is the problem of **change**. Human societies, including the Church, are not static entities. They change over historical time frames. Structures emerge and fade away. Meanings and values shift as well as the symbols that mediate them. What was once dominant becomes minor, or even subversive of the new context. How do we understand such changes? What is the dynamic of change and how does it affect structure and identity? Here we can grasp a fundamental distinction between society at large and the Church. On democratic understandings the identity of a society is the free creation of its people and so is subject to fundamental revision. Not so the Church which understands its identity as a gift from God. Does this mean it can never change, or can there be a change in identity of the Church, but not of identity?³⁰ To answer such questions we need to locate them within a larger theoretical framework more familiar with such issues, that is, the social sciences.

These four interlocking categories, structure, identity, authority, and change, are common to the concerns of the social sciences, yet they have a

²⁸ See Lonergan, "The Dialectic of Authority," in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 5–12. Lonergan adopts the standard Weberian definition of authority as legitimate power but significantly alters its meaning through an analysis of legitimacy based on authenticity.

²⁹ See Joseph Komonchak, "Authority and Magisterium," in *Vatican Authority and American Catholic Dissent*, ed. William W. May (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 103–14. See also his contribution in *Church Authority in American Culture: The Second Cardinal Bernardin Conference* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) where he states: "The primary bearer of the Gospel from generation to generation is the whole community, and what we call authorities or structures or authority live on the capital of the word in grace that's found in the church . . . authority and community mediate one another" (130).

³⁰ See Richard Lennan, *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (New York: Oxford University, 1995) 139. Also Karl Rahner, "Reflection on the Concept of 'Ius Divinum' in Catholic Thought," in *Theological Investigations*, 5, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 219–43.

special theological resonance in ecclesiology. In relation to the Church, the first three are often claimed to be of divine origin. Jesus establishes the Church with various institutional structures. His divine teachings form the core of its identity and he imbues those who fulfil its institutional structures with a divinely mandated authority. Much of the burden of a historically conscious ecclesiology resides in the task of measuring such faith claims against what can be established through the means of critical history. The question of change is more difficult. As Ben Meyer has noted, in the early Church “they did not *acknowledge* development. They overlooked it. They suppressed its novelty, intent on ways of relocating the creative aspects of their own historical experience, safely and objectively, in God’s eschatological saving act.”³¹ Such has often been the oversight of the Church and often ecclesiology ever since. More recent theologies, more cognizant of change will often appeal to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church as a source of the new. From what follows I argue that the problem of change requires a more nuanced analysis, one more cognizant of the general processes of and distinction between social and cultural change.

AN EXAMPLE OF EMERGING STRUCTURES

In the light of these comments on the structure of systematic ecclesiology, I would like to focus attention on the issue of the emergence of the structures of ministry in the early Church. Few issues have been as subject to such detailed study, few are as significant in terms of their long-term impact of the life and self-understanding of the Church, and few are as subject to dialectically divergent evaluation, often along denomination lines.³² For many, the process of “institutionalization” marks the beginning of the long process of decline, culminating in the present “parlous” state of Roman Catholicism. For others, the immediate post-apostolic writings of *I Clement* and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch represent the finest articulation of the Catholic ideal of ecclesiastical office. The starting point for much of this discussion is the debate between Rudolph Sohm and Adolf von Harnack, a debate that in turn influenced the sociological writings of Max Weber who used the early Church as a model in his analysis of the shift from “charismatic authority” to either “rational authority” or “traditional authority.”³³

³¹ Ben Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1986) 23.

³² See the two works: John Fuellenbach, *Ecclesiastical Office*; and James Tunstead Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church* esp. 1–179.

³³ Burtchaell notes the circularity of this process. Weber draws on Harnack and Sohm, but is cited as a sociological source by later authors writing in the same debate (*From Synagogue to Church* 138).

This issue touches on the key concerns I have already identified: structure, identity, authority, and change. Ministry is the key structure to emerge from the first two centuries of the early Church. That emergence of this structure is itself linked to the problems of identity, authority, and change, and, in due course, ministry becomes the central authorized institution for dealing with future questions of identity and change. It can also illustrate the thesis that ecclesiology must be empirical, critical, normative, dialectical, and practical. Much of the empirical and critical work has been done by the many scholars who have studied this era, and, in particular, the writings of *I Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. I hope that my present article will contribute to the normative, dialectical, and practical side of the project.

However, before we turn to any analysis of that era, we must deal with two preliminary concerns of a more sociological nature, though not without theological significance. The first concerns the nature of the process of “institutionalization.” The second is a delineation of the major trajectories of social and cultural change.

Institutionalization: Reorienting the Standard Account

As I have noted, many who attempt to analyze the emergence of ministry will evoke in one form or other, the notion of institutionalization. One may well ask, what exactly does this term explain? Most who use it will speak of some mysterious type of “sociological necessity,” or simply an inherent tendency for groups to institutionalize, however regrettable that may be. It starts to sound like a paradoxical “necessary evil,” something we all admit must and will happen but which we regret deeply nonetheless.³⁴

Surely however more needs to be said. There are serious ontological objections to the notion of a “necessary evil” particularly in relation to human constructs such as institutions. And if institutions are so “evil” why are they so prevalent? What is it that pushes human communities to develop institutional forms, be it in soccer clubs, art societies, and even religious communities? The answer is simple. Institutional forms provide an efficient means to achieve certain recurrent needs within the community. These needs are generally internal, that is, they are needs for the community to reproduce itself, to maintain identity and to regulate the process of change. Such needs are generally distinct from the goals of the community which may be much broader. A soccer club exists to promote playing

³⁴ Both Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 50, and David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 50–52, refer to the process as a “sociological law.” Bosch goes so far as to identify the shift from “movement” to “institution” as a failure of the early Church, but at the same time necessary for the Church to survive.

soccer, but its institutional form ensures that members are trained, that playing fields are maintained, that games are organized, and so on. Indeed the existence and efficiency of the institution frees the energy of the group to better achieve its goals. People join the soccer club to play soccer, not to run the club, but if no one runs the club, the game suffers. From this perspective institutionalization is good, for it promotes the common good of the community by allowing the community to focus its energies on its goals and not on its internal needs. Institutions are a product of practical intelligence, to meet the particular recurrent needs of a human community.³⁵

This is not to deny that institutions can become deformed. They may be used to promote group biases or to misuse and maintain power. These are the besetting sins of institutions, and, like the poor, they will always be with us. Those who view the process of institutionalization as a “necessary evil” tend to focus on these sins, while acknowledging the necessity of the process. Still we must clearly differentiate between the proper purpose and use of institutions, and their misuse. To view them as a “necessary evil” is to invite permanent suspicion of institutions per se, indeed to invite their abandonment as part of the problem, rather than view their reform, together with constant vigilance against their distortions, as part of the solution.

This analysis has two advantages over the more prevalent Weberian approach. The first is that it relativizes institutions without undermining them. Institutions are the product of practical intelligence. There are, as the saying goes, many ways to skin a cat. There are also many institutional forms that can be adopted to meet the recurrent needs of the community. Some will be more efficient, other less so. Some will be efficient but dehumanizing (such as dictatorships, or the committee of one), while others might be more humanizing but less efficient (such as full participatory democracy). Practical intelligence and the efficiencies it achieves are not the only communal values, but at the same time they cannot be neglected or the energies of the community will be dissipated. The second advantage is that one can develop a critique of institutions on the basis of a critique of practical intelligence, of the type found in the writings of Bernard Lonergan.³⁶ The analysis can be dialectical and truly practical.

It is not difficult to relate this to the life of the Church. What are the

³⁵ It is interesting to note how often institutions are spoken of as “static,” in contrast to some other element of social existence. In some way institutions operate in our discussions like concepts. Both are the most obvious elements to focus on, sociologically or cognitively, but if we take them alone we miss the intellectual dynamism which is their origin.

³⁶ In particular one can evoke Lonergan’s notions of group and general bias.

recurrent needs of the Church? One may think of a whole range of answers, from leadership to the stewardship of property, and some of these needs may vary in different historical epochs. However, if we narrow the question to “what are the recurrent needs of the Church, specific to its identity as a Christian community?,” the answer might be more restricted. We might answer in terms of things such as public prayer, initiation into the community, forgiveness of sinners, eucharistic fellowship, preaching the word, or handing on the tradition. For the Church exists as a Christian community through the mediation of grace made present in word and sacrament. With this restriction in mind we get something that begins to look like the function of ordained ministry in the Church.

This analysis also makes clear what is the secondary, if essential, nature of institutions such as the institution of ordained ministry. Ordained ministry exists to meet the internal recurrent needs of the Christian community, but the Church exists for the sake of the kingdom which is the work of all, particularly the laity. The real issue that the Church needs to face is not lay ministry, which tends to focus of the Church’s internal needs, such as liturgy, catechesis, music, hospitality, but on the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church to the world.³⁷

Finally I note here that the analysis I have just presented stands even if one were to posit the existence of the structure of ministry in the intention of Jesus himself. One would be hard pressed to suggest that Jesus’ intentions were impractical and unintelligent. Without such an analysis, however, there is a real danger of voluntarism, that ministry is the way it is because Jesus willed it, as if this bore no relationship to the actual needs of the newly developing Church. Of course, the historical evidence suggests a more complex process, from which I suggest two things emerge. The first is that the initial needs (apostolic era) differed from the recurrent needs (post-apostolic era). The second is that the precise nature of those recurrent needs became clear to the early Church only as time went on, until it finally settled on the three-fold pattern of ministry that has been historically normative ever since. However, for a theological evaluation of this process, we need to consider the major trajectories for social and cultural change.

³⁷ See for example Paul VI’s postsynodal apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) which identified the arena of the lay mission as “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” as well as the more domestic areas of “human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work and suffering” (no. 70).

Trajectories for Social and Cultural Change

As with institutionalization, social and cultural change are not specific to theology. They arise in any scientific account of societies, and the analysis and evaluation of such processes of change vary across the differing sociological schools. This is not the place to engage those schools in the type of dialectical critique and reorientation that the current project envisages.³⁸ Rather I simply posit two major trajectories for social and cultural change, and justify them on the ground that they correspond roughly to Lonergan's notions of creating and healing in history, especially as they are explicated by Robert Doran.

Trajectory 1: From Practical Insight to Cultural Change

The trajectory begins with a new practical insight that alters the social situation. This may be a new technological development such as the invention of computers; a new economic insight such as the free market; a new political insight such as representative democracy. If the practical insight works, that is, if it increases on a recurrent basis the flow of basic goods, improves the efficiency of the distribution of those goods, or increases the sense of belonging in society, then it will lead to the development of lasting institutions that embody this practicality. This in turn will lead to new meanings and values that incorporate those practical insights as part of the social story, as part of the social identity, as part of the way things should be done. In this way the cultural superstructure may respond to developments in the social infrastructure, by incorporating new meanings and values consonant with the social change. A conflictualist sociology invariably understands such a process as ideological but it need not be thought as such.³⁹ The making of meaning is essential for fully human living—human beings do not live by bread alone—and while it may on occasions be distorted, without it our lives would be less than human. It may however be ideological if the practical insights neglect other communal values and the meanings and values that arise justify such neglect by denying the validity of those communal values. Thus with liberation theology and critical theory we must ask, “Who are the victims of this social change? Who is marginalized? Whose voice has not been heard?” We must ask whether

³⁸ I argue this in my article, “Theology and the Social Science: The Contribution of Bernard Lonergan” not yet published.

³⁹ There are four major sociological approaches—empirical, functionalist, conflictualist, and symbolic interactionist, see Gregory Baum, “Sociology and Theology,” *Concilium* 1/10 (London: Burns and Oates) (1974) 22–31. Conflictualist approaches to social analysis are favored by liberation, feminist, and critical theorist. My own approach may be described as interactionist.

the practical insight suffers from bias, either individual, group, or general. All these are possibilities. But in the ideal shift new practical insights give rise to cultural shifts that, recognizing their own contingency, can avoid ideological pretensions and distortions. Culture is a creative, contingent, indeed artistic expression of the human spirit helping us make sense of our social world. We arrive at a new relatively stable social and cultural state that incorporates the shift brought about by practical intelligence.

Trajectory 2: From Cultural Change to Practical Insight

The second trajectory begins with the emergence of new meanings and values. How may this happen? It may occur when one culture comes into contact with another, as when European culture “discovered” the East and developed new art; when Islam brought Aristotle to the Christian West in the Middle Ages. It may happen when a creative human being develops a new philosophy or even a new religion. Most significantly it may occur when God communicates new meanings and values into human history through revelation. This revelation is most evident in the incarnate meaning of the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death, and Resurrection. It is further carried in the hearts and minds of his followers, particularly the saints. It finds written expression in the Scriptures, the definitive judgment in the dogmas of the Church and in the writings of theologians.⁴⁰ New meanings and values, whatever their source, may be incompatible with the present social ordering. New insights into the meaning of human dignity may be incompatible with slavery, with denial of women’s voting rights, with child labor. These insights grow among people through debate, discussion, and art. Cultural institutions are formed to promote a certain vision of life around these new meanings and values. People begin to envisage a new social ordering through a multiplicity of practical insights that are more expressive of the emerging meanings and values by which people give purpose to their lives.⁴¹ This new emerging meaning may of course represent the biased interests of a particular group. It may reflect a distorted meaning such as racism. But it may also represent a greater attunement to the intentional goals of truth, goodness, and beauty. Such an attunement will lead to a healing of distortions in the social order.

⁴⁰ In the few instances where Lonergan speaks of revelation, he uses these terms. For a full account of this see my work, *Method, Meaning and Revelation: The Meaning and Function of Revelation in Bernard Lonergan’s Method in Theology* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000) where I correlate different modes of revelation with Lonergan’s notion of the carriers of meaning.

⁴¹ In such a context, conflictualist sociology recognizes the way in which social ordering may reflect the interests of particular groups but has no criteria for evaluating the emergence of a new culture driving social change.

It should be clear from what has been noted so far that the two trajectories have differing theological significance. The first is the creative path of practical intelligence meeting practical needs that in time finds commensurate expression of meaning and value within the larger ecclesial culture. Within the Church one might think of the College of Cardinals or modern religious orders. Such activity may still be viewed as part of the work of the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the Spirit purifies our hearts and minds to make sound practical judgments about how to fulfill certain needs in the Church. In the second trajectory, cultural change leads the way, one aspect of which might be the shift in meanings and values introduced by divine revelation. These are far more significant theologically as their ultimate grounding is divine revelation itself. I have already suggested the impact that revelation may have had on the abolition of slavery, not in the short term but in the long term. In the early Church one example is the decision to eliminate the requirement of circumcision for Gentile converts. The rationale behind this decision seems to be the universalist soteriology revealed in the death and Resurrection of Jesus.⁴²

In the context of my present study, however, the question to be asked is how should we understand the movement toward institutionalized forms of ministry in the early Church? Which trajectory is at work? The answer to this question has a profound impact on one's understanding of that ministry. If one proposes the first trajectory, then that form is simply the product of practical intelligence meeting the exigencies of the newly established Christian communities, though these are later sacralized by those communities. In this case we might argue that the form of ministry is "divinely ordained," but in a general providential sense that God ordains progressive movements in history. However, where such a providential sense is missing, or a more radical hermeneutic of suspicion is present, evaluations will range from "purely human origin" to the operation of a group bias to the exclusion of some suppressed subgroup (e.g. the rich over the poor, men over women). In my judgment, it is fair to say that most Protestant authors tend to view ministry in terms of this first trajectory, though increasingly Catholic authors have also adopted such a stance.

If one proposed the second trajectory, then the form of ministry is still the product of practical intelligence, but that form might claim some specific grounding in revelation itself. In the latter case the form of ministry may make a claim to being "divinely established" though perhaps implicitly. Still that is not the only possible explanation "from above." Practical intelligence could be taking the lead from some other cultural factor impacting upon the life of the early Church, for example, Roman conceptions of order. Until recently Catholic authors tended to view ministry as

⁴² So argues Ben Meyer, *The Early Christians*, passim.

grounded in revelation, to the point of a voluntaristically conceived “will/intention of Jesus.”

Thus we can identify two main hypotheses, together with various branch points, with which to approach the historical data, data whose classical loci are the immediate subapostolic writings of *I Clement* and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. What are important in these writings are the symbols that both authors deploy in speaking about ministry. Two symbols of particular importance are apostolicity and sacerdotal symbolism drawn from the Old Testament, for by the third century these dominate the discourse on ministry.

1 CLEMENT AND IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

The first thing that should be noted is that within the vast exegetical and historical studies of *I Clement* and the letters of Ignatius,⁴³ just about every variation of the above trajectories can be identified. Scholars have interpreted these documents to justify the divine origins of ministry, or conversely to justify the view that the origins of ministry fall under a hermeneutic of suspicion, and every position in between. The fact that these variations often fall into denominational patterns is indicative of the theological a priori operating in the interpreters. Clearly a more explicit methodology is required than is currently being displayed in most of these modern commentators.

The second thing to note is that both sides of this hermeneutical divide recognize the vital importance of these letters in the present theological climate. The stance that one adopts with regard to these letters will have an impact on a range of current ecclesiological debates, particularly ecumenical debates, especially since some fundamentals of church order are being worked out in these two letters. *I Clement* is taken as providing the classic locus for the divine origins of the order of ministry. Ignatius provides the classic locus for monoepiscopacy, as well as the three-fold order of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Much depends on the way one evaluates these writings.

The third thing to consider in these two early sources is the differing context out of which their authors wrote. Most commentators note that the

⁴³ There are a number of significant recent studies dealing either directly or indirectly with these letters, including the following: John Fuellenbach, *Ecclesiastical Office*; David Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from I Corinthians to I Clement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996); Raymond Brown and John Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1982); William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Eric Jay, “From Presbyters-Bishops to Bishops and Presbyters,” *The Second Century* 1 (1981) 125–62.

context of *1 Clement* is not clear. There was a dispute in the Corinthian community over deposing elders from their office but the reasons remain obscure. Various theses have been proposed, but none has been widely accepted.⁴⁴ The problem seems to be that the usual concern, some doctrinal division, does not appear to be present. The dispute does not seem to be the central meanings and values of the community, but simply questions of that community's social ordering. The letters of Ignatius present a different picture. The communities to which he writes, apart from Rome, seem to be facing serious doctrinal division, from Judaizers on one side to Docetists on the other.⁴⁵ Here we witness a serious struggle over the identity of the emerging Christian community.

What light does the above analysis shed on *1 Clement*? It is generally acknowledged that the key sections are Chapters 40–44. For our purposes I shall begin with Chapter 42:

42 (1) The Apostles received for us the gospel from our Lord Jesus Christ; our Lord Jesus Christ received it from God. (2) Christ, therefore, was sent out from God, and the Apostles from Christ; and both these things were done in good order, according to the will of God. (3) They, therefore, having received the promises, having been fully persuaded by the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and having been confirmed by the word of God, with the full persuasion of the Holy Spirit, went forth preaching the good tidings that the kingdom of God was at hand. (4) Preaching, therefore, through the countries and cities, they appointed their firstfruits to be bishops and deacons over such as should believe, after they had proved them in the Spirit. (5) And this they did in no new way, for in truth it had in long past time been written concerning bishops and deacons; for the scripture, in a certain place, says in this wise: I will establish their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.⁴⁶

While earlier Catholic scholars have viewed this as establishing the divine origin of the order of ministry, it is a difficult position to maintain. What Clement identifies as “according to the will of God” are sending of Jesus from God and the Apostles from Jesus, both “done in good order.” The focus then shifts to the work of the Apostles, persuaded by the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit, to preach the Gospel and establish “bishops and deacons” in the new communities. In seeking to justify this action Clement does not point to any instructions, actual or imagined, from Jesus, but to a mistranslation of a verse from Isaiah 60:17, “from the Scripture.” It would

⁴⁴ In particular see Fuellenbach, *Ecclesiastical Office*.

⁴⁵ See for example the commentary by Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, who reviews the debate as to whether Ignatius is fighting on one front (a Jewish-Docetist hybrid) or two (distinct Jewish and Docetist groups). He concludes that there were two distinct groups and that “the link between Judaizing and docetism was invented by Ignatius” (118).

⁴⁶ Translation by Charles H. Hoole, 1885, available on <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/St.Pachomius/Greek/clement.html>.

seem that Clement is aware that some justification is needed for the actions of the Apostles, lest it be thought of as an “innovation,” and he seeks that justification, creatively, in the Scriptures. The suggestion, that what is at work is the “practical intelligence” of the Apostles, is further reinforced in Chapter 44:

44 (1) Our Apostles, too, by the instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ, knew that strife would arise concerning the dignity of a bishop; (2) and on this account, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the above-mentioned as bishops and deacons: and then gave a rule of succession, in order that, when they had fallen asleep, other men, who had been approved, might succeed to their ministry.

While the Apostles received “instruction from our Lord” it concerns the strife associated with the office, not the actions of appointment and the “rule of succession,” which seem to be their own.⁴⁷

What other evidence might we find that could help us determine the trajectory of change being taken here? Chapter 40 evokes sacerdotal symbolism which may be suggestive that the emergence of ministry might be linked to the sacerdotal self-understanding of the Christian community (1 Peter). This could be an indicator of the second trajectory, from revelation to social change. However Clement’s emphasis is on “good order,” “these he has not commanded to be done at random or in disorder, but at fixed times and seasons.” This emphasis on “good order” has already been flagged earlier in the letter (Chapters 19–22, 37–39) where Clement speaks of how “the great Maker and Master of all things hath appointed [them] to be in peace and harmony, doing good unto all things,” (Chapter 20:11). Clement will even appeal to the sense of order in the Roman army (Chapter 37). These seem to be indications that the type of divine origin that Clement is appealing to is one operating within divine providence. In the terms I have already spelled out, it is divinely ordained, but not divinely established.

Can we discount the possibility, raised by various scholars, that we are dealing here with some type of group bias? This is more difficult given the paucity of information available and that we only have one side of the argument. However, taken at face value, Clement’s argument seem to be that those who have deposed the resident presbyters are precisely the type of persons who would use the office for their own ends, and not for the good of the community, “men who are foolish, and senseless, and puffed up in the pride of their own speech” (21:5). Do we have any reason to doubt the veracity of such a judgment? That depends on the degree of suspicion

⁴⁷ The precise nature of their “rule” according to Clement is not clear, depending as it does on the exact meaning of 44:2. However this obscurity does not cloud the fact that the rule finds its origins in the Apostles.

within the reader, for little further evidence is available. Indeed it is not implausible to suggest that the emerging structures of ministry were beginning to accrue significant authority [i.e. legitimate power] within the churches, which in time caused those who were attracted to that power for its own sake to covet ecclesial office.⁴⁸ Such a situation is not unfamiliar.

Some indirect evidence is nonetheless available in the concerns Clement raises in Chapters 33–36. In this major section Clement is exhorting the Corinthians to “work with all our strength the work of righteousness” (33:8); “strive with our whole heart not to be slothful or remiss toward every good work” (34:4); “harmonize with his blameless will, and follow in the way of truth, casting from us all unrighteousness and lawlessness, covetousness, strife, malice and fraud, whispering and evil speaking, hatred of God, pride and insolence, vainglory and churlishness” (35:5). These it would seem are exhortations to the community not to lose sight of its overall mission, to be witnesses to, and to manifest the power of God’s transforming grace in the world.⁴⁹ One thing that will quickly dissipate the energy of the community in working toward their proper goal is dissension within the community itself. One might argue that Clement is not concerned with preserving power of some privileged group but with the transformative mission of the Church, and how that mission will be compromised in the present dispute.

Do the letters of Ignatius shed any further light on these questions? As I have noted, the context of Ignatius’s letters differs from that of *1 Clement*. In Ignatius’s letters the primary issue is that of heresy, of identifying and defending the central meanings and values of the Christian community. Faced with the division of heresy, the theme of unity, already present in *1 Clement*, becomes a constant refrain. The concrete expression of this unity is found in submission to the “one bishop along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow slaves” (*Philadelphians* 4). In the letters of Ignatius we find clear evidence of the monoepiscopacy and the three-fold order of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Of particular interest to me here are the types of symbols Ignatius deploys in his account of the various offices. In the *Letter to the Magnesians* Ignatius speaks of the three-fold order of

⁴⁸ Burtchaell comes to a similar conclusion when he notes that Clement made “a scorchingly explicit moral inventory of the rebels. They had acted, he said, out of jealousy for power and factious rivalry, and these had been disastrous forces in the short memory of the Christian community” (*From Synagogue to Church* 354).

⁴⁹ This conclusion is not dissimilar to that of Otto Knoch, as spelt out in Fuelenbach: “the primary responsibility of the presbyter-bishop is the liturgy of the community . . . To be Christian means to participate in the liturgy of the community, to subordinate oneself to the whole according to one’s *tagma* [rank], to hold to the apostolic message, and to exercise and grow in Christian virtue” (*Ecclesiastical Office* 91).

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."⁵⁰ Similarly in the *Letter to the Trallians* he states: "... let 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."⁵¹ Though he is not always completely consistent, the pattern of the typology is clear: bishops = God the Father; deacons = Jesus Christ; and presbyters = the apostles.

Three things emerge from the letters of Ignatius. First, the typology above finds no parallels in *1 Clement*. There is no suggestion in Clement that the bishop is "set over you in the place of God." Similarly Ignatius seems unaware of the linking of episcopacy to the apostolic function, as found in *1 Clement*, preferring to view the presbyters as a type for the apostles. Secondly, Ignatius does not seem as touched by the sacerdotal symbolism evoked by Clement in his treatment of ministry. The issue of "priesthood" is raised in the *Letter to the Philadelphians* (9:1-2), but no connection is made to the orders of ministry in the Christian community. Thirdly, the typology proposed by Ignatius does not survive beyond his own writings. By the end of the third century, sacerdotal symbolism and apostolic succession become the keys for the Church's self-understanding of its orders of ministry. Ignatius's typology appears as a creative movement in the development of that self-understanding, but one which is quickly superseded.

This reading of Ignatius reinforces the conclusion drawn from *1 Clement*. There is little evidence that the orders of ministry are the result of some prior revealed datum that then finds expression in the practical construction of office in the early Church. Instead what we find is a creative theologizing, in both Clement and Ignatius, which attempts to place the emerging orders of ministry into some suitable framework of meaning. If anything, the trajectory of emerging meaning laid out in *1 Clement* ends up more successful than that of Ignatius. Again the initial impetus to the orders of ministry seems to be one of practical intelligence.

If so these document stand at the beginning of a development which will become de facto normative for the history of the Church. Does the conclusion that the impetus for the structure of ministry lies in practical intelligence mean that there is no intrinsic norm operating, and that another structure would be just as valid? Here some caution is needed. Elsewhere I have argued for what might be called a "transcendental" basis for the

⁵⁰ *Magnesians* 6:1. The translation from William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* 112.

⁵¹ *Trallians* 3:1, *ibid.* 140.

three-fold order of ministry, grounded in Lonergan's scale of values and the notions of healing and creating in history.⁵² On that basis, one could argue both that the three-fold order of ministry is the product of the practical intelligence of the community, and that the community, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, basically "got it right." That is, it produced a simple structure that met the recurrent needs of the community to preserve and develop its identity as a Christian community. One might easily find in this the hand of divine providence, confirming that in fact the three-fold order of ministry is divinely ordained, if not directly instituted divinely.

MISSION OR COMMUNION ECCLESIOLOGY

Before concluding, I would like to comment on what is perhaps the dominant symbol evoked in ecclesiological debates today, that of *communio* or *koinonia*. Several theologians have contributed to this communion ecclesiology. Its dominance is such that one author has claimed, "communion ecclesiology is the one basic ecclesiology."⁵³ Indeed the umbrella is so broad as to include such diverse theologians as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Hans Küng. However, apart from some initial comments, I have not evoked here the notion of communion. Indeed the organizing principle I have proposed is not communion but mission, the mission of the Church envisaged in terms of its teleological orientation to the kingdom of God. Why have I chosen to write in a way that neglects this current trend?

The first and most obvious difficulty that communion ecclesiology faces is its idealizing tendency. This leads to significant theoretical problems when dealing with questions such as the sinfulness of the Church and practical problems when an appeal to unity can be used ideologically to suppress disagreement and movements for change. While the symbol of communion carries romantic and utopian attractions, I remain unconvinced that it can achieve the systematic goals spelled out in this present study, for its starting point is not the concrete data of history but an idealized vision whose contact with that data will always remain problematic.

Sociologically this is a reflection of the fact that communion ecclesiology represent a functionalist option. A functionalist sociology stresses values of interdependency, harmony, integration, and unity. Typically such a sociology evokes organic metaphors for society, idealizes the status quo, has

⁵² Neil Ormerod, "System, History, and the Theology of Ministry," *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 432–46.

⁵³ Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* 2. Also Walter Kasper, "there is only one way into the future: the way pointed by the council and its communion ecclesiology. This is the way which God's Spirit has shown us" (*Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl [New York: Crossroad, 1989] 150).

difficulty accounting for significant change and in fact tends to view such change with suspicion. When one identifies the disparity between the ideal and the actual, one can then be accused of threatening the harmony and unity of society. The dangers of such an approach in ecclesiology should be self-evident.

The second difficulty that I find in communion ecclesiology is the contingency of the ideal it specifies. It is clear that we live in a highly individualistic society. People experience the breakdown of local community and feel threatened by anonymous forces of globalization. Within such a setting the symbol of communion can become a concrete symbol for salvation and hence of the kingdom.⁵⁴ However things might seem different in a society where communal forces are felt as oppressive and stifling of human creativity. Such a society would respond to very different salvific symbols. Thus while the symbol of communion resonates with our present context, I think it suffers from a contingency that can be overcome in a broader framework, that of mission.

The third and final difficulty is that while eschatologically communion may express our final resting place, in the historical here and now unity is more a means than an end. Social and historical communities seek unity because without unity they cannot achieve their real goals. Disunity disrupts any possibility of a common goal. But unity itself is a means to those fuller goals. In a broader context Lonergan argued that a general notion of development applicable to the human sciences involves a dialectic tension between transcendence and limitation.⁵⁵ Within this general notion there are *integrators* which are principles of limitation, providing integration and harmony, and *operators* which transform the present situation in the direction of some normative transcendence. As Lonergan noted, the operator relentlessly transforms the integrator, so that development is not a homeostatic balance between two opposed forces but is dynamic and transformative of the underlying reality. In this context communion is a symbol of ecclesiological integration, while mission is a symbol of ecclesiological operation. And in Lonergan's framework, the priority lies with the operator.

It is clear that a significant motivating factor behind communion ecclesiology is renewed interest in the theology of the Triune God. As Kasper notes: "the communion of the Church is prefigured, made possible and

⁵⁴ For example, Kasper begins his discussion of communion ecclesiology with appeals to the "danger of isolation, and the misery of loneliness" found in modern individualistic society (ibid. 148).

⁵⁵ Lonergan, *Insight* 488. For another sociological approach utilizing the notions of transcendence and unity, see David Martin, *The Breaking of the Image: A Sociology of Christian Theory and Practice* (New York: St Martin's, 1979) esp. 1–16.

sustained by the communion of the Trinity.”⁵⁶ Further “it is precisely as communion that the church is an icon of the Trinity,” though the expression of that communion gets reduced to “variety in unity and unity in variety.”⁵⁷ While this attempt to link ecclesiology and trinitarian theology is admirable, one might question whether this is the appropriate place to identify a connection. The divine unity is where God is most different from God’s creatures, even the creation that we call Church. What is first in our knowledge of the triune nature are the divine missions of Word and Spirit, which in turn ground our knowledge of the processions and persons within the Trinity. In this way a *missio* ecclesiology also makes contact with trinitarian theology, not in terms of *communio* and *perichoresis*, but in terms of *missio* and *processio*.⁵⁸ Communion may be our eschatological end in the vision of God, but in the here and now of a pilgrim Church mission captures our ongoing historical responsibility.

CONCLUSION

My intent here has been programmatic. I have sought to spell out the structure of a systematic ecclesiology under the following headings: empirical, critical, normative, dialectic, and practical. I have argued that an intrinsic component of this process is engagement with the social sciences, an engagement that also involves a critical reorientation of those sciences. I then sought to illustrate its argument with a particular case study, of the emergence of the three-fold order of ministry in the early Church. Throughout my study, and in the discussion of communion ecclesiology, I hope that the reader can grasp the ways in which sociological insights, suitably reoriented—the nature of institutions, of authority, of the interaction between social order and culture, of sociological types—have been woven into the discourse, not as some alien intrusion perverting true theology, as proposed by Milbank, but as the natural light of reason illuminating social and cultural processes found both within and outside the Church. In the Catholic tradition my theme draws upon the principle that nature is completed and perfected by grace, not supplanted or destroyed by it.

This principle stands firmly in the Thomist intellectual tradition. Hopefully my article will be seen as a contribution in that light. In a widely distributed article, Walter Kasper has distinguished his own approach to ecclesiology from that of Joseph Ratzinger as being based in their differing

⁵⁶ Kasper, *Theology and Church* 152.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 160.

⁵⁸ For example, Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983) 7–12.

philosophical starting points: “The conflict is between theological opinions and underlying philosophical assumptions. One side [Ratzinger’s] proceeds by Plato’s method; its starting point is the primacy of an ideal that is a universal concept. The other side [Kasper’s] follows Aristotle’s approach and sees the universal as existing in a concrete reality.”⁵⁹ My study stands in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition with emphasis in the concrete reality of ecclesial history. Given the nature of the debate between these two ecclesiastical figures, one appreciates the claim that a systematic ecclesiology is not only empirical, critical, normative, and dialectic, but also practical.

⁵⁹ Walter Kasper, “A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger on the Church,” *America* 184 (April 23–30, 2001) 8–14.