

PHILOSOPHICAL MODELS IN ECCLESIOLOGY

THOMAS FRANKLIN O'MEARA, O.P.

Aquinas Institute of Theology, Dubuque

AN IMPORTANT book, after it is written, often appears to be one simple yet fruitful idea. Such is Avery Dulles' *Models of the Church*, "a comparative ecclesiology in five major approaches or models."¹ Three of the five models—servant, herald, body—are biblical in their origins, although Scripture may not apply all of them directly to the Church. Dulles draws his first model, institution, partially from political science, while that of sacrament comes from centuries of theological reflection. Dulles' models are neither a collection of biblical names for the Church nor an arrangement of the juridical claims of the Church's constitution. They are properly theological, products of faith's reflection upon ideas drawn from the New Testament.

Are there other models of the Church—not other theological or biblical models, but other *systems of models*? There are, and they exercise a deep influence upon every aspect of the Church, from the Roman Curia to the parish council. These other systems are drawn from philosophy, political science, and sociology, or from management theory. Their influence is such that they can aid or impede the future realization of more biblical, more pastorally responsive models. It is these ecclesiologies, the results of one other system of ecclesial paradigms, which the following pages wish to lay bare.

We use models as intellectual tools. They help us to analyze and to explore reality. A model or a paradigm brings various elements together into a constellation, and the constellation arranges the elements in a new way. The model is insight into the whole, into the meaning and relationship of the elements. Then in a *kairos* a new way of seeing breaks through.

There are other models of the Church; they present different perspectives on the Church and are produced by different intellectual horizons. At least four model-systems are actively employed in interpreting Roman Catholic theology of the Church; all have been and can be used to explain the history and the structure of the Church.

The *first* model-system includes images which the New Testament itself employs to describe the Church. The *second* set of models is drawn from the theological tradition of the Church, from its reflection upon its own nature (Dulles legitimately unites the first and second). In the *third*

¹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974) 7. For an arrangement of models in ecclesiology drawn from patterns in Christology, see J. P. Schineller, "Christ and the Church: A Spectrum of Views," *TS* 27 (1976) 545 ff.

type of model we see the influence coming from extra-Christian forms of a particular culture, the presence in ecclesiology of various philosophies. By "philosophy" I mean the articulation of a specific world view. Philosophy is the ontological expression of the way a particular time thinks; it distills, expresses, structures the image of person and world which emerges from a culture. In general, philosophy offers the thought-forms and leitmotifs for theology to reflect upon the mystery of salvation history. Ecclesiology as part of theological reflection can be more or less influenced in its self-expression by the philosophy of a time. Philosophy fashions ecclesiology by offering structures (not immediately biblical) for ecclesial life and worship which themselves depend upon a particular understanding of being and existence. The *fourth* set of models comes from the social and behavioral sciences: from society, from political science, from managerial and organizational theories.² The prominence of the behavioral and social sciences in this century has contributed to the questionable isolation of metaphysics; nevertheless, philosophy remains related to political science and psychology. It is the formation of the third (and to a lesser extent the fourth) set of models in the theology of the Church which we wish to pursue.

The history of ecclesiology, like all of theology, is not simply an elaboration of religious words but a history taking place within cultural-philosophical frameworks which often exist independent of Christianity. Philosophy, like literature, art, and science, articulates the culture of a time. We cannot here inquire into the priorities or process of how a culture finds and alters its world view. Just as there is an interplay between economics and the arts in the emergence of a culture, so theological and secular factors can mutually influence each other in a process which is not always the same. Because the world view of an epoch influences the culture so widely, it influences theology. Through images of man and cosmos, through the hermeneutics of language and symbols, through social patterns perceived, that very visible aspect of Christian life, ecclesiology, is touched. Philosophical forms influence the paradigms of ideas about the Church through canonists, bishops, and theologians. Administrators of the Church, who might presume that their ecclesiology, in form and goal, has its roots in Scripture or tradition would be surprised to see that in fact it depends upon a metaphysics.

How are "philosophical models" active in ecclesiology? They are not images or symbols but structures revealing and arranging reality. They have their source in the ontological framework of real and mental

² On the use of organizational models which contain psychological and sociological dynamics, see *A Model of the Church in Ministry and Mission* (Naperville: CCPD, 1976); P. Granfield, "A Cybernetic Analysis of the Church," in *Ecclesial Cybernetics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) 1 ff.; Sabbas Kilian, *Theological Models for the Parish* (New York: Alba, 1977).

relations. Their ideas are recognizable within ecclesiologies as originally and properly the gift of a significant philosophy. The history of ecclesiology locates their activity within a particular area of the Christian faith—the Church. Upon analysis, their philosophical origin and weight remain imposing. They are, in a sense, prior to or outside of revelation and grace (although neither of these exists independent of human subjectivity); for incarnational Christianity works within that succession of cultural moments which make up history.

Before the Enlightenment the various areas of human reflection—psychology, philosophy of science, metaphysics—were all considered to be *philosophia*. Today philosophy tends to be identified with that deeper explanation and reduction of the world view of a culture. Although ontology appears abstract, philosophical models can be quite concrete. They are as influential as a document from a Roman congregation, as tangible as the decision of an archbishop. At times architecture, participating in the single *Zeitgeist* of a cultural epoch, has frozen the philosophical forms into stone. For instance, the ecclesiology of the Roman Church from Cyprian to Gregory is rendered concrete and tangible in the construction and deployment of the basilica, that of Pseudo-Dionysius in a Gothic facade.³ Each philosophical model has its own cluster of images, its own vocabulary and values, its own way of thinking, its own priorities, as well as its unfaced problems and its weaknesses. Philosophical models are both legitimate and unavoidable.

To set bare the philosophical models of the Church is to allow the members of the community to see the origin of Church structures. Christians may prefer to transfer their obedience of faith to those elements which lie closer to the experience of the apostolic generation. To liberate the Church to hear new ways of becoming the Body of Christ requires an exposition and a critique of the role played in ecclesiology by philosophical paradigms. This is not to replace metaphysics with biblicism. There is no human life without ontology, no culture without structures of consciousness. The Church and its historical self-realization will always employ a form which we call philosophical precisely because it thereby attains visibility and life. But it should do this consciously, subjecting these forms to Spirit and Word.

Five distinct philosophical frameworks can be found in ecclesiologies operative today in the Roman Catholic Church.⁴ These ecclesiologies

³ See D. R. Wall, "Church Architecture," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 3 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 785 ff.; C. Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1975); O. von Simson, "Wirkungen des christlichen Platonismus auf die Entstehung der Gothik," in *Humanismus, Mystik und Kunst in der Welt des Mittelalters* (Leiden: Brill, 1953) 159 ff.

⁴ I am focusing on the history of ecclesiology in the Western and Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant churches partake in some of these models and have their own. At

might be designated as (1) Neoplatonic, (2) Aristotelian, (3) nominalist, (4) idealist, and (5) phenomenological-historical. Each exemplifies the strong presence of ontological thought-forms in the theology of the Christian Church, and each displays the characteristics of its own world. All the models illustrate the power of philosophy in ecclesiology, although each fashions its own unique theology of the Church. Theologians are introduced to make the philosophy of a particular ecclesiology concrete, but none of the major ecclesiologists employs only one model.

What follows is an introductory description of the influence of five philosophies upon the history of ecclesiology. Not all the characteristics of each philosophy is described, nor are all the theologians influenced by that one model mentioned. As a beginning, I want to establish the strength of metaphysics and political philosophy in ecclesiology; the full historical and practical ramifications remain for further research.

NEOPLATONIC MODEL: CHURCH AS ILLUMINATING HIERARCHY

In the thirteenth century one met Neoplatonism not only in the revered Augustinian tradition and in the enthusiastically received works of Proclus (which were passing as Aristotelian) but especially in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. With his reputation as a convert of St. Paul and as a missionary to the Parisians, the Areopagite's philosophy influenced aesthetics, politics, mysticism, theology, philosophy, and ecclesiology. Both Albert the Great and Aquinas commented on his writings, as did Bonaventure. A recent study claims that Dionysius was the first to employ the word "hierarchy" as it is now used in Western civilization.⁵ The Plotinian emanations (with God's freedom preserved) were arranged in a *hierarchia*, a ladder where the divine and angelic orders found a terrestrial counterpart not in ontology but in ecclesiology; the final work of a kind of trilogy was *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*. In this model the higher fashions the lower out of a goodness bordering on necessity. Within the hierarchical arrangement is a movement from the higher downwards to the lower. Since everything in the lower is already present in the higher level, nothing really new can emerge. Unity begets diversity and that community of differentiation finds its goal in a return to the One. Plurality points back to the prior, higher unity, while the higher finds the fulfilment of goodness in the production and illumination of the lower orders.

the conclusion I shall briefly indicate models operative today, models drawn not from a past history but from recent world views.

⁵ "Pseudo-Dionysius is the virtual author of the term with the lexical meaning which it has possessed since" (R. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the "Letters" of Pseudo-Dionysius* [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969] xxi). Hathaway refers to hierarchy as a "practical model of order" for the members and activities of each hierarchy (ibid. 100).

As is well known, the *Summa theologiae* has as its basic framework the Plotinian *exitus-reditus*. Yet it remains basically true that the *Summa* contains no section on the Church. For Yves Congar, Thomas Aquinas' ecclesiology is found in his lengthy treatment of the Christian life; Aquinas views the Church as a *communio* to nourish faith, hope, and love. Congar observes the influence of Platonism in this ecclesiology of grace.

In the world of grace a kind of Platonism is valid, for Christ contains in Himself the fullness of the species grace in a way similar to that in which the archetype of Man, in Plato, contains the fullness of the human species. So that if other individuals are to receive grace, too, they may only do so in dependence upon Christ.⁶

All grace flows to the members of the Mystical Body from the *caput*, Christ.⁷

Citing Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Commentary on the Sentences* explains that episcopal power has for its goal the purification, illumination, and leading to perfection of the ranks of Church members below it.⁸ In the *Summa theologiae* the *Secunda pars*, treating of the Christian life, reaches its climax not with active ministries but with a description of religious states of life. "The grace of Christ redounds as from the head to the members in different degrees, so that the body of the Church might be perfect."⁹ The liturgy of ordination of a bishop (Aquinas quotes the Areopagite) shows symbolically that the bishop participates in the power of the total hierarchy by illuminating all beneath him. "We see the universal hierarchy terminating in its own proper hierarch, that is, the bishop."¹⁰

The Middle Ages loved *ordo*, the arrangement of beings. While this order could be based upon Aristotelian logic proceeding upwards from the general to the specific (or upon a Pythagorean and Augustinian attention to numbers), often it was a Neoplatonic arrangement. A lasting Neoplatonic influence in ecclesiology came not only from the Augustinian

⁶ Y. Congar, "The Idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Thomist* 1 (1939) 31 f. For the *exitus-reditus* theme in Aquinas, see M. D. Chenu, "Introduction to the *Summa* of St. Thomas," *Thomist Reader* (1958) 1-34.

⁷ Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 3, qq. 7, 8.

⁸ Aquinas, *Super Sent.* 4, d. 24, q. 3, a. 2. "Episcopal power stands in relation to those inferior orders as political power stands in relation to the arts and lower potencies. . . . Now this power imposes a certain law and measure upon the inferior arts. . . . In like manner it pertains to the bishop to designate all the sacred ministers" (*ibid.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1).

⁹ *Sum. theol.* 2/2, q. 183, a. 2. Aquinas arranges Moses and the chosen elders of Num 11:16 into a hierarchy of grades (3, q. 67, a. 2, ad 2).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 184, a. 5; a. 6, ad 2.

and Franciscan but from the Thomist tradition. Aquinas, Congar points out, was less influenced by the Areopagite than most theologians in the thirteenth century.¹¹ He knew how to criticize any strict analogy between angelic hierarchies and Church order, and he integrated a theology of the life of grace to render more flexible the static arrangement of being and grace. While Aquinas' ecclesiology is much richer than the ecclesiology of those medieval theologians who do not move beyond Dionysius, nevertheless the Neoplatonic pattern is not set aside by Aquinas. He quotes the Areopagite frequently and employs his theology of hierarchy and illumination not only to explain Church office but scriptural and prophetic inspiration, teaching and revelation. It is at the level of the inner person in contact with grace that the Dionysian mediators are removed; in public life they are present.

Concrete expressions of this Dionysian ecclesiology still occur, often determining the life of the Church. The Church is visualized as a hierarchy containing an inner, vertical, downward movement. The higher levels, whether of beings, angels, ecclesial offices or social states of life, fashion and control the lower levels. Visually expressed, this paradigm is a pyramid. In Neoplatonism, through emanation the immediately higher level forms the next lower level and continues to sustain it in being and to illumine it with knowledge. "To sustain it in being"—in the area of Church authority, ecclesiological theory moved from viewing the episcopacy and papacy as recognizers and co-ordinators of many ministries (including their own) to seeing one Church office as the *creator* of all other Church activities. Baptism and charism counted for little, since a special activity of the hierarchy—ordination or participation in jurisdiction—was needed to fashion any formal activity on behalf of the Church.

Within this conception of hierarchy, episcopal activity became the imparting of particles of grace or truth from the *agentes* to the *suscipientes*. The hierarchical arrangement and aristocratic activity might be balanced within the Christian body internally by charisms and grace, but ultimately in this theology the lower can contribute little publicly to

¹¹ "For Dionysius, the hierarchical quality is a quality of existence and corresponds to an ontological degree of participation in the divine light. For Thomas, it is a question of a *potestas* which can be communicated by *commissio*. . . . The angels are in a hierarchy which is at once one of nature and of grace; in ontological perfection and in sanctity they are dependent upon their proximity to God. But with human beings grace is a hidden reality, uncertain and precarious. . . . It cannot ground a visible and social hierarchy. . . . Obviously, St. Thomas owes much to Dionysius. He owes to him some large schemas of his thought, certain ideas. . . . But his ecclesiology appears to us little influenced by Dionysius in its broad lines. It is too Christological, too soteriological, too anthropological. . . ." (Congar, "Aspects ecclésiologiques . . . du XIIIe siècle et le début du XIVe," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 36 [1961] 35 ff.).

the higher orders. The higher contains *eminenter* all that exists beneath it.

ARISTOTELIAN MODEL: FOUR CAUSES

The second philosophical model is Aristotelian. This metaphysical paradigm is present, surprisingly, less than we might expect in the thought of the theologians of the Middle Ages; as we saw, Aquinas' ecclesiology is markedly Neoplatonic. Traces of Aristotelianism are found in the medieval theology of ordination, in descriptions of grace in the Church through efficient and formal causality. The Aristotelian model, however, attained wider influence in the ecclesiology of the Roman schools during the Neo-Scholastic revival of the hundred years prior to Vatican II.

Different doctrines of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics are used as the background for the theology of the Church. Aristotelianism is concerned with the analysis of an empirical and metaphysical reality. Second, the inner structure of each being is bestowed by a material and by a formal element; for something living, an organism, matter and form become body and soul. Further philosophical analysis discloses that there are significant elements beyond the formal and material, and so a full description emerges from the isolation and description of the four causes of the being in question. For Aristotle, full scientific or sapiential knowledge of something comes through knowing its causes.¹² If these realms of causality are four, three of the causes are similar; the efficient cause, the form itself, and its ultimate purpose are all in a sense the same. The material substratum provides the potential for this process of becoming and existing.¹³

Because metaphysical knowledge derives from natural science and empirical research, the Aristotelian model stresses the visible nature of the Church, its knowability, its capability of being captured in a definition. This definition grounds for its subject a logical system of properties and attributes. Ecclesiology becomes a metaphysics of the Church where emphasis is placed upon the juridical elements, since these are the most visible. Logic ceases to be the instrument of knowledge and becomes the girders of bureaucracy. The idea of an invisible Church is unacceptable not only because of its association with the Reformation but because it would render ecclesial analysis impossible. If the Church were not visible, an empirical-philosophical ecclesiology would stop short. Visibility leads to causes and characteristics—the “notes of the Church.”

¹² “When the objects of an inquiry in any area have principles, conditions, or elements, it is through acquaintance with these that knowledge, i.e., scientific knowledge, is attained” (Aristotle, *Physics*, 1, 184 a 10–12).

¹³ On the four causes, see *Metaphysics* 5, 1013 a 24–32.

Some ecclesiologies describe the Church in Aristotelian terms of body and soul. We recall that the theme of the Body of Christ is Pauline, but the ultimate source of this framework is philosophical psychology: the elements or causes of a living creature are soul and body. J. Perrone's ecclesiology from the middle of the nineteenth century is typical of those choosing this framework.¹⁴ Yves Congar in a more subtle way shows the influence of this model as he inquires into tradition. The Holy Spirit and the Church are subjects of living tradition, separate yet joined together in a vital activity.¹⁵

With G. Paris's *De vera Christi ecclesia*¹⁶ we move to those ecclesiologies which explain the Church through causality. To know the four causes of the Church is to know the Church. After Paris treats the definition and institution of the visible Church, he defines the material element of the Church to be the members with their baptism and faith. While Christ as institutor is the main cause, the hierarchy is not only a formal cause of the Church but the proximate efficient cause, precisely as being superiorly active to and thereby different from the laity. The final cause of the Church is not so much the eschatological kingdom of God as the sanctification of the members and their participation as souls after death in the beatific vision.

The climax of the employment of Aristotelian thought-forms in ecclesiology lies in the unfinished work of Charles Journet. Each of the four volumes planned for this ecclesiological system would treat one of the four causes: only two, on the efficient and material causes, were finished.¹⁷ In the Introduction to this mammoth work its author writes: "The word Church may be taken, and I shall in this book take it, in its *formal*, or *ontological* or *theological* sense. So taken, it indicates the Church in her entirety, body and soul together. But it indicates the Church alone, pure and unmixed, to the exclusion of all that is other than itself."¹⁸ The Fribourg theologian then sets forth his program, improving upon his predecessors by arranging the four marks of the Church neatly within the framework of causes.

... to explain the Church in terms of the four causes on which she essentially depends. The apostolic hierarchy will then represent no more than the immediate efficient cause of the Church, of the Mystical Body. Its proper effect is to give

¹⁴ *Praelectiones theologicae* 4 (Paris: Gaume, 1889) 8-53.

¹⁵ *Tradition and Traditions* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 308-48.

¹⁶ Malta: Muscat, 1949; see 15-74. Also employing causality as a framework is R. Schultes, *De ecclesia catholica* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1925).

¹⁷ *The Church of the Word Incarnate* 1: *The Apostolic Hierarchy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955); 2: *Sa structure interne et son unité catholique* (Paris: Desclée, 1962).

¹⁸ *The Apostolic Hierarchy* xxvii.

existence to the Church herself, "Christ diffused and communicated," along with her two constitutive causes, the soul that makes her wholly spiritual and the body that makes her wholly visible; and to set her on the way towards her final cause, namely the divine sanctity, which it is her mission to reflect and communicate.

In this perspective the four marks, the four notes of the Church, naturally fall into place as corollaries of each of the four causes respectively. They are seen as rooted in and growing out of the very essence of the Church, an exteriorization, a normal manifestation, of her mystery.¹⁹

The language as well as the metaphysics are Aristotle's. Although Journet's format was tightly scholastic, his inclusion of amounts of biblical and patristic material led to an opening up of ecclesiology in the fifteen years prior to Vatican II.

In an Aristotelian ecclesiology the Church, like many other realities of faith, is subjected to a dualism, in this case that of body and soul. Too easily the laity becomes the *corpus* animated by a soul which is passive. The active, spiritual side of the Church is almost monopolized by the hierarchy, a separate caste within this organism. A second emphasis, upon the efficient cause, tends to substitute the hierarchy for the risen Christ and his unseen Spirit. The hierarchy as an exact replica of the Twelve serves as the vicar of Christ. No longer are they the bearers of limited ministerial roles within a community of gifts and services; they become its very cause. This weakens the community as the Body of Christ, for the members of the Church are only a material cause. They do not receive a dynamic role, as they would if baptism were recognized as the bestower of various roles, ministries, and charisms upon a living organism. The diversity which vitalizes a living body is lost, for how can pure material effect ministry and evangelization?

NOMINALIST ECCLESIOLOGY: WILL THROUGH LANGUAGE DETERMINES REALITY

With our third philosophical ecclesiology we find ourselves on less firm footing. We are describing not a clearly defined group of theologians treating the Church from the perspective of this particular philosophy, but a general approach to reality. The influence of this philosophy upon ecclesiology since the fourteenth century is largely unresearched. Nominalist philosophy weakens the link between realities and words, between empirical entities and the systems of thought describing them. To support this less certain fabric of the world of beings, a strong role is given to the will. The ecclesiology of the fourteenth century, of Marsilius of

¹⁹ Ibid. xxvi. Journet mentions that R. Garrigou-Lagrange followed this same approach in his *De revelatione* 2 (Paris: Lethielleux, 1912) 208 ff.

Padua and William of Ockham, was primarily concerned with its critique of Church authority. The thrust of Ockham's antipapal ecclesiology was to discredit the connection between a papal position of authority at Avignon and the biblical origins of Christianity. This separation of mental constructs from biblical or divine realities, however, would be used later to *enhance* central authority. In ecclesiology, the doubt cast upon the theological enterprise, upon the correlation between faith and grace in theological definitions, upon locating authority in pope or council, stood in the background behind the new appeals to Scripture and the issue of faith versus reason. Did that new emphasis upon power in the later Middle Ages introduce into the self-reflection of the Church a move away from an attitude of contemplation and teaching to sovereign control? This will-for-control reduced the realities of nature and of grace to become, as codes and theologies, its pawns. While there is no formal school of developed nominalist ecclesiology, that philosophical stance has at times obtained so strong a presence in the Church that its isolation and description are important.

In the fourteenth century a shift began away from the preponderance of ontology to that of logic and analysis. Questions which had been treated as issues about real beings were studied as logical questions. "To all intents and purposes he (Ockham) undermined the natural theology and metaphysical psychology of his predecessors. Ockham admitted that some metaphysical arguments are 'probable,' but this simply illustrates the tendency in the fourteenth century to substitute probable arguments for demonstrations."²⁰ It was certitude in essence and causality which Ockham criticized. By purging Christian theology and philosophy of that Greek necessity of arranged essences, he would safeguard the ultimate reality, the divine will and liberty. This happened at the price of rending the ontic fabric which lay between the will of God and the mind of man.

The influences of nominalism in ecclesiology can be arranged around (1) the separation of mental systems from the real world and (2) the superiority of the will over the mind. When do we find the inception of nominalist influence in the ecclesiastical structure and rationale of the Church? This history remains to be researched, but a key for discerning a nominalist ecclesiology is the assertion of the system over the reality,

²⁰ F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* 3/1 (New York: Doubleday, 1963) 22 f. Brian Tierney points out that it is dangerous to make Ockham responsible for the various later movements which show nominalist characteristics (*Ockham, the Conciliar Theory, and the Canonists* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971] 1). Ockham's critique of both council and pope as a firm ultimate authority had the eventual result of loosing the organization of the Church from all moorings. The new systems, by not claiming to have solid roots in some extrahuman reality, whether that be charism or office, were also capable of becoming rigid. In their free-floating logic they were organizationally independent; as subject to only human criticism, the apparatus of the Church became autocratic and dangerous.

the human code over grace. This attitude we see gaining public, universal acceptance after Trent.

Words have for the nominalist an independent realm of existence. Museums of language and systems of mental structures, laws and censures are built and maintained. The mental horizon loosens its moorings from the given world. In ecclesiology the considerable verbal apparatus of the Church's administration has at times received in practice ultimate authority. Within the corridors of law and bureaucracy, quite unevangelical systems gained dominance as the realities—historical and contemporary, human and divine—faded. A certain kind of ecclesiology found so widely from Trent to Vatican II has occupied a middle ground between canon law and Scripture. Not simply an application of canon law, ecclesiology nevertheless rarely explored the depth and breadth of the event of Christ in his Body, the Church. Scriptural revelation provided a collection of sentences to support the elaboration of the juridical side of a papal and episcopal Church. Just as the overly analytic philosopher may ignore the cosmos as a given, so this ecclesiology felt less obligation to the implications of the ecclesial life of the apostolic generation.

Nominalism begot voluntarism. Not the theoretical mind but the potentially irrational will makes meanings and establishes goodness. Power (arbitrary or not) lies beneath everything and it alone sanctions. We see this voluntarism in ecclesiology when Church authority acts as if it fashions or controls the realities given by grace and revelation. This happens in several ways. First, codes of language are elevated above contemporary life and the charisms of the Spirit. Second, the Church itself defines the limits of its own power. Authority is no longer a service to salvation history continuing in the communal life of the Church, it is power *over* deposits or treasuries of the divine. The Church assumes power over the Bible and the sacraments. Third, there is the entrance of the Church's dictates into the internal forum of the human personality: men and women unknowingly enter into contracts or sins; despite signs of the presence of grace, they are condemned, excluded. In these three areas—scriptural texts, Church authority, the inner life of the individual—the Church has moved from the position of deacon or bishop to that of lord or creator. The given, whether of salvation history or of the activity of the Trinity, is changed into the domain of merely mental systems.

IDEALIST ECCLESIAL MODEL: UNFOLDING OF THE SELF

The first three philosophical ecclesiologies have been present in the Roman Catholic Church for centuries; the next two are more recent philosophies employed by theologians of this century in dialogue with idealism and existentialism.

We might be surprised at the idea that German idealism had much influence upon Catholic theology. Nevertheless, scholasticism in Germany was moribund by 1750, and a theological renaissance took place from 1798 to 1848, during which German Catholic theologians considered it opportune to employ the new idealist systems of Schelling and Hegel for theology. And around the turn of this century, because of new interest in Kant and Hegel, idealist insights were active in theologies, theologies often labeled Modernist.²¹

Idealism is concerned with a total explanation of reality. This explanation begins not with individual entities but with the active consciousness of the mind. Consciousness, spirit, has a history which is a self-unfolding into the various levels of the world around us: nature, mind, history, religion, and art. This evolving totality is organic, living, growing. What is fragmentary and potential is leading out of (for Schelling) or to (for Hegel) a synthetic unity. The union of nature and spirit is concretized through symbols, through words, and especially through art.

A. D. Sertillanges, the imaginative forerunner of the generation of Congar and Chenu, wrote an apologetic for Christianity and the Catholic Church. In its opening chapters *The Church*²² often reminds its reader of Schleiermacher and Chateaubriand. The point of departure is definitely the subject and its surrounding world. Through religious feeling and personal need this "romantic ecclesiology" leads the engaged individual to see the truth of the faith and the value of the community.

Karl Rahner presents us with a clearer example of the influence of the philosophy of the nineteenth century upon ecclesiology. Rahner's theology has many sources, but occasionally it displays some traits of an idealist paradigm. He does not hesitate to locate not only Kant but Hegel in the same philosophical lineage as Aquinas, contrasting them with Platonism.²³ This is not to claim that idealism is a major influence in the full thinking of Rahner. The triad Aquinas-Kant-Heidegger remains basic as his background. Nevertheless, one legitimately perceives, in his writings on the Church, forms from romantic idealism. Perhaps his is the reverberation of Möhler's ecclesiology so influential in the milieu leading to Vatican II, or perhaps it is a testimony to the lasting presence of idealism in German culture, a presence temporarily shunted aside by existentialism but by no means fully replaced. The following remarks are intended to spotlight and to support the insight that there

²¹ See H. Fries and G. Schwaiger, *Katholische Theologen Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert* (3 vols. Munich: Kösel, 1975).

²² London: Burns, 1927.

²³ For a study of the influence of Hegel upon Rahner's theology, see K. Fischer, *Der Mensch als Geheimnis* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 344 ff. Fischer singles out as possible areas: spirit, history, a becoming God in Christ, the process of differentiation in God manifest in the creature's life of grace.

is an idealist strain in Roman Catholic ecclesiology, but not to exaggerate that influence.

The point of departure for theology is not the event of Jesus Christ but the transcendental, fallen, and called personality amid an unseen dialogue with that mystery of self-communication we call God. "Theology partakes of a method which is subject-centered and its process is the process of the self-understanding of the subject."²⁴ God's nature includes within itself, as creative love, the drive towards the future and towards concreteness. God's self-transcendence includes subjecting Himself to a history.²⁵ "The self-communication of God has, although it is the transcendently most inner ground of the world and its history, a dynamism (realized in) salvation history."²⁶ God is the grace of our existential subjectivity, whose fulness is its future.

The world and its history are incarnational. The horizon and atmosphere of God's revelation and grace penetrate our life and world. The Church partakes in this sacramental (i.e., incarnational) union of reality, process, and sign.²⁷ Because of the radical temporality of revelation, faith, and human existence, there is no ideal Church, neither in a baroque, papal sense nor in a spiritualistic, sectarian sense. The ideal Church lies ahead, at the end of the eschatological process. The Church as the historical objectification of revelation partakes of both incarnation and history, and so is always and inevitably becoming the Christian community. While Rahner does not examine the Church as an idea or a principle, he will compare it to a personality. The renewal of the Church frequently is an unfolding insight into the structure of existence or the presence of God. This seeing into meaning and relationship is a slow and unpredictable historical process.

The Church is an incomplete essence moving from potency to act, incarnationally realizing the Spirit. Ecclesial change is "growth in the reflex consciousness of a knowledge which in substance the Church has always possessed."²⁸ As Schelling spoke of the absolute spirit as bipolar and organic, Rahner can speak of the Church as organically constituted within whose evolving life there are opposing tendencies, true but consti-

²⁴ "Anthropologie," *LTK* 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1967) 622. "The two mysteries of incarnation and grace are simply the mysteriously radical form of the mystery which we have shown to be the primordial one from the point of view of philosophy of religion and of theology: God as the holy abiding mystery for the creature . . . in radical proximity" ("The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," *Theological Investigations* 4 [Baltimore: Helicon, 1966] 67).

²⁵ "Revelation," *Theological Dictionary* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965); "Intellectual Honesty and Christian Faith," *Theological Investigations* 7 (New York: Herder, 1971) 61 ff.

²⁶ "Church," *Theological Dictionary* 81.

²⁷ "Heilige Schrift," *LTK* 5, 116.

²⁸ *Theology of Renewal* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964) 3, 6, 17.

tutive polar tensions: authority and charism, individual and community, present and future.²⁹

The transcendental self is central in any post-Kantian system, and as spirit it evolves through its potencies towards a fuller reality. In an idealist ecclesiology the Church is a collective self. This self is transcendental, i.e., it contains structures determinative of its life and of future realization. This communal transcendental self is surrounded by the Spirit of God. Dialogue and relationship with Him grounds life and discernment. This ecclesial self has a permanent nature but also acts as a catalytic agent for critique and change; amid spirit and grace, community and divinity, it stands at the center of unfolding history. Because of Rahner's focus upon self and because of its foundation not in dogmas or canons but in an idealist ontology, his theology possesses a certain universality. There are degrees of belonging to the collective self, stages in that community's realization of its own essence in historical forms. To the extent that other churches, religions, and movements partake in and resemble the center of the collective self, they are similar to the Church.

Rahner speaks of "the historically attainable life of the Church as the symbolic embodiment of the Spirit of God."³⁰ This continued incarnation is through life (time) and symbol (space). The community's life is *Entfaltung*: unfolding, self-disclosure, self-realization. The Church's nature is not something clearly given at the beginning nor does the Church during any one epoch fully realize its essence. Mission and ministry do not proceed from a hierarchy downwards to needy members. Not distinct from the life of the Church, they are part of the process of the Spirit-in-community. No ministry within the Church can exhaust the charisms and services potential in the Spirit; mission from the community moves out towards a larger community, where the Spirit is also at work in its history with implicit faith and unperceived graces.

While the Church never fully displays or exhausts its dynamic nature at any moment in history, still the visibility of the Church (its presence as concrete tangible sign in each historical epoch) is important. The Church as sign (sign is related to art, and for the idealists art was the synthesis of nature and mind) is a replica of the incarnational nature of this process of the Church's life. "When we say that the Church is the persisting presence of the incarnate Word in space and time, we imply that it continues the symbolic function of the Logos in the world."³¹

This organic, evolving ecclesiology accomplishes well the necessary job of freeing the universal Church from legal bonds to one epoch or to

²⁹ *The Christian Community* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 64, 89, 111.

³⁰ "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations* 4, 423.

³¹ *Ibid.* 240.

one type of ecclesiology. The changing structures of Church life are seen as part of a process. Here we locate the Christian community in a *universum* of various movements and major religions which can no longer simply be ignored or condemned. Is not an idealist ecclesiology inevitably weak at the level of practical ecclesial renewal? It seems to run out of ideas and power as it reaches the rim, the sharp edge where issues of how to renew a diocese, a parish, or a missionary outpost pose concrete and practical questions.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL-HISTORICAL MODEL: PARTIAL DISCLOSURE IN HISTORY

With our final model we move from the philosophies of past centuries to one of our own time. I call this model "phenomenological" because, refusing to deduce a formal structure from a given essence of the Church, it begins with a cluster of forms, seeing there an emerging if only partially disclosed nature. The phenomenological approach becomes "historical" as, no longer expecting perfect definition or eternal essence, it unveils to us a particular, enduring reality by means of the formal arrangement of old and new characteristics. This process of disclosure takes place in time. Only in history can the essence appear, and then it appears only partially. Time and form seem to be the necessary bridges for the beginning of something to reach our perception.

This philosophical approach is related to Heidegger's theory of the historicity of Being and truth. Truth is not a law or a mental equation but a *process* of uncovering some entity. Heidegger writes: "Truth is that unveiling of beings through which an openness shows its nature."³² The presence of Being in human existence is a process immersed in rather than separate from time. Being permits itself to be discovered by human existence—for instance, through language or art. Truth is not the mental side of life, nor does it hover above history in serene abstraction, but it is the same as Being and as such can only be disclosure-in-history. And yet, for every revealing there is a corresponding hiddenness and concealment. To allow one facet to be seen is to conceal its opposite. "To let be revealed is of its very nature simultaneously to conceal. The existent and ecstatic freedom of human existence takes place in the concealing of being as totality."³³ Full reality is never apprehended; moreover, Being and truth are known not apart from cultural history but through it. In Hans Küng's theology of the Church, the essence of

³² M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1961) 16. We are accustomed to Heidegger's name being linked, theologically, to Bultmann and his disciples. This framework of historical truth is more at the center of Heidegger's thought than the limited use Bultmann made of certain characteristics of human existence.

³³ *Ibid.* 19.

the Church (so often and so presumptuously defined by some canonists and ecclesialogists) resembles Heidegger's Being.

The Church is a historical being whose public life is grasped through the *forms* of a particular time calling forth an ecclesiology for this or that cultural epoch. We need not conclude to a direct dependence of Küng upon Heidegger. What is important here is that Küng has passed over, at the beginning of his lengthy ecclesiology, not only the Platonic and nominalist metaphysics of the Church but also the evolutionary stance where a Christian reality, e.g., the Church, finds in the history of dogma a better and better format. We have understood the history of dogmatic expression and of faith in what is largely a Hegelian sense: to know more is to know better; to know later is to know more deeply. Küng's fundamental theology of the Church rejects this modern triumph of historical survival. Each epoch can disclose and reveal the Church's life and mission. In this limited but important way Küng has adopted a view similar to Heidegger's phenomenology of the history of truth.

The starting point for ecclesiology is the fact that the "essence" of the Church is expressed in changing historical forms.

Essence and form *cannot be separated*. The essence and the form of the Church should not be divorced from one another but must be seen as a whole. . . . There is not, and never was, in fact, an essence of the Church by itself, separate, chemically pure, distilled from the stream of historical forms. We can only glimpse the real Church if we see the essence of the Church as existing in its historical form, rather than as existing beyond and above it.³⁴

Ecclesiology is no more a logical science deducing attributes of a defined eternal essence. The theologian can do justice to the tradition and stability of the Church even when a variety of ecclesiologies, influenced by external cultural factors, have existed and still exist. Rather than being ashamed of diversity and historicity, ecclesiology rejoices in them; it is freed by legitimate and necessary variety.

Küng's ecclesiology is always historical and descriptive. The transcendental essence of the Church is never captured but appears in this or that cluster of forms, whether this be the ecclesiology of Cyprian or of Bellarmine. Küng, in fact, favors the ecclesial life which Paul describes as that of Corinth, but the Tübingen theologian intends to remain within the dialectic of essence and form. This model would, then, agree with Ranke's phrase that every age stands immediately before God. Every ecclesiology is instituted by the Spirit of Jesus.

We do not equate Dulles' theology of the Church as simply a variant of this approach. Yet the theoretical resolution of the fact of different models for the Church functions within this approach. No single eccle-

³⁴ Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 5 f.

siology is *the* correct one: the full nature of the Church eludes each paradigm, whether it be that of servant or of sacrament. Küng speaks more philosophically of *Wesen* (essence) and Dulles prefers the theology of mystery (favored by the French); while Küng recalls German phenomenology, Dulles probes American sociology.

Theologians often tend to assume that the essence of the Church somehow exists, like a dark continent, ready-made and awaiting only to be mapped. The Church, as a sociological entity, may be more correctly viewed as a "social construct." In terms of sociological theory, one may say that the form of the Church is being constantly modified by the way in which the members of the Church externalize their own experience and in so doing transform the Church to which they already belong.³⁵

And Dulles can remind us of Heidegger as he explains that each of the models has its reason for utility or neglect.

... to what extent are the models compatible or incompatible? Are the differences of horizon mutually exclusive or mutually complementary?... Are they an opaque screen that shuts off the reality of the Church, or a transparent screen that permits us to grasp the Church as it really is? If the latter, what really is the Church?³⁶

Our final phenomenological-historical model, with its cultural epochs and its paradigms born of different intellectual horizons, returns us to the very issue of models. A variety of philosophical ecclesiologies is present because the mysterious nature of the Church is more than theology or polity can grasp. If a cultural framework reflects the goodness of a culture, and if it does not fully control or falsify the essence of Christian community, it succeeds within the task of ecclesiology. Yet the next historical period will see what the previous one did not reveal, contours of the Church's nature which were neglected or obscured, and the process of self-discovery for the Church continues.

CONCLUSION

The study of the influence of metaphysical, sociological, or political frameworks in the history of the Church is as large as the history of ecclesiology. Indeed, aligning according to these paradigms the major theologians and movements in the history of the Church's self-understanding would be one way of writing the history of ecclesiology. The mental and social structures born out of each epoch enable this reincarnation of the Church. Each form may be employed, blessed, criticized, or condemned. This essay has had as its goal simply to raise the important fact that philosophy—from ontology to political science—offers the struc-

³⁵ Dulles, *Models* 187 f.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 179.

tures upon which the fundamental elements of being-the-Church are arranged.

Having indicated the influence of extrabiblical frameworks in several ecclesiologies, we might at this point be tempted to carry our investigation further by asking whether any contemporary American models have recently arrived upon the scene. Only since Vatican II have contemporary patterns of thought been allowed to influence the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Although considerable work has been done in this area over the past decade, we still do not have a systematic and contemporary, or American, ecclesiology. I shall merely list certain systems which may become more and more influential.

1) Vatican II balanced the monarchical hierarchy with various collegial bodies, e.g., the international synod, the presbyteral senate, the parish council. This has introduced into ecclesiology that particularly modern polity of *democracy and republicanism*. A representative structure of government now has some role at various levels of Church life.

2) While democracy offers salutary paradigms, *technology* or *technocracy* may not. Technology seems incapable of enhancing the human, of producing symbols of the personality amid the mystery of the world. Secular technology does not draw new forms out of the sustaining archetypes of humanity. Preferring to manipulate rather than to reveal, it has not yet reached the level of ontology. Art illustrates this inability to incarnate world view and personhood. Modern Church architecture more often than not resembles its technological counterparts: banks, theaters, corporate headquarters. But then the Church building is not the result of a community reflecting upon its life and ministry, and so it neither reproduces nor assists a vital ecclesiology.

3) America is famous for its *pragmatism*. A pragmatic ecclesiology would emerge from the needs and hopes of the Church.³⁷ The Church's program is its structure. Both program and implementation build from the diversity of the entire Church and involve all levels. This ecclesial approach has been quite prominent in the symposia, programs, position papers often sponsored by Catholic professional organizations such as the Canon Law Society of America and the Catholic Theological Society of America, and in the innovations and controversies which have surrounded the American Catholic Church over the past decade. The "Call to Action" meeting is the most recent example of this growing ecclesial approach.³⁸

³⁷ On American representative models, see Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics*; J. Theisen, "Models of Papal Ministry and Reliability," *American Benedictine Review* 27 (1976) 270 ff.; M. Fahey, "Continuity in the Church amid Structural Changes," *TS* 35 (1974) 415 ff.

³⁸ Cf. R. Haight, "Mission: Symbol for the Church Today," *TS* 36 (1976) 620-49.

4) Finally, there is *Marxism*. The theologians of liberation from South America have taken some ideas of Marxism seriously. But have they looked at the styles of socialism precisely as inspiring the forms of the entire Church?³⁹ This approach would easily set past ecclesiastical forms aside in a radical historical critique. The new ones would exist not to serve a Neoplatonic mysticism or liturgy but to profit community organization, to offer *diakonia* to the exploited, and to voice a prophetic critique of injustice.

I shall not pursue what may be the future models of ecclesiology. The five paradigms reaching from Plato to Heidegger which I have singled out have long determined ecclesiology and still do so. Call them philosophical or cultural models: because their provenance is ontology and psychology, they give the forms in and by which the Christian community lives. Theologies of the Roman Catholic Church since Trent and Vatican I have emphasized the divine reality (*ius divinum*) of the Church. To comprehend these philosophical models in their complex influence is to learn again that the term of Incarnation is not the eternal idea but the solid concreteness of finitude, the mixing colors of history. The presumption of an eternal metaphysics, i.e., a perennial definition for the Church, undermines its historical and eschatological nature. It belongs to the Church's essence to change. The forms of cultural history are the lessons of ecclesiology.

³⁹ For brief comments on Marxism in ecclesiology, see T. Sanks and B. Smith, "Liberation Ecclesiology," *TS* 38 (1977) 3-39. For a useful, sympathetic presentation of recent Latin American theological methodology, see Alfred T. Hennelly, S.J., "Theological Method: The Southern Exposure," *TS* 38 (1977) 709-35.