# CHURCH AS STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITAS: VICTOR TURNER AND ECCLESIOLOGY

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*[Editor's Note: Anthropologist Victor Turner focused on the dy-
namic relationship between the liminal condition affecting sub-
jects of "rites of passage" and the relatively permanent state of
the overall structure of ordinary life. He extrapolated his theory
into a wider application to social and cultural dynamics. The
author here argues that Turner's methodology is fruitful for
analyzing ecclesial life, bearing especially upon permanence
and change. He then attends to the "types" of three contempo-
rary liminal groups and the Church's possible response to
them.]*

A S ANYONE WHO inhabits the northerly climes knows, the wintry sea-
son brings with it two perils. One is that we may venture into the
cold ill equipped for it and so freeze to death; the other is that we may
barricade ourselves in the familiar warmth of our own dwellings and
miss the invigorating challenges of the season. Of course, many who
can afford it simply take off to Florida, the Bahamas, or Arizona and
thus enjoy the pleasures of total obliviousness. Not to belabor the
metaphor any further, I intend here to initiate an investigation into a
method by which Christians, here Roman Catholics in particular,
might exercise a creative process that enables some integration be-
tween those who risk being frozen into structures and those who hide
out from the cold in the warmth of small supportive circles of the
like-minded.

There is of course nothing original in my plan thus far. Christians
have struggled with the problem and the mystery since the day after
Pentecost, and humans have faced the challenge (one may at least
conjecture) since the dawn of organized society. Ecclesiologically, in
the present century, the popularity of Avery Dulles's *Models of the
Church* was based largely on the tension between the elements typified
by his models of institution and mystical communion; and Leonardo
Boff developed his own set of models to deal with the same problem,

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especially to support the need of the oppressed and marginalized for strong local community.[1]

Theologians, at least since Congar, Rahner, de Lubac, and Schillebeeckx, have been retrieving the creative work of the early 19th-century, tragically short-lived theologian Johann Adam Möhler in the project of rescuing the Church from the model of the "perfect society" into which it had fallen since the Reformation. Möhler's *Symbolism* typified the dynamic definition he gave to the Church:

By the Church on earth, Catholics understand the visible community of believers, founded by Christ, in which, by means of an enduring apostleship, established by him, and appointed to conduct all nations, in the course of ages, back to God, the works wrought by him during his earthly life, for the redemption and sanctification of mankind are, under the guidance of the Spirit, continued to the end of the world.[2]

His *Unity in the Church* is grounded on the mission of the Holy Spirit as building a community consisting of an integration of spirit, letter, and church within tradition. Möhler's powerfully pneumatological Church maintains both mystical and intellectual unity, while thriving on healthy diversity.[3] Two points made by Möhler are especially valuable in relation to my project in the present article: first, the unity in diversity of the early Church, especially in its development of worship,[4] and second, his approval of Augustine's position on heresy. While Möhler often expresses abhorrence of heresy, like Augustine he considers it an opportunity for growth in the search for truth and the development of doctrine.[5] The liminal experiences to be discussed here are not per se heretical, but they bear an analogy to heresy in that their separation from the conventional mainstream can be an occasion for creative reform if the Church will enter into genuine dialogue with these experiences.

My method in this article assumes an integral place for the social sciences in theological work (although anthropology has often been called as much an art as a science). Such sciences are not to be seen as theologically "normative" but as vital means of interpretation and description of church life.[6] In an earlier article, I discussed the value of

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[1] See Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

[2] Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism, or Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings*, trans. James Burton Robinson (London: Gibbings, 1906; German original 1832) 258.

[3] Möhler, *Unity in the Church, or the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, trans. and ed. Peter C. Erb (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996; German original 1825) 81–92.

[4] Ibid. 161–205.                              [5] Ibid. 298–300.

[6] On this point, John Milbank develops a complex argument against "secular reason," and argues that sociology is not a "true meta-discourse about religion"; see his *Theology*

acknowledging that the Church is a subsystem of culture, employing the term "cultural system" as understood by Clifford Geertz.[7] I intended this without any prejudice to the existence of the Church as mystery and as a prophetic community that looks beyond empirical culture.

Here the fundamental analogy to the creative theological tension between institution and community (*Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*) is the ethnological tension between "structure" and "communitas" as developed by the late British anthropologist Victor Turner (1920–1983), whose later years were spent in the U.S. The special insight of Turner, over against the school in which he was trained, was that society and structure are not coextensive. Turner's research and reflection taught him that society is always a dynamic process, consisting of two mutually interdependent and interactive poles that he came to call "structure" and "communitas." But Turner was able to arrive at this theory only by way of a long journey, which fittingly enough he called a pilgrimage. I first trace that journey, and then discuss how Turner's categories might serve not only to describe the dynamics of the Church but also to nourish its ongoing historical growth.

Turner's work, as we shall later see in greater detail in his study of pilgrimages, lends itself to an ecclesiology that is both dynamic and appreciative of continuing structure. In this article I discuss how Turner's work can assist ecclesiologists in their efforts to mediate tensions that characterize the Church moved as it is by the power of the Spirit, and to explore the dynamics animating every sociocultural community. Turner, in collaboration with his wife, Edith, came to the insight that the processes of aboriginal cultures, especially their religious rites, are fundamentally those of all cultures and religions. My own conviction is that humans never evolve out of this primordial, "natural" condition, and that grace always deeply respects it.

My article has two major goals: first, to articulate the thought of Victor and Edith Turner, and then to apply it to ecclesial identity and processes. From my own pastoral experience and fieldwork, I then offer examples of how cultures and religious traditions that are "liminalized" or marginalized from mainstream society should be awarded a valued place in the universal Church, and how they might aid the

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*and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 101. While agreeing that theology must not surrender its vocation to the social sciences, I argue here that theology must attend to the description of church as a society as well as a prophetic community. Thus theology must accept social theory into its circle of close collaborators and even consider it as integral to the total theological project. To fail in this is to fall into what Karl Rahner has called an "ideology of transcendence" that belittles the penultimate realities in order to deal with the ultimate; see Rahner, "Ideology and Christianity," in *Theological Investigations* 6, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 43–58, at 45.

[7] Carl F. Starkloff, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems," *TS* 55 (1994) 66–81 and 274–94.

Church's vitality. From readings on new religious movements, basic ecclesial communities, and "Women-Church," I then draw additional examples relative to the creative tension between what Turner called "structure" and "communitas."[8]

TURNER'S FIELD DEVELOPMENT

Tracing the growth of Turner's thought is a taxing exercise, first, because of its ethnological and philosophical richness and complexity, and second, because his books consist of articles published outside of temporal sequence. To retain the simplicity necessary for this article, I carefully note the temporal succession of Turner's ideas, resisting the temptation to enter into the many philosophical themes he has discussed over the years. Thus I focus here on the development of the concepts of structure and communitas. The best way to maintain clarity in this exposition is first to give brief accounts of Turner's fieldwork and then to turn to his theoretical interpretations.

One of Turner's most famous books, *The Forest of Symbols*, published in 1967, contains essays written as early as 1958; some chapters were written specifically for the book. This field report on the ritual life of the Ndembu people of Zambia describes the ethnological origins of Turner's development as both a social scientist and a philosopher as well.[9] In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner engaged in "thick description" of a complex of Ndembu rituals, dealing with all aspects of this people's life. I focus explicitly on that characteristic of ritual life that Turner called "rites of passage," which he borrowed from Arnold van Gennep's foundational book written early in the 20th century.[10] There is a sense in which every rite might be called a passage; van Gennep had de-

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[8] Andre Droogers, writing, appropriately to our topic, on the problem of syncretism, offers a cogent argument for the value of Turner's work: "He has shown how important the margins of society may be for its renewal, particularly because hierarchical relations are experienced less prominently there. The same happens when society goes through a marginal phase. It can be shown that founders of world religions started out from such marginalized situations" (Droogers, "Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem," in J. D. Gort et al., eds., *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989] 19).

[9] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University, 1967). A helpful insight into Turner's writing can be found in Clifford Geertz's remarks on Bronislaw Malinowski: "The problem, to rephrase it in as prosaic terms as I can manage, is to represent the research process in the research product; to write ethnography in such a way as to bring one's interpretations to some society, culture, way of life, or whatever and one's encounters with some of its members, carriers, representatives, or whatever into an intelligible relationship" (Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* [Stanford: Stanford University, 1988] 84.) Geertz was pointing out in this book that the anthropologist will often have more problem writing about fieldwork than in actually doing it. In general, I think, Turner has done such writing with greater clarity than has Geertz.

[10] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffe (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960; original 1908.)

scribed numerous different versions of passage; birth, initiation, marriage, funerals, entrance into societies, trades, warriorhood and sacred offices, fertility/sterility rituals, rites for the construction of dwellings, and more. Turner adopted this viewpoint as he came to see the pervasive element of passage in sacred ceremonies, emphasizing especially van Gennep's categories of separation, liminality, and reintegration. These terms refer to rites in which candidates pass through the stages of separation from the larger community (preliminal), rites of actual transition (liminal), and rites of reincorporation (postliminal).[11]

While Turner discussed a number of rituals that are not so explicitly passage rites, *The Forest of Symbols* contains one that has always been among the best known of such rituals, the *Mukanda* or rite of circumcision.[12] In this extensive chapter, Turner described the process by which young boys, ranging from age eight to about fifteen, are ceremonially removed from the society of the women, set apart in the company of male ceremonial officiants, and undergo not simply the actual physical operation, but a full instruction on their place in society, on morality, and on the meaning of symbolic activity. Finally, the boys are welcomed back with great joy into the larger community with a new status, rights, and duties. They have passed through a ceremony of ritual death to childhood and emerged into a new life of manhood.[13]

For a second significant rite of passage, actually a complex of two rites, pertaining to women and their roles in the culture, I turn to what is perhaps Turner's best known work, *The Ritual Process*, consisting of essays published more or less during the same time period, and relying on the same period of fieldwork.[14] The two rituals treated in detail here are the *Isoma* for a woman who has been unable to bear children or who has borne dead children (a ritual of underperformance), and the *Wubwang'a*, or the ceremony for a woman who has borne or is expected to bear twins (a ritual of overperformance). Turner attributed concern regarding twins to the culture's absence of milk animals such as cows or goats, and the possibility that a woman might not be able to nurse more than one child at a time.[15]

In the *Isoma* the apparently barren woman is perceived as somehow out of place or out of right relationship to her role, and thus polluted and dangerous.[16] Basically, a ritual is needed to restore right relationships that were probably disturbed by incurring the displeasure of an

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[11] Ibid. 11.                              [12] Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* 151–279.
[13] Turner noted that, while basically the ritual is one related to puberty, contemporary usage has liberalized its practice to include younger boys, largely due to modern influences such as school or the need to work (ibid. 152).
[14] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine, 1995; original 1967) 1–93.
[15] It is important to note here that the ritual does not focus on the problem solely as that of the woman.
[16] Turner is here employing the terminology of his junior colleague Mary Douglas, who described pollution or "dirt" as "essentially disorder" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An*

ancestor. As with boys preparing for circumcision, the woman is set aside from the everyday community to undergo a series of symbolic actions administered by medicine men and women. The passage, however, must also include the woman's husband, who is seen as normally having the power to give the woman children, but who may have lost this power by bringing down the ancestor's curse.[17]

For the ceremony, a trench is dug in the ground and covered over with boughs to form a kind of tunnel. The woman, holding a white pullet, or young chicken, enters into the tunnel, followed immediately by her spouse. Both then pass through the tunnel and emerge through the exit hole, after which each is ceremonially bathed. Then they enter a specially prepared hut, where they must remain until such time as the pullet lays its first egg.

The *Wubwang'a* or twin ceremony takes place at a river which represents the source of life. The ceremony is performed on the twin-bearing woman by male and female "adepts," whose various medicines are used to bring to life the healing powers of certain trees.[18] These specialists perform on the woman a series of libations in order to make her milk healthy and to impart to her "the basic values of goodness, purity, good health, fertility, openness, social communion, and a number of other auspicious qualities."[19] Turner described this highly complex ceremony in careful and elaborate detail; for our purpose here it is important to note simply that the ceremony ends with both the father and the mother passing through another tunnel, formed by the spread legs of all the male and female adepts who have treated them. As in the fertility ritual, they thereupon repair to a hut where they remain for two hours until the woman is brought out for a final washing and then full reception back into the larger community.

### FUNDAMENTAL CATEGORIES

We now come to the terminology that Turner developed to interpret these ritual processes and others like them. After his studies of tribal societies, he continued to apply these categories both to wider secular societies and to certain dimensions of ecclesial life. Although the two basic terms are not original with Turner, his usage of them is. The first of these categories is structure, the second is communitas (the Latin form is employed to distinguish its unique quality from the more general term "community").

What did Turner mean by "structure"? He explained the term and all of his more developed terminology, in the glossary of a later book co-authored with his wife, Edith, to which I shall return in detail: the

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*Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* [London: Routledge, 1985, original 1966] 2 and passim).
[17] *The Forest of Symbols* 31–32.     [18] Ibid. 51–55.
[19] Ibid. 59.

study of Christian pilgrimages.[20] In this work, the authors were careful to distinguish their understanding of structure from that of the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, for whom structure was fundamentally an internal *cognitive* process. While not denying some epistemological connections to this understanding, the Turners defined structure in British anthropological terms as a *social* phenomenon. Accordingly, structures for the Turners are "the patterned arrangements of role sets, status sets, and status sequences consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society and closely bound up with legal and practical norms and sanctions."[21] By the time the Turners had recorded their later research, their understanding of structure had been extended to all forms of society, aboriginal or modern. In my account of tribal rituals, the structure is the regular order of day-to-day village life, as opposed to the sacred moments of life-crisis ritual events, so different from structure that Turner named them "anti-structure."

These ritual events manifest the phenomenon Turner called "communitas," taking the term from Paul Goodman but employing it quite differently and also distinguishing it from the well-known *Gemeinschaft* concept of Ferdinand Tönnies. It is important to mention this distinction here, because it further clarifies what Turner is about. For Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* was the term for close community, set over against *Gesellschaft,* or formal society, but still containing the elements of structure. Turner made it a point to separate structure from communitas radically for the sake of describing (although not finally dichotomizing) the social process.[22]

Thus, for Turner, communitas was "a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations and circumstances." A further brief comment reveals the dynamic process we are investigating: "It [communitas] is the *fons et origo* of all structures and at the same time their critique."[23] Further, "It may be regarded by the guardians of structure as dangerous and may be hedged around with taboos, and associated with ideas of purity and pollution."[24]

Consequently, the ritual events of circumcision and of reproduction described above demonstrate the "unmediated communion," operating differently from ordinary social life, that occurs in rites of passage. Such states of communitas are both a threat to ordinary social life and a necessity for its continuity. Nothing in such rituals is in its ordinary

[20] Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University, 1978).
[21] Ibid. 252.
[22] For fuller discussion of this distinction, see Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1996; original 1974) 202–10.
[23] Ibid. 250.        [24] Ibid. 251.

place or order, and thus, in Douglas' terms, they are situations of danger. This also explains why they could be called "anti-structure."[25]

Turner employed additional terminology to deepen his descriptions. We have seen how he used van Gennep's triad of separation, liminality, and reintegration, or preliminality, liminality, and postliminality. Thus any rite of passage, or transitional ritual, accompanies changes of place, state, social position, and age in a culture. To be liminal is to be in a "state and process of mid-transition."[26] It is a condition of "secular powerlessness" joined to "sacred power": that is, the liminal person or group as such has no social or political clout, but it is endowed with an awesome sacred power, or *mana,* that, as we shall see, does have paradoxical connotations for secular life.

A further set of terms that should be mentioned here is Turner's subdivision of communitas into another categorical set, spontaneous (or existential), normative, and ideological. The spontaneous or existential communitas is the state of becoming that occurs in a marginalized and anti-structural group. In some of his ritual descriptions, Turner described how such a group may engage in actions, especially sexual, that are unacceptable in ordinary social structure. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," the Turners remarked,[27] while elsewhere Victor Turner suggested the hippy communes as modern examples of this condition.[28]

Normative communitas is "the attempt to capture and preserve spontaneous communitas in a system of ethical precepts and legal rules."[29] Here, the marginal group itself, as it moves toward reintegration or its own organization, is attempting to become a perduring social system.[30] This terminology is of considerable importance for the historical development of ecclesiology.

Ideological communitas, finally, is "the formulation of remembered attributes of the communitas experience in the form of a utopian blueprint for the reform of society."[31] This phase is in tension with normative communitas because it envisions how the primitive communitas might serve as a model for society as a whole; examples would be various socialist experiments or, as Turner noted, the ideals of Leo Tolstoy.[32] This form of communitas is significant for ecclesiology insofar as it examines the role of marginalized groups in relation to secular society and to the Church.

DEEPENING THE THEORY

One may ask at this point whether Turner was warranted in extrapolating his analysis of the rituals of tribal societies into such an all-inclusive theory of society. Turner addressed this problem in *The*

[25] Ibid. 250.
[27] Ibid. 252.
[29] *Image and Pilgrimage* 252.
[31] *Image and Pilgrimage* 252.

[26] Ibid. 249.
[28] *The Ritual Process* 132.
[30] *The Ritual Process* 132.
[32] *The Ritual Process* 133.

*Ritual Process* by means of an autobiographical reference to his own professional formation in the school of British anthropology, which regards a "society" as a system of social positions.[33] Coming to see this as a needlessly static description that lends itself to a possible Hobbesian theory of social life, he began to move toward understanding society as a more complex set of relationships and processes. In this quest, he turned increasingly, as did many other thinkers, to the work of Martin Buber.[34] To better describe how Buber's I-Thou philosophy shows itself in society, Turner turned to the kind of dynamics found in rites of passage—close attention to persons, intimate rituals, a sense of belonging, and finally an attention to reintegration into the wider community.

I attempt to deepen this explanation without burdening my article with other studies done by Turner on semiotic theory and further ceremonial analysis. For this purpose, I examine more closely how the Turners extended the practice of "processual symbolic analysis," which they described as "the interpretation of symbols as dynamic systems of signifiers (the outward forms), their meanings, and changing modes of signification, in the context of temporal sociocultural processes."[35] In other words, the authors were establishing a paradigm for society in general drawn from ethnological fieldwork. This is not without peril, of course; take, for example, the later Nazi distortion of the "blood and soil" concept employed by Bruno Gutmann in order to help Africans reinforce their own identities.[36] This historic problem is an apt illustration of the basic tension between church as cultural system and church as prophetic community.

This makes very significant an early statement of Turner's about rites of passage: *"Rites de passage* are found in all societies but tend to reach their maximal expression in small-scale, relatively stable and cyclical societies, where change is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythms and recurrences rather than with technological innovations."[37] Thus, both Turners proceeded with caution in applying the idea of ritual passage to modern societies and to groups within the Church. However, Victor Turner would make a solid case for extending van Gennep's phrase to describe the process of transition between states or "relatively fixed and stable conditions" in all societies that include legal status, professions, offices or callings, ranks, and degrees.[38]

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[33] Ibid. 131.

[34] I am referring to Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

[35] *Image and Pilgrimage* 243.

[36] For a concise summary of this position in mission theory, see J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Interpretation,* trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 51, 193.

[37] *The Forest of Symbols* 93.          [38] Ibid.

What most intrigued Turner in his early fieldwork was the condition and process of liminality, theoretically indicated as early as Plato, and emphasized by such diverse figures as Hegel and the post-Reformation mystic Jacob Boehme. Therefore, he wrote: "Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the way to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise."[39] Liminality is thus "the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence."[40] In these remarks we can see how Turner came to appreciate the necessarily permanent tensive interaction between dynamic liminality and stable structure.

Even in his essays written between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, Turner was expanding his concepts to show how they apply, for example, to the process of full initiation into a religious order, or the growth of millenarian movements on the margins of society and church. Thus he could observe how liminal persons or groups appear always to "fall in the interstices of social structure."[41] They are always somehow alienated, with elements of poverty and social weakness giving them a certain special power, not the least of which is a dynamic relationship among themselves, a relationship that Turner describes by means of Buber's categories. Turner saw the tension between liminality and structure as a dialectic between the "immediacy of communitas" and the "mediacy of structure," and argued:

What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of communitas outside of or against "the law." Exaggerations of communitas, in certain religious or political movements of the levelling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, over-bureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification.[42]

I noted in my earlier discussion of circumcision how Turner proceeded to further his argument that society is a process of adaptation that can never be completely consummated, "since it involves as many specialized adaptations as there are specialized influences in the environment to be met, as Herbert Spencer wrote a century ago."[43] Consequently, what Turner wrote of circumcision rites can be applied to other processes of liminal passage: that is, the goal of passage ritual is to restructure relationships or to realign them in a new structure.[44] Liminality is therefore a locus of symbolic creativity in a society: "Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art."[45]

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[39] Ibid. 97.
[41] *The Ritual Process* 125.
[43] *The Forest of Symbols* 271.
[45] *The Ritual Process* 128.

[40] Ibid. 106.
[42] Ibid. 129.
[44] Ibid.

But this argument is far from an espousal of naive Romanticism. Turner insisted on the twofold tensive fact: spontaneous communitas cannot remain for long, but soon develops a structure, norms, and rules for itself, and thus becomes normative communitas.[46] Ideally, what happens is that the stable structure benefits from liminal communitas: "Structural form is divested of selfish attributes and purified by association with the values of communitas."[47] Within tribal societies, this kind of tensive creativity (again, not to romanticize) is built into the society itself from antiquity, so that what happens to each person in the liminal ritual conditions them to contribute to the larger group upon their return, and the community expects such a response to ensue from the ritual. Modern, symbolically unstable, secular society has a massive problem with this, of course, but the Turners have found a historical analogy to the aboriginal experience within the history of the Church.

APPLICATIONS TO ECCLESIAL PHENOMENA

### Religious Orders

Turner first began to extend his analysis of tribal ritual into the realm of the Church with his published essays on Ndembu religious custom. He quickly saw the parallel here to the full incorporation of novices into a Benedictine monastic community and the rites that go with it. But this interest carried him more deeply into church history where he found himself most intrigued by the story of St. Francis of Assisi. I summarize briefly the story well known to many Christians, some of whom are familiar with the narrative through its popularity on the heels of the "flower children" movement, recalling the 1970s film *Brother Sun and Sister Moon.* Especially notable is the film's scene in which young Francis Bernadone, after his vision that conveyed to him the message, "Francis, rebuild my Church," strips himself naked before his father, his bishop, and the town population, including the young Clare, and then strides out alone into the wilderness. There, on the margins, he sets to work literally and materially rebuilding an old church. It is intriguing that even though Francis's behavior shocked some of his fellow townsfolk, that shock was mitigated by the existing tradition of spiritual liminality. Thus, the subsequent Franciscan community was not violently ostracized or attacked before the episode involving the Spirituals.

Turner saw the first disciples' gathering around Francis as almost an archetypal spontaneous communitas, an event marked by stripping away of possessions, radical poverty, material weakness, and burgeoning spiritual power and influence, indeed almost a "magical" quality.[48] But his quality was short-lived: at first Francis and his followers sur-

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[46] Ibid. 132.  [47] Ibid. 184.
[48] Ibid. 139.

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vived without income, without possessions except for the clothes on their backs, and without structure. But even Francis, during his short lifetime, was forced to legislate a rule for his growing community, and in this event he encountered the limits of his charismatic personality. About this Turner wrote that it seemed to have been Francis's intention that his disciples would be permanently liminal, following the poor and naked Christ, that his friars would always be in a state of temporal passage until they entered the unchanging state of heaven.[49] And this was the condition, quite literally, in which Francis died.

However, the Order that followed Francis faced the necessity of becoming a structured community, not simply because the official Church demanded it, but because no historically developing group can do without organization. Eventually there ensued the famous split between the Spiritual Franciscans and the conventuals regarding absolute poverty. Turner saw it as no mere coincidence that the Spirituals became involved with the teachings of the millenarian Cistercian, Abbot Joachim of Flora.

Moving in an opposite direction was Francis's first administrative successor, Brother Elias, who made the Order into a structured community—still a communitas vis-à-vis the institutional Church and secular society, but a normative communitas with increasing involvement with material possessions and property. This latter form was supported by Pope John XXII, while the apocalyptic Spirituals were eventually eliminated; Turner observed however that many of the Spirituals' principles have been used historically in reforming the Order. The larger structure can tolerate its liminal rites, but only insofar as they submit to some domestication. In this one can note a certain demonic element, as renewed study of the persecution of medieval movements like the Cathari has illustrated. A movement such as this might have benefited the church structure if it had been treated, both sympathetically and critically, as a liminal reality.

Fundamentally then, Turner's argument was that historical existence necessarily calls for structure: "Structureless communitas can bind and bond people together only momentarily."[50] He did not absolve the institutional Church that easily, since he included in *The Ritual Process* a chapter entitled "Humility and Hierarchy."[51] It is important to note the ways in which communitas experiences so often reverse the roles of the powerful and the powerless, apparently to remind those in power of the danger of their positions. For Turner, the tribal instance is the Ashanti ritual in which a new king and his wife must be reduced to a liminal ritual existence for a time, during which they endure ridicule and are reminded of the dangers of power.[52] He cited the Christian-pagan syncretic custom of Halloween as an example of how

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[49] Ibid. 144.
[51] Ibid. 166–203.

[50] Ibid. 153.
[52] Ibid. 178–81.

young children are granted temporary symbolic power over the adult world.[53]

In Turner's view, the Church like any society stands to benefit from communitas experiences that divest it of its self-serving traits and the tendency of structure to preserve itself uncritically. For the remainder of this article I wish to explore the relationship of the Church to liminality and to see how it can be strengthened by it. The symbolic form that most intrigued both Victor and Edith Turner was that of the pilgrimage, for which they felt as Roman Catholics not only intellectual eros but spiritual fascination.

## Pilgrimage

By the early 1970s, Victor Turner was already directing his interest toward the study of Christian and non-Christian pilgrimages.[54] I draw my observations from the Turners' book-length collaborative work, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture,* a book creative in the many ways in which it seeks to understand the tension between stability and movement, order and creativity, spontaneity and authority.

In their discussion of pilgrimage, the Turners chose to call it a "liminoid" phenomenon, a term they use to describe an example of communitas and liminality, but one that occurs within the historical or salvation religions, as opposed to those occurring within tribal religions. They wrote, "Liminality is now seen to apply to all phases of decisive cultural change, in which previous orderings of thought and behavior are subject to revision and criticism, when hitherto unprecedented modes of ordering relations between ideas and people become possible and desirable."[55] With the liminoid reality of pilgrimage in historical religions as opposed to tribal rites of passage, the moral unit is the individual who is seeking release from the sins and evils of the structural world, for salvation, perhaps for "indulgences" through penance. In tribal rites of passage, while individuals certainly undergo trials and ordeals, the moral unit is the social group or category; the goal is the attainment of a new sociocultural status and state.[56] Furthermore, a pilgrimage in the historical religions is a voluntary action, while the tribal rite is prescribed as part of each member's full incorporation.[57] This also serves to explain why modern society has generally lost meaningful rites of passage, or even why the churches have difficulty practicing meaningful ones: the holistic sense of the community is no longer present, and social pressure in the realm of the sacred is no longer effective.

The Turners understood pilgrimage as something that begins spon-

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[53] Ibid. 172–77.
[54] See Victor Turner, "Pilgrimage and Communitas," *Studia Missionalia* 23 (1974) 305–27.
[55] *Image and Pilgrimage* 2.          [56] Ibid. 8.
[57] Ibid. 34.

taneously, driven by a spiritual inner force they called "entelechy"—basically the force of devotion and longing, or an "orectic" force, to use a favorite Turnerian expression.[58] Pilgrimage began as an experience outside the structure of the hierarchy, and thus as a development beginning with "anti-structure," passing through "counter-structure" (a normative communitas with many rules and procedures but over-against the institution) and back to structure, once the Church decided to sanction it.[59] Such a devotion is a threat to both conservative structure and to modern reformers; to the structure for reasons already discussed, and to reformers for the same reasons that liberation theologians have debated the value of popular religiosity. "From the point of view of those who control and maintain the social structure, all manifestations of communitas, sacred or profane, are potentially subversive."[60] On the other hand, having the anthropologist's typical sensitivity to the value of traditional symbols, the authors also admonished post-Vatican II renewalists: "Here those who are concerned with church renewal should proceed carefully, for their pruning may hack away the very roots of religious devotion, rather than the dead wood they are intending to destroy."[61]

In their own pilgrimage, the Turners paid special attention to phenomena in Mexico and Ireland—perhaps the two most dramatic examples in which the Christian and the "pagan" come together syncretically. The most renowned among those they describe in Mexico is, of course, the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.[62] The history of the Guadalupe pilgrimage was important to the Turners because the founding event, the apparition to the Indian peasant Juan Diego Cuauhtlatohuc, most likely contains many aboriginal elements. The devotion eventually received the blessing of the bishop, who originally suspected its orthodoxy. Thus, the development of the pilgrimage itself became a case in which a spontaneous communitas develops into an important ongoing fixture within the structure.

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[58] Turner used this word and its etymology (Gk. *orego*, "reach out," "extend") to describe a powerful emotional, virtually physiological, longing. This usage was to distinguish the passionate pole of symbolism from the merely cognitive (*The Forest of Symbols* 54); see also his densely detailed article, "Symbols and Social Experience in Religious Ritual," *Studia Missionalia* 23 (1974) 1–21, at 9.

[59] *Image and Pilgrimage* 26.          [60] Ibid. 32.

[61] Ibid. 29.

[62] The Turners do not discuss, although they include in their bibliography, the fascinating study by Barbara Myerhoff, *Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1974) in which the author frequently expresses her debt to Victor Turner. This book is important, among other reasons, because it treats of a non-Christian Mexican pilgrimage among people who have a history of Christian mission. Myerhoff discusses Catholic influence on the Huichols (39, 53, 67) but holds that this tribe kept their Catholicism and their indigenous religion carefully separated (73). However, the possession of two worldviews (aboriginal and "Western") could indicate a certain intertwining of social and individual "moral units." I shall suggest other such examples in modern tribal groups.

The other "archaic" pilgrimage (originating in a "pagan" past and containing many syncretic elements[63]) to which the Turners devoted a long section is the famous St. Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg, Ireland. This was an example for them of an archaic phenomenon eventually sanctioned by the Church and heavily endowed with indulgences. The three days at the shrine are filled with prescribed penitential practices such as fasting and sleep deprivation, both typical of normative communitas.

Both the Guadalupe and the Lough Derg pilgrimages are characterized by the quality of "flow," a term borrowed from the American psychologist Csikszentmihalyi to describe an experience of total involvement to the extent that time passes unnoticed and a sense of wholeness surrounds the participants. In such a state, the group loses its sense of dualism and focus on the ego, again all characteristics of ideal communitas.[64] The remainder of the Turners' book was devoted to later medieval and modern pilgrimages at Walsingham, Loreto, La Sallette, and Lourdes. All of these fall within the orbit of communitas, especially the modern pilgrimages, in which Mary is seen to intervene in the harsh structures of postindustrial society.

To summarize the importance of pilgrimage for my argument, we should note the Turners' comments on the communitas value of pilgrimage within the structure of the institutional Church. Discussing the various pilgrimages to Rome itself, they write "The Roman pilgrimage was prototypical in that it represented the genesis and fast growth, in the apostolic and subapostolic age, of the Roman structuration of the original Christian message."[65] The significance of this is that even so structured a reality as the Catholic Church is only a liminal one—even a "ludic" (playful) structure—over against the state, which has all the economic and political power. There is no mention here of the problem of postmedieval Christendom wherein the Church operated so closely with the state that in itself it tended to lose the communitas quality of its early centuries. But that is the point I now wish to address: how the Church can continue critically to draw spiritual strength from marginal communitas groups, and thus resist its own ossification as well as absorption by secular structure. The Turners remarked, "It used to be said among Catholics, As Mary goes, so goes the Church. We would qualify this to mean: As communitas goes, so goes the Church."[66] Following that observation, I will now expand this idea beyond the discussion of pilgrimages and religious orders.

[63] *Image and Pilgrimage* 18.

[64] For fuller treatment of this term in a book published after the work of the Turners, see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

[65] *Image and Pilgrimage* 168.      [66] Ibid. 171.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Within the limits of a single article it is impossible to develop an extended discussion of the dynamic tension between communitas and structure from the outset of Christianity. But for the sake of continuity, it will be helpful to note how the tension is even historically observable throughout the Old Testament and especially within the Judaism of the Maccabean period when Israel was under Greek domination. In turn, the spontaneous Maccabee movement developed into the normative communitas of the Pharisees, who had to contend with the later dominant structure of the Roman Empire. It is well known too how such apocalyptic forms of communitas as the Essenes grew up in that period.

In turn, the Pharisees and the Scribes transformed the Jewish communitas into a structure within a structure, which itself produced the communitas of John the Baptist and then of Jesus. Turner's pattern of communitas, and in certain instances even of pilgrimage (e.g. the Feast of Tabernacles), figures in the ministry of Jesus and his immediate disciples. The pharisaic structure, let alone that of the Roman-Herodian rule, was unable to tolerate this communitas in its midst. Hence the radical break that involved first the execution of Jesus and then the expulsion of the Nazarean communitas.

Without delving here into deeply scholarly sources, it does seem safe to suggest, however, that the history of the Church has consistently reflected tension between communitas and structure. This history, I would argue, constitutes what Victor Turner has described as "social dramas." While he does not allude to the etymology of the word "drama" (signifying dynamic "running" action), he does point out the qualities of social drama "concerned mainly with relations between persons in their status-role capacity and between groups and subgroups as structural segments."[67]

This implies inevitable conflict. In fact, one of the most famous pilgrimages emerges from such a dramatic conflict, that between Thomas Becket and Henry II concerning spiritual versus secular power.[68] Out of Becket's martyrdom grew the spontaneous pilgrimage to Canterbury, which the Church eventually consecrated within its structure. The ever-pressing question to be put to Christians, especially Catholics with their highly structured system, would be: What does the Spirit wish to achieve through this tensive unity between communitas and structure?

## Contemporary Examples of the Tension

On the eve of the third millennium the Church displays a highly complex system. In Turnerian categories, the Christian Church unquestionably began as a spontaneous existential communitas in the

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[67] *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* 45–46.
[68] Ibid.

face of a powerful structure. Today, contemporary versions of such a tension show the Church claiming to be what Turner called a normative communitas over against the various secular structures. Interiorly, however, the Church is a structure in Turner's sense, especially as seen by the vast number of persons belonging to various forms of communitas in differing degrees of tension with the official Church. To further complicate the matter, these "communitates" generally are situated on the margins of secular society as well.

I now wish to describe three types of liminal groups currently on the margins of both Church and society, although I am well aware that many other examples could be identified. The groups I describe are examples, in my judgment, of Turner's remark, "Liminality is the mother of invention!"[69] I focus in turn on new tribal religious movements ("revitalization movements") having both archaic and modern elements; on the well-known "basic ecclesial communities," which likewise often have archaic and modern elements; and on the modern communitas identified by Rosemary Radford Ruether as "Women-Church."

## New Tribal Religious Movements

The terminology for the movements here under discussion was coined by Harold W. Turner (no relation to Victor Turner), following upon his own lengthy field experience as a Presbyterian missionary in West Africa. Turner used the acronyms NERMS for all new religious movements in general, and PRINERMS for movements arising within primal or indigenous cultures. The literature on such movements is now quite vast, including a special issue of *Missiology* in 1985, edited by Harold Turner, that contained five studies of these new movements and extensive bibliographies.[70]

Among the new movements, the best known are those in sub-Saharan Africa, now estimated to number some 6000 separate communities.[71] The most familiar names among African Independent Churches (AIC) are the Kimbanguist Church of the Congo area, founded by Simon Kimbangu in the first half of the 20th century, the Harrist movement in the Ivory Coast, and the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Nigeria. Common to these groups is the fact that their prophetic founders began as converts to or members of mainstream European-based churches but eventually found those structures unable to offer their people satisfying spiritual nourishment. While the AICs are not simply reactions to the mainstream churches, they can be

[69] Turner, "Symbols and Social Experience" 10.
[70] *Missiology* 13 (1985) 81–101. This journal has continued to follow these movements, as, e.g., in its January 1997 issue; see esp. Solomon Zvanoka, "African Independent Churches in Context," *Missiology* 25 (1997) 69–75.
[71] See David Shank, "Mission Relations with the Independent Churches in Africa," *Missiology* 13 (1985) 23–44.

seen in Victor Turner's terms as types of liminal communitas over against ecclesiastical structures that their members found too rigid and lifeless.

Many, if not most, of these AIC groups remain on the margin of the mainstream churches, but the Kimbanguist Church was admitted into membership in the World Council of Churches some three decades ago, thus manifesting a type of "reincorporation" as a "rite of passage" to a stronger ecclesial life. In a lengthy article concerning the AICs, M. L. Daneel describes in detail how these churches have been leading many other African churches in an ecological movement that has deeply in-fluenced liturgy, preaching, and theology.[72] For Daneel, the indigenous gifts of these (until recently) marginal churches have served to pro-claim the urgency of a new earthkeeping vocation for all the churches. His article provides an example of how liminal groups develop and nurture a spontaneous creativity that can transform the larger struc-tures from which they emerged, providing that the structures can adapt themselves.

Latin America too has seen a growth of new religious movements sharing a remarkable similarity to those of Africa in that they fill spiritual needs that the mainstream churches, mostly Roman Catholic, have not been able to fill. Evangelical missionary Kenneth Scott has described movements such as "Israelitas," "Illuminados," "Los Naza-reos," and "Jacobistas," that spring from mainstream Protestant churches.[73] But as is well known, the Roman Catholic phenomenon in Latin America has for centuries manifested, not separate communi-ties, but countless pockets of what Victor Turner would call spontane-ous communitas, syncretisms of Iberian Catholicism and aboriginal religiosity. All of these manifestations can be described by the phrase "popular religiosity" in its positive social sense. That is, Amerindian societies throughout North America have implicitly come to see their traditional tribal religions as experiences of communitas in resistance to foreign domination.

Another well-known form of movement is found in the millenarian communities that sprang up in the South Pacific following upon colo-nization and missionization—events that the local peoples understood as a single experience.[74] The term "cargo cult" came to describe these communities, so named because the local people believed that by be-coming Christian they would reap the enormous material benefits that they constantly saw arriving by ship and later by air. These groups also fall under the designation of communitas, but with an ironic twist:

[72] M. L. Daneel, "Earthkeeping in Missiological Perspective: An African Challenge," *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association of Mission Studies* 13 (1996) 130–88.
[73] Kenneth Scott, "Latin America: Peruvian New Religious Movements," *Missiology* 13 (1985) 45–59.
[74] See Theodor Ahrens, "The Flower Has Thorns as Well: Nativistic Millenialism in Melanesia as a Pastoral and Theological Issue," *Missiology* 13 (1985) 61–80.

rather than being directly prophetic vis-à-vis material wealth, they sought it for themselves. The syncretic practices of the cults show them to be forms of liminal religiosity over against the structure of colonialism. As Ahrens has observed, it is to the credit of all the mainstream Christian churches that they have begun to seek to dialogue with these groups and to change their own policies in the direction of inculturation or contextualization.

North America has also had its share of these phenomena, even though the aboriginal population north of the Rio Grande is miniscule in relation to the dominant society.[75] In a brief article that has had widespread influence in describing such movements, Anthony Wallace characterized these "revitalization movements" as "a deliberate, organized effort of members of a society to produce a more satisfying culture."[76] Most of these movements originated with native prophets or visionaries as spontaneous forms of communitas, and gradually have become normative forms. In many cases, the ritual form has been traditionally tribal, with some influence of Christian elements. Some have taken the form of new religious movements. The best known is the Native American Church that is focused ritually on the herb peyote and that contains syncretic elements from Christianity and from the use of peyote among some Mexican Indian tribes, as described in Myerhoff's *Peyote Hunt.*

In summary I highlight these elements of the new primal religious movements. After being a "participant observer" in the ritual life of aboriginal people in the U.S. and Canada, and briefly witnessed other such movements in Australia and South Africa, I am personally convinced of the profound value of Victor Turner's categories for describing how spontaneous developments on the margins of structure can and sometimes do have a powerful effect in challenging and changing the structure. Still I would employ the phrase "rites of passage" with great caution here, since many of these people have no intention of "passing" into the universe of the dominant structure. But many of them do envision that as an ideal, having no wish to separate themselves from the churches. In language redolent of Turner, these people can be described as longing to see their own cultural practices recognized and sanctioned by the mainstream churches.

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[75] I have already described many of these movements and groups; see Carl F. Starkloff, "Religious Renewal in Native North America," *Missiology* 13 (1985) 81–101; "Mission Method and the American Indian," *TS* 38 (1977) 621–53; "Aboriginal Cultures and the Christ," *TS* 53 (1992) 288–312; "Inculturation and Cultural Systems," *TS* 55 (1994) 66–81, 274–94; "Dialogue, Evangelization, and Church Growth among Aboriginal North Americans," *Studia Missionalia* 42 (1994) 279–94; " 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbors' or 'The Meeting of the Rivers?': Dialogue and Inculturation among Native North Americans," *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995) 367–88.

[76] Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956) 264–81, at 265.

## Basic Ecclesial Communities

I need not dwell long on these *communidades de base* or communities of the marginalized, originating in Latin America, which might be identified as forms of "ideological communitas." Famous treatments of these communities have already been published.[77] The importance of including these communities here is that in some dioceses in South and Central America and in Mexico, with derivative forms in North America, such communities have functioned with the power of Turner's communitas. Thus they sustain those living in poverty, in forced liminality and physical powerlessness, and make them powerful prophets to the wider church and society. Within these communities, sacramental life, popular religion, and especially the Eucharist serve as internal rites of passage to give them strength to face the hardships of life. Although many bishops and mainstream Catholics have remained intimidated by these threats—as they see them—to their hold on structure, others have listened to them and allowed them to function as agents of growth for the larger society.

## Women-Church

Although I do not presume to identify myself as a feminist theologian, some women theologians have suggested to me that many elements in the theology of liminal communitas find resonances in feminist thought. In retrospect, I see clearly the common elements, including that of ideological communitas. In general, the quality most pertinent here is the phenomenon of separateness embraced by some feminists. These theologians believe that women, denied full participation in Roman Catholic structure, must either withdraw from all mainstream associations, or at least have spiritual events and movements consecrated to the needs of women. They differ in their views about the duration of such periods of withdrawal, and about whether or not to include men in their liminal communities.

Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Women-Church* best illustrates for me the general dynamic of communitas: as Ruether herself notes, without citing Turner or van Gennep, "Women-Church embraces a liminal religiosity."[78] Ruether emphasizes that Women-Church, as she sees it, is based on the desire for unity rather than separation and sectarianism, and longs to "be church," to build a total community "as a community of liberation from patriarchy."[79]

Ruether's book contributes to the understanding of the creative

[77] See esp. Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power* and *Ecclesiogenesis: The Basic Communities Reinvent the Church,* trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986); José Marins et al., *Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Church from the Roots* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1983).

[78] Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989) 4.

[79] Ibid. 5–6.

structure vs. communitas tension, first by its historical theology regarding the growth of the Roman Catholic Church, and secondly by its recording of numerous liturgies that have been developed among feminist communities. Like the rites of other liminal groups, the rituals of Women-Church contain a certain syncretic nature, developed perhaps more self-consciously than those among aboriginal societies, but intended to be rites of passage to a better life not only for the liminalized but for the universal Church. It is to this wider ecclesiology that I now turn.

### TURNER'S CATEGORIES AND ECCLESIAL KOINONIA

The question that has driven my study is: To what extent is it possible for the institutional Church, in its structural aspect, to sanction, interact with, and grow from its relationship with liminal communitas groups? Formulated more starkly: Is it to be tensive unity or schism? In asking this question, I would remark that the entire burden of dialogue, of yielding and accommodating, should not be laid on the back of the institution. As we have seen, Victor and Edith Turner themselves always resisted such an oversimplification. Placing a certain implicit trust in the aboriginal societies of their experience, they called for an ongoing mutual interdependence between structure and communitas. We have to deal constantly with both the propensity of the structure to resist novelty and with that of the communitas to fall into sectarianism. What the Church might hope to gain from such an investigation of this "processual" dynamic is no less than a deeper communion or koinonia. How, then, can the Church continue its pilgrimage toward the true *katholikon*, living the life of "saving participation," the true meaning of koinonia? How can the Church best further a dynamic understanding of its own essence within the economy of history, where it sojourns as both a transcendent and a sociocultural reality?

I will briefly sketch a possible ecclesiological method that could be developed at greater length. For this I have found most serviceable the excellent book of Jean-Marie Tillard, O.P., *A Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion.*[80] The title, in one sense, says it all: the *katholikon* is a church of churches, a community of communities. Tillard locates the beginning of this process in the heart of the tiny group of men and women gathered by Jesus.[81] The Church that grew from this tiny liminal group is challenged to struggle to restore the unity of humankind lost at Babel, "for humanity is truly itself only in *communion.*"[82] Tillard's work illustrates how a "high Christology" might in-

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[80] Tillard, *A Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion,* trans. R. C. de Peaux, O. Praem. (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992); the original French text is *Eglise d'églises: L'ecclésiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1987). For citations given here I have checked the translation against the original version.

[81] Ibid. 4.                              [82] Ibid. 12.

deed be the most powerful of all historical theologies. Discussing how a theology of the body of Christ is essentially missiological, he writes:

According to this perspective, it becomes impossible to separate Body and mission, ecclesial *koinonia* and involvement "for the world." If there is no Church of God without its being missionary, there is no missionary Church unless it is welded into the unified Body of Christ. It is erroneous in the Church of God to separate its interior reality of grace from its role as an instrument of salvation. There could not be one without the other.[83]

There are two dimensions of ecclesiology here that express theologically what Turner's categories express anthropologically: the nature of the Church as communio, and the visibility of that communion. First, Tillard asks the question originally put by the *periti* at Vatican II: How can the Church, without surrendering its historical visible structure, avoid a juridicism that stifles communion?"[84] Tillard seeks to unite the concrete visible elements with the inner dynamism of mysterion and koinonia. Without referring to Turner, he illustrates that ecclesial communion is not only communitas, but structure as well, an interaction that constitutes a "processual" symbol.

Tillard challenges the Church in its preaching and magisterial function to attend to its vocation. In terms redolent of Karl Barth, as well as Ignatius Loyola, he reminds the Church that its proclamation calls believers to faith, not in itself, but in the God who is proclaimed. The Church has no "power" over the act of faith: "It serves the Word by expressing, articulating, reflecting in it the experience *which the Spirit has given it to live* and which has no power over the effect of the Word on the believer."[85] It is a challenge to all Christians, but especially to those holding authority to oversee the structure, that they not impede the spontaneous interaction between the Spirit and the community.

Second, Tillard is concerned about a visible communion of the churches. His most urgent purpose is an ecumenical one, the search for reunion of all ecclesial bodies. More particularly, he seeks to solve the neuralgic problem of how authority is shared by the Bishop of Rome and the college of bishops. He also highlights the problem of universal communion. This is the point at which I suggest a methodology by which the Catholic Church might put its own house in order. That is, how might the Church relate to the problem of marginalization that has always been with us but which is of special urgency today? What is to be its policy in view of ethnic conflict, ecclesiastical and secular marginalization, and the condition of alienated groups?

TOWARD AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF "PROCESSUAL" DYNAMICS

At this point, we should remind ourselves how the Turners' insight into rites of passage led them to understand how the process of struc-

[83] Ibid. 28.                     [84] Ibid. 206, esp. n. 120.
[85] Ibid. 250.

ture/anti-structure, structure/communitas, and separation/liminality/ reaggregation applies to all forms of human society. To be sure, there is a difference between a purely existential communitas that springs from spontaneous sources and the normative communitas that has either developed out of an existential moment or been established over eons of unrecorded time within the structures of aboriginal cultures. But in the Turner viewpoint, the constant fact of the structure/ communitas dyad points to a need situated deep within human nature for both social stability and creative regeneration. I suggest, then, that this deeply orectic or passionate need and its continual revitalization symbolizes a certain general "law" of society. That law describes how the Spirit through the centuries moves the Church in its historical dimension as a complex cultural system. I thus conclude with five brief recommendations for ecclesiology: how to exercise interdependency between structure and communitas; how to recognize dynamic forms of communitas; how to incorporate without domesticating; how to discern the dynamic of syncretic processes; and the importance of reviving strong liminal sacramental rituals.

### Interdependency

The necessary interdependent tension between structure and communitas signals the urgency of the "common ground" conversation called for by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. Obviously, compromise is demanded here. "Conservatives" are challenged to appreciate the value of cultural change, even in areas of theology, and to find ways to enable spontaneous vitality to operate within structure. "Progressives" will have to be more reflectively self-critical and to realize the "utopian" nature of their hopes. The writings of cultural anthropologists in general seem to appreciate this kind of tension as creative.

The works of Victor and Edith Turner and Mary Douglas are especially helpful from within the Catholic tradition as constructive critics of change, especially canonical and liturgical, as it impacts on people's cultural sensibilities. If they appear at times inclined to be overly primitivist, they speak from extensive field experience. One thinks, for example of the remarks of the Turners about avoiding the baby-with-the-bath-water syndrome, and Mary Douglas's astringent and even sarcastic criticism of overeager liberal clerics whose reform measures have hurt the religious feelings of her own "bog Irish" people.[86] If, as some theologians and social scientists argue, it takes several generations to achieve any kind of "reception" of an ecumenical council in the Church universal, we may be able to employ the Turnerian categories to help us understand this process.

[86] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Random House, 1970) Chap. 3.

## Recognizing Dynamic Forms of Communitas

I have already described several types of liminal communities. Here I wish simply to suggest how to implement approaches to them in the Church. Certainly the social and ritual life within aboriginal communities, especially their rites of passage, have served to prevent an even more catastrophic disintegration of tribes already severely mauled by the dominant European cultures.

Many who work within or alongside aboriginal cultures have witnessed time after time how the dynamics of life-crisis rites (infant naming and initiation, puberty rites, healing rituals, society initiations, death and mourning rites) impart fresh strength to a community. Certain rituals, such as the Plains cultures' "sun dances," the Pueblos' *kivas* and harvest ceremonies, the more recent peyote rites and communities, and regular performances of fasting rites and sweat lodges have provided authentic symbolic power. While it is true that many Christians today in these tribes are only nominal, there are many other practicing Christians for whom such practices give them a rich syncretic experience of spiritual and cultural vitality. I have elsewhere suggested that perhaps the official Church should be ready to sustain a period of theological messiness as such groups wrestle with their identities.[87]

It would be misguided for the Church to attempt to "baptize" and thus to control such practices. But there is an option. Catholic theology might consider such rites as authentic occasions of grace and support aboriginal Christians in the practice of them. If a critical stance is ever to be taken, as at times it must be, local practitioners should be helped to carry out such a critique. As the mainstream Church, in its ministers, finds itself in the role of participant observer, it will be rewarded with such testimonies as the voice of the community announcer at the 1997 Arapaho Offerings Lodge or Sun Dance. In this passage of three days, he reminded onlookers to pray for those people in the lodge who were fulfilling their vows to "Almighty God, Our Lord." Or the visitor in a sweat lodge ceremony will often hear highly emotional prayers to the Creator and Jesus for guidance in trouble and suffering. Such edifying testimony is also a challenge to every sacramental theologian and liturgist.

## Incorporation vs. Domestication

At the present time there is a strident reaction in some aboriginal communities, especially among "traditionals" and their intellectual spokespersons, against all kinds of synthesis between existing church symbols and native symbols, which they denounce as appropriation. This kind of reaction occurs among all marginalized cultures; and it is

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[87] See Carl F. Starkloff, "The Problem of Syncretism in the Search for Inculturation," *Mission: Journal of Mission Studies* [formerly *Kerygma*] 1 (1994) 75–94, at 93.

not unjustified, especially when outsiders let themselves get carried away with the zeal for change denounced by Douglas. On the other hand, there is evidence that there is no pure religion wherever there has been contact between peoples, and that by now is indeed just about everywhere. The Church is no exception. The point at issue is one of determining who has authority over incorporation or domestication and how it is to be shared between the structural Church and all liminal groups. This leads to the following point.

### Syncretism

More and more scholars, departing from a four-century-long policy of denouncing syncretism, have come to admit its inevitability and to seek out ways to facilitate it honestly and authentically.[88] The problem of syncretism is a profound and urgent issue, not only for aboriginal-church relations, but for all liminal communities on the margins of a religion that has "universal" claims. In this context, the structural Church finds itself encountering women's groups, New Age groups, communities of people living with AIDS, neo-primal movements such as Wicca, all of which reach outside conventional church tradition for their ritual and ethical experience. The works I have cited in this article, especially those by the Turners, Mary Douglas, and Clifford Geertz, may well be invaluable companion works for theologians and church authorities, assisting their efforts to find the proper relationships between authority and creativity.

### Liminality in Sacramental Life

Some readers may find it odd that I bring up this urgent dimension only at the end of my article. Yet I write not as a liturgist but as a systematician. By this point I hope, however, that it has become clear how dramatically the tension of structure vs. communitas affects all forms of communal life. Any perusal of current articles on liturgical worship will reveal frequent lamentations about the way in which the drama has gone out of the sacramental system, and how so much of it has become routinized. Certainly, there are efforts to revitalize the processes, touching the catechumenate, the rite of Christian initiation, the rite of reconciliation, the rite of anointing, all of these connected intimately with the Eucharist.

However, the labor of recreating the Church's identity as communitas in constructive tension with secular society is at best only in its early stages. I refer, first of all, to my discussion of ways in which the

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[88] See, e.g., Boff, *Church: Charism and Power,* Chap. 7; Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985) Chap. 7; Jerald D. Gort, ed., *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, ed., *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Carl F. Starkloff, "The Problem of Syncretism in the Search for Inculturation."

Church is to come to terms with its many different cultures in order to create meaningful expressions of communitas and thus new life for the structure. More specifically, the Church desperately needs new creativity in establishing and sustaining family life in the face of secular structure.[89] Although creative efforts are afoot to revitalize the increasingly painful passage through adolescence and early youth, the current sacramental dimension has only feeble relationships with spontaneous youth groups seeking communitas and finding instead little more than peer pressure. Such peer pressure extends on into marriage and family life.

CONCLUSION

One is tempted to cry out that the above suggestions come too late. Have technological society and "modernity" destroyed all possibility of sustaining life-giving processes that are not merely uncritical reflections of pop culture? One powerful response to this question, I believe, is contained in the work of Victor and Edith Turner. By investigating primal human needs, the Turners have touched on primitive life-giving processes. The prospect of reconfiguring these for contemporary society is intimidating, and the official Church might be forgiven if, as Bernard Lonergan once said, it has arrived on the scene "a little breathless and a little late." But perhaps what the Church must retrieve is that primordial creative power that enabled it to insert itself into the cultures that it encountered over the first seven centuries. Perhaps the official Church needs to extend the critical openness that it has shown to the pilgrimage phenomenon into other experiences of communitas. Certainly, mistakes have been made in the insertion into cultures, but perhaps the development of methods of inculturation suggested by responsible use of the ethnological disciplines will help us at least to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

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[89] A passionate secular plea for such family support in the face of "social engineering" can be found in Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic 1977).