Ecclesiology as Political Theology: On Delivering on a Transformative Strategic Orientation in Ecclesiology

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Abstract

This three-section essay reappraises both Edward Schillebeeckx's continuing significance and the relationship between ecclesiology and political theology. Having identified two differing sets of concerns within political theology, the first section argues that the claim that the church is the true form of political theology needs to be disciplined by a Schillebeeckx-like critical ecclesiology if it is to avoid ecclesiological idealism. The second section argues that such transformative ecclesiology is itself an act of intra-ecclesial political theology; and the third that it needs to be pursued with greater political astuteness than Schillebeeckx manifested in his theology of ministry.

Idealism

Ministry

Pragmatic

Strategic

Transformative

Political theology

Edward Schillebeeckx

Introduction

It is doubly timely both to be re-assessing Edward Schillebeeckx's lasting significance

relative to the fresh opportunities and renewed conciliar ethos of the current pontificate and to

be taking stock of political theology relative to the current global context.[1]

      In 1999, in the early years of Tony Blair's New Labour UK government, a conference

was held at Newman College, Birmingham under the title "The Gospel of Justice in a World of

Global Capitalism: The Future of Political Theology".[2] In that post-1989 context – following

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[1] As with the other essays in this special number, a shorter version was presented to *The*

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2016. I am grateful to Anna Rowlands for her comments on an earlier draft, as too the three

anonymous reviewers.

[2] Select papers were published in Paul D. Murray, ed., *Political Theology* 3 (2000), 11–103;

also Elaine Graham, "Good News for the Socially Excluded? Political Theology and the Politics

the collapse of Soviet communism – of apparent geo-political stability and global North buoyancy, left and right in UK politics appeared to have moved to a new consensus, accepting deregulated global capitalism as the only show in town.[3] The key question was whether political theology could still have any prophetic role, focussed on radical alterity, or was now limited to working for the amelioration of the worst excesses and consequences of global capitalism and a "globalisation for the good".[4] Whatever concerns there had been about the Soviet system, it represented an alternative to liberal capitalism[5] which, as exemplified by

of New Labour", *Political Theology* 2 (2000), 76–99; and Alison Webster, "Blairism, Globalization and the Future of Welfare", Ibid., 100–106; and Peter Scott, "'Global Capitalism' vs 'End of Socialism': Crux Theologica?", *Political Theology* 4 (2001), 36–54. See also Andrew Bradshaw and Murray, eds., *Global Capitalism and the Gospel of Justice: Politics, Economics, and the UK Churches* (London: Christian Socialist Movement, 2002), representing papers from a related 2001 conference.

[3] See Tony Blair, *The Third Way: New Politics for a New Society* (London: The Fabian Society, 1998); and Anne Coddington and Mark Perryman, eds., *The Moderniser's Dilemma: Radical Politics in the Age of Blair* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998); also Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens, eds., *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000).

[4] This language was then current in the literature of CAFOD, the English and Welsh Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. For subsequent similar-sounding usage, see Kamran Mofid, *Globalisation for the Common Good* (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2002); also http://www.gcgi.info/.

[5] See Ronald H. Preston, *Confusions in Christian Social Ethics: Problems for Geneva and Rome* (London: SCM, 1994), 91–7, particularly 92; also Harold Wells, *A Future for*

Latin American liberation theology, lent some legitimacy to calls for the radical transformation, not just amelioration, of the entire capitalist system.[6]

In this special number of *Theological Studies*, we are again asking after the Future of Political Theology but in a very different world context: one of so-called "war on global terror"; of a resurgent East-West axis; of heightened European awareness of the recurrent fact of mass displacement of peoples; a context wherein significant numbers have lost all faith in consensus politics; where the unthinkable has become possible (e.g. Brexit and President Trump); and where the common good of the polis struggles even to be perceived as a worthwhile project. It is in this deeply challenging context that we are asking as to what it means to proclaim and witness to the gospel of the Kingdom? What it means to be the church in politics?

As complement to the other essays, this essay turns the spotlight directly on intra-ecclesial matters. Ecclesiology is here understood as the task of critical-constructive analysis of issues and difficulties arising in the practice and self-understanding of the church, the transformative purpose of which is to: diagnose the ills; identify possible ways forward; and so enhance the quality of the church's practice and self-understanding, for the dual sake of

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Socialism? Political Theology and the "Triumph of Capitalism" (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International, 1996).

[6] See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973 [1971]); also Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976 [1975]); and *id.*, *Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today. Vol. 1: Faith and Ideologies*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984 [1982]).

intra-ecclesial flourishing and extra-ecclesial witness and mission.[7] For present purposes it is notable that this approach to ecclesiology resonates with Schillebeeckx's own critical understanding of the theological task.[8] The specific focus in this essay is on showing that ecclesiology, thus understood, needs to be intentionally pursued as an act of political theology

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[7] See Murray, "Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice: On the Transformative Task of Systematic Ecclesiology", *Modern Theology* 30 (2014), 251–81; also id., "Engaging with the Contemporary Church", in *The Routledge Companion to the Practice of Christian Theology*, eds. Mike Higton and Jim Fodor (New York: Routledge, 2015), 278–93. For the quality of intra-ecclesial life being inextricably associated with the extra-ecclesial capacity for convincing witness and mission, see Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 27, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; also *id.*, "Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordinating Committee" (July 28, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html.

[8] See "Theology is the critical self-consciousness of christian praxis in the world and the church." Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Seabury, 1974), 154; and *ibid.* xiii; also 'In terms of pastoral theology, negative experiences of contrast have a power to lead to criticism of ideologies, the formation of diagnoses and the provision of dynamic inventions for the future.' *id.*, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 209; and *ibid.*, 12; also *id.*, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 75-6, 77, 79, 83.

if it is to be genuinely capable of realising its transformative intent.[9] The essay is in three main sections.

Within the constellation of nuanced approaches in political theology, the first section, "The ecclesia as the true polis", identifies two broadly contrasting sets of concerns. These are labelled "Christian integralism" – sometimes regarded as being somewhat sectarian and idealist in orientation – and "Christian externalism", which might also usefully be regarded as a mode of tactical, "pragmatic engagement". Having explored something of the tensions and possibilities between these concerns, focus turns to the integralist claim that the sacramentality of the church's life and being constitutes the true form of Christian political theology. It is argued that if this stimulating claim is not to end in ecclesial idealism then it needs disciplining by something like the mature Schillebeeckx's call for critical ecclesiology. This is essential if the integralist claim for the prophetic sacramentality of the church is itself to have any integrity.

The second section, "Ecclesiology as a political task", argues that as an intentionally transformative activity within the church, this required critical ecclesiology is properly understood as a kind of intra-ecclesial political theology: both because it pertains to ecclesial polity and because it requires a certain political astuteness if it is to be genuinely effective. With some resonance with the aforementioned constellation of concerns within political theology, indication is given of something of the range of strategies which the politically self-aware ecclesial theologian might adopt. Here the strategies of protest and alternative visioning exemplified by Schillebeeckx's later work are accorded due honor. Indeed, the transformative

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[9] For an intentionally transformative ecclesiological practice pursued as an astute act of political theology, see Bradford E. Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016).

understanding of the ecclesiological task presupposed throughout this essay is precisely oriented towards such alternative visioning. Nevertheless, it will be asked whether other, more pragmatic, strategies might also be needed if such transformative aspirations are actually to be realised; strategies concerning which Schillebeeckx might be found more wanting. In view here are such pragmatic strategies as: approaching theological and ecclesial change as the "art-of-the-possible"; placing due emphasis on the need to win hearts and minds; and prioritising the correlative need to build effective broad-based alliances, with the inclusion of relevant power-brokers.

As one brief example, the final section focuses on "Building broad-based consensus around an integrated theology of ministry as means of serving the communion and witness of the church". Here the lines of Schillebeeckx's theology of ministry are traced as a possible case-study in the need for alternative visioning to be married with strategic astuteness, both theological/doctrinal and ecclesial/cultural-institutional.[10] The argument is that Schillebeeckx's rightly-intentioned attempt to overcome sacerdotal-cultic accounts of clerical distinctiveness needed to be more ecclesially inclusive if it were to overcome the limiting binary he correctly identified and so achieve the level of broad-based consensus required for

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[10] For further, see Murray, "The Need for an Integrated Theology of Ministry within Contemporary Catholicism", in *Ministries in the Church. Concilium* (2010/1), eds. Susan Ross, Maria Clara Bingemer, Murray (London: SCM, 2010), 43–54. The argument sketched here is given full articulation in Murray, "What Difference Does Ordination Make? Resolving a Catholic Problem through Receptive Learning from British Methodist Tradition", *forthcoming*.

change to be effected.[11] His way of proceeding too easily appeared simply to replace sacerdotal-cultic accounts with a purely functional one in a manner which reinforced an unhelpfully competitive dynamic between clerical and lay dignity. Consequently, rather than successfully taking the discussion to a new place, he was perceived as sharing in an attempted flattening of ministry which provoked strong institutional reassertion of hierarchically-construed accounts of clerical distinctiveness. By contrast, I argue that in order to deliver on Schillebeeckx's own right intentions in these regards, a more subtle and astute approach is required: one which can be seen as a development of Schillebeeckx's approach but which is more capable of building a broad-based alliance around a non-competitive theology of ministry and, thereby, more effectively serving the church's calling to be sacrament of the Kingdom.[12]

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[11] For Schillebeeckx's acknowledging the need to overcome the binary through inclusiveness, see "… I have preferred to adopt another way which also seems to me to be a more strategic one, namely to choose as my starting point what has been accepted and defended by both sides of the church with a view to building up the Christian community: both by representatives of the official church order, which is still in force, and by the protagonists of the critical, alternative practice.' *Ministry*, 78. As will become clear, my argument is that Schillebeeckx did not follow through on this strategic recognition of the need to work for inclusiveness.

[12] For an early mention of this need for a "non-competitive theology of ministry" within Catholicism, see Murray, "Catholic Theology After Vatican II" in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, 3rd edn., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 265–86 at 274–5. This was subsequently developed at greater length in Murray, "The Need for an Integrated Theology of Ministry within Contemporary

The ecclesia as the true polis

Over the past 30-plus years, political theology has been shaped by a fruitful tension between two differing sets of concerns which I am here calling "Christian integralism" and, less commonly, "Christian externalism", or "pragmatic engagement". On the one hand, integralism is focussed – sometimes regarded as admixed with a somewhat idealist and sectarian orientation – on the strategic need to live radical Christian alterity as counter-witness to the prevailing norms of secular society.[13] On the other hand, the externalist instinct is toward more pragmatic forms of engagement with prevailing systems, focussed on working from within for the transformation of society's ills, frequently fired by a vision of the common good which both relates to and transcends these prevailing norms.[14]

Catholicism", *op. cit.*. Richard Gaillardetz has also made use of this concept, see Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015), 91–113, particularly 102–9.

[13] E.g., see Bernd Wannenwetsch, "The Political Worship of the Church: A Critical and Empowering Practice", *Modern Theology* 12 (1996), 269–99; and Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold, eds., *Liturgy, Time and the Politics of Redemption* (London: SCM, 2006); also Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

[14] E.g., see variously Christopher Insole, *The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism* (London: SCM, 2004); and Patrick D. Miller and Dennis P. McCann, eds., *In Search of the Common Good* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005); and Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*

The former set of concerns has been particularly associated with the work of Stanley Hauerwas, at least before it came under the moderating influence of Romand Coles;[15] as also with John Milbank's radical orthodoxy.[16] In specifically Catholic guise, it bears some comparison with aspects of Pope John Paul II's teaching, and finds its clearest advocate – albeit with distinctive twists and subtle nuance – in the work of William T Cavanaugh.[17] That

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(Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2008); and Nigel Biggar, *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner, and Michael Welker, eds., *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013).

[15] See Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1981); and *id.*, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983); and *id.*, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991); compare Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007).

[16] See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990); and *id.*, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); also Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the Human Future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); also Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[17] See Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html; and *id.*,

said, it is the latter inclination, towards in-situ transformative engagement with the

specificities and complexities of shared social and political realities, which is generally more

characteristic of Catholic political theology.[18] Taken together, this should raise a note of

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Veritatis Splendor (August 6, 1993), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-

ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html; and *id.*,

Evangelium Vitae (March 25, 1995), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-

ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html; and William T.

Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age*

of Global Consumerism (New York: T & T Clark, 2002); *id.*, *Migrations of the Holy: God,*

State, and the Political Meaning of the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); and *id.*,

Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998);

also Derek Jeffreys, *Defencing Human Dignity: John Paul II and Political Realism* (Grand

Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004).

[18] E.g., see Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, trans. Doris C. Anson (London:

Geoffrey Bles, 1945 [1943]); and Johann Baptist Metz, "The Church's Social Function in the

Light of 'Political Theology'", *Concilium* 6 (1968), 3–11; and Fiorenza, "Prospects for

Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges", in Fiorenza, Tanner, and

Welker, eds., *op. cit.*, 36–59; and Fiorenza, "Justice and Charity in Social Welfare", in *Who*

Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare, ed. Mary Jo Bane,

Brent Coffin, and Ronald Thiemann (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 73–96; also Hans Küng,

A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM,

1997).

caution against viewing these two tendencies as necessarily opposed within a rounded Catholic purview.[19]

Indeed, it needs acknowledging that despite referring to Christian "externalism" as exhibiting modes of "pragmatic engagement with prevailing systems", it would be incorrect to view those who are strongly focused on the first set of concerns as being unconcerned to effect social and political transformation. The somewhat idealist, supposedly sectarian-leaning "integralist", as least in Hauerwasian-Cavanaughian mode, is less concerned to retreat from the world, per se, and more concerned to offer distinctive witness to it. As Cavanaugh writes:

> The role of the church is not merely to make policy recommendations to the state, but to embody a different sort of politics, so that the world may be able to see a truthful politics and be transformed. The church does not thereby withdraw from the world but serves it, both by being the sign of God's salvation of the world and by reminding the world of what the world still is not.[20]

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[19] For a helpful contribution, see Ellen Van Stichel and Yves De Maeseneer, "*Gaudium et spes*: Impulses of the Spirit for an Age of Globalization", *Louvain Studies* 39 (2015-16), 63–79; and for a specific example which subtly draws upon each set of concerns, see Anna Rowlands, "The State Made Flesh: Catholic Social Teaching and the Challenge of UK Asylum Seeking", *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012), 175–192.

[20] Cavanaugh, "The Church as Political", in *id.*, *Migrations of the Holy*, 123–40 at 138; also *id.*, *Theopolitical Imagination* 46; and *id.*, *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016); also Hauerwas, "Will the Real Sectarian Please Stand Up", *Theology Today* 44 (1987), 87–94; and *id.*, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (London: SCM, 2001); also Luke

To put this in terms of the more Catholic category of sacramentality, the focus is on the need for what we might refer to as distinctive "sacramental-prophetic showings" of attractive possibilities for human flourishing which outstrip the perceived capacities of the prevailing secular logic.[21] That is, the concern is to live Christian difference for the sake of witnessing to the world and, ultimately, converting the logic of the world by out-thinking it, out-narrating it, and out-performing it. At its strongest, this is not romantic idealism but a seriously intentioned strategic radicalism, concerned to show possibilities beyond current standard imagining and the relative paucity of prevailing ways of being when compared with the richer ways being lived within the church.

For its own part, in-situ Christian engagement works to achieve specific tactical gains within the existing system with the proximate aim of ameliorating the ills of the prevailing order in a modest reforming fashion. Longer-term, however, it too can have a strategic

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Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[21] For the link between the church's sacramentality and political theology – but, interestingly, from a perspective evincing greater sympathy with an "externalist" rather than an "integralist" orientation – see Stephan van Erp, "World and Sacrament: Foundations of the Political Theology of the Church", *Louvain Studies* 39 (2015-16), 100–118; also Fiorenza, "Foundational Theology as Political and Sacramental Public Theology", *Louvain Studies* 39 (2015-16), 121–40. In turn, for an account of Christian ethics in sympathy with the Hauerwasian turn which emphasises the need for distinctive witness in and through the particularities of life, in ways which outstrip prevailing secular logic, see Michael Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

radicalism about it which seeks to expose the contradictions and limitations in the prevailing system and so move it, through long processes of incremental change and tactical pressure, to more fundamental transformation. Here immediate tactical gain can be in service of long-term strategy; and the long-term strategy can simply be one of repeated immediate tactical gain.[22] That is, repeated tactical ("pragmatic") engagement, aimed at proximate modest reform, can be pursued in service of a strategic commitment to effecting thereby more fundamental systemic and cultural change over time. In order to achieve this combination of immediate tactical- pragmatic engagement with longer-term strategic orientation, it is necessary to weave

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[22] On the relationship and "distinction between strategy and tactics", see Michel de Certeau, "On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life", trans. Fredric Jameson and Carl Lovitt, *Social Text* 3 (1980), 3–43, particularly 5–10, and at greater length in de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1984 [1980]). All references here are to the 1980 essay. For de Certeau, strategy is aimed at overcoming the prevailing logic and replacing it with another, thereby effecting and maintaining a change of power, see 5. By contrast, tactic is aimed, 'blow by blow', at creative insurgency and interruptive anticipation whilst still having to operate under the terms of the prevailing logic and power, see 4 & 5. Viewed in these terms, the implication can seem to be that tactic is a lesser, secondary option – "an art of the weak" – when the option for strategizing for regime-change is not open, see 4-6. Whilst recognising this scale-difference, I am suggesting that sustained commitment to tactical interruption and anticipation can, in certain circumstances, intentionally serve a medium-to-long term strategic aim of effecting a change of logic, ethos, instinct, and habitus, by stealth rather than revolution, by persistent "guerrilla" interruption rather than open field combat (cf. 7).

together a range of dispositions and commitments which can too easily separate out from one another as distinct, even competing, cords of Christian pastoral-political engagement:

1) compassionate response to "negative contrast experiences" of suffering, issuing in the attempt to focus attention and resource on their immediate alleviation;[23]

2) recognition that such occurrences of suffering tend to be causally intertwined with systemic weaknesses which require analysis so as to enable both more effective prediction and ameliorative redress, on the one hand, and clearer, more focussed prophetic denunciation, on the other hand;

3) preparedness to commit imagination, further analysis, and resource to the exploration of alternative modes of proceeding which have the potential to overcome key aspects of current systemic weaknesses;

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[23] For the notion of "negative contrast experiences", both drawing on and going beyond the Frankfurt social theorists, in order to speak of the protest which suffering evokes – manifesting as other than how things should be – and the positive responsive commitment to the "*humanum*" which it elicits, see Schillebeeckx, "Church, Magisterium and Politics", in *id.*, *God the Future of Man*, trans. N. D. Smith and Theodore Westow (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 141–66 at 153–6; also *id.*, *The Understanding of Faith*, 91-5; and *id.*, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury, 1980), 817–9; and *id.*, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 5–6 & 28–9, henceforth *Church*. For further, see James A. Wiseman, "Schillebeeckx and the Ecclesial Function of Critical Negativity", *The Thomist* 35 (1971), 207–46; and William Portier, "Schillebeeckx's Dialogue with Critical Theory", *The Ecumenist* 21 (1983), 20–27; and LaReine-Marie Mosely, "Negative Contrast Experience: An Ignatian Appraisal", *Horizons* 41 (2014), 74–95.

4) sustained application of effective strategic pressure in support of the realisation of such alternative possibilities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the differing default concerns of Christian integralism and pragmatic, in-situ engagement can lead strong advocates of each to find it difficult to recognise the worth of the other. Focussed on the strategic need for attractive showings of a logic which outstrips the secular, the integralist can think that work for immediate pragmatic-tactical gains and possible longer-term reform is always in danger of being compromised and neutralised through overly-close association with the prevailing logic.[24] As Cavanaugh quotes Coles, commenting on Harry Boyte: "Pragmatic politics can foster poor listening and a restless intolerance toward those who speak from angles and in idioms that are foreign to many in the organization …"[25] Equally, the engager wants to emphasise the imperative need for the church to minister today to existing wounds and suffering rather than simply seeking to disclose the body healed through anticipatory witness. Here the conviction is that Christian hope and charity need to be effected precisely in and through the ambiguities of the present. As St Augustine said, commenting on Jer 29: "… so long as the two cities are intermingled

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[24] See "I believe … that the Church needs to reclaim the 'political' nature of its faith if it is to resist the violence of the state. What this may mean, however, must go beyond mere strategies to insinuate the Church into the making of public policy. If this book is a plea for the social and political nature of the Christian faith, it is also a plea for a Christian practice that escapes the thrall of the state." Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* 46; and *ibid.* 63, 70, 83 & 95.

[25] *Ibid.*, 80, citing Coles, "Toward an Uncommon Commonwealth: Reflections on Boyte's Critique of Civil Society, *The Good Society* 9 (1999), 23–27 at 26.

we also make use of the peace of Babylon – although the People of God is by faith set free from Babylon ..."[26]

Now exercising the prerogative of what has been referred to as the Catholic both/and rather than the Protestant either/or, the truth is we need both the externalist's pragmatic concern for specific tactical gains in the public domain and the integralist's idealist commitment to the expansion of imaginations through sacramental-prophetic showings.[27] We need, that is, what the Pittsburgh-based philosophical polymath, Nicholas Rescher, refers to, in a different context, as a conjoint stance of "pragmatic idealism".[28] So recognising but somewhat parking this basic tension and constellation of possible approaches in Christian political theology and practice, let us, for now, focus on the more fundamental claim variously made by Hauerwas, Milbank, and Cavanaugh (the latter in qualified form), that the church simply is the true polis.[29] Here the claim is that before any specific initiatives ad extra, the

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[26] St Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, XIX, 26, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1984), 892.

[27] For an outstanding both/and performance of Christian political theology and action – albeit one which is broadly evangelical rather than Catholic in ecclesial orientation – see Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*. In the Catholic context, as noted, see Rowlands, "The State Made Flesh", *op. cit.*

[28] See Nicholas Rescher, *A System of Pragmatic Idealism*, Vols 1-3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992-94).

[29] See Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, (Notre Dame: Fides, 1974), 221; and *id.*, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99; and *id.*, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995); and Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380-438; also Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as*

being and life of the church itself represents the true form of Christian political theology in as much as here is to be found the authentic story of human sociality well-told and well-performed. As someone for whom the distinctive life of the church is very important, who is committed to a self-critical mode of theological postliberalism, and who currently works in ecclesiology, I find this claim to be both innately attractive and, potentially, highly dangerous.

As regards its attractiveness: it is patently true that "actions speak louder than words"[30] and that the first message and witness the church gives to the world, our first proclamation of the Gospel, is in our ecclesial life, practices, and structures, prior to any specific initiatives or actions ad extra.[31] This is what it means for the church to be as a sacrament of the Kingdom.[32] All of this represents a welcome return of the church to the centre of political theology. But herein also resides its challenge, difficulty, and even danger.

Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995). For Cavanaugh, see *Theopolitical Imagination* 49, 84, 90, and 97–122, particularly 113–4; and *id.*, "The Church as Political", particularly 138; also *id.*, "From One City to Two: Christian Reimagining of Political Space", in *id.*, *Migrations of the Holy*, 46–68 at 57–8. But compare: "The church is not a polis but a set of practices or performances that participate in the history of salvation that God is unfolding on earth." *Ibid.* 66.

[30] See Ciarán Earley and Gemma McKenna, *Actions Speak Louder: A Source Book for Social Ministry* (Dublin: Columba, 1987).

[31] This is core to Leonardo Boff, *Church, Charism, and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John Diercksmeyer (New York: Crossroad, 1986 [1981]).

[32] See Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964) 1, 9, 48, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

The point is that whilst the church is indeed called to be sacrament of the Kingdom –

properly disclosive of the true polis – and whilst, by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit, it

does on occasion fulfil this calling, the church in this order, as St Augustine fully recognized,

is always a mixed reality, a *corpus permixtum*, a field of intermingled wheat and tares.[33] The

danger is that the postliberal rhetoric of ecclesial distinctiveness can too easily neuter this

necessary note of ecclesial realism,[34] even when it still sounds as part of a theologian's overall

performance.

To take just one example: Cavanaugh contrasts the "unity of the state body" with the

"true catholicity" of the eucharist on the grounds that the former "depends … on the

subsumption of the local and the particular under the universal" whereas the latter "gathers

the many into one (cf. 1 Cor. 10.16–17) as an anticipation of the eschatological unity of all in

Christ" in such manner as "the local is not therefore simply subordinated to the universal."[35]

The problem, however, is that whilst, doctrinally, this represents an entirely correct account of

true eucharistic catholicity, when transposed into the empirical sphere of actual, lived

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[33] See St Augustine, "Sermon XXIII", trans. R. G. MacMullen, in *The Nicene and Post-

Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Series 1, Vol. VI, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids,

MI: Eerdmans, 1996 [1887]), 334–5, henceforth, e.g. *NPNF* 1.VI (1996 [1887]); also *id.*,

"Letter XCIII – To Vincentius", IV,15 & IX,33, trans. J. G. Cunningham, in *NPNF* 1.I (1994

[1886]), 382–401, at 387 & 394; and *id.*, *Concerning the City of God*, XX,9, *op. cit.* 914–5;

and *id.*, "In Answer to the Letters of Petilian, the Donatist. Book II", XCI,198–9, trans. J. R.

King, in *NPNF* 1.IV (1996 [1887]), 530–595 at 577.

[34] See Nicholas M. Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?"

International Journal of Systematic Theology 5 (2003), 287–308.

[35] Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* 49.

Catholic practice it falls woefully short. Indeed, in this lived context such language is in danger of acting as idealised ideological reification for a similarly routinized "subsumption of the local and the particular under the universal" in the life of the church as in the life of the state. This stands as one of the core structural pathologies and performative contradictions within modern Catholicism.[36]

Consequently if this fruitful emphasis on the political significance of the sacramentality of the church is not to collapse, against its best intentions, into a form of ecclesiological idealism – even ecclesiolatry – fascinated by the imaginative construction of a church which has never actually existed, then it needs to be clearly and consistently integrated with the kind of critical ecclesiology for which Schillebeeckx calls in his mature writings;[37]

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[36] See Murray, "Redeeming Catholicity for a Globalising Age: The Sacramentality of the Church", in *Believing in Community: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church*, eds. Peter De Mey, Pieter De Witte, and Gerard Mannion (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 228–40, particularly 236–40. At a number of levels, a core commitment of the Francis papacy is to promote the repair of this imbalance: e.g., by emphasising national and regional bishops' conferences; by revising the workings and ethos of the Synod of Bishops; and by calling for a total-synodality in the church at all levels. See Murray, "*Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*: On Delivering on the Ecclesiological Implications of *Evangelii Gaudium*" in, *Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, and the Renewal of the Church*, eds. Alana Harris and Duncan Dormor (Mahwah, NY: Paulist, 2018), 85–111.

[37] On the recurrence of idealised, "blue-print" constructs in ecclesiology, see Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), particularly 25-51. For Schillebeeckx's call for a critical ecclesiology, see Schillebeeckx, *God is New Each Moment: Edward Schillebeeckx in Conversation with Huub*

one capable not only of celebrating supposed Catholic distinctiveness but also of holding its lived performance to account, with a view to testing for and constructively responding to any indications of systemic incoherence between doctrinal theory and ecclesial reality.[38] We need, that is, a theology of the actual lived practice and organisational reality of the church; one which views ecclesial reality both as potentially sacramental of the Kingdom and as in need of continual conversion and renewal if it is to fulfil, even partly, this calling. As Cavanaugh himself recognises, "The church must acknowledge its sin and always tell the story of salvation penitentially, as the history of the forgiveness of sin – *our* sin."[39]

Oosterhuis and Piet Hoogeven, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983), 79–90; and *Church*, 187–228; and *Church with a Human Face*, 5; also *id.*, "Critical Theories and Christian Political Commitment", trans. David Smith *Concilium* 84 (1973), 48–61. For discussion, see Murray, "The Ups and Downs, High and Lows, and Practicalities of Ecclesiological Analysis with Edward Schillebeeckx", in *Sacramentalizing Human History: In Honour of Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009)*, eds. Erik Borgman, Murray, and Andrés Torres Queiruga, *Concilium International* (2012/1), 70–91. As my earlier-referenced account of the ecclesiological task suggests (see n.7), I prefer the adjectival couplet "critical-constructive" over "critical" alone: for all its vital importance, the Christian theological task does not consist solely in idolatry-alert "criticism" but also constructive re-articulation and performance, see Nicholas Lash, "Criticism or Construction? The Task of the Theologian", in *id.*, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), 3–17.

[38] See Murray, "Searching the Living Truth of the Church".

[39] Cavanaugh, "From One City to Two", 66–7; and "The ontological *participation* of the church in Christ does not mean a full and simple identification of the church with Christ on

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It is a loss to us that Schillebeeckx was never able to complete his proposed *Jesus*, *Christ*, *Church* trilogy with the developed critical ecclesiology he had originally intended.[40] We do, however, owe an immense debt to Daniel Thompson for synthesising the outlines of Schillebeeckx's critical ecclesiology from his various occasional pieces on the subject.[41] Equally, it is fitting that Schillebeeckx leaves us not with a finished ecclesiology but with an orientation and task to pursue. In this light, the following section reflects on what it might mean to pursue this critical-constructive ecclesiological task in the current Catholic moment.

Ecclesiology as a political task

The core concern of the previous section was to argue that the welcome return of the church to the centre of political theology needs to be balanced by a critical-constructive pursuit of ecclesiology if it is to be preserved from idealised, idolatrous distortion. In turn, the core concern of this section is to argue that this required critical-constructive ecclesiology should itself be understood as an intra-ecclesial political task. A task, that is, of political theology

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earth." *Ibid.* 66–7; also *id.*, "The Sinfulness and Visibility of the Church: A Christological Exploration", in *id.*, *Migrations of the Holy*, 141–69; and "The Church as Political", 140.

[40] See Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979); *Christ*, *op. cit.*; and *Church*, *op. cit.* For the earlier intention for *Church* to present a significantly more developed ecclesiology than it does (it largely stands as a summary representation of his earlier work), see *Church*, xiii–v.

[41] See Daniel Speed Thompson, *The Language of Dissent: Edward Schillebeeckx on the Crisis of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2003).

within the church: both in the sense that it relates to ecclesial polity and in the sense that it requires political astuteness if it is to have any chance of actually effecting desired change rather than just calling for it. As such the concern here is to explore what strategies the politically self-aware ecclesial theologian might adopt. The aim is to help us become more self-conscious about these strategies, more appreciative of their respective roles, and more effective in their pursuit.

En passent it might be noted that a related and potentially useful preliminary exercise would be to pursue a systematic social-scientific study of the various protest movements and pressure groups within the Catholic Church and the strategies they adopt, together with an analysis of what they might learn from various agent-of-change processes and related movements in wider society, such as Saul Alinsky's broad-based community organising.[42] But that is an issue for another day.

As exemplified by the mature Schillebeeckx, the standard strategies of the critical ecclesiologist are those of protest at the frustrated, dysfunctional, even iniquitous state of things within the church, combined with the visioning of alternative ecclesial possibilities. Interestingly, this concern for the visioning of alternative possibilities sounds a certain ironic resonance between the strategic approach of the critical ecclesiologist and that of the aforementioned theo-political integralist; and this despite the characteristically different emphases they place on the perceived ills of the church. The point is that just as the integralist's concern for distinctive sacramental-prophetic showings of Christian difference is aimed at expanding and transforming prevailing socio-political imaginaries, so too the

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[42] The close engagement with Alinsky-inspired community organising in Hinze's *Prophetic Obedience* is significant. What is here being called for is a systematic strategic analysis of the ways in which Catholic ecclesial reform groups might learn from such approaches.

intention behind the critical ecclesiologist's alternative ecclesial visionings is to effect a quantum shift in the Catholic imaginary and thereby inspire and attract Catholics, individually, communally, and institutionally, to move forward. As was earlier argued in relation to the integralist's approach, however, the recurrent limitation of such alternative visioning is that it can too frequently tend towards offering overly-idealised accounts, both of what the church can become and of what is currently possible, in ways insufficiently connected with the lived reality of things.[43]

As I have elsewhere argued in specific relation to Schillebeeckx, whilst this can indeed offer us inspiring alternative vision for whence we might desire the church to move, it does not engage sufficiently with current constraints and the question of how, in practicable and realisable ways, we are to move from where we are to where we wish to be.[44] The point is that one does not walk a mile in a single leap but step-by-step. By contrast, the critical ecclesiologist focussed on alternative ecclesial visioning is not always sufficiently attentive to this more pedestrian but absolutely crucial task of strategizing the step-by-step.

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[43] It is notable that in criticizing most twentieth century ecclesiology as being of an idealised, "blue-print" variety, Healy is not simply thinking of writers whose sense of the beauty and theological significance of the church in the economy of salvation occludes their taking the church's collective, institutional failings sufficiently seriously. He also has the greats of critical-constructive ecclesiology in his sights, such as Karl Rahner, who could never be accused of having an overly-saccharine view of the church, see Healy, *Church, World and Christian Life*, 28–9 & 31–2.

[44] See Murray, "The Ups and Downs, High and Lows, and Practicalities of Ecclesiological Analysis with Edward Schillebeeckx", particularly 81-6.

So, whilst genuinely valuing the continuing importance of this dual strategy of critical prophetic protest and alternative ecclesial visioning, and, indeed, whilst wanting to serve its practical realisation, the core concern of this essay is to suggest that if such alternative ecclesial visions are actually going to be realised then other, more pragmatic, tactics and strategies are also required. That is, other, more pragmatic tactics and strategies in the intra-ecclesial context which are analogous to those pursued by theo-political engagers in the socio-political context but concerning which Schillebeeckx can be found, surprisingly, somewhat wanting. The irony, then, is that whilst the tactical-pragmatic engagers are Schillebeeckx's natural allies in the socio-political context, in the intra-ecclesial context he has something in common with the idealist alterity of the theo-political integralists, and this despite his pursuit of ecclesiology in a far more critical key.[45]

The main burden of this essay is to argue that it is vital for the would-be transformative ecclesiologist to absorb this point – concerning the need for tactical-pragmatic

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[45] See "… whilst he develops a sophisticated hermeneutic for seeking to engage the submerged and occluded lived reality of the church in relation to varied historical contexts, the strongly theorised means by which he seeks to do this brings with it its own form of ecclesiological idealism which again offers an ideal-type solution to the church's contemporary tensions … The result is that for all his work being propelled by the need to respond to current ecclesial difficulties, Schillebeeckx ultimately fails to take the complex specificities of our contemporary issues and the full range of constraints as well as possibilities that operate there with sufficient seriousness. … his reconstruction of lost worlds of alternative possibility … offer an alternative idealised vision without any convincing pragmatic strategy as to how to travel forwards in a way that can genuinely speak into the situations we face and [help to] build the necessary consensus around them." *Ibid.* 86.

approaches in the strategic pursuit of critical-constructive ecclesiology – and to adapt to it; particularly so when working in the context of highly resistant, seemingly intransigent ecclesial power systems such as the Catholic Church. For what else can one constructively do, other than adopt a strategy of tactical subversion, when one has exhausted one's capacity and passion for protest and when the wells of inspired vision have been plumbed but the system remains unmoved beyond intensified resistance?[46] Perhaps one can sustain oneself with lament and fold oneself into the wounds in the ecclesial body of Christ, trusting that the day will come when these wounds are transformed into jewels of redemption?[47] Or perhaps one might focus in hope on the task of fresh theological composition, reconciled to the prospect of such pieces likely languishing un-played in the ecclesial piano stool but sustained by the belief that circumstances will eventually change and bring to pass the right time for their performance.[48] Beyond this, however, how might one do more than simply endure and hope for the dawn? Or, to alter the metaphor, how might one intentionally seek to break up the frozen ground? How might one seek to warm and irrigate the soil and so bring its dormant

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[46] Leaving aside the intentional adoption of a strategic stance of tactical subversion as a positive way forward, the state of frustrated protest and thwarted vision and action here alluded to more or less accurately describes the situation in which many critical-constructive Catholic theologians found themselves during the previous two pontificates.

[47] On the place of lament in critical-constructive ecclesiology, see Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience*, 73-90.

[48] E.g., concerning the significant transition that occurred in the prevailing circumstances for Catholic theology from the 1930s-1950s to the 1960s: when circumstances changed and could open into the events of Vatican II, the necessary fresh theological compositions were already available for received performance, despite their previously languishing under censure.

seeds to bloom? That is, how might one seek to alter the ecology and even the climate so that real change can occur?

The constructive proposal here is that given that outright revolution is neither feasible nor appropriate for the Catholic theologian for whom the core Catholic commitment and central theo-dramatic calling to unity has gone deep, it becomes important to consider the merits of thinking of theological agency-for-change as the art-of-the-possible. For example, thinking of theological change-agency as the art-of-the-possible implies that due emphasis needs to be placed on and necessary energy and care invested in the winning of hearts and minds in ways that require more patient, more engaged, more tactical-pragmatic ways of proceeding than either the strategies of impassioned protest or inspired alternative visioning alone easily support. This in turn implies the need to invest in the building of broad-based alliances through applying care and attention to identifying and, where possible, protecting the core interests of other interlocutors than one's natural allies. Such tactical astuteness should not be dismissed – as purists and self-styled prophetic visionaries are wont to do – as a matter of cynical compromise. On the contrary, the conviction here is that truly radical prophetic commitment is not simply about the mounting of barricades in protest but about the sustained, patient labour required for the institutionalising of new possibilities for life.

More than this, nor should such attentiveness to the ecclesial others within our own communion, aimed at the building of effective broad-based alliances, be regarded as mere political prudence. Properly understood, it is itself already a profoundly theological commitment, which relates to the true nature and practice of catholicity as a thinking and living "according to the whole" truth of things in Christ and the Spirit, in a fashion that refuses the assumption that all differences and distinctions must necessarily constitute

divisions.[49] On intrinsic ecclesial and theological grounds, and not just for prudential political considerations, it is a fundamental mistake for ecclesial progressivists to think it acceptable either to pillory or to ignore ecclesiological instincts with which one might not oneself be in natural sympathy and which one might even assume to be implicated in the problematic state of things. Rather, it is necessary to get inside the operative mind-set and to seek to see what is there to be seen.

Pope Francis's pontificate represents a new moment in this regard which holds challenge for so-called conservatives and progressivists alike.[50] It certainly marks the end of the privileging of the chosen school of court theology (Balthasar, Ratzinger, *Communio* etc.) of the previous two pontificates[51] and the welcoming back to formal Catholic conversation of those shaped by different theological instincts, literally so for Leonardo Boff concerning consultations sought in the drafting of *Laudato Si'*.[52] Equally, however, it would be wrongheaded to see in this any straightforward reversal of the basic binary of *Communio* versus *Concilium*-style approaches which has characterised much post-conciliar Catholic

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[49] See Murray, "Living Catholicity Differently: On Growing into the Plenitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God", in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, eds. Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), *in press*.

[50] See Murray, "*Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*".

[51] See Eamon Duffy, "Who Is the Pope?", *The New York Review of Books* (February 19, 2015), 11-13.

[52] See Pope Francis, "*Laudato Si'*. Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home" (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

theology.[53] The "Francis moment"[54] does not represent the same game continued only with a different distribution of power and patronage. The profound theological instincts of Jorge Bergoglio/Pope Francis defy easy categorisation within the prevailing Catholic binary.[55] Conservatives and progressivists are alike being called to resist the common tendency to speak, effectively, only to those with whom we are already in agreement and to learn again to pursue a whole-church orientation in Catholic theology.

Nor is this simply a matter of good ecclesial manners but of sound pragmatics. As the depth and range of intra-Catholic criticism of Pope Francis manifests, whilst, on some fronts, this papacy marks a sea-change, it has by no means served to neutralize the forces of ecclesial conservatism, which still exercise considerable influence in the church. Nor has Pope Francis succeeded in convincing and carrying such forces with him. If the opportunities of the "Francis moment" are to be secured for the long-term good of the whole church, then persuasion, diplomacy, and fine-tuned, careful argumentation have vital roles to play.

For those of us who are intentional about contributing to the process of ecclesial reform and who are explicitly pursuing the conceiving of change within Catholicism by

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[53] See Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 91–166.

[54] See Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The 'Francis Moment': A New Kairos for Catholic Ecclesiology. Presidential Address to the Catholic Theological Society of America", *Proceedings of the CTSA* 69 (2014), 63–80.

[55] See Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014); also Massimo Borghesi, *Jorge Mario Bergoglio: una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Jaca, 2017); and *id.*, "Living with Contradiction: Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey", *The Tablet* (February 10, 2018), 4–5; also Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, trans. William Madges (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2015), 9–13.

ministering therapeutically to its wounds, one clear implication is that we must be prepared to take the time patiently to test and to demonstrate how the options we have before us – even those which are novel and apparently discontinuous – can be appropriately integrated with received formal Catholic understanding.[56] This in turn means being prepared to take the time to show how any proposed changes to the sedimented deposits of the tradition are benign, even vital, rather than destructively invasive.

To connect this with my broader argument concerning the theo- and ecclesio-political nature of the ecclesiological task: all this suggests that this is a task requiring fine-detailed needlework and keyhole surgery – of the kind at which Rahner excelled, particularly in his pre-conciliar essays – rather than settling either for broad-brush painting of desirable directions of travel or sweeping polemic and posture. The critical-constructive concern must be to scrutinise, test, and indicate how the web of Catholic belief and practice might be

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[56] In his remarkable work on continuity and change in Catholic doctrine, John E. Thiel shows that even the senses for seemingly "dramatic development" (through the displacing of something previously authoritative) and for novel "incipient development" must, over time, come to be seen as further uncontentious examples of the sense for "development-in-continuity" if what they are discerning and advocating are to be received into the newly settled "literal sense" of the tradition, see Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 171 & 180-81; also *ibid.* 3–30 & 100–28. In tune with this, I am here arguing that it is incumbent upon the critical-constructive ecclesiologist to test for and to seek to ease the passage of a proposed doctrinal or ecclesial change from the status either of the "dramatic" or the "incipient" to being received as an uncontentious, if creative, act of faithful continuity and appropriate dynamic integrity.

virtuously and appropriately rewoven so as to be able to give more faithful, fluent, and attractive witness, with dynamic integrity, in the contexts of particular challenges and opportunities.

By way of brief illustration of what this might mean in practice and how it might differ subtly but significantly from Schillebeeckx's way of proceeding, the focus shifts in the final section to trace in outline what, in this spirit of whole-church ecclesial theology, it might mean to proceed in an ecclesially appropriate and politically astute fashion in relation to the search for an integrated and non-damaging theology of ordained ministry. As earlier indicated, this constitutes a part-summary of a longer related argument which is in train.

Building broad-based consensus around an integrated theology of ministry as means of serving the communion and witness of the church

Attention turns here to a specific site of ecclesiological contestation, concerning divergent understandings of the relationship between the ordained and the body of the church, and the need to overcome any granting of theological legitimacy to clerical elevation, superiority, and unaccountability.[57] Attempts have been made since before the Council to achieve an integrated theology of ministry[58] but, thus far, without being able to achieve any stable new

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[57] See George B. Wilson, *Clericalism: The Death of the Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008); and Michael L. Papesh, *Clerical Culture: Contradiction and Transformation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004).

[58] Providing decisive stimulus was Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1953), ET *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Bloomsbury, 1957). For a comprehensive historical discussion-

consensus. In service of this aim and in light of this essay's central argument – concerning the intra-ecclesial political nature of the ecclesiological task and the need for a whole-church orientation and correlative commitment to building broad-base consensus – it is important to understand and take account of all of the relevant interests which are in play here.

Further, given the church's life, practices, and structures are the first statement we make to the world, these ministerial disputes need be seen as relating to the church's sacramentality and sign-value and, hence, the church's witness and mission. This is a specific example of ecclesiology's relationship to political theology. It is also why the disputes have been so charged: a clear case of ecclesiology itself being a political task within the church.

Schillebeeckx's own contribution and approach here makes a fascinating case-study. Reflecting his close engagement with critical Christian communities in 1970s Netherlands,[59] Schillebeeckx, along with others, most notably the early Küng, sought to resituate the ordained within the body of the church and provide a correlative theological basis for structures and practices of mutual accountability by viewing the ordained as distinguished simply by their performing the specific function of pastoral leadership in a recognised way.[60]

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cum-constructive contribution, see Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

[59] See Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 3, 79-80, 82-3, 101; also *id.*, *Church with a Human Face*, 8-10.

[60] See Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 31, 34, 37, 40, 41, 45, 70–2, 128-9, particularly 37: "Ministry in the church is not a status or state but a service, a function within the 'community of God' …"; and 70: 'The tension between an ontological-sacerdotalist view of the ministry on the one hand and a purely functionalist view on the other must therefore be resolved by a theological view of the church's ministry as a charismatic office, the service of leading the community, and therefore as an ecclesial function within the community and accepted by the

Far, however, from healing the wounds of clericalism in Catholic theology and practice of ministry, the constellation of intended remedial initiatives with which Schillebeeckx aligned himself, and for which he became the leading advocate, in fact provoked a sustained official rejection of functionalist categories and a corresponding strict restatement of the need to think the distinction between ordained and lay in substantive ontological terms.[61]

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community.' Also *id.*, *Church with a Human Face*, 157 & *passim*; and Küng, *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*, trans. John Cummings (New York: Doubleday, 1972), particularly 66. More recently, Küng has given stronger articulation to the distinctiveness and "special fullness" of the permanent, public, officially recognised role of the ordained in a manner that more obviously distances him from purely functionalist accounts and draws him closer to what is proposed here, see Küng, *Reforming the Church Today: Keeping Hope Alive*, trans. Peter Heineggth et al (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 85–6. I am grateful to Greg Ryan for drawing my attention to this section.

[61] For formal magisterial restatement of the essential difference of ordained priesthood deriving from direct specific succession from Christ rather than the Spirit-filled, charism-endowed body of the church which is the source of lay service (as Schillebeeckx et al argued), see Pope John Paul II, "*Christifideles Laici*. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World" (December 30, 1988), 22–3, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html; and *id.*, *Letters to My Brother Priests: Complete Collection of Holy Thursday Letters (1979–2005)*, ed. James Socias, 5th edn. (Downers Grove, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2006); also the Congregation for the Clergy in collaboration with seven other Roman dicasteries, "Instruction on Certain Questions

Now, whilst accepting from the outset that ecclesiastical authoritarianism and instinctive attachment to deeply-rooted clericalist habits of mind doubtless contributed to the rejection of the kind of resolution which Schillebeeckx attempted, I want also to suggest that this negative reaction cannot be dismissed as purely and simply concerned to maintain existing patterns of authority. Whilst fully agreeing that the pernicious cultures of clerical superiority and exceptionalism need to be deconstructed and overcome for the sake of the whole-body health of Catholicism, what I specifically want to focus on here is the question as to what else of a more directly theological and ecclesially significant character may also have been at work in prompting the rejection of seemingly purely functionalist accounts of ordained ministry?[62]

Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests" (November 27, 1997),

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html. For Schillebeeckx acknowledging that the strong restatement of sacerdotal understandings of ordained distinctiveness was, in part, a reaction to the perceived reductionism of critical approaches, see *Ministry*, 106; also *Church with a Human Face*, xi.

[62] Note I say "seemingly purely functionalist accounts". In fact, Schillebeeckx clearly identified and rejected the basic binary of sacerdotal ontologism versus pure functionalism, and viewed his proposed approach as a way of transcending this binary, with the "above" of divine ordination and the "below" of formal community recognition being one and the same, see *Ministry*, 5, 44-5, 68, 105-26, particularly 105, 109-10, 112-13; and *Church with a Human Face*, 74, 137; also *id.*, "The Catholic Understanding of Office in the Church", *Theological Studies* 30/4 (1969), 567-87, particularly 568: "The offices of the Church, which certainly emerged from the community of the Church according to sociological laws, nonetheless owe

Significant here is the fact that even amongst those who share Schillebeeckx's concern to counter the pathologies of clericalism, there can be a sense of dissatisfaction with purely functional categories for ordained ministry. Seeking to grasp what is at issue theologically here is not simply about the politics of achieving consensus by placating those wedded to substantive ontological categories. It is a matter of seeking to understand and protect what might properly lie at the heart of Catholic theological instincts in this regard so they can be disaggregated out from the default to clericalism and authoritarianism to which they have become hostage. That is, in pursuing this line, I am seeking to deliver by alternative means on the same anti-clericalist agenda in support of greater ecclesial accountability to which Schillebeeckx was committed. Moreover, as earlier indicated, the constructive approach I

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their emergence to the community of the Church as set in order by the apostles—in other words, to the community of the Church as authoritatively guided by the apostles from the very origin of that community. What, then, is at the origin of the sociological process of growth (in which the Spirit of God is active) is not a community that was initially without authority, but the apostolic community itself." As such, my argument is not that Schillebeeckx propounded a reductively functionalist account but that his *de facto* close alliance with critical praxis combined with a relative under-attention to the concerns of ecclesial conservatives and the prevailing formal magisterial mind-set meant that his proposal was heard as reinforcing one side of this binary rather than showing a way to its overcoming. For his primary option, see "Thus the practice of particular Christian, and above all critical, communities was the stimulus and the challenge to this study." *Ministry*, 101. Schillebeeckx's specific limitation, then, is that he did not sufficiently draw out the ontological depth of what he was proposing, leaving that as a task for the next generation of Catholic theologians.

advocate can, in some respects, be seen as a development on from Schillebeeckx's own

approach, part of the process of "purification" which he anticipated as being necessary.[63]

Reactionary sacerdotalism and hierarchical authoritarianism aside, at the theological

core of dissatisfaction with functional understandings is the conviction that ordained ministry

properly consists in a fundamental orientation and enfolding of life rather than a mere

function which can be picked up, put on, and put down, like a set of vestments.[64] The instinct

is that the ordained are not simply functionaries of the sacraments but are themselves called-

out to be sacramental in their being and life.

Presupposing but seeking to deepen the work of Schillebeeckx et al, one of the most

promising attempts to maintain this instinct in near-recent Catholic theology, whilst also

disentangling it from any notion of a two-tier dispensation of charism and dignity, has been

the shift from substance-based ontology to relational ontology in the work of Susan Wood,

Edward Hahnenberg, Richard Gaillardetz, and others.[65] Here ontology/being is understood not

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[63] See "So in the distant future we can expect the fulfilment of the expectation of an ultimate

canonical sanctioning of what could be called the present-day. 'fourth phase' in the church's

practice of the ministry (probably after a degree of purification)." Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 3.

[64] Compare "We do not exclude the fact that ordination disposes the priest 'ontologically',

that is, that his specific mission orientates his whole person and hence his whole life towards

this service. When God calls us, our whole person is engaged or 'touched'." Piet Fransen,

"Orders and Ordination", in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed.

Karl Rahner (London: Burns & Oates, 1977), 1122–48 at 1142.

[65] See Wood ed., *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained

Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003); also Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational

Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 2003).

in terms of distinct, essentially defined substances but in terms of the conditions for existence of beings and the quality and character of relations between them. In this way of thinking the ontological distinctiveness of the ordained resides not in their undergoing some mysterious inner transformation to a more elevated state of existence, but in their formally entering into the different ecclesial relationships associated with pastoral leadership.[66]

This creative proposal has a great deal to commend it but a question still remains as to its final adequacy as thus far articulated. Whilst maintaining a role for ontological rather than purely functional categories, the advocates of relational ontology nevertheless share with Schillebeeckx a focus on substantial, intentionally life-long, pastoral leadership as the distinguishing feature between ordained and lay.[67] Their concern is to draw out its ontological density and the web of relations and responsibilities it entails. The question remains, however, as to what this implies about the ordained dignity of those who find themselves no longer able to serve in active pastoral ministry for reasons such as illness, retirement, or deployment in a role with no pre-requisite for ordination. Does it imply that the once-ordained cease to have the effective dignity of the ordained as and when they cease to be involved in pastoral

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[66] See Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion", in ed. Wood, 26-51 at 39-40.

[67] E.g., see "… a basic theology of the presbyterate ought to begin with an understanding of the presbyter's sharing in the ministry of pastoral oversight …" Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 135; and "No matter what different forms it takes, ministry is concerned with the leadership of the community …", Schillebeeckx, *Church with a Human Face*, 119.

leadership?[68] If so this would conflict both with the traditional Catholic principle concerning the permanent distinctive dignity of the ordained and with their typical self-understanding, rooted in a sense of defining response to a life-long call rather than time-limited employment.

The present alternative proposal builds on the insights of relational ontology whilst seeking to take account of this problem. The suggestion is that ordained distinctiveness is best thought of as being called to a fundamentally different *mode of exercise* – public, authenticated, and representative/sacramental – of Christ's one variegated Spirit-led ministry and witness in the church as a whole. Moreover, the ordained are to be thought of as exercising this ministry and witness not simply when they perform specific pastoral functions but in the entirety of their lives.

In sympathy with Schillebeeckx's way of integrating bottom-up and top-down approaches,[69] ordained ministry is not here viewed as a distinct hierarchical dispensation direct from Christ, in contrast to the charismatic endowment of the general body of the church. Rather, the ordained are regarded as called-out by Christ in the Spirit, as discerned by the Spirit-indwelt ecclesial body, to be the authenticated, public witnesses to and sacramental representations of Christ's one variegated ministry and witness throughout the ecclesial body. Their calling is not to stand over the community but to reflect back to it that which, in all its

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[68] See *Ministry*, 41 where Schillebeeckx seemingly approvingly records this as being the case in the early church: "Another fundamental consequence of the canon of Chalcedon was that a minister who for any personal reason ceased to be the president of a community *ipso facto* returned to being a layman in the full sense of the word."

[69] See Murray, "The Ups and Downs, Highs and Lows, and Practicalities of Ecclesiological Analysis".

members, it most deeply already is.[70] This is not an essentially different kind of priesthood to the common priesthood of the faithful. Nor is it a higher quality version of the same priesthood. But it can be properly thought of as an essentially different *mode of exercise* – i.e. public, official, representative, sacramental – of the one priesthood of Christ in which all the baptised share and which is performed in the church at once under two distinct modes.

This is an approach which seeks to protect relevant core instincts and convictions about the ordained whilst clearly resituating them within the body of the church, with mutual accountability as a natural correlate. Equally, far from alienating or dis-empowering the laity, the informal, unofficial status of lay ministry and vocation relative to the authenticated, public status of the ordained cannot properly be taken to imply that the former is less virtuous, less imaginative, less effective, even less exemplary. It simply implies that as informal and unofficial it is free of either the validation or the constraints and expectations of official sanction.

This briefly sketched "incipient" way of thinking about ordained distinctiveness and the relation-in-difference it suggests between lay and ordained ministry obviously needs far more detailed articulation and testing before it can be recognised as a legitimate example of "development-in-continuity" which can be received into a fresh settlement of the "literal sense" of Catholic tradition. That task requires another essay in its own right.

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[70] This proposal interestingly connects with an undeveloped but repeated acknowledgment in Schillebeeckx's own analysis that within the early church exemplary witness to the life and mission of the community was more fundamental as a criterion for ministry than authorised appointment to community leadership, see *Ministry*, 31-3, 45, 47, 50, 138; and *Church with a Human Face*, 93, 119, 121.

For present purposes, however, the important thing to note is the way in which this proposed approach seeks to accommodate the core interests and diverse ecclesial and theological concerns of distinct groups in the church. As such, it is offered here as one brief example of the kind of politically astute, ecclesially prudent, and theologically creative, whole-church Catholic approach that is required if the necessary broad-based consensus is to be achieved to support real and lasting change in the Catholic system.

The conviction is that where the wider thought-world and associated praxis which Schillebeeckx represented provoked reactionary denunciation and so reinforced rather than overcame the basic underlying binary between ontological and functional approaches, the approach sketched here – which takes the ecclesio-political dimension of the ecclesiological task seriously – has the potential to deliver on Schillebeeckx's reforming goals with ecclesial integrity. It points the way towards an integrated, non-competitive, mutually supportive theology and practice of ministry around which both lay and ordained can gather as a whole body, a whole church, each finding their own dignity duly valued. In so doing it speaks to the need for what Schillebeeckx identified as a "non-sacral" form of the "sacramentality" properly pertaining to the ordained.[71] It is offered here as one example of what it means to pursue critical-constructive ecclesiology as a task of intra-ecclesial political theology in service of the whole-body flourishing of Catholicism.

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[71] See *Ministry*, 71; and *Church with a Human Face*, 263-4.