

“Donald Senior brings together in this volume a wealth of personal and professional experience: extensive theological study, research, writing, and teaching, along with twenty-three years as president of a graduate school of theology. He provides a cogent scriptural foundation for understanding the work of administration as both a calling and a gift and does so in ways that are inviting, inspiring, and encouraging. Senior’s stirring words find genuine and profound meaning in everything from fund-raising to finances. This is a must-read for all who are called to serve as administrators.”

—Abbot Gregory Polan, OSB  
Conception Abbey  
Conception Seminary College

“The author of *The Gift of Administration* holds the unusual credentials of a renowned biblical scholar and a skilled, admired administrator. The book reflects the gifts of both vocations as Donald Senior fittingly brings to bear the biblical imperatives that require leaders to serve without seeking honors. In a central chapter on the responsibility of building community, he identifies many qualities of a truly spiritual leader, such as one who is courageous, compassionate, humble, truthful, and understanding. Throughout the book, those looking for practical applications will find them in chapters on mission and planning, finances and fund-raising, among many others.”

—Sister Katarina Schuth, OSF  
Endowed Chair for the Social Scientific Study of Religion  
St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity  
University of St. Thomas

“Father Donald Senior’s latest work combines sound exegesis with astute reflections that are the fruit of a long and successful career in higher education administration. In identifying the various activities of the administrator—articulating the mission, leading, planning, fund-raising, communicating—as expressions of discipleship that are founded in the New Testament itself, Father Senior has uncovered a hitherto neglected theological and spiritual depth of administration. And, as we have come to expect from Father Senior, he writes with clarity and precision. This book should be required reading for bishops, pastors, mission leaders, educational administrators, or anyone else who has responded to the call to be a steward of the church’s goods.”

—Rev. Seán Charles Martin  
President  
Aquinas Institute of Theology

“In this book, Father Senior provides a firm biblical foundation for the charism of ‘steering’ the barque of Christ—flowing from the call of Jesus who laid out the vision of the servant leader. The Church on mission needs servants good at planning, coordination, and communication. Father Senior contributes to a ministry easily taken for granted.”

—Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, DD  
Archbishop of Louisville  
President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

“*The Gift of Administration* is itself a gift to leaders of religious institutions. Donald Senior is as able a New Testament scholar as he is an administrative leader, and he connects administration in the present moment with patterns of churchly leadership described in the New Testament. The result is true wisdom from the long tradition in a field dominated by advice from present experience. *The Gift of Administration* is simply the best book I have ever read on administrative leadership; it stands high above a crowded field of contenders.”

—Daniel Aleshire  
Executive Director  
Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

“With equal parts erudition and inspiration in his remarkable book, *The Gift of Administration*, Donald Senior reframes the necessary work of administration as life-giving ministry. Grounded in Scripture and rich theological tradition, this book will surely inform and encourage all who are entrusted with the leadership and management of faith-based organizations.”

—Kerry Alys Robinson  
Executive Director  
National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management

“The time was long overdue for a biblical and theological book about administrative work. The beauty of *The Gift of Administration* is that Senior not only draws rich material from Scripture but also provides indispensable frames from different theologians and leaders like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Pope Francis for approaching the role of administrator. This is a unique and invaluable resource.”

—Rick Bliese  
President  
In Trust Center for Theological Schools

# The Gift of Administration

New Testament Foundations for the  
Vocation of Administrative Service

Donald Senior, CP



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# Preface

The impulse to write this book comes from the strange blend of responsibilities that I have been engaged in over the past several years. Shortly before my ordination as a priest, my superiors asked me to pursue graduate biblical studies at Louvain University in Belgium. Prior to that assignment, I had dreamed of being an overseas missionary once I was ordained. I remember being deeply moved by the report of one of our Passionist missionaries in Korea who described his experience on the Island of Sorokdo, ministering to the lepers who were confined there. Boyhood memories of stories about the heroic Saint Damian of Molokai, the Belgian missionary who had served the lepers and himself had contracted the disease, came rushing back. Who could forget the drama of his revealing that he had contracted the disease by addressing his congregation at Sunday Mass with the words, “We lepers . . .”

But like an arranged marriage, my superiors had another proposal in mind. And, as I understand can happen with arranged marriages, I fell in love with my new destiny. I had had two great biblical professors in my seminary days—Barnabas Ahern and Carroll Stuhlmueller—both of whom were at the forefront of the resurgent biblical movement in Catholicism and both of whom imbued a deep love for the Scriptures in

their students. So after my ordination in 1967, I went off to the University of Louvain and earned a doctorate in theology and Sacred Scripture under the fearsome tutelage of a truly great scholar, the late Frans Neiryndck. He was a resolute taskmaster, but because of him, I learned what scholarship with rigor and integrity meant, and that experience has guided me in my own work ever since.

In 1972, at the completion of my doctoral work, I returned to the United States and took up teaching at the newly formed Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, a graduate school of theology sponsored by several religious communities. For the first sixteen years of my time on CTU's faculty, I reveled in the work of teaching and writing in the field of New Testament. CTU encouraged its faculty to offer service to the wider Church, so I was also busy with lectures and workshops across the country and involvement in a number of publications on biblical topics.

In 1987 my world shifted unexpectedly. Our president at the time resigned abruptly, worn down by his duties. I was in Australia when this happened, giving a series of lectures during the first (and only) academic sabbatical of my career, but the phone call of the chair of our board reached across the Pacific early one morning and asked me if I would consider becoming acting president while the search for a new president was underway. The year before, I had served as acting dean for CTU—but with the proviso that I would not be a candidate for the permanent position. Having completed that task—and having escaped being elected dean—I was a prime target to be acting president. I agreed, but again with the proviso that I would not be a candidate for president. I loved teaching and thought that my whole training and preparation would be wasted if I moved into full-time administration.

As fate—or Providence?—would have it, the search for a new president came up empty and the board turned to me to accept the role. After pondering for a while and consulting my religious superior, I agreed to make the jump into what for me was an entirely new role. I had served as a program director, a department head, and as acting dean, but in these roles my administrative duties were either part time or, in the case of acting dean, transitory. Now I was into administration with both feet!

After eight years in the role of president, I thought I had paid my dues and happily returned to my work teaching on the CTU faculty. But not for long—my successor was a wonderful, warm, and kind human being, an exemplary priest. Because of a number of factors, however, he found the work of president overwhelming and graciously agreed to step down after only a year and a half on the job. Worried about the institution appearing to its publics as unstable, the Board of Trustees urged me to return as president. I did so, but not as a heroic sacrifice, even though I had been very happy after leaving the president's office to return to teaching full-time. In fact, I had experienced great satisfaction in my first stint as president. The work of administration opened me up to experiences and learning that I realized I would never have acquired in my role as a faculty member—as sacred and fulfilling as that role had been for me. Suddenly I found myself working with accomplished laymen and women on our Board of Trustees, encountering leaders in the civic, professional, and business world of Chicago in seeking their support for the mission of CTU, interacting with Church leaders in Chicago, the United States, and even the Vatican, and working with and surely learning from a whole new cadre of colleagues who served as presidents and deans of great Protestant schools of theology through involvement in the Association of Theological

Schools of the United States and Canada. All of these contacts with remarkable people were like a new school of life for me, opening my eyes to realities that previously I hardly knew.

Thus returning to full-time administration after a brief respite was not a terrible burden, even though I had not sought it. I had, unexpectedly, a great deal of satisfaction in my first turn at being president. Likewise, I had freely left the office in the first place after a decent length of time. Being urged to come back gave me a sense of freedom and serenity in returning to this role. My CTU colleagues knew I was not motivated by an unquenchable desire to be president, and I was acting freely and for the good of the school. I continued to serve as president for another sixteen years. Combined with my first stint, I was privileged to serve as president of CTU for twenty-three years, finally stepping down in June 2013.

All during that time, I thought it was important that I maintain as best I could my involvement in biblical scholarship. I taught some courses each year, especially in our sabbatical program and summer institute, offered workshops and study days for the wider Church, and continued to write and edit in both popular and technical journals. In 2002, I was appointed by Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. I served three popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis) in the course of my terms on this commission, and this work, too, helped keep me abreast of biblical scholarship in a unique way. I found that all of this academic work of teaching and writing was not a hindrance to my responsibilities as president but actually helped me maintain my involvement in the life of the school.

It is this blend of biblical studies and administrative experience that led me to this book. Over time I came to see both biblical scholarship and the work of administration as expres-

sions of my vocation as a Christian. Both, I was convinced, were deeply rooted in the nature of the Gospel and the mission entrusted to the Church by the Risen Christ. But, while it was easy to see the connection between my faith as a Christian and the vocation of studying and teaching the Scriptures, it took me some time to appreciate the fact that administration, too, was an authentic, Gospel-rooted ministry. For many, both in the academy and in the Church, administrative work is viewed as a “necessary evil,” as something that somebody has to do in order to keep the lights on and the doors open but only ancillary to the real mission of a school of theology—or a parish or any other religious institution. Like flossing one’s teeth, it was a required duty but not what gave meaning to one’s day.

Sometimes I experienced that this view of administration, which is often unstated but nevertheless present, can lead colleagues who have other roles in a Christian institution to look down on those in administration. On the occasion of my first being elected as president, one of my colleagues and friends on the faculty, said “better you than me” in a tone that suggested I had contracted some disease or fallen into some terrible misfortune! Teaching and counseling and preaching and leading worship are, it seemed, the true works of ministry; doing administrative tasks was considered second class. In my experience, when major administrative posts came open in our school and in other schools I was familiar with, there were not lines of candidates clamoring for the jobs.

What I hope to accomplish in this book is to draw on my blend of background in both biblical studies and administrative service to show how the work of administration is truly a work of ministry. I write not as a theorist about management but as a practitioner of administration in a religious institution. The overall purpose of administration and its defining

tasks all have a strong base in the Scriptures and in Christian tradition. Exposure to this book may not transform reluctant stewards into enthusiastic administrators nor cause crowds of candidates to seek administrative work in religious institutions. But hopefully it will demonstrate that, as Paul the apostle noted, administration is one of the gifts the Risen Christ gives to his Church (1 Cor 12:28) and thereby help those involved in this ministry to realize that serving as an administrator is an authentic expression of the Church's mission in the world. Hence the title of this book.

My experience as an administrator has been in Catholic institutions, although I had the privilege of serving as president of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada and being a member of its board for several years—an experience of governance in an ecumenical setting that I cherish. I hope that what I offer in this book will be of use not only to Catholic administrators but also to all Christians who are involved in administrative service.

Sitting down to write this book brought to memory the many friends, colleagues, and mentors who taught me how to do my job. I thought of the superb trustees I worked with, many of whom became personal friends and I often felt part of their families—celebrating baptisms and weddings and funerals—which was always a privilege. I think of the board chairs who in a particular way supported and directed me: Michael Higgins, CP, the late Anthony O'Connell, OSM, the late Marty Kirk, CMF, Tom Reynolds, SSC, Michael Slattery, OSA, and Kurt Hartrich, OFM. I was also privileged to serve closely with some outstanding academic deans: Tom McGonigle, OP, Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, Gary Riebestrella, SVD, and Barbara Reid, OP. A president soon learns that partnership with your finance officer is crucial; I was

fortunate to serve with excellent partners: Maureen Meter, Bernice Frederick, and Mike Connors. For me, the president has to work hand in glove with your development officer. I will always be grateful to Cy Maus who helped me get our development program off the ground, to his successor Emily John, to Bill Booth—who guided us through our first capital campaigns—and to Anne Marie Tirpak who helped lift our program to a whole new level. Getting the word out in an effective and appropriate way depends on good public relations and communications people. I was blessed to have excellent ones in Regina Baiocchi, Pattie Sporrang Thompson, Stephanie Sinnott Boland, Beth White, and Nancy Nickel. Hardly least, excellent personal assistants kept me on track these past years: Shirley Brin, Margaret Cassidy, Valerie Holloway, and Pam Pauloski, SP. I can't thank them enough.

As I mentioned above, a special blessing for me was to be engaged with the Association of Theological Schools of the United States and Canada all during the time I served as president of CTU. This ecumenical organization is both a fully licensed accrediting agency and a professional support organization that has been instrumental in providing on the job training for a host of theological educators and administrators. I especially appreciate my association with its superb executive director Dan Aleshire and with fellow board chairs who became friends and heroes to me as I learned the ropes: Martha Horne, David Tiede, Cynthia Campbell, John Kinney, Richard Mouw, and J. Dorcas Gordan.

I was blessed to serve as president of CTU during the tenure of two great archbishops of Chicago, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin and Francis Cardinal George. Each of them was a great support and inspiration to me and understood well the mission of a school of theology.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the trustees, faculty, staff, and students of CTU—my inspiration for all of the twenty-three years I was privileged to serve as president of this vibrant and sacred place.

# Introduction

## *The Gift of Administration*

In trying to drive home to his Corinthian community the need for harmony in the midst of diversity, Paul the apostle lists the various gifts that God gives certain people in the community. He begins with what seems a priority list: “first apostles,” “second prophets,” “third teachers,” and then “mighty deeds”—the latter presumably heroic or even miraculous but undefined accomplishments that some perform for the sake of the community. After that Paul lumps other gifts together: “then healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues” (see 1 Cor 12:28). The Greek word Paul uses for “administration” is *kubernetes*, from the root word meaning to “guide” or “steer,” like the pilot of a ship.

Curiously, when Paul restates his list in the following verse—reaffirming his message that all those endowed with these various gifts have to work together—he repeats all of the gifts mentioned in the previous verse but leaves out the gift of “administration”! Paul, we should remember, was emphatic about his own role as an apostle, and he testifies that he himself did healings, taught and preached a lot, and was capable of ecstatic utterances, so those gifts loomed large in his own

experience. But Paul was never a local administrator, and that particular gift seems to have fallen off of Paul's conscious chart!

Paul's no doubt unintended downplaying of "administration" as a gift of God has been repeated over the centuries and continues to this day. Whole libraries could be filled with contemporary books on the Christian works of teaching, preaching, healing, and prophecy, but there are relatively few biblical or theological studies on administration as a genuine gift or charism for the Church. A few years ago, the Lilly Endowment sponsored two studies of the attitudes of clergy toward administrative and fund-raising activities. They titled the report of these studies, "The Reluctant Steward."<sup>1</sup> They found that while Protestant and Catholic clergy alike prized their work of preaching, counseling, leading worship, and teaching, they considered administrative duties a necessary but unwelcome intrusion on their vocation of ministry.

None of this is a great mystery. The biblical roots of the teaching or preaching ministry, for example, are evident in both the Old and the New Testaments, including the ministry of Jesus himself and the work of the apostles and numerous other characters in the early Church. The work of healing—whether considered from a charismatic perspective or in relationship to the healing arts of the physician and health-care worker—finds a massive foundation in the healing ministry of Jesus and the reverence for the ministry of healing present

1. Daniel Conway, Anita Rook, and Daniel A. Schipp, eds., *The Reluctant Steward: A Report and Commentary on the Stewardship and Development Study* (Indianapolis, IN, and St. Meinrad, IN: Christian Theological Seminary and St. Meinrad Seminary, 1992). A follow-up study appeared ten years later: Daniel Conway, *The Reluctant Steward Revisited: Preparing Pastors for Administrative and Financial Duties; A Report and Commentary on a Study Conducted by Saint Meinrad School of Theology with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.* (St. Meinrad, IN: St. Meinrad School of Theology, 2002).

throughout the New Testament and on into Church tradition. Obviously the role of the prophet stands out in the Old Testament, and Jesus himself and great leaders of the early Church wore the mantle of the prophet in their fearless proclamation of the Gospel and their challenge to false values.

## **Administration as a Christian Vocation**

But administration as a specific Christian work? Obviously there were leaders and administrators who enabled the early Christian communities to develop and thrive, but their work is not the primary focus of the New Testament and, in a sense, one has to read between the lines of the biblical text to draw out an appreciation of the essential role they played. If today one searches for a deeper understanding of the work of administration from a faith perspective, the terrain of available materials is fairly sparse. Most of the creative reflection on the role of the administrative leader draws on the accumulated wisdom of effective corporate management and utilizes the insights of psychology and other social sciences to address needed skills in areas such as institutional leadership, strategic planning, personnel management, and conflict resolution, as well as how to acquire vital motivational and organizational skills. Popular business “gurus” such as Peter Drucker, Warren Bennis, and Stephen Covey, to cite some noted examples, have published many volumes each and have recorded millions in sales.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature that links administration and management with “spirituality.”<sup>2</sup>

2. See, for example, Margaret Benefiel, *Soul at Work: Spiritual Leadership in Organizations* (New York: Seabury Press, 2005), and the collection of essays *Religion, Business, and Spirituality*, ed. Oliver F. Williams (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

Many of these works are based on empirical data that gauges the impact of spiritual attitudes and virtues on the effectiveness and satisfaction rates of those who bring their “spirituality” in some fashion into the workplace as opposed to those who do not. By “spirituality,” most of these studies mean a set of beliefs and attitudes and a habit of reflection and inner peace that gives a person a certain wisdom and serenity in dealing with the stress of the workplace. Relatively few of these works draw directly on a specific religious tradition such as Christianity, and virtually none connect the specific tasks of administration to the fundamental resources of the Scriptures or Christian theology and Christian faith as such. Employing the values and qualities inherent in one’s “spirituality” may increase job satisfaction and help one to cope with the stresses and strains of one’s daily work, but there is no case made in these studies to demonstrate how the very tasks of administration are rooted in and are an expression of one’s Christian faith or the spirituality that is based on it. On the contrary, administrative work is seen as a challenge to be overcome or a problem to be contained.

Where such rare links between administration and faith are considered, it is often by Evangelical Christians who see administration as a Christian vocation.<sup>3</sup> The body of Roman Catholic authors on this subject is even rarer. One outstanding example is the contribution of Ann M. Garrido in her book *Redeeming Administration: 12 Spiritual Habits for Catholic*

3. See, for example, Wayne Grudem, *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible’s Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003); R. J. Stepansky, *Thoughts on Leadership from a Higher Level: Leadership Lessons from the Bible* (Suwanee, GA: Deeper Calling Media, 2015), e-book.

*Leaders in Parishes, Schools, Religious Communities and other Institutions*, a work that began as a well-received article in *America* magazine and was later expanded into a book.<sup>4</sup> As the subtitle of her work indicates, Garrido reflects on the Christian virtues needed for making the work of administration effective and life giving. She follows her reflections on each of these twelve virtues with an example from the life of a particular saint. In her reflections, she also draws on her own experience in a variety of roles in academic administration at the Aquinas School of Theology in Saint Louis, Missouri. Her list of virtues and her meditations on them will make sense to anyone who has wrestled with the work of administration in various levels of a religious institution: breath of vision, generativity, trust, *agape* (self-sacrificing love), integrity, humility, courage, a habit of reflection, a sense of humor, willingness to forgive and be forgiven, “embracing death” (i.e., the Christian realization, based on the Paschal Mystery, that some plans and efforts must be transformed by suffering in order to ultimately flourish), and, finally, hope.<sup>5</sup>

If one were to characterize the approach taken in Ann Garrido’s study, it might be called an exercise in “virtue ethics” applied to the role of an administrator, that is, identifying the values and practices that promote holiness within the context

4. Ann M. Garrido, *Redeeming Administration: 12 Spiritual Habits for Catholic Leaders in Parishes, Schools, Religious Communities, and Other Institutions* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013); also, Ann M. Garrido, “More Than a Desk Job: The Spirituality of Administration,” *America* 201, no. 1 (July 6, 2009); Zeni Fox and Regina Bechtle, eds., *Called & Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005) also take up the issue, but the emphasis in most of the essays included concentrate on ministerial rather than administrative roles.

5. See the further discussion of these “spiritual habits” in chap. 6 below, pp. 137–47.

of a particular role. This is a genuine reflection on Christian spirituality and eminently useful for those who desire to bring the light and wisdom of their Christian and Catholic heritage into the workplace where many Christians will spend a major part of their lives.

The approach taken in *Redeeming Administration* helps clarify the somewhat different—but hopefully complementary—approach I want to take here. Ann Garrido’s study—and others similar to it—consider the attitudes and virtues that will enable the Christian to find and exercise virtue in the midst of administrative work. The ultimate goal is to be able to seek and find holiness in this vital and unique form of human activity.

My hope, by contrast, is to consider how the essential elements of the work of administration themselves are rooted in our Christian biblical and theological heritage. While it makes sense to learn the art of administration from the wisdom of corporate leaders and social studies of effective management, what we might call “secular” sources—meant in a positive, not negative sense—it is also important to know that from a Christian perspective, the practices (and virtues) demanded by the work of administration have a solid biblical and theological foundation and as such can be an expression of one’s Christian call to discipleship and service. While perhaps not having the explicit and prominent place in the array of Christian ministries that preaching, teaching, and healing may have, nevertheless, administration is also named by Paul as a “gift of God” given to the community to build it into the Body of Christ and one grounded in the very nature of the Christian mission to the world.

For example, the ministry of preaching can learn from the science and art of public speaking and communication,

without diminishing the fact that it is an explicit expression of the Christian mission. Those who are Christian teachers can benefit from a study of pedagogy and knowledge of how students at various levels learn, at the same time they can turn to a well-thought-through biblical and systematic theology of Christian teaching that clearly shows this work is an expression of the Gospel. Likewise, those who engage in the healing professions, whether as a physician, nurse, psychologists or research doctor, necessarily depend on the knowledge and skill of the medical profession to responsibly carry out their work, but at the same time, the healing arts are rooted deeply in the very nature of the Christian mission to the world.

I firmly believe that the various expressions of the work of administration, while learning from “secular” experience and knowledge, can also find their grounding and rationale within the very nature of the Christian mission. In short, administration—like preaching, teaching, and healing—is also an expression of the Gospel. To take a quick and perhaps easy example that will be looked at in more depth later on, the work of fund-raising, which many administrators, particularly those at the leadership level, must engage in, can be viewed as a kind of secular activity, with a body of literature that addresses the various techniques and skills needed for this kind of work. But from the perspective of the Christian mission to the world, motivating Christians to share their resources with those in need goes to the heart of the Gospel. Likewise, strategic planning (which will also be considered later), vital for healthy institutions and part of the work of administration, can turn to an enormous “secular” literature on the various methods and philosophies of strategic planning. But at the same time, planning for the future is also a consequence of the Christian view of history, which is rooted in the New Testament itself.

At the heart of Christian ethics is the call for us to live now in view of the future we most earnestly desire to see. Jesus' own inaugural preaching proclaimed that because the kingdom of God was coming we should "change our perspective" (the literal meaning of the Greek word *metanoite* used in the gospel) and believe in the Good News (see Mark 1:14-15). Thus, thinking about the future from the perspective of Christian faith and turning our resources and actions in that direction makes planning a potential act of discipleship.

### **The Levels of Administration**

At the outset, it is important to identify what is meant by administration and who is involved in it. The etymology of the word is revealing. "Administer" comes from Latin, combining the word "serve" (*ministrare*) and the prefix "to" (*ad*), and therefore means to offer aid or service or direction to someone. According to Webster's Dictionary, the word has come to mean in modern English "the process or activity of running a business, organization, etc." The terms "manage" or "manager" can have essentially the same meaning. The verb "manage" comes from the Italian word *maneggiare*, which referred to handling tools or even animals. This word, too, can trace its etymology to the Latin word *manus*, which means "hand." If there is a difference between the concepts of "managing" and "administering," it is that "managing" is often associated with the "handling" or coordinating of personnel within an institution. Sometimes the task of "management" has a somewhat pejorative ring, implying a small-bore type of handling or even manipulating personnel. "Administration," on the other hand, has a broader scope that includes "managing" personnel but incorporates other tasks necessary for the health of an institution.

Thus, an “administrator” is anyone involved in the process of running or managing an institution. Obviously there are different levels of “administration.” There are “chief administrators” such as bishops, presidents, deans, finance officers, or directors of development and department heads. And then there are what might be called, especially in the corporate world, “middle management”; these are people such as program directors and key staff. For example, in an academic institution, such key staff include the registrar, the public relations director, the director of maintenance, etc. Then there are the vital roles of the clerical staff such as the receptionists, the security personnel, and so on, whose combined work enables an institution to function. All of these roles and many others like them represent full-time administrative work, i.e., “being involved in the process or activity of running or managing an institution.”

There are also persons within an institution—particularly a religious institution such as a parish or school—who do not think of themselves as “administrators” but are, in fact, involved in some aspects of administering an institution. Pastors, for example, are probably reluctant to define themselves as “administrators” but, in fact, they spend a lot of their time involved in the work of administration: worrying about the budget, concerned about leaky roofs and faltering furnaces, and sometimes snarled in difficult personnel issues. In most institutions, faculty, too, would not consider themselves in “administration” but find that their duties include such administrative roles as managing an academic program or heading a department. In the reality of institutional life, the lines between direct administrative work and explicitly pastoral activities can often be blurred. Pastors become immersed in administrative details in order to keep their parish community healthy, and presidents and deans of schools will often have to

be “pastors” to some of their faculty and staff in moments of personal crisis. And sometimes, too, the roles seem to merge: having to discipline or even let go of a staff member is one of the administrative responsibilities dreaded by most administrators I know, but there is also the need to carry out this duty in a “pastoral” manner, respecting the dignity and well-being of the person affected.

There is another dimension to the administration of an institution that needs to be identified here as we begin our reflection. I am referring to the notion of “governance.” “Governance” may be defined as “the system of rules, practices, and processes by which a company or institution is directed and controlled.” Governance implies a certain power or authority to direct an institution in the light of its mission. As such, governance is distinct from “administration” which is more directed to the everyday tasks and procedures and policies that sustain an institution and help it thrive. Within most nonprofit organizations, the category into which most religious institutions fit, “governance” will be the prime responsibility of a Board of Trustees, a bishop, and to some extent the president and chief administrators of an institution who receive delegated authority from their “governing body” and are accountable to that governing body.

In many institutions today, particularly academic ones, there is an interest in “shared governance.”<sup>6</sup> Most faculty, for example, do not consider themselves simply as “employees” who

6. See the discussion in David Tiede, “Faculty Powers in Shared Governance,” *Theological Education* 44 (2009): 29–37; Steven C. Bahls, *Shared Governance in Times of Change: A Practical Guide for Universities and Colleges* (Washington, DC: AGB Press, 2014); also the articles on shared governance found in *In Trust* magazine 26, no. 2 (2015): 19–23.

carry out their responsibilities under the direction of others but as genuine stakeholders in the direction and well-being of the school they serve. They rightly expect to have some say or influence on the overall direction of the school, that is, a share in the school's "governance." This is a reasonable expectation, yet the notion of "shared governance" has a certain imprecision that can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. While faculty, for example, rightly expect that they should be seriously consulted regarding the fundamental direction of the school, that does not necessarily mean that it is a good idea for faculty to have a determining vote on the school's budget or to intrude in contract negotiations. On the other hand, those in administration should not have a heavy hand in designing courses or curriculum. When I first introduced a development program in my school, some faculty members, unused to seeing solicitation letters going out from CTU, wanted to have some say in the content of our appeal letters. Only half in jest, I suggested in that case that I would also want to review each of their syllabi!

"Shared governance" in its healthiest expression means that those who hold ultimate responsibility for the financial and institutional health of the institution exercise that responsibility in a way that recognizes and honors the legitimate concerns that various stakeholders—faculty, staff, and even the wider public—have about the well-being and direction of the school. Such a process of governance calls for a lot of trust and clear communication.

Thus for some major administrators—particularly presidents and other types of chief executive officers—"administration" also involves the responsibility of "governance." Such administrators must not only engage in the day to day tasks of administration but also keep alert to the "bigger picture" and

be responsible to the fundamental mission and spirit of an institution. We will consider this further under the heading of “leadership” and its roots in the Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

This book, then, is directed to those who are engaged in governance and administration, whether as full-time administrators and managers or those who define their roles in other ways but are drawn into administrative duties as part of their everyday responsibilities. In the case of academic institutions, I think of the presidents or principals, academic deans and finance officers, development directors and public relations officers, registrars and program directors, directors of maintenance, and the many clerical and other staff that make up the “administration” of a school. In parishes or congregations, I think of the pastor, the business manager or administrator (in parishes where this or a similar role exists), the receptionist and other staff, the school principal, and the building manager—all of whom make up what is often called the “parish staff.” And I don’t want to exclude those who at least for a portion of their responsibilities are drawn into the work of administration: faculty, teachers, liturgists, etc.

I should make it clear that this is not intended to be a “how to” book, although perhaps some wisdom on how to do the work of administration might slip through! It is more of a “why” book—offering what I hope is a rationale for understanding that the work of administration has as legitimate a claim on the Gospel and the Christian mission as does the more explicit and easily identified work of preaching or teaching or healing. Grasping the “why”—the deeply Christian rationale for the work of administration—can assure us that we are in fact doing the work of God when we serve as

7. See chap. 2 below on leadership, pp. 23–42.

an administrator. And that assurance can lead to a deeper serenity about the meaning of our work and even a more effective exercise of it.

When I was first drafted to be president of Catholic Theological Union, I often found myself feeling that I should be somewhere else—that in some strange fashion, I was misplaced. I should be spending more time in biblical research, more time in the classroom, more time with students. I remember sharing this feeling with a trusted colleague who was also a biblical scholar and a president of a major Lutheran seminary. He, too, confessed to sometimes “looking over his shoulder” and wondering if he should be somewhere else. Only after a period of time and, more importantly, after thinking more deeply about the biblical and theological basis for the ministry of administration, did I make peace with my role as president and administrator of an institution and see it more clearly in the light of the Gospel.

Helping others make peace with this Christian task and to draw life from it is the goal of this book.



# 1

## The “Institutional” Church

### *Is There Another Kind?*

One of the fundamental reasons the work of “administration” may be seen as less than wholesome as a Christian calling is because of an aversion to considering the Church itself as an “institution.” If you go on the Internet and happen to Google the term “institutional church” or “the church as an institution,” you will find item after item stating that the Church is not and should never be an “institution.” One author, for example, claims that “the true church is a spiritual organism—a body, not an earthly organization or institution” and appeals to Romans 12:4-5 where Paul states that “we, who are many, are one body in Christ.” But in fact the apostle says nothing here for or against the Church as an institution. The same blogger goes on to say, “The bible warned us about the institutional church explaining that it would be a Christian’s departure from the faith.” Another states: “Words matter. It’s potentially dangerous and certainly misleading to refer to the church as an institution. Institutions are by definition an ‘it.’ The Bible never uses the word ‘church’ in this fashion.”

Yet another observer ratchets things up quite a bit and states unequivocally that “the institutional church is the collected group of Christians who *don’t* want a relationship

with Jesus Christ on his terms but on their terms. Therefore, they create and serve a false Christ which leads to bondage, a lack of power and a delusional mindset that believes he/she will inherit eternal life when in fact will be damned to hell if there's no repentance." Often enough, the Roman Catholic Church, with its full-blown hierarchical organization and numerous structures, is cited as a prime example of a church that has lost its way by being an institution.

Many of these negative comments about the Church as an "institution" come from Christians who are part of a very charismatic and fundamentalist form of Christianity. Such Christian groups are often described as having a "low ecclesiology"—not "low" in a negative sense but "low" in the sense of being more loosely organized and having minimal structures. But it is not only fundamentalist Christians who take a dim view of the Church as an institution. Some modern biblical scholars and historians tend to speak of early Christianity not as a "church" but as a "movement." Describing the spread of early Christianity as the "Jesus movement" rather than a "church" or "churches" also emphasizes its noninstitutional dimensions, seeing Christianity as an ideology or as a loose collection of diverse groups holding various viewpoints and practices rather than a community with set structures and a visible organization. Prevailing cultural forces may be at work here, too. North Americans, for example, are wary of institutions in general and glory in the freedom and autonomy of the individual. Many Christians today seek spiritual experience but don't want to be part of a religious institution: they are "spiritual but not religious," as the slogan goes.

## **The Church as an Institution**

What is this strong aversion to identifying the Church as an "institution"? We might start by defining what an "institution"

is. Webster’s Dictionary list several meanings for the term, but the first two on the list are most pertinent:

1. An organization, establishment, foundation, society, or the like, devoted to the promotion of a particular cause or program, especially one of a public, educational, or charitable character: “This college is the best institution of its kind.”
2. The building devoted to such a work.

The first meaning probably fits best with what is meant by the “institutional Church”—an organization or human community devoted to a particular “cause” or “program.” These are not biblical or traditional Christian terms for the Church, but they do point to a visible human community that is gathered for a particular purpose or, in Christian terms, a particular mission. Sometimes, as in the second definition, we use the term “church” to refer to a building that houses a specific Christian community, but in speaking of the “institutional” Church, we mean something more comprehensive than that—i.e., the entire organization and structure of the Church as a human community.

Of course, the Church is much more than its visible structures. There is what we could call the “charismatic” or “spiritual” dimension of the Church that forms its essence. We are referring here to the faith in Jesus Christ that is the foundation of the Church, to the love of God and neighbor that binds the Church together in community, and to the God-given and Spirit-driven mission of the Church to bring the Gospel message of love and reconciliation to the world. Pope Francis was quoted as saying the “church is not an institution but a relationship of love”—he was no doubt referring to this charismatic or spiritual dimension that gives the Church its

ultimate meaning and purpose. Classic Catholic theology referred to three major expressions of the Church: the “Church triumphant,” or those Christians who now enjoy God’s presence in heaven; the “Church suffering,” or those Christians in purgatory awaiting the cleansing of their sins before entering into paradise; and the “Church militant,” i.e., the Church on earth still struggling on the path to salvation. All three of these dimensions of the Church have a profound spiritual character—all center on faith in Christ and being animated by God’s Spirit of redemptive love.

But, at the same time, the institutional dimension of the “Church militant” is also essential. The Church on earth is composed of bodily human beings who, inspired by God’s grace, seek to form a community of faith. And that leads to the requirements of being an “institution.” One might ask Pope Francis himself about this as he works on his mandate from the Church to reform its administrative structures! Along with his refreshing emphasis on mercy and forgiveness and the beauty of the Gospel—that is, the Church as “a relationship of love”—Pope Francis has also spent a lot of his time setting up commissions, sorting out the Church’s finances, and designing structures and making personnel appointments to give the Church more integrity and make it more efficient. The Church cannot be reduced to its institutional structures, but it also cannot exist without them.

To be a community drawn together and sustained in love and to exist in history with constancy and effectiveness, the Church also needs to be “institutional.” Think of this in concrete, practical terms. If the Church is to gather as a community, then it will need physical space in which to do so—whether in someone’s home, as was the case with the early Church, or in a structure with enough space and appropriate

design set apart for this purpose—as soon developed in Christian history. And if there is such a space, then it might need heat in winter, ventilation in summer, electricity, fuel, maintenance, and money! And if the community grows—as one prays it will and as early Christianity did—then it must have someone to convene the community and gather it and prepare hospitality for its members and lock and unlock the doors and lead or at least facilitate this gathered community in some fashion. And so we have pastors, parish staffs, and various managers and leaders of diverse Church institutions. And if the community is spread out over a certain distance, then this community needs to communicate with its members and instruct them about their faith tradition and preach to them the Gospel message and read to them the Scriptures and teach them how to sing sacred songs—and here come the catechists, the preachers, and the musicians, and here, too, in our modern world, come sound systems and computers, telephones and newsletters, websites, and other forms of social media—and the people with the technical skill to make these things work properly!

And if the Church remains true to what Jesus has commanded his disciples concerning the poor, then the Church is going to have to organize resources to provide food for the poor and other types of social services—and here comes institutions and organizations like Catholic hospitals and clinics, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services and the Saint Vincent DePaul Society and the Knights of Columbus and their counterparts in most Protestant and other Christian denominations—each of them part of the “institutional” dimension of the Church. And if the Church is true to its worldwide mission confided to it by the Risen Christ, then it cannot be confined to a particular place or race or culture, but it must also be regional and international.

Therefore, the Church needs communication and even coordination among the churches (something that was already happening in the earliest Church as attested in the New Testament) and so one needs leadership at a regional and international level—and so we have popes and bishops and Church officials of various sorts and all of the communication structures and lines of authority and coordination and accumulated resources needed to maintain a worldwide community of faith. And, not least, to maintain all this and have things work together properly, the Church needs personnel—many will be volunteers, but many others will need to work full-time as “employees,” so they will need just salaries. And, because of the necessary costs of buildings and equipment and hospitality and personnel, there will be a need for collections and fund-raising throughout the Church from its most local expression to its regional and national and international dimensions.

The deepest and most fundamental theological rationale for the Church’s necessary institutional character is the incarnation itself. “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us!” This changes everything. Christian faith is not purely “spiritual”; it is also human and physical, rooted in the human body-person and in human history. Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God, was not a disembodied spirit but a flesh and blood human being—this is ground zero of Christian faith. Catholic tradition has used the lens of the incarnation to understand various aspects of its life. It applies the analogy of the incarnation to the nature of the Scriptures themselves: the Bible is truly God’s Word and therefore eminently spiritual, but that Word can only come to us in human terms, incarnate in the various Spirit-illuminated writings of the Bible. The biblical authors, we believe, were inspired by the Spirit,

but they remained human authors. Therefore, their writings are expressed in and through the language, literary forms, and cultural and scientific limitations of human beings. Unless we were to think of the Scriptures as magical writings that dropped down from the heavens—which we do not—we realize that the Word of God becomes present to us only through human beings. This same incarnational principle can be applied to the sacraments. The visible, physical forms of bread, wine, and oil and the human agency of bride and groom and confessor and anointer make God’s transforming grace visible and present and possible for us.

### **The Human Face of the Church**

But, of course, it would be foolish to “idealize” the institutional dimension of the Church. The human face of the Church at times has been and always has the potential to be a cause of scandal and disillusionment for sincere Christians. Certain forms and structures appropriate for the Church’s life in one generation can lose their cogency as time and cultures develop and change. The financial resources necessary for the Church to convene and carry out its mission can also become a source of avarice and greed. Church leaders and other personnel necessary for the life of the community can forget their purpose and exist more for themselves, creating a closed clerical or bureaucratic culture. A particular Christian community can close itself off and enjoy the comfort of a close-knit and prosperous religious ghetto while forgetting its mission to the world and ignoring the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

But these failings, which can be inventoried at great length throughout Christian history, do not cancel out the fact that the Church is and must be an “institution” if it is to have a

presence in human history and carry out its mission to the world. Many people today, as they have in the past, long for a purely spiritual Church purged of its human dimension, or at least a Church pulsating with full human integrity and Christian devotion—an ideal Church. The popular novelist Anne Rice, who a few years ago converted to Catholicism and later revoked her membership in the Church, stated her reasons for leaving the Church in this way: “For those who care, and I understand if you don’t: Today I quit being a Christian. I’m out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being ‘Christian’ or to being part of Christianity. It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For ten years, I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else.” What alienated Anne Rice was not “Christ” but Christians—more precisely, the Church in all its scandalous humanness.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor and theologian who was martyred by the Nazis at the end of World War II, spoke of this kind of “scandal” in his classic reflection on Christian community, *Life Together*. He and a group of pastors who had taken a prophetic stance against the Nazi regime (a stance which would ultimately cost Bonhoeffer his life) decided to form a clandestine seminary to prepare a new generation of clergy who would not be compromised by collaboration with the Nazi government. Bonhoeffer was asked to write the rule of life for this seminary, and that beautiful and powerful description of Christian life became his book: *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*.<sup>1</sup> In the chapter

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954).

on “community,” Bonhoeffer noted the following: “Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and to try to realize it. But God’s grace speedily shatters such dreams. . . . He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”<sup>2</sup> It is the human face of the community—its “institutional” character if you like—that challenges such “wish dreaming,” as Bonhoeffer calls it.

### **The Biblical Foundation for the Institutional Church**

A close reading of the New Testament demonstrates that such an “ideal,” purely spiritual and suprahuman Church never existed. It is a myth, or what Bonhoeffer would call a “wish dream” to think that the Church of Jesus Christ began as a purely spiritual entity and only degraded into an institution because of the human sinfulness of its members and the compromise of its original ideals. In fact, the Church was an institution from the moment of its birth. Those earnest bloggers who believe it is wrong to view the Church as an institution need to take a deeper look at the Bible, including the portrayal of the frailty and sins of the first few human beings Jesus chose as his community!

Consider Jesus himself and that small community gathered around him as portrayed in the gospels. At first glance, we

2. *Ibid.*, 27.

do see that Jesus was a “charismatic” figure, a mobile, itinerant preacher and healer—not an institutional figure such as a leader of a synagogue or a temple priest or official. Yet even within this small and mobile community of followers constituted by Jesus, there are hints of rudimentary institutional life. For example, if John’s description of Judas is to be accepted, then this errant disciple was the “treasurer” of this Jesus community, holding the community purse with funds to be used for the group’s own needs and to provide alms for the poor (see John 13:29). That there were funds available is suggested by Luke’s comment that some prominent women supported Jesus and his disciples out of their own resources (e.g., Joanna, the wife of King Herod’s steward Chuza, and “many others”; see Luke 8:3). And we should note that Jesus seems to have “instituted” at least a modest organizational structure among his community of disciples, with Peter designated as the leader and spokesperson (Matt 16:17-19, a role echoed in all four of the gospels). When faced with a hungry crowd who had no provisions on hand and were in an isolated spot, Jesus instructs his disciples to organize things and exercise some crowd control! (Mark 6:39-40, where Jesus tells his disciples to organize the crowd in groups of “hundreds and fifties.”)

But much more important than these few hints of some rudimentary institutional life among the band of Jesus’ disciples is the glaring fact that Jesus himself was a full participant in a longstanding religious institution, namely, Judaism. Jesus of Nazareth, after all, did not come to found a new religious institution or church; in a very real sense, the “church” or the *ekklesia*—the “assembly” of God from which the term “church” ultimately derives—was already there in the religion of which Jesus was a part, the covenant community of Israel instituted by God at Sinai. It would be more accurate to say that the earthly Jesus’ more immediate mission was to reform and re-

invigorate his religious community, his beloved Judaism, rather than to start something completely different. Only later, under the inspiration of the Risen Christ and the unfolding events of the post-Easter community and its mission, would—over time—the distinctive existence of the Christian Church vis à vis Judaism become apparent.

But during his lifetime, it is clear that Jesus participated readily in the “institutional” life of the Jewish community. The signs are everywhere in the gospels. As several stories of Jesus’ healing and teaching in all four gospels demonstrate, Jesus frequented the synagogues of his region. As Luke begins his description of the ministry of Jesus, he notes: “He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4:16). Mark’s Gospel, too, notes that Jesus’ first exorcism—at the very beginning of his ministry—took place in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1:21–28). Matthew summarizes Jesus’ ministry thus: “He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people” (Matt 4:23; a summary statement repeated in 9:35). In describing Jesus’ discourse on the Bread of Life, John’s Gospel notes, “These things he said while teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum” (John 6:59).

The synagogue we now know from the past several decades of archaeological exploration in the Holy Land was a vital Jewish institution that existed alongside the Jerusalem temple and was the source of local Jewish communities’ prayer life, education, and social interaction. Synagogues were administered by “managers” and attendants—presumably compensated by the synagogue community for their services. Rabbis, on the other hand, served as the source of religious teaching and preaching for the synagogue congregations. In Luke’s account of the healing of the woman “bent double” (Luke

13:10-17), Jesus has an encounter with an anxious synagogue “manager” (literally in Greek, the *archisynagogos* or “leader” of the synagogue) who, despite witnessing the cure of the woman (whom Jesus calls a “daughter of Abraham”), worries about the schedule: “There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath.” How many administrators over the centuries have also worried about the schedule! Luke also notes that in Nazareth a synagogue “attendant” (in Greek, the *huperetos*, that is, an “attendant” or “servant”) provides Jesus with the scroll from which this visiting preacher will read and preach (Luke 4:17, 20). Both of these passages suggest a level of institutional organization in the synagogue life of the time.

We also know that Jesus frequented the Jerusalem temple—clearly a major sacred institution for Judaism and one that would remain sacred for early Christianity until the tragic destruction of this massive shrine in AD 70, as we learn from the early chapters of Acts (see Acts 2:42-47). In Luke, Jesus’ family takes the infant Jesus to the temple for a blessing as prescribed by the Mosaic Law (Luke 2:22-24). Later, when Jesus and his family have come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the bar mitzvah of Jesus, he is separated from them because he loves being in the temple and being in conversation with some of the teachers and priests associated with the temple (Luke 2:41-50). All three Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus’ final visit to the temple as the climax of his earthly mission (see Mark 11; Matt 21; Luke 19). His prophetic action of purifying the temple triggers deadly opposition to Jesus and will lead ultimately to his death. John’s Gospel, on the other hand, recounts several visits of Jesus to the temple and his involvement in the liturgies associated with the temple.<sup>3</sup>

3. See John 2:13-25; 5:1; 7:10, 37; 10:22; 12:12; 13:1-2.

Later Christian literature, especially after the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70, would describe the body of the Risen Jesus as the “temple” where God dwelled (as in the case of John’s Gospel, see John 2:19-22) or see the Christian community itself as the “temple”—now a spiritual temple not made by hands and, like the Jerusalem temple before it, as the locus of God’s presence.<sup>4</sup>

The gospels are clear that Jesus revered the temple—this massive institution—otherwise he would not have been distraught at the abuses that detracted from its sacredness. Because the Jerusalem temple had been built by Herod the Great whose own religious integrity was very suspect, some devout Jews foresaw that in the messianic age to come God would destroy the building constructed under Herod and replace it with a new and purified temple.<sup>5</sup> But in any case, Jesus, like his fellow Jews, had great reverence for this “house of God” and went there to offer sacrifice, to pray, and to learn.

There is no question that the temple was an “institution” by any definition. For it to function, it needed elaborate systems: a water system for the constant animal sacrifices that took place there; a host of priests and attendants to ensure the smooth functioning of the temple liturgies and for crowd control; workers who cleaned and maintained the temple; money changers to convert Roman coins (with the head of the emperor inscribed on it) into specially minted coins suitable for a temple donation; shops to take care of those seeking to purchase doves and grains for sacrifice and to attend to the

4. See, for example, 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:4-5.

5. See Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, SBL Dissertation Series (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

needs of the thousands of pilgrims who came to the temple each year; *mikvot* or ritual baths needed so that the devout pilgrims who came could properly purify themselves before entering the sacred precincts of the temple; and so on.

And Jesus, too, participated—as virtually all male Jews did—in the financial upkeep of the temple and its priesthood. That ancient Judaism had an elaborate system of tithing in order to provide funds for the personnel and activities of the temple is well known. An intriguing story in Matthew’s Gospel portrays Jesus as instructing Peter to extract a coin from the mouth of a fish so that it could cover the half-shekel temple tax that each of them—and all male Jews—were expected to pay (Matt 17:24-27). And Jesus praises the poor widow who gives so generously to the upkeep of the temple (Mark 12:41-44).

Thus to claim that Jesus was fundamentally opposed to his community becoming an “institution” runs contrary to the actual evidence of the gospels. Jesus himself was a full and devout participant in the institutional life of his own Jewish religion. He strongly critiqued the false values and hypocrisy of many of the religious leaders and their practices, but that did not lead Jesus to avoid participating in synagogue life or to refuse to enter the temple. It also meant that Jesus, like his fellow Jews, depended on the people and structures and systems that enabled the temple and the synagogue to function. And, like his fellow Jews, Jesus contributed financially to the upkeep of this “institution.”

## **The Apostolic Church as Institution**

The biblical case for the Church as an institution is even more evident in looking closely at the life of the early Church

as depicted in the other writings of the New Testament. The apostolic Church and the post–New Testament Church would fight hard to maintain their fundamental belief in the humanity of Jesus. The Risen Christ present in the community through the power of the Spirit was also the earthly Jesus who had been crucified and who still bore those wounds as a sign of his love. In the remarkable and haunting resurrection appearance stories in the Gospels of Luke and John the Risen Christ appears to his disciples with the marks of the nails of crucifixion visible on his risen and transformed body (see Luke 24:39-40; John 20:20). In Matthew's Gospel, the Risen Christ promises to remain with his fragile and hesitant community until the end of time (Matt 28:16-20), fulfilling his name as "Emmanuel—God-With-Us" (see Matt 1:23). Paul, of course, would forge a designation for the Church that drew directly on the mystery of the incarnation. The Church was the "Body of Christ" and its many and diverse members were formed by the very human participants in the Church that Paul names (see 1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:3-8; also picked up in Eph 4:1-16; and Col 2:9-10).

The Church of the New Testament founded in the wake of the resurrection of Christ was from the start a very human church, no less so than the community of very human and very frail human beings whom Jesus had chosen as his first disciples. The gospels do not flinch from describing the confusion, failings, and outright sins of Jesus' disciples. One will betray him, the leader denies he even knows Jesus, and all of the disciples seem to abandon Jesus at his time of greatest need. The mission of the Church was to bring the presence and message of Jesus to the world, but it would do so through the human agency of the disciples and the structures—institutions—they built.

Those institutional structures and functions are found on almost every page of the New Testament. Because we learn about these structures through comments and asides in letters and other texts, we do not have the benefit of a full description of the Church's organization in the New Testament period. But we have plenty of evidence that the Church became organized from the outset—probably adapting structures they were used to in Judaism since the majority of the first generation of followers of Jesus was Jewish. We hear about “elders” (*presbyters*) who are not just older and hopefully wiser members of the community but also have an official role (1 Tim 5:17-22). We hear of “overseers” or “bishops” (the Greek term *episcopoi* is used for both; see 1 Tim 3:1-7), leaders whose original function seemed to be primarily managing the financial resources of the communities but later expanded to other related supervisory duties.<sup>6</sup> There are “widows” who also seem to have official duties (1 Tim 5:3-16). Luke tells us that the Jerusalem community selected “deacons” to take care of the distribution of goods to those in need so that others could devote themselves to the preaching ministry (Acts 6:1-7; also mentioned in 1 Tim 2:8-13). Paul has his trusted companions such as Timothy, Titus Sosthenes, Silas, and others who traveled with him and frequently carry his pastoral letters and other messages to the various communities the apostle had visited. The Jerusalem Church sent the highly respected and trustworthy Barnabas to investigate the situation in Antioch where some Jewish Christians had started baptizing Gentiles. Later the Church in Antioch would commission Paul and Barnabas to begin a mission to the rest of Asia Minor.

6. See Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

The early Church also had a fairly sophisticated level of organization that extended beyond a local community. Acts informs us that the community in Antioch wanted to send some financial support to the Christians in Judea who were suffering from a famine. After organizing a collection they sent the always trusted Barnabas, along with Paul, to deliver the contribution to the elders of Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). Peter, James, Paul, Barnabas, and other apostolic leaders arrange to gather in Jerusalem to tackle the issue of the mission to the Gentiles and its requirements (Acts 15)—the timing and communication and arrangements for such a meeting demand a fairly advanced level of organization. There is also evidence of other such formal meetings taking place in the early Church (e.g., Acts 20:17-28 where Paul arranges a meeting with the elders of Ephesus at Miletus as he is on his way by ship to Jerusalem).

These and other early Christian leaders were human beings and had to eat and pay their expenses—presumably with financial support supplied by their sponsoring Christian communities. Paul, in fact, emphasizes that leaders and missionaries like himself had a right to financial support from the community, even though he generally chose to support himself with his tent-making work (see 1 Cor 9:1-18). In his letter to the Philippians—a community Paul obviously favored—the apostle thanks the community for its monetary support of his mission (see Phil 4:15-18).<sup>7</sup> And, as we will discuss in more detail later, Paul would initiate a major fund-raising campaign among the Gentile churches for the sake of the

7. On this, see Julien M. Ogereau, "Paul's *κοινωνία* with the Philippians: *Societas* as a Missionary Funding Strategy," *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014): 360-78; and D. E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy* (New York: T & T Clark, 2013).

Church in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Jerusalem Christians “shared all things in common” and pooled their resources. The fateful story of Ananias and Sapphira who are struck dead because they deceived the apostles about their finances indicates how serious this “institutional” aspect of the early Church was taken!<sup>9</sup>

We also know that the early Church selected places in which to meet. Paul refers to various groups of Christians at Corinth who gather in specific homes, probably villas capable of holding a fairly sizeable group. Paul writes to his friend Philemon and “to the church that gathers in your house” (Phlm 2). Clearly in these homes where the community gathered on a regular basis, the “hosts” not only provided space and hospitality but also exercised a certain leadership—enough to have some of the Christians identify with them (see 1 Cor 1:10-17). As time went on and the communities grew, these original house churches would give way to larger buildings specifically designated for Christian gatherings and worship.

There was also considerable communication among the various local Christian communities—not just casual friendly relations but apostolic communications from sets of Christian leaders to their fellow Christians. Obviously this is the case with Paul who sends letters to his various churches, a practice continuing beyond the lifetime of Paul and into the life of the post-New Testament apostolic Church as indicated in the *Didache* and the Letters of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp that extend into the second century. The author of the First Letter of Peter, for example, foresees his message being delivered to a series of Christian communities in north and central Asia Minor (i.e., in the regions of “Pontus, Galatia,

8. See below, pp. 114–15, 125–30.

9. See Acts 5:1-11.

Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"—all regions in present-day Turkey). Although we know less about the specific details of how they were circulated, the gospels, too, must have quickly spread throughout the Christian world of the first century. Both Matthew and Luke were acquainted with the Gospel of Mark and there is also some level of contact or at least influence between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John.

In any case, by the end of the first century the gospels and the Pauline letters and most of the other New Testament writings were known and accepted as sacred writings. This implies a remarkable network of organization and communication on the part of the early Church. It also requires financial organization, with support needed to compose and preserve copies of scrolls and to provide for the livelihood of at least some Christians who were entrusted with circulating—and in some instances interpreting—such texts. Much of their support would come from the hospitality of the communities who received these messengers, but this local hospitality would not be available everywhere and no doubt some direct financial support must have been supplied to the early Christian missionaries and teachers who circulated on land and sea throughout the Mediterranean world.<sup>10</sup>

## A Fully Human Church

As is the case today, these institutional structures and the personnel who administered them—this necessary human

10. The *Didache*, a Christian text that may date to the end of the first century, advises the communities to offer hospitality to itinerant prophets and teachers but to be wary of those who are frauds or take advantage of such hospitality. On this see Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), esp. pp. 105–28.

face of the Church—would be the cause of stress, failure, and scandal from the very beginning of the Church’s existence. Very often finances and other resources became a source of conflict. This was the case with the Jerusalem Church, as is noted in the Acts of the Apostles (6:1-7); apparently the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians were complaining about the Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians because the widows of the Greek speakers were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. The leadership had to step in and appoint assistants who would take care of the problem. As noted above, John’s Gospel accuses Judas of pilfering from the common purse he had been entrusted with (see John 12:4-6). The sharp words of the Johannine letters about the “deceivers” seem to warn the community addressed to be careful about offering hospitality and support to these interlopers (see 2 John 8-10). Paul makes a sharp defense of his and Barnabas’s rights to receive support from the Corinthian community—apparently in response to criticism he had received from some members of the community (see 1 Cor 9:1-18).

There were also disputes and clashes in the early Church, just as there have been through the centuries. Paul reports confronting Peter “to his face” when the leader of the apostles had withdrawn from table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch, apparently because Peter had been criticized by representatives of James and the Jerusalem Church (Gal 2:11-14). Paul and Barnabas, the first missionary team in the early Church, decide to break up when Paul opposes having John Mark accompany them because he had apparently abandoned them at Pamphylia during their first missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). Paul wrestles with his Corinthian Christians on a number of disputed points, including the division of the community into factions (1 Cor 1:10-11). Paul also urges Euodia and Syn-

tyche, apparently two prominent women in the community of Philippi, to reconcile with each other and asks others in the community to be mediators (Phil 4:2-3). The letters of John, particularly the second and third letters, reveal a community engulfed in bitter controversies concerning rival factions and false teachers. James confronts his community about showing partiality during their assembly to the rich while embarrassing the poor (Jas 2:1-4). The author of 2 Peter warns that there are some statements in Paul's letters "hard to understand" which can lead the ignorant and unstable astray (2 Pet 3:14-16). And strong complaints about false teachers leading the community astray are found throughout the New Testament, especially in the Pastoral Epistles (e.g., 2 Tim 2:16-18, which names Hymenaeus and Philetus as false teachers whose corrupt influence "will spread like gangrene"! ). As we will point out later, there is a substantial amount of exhortation in the New Testament letters about avoiding recriminating and provocative speech and the need for community members to address each other with respect and care—a sure sign that disputes were not uncommon in the early Church!<sup>11</sup> No wonder that in Jesus' discourse on life in the community of disciples, the Gospel of Matthew provides a procedure for handling conflict as well as an urgent call for limitless forgiveness (see Matt 18:15-20).

## **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that from the very outset the Church of Jesus Christ, along with its vibrant faith and dynamic missionary spirit, was also a very human Church—human in its need to organize and structure its life together in order

11. See below, pp. 82–93.

to exist within history and human in that it was prone to problems and failures. As we have noted in the examples cited in this chapter, there are clear signs of the Church's essential "institutional" nature from the first moment of its existence, including the experience of Jesus himself and his small community of disciples embedded within their Jewish context. Obviously the often rudimentary structures of the early Church would develop and change as the Church moved out further into the Mediterranean world and grew in size and complexity. Obviously, too, a community of believers that existed as a small and fragile minority within an often hostile Roman world would undergo significant change when in the post-Constantinian period of the fourth century and beyond, it would receive imperial endorsement. But no matter what these historical developments entailed, it is a myth to describe the change as that of an original, purely spiritual, charismatic, and noninstitutional Church degrading into an institutional Church essentially alien in form and spirit from the Church Jesus intended.

A Church built on faith in the incarnate Jesus and one extending its life out into history would by necessity be an institutional Church, with strengths and weaknesses not unlike those of the institutional Church today. If I have learned anything from spending many years in administration, it is that institutions have a life of their own! An institution is formed of a network of people and structures that cannot be ignored. If the Church has an institutional dimension, then it also needs administrators of various sorts to enable the Church to continue its journey through history. It is to the various facets of administration within the context of a community of faith and their foundation in the Gospel that we now turn.