

Toward a Self-Shepherding People: Evolving Faith Communities through the lens of the Epistemological Theories of Bernard Lonergan and Robert Kegan

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Abstract: This paper traces the cognitive growth of one community over a ten year period as it gathered over the issues of parish restructuring and the priest sexual abuse. The documents this community produced and the actions it took are examined for their epistemological richness through the theories of Bernard Lonergan and Robert Kegan. Lonergan's notion of the realms of meaning and Kegan's subject-object theory, though both primarily or exclusively concern individuals, have significant implications for describing and analyzing community's cognitive growth over time. Like individuals, faith communities are "held" in various ways as they develop and change. That is, they are supported and challenged in particular ways through their ecclesial cultures, patterns of relationships, and leadership structures.. Faith communities are held, but they also hold onto certain capacities that they are able to decide about within the cultures and structures that hold them. What is an epistemological community? How does one evaluate the various horizontal orders of consciousness and their influence on a group's functioning? This paper examines these questions with an eye toward better understanding the development of intentional groups and improving the manner in which they are led.

The story of the two Catholic parishes of this study is the story of communities in transition mediated through various forms of dialogue that reveals underlying and evolving structures of meaning making. The transition is not a result of demographic shifts, or a significant loss or increase in population; neither is it because of aging facilities needing costly repairs or because of an unmanageable debt burden. The dramatic changes these faith communities face, and have been facing for over ten years, is the perceived need by bishops and diocesan leaders to reconfigure parishes in response to the priest shortage. Rather than multiplying indefinitely the parishes priests are asked to pastor, many dioceses are looking to faith communities to make changes including clustering, merging or closing parishes. These changes are usually occasions of anxiety, frustration, and feelings of loss in the aftermath of letting go the sacred spaces that contain so much of one's sacramental history. They often come with significant financial liability as well from several hundred thousand dollars to millions of dollars¹ paid for not by dioceses, but by parishioners willing to make the additional sacrifice in order to continue celebrating weekend liturgies, and in the belief that their loyalty in doing so will exempt them from future consolidations. The crisis brought on by a declining number of priests in a growing Catholic population, together with the crisis of leadership in the aftermath of the priest sexual abuse scandal has brought bishops and lay parishioners into new and unexpected forms of dialogue. Where most conversations between bishops and laity are mediated through pastors of parishes or through the media itself, these twin

¹ As is the case in which several parishes are suppressed in favor of building one new church, or where one or two are closed and a third is renovated to accommodate the members from the suppressed parishes. For an example of the former see, Marian A. O'Brien, *Building Something Beautiful for God: The Story of One Catholic Community's Consolidation* (Penmor Lithographers, 2002).

issues have broken down in places the ecclesiastical divide that separates the laity from bishops. The ensuing dialogue that concerns the communities of this study went far beyond the conversation sanctioned by the official initiatives that brought parishes and diocese together. This paper looks at the “going beyond” in terms of the cognitive development of one two-parish community as it engaged in dialogue with the diocese over a ten year period. It is a story of transition, dialogue and epistemology.

From 1994-2004 many lay parishioners from the two parishes gathered at the behest of diocesan or parish leaders, or gathered on their own initiative.² In this period four general patterns can be observed in the hierarchy’s accessing of lay participation in parish restructuring initiatives: the hierarchy reduced the range of issues that could be raised; it dramatically reduced the number of lay participants invited to participate; it removed lay participants further and further from their parish context; and became less democratic over time by increasingly controlling who could participate.³ But patterns also emerged in the lay participants, in the increasing range and complexity of what they were able, as a group, to take a perspective on; in the growing sophistication in their

² 1) These include the 1994 diocesan initiative in which 8,500 Catholics gathered voluntarily (as opposed to being appointed by pastors) over two or three weeks in parishes to discuss and select among various parish models; 2) the 2001 diocesan initiative in which roughly 300 lay parishioners and clergy gathered in deaneries (2 or 3 lay persons per parish appointed by pastors) to discuss a diocesan proposal for consolidating and closing parishes in response to the priest shortage (the pastor gathered ten parishioners in two parish meetings, which were followed by two deanery gatherings); 3) the 2002 parish Listening Sessions begun by lay parishioners with the support of the pastor in response to the priest sexual abuse (two large meetings followed by many “drafting committee” meetings); 4) the 2003 diocesan initiative to craft a five year vision for the diocese in which pastors, in light of the continual shrinkage in the number of priests, were invited to send to the diocese their own vision for the diocese (the pastor of the parishes gathered a group of about 15 parishioners for four ad hoc meetings to co-construct a vision for the diocese); 5) and the 2004 diocesan initiative in which diocesan leaders formulated a “rationale” for dealing with the priest shortage under the rubrics of a new evangelization.

³ 1) The range of discussible topics went from, a) ordination policy, lay administration of parishes and models of parish restructuring in 1994, to b) examining a restructuring proposal to consolidate, close and sell many parishes for the stated purpose of “staffing Sunday liturgies” in 2001, to c) formulating a plan to implement a prior decision to reconfigure parishes in 2004. 2) The reduction in the number of lay participants in diocesan parish restructuring initiatives over time was from 8,500 (1994), to 300 (2001), to zero (2003), and then 12 (2004). 3) On the practice removing lay participants further from their parishes over time: in 1994 participants meet in parishes, then deaneries (2001), and then the diocese (2004). 4) On the practice of being less democratic over time, parishioners were self-selecting in 1994, appointed by pastor in 2001 and appointed by the bishop in 2004. Explaining these patterns as a logical movement of a complex community as it gained the momentum it needed to make critical decisions would require that both the diocese and parishes understood the key events as 1) explicitly connected to each other, 2) as cumulative in that one event built on and carried forward the learning from the previous, and 3) as progressive in that they all represented a movement toward a commonly understood goal. However, it was the perception of the lay participants in my qualitative study, “Rhetoric, Reality and Religious Education”, (portions of which I presented in a colloquium at APPRRE, 2005 in Toronto), that none of the events were connected since new initiatives did not reference previous initiatives; and that each event represented “a starting over”, a belief the diocese itself reinforced. For example, in 1994 the bishop in his “Summary Report” states that it is merely a “preliminary” report and is a “kind of first-step in our continuing discussion of this problem [priest shortage].” But after the enormous work done by parishioners, priests and hierarchs in 1994, the same bishop seven years later in a letter initiating the 2001 process states, “Once again I repeat, these proposals are very preliminary, a starting point.” Similarly, in the 2003 and 2004 initiatives none of the previous initiatives are named; and while “previous learning” is mentioned, the nature of the learning, and by whom, is left unsaid.

understanding of what they were responsible to and for; and in the movement from being over-determined by parish and diocesan leaders to becoming as a group more self-determined, or what I am calling, self-shepherding.

One lens through which I have analyzed the data is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is a helpful frame through which to examine power relations at work in dialogue and how language is used to enact and naturalize ideology.⁴ CDA looks at how discourse not only points to, but also constructs the social context and is therefore “constitutive, dialectical and dialogic.”⁵ It is a helpful theory and method for surfacing taken for granted ideologies in both diocesan leaders’ and lay parishioners’ use of language. It does not, however, provide measures for analyzing the *cognitive complexity* of that language and its evolution over time. The question of the cognitive development of a community is an epistemological question that is perhaps more fundamental than questions of power. The lay participants in the various parish-diocese dialogues not only held perspectives on the issues at hand, took responsibility and engaged leaders, but these also *changed* – very slowly – but always in the direction of greater complexity. What I propose here is to lay a foundation for the analysis of group epistemologies by looking at and extending Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental framework and Bernard Lonergan’s realms of meaning. The questions of what meaning making structures a particular gathering of lay parishioners is operating out of and what complexity of curriculum the various leaders of that community are deploying might bring clarity to the lay-hierarchy problematic in the American Catholic Church. Before addressing these questions we first need to take a closer look at the theories of Kegan and Lonergan.

In Kegan’s neo-Piagetian epistemology – subject-object theory – people are active participants in their own development, or meaning-making. This constructive-developmental approach understands that individuals *construct* meaning and *evolve* through various eras or adaptive balances through which they defend, then surrender, then reconstruct new centers of meaning. This growth process involves struggles of differentiation – emergence from embeddedness – which creates out of the former “subject” a new “object”.⁶ In subject-object theory, “‘subject’ refers to the basic principle of organization; ‘object’ refers to that which gets organized”⁷ In other words,

⁴ See, Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: the Critical Study of Language* (New York: Longman, 1995); *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992); James Gee, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourse* (New York: Falmer Press, 1990); Rebecca Rodgers, *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004). See also, Basil Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

⁵ Rogers, 5.

⁶ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 31. In other words, what we hold as object, we can decide about. Intimately connected to the growth process, Kegan argues, are two key yearnings we possess: the yearning to be included, accepted, held (“attention-recruiting”); and the yearning to be independent, autonomous, distinct and individual (“object-grasping”). All of this, however, must be understood in the context of the psychosocial environment in which we find ourselves or, what Kegan calls, the *holding environment*, or culture of embeddedness which holds the individual. There is never just an individual, says Kegan; there is always a psychosocial holding environment (object-relations theory) which consists of three functions: *confirmation* (holding on: encouraging, giving proper tasks and feedback), *contradiction* (letting go: appropriately opposing or resisting) and *continuity* (remaining in place: sticking around, being there when you are needed).

⁷ Lisa Lahey, Emily Souvaine, Robert Kegan, Robert Goodman, and Sally Felix, *A Guide to the Subject-Object Interview: Its Administration and Analysis* (Cambridge: Subject-Object Research Group, 1988), 13.

what one holds as object one can reflect upon and decide about, but what one is subject to, since it is the means by which one reflects and decides, cannot become an object of reflection.

For Kegan, metaphors of motion, movement and dance, are central to understanding the development of persons from one order of complexity to another. There are five orders of consciousness from infancy to late adulthood which he variously names as adaptive balances, truces or orders of consciousness. Since our concern is with adults, we will treat only second, third and fourth orders of consciousness, and ignore fifth since it is so rare. Kegan and his colleagues have demonstrated that at any given time over half to two-thirds of adults in the U. S. are less than fourth order consciousness, and this percentage is based on a population that is “whiter, wealthier, and better educated than the general population”⁸ In one composite study that is more representative of the general population over one third of adults were second order, over two fifths are third order and one fifth are fourth order.⁹

Second order consciousness is embedded in, or subject to needs, interests, wishes and goals; understands others as “suppliers” to the self; and enters relationships on behalf of its own interests. The second order, or “Imperial” self can take the point of view of another person, but not hold her own point of view and the other’s simultaneously and internally. In the third order self, one can hold one’s own and another’s point of view together; one can take the point of view of the other taking one’s own point of view – holding both points of view simultaneously and internally.¹⁰ This becomes the basis for a new “interpersonal” balance whereby individuals enter into shared realities with others; the other is now constructed in a relationship “not as a separate individual with her own values and beliefs but as part of a shared reality”¹¹ Values and standards are internalized but have their authority in sources other than the self, such as parents, mentors, peers, or other institutions and their leaders. The third order self is embedded in the psychological surround, according to Kegan, but holds needs, interests and point of view as object.

In the movement from third to fourth order, the other-authoring, interpersonal surround that once held the person (which made one *subject* to expectations and authorities outside the person) begins to move from subject to object – to that which the self holds and can decide about. The self, now disembedded from the psychological surround, and having gained some distance from the interpersonal realm, now can decide about (hold as object) relationships – one *has* relationships rather than *being had* by them, to name one fourth order capacity. The extraordinary movement from one order of consciousness to another requires the right combination of support and challenge, and the building of “consciousness bridges” that secure both ends of the mental divide. These three orders of consciousness, second, third and fourth, have remarkable resonances with Bernard Lonergan’s theological method.

⁸ Robert Kegan, *In Over our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 191.

⁹ Kegan, *In Over our Heads*, 195-196. The exact percentages second order, 36%; third order, 43%, fourth order, 21% (zero at fifth order).

¹⁰ Lahey, *Guide*, 49-50.

¹¹ Lahey, *Guide*, 327.

Both Lonergan and Kegan acknowledge their debt to Jean Piaget.¹² It is this Piagetian influence in Lonergan that comes through in his notion of the realms of meaning.¹³ It should be noted that Lonergan's transcendental activities and corresponding imperatives (*experience* – be attentive; *understanding* – be intelligent; *judgment* – be reasonable; *decision* – be responsible) have correspondences with development theory, but with limited effect.¹⁴ The realms of meaning, however, consisting of *common sense, theory, and interiority* are explicitly developmental since they represent an evolutive transformation or developmental movement from undifferentiated to differentiated consciousness. The operations of consciousness – experience, understanding, judgment and decision – operate within each of the realms of meaning (which makes it impossible to ground a developmental theory in the transcendentals alone). The realms of meaning are successive and represent a qualitative, meta-growth of a person toward what Lonergan calls self-appropriation. Each realm is a qualitative growth from the previous realm which neither destroys nor simply advances,

¹² Lonergan in *Method*, 27-29; Kegan throughout *Evolving Self*, but especially in chapter one, "The Unrecognized Genius of Jean Piaget" 25-45. There is a dissertation which attempts to connect the works of Lonergan and Kegan. See, Robert Berchmans, *A Study of Lonergan's Self-Transcending Subject and Kegan's Evolving Self* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001). However, the author does not make the connection between Lonergan's realms of meaning and Kegan's orders of consciousness. Rather, he sees the point of contact to be the self-transcending/meaning-making self, and the similarity between Lonergan's "levels of consciousness" (the four transcendentals) and Kegan's orders of consciousness. The author may have read Kegan through the lens of Lonergan and, accordingly, confused the subject-object distinction in Kegan's work. For example, he reports that Kegan's system "studies personality precisely in the process and stages of development of the person in the context of the interaction between the subject (organism) and the object (environment)" (64, author's parentheses); "In fact, what the subject had considered to be an object, something extraneous has become the subject, a part of one's identity" (103); and "In each stage of Kegan's theory, the self accommodates and assimilates into the self what was regarded as the objective pole in the previous stage" (110). In Kegan's constructive-developmental psychology, however, "subject" is not interchangeable with "person". It is that which holds the self, that in which the self is embedded. In the evolution of the individual, the self slowly dis-embeds from what was *subject* which then becomes held as *object*; what was "behind" the self, as it were, driving the operations in one "stage" (subject) moves "in front" of the self, and is able to be noticed, held, acted upon in the next "stage" (it becomes object). Therefore, in third order consciousness one is *subject to* the interpersonal, psychological surround, etc, but *holds as object* needs and preferences (the *subject* of second order, which holds impulses as object). In the fourth order, self-authored self, the psychological surround moves from that which holds the self to that which the self holds as object. Also, by equating "object" with "environment," Berchmans may have confused what Kegan means by internalization. That is, third order internalizes authority, for example, which means that it now matters to the individual who, nevertheless cannot take a perspective on it since he is subject to it. Internalization is a movement to subject, not object.

¹³ It must be pointed out, that Lonergan himself did not clearly develop the idea of the realms of meaning. These are connected to his notion from the "stages of meaning" that he sees as having occurred in the West and in the experience of the early Church, but also traces in the development of consciousness within an individual "subject." He traces this both in *Method*, 85-99. There is a fourth, transcendental realm: falling in love with God, which I do not develop here.

¹⁴ For example, "understanding," in which consciousness spontaneously seeks intelligibility in the data of experience, is at least remotely similar to the capacities described by Kegan's third order mind. In its search for patterns in the data of experience, understanding asks questions of wonder such as "who, what, where, how, when and why?" which corresponds to the "cross-categorical" capacity for abstraction: the mind is now capable not only of explanation, but definition. "Judgment," which asks a qualitatively different order of question – a question for reflection and affirmation such as "is it so? is it true?" – is the point at which critical reflection is not only possible, but required, and has resonances with Kegan's fourth order, self authored consciousness.

but transforms by way of sublation that which came before.¹⁵ Fundamental conflict, or dialectical opposition exposes the different delimiting horizons through which people perceive the world. These are not simply differences in ideas, but of persons operating within fundamentally different horizons. Horizons are structures of knowledge and are “the condition and the limitation of further development... they are also the boundaries that limit our capacities for assimilating more than we already have attained”¹⁶ Dialectic involves “an objectification of subjectivity,”¹⁷ – a statement remarkably close to Kegan’s subject-object theory – through which horizons are *revealed* in conflict but only *changed* through intellectual, moral and religious conversion, each of which are modalities tending toward self-transcendence.¹⁸

When asking what horizons are for Lonergan one might too quickly think, intellectual, moral and religious conversion. They are not the same thing as conversion, however. Rather, a horizon is an evolutive stage one achieves and is closely linked to the realms of meaning. Conflicts within, between and among horizons reveal a need for a qualitative transformation; they reveal the need for intellectual, moral and/or religious conversion. They are Lonergan’s attempt to explain not simply the particular “viewpoint” or “world view” of a person, but to explain a way of making meaning. Horizons, then, are *epistemologies*, they are stages of meaning-making. He states that horizons “are related as successive stages in some process of development. Each later stage presupposes earlier stages, partly to include them and partly to transform them.”¹⁹ These horizontal stages are not simply the movement from intellectual to moral to religious conversion, but *qualitatively* different and more complex ways of making meaning. In conversion, then, one experiences the *changing* of one’s horizon; conversions are not “stages” but a series of experiences through which horizontal meaning-making structures are transformed toward self-appropriation and self-transcendence. It is here that we have a remarkably close tie to Kegan’s system with *common sense* closely coinciding with second order consciousness, *theory* (or science) with third order, and *interiority* (self-appropriation) with Kegan’s fourth order.²⁰ Interiority for Lonergan not only grounds one in a proper theory of knowledge, it enables one to give an account of his/her own operations of consciousness, thus enabling one to

¹⁵ Kegan would say it “transcends and includes.”

¹⁶ *Method*, 237.

¹⁷ *Method*, 253. Dialectic is Lonergan’s 4th functional specialty, revealing the need for interiority and conversion, see *Method*, 235-266. The 5th functional specialty, foundations, “objectifies conversion” (144), meaning that in foundations, one is *standing on, operating out of*, or in Kegan’s language, *holding* one’s own conversion.

¹⁸ *Method*, 238-244. One is tempted to see the three conversions themselves as “successive stages” and, therefore, as what we ought to link with the “realms of meaning”. There is, however, no necessary chronological priority of one mode of conversion over another. See “Bernard Lonergan Responds,” in *Foundations of Theology*, Patrick McShane, ed. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971) in which he states, “In order of exposition I would prefer to explain first the intellectual, then moral, then religious conversion... In order of occurrence I would expect religious commonly but not necessarily to precede moral and both religious and moral to precede intellectual” (240-241).

¹⁹ *Method*, 236.

²⁰ In Kegan’s system, no one is simply “third order” or “fourth order” but is moving/dancing along a slowly evolving journey of increasing complexity and capacity. The “Subject-Object Interview”, for example, makes *six* distinctions or gradations between any *two* orders of consciousness. See Kegan, 1994, note 25, p. 370.

take responsibility resulting from the heightening of consciousness that is for Lonergan self-appropriation, or the “objectification of the subject”.²¹

Though there are overlaps and challenges in any comparison between the systems of these two theorists, somewhat expected since one theorizes out of a theological method and the other out of constructive-developmental psychology, there are remarkable points of contact. The point of this paper, however, is not only to bring Lonergan and Kegan into conversation, but to see if their theories can be extended beyond individuals (in the case of Kegan) to include groups, but ones considerably smaller than “the West” (in the case of Lonergan)²².

I argue here that epistemologies can and do emerge and operate within groups. Two things at least have to be accounted for in extending these theories to local communities or to groups within a community. First, what is a “group” and how can it be understood as an epistemological gathering or a meaning-making community? Second, what are the data sources, or artifacts of the various events, and how do researchers assess their epistemological richness? On the first point, the epistemological community I am interested in here is a community individual meaning makers²³ gathered and authorized with a specific mandate, working on behalf of a particular constituency, collaborating toward a common set of goals, and consisting of two, or more likely three, horizons or orders of consciousness.²⁴ A Bible study, while producing knowledge within a learning community, does not represent the congregation, or speak or act on its behalf. As a group it is therefore less likely to demonstrate a complex epistemological structure than, say, a parish Pastoral Council or board of directors which is charged with particular responsibilities to do something with the knowledge it produces on behalf of the community. It is in the intersection of the *knowing* and *doing* of a group, how it understands, and what it does with what it understands, that is of interest here. If individuals operate within one realm of meaning or order of consciousness²⁵ communities of adults are likely made up of a variety of orders of consciousness – second, third and fourth. Thus, one should expect, and look for, a variety of epistemological expressions in a document that is truly a group production.²⁶

²¹ *Method*, 262, another subject-object statement. Cast in Kegan’s language, through the achievement of “interiority”, one is no longer subject to, but holds as object, key capacities of the self and can, accordingly, look at, examine, decide about them rather than be embedded in them.

²² Lonergan saw the realms of common sense, theory and interiority work themselves out in the development in the Western tradition in three “stages of meaning” as science became autonomous and philosophy turned its attention toward conscious intentionality.

²³ A community for the purposes of this paper is always a gathering of individuals operating out of different orders of consciousness. A “group mind” or “group consciousness” is always plural and always ambiguous.

²⁴ A group that is or becomes an epistemological community is likely to exist over time, have some means of visioning, some mode of “remembering”, a mechanism of boundary management and at least a minimal continuity of membership.

²⁵ Actually in Kegan’s system one is rarely just “3” or “4” since subject-object theory makes five distinctions within one order of consciousness and one moves slowly but steadily through them. 3, 3(4), 3/4, 4/3, 4(3) are the five distinctions for *third* order. 3 simply means no evidence of 2 or 4; 3(4) means that one is 3, but fourth order is beginning to make an appearance; 3/4 and 4/3 means both are strong but in the first, 3 is dominant and in the second, 4 is dominant; 4(3) means four is strong but must defend against the appearance of 3 which is still present.

²⁶ For the purposes of this study I am calling a document a “group document” if it was publicly crafted throughout its production. Since all but one of the groups employed drafting committees, a “publicly

On the second point, the data sources I used in searching for epistemological structures are the documents produced by the groups at each event; interviews of participants who participated in at least three of five of the events from 1994-2004; emails from participants to each other and to church authorities as they drafted various documents; and researcher observations. Also of interest are the documents that called and authorized the various gatherings as a way of assessing the expectations of the community leaders as well as participants' responses to these expectations.

One way to examine possible epistemological structure is to look at how a group puts together a particular experience. For example, after the 1994 restructuring initiative, the two parishes of this study, formerly separate parishes each with its own pastor, finance and pastoral councils, were instructed to merge by the bishop who, in 1996 installed one priest for both communities. The community's response to the merger was framed by study participants²⁷ as doing what they believed was necessary to preserve their parishes against a hierarchy with the power to close them. This entailed holding the tension between cooperating with a merger while at the same time attempting to preserve each community's distinct identity. As they struggled in the following five years to bring the two communities together in a new kind of unity – an effort that led to a net increase in the number of ministerial and missionary activities the parishes engaged in – they began to believe that their experience of merging was unusual, even exemplary, and earned them the right to ongoing perdurance. The traumatic feelings of loss and confusion when it was discovered in the 2001 initiative that the smaller of the communities was on a list of parishes proposed to be closed and sold led participants, among other things, to express their perception that they had done all the right things to stave off this eventuality in an era of priest shortages, and that the hierarchy was somehow “not playing by the rules” when it proposed to close and sell the smaller parish. Using a distinction Kegan makes, the data is suggestive of content (language that does not disclose epistemological structure) as well as possible structure (language that demonstrates the use of an epistemology, even as it remains ambiguous).

This response might be 2ish if the feelings expressed were derived from a fear of what the hierarchy could do to them if they didn't cooperate in the merger (i.e., refuse to provide them priests in the future, or shut them down); or 2ish if their cooperation derived from an understanding of an implied bargain, that doing so would serve their interest in staying open and, having done so, they would thereupon get what they wanted from a hierarchy that existed to meet their needs. This is suggestive of a group organized around second order capacities (even as its members function individually at second, third and fourth orders). That is, organized around its own needs and interests, unable as a group to subordinate these on behalf of their relationship to the larger Catholic community.

The response is 3ish if the feelings about parish viability and sustainability were derived from other authority figures such as the pastor; if their playing by the rules was

crafted” document had to a) include only content discussed in the group, and b) be returned to the group for final redaction and approval. Most of the documents consisted of collections of quotes lifted from easel boards on which facilitators had recorded participants' comments during sessions. The quotes appeared in the documents often with very little editing.

²⁷ Participants who were interviewed in 2004 and 2005. Therefore, their “frame” is retroactive and not necessarily reflective of their order of consciousness back in 1994 or 2001.

out of a felt expectation that it would win hierarchical approval; if their offense-taking was derived from a sense of loss at the perceived breach of an implied relationship between the parish and diocese; and, moreover, if the group was able to hold its own point of view simultaneously with the point of view of the hierarchy. This, then is suggestive of a group organized around third order capacities. That is, needs and interests no longer rule, but the group is embedded in the approval and expectations of authority inside and outside the group such as the pastor, bishop or chancery officials.

The response is 4ish if the feelings of concern over the proposal to close or sell the smaller of the parishes were derived from a sense of violation of how they had come to see themselves as a community; a sense of violation of who they had become in the five years post-merger (1996-2001); and if their participation and collaboration was understood by them as co-creating with the hierarchy a new and viable community that assumed a self-determining or governing role for themselves – one violated by the hierarchy's unilateral proposal in 2001 – then it is suggestive of a group functioning at or near fourth order. Clearly some of the participants in the study understood the conflict from a fourth order balance at the time of the interviews in 2004 and 2005, even if the 2001 group was not likely functioning at fourth order.

In fact, all three epistemologies are evident in the data. But how does one determine whether or not there is a dominant epistemology; and how does one determine the relative strength or weakness of the other two? One critical methodological decision I have made in measuring cognitive structures is to look at linguistic and non-linguistic ways a group enacts epistemologies, which represents a departure from subject-object theory. These include describing and analyzing the circumstances surrounding the origins and suspension of the groups. One may balk at this since, with individuals, the *doing* can be assessed in the *saying*, and there are already sophisticated methods for interpreting orders of consciousness (the subject-object interview, for example). That is, one demonstrates one's cognitive capacity in language; one is *doing* one's order of consciousness linguistically. Therefore, why add another layer of doing for groups? The short answer is that groups do things not always expressed in language. For example, by asking, "what satisfied the groups/ to what did they return or into what did they transform?" one discovers a group enacting meaning-making structures linguistically and non-linguistically.

All of the groups gathered and organized around some action on the part of the hierarchy; action that generated strong negative responses from parishioners which, in turn, morphed into documents articulating the knowledge produced through the group process. And yet, except for the 2004 gathering, groups generally returned to status quo at the close of each initiative as measured by the fact that they did not protest their suspension nor demand new processes or mechanisms to preserve or implement what they had learned. The lay quiescence after such events represents a non-verbal communication, and suggests a pervasive trust in or loyalty toward pastors and bishops, or a return to trust when overtures, even slight overtures, were made by the hierarchy in response to parishioner demands. I infer from this a dominant third order base in the groups. While there were likely members who were second and fourth order, and exerted influence on the group (see below), the overwhelming logic, or epistemology of the group was third order which can be expressed in a balancing feedback loop: Lay parishioner (LP) trust > hierarchy (H) action > LP lose trust > LP challenge H > H

responds > LP return to trust. This feedback loop operated as long as both parishes remained open, or until the group began to construct and act on its own vision of church (then a reinforcing feedback loop emerged in which the group resisted suspension). Prior to 2003, loyalty/trust is the general ground or structure of the group's knowing. A value-generator working in the group that self-consciously relativizes loyalty to a vision of parish/church/laity is not weighty enough to draw the group into its orbit. There is no effective visioning capacity that not only preserves inter-ecclesial relationships but does so on behalf of a claimed identity of who they are as a community, a capacity that regulates and subordinates trust to a "theory of trust". The group's role creating, goal producing, boundary managing and limit setting function is therefore ceded to the pastor and the hierarchy.

Thus, when fourth order puts forth demands for lay assemblies in a self-shepherding bid to partner with the hierarchy in the governing of the parish and diocese, or calls for stronger parish Pastoral Councils, financial accountability and two-way communication in service to regulating relationships between laity, clergy and hierarchy, third order recognizes and supports these same demands (assemblies, accountability and two-way communication) but from a horizon bounded by the ecclesio-psychological surround. Third order offers its support on behalf of the emerging group consensus (knowing what it wants when others express what they want), on behalf of preserving relationships within the parish (against the threat of parish closures) and in service to re-authorizing religious leaders who have let them down.²⁸ When the diocese acknowledged parishioner contribution to the 1994 initiative, when it dropped its 2001 proposal to close one of the parishes after vociferous opposition, when the bishop responded in a letter to the parishes in 2002 addressing some of the parishioner concerns about his handling of the sex abuse crisis, third order goal's were largely met – trust was reestablished – and they saw little reason to protest the group's suspension. The status quo was reestablished. They were able to go along with calls for lay assemblies, accountability and communication, not from self-shepherding ground, but because it provided a means to affirm and reaffirm their relationship with and trust in the very authorities they felt compelled to challenge in these instances. Third order goals were met even as fourth order goals were not (no lay assemblies, weak Pastoral Councils, no episcopal accountability, no multi-directional communication).

What of second order's presence? Second order bought into the group's overall goals, but in service to their own needs and interests rather than in service to relationships. Leaders construed as extrinsic sources of needs-meeting (as opposed to third order which, having internalized authority, is able to feel and respond to the claims of others – they matter – including and especially the perceived expectations of leaders) are opportunistically engaged. The hierarchy for this cognitive constituency is that which has the power to save or close a parish; it is simultaneously a source of needs-meeting and a source that can render harm. The fundamental need of this order of consciousness

²⁸ Re-authorizing is not self-authorizing (fourth order). A group dominated by third order is not simply held captive to authority, but bequeaths to authority figures or tradition the power to tell them who they are. It is other-authored, but also authorizing, not of self, but of its own mentors and leaders, unselfconsciously empowering them (as Kegan might say) with the capacity to organize their energy and lead. The re-authorizing in this case is a return to trust once bishops or chancery officials responded by giving some attention to their concerns.

in this context is regular Eucharist and parishes available to provide it. If they perceive that the hierarchy's response (and their participation) is one that a) keeps available the Eucharist and b) renders no harm, then they would likely return to the status quo and lose interest in the group. This, in turn, would add weight to third order's decision to acquiesce to the group's suspension, further weakening the impact of four's complaint that not much, in fact, had been gained when measured against the goals of giving jurisdiction to a lay constituency within the parishes they build, maintain, and support.

In the groups prior to 2003, the dominant order of consciousness is three, with four present, but weaker than two. But this does not capture the motion of the groups over time. In all groups, three remained dominant. What happened, however, was a continual decline in two and a continual rise in four. So, for example, in a critical 2001 document in which parishioners crafted their response to the hierarchy's proposal to close one of their parishes, they repeatedly expressed their own point of view (how wrong it was to close a viable, vibrant parish like theirs) without also considering the hierarchy's point of view (that there might, in fact, be a serious problem that the diocese was trying to address, however inadequately). Second order also appears in the group's willingness to bargain with the diocese (you keep us open and we'll make it easier for priests by reducing the number of Masses). But two was not dominant. The document expressed hurt that the diocese had not acknowledged their successful merger in 1996 which represents a breach in an implied relationship between parish and diocese. The participants who crafted and edited this document were also embedded in the overarching frame established by the diocese which meant that they were unable to do more than "resolution" a problem posed by others. That is, they did not challenge the problem-posing role of the hierarchy, but came up with new and better solutions within a frame they simply assumed. I take this as strong evidence of three. The group takes for granted a relationship with the diocese even as it is unable to take a perspective on that relationship. Four appears once in a sentence which calls for a comprehensive educational program to rethink what it means to be church and priest and to use this new vision as a criteria or standard for strategizing about parish restructuring in the future.²⁹

By 2003 and 2004, however, four's presence is much more noticeable in the emerging vision and visioning capacity of the group as it shaped its own ideology of parish and diocese and began to use it as a standard to inform group action. Lonergan's notion of dialectic and its function of exposing different delimiting horizons might be what is behind the shrink in two and growth in four. Individuals in late second or late third order "horizon" were challenged and supported by the group process in the practice of "relativizing" and "subordinating" needs and interests to relationship (second to third) and relationship and authority to a value and vision generating capacity (third to fourth). Thus, in this epistemologically reactive environment, as four gained from three and three from two, three remained the dominant order of consciousness while two waned and four waxed. The group's overall volatility was always in a forward direction toward increasing complexity.

²⁹ A sentence or paragraph in a document was often a quote by a participant recorded on an easel board by a facilitator and written into a draft for later group editing. Accordingly, most of the statements in these documents have "faces" on them, a fact recognized by interview participants who saw the surprising coherence of these "committee letters" as a sign of the Holy Spirit working among them.

This paper leaves unanswered many questions, such as the relationship between leader's and communities, and the interaction between leaders and participants in the construction epistemological communities. However, what I have attempted here is to begin a conversation about how groups can be understood as cognitive communities and how they might be assessed for their mental complexity.