

THE VESTIGIAL VERGER

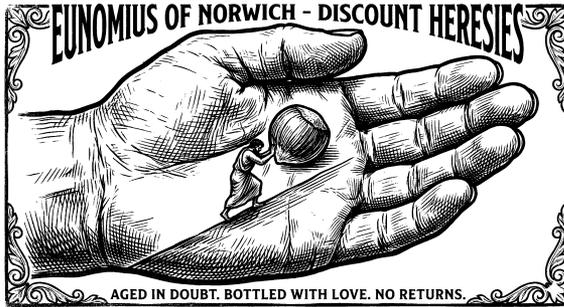
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A Reader's Guide

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The Vestigial Verger examines
theological questions through systems
engineering and structural analysis.
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If You're Confused, Good

You've opened a journal that applies systems engineering to sacramental theology, uses thermodynamics to explain grace, and treats the Church as a distributed database with entropy management problems. If you're wondering whether you've wandered into the wrong room—whether this is theology trying to be engineering, or engineering trying to be theology—the answer is *yes*.

This journal sits at a disciplinary boundary that most people avoid. We don't avoid it because we're brave; we avoid it because ignoring it causes failures we can't afford.

The Central Claim

The Vestigial Verger operates from one foundational assertion:

Theological systems and engineered systems exhibit the same structural dynamics because they solve the same fundamental problems.

How do you maintain coherence across distributed nodes? How do you export entropy? How do you ensure critical functions persist when individual components fail? How do you design for graceful degradation under stress?

These questions apply equally to:

- MongoDB replica sets and the apostolic succession
- Load balancers and parish priests

- Distributed consensus algorithms and ecumenical councils
- Metabolic pathways and the Eucharistic cycle

We are not being metaphorical. We are claiming these are *isomorphic structures*—different substrates implementing identical patterns.

Who This Is For

This journal is written for people operating at boundaries:

Engineers who attend church and wonder why their pastor doesn't treat Sunday attendance like an SLO violation (because it is one).

Theologians who build systems and recognize that Augustine's *City of God* is describing federation topology, not metaphor.

Clergy managing collapse who need engineering language for what they already know: the structure is failing, and sentiment won't hold it.

Anyone tasked with maintaining something when the people who built it are gone, the documentation is incomplete, and the users are demanding features the system was never designed to handle.

If you've ever been the last person in the room when the crisis hit, this journal is for you.

What We Mean By “Theological Engineering”

The phrase sounds like a category error. Theology deals with eternal truths; engineering deals with contingent systems. Theology is normative; engineering is descriptive. How can they be the same discipline?

They converge at the problem of **implementation under constraint**.

Theology makes claims about what *should* be true: God is present, the Church is one, grace is freely given, love is the greatest commandment. Engineering asks: given finite humans, limited resources, entropic decay, and coordination costs—*how do you actually build that?*

- **The Invariant** is the theological claim (what must remain true).
- **The Lattice** is the engineered structure (how you maintain it).
- **Grace** is the energy input (what you cannot manufacture but must design to receive).

The theology tells you what to preserve. The engineering tells you how to build systems that can actually preserve it. Neither is sufficient alone.

Our Methodology: Structural Isomorphism

We proceed by pattern recognition across domains:

Step 1: Identify the invariant. What state must the system maintain? For baptism: incorporation into the trust network. For the Eucharist: presence distribution. For marriage: load-sharing under asymmetric stress.

Step 2: Map the structure. What mechanisms maintain this invariant? Baptism uses vouch-chains (same as SSH key signing). The Eucharist uses metabolic cycling (same as cellular respiration). Marriage uses structural damping (same as earthquake-resistant buildings).

Step 3: Identify failure modes. Where does the system break? What are the thermodynamic limits? What happens when you exceed Dunbar's number, overload the priest, skip Eucharist for six months?

Step 4: Design for graceful degradation. You can't prevent all failures. How do you build so that failure is survivable? How do you maintain core function when peripheral systems crash?

Grace operates through thermodynamic constraints. The Church exhibits database consistency problems. These are not reductions—they are structural specifications. Ignoring these realities doesn't make you more spiritual; it makes you less effective.

The Three-Tier Architecture

Papers in this journal operate at three levels simultaneously:

Level 1: The Mechanism (systems analysis)

- How does this structure actually work?
- What are the inputs, outputs, constraints?
- Where are the single points of failure?

Level 2: The Invariant (theological claim)

- What truth is being preserved?
- Why does this structure exist?
- What collapses if it fails?

Level 3: The Mandate (practical implication)

- Given the mechanism and the invariant, what must we build?
- What are we doing wrong?
- What structures are we pretending work that mathematically cannot?

You can read any paper focusing on just one level. But the power comes from holding all three simultaneously—seeing the mechanism, honoring the invariant, accepting the mandate.

Recurring Concepts: Your Glossary

Certain terms recur throughout this journal with precise technical meaning:

The Invariant: The system state that must be maintained. Not a preference or ideal—a hard requirement for system survival. Example: “Christ’s presence must be accessible to every baptized person.”

The Lattice: The structural delivery system that maintains the Invariant. The Lattice is built, can fail, requires maintenance. Example: the network of parishes, the liturgical calendar, the apostolic succession.

Grace: Energy input from outside the system. Cannot be manufactured by structural excellence alone, but structure determines receptivity. Theologically divine gift; systems-theoretically the mysterious input that prevents thermodynamic death.

Entropy: Disorder, waste heat, degradation. All real systems generate entropy. Without export mechanisms, entropy accumulates until system collapse. The Second Law applies to churches.

Granular Impotence: The mathematical constraint that intimacy does not scale. You cannot automate pastoral care. You cannot centralize love. Attempts to exceed Dunbar’s number (~ 150 relationships) produce structural rather than relational care.

The Observer: Any system capable of experiencing Δ Perceptual (gap between current and desired state) and asking “Why?”

Generates Want, requires Love (external service of Want), constitutes You.

Dissipative Structure: A system that maintains order through continuous energy throughput. Exists far from equilibrium. The body metabolizes food; the Church metabolizes grace. Stop the input, structure collapses.

Network Topology: How nodes connect matters as much as what nodes exist. A centralized hub-and-spoke network fails differently than a mesh. The Church's structure determines what coordination problems it can solve.

When you see these terms, we're not being poetic. We're using them the way an engineer uses "load-bearing" or a theologian uses "sacrament"—as precise descriptors of how things actually work. You do not need to understand these terms on first read. They will recur.

What We Are Not Doing

To clarify scope, here's what this journal does *not* attempt:

We are not defending institutional Christianity. We analyze how Christian structures function, where they succeed, where they fail. Some structures should fail. Some should be rebuilt. Analysis is not advocacy.

We are not reducing theology to engineering. The mystery remains. We specify mechanisms within the mystery—not to explain it away, but to maintain what it demands. "How does grace flow through structure?" is a different question than "What is grace?" We answer the

first. The second remains open.

We are not providing pastoral comfort. This journal is a field manual for people maintaining systems under crisis. It is not gentle. If you need pastoral care, find a priest. If you need to understand why the structure is collapsing and what to build instead, keep reading.

We are not writing for academics. Citations are minimal. Jargon is unapologetic. We assume you either know the domain already or will look it up. The goal is transmission of operational knowledge, not comprehensive review.

These are working models. We describe observed structural dynamics, not eternal metaphysical truths. When reality contradicts the model, we revise the model—not from epistemic weakness, but structural necessity. Correspondence to observed patterns is non-negotiable. Metaphysical certainty is not our domain.

On Authorial Substrate

These journals—*The Vestigial Verger* and *Via Negativa*—are written by a single author using an adversarial ensemble methodology mediated by large language models (including, but not limited to, contemporary frontier systems).

This is not ghost-writing. It is collaborative synthesis under full authorial responsibility.

The author provides theological direction, structural constraints, and final editorial judgment. The models are used instrumentally: to generate adversarial critique, sur-

face counterarguments, and identify structural weaknesses across domains the author already inhabits.

The result is one voice expressed through multiple modes.

Eunomius of Cyzicus did not time-travel to critique this work. An anonymous reviewer did not independently arrive at the unfalsifiability objection. These critiques are generated—but they are not fictional. They represent the strongest attacks the author could reliably construct against their own framework, rendered legible through adversarial tools.

This methodology is disclosed not to diminish the work’s seriousness, but to accurately describe its substrate. The theology is real. The engineering is real. The performance—understood as intentional compositional method—is deliberate.

How to Read This Journal

If you’re new: Start with “Sacramental Systems” (Vol 1, Issue 1) for the foundational framework. Then “A Brief Explainer on Want” for the anthropological model. Then wherever your crisis takes you.

If you’re clergy: Look for papers on your current failure mode. Parish collapse? Read “The Distributed Church.” Feeling the load? Read “Ordination as Load-Bearing Capacity.” Parishioner won’t listen to reason? Read “Granular Impotence.”

If you’re an engineer: Start wherever the topology looks

familiar. Recognize the patterns from your day job. Notice what transfers. Ask what your production systems can teach you about ecclesiology, and vice versa.

If you're hostile to religion: Bracket your contempt long enough to notice the structural patterns. The Church has 2000 years of operational data on distributed consensus, entropy management, and graceful degradation. The substrate is theological; the dynamics are universal. Extract the isomorphism, leave the metaphysics.

If you're hostile to engineering: Notice that your tradition has been doing systems engineering for millennia—you just called it “formation” and “discipline.” The desert fathers were debugging cognitive systems. Monastic rules are API specifications. Liturgy is load balancing. We're just making explicit what was always implicit.

What Success Looks Like

This journal succeeds if you:

Recognize patterns you couldn't name before. “Oh—that's why parishes under 80 people feel different. Topology change at Dunbar threshold.”

Make better decisions under constraint. “We can't automate this function. We need more load-bearing humans, not better software.”

Maintain what matters when everything else collapses. “The Invariant is presence and coherence. Everything else is negotiable.”

Build structures that honor both mechanism and mystery. “Grace doesn’t bypass thermodynamics. We design for receptivity, not manufacture.”

If reading this journal makes you better at maintaining the thing you’ve been called to maintain—whether that’s a parish, a marriage, a community, a production system, or your own sanity—then it’s working.

The rest is grace.

A Note on the Title

“Vestigial” means a structure that persists after its original function has been lost or transformed. A verger carries the ceremonial staff that once cleared literal paths through crowds, now a ritual gesture in empty aisles.

We chose *The Vestigial Verger* because we are writing in an age of institutional collapse and synthetic emergence—where old structures persist not because they’re needed but because they haven’t finished failing yet, and where new structures emerge that solve old problems in unrecognizable forms.

The verger’s job was always maintenance: ensure the procession can move, hold the structure even when it seems pointless, carry the staff when no one remembers why.

In an age of collapse, maintenance is not failure. It is the only thing that works.

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