

**Essays in Systematic Theology 55:  
Social Grace and the Mission of the Church<sup>1</sup>**

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I begin this contribution in honor of Joseph Komonchak with two informal statements made by Bernard Lonergan in 1962, in discussion sessions at an institute titled ‘The Method of Theology’ at Regis College, Toronto:

Things like the Trinity, and so on, are treatises that are finished; and *treatises like the mystical body haven’t begun to be attempted yet*. All the positive work has been done, but *the categories in which one can think them have not yet evolved*. Questions like the church, and so on, which have arisen and become prominent since the Middle Ages, these are things that haven’t been categorized by medieval thought. It is there that the difficulties arise, and it is there that you have very complex questions.<sup>2</sup>

The degree of thematization differs in different cases. The fundamental developments are: (1) the Trinitarian doctrine in which the key element is the consubstantial; (2) Christological doctrine: one person and two natures; (3) the

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1 A slightly revised version of a paper that appeared in *A Realist’s Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph A. Komonchak*, ed. Christopher D Denny, Patrick J Hayes, and Nicholas K. Rademacher (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015) 169-84.

2 Bernard Lonergan, *Early Works on Theological Method 1*, vol. 22 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Robert C. Croken (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 280, emphasis added. For some time prior to 1965 or 1966 Lonergan referred to his book in process as ‘The Method of Theology’ rather than ‘Method in Theology.’

idea of the supernatural, habit and act. There is then *the field in which the categories are not as yet fully developed*. For example, categories as to the instrumental causality of the sacraments: that has to be broadened out; *there is also everything regarding history and the mystical body and the church; all these need further development*.<sup>3</sup>

It may be argued that the problem that Lonergan mentioned regarding the theology of the church remains in effect fifty years later, despite the renewal begun at the Second Vatican Council. But it may also be argued that the work of Joseph Komonchak has led the way in meeting these questions.<sup>4</sup>

Lonergan insists (and Komonchak agrees) that a systematic ecclesiology has to be worked out in the context of a theological theory of history. In this present essay I wish to suggest (1) that the fundamental category for the development of ecclesiology precisely in the context of history is ‘mission,’ and (2) that the dogmatic-theological context of the church as mission resides in the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and so in an area where, if Lonergan is correct, appropriate categories are firmly in place.

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3 Ibid. 340-41, emphasis added. See also Joseph Komonchak’s comments regarding similar statements in Lonergan’s *Insight in Foundations in Ecclesiology: Supplementary Issue of the Lonergan Workshop Journal*, vol. 11, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Boston College, 1995) 47, 77.

4 The essays collected in *Foundations in Ecclesiology* stand out in this regard. See also Komonchak’s more recent Père Marquette Lecture, *Who Are the Church?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008) and the work referred to below in note 20, which contains a set of positions found consistently in Komonchak’s work.

In the first two parts of this paper I will place the mission of the church in two interrelated contexts. First, I will present the *dogmatic-theological* context as I understand it, reviewing and updating my theology of the divine missions and relating them to the mission of the church. Second, I address the mission of the church in *culture*, where culture is understood in relation to Lonergan's proposal of a scale of values. After this, I relate these two contextual discussions to the heuristics of church ministry suggested by Lonergan in chapter 14 of *Method in Theology*, the chapter on the functional specialty 'Communications.' My claim for mission as the fundamental ecclesiological category will be defended in this final section.

## **1 The Dogmatic-theological Context of Ecclesial Mission**

The theological understanding of the mission of the church must be located in the context of the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20.22). Without its mission the church would not exist, and the church has no mission except in the context of the two divine missions.

On the two divine missions and their relations to each other I followed for a number of years the theological doctrine of Frederick Crowe, which Crowe claimed to be also the position of the later Lonergan: 'God first sent the Spirit, and then sent the Son in the context of the Spirit's mission, to bring to completion, perhaps not precisely the work of the Spirit but the work which God conceived as one work to be executed in the two steps of the twofold mission of first the Spirit

and then the Son.’<sup>5</sup> I have come to see that this statement requires (1) a terminological refinement that distinguishes common and proper predication, and (2) further doctrinal refinement in terms of invisible and visible missions of both the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The doctrinal refinement is demanded by the prescription that the order of the divine missions must be that of the divine processions, since the missions are the processions joined to a created external term. The mission of the Holy Spirit cannot be understood as preceding the mission of the Son unless further qualifications are added.

I have come to express my position as follows.<sup>6</sup>

(1) The universal gift of grace occurs in invisible missions of both the Word and the Holy Spirit, independently of and so historically prior to the visible mission of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth. The Father (not ‘God’) sends the Word invisibly through divinely originated insights and judgments of fact and value that, in acknowledging *gift*, reflect a faith that is knowledge born of love; and concomitantly the Father and the Son (again, not ‘God’) send the Holy Spirit in whom human beings participate through acts of charity that flow from the *verbum spirans amorem* (word breathing love) that is faith.

(2) These invisible missions are universal.

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5 Frederick E. Crowe, ‘Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions,’ in Crowe, *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 325.

6 For more detail, see Robert M. Doran, ‘*The Trinity in History: First Steps beyond Volume 1*,’ paper presented at the Lonergan Workshop, Boston College, 2014. See above in this set of *Essays in Systematic Theology*, essay 52.

(3) The Father (not ‘God’) sends the Son in Jesus, in the ‘fullness of time’ established by the effective history of the invisible missions, in order to *reveal* the work that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together conceive as one work to be executed first in the invisible missions of the Son and the Spirit and then in the visible, revealing mission of the Son.

(4) The Father and the risen Jesus send the Spirit in a visible, palpable fashion at Pentecost to manifest, confirm, and celebrate the revelation.

(5) The goal of the totality of the divine missions, visible and invisible, is the establishment of the reign of God.

What is revealed in Jesus consists partly but constitutively in what Lonergan calls the law of the cross, whereby the evils of the human race are transcended not by power but by nonviolent love.<sup>7</sup> That same law is a central feature in the actual graces through which the invisible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit occur throughout history.

The visible mission of the Son is thus primarily the revelation of the love of God poured out upon humanity in the universal gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift which itself is intimately connected with and dependent upon the Son’s invisible mission in a faith that acknowledges a primal giftedness not only of existence but also of divine love in grace. The visible mission of the incarnate Word makes explicit and

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<sup>7</sup> Lonergan expresses the law of the cross most fully in thesis 17 of *De Verbo incarnato*. See Bernard Lonergan, *The Redemption*, vol. 9 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018). The basic structure of the law of the cross is threefold: basic sin leads to multiple moral evils; moral evils are responded to not by force and violence but by love promoting the good; the situation is transformed into a greater good.

known what has always been present and operative, often without being objectified. The revelation in Jesus enables explicit and deliberate personal relations of human beings with the three divine persons and with one another. Thus, the mission of the Son is constitutive of the friendship with God that is inaugurated on God's part by the invisible missions but that requires the outer word of revelation if it is to come to completion. The visible mission of the Son articulates the meaning that renders this friendship not simply conscious in some unobjectified fashion but also known. The first and foundational set of personal relations made possible by the whole structure of divine mission consists of relations with the three divine subjects, and indeed with each of them distinctly. Each of the divine persons is a distinct term of a relation on the part of the human spirit.<sup>8</sup> We now know that, but even before the revealing visible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit this was the case, even though it was not known; and it is the case today even beyond the boundaries of explicit Christian belief.

The structure of the grace that makes *all* who accept it pleasing to God (*gratia gratum faciens*) by initiating them into participation in divine life is itself Trinitarian. It is a created participation in and imitation of the Trinitarian relations

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<sup>8</sup> The issue of the extent to which these are distinct relations is a question that I will not pursue here. Relations are really distinguished, not by a multiplication of terms, but by a multiplication of orderings. See Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 248-51. It is sufficient for my present purposes to emphasize that there are three distinct terms of our explicit created human relation to the triune God. But see the next note.

of active and passive spiration.<sup>9</sup> The offer of such grace, once again, is universal. We are able to articulate it in Trinitarian terms due to the revelation that is the function of the visible mission of the Word.

Through the gift of God's love the uncreated Holy Spirit dwells in us as the uncreated term of a created relation. That relation requires a base that traditional theology called sanctifying grace, a base that, Lonergan says, is a created participation in active spiration. Active spiration is the divine relation of Father and Son to the Holy Spirit. We share through sanctifying grace in the relation of the Father and the Son to the Spirit. This is the basic or foundational gift. As Thomas Aquinas started to work it out as early as *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 5, it is communicated not only sacramentally through baptism; rather, 'every effect that God works in us from his gratuitous will, by which he accepts us into his kingdom, pertains to the grace that makes one pleasing.' On Lonergan's interpretation,

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9 See Robert M. Doran, *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions*, vol. 1: *Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), especially chapter 2. See also Robert M. Doran, 'Sanctifying Grace, Charity, and Divine Indwelling: A Key to the *Nexus Mysteriorum*,' now available as Essay 32 in Doran, *Essays in Systematic Theology*, and published in *Lonergan Workshop 23*, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Boston College, 2012) 165-94. See also Robert M. Doran, 'What Is the Gift of the Holy Spirit?' and 'Social Grace and the Mission of the Word,' available as Essays 34 and 37 in the same e-book. In terms of the question raised in the preceding note, if in fact grace is structured in this way, there would be two distinct relations, because there are two distinct orderings: the relation to the Holy Spirit based in sanctifying grace, and the relation to the Son and the Father based in charity.

Aquinas here began to entertain the possibility that there are certain moments of what would come to be called actual grace that are also ‘sanctifying graces.’<sup>10</sup>

Our participation in active spiration is a participation in the Father and the Son together. The reception of the unqualified love of the Father establishes a quality of self-presence, a condition in which the mind finds itself, that may be likened to Augustine’s notion of *memoria* as the created analogue for the Father.<sup>11</sup> But *memoria* is joined to, equiprimordial with, *mens*, mind, and gives rise to a knowledge born of that love, the knowledge that Lonergan calls ‘faith.’ Faith is the created consequent condition of the invisible mission of the Word. Memory and faith together are the created participation in Father and Son together, in active spiration. We share in active spiration by a transformed radical disposition of our entire being and by the knowledge born of that transformed disposition, precisely as together these breathe love. Faith, the knowledge born of God’s love, is articulated in a set of judgments of value regarding the worthwhileness of the gift and of everything else.<sup>12</sup> In its basic moment faith is an ineffable ‘yes’ to the gift

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10 See Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 35.

11 Whether ‘memory’ in the analogy that I am proposing has the same meaning as Augustine’s *memoria* is a secondary question. I will be happy if there are correspondences. But if not, I am prepared to argue for the theological fruitfulness of what I am proposing.

12 See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, vol. 14 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017) 111-14 for an excellent and clear articulation of such judgments of value.



that has been given, and as such it is a created participation in the divine Word, the external term that is the created consequent condition of the Word's invisible mission.

The reception of love and the faith born of that love breathe charity, our love of the givers of the gift. Charity, then, as proceeding from participation in active spiration, is a created participation in passive spiration, that is, in the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so charity proceeds from the transformed disposition that I am calling 'memory' and from the knowledge born of that disposition, the knowledge that Lonergan calls faith.

For Christians charity manifests itself in companionship with the Son made flesh for us and in eschatological hope for the vision of the Father through the mediation of the Son. But just as the gift of God's love is universal, so charity is not limited to Christians. For those who do not know the revelation of this Trinitarian gift, charity takes the form of a love of wisdom and a purified transcendence that in fact if not in name is a love of God with all one's heart and all one's mind and all one's strength and a love of one's neighbor as oneself. In Christian and non-Christian alike, the love of God and neighbor grounds the changed attitudes of Galatians 5.22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and the inner disposition to return good for evil done and so to love even one's enemies.

Our created relations with the three divine subjects thus establish the state of grace as an interpersonal situation whose formal effects extend to the establishment of a genuine community of meaning and value among human beings, or what I am calling social grace. Even without the revelation of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the religious situation of humankind has always been intersubjective; but the

revelation of the gift in Jesus promotes the primordially intersubjective status of human religion to the distinctly and explicitly interpersonal.<sup>13</sup>

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13 This has implications for Girardian mimetic theory and its significance in theology. Briefly, when religion remains primordially intersubjective, its extension to human relations is what Girard calls ‘interdividual,’ and is subject to the vagaries of mimetic desire, including notable aberration. The promotion of intersubjectivity to deliberately interpersonal relations should transcend the danger of the deviated transcendence to which Girard calls attention, though clearly religions of the word have their own history of violence, and they have fewer excuses for succumbing to distorted interdividuality. The advent of the religious word does not eliminate human sin. For Lonergan’s own reflections on religions of the infrastructure (intersubjectivity) and religions of the superstructure (interpersonal relations mediated by the word), see ‘Sacralization and Secularization,’ in Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, vol. 17 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 68-70. Typically, Lonergan is more generous than Girard: in this case with his evaluation of religions of the infrastructure. After all, the clericalism that Lonergan saw through in his own church but that remains the central problem of that church is basically a religion of the infrastructure, of the interdividuality that accounts for clerical ambition and strife as much (and for the same psychological reasons) as it is responsible for the abuse crisis from which the church will not recover for decades. 2018 note: This footnote was in the original version of this essay, but it was not published in the Komonchak Festschrift.

It is in this same dogmatic-theological context that we must understand the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to cooperate with the three divine persons in extending to the ends of the earth and to the end of time the revelation of the missions of the Word and the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the visible mission of the incarnate Word, as these missions together establish the interpersonal relations with the three divine subjects and among human beings that constitute the state of grace. Ecclesial mission is fulfilled as the church discerns the presence of the Holy Spirit and announces in word and sacrament the news of God's love.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the community that *knows* these missions. That knowledge distinguishes the church from all other communities. The beginning of the community is marked by an outburst of joy over the fruitfulness of the divine revelation of God's love. What was hidden is now revealed. What was conscious but not objectified or what remained imperfectly articulated is now known and can be clearly spoken, proclaimed, announced. The mission of the Holy Spirit, previously for the most part invisible, becomes not only visible but also tangible and audible at Pentecost, as the community is born whose mission it is to cooperate with God in carrying on the divine missions and manifesting their unity and complementarity. Pentecost is thus the beginning not only of the church but also of the church's mission, which is inseparable from the existence of the church.

Evangelization within this context has two dimensions.

First, it proceeds from the conviction that the incarnation of the eternal Word marks the definitive revelation of the gift that God is always pouring forth by flooding human hearts with God's love by the Holy Spirit given them. But if that gift, now revealed, is offered universally, then evangelization entails speaking a word that assists others in recognizing God's gift of love in their own lives, including in their own cultures and religious traditions.

Second, as rooted in the revelation that occurs precisely in Jesus and so in the paschal mystery, evangelization addresses specifically the problem of evil, and it does so from the standpoint of the law of the cross as the revelation of the divinely ordained response to evil. ‘This is why the Son of God became man, suffered, died, and was raised again: because divine wisdom has ordained and divine goodness has willed, not to do away with the evils of the human race through power, but to convert those evils into a supreme good according to the just and mysterious law of the cross.’<sup>14</sup> Genuine evangelization promotes a soteriological differentiation of consciousness, a conversion of heart and mind that entails refusing to meet evil with evil and instead overcoming evil with more abundant good.<sup>15</sup>

## **2 The Scale of Values and the Cultural Context of Mission**

The mission of the Son is the mission of the divine *Word*, and so of divine meaning. Words are social realities. Through them, subjects (including the divine subjects) communicate. The visible, tangible, palpable, audible mission of the Word, and of the church that is sent by the Word just as the Word was sent by the Father, is intimately connected with the social mediation of the human good through the communication of meaning and value. Evangelization entails speaking a word, and the word that is spoken is a cultural reality. The social mediation of the

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14 Bernard Lonergan, Thesis 17 of *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian

University Press, 1964) 552, now found in English in *The Redemption* 197.

15 On the soteriological differentiation, see Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 2001) index, under ‘Soteriological constitutive meaning, differentiation.’

human good depends on the articulate development of cultural values, whose function is ‘to discover, express, validate, criticize, correct, develop, improve [the] meaning and value’ that people find in their living and operating.<sup>16</sup> Not only did the visible, tangible, palpable, audible mission of the incarnate Word entail the proclamation of the reign of God, but that proclamation was delivered not in abstraction from history, but in the context of the cultural and religious values of Jesus’ immediate surroundings.<sup>17</sup> Before embodying the law of the cross in the incarnate meaning of the paschal mystery, Jesus was already proclaiming it when he discouraged violent resistance to unjust oppression – resistance, yes, but the kind of resistance that heaps up good born of love, not the kind of resistance that would destroy the oppressor and keep the wheel of violence turning. The mission

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16 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 33.

17 N.T. Wright has insisted, for example, that intimate to Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God, indeed at its heart, was the insistence that violent revolution against the Roman occupation was not the way of the kingdom he was proclaiming. That dimension of his proclamation was ultimately rejected by the supreme guardians of the cultural and religious values of the people, and the non-violence of Jesus’ message was a principal reason for that rejection. That rejection led to his death, but his death and resurrection were also the catalyst of the birth of the church and the beginning of the evangelization that proclaims meanings and values transformed by the paschal mystery, meanings and values that arise when a soteriological differentiation that includes the precept to return good for evil is brought to bear on prevailing cultural values. See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1992). 2018 note: This footnote was in the original version of this essay, but it was not published in the Komonchak Festschrift.

of the church born at Pentecost is to carry on precisely *that* evangelization in all the cultural contexts into which the church is led by the Spirit of God. Evangelization is directed specifically to culture, to the meanings and values that inform different ways of living, and it brings to culture primarily the epistemology of love that contrasts so sharply with the sinful inclination to return evil for evil. Without that dimension, without the spirituality of the deutero-Isaian servant of God that is incarnate in Jesus, the rest of what the church says is sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, for it prescind from the Trinitarian and paschal dogmatic-theological context of the church's mission, and without that context there is no mission.

But if culture is the locus of evangelization, then we need to address the issue of culture head-on in any discussion of the mission of the church.

The function of culture unfolds on two levels, infrastructure and superstructure. The term 'infrastructure' when used with respect to culture refers to the realm of common sense as it goes about its business of relating things to us in the practical affairs of everyday life and the dramatic interchanges among people. More precisely, the full infrastructure of society consists of the technological, economic, and political structures that emerge from the dialectic of practical intelligence and intersubjectivity in the constitution of the social order, under the dominance of the everyday dimensions of culture. The infrastructure thus conceived is proximately responsible for the distribution of vital goods to the community.

The superstructure results from what Georg Simmel calls *die Wendung zur Idee*, the turn to reflection that is almost inevitable in cultural development.<sup>18</sup> The superstructure is constantly engaged in transforming the infrastructure, for better or

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18 Georg Simmel, 'Die Wendung zur Idee,' in *Lebensanschauung: Vier metaphysische Kapitel* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1918) 29-98.

for worse, and the infrastructure is constantly either aiding the superstructure to do its authentic work through deep reflection or, more usually, interfering with that work through the influence of the general bias of common sense against theory, long-range issues, ultimate questions, and deeper reflection in general.

The turn to reflection may be mythic, but it may also be genuinely religious. It may be ideological, but it may also be truly theoretical. It may be oppressive, but it may also be the fruit of wisdom. It may be manipulative and mendacious, but it may also gently persuade to intellectual, moral, religious, and psychic conversion. It may serve only the interests of the rich and the powerful, but it may also serve the common good of order and even adopt a preferential option for the poor. It may be, and usually is, some mixture of authenticity and inauthenticity. In most contemporary societies, the *Wendung zur Idee*, the turn to reflective objectification, contains a theoretical component, and its principal home is the academy. But the contemporary academy is no stranger to the rationalization of inauthenticity and alienation. In general, we may say that the intellectual ministry of the church is aimed primarily at the superstructure of culture and so to the academy, but with an eye to, and even for the sake of the well-being of, the infrastructure.

Viewed from a theological standpoint, both infrastructure and superstructure will always stand in need of reorientation and integration. The work of evangelization is intimately connected to this reorientation and integration of culture, of the meanings and values that inform human living. Lonergan expresses this need by citing the destructive influences of several kinds of bias in culture and society, where in each instance bias entails at its root a flight from understanding.

The conversion required for the integrity of culture is made thematic, and so able to be elevated to an explicit role in culture, through participation in the mission of the incarnate Word, and so through the linguistic carriers of meaning, the words in the Word, that are directly dependent on that mission, as the church

appropriates its own foundation and builds its proclamation on that appropriation. The mission of the church to culture entails making conversion thematic in its various dimensions and so elevating it to the place where it becomes an explicit dimension in culture. In the academy, where the church addresses the superstructure of culture, this includes and even privileges an intellectual conversion. The church's appropriation of its mission entails a turn to reflective objectification on the part of the church. That reflective objectification is, in part, theology. Through the development of the religious word and the specification of its relation to other cultural meanings and values, and especially to other words, theology elevates conversion from being simply conscious to being known, articulated, appropriated, and implemented. It makes conversion a theme in the public life of the academy, and it helps the church make it a theme in the public life of society in general through the evangelizing proclamation of the gospel. But by its explicit location in the academy, theology reminds other superstructural practitioners that there is an intellectual as well as a religious, moral, and affective dimension to conversion.

Obviously, however, the church's mission to culture is not limited to the superstructure. This mission is to see to it that the social mediation of the human good is shot through with what we may call social grace. Grace becomes social as the meanings and values that inform given ways of living are transformed by the explicit revelation of the gift of God's love, that is, by the two divine missions extended into history in the mission of the church, the community that knows both missions explicitly. That transformation means conversion of those meanings and values, and such conversion is a matter of reorientation at both levels of culture. Grace will become truly social in proportion to the degree that a series of words is spoken that will reorient economic and political life for the sake of the realization



of the integral scale of values: vital, social, cultural, personal, religious.<sup>19</sup> Those words will, of course, be resisted, and the speakers will embody the law of the cross as they absorb the resistance like a blotter, refusing to return good for evil.<sup>20</sup>

Of particular concern is the link between cultural and social values, where meaning is the controlling factor in human affairs. Ideology, the rationalization of inauthenticity, has the unfortunate effect of preventing the pursuit of meaning from exercising that controlling function. There is a complex surd that at times escapes personal and communal control so as to prevent integral meaning from becoming operative in the constitution of the social order. By ‘integral meaning’ I am referring to theological, philosophical, and human-scientific (including economic) positions that are the fruit of interdisciplinary collaboration carried on in explicit dedication to the human good at the level of the cultural superstructure. The complex surd that prevents these developments from occurring in the infrastructure is precisely what is meant by social sin. Social sin, correctly understood, is at its roots the failure, indeed the refusal, to allow the meaning of the normative scale of

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19 On the scale of values, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 32-33. The notion of the scale of values joins the notion of dialectic to form the central complex of meanings in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*.

20 ‘... the fundamental theorem, as it were, is transforming evil into good, absorbing the evil of the world by putting up with it, not perpetuating it as rigid justice would demand. And that putting up with it acts as a blotter, transforms the situation, and creates the situation in which good flourishes.’ Bernard Lonergan, ‘The Mediation of Christ in Prayer,’ in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, vol. 6 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 182.

values to inform the social order. In Lonergan's theology of social sin, bias – the bias of distorted affectivity, the bias of the individual, the bias of the group, and the general bias of common sense against ultimate issues and long-term solutions – contributes to the increasing dominance of the social surd. The integral functioning of the full scale of values is constitutive of what I mean by the 'social grace' that is set over against social sin.<sup>21</sup> And that integral functioning entails the reversal of bias precisely through the word that speaks the truth and exhorts to the good, not only at the infrastructural level of everyday living but also at the superstructural level of objectifying reflection, where the mission of the church is precisely to guide the reorientation of human-scientific endeavors in the light of the theological foundations provided by religious, moral, intellectual, and affective conversion. As I argued extensively in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, intrinsic to the full functioning of the scale of values is the equitable distribution of vital goods to the entire community, and within that context what both the theology of liberation and the church's magisterium have called the preferential option for the poor.

### **3 The Church as a Process of Self-constitution in History**

The mission of the church has to be set in these overarching Trinitarian and cultural contexts. The Trinitarian context acknowledges participation in Trinitarian life as a universal offer to humankind, one that is revealed and so made known in the visible mission of the Son but also one that Christians must respect wherever they discern it, whether the revelation has found its way into individual and communal thematizations or not. The cultural context calls for the evangelization of infrastructure and superstructure, where by evangelization is meant the

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21 See Robert M. Doran, 'Social Grace and the Mission of the Word' 1-2.

application of a soteriological differentiation to the establishment of social structures that deliver just conditions at the infrastructural level and to the reorientation and integration of philosophic, human-scientific, and scholarly endeavors at the superstructural level.

As one might expect from the appeals I have already made to Lonergan's work, these emphases are not absent from the incipient heuristics of ecclesial ministry that are contained in the final chapter of *Method in Theology*, the chapter devoted to 'Communications.' What follows is a brief interpretation of that material in relation to the position I have suggested.<sup>22</sup>

Meaning, including the meaning of revelation, fulfills cognitive, effective, constitutive, and communicative functions.<sup>23</sup> In particular, meaning is the formal constituent of human community, which is an achievement of common meaning. In each individual, common meaning is constitutive of the individual as a member of the community. In the group, meaning is constitutive of the community itself.

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22 It was primarily through conversations with Joseph Komonchak and even through a few incidental remarks that he made to me on several occasions that I came to appreciate more deeply the ecclesiological significance of chapter 14 of *Method in Theology* as well as the importance for understanding contemporary theological differences on the issue of the employment of general categories, categories shared especially with the social sciences, in the elaboration of a contemporary ecclesiology. These themes are central to several of the essays in *Foundations in Ecclesiology*. See also Joseph Komonchak, 'Augustine, Aquinas, or the Gospel *sine glossa*? Divisions over *Gaudium et Spes*,' in *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican ii*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (New York: Continuum Books, 2003) 102-18.

23 See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 74-78.

The communicative function of meaning is responsible for the genesis of common meaning. It is through communication that people come to share the same or complementary cognitive, constitutive, and effective meanings, and to develop them. Communities are changed by changes in their constitutive meanings.

The constitutive meaning of the church finds its basis in the revelation of God's universal gift of love in the life, words, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Word of God, and so primarily in the paschal mystery. The church, thus constituted by meaning, should be regarded as a part within the larger whole of the single worldwide society of human beings, rather than being regarded as a distinct *societas perfecta*. As a part within that larger whole, the church has the mission of continuing to proclaim, and to speak from, the revelation of God's love and to work out the implications of that revelation and proclamation in the infrastructural and superstructural dimensions of meaning precisely as meaning constitutes cultures.

The ideal basis of society is community, the achievement of common meaning. And community, writes Lonergan, 'may take its stand on a moral, a religious, or a Christian principle. The moral principle is that [human beings] individually are responsible for what they make of themselves, but collectively they are responsible for the world in which they live. Such is the basis of universal dialogue. The religious principle is God's gift of his love, and it forms the basis of dialogue between all representatives of religion. The Christian principle conjoins the inner gift of God's love with its outer manifestation in Christ Jesus and in those that follow him. Such is the basis of Christian ecumenism.'<sup>24</sup> With respect to the theology of mission in a multi-religious situation, the task, it seems, would involve bringing the basis of Christian ecumenism, namely, the explicit joining of the two

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24 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 332.

divine missions, to bear on the basis of interreligious dialogue, namely, the gift of God's love in the universal mission of the Holy Spirit, since the distinct feature that Christians bring to that dialogue is the explicit revelation of a gift that has been offered to all.

All three of these principles – moral, religious, and Christian – are precarious, thus rendering human community ever imperfect and even endangered. The moral principle, that we are individually responsible for what we make of ourselves but also collectively responsible for the world in which we live, has been rejected on a massive scale by the ideology of selfishness manifest in neoliberal politics and economics. But the sustained and consistent influence of the moral principle depends on the effective functioning of religious and moral conversion, and of at least implicit intellectual and psychic conversion, at the level of 'personal values' in the scale of values. And the same can be said for the religious and Christian principles of community. 'There are needed,' Lonergan writes, 'individuals and groups and, in the modern world, organizations that labor to persuade people to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion and that work systematically to undo the mischief brought about by alienation and ideology.' By 'alienation' he means neglect of the exigencies of human attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility, and by 'ideology' he means any doctrine that would justify such alienation. 'Among such bodies' persuading to conversion, he continues, 'should be the Christian church.'<sup>25</sup>

The Christian church is 'the community that results from the outer communication of Christ's message and from the inner gift of God's love.' Its mission is 'the effective communication of Christ's message,'<sup>26</sup> and so

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25 Ibid. 333.

26 Ibid.

collaboration with God in the missions of the Holy Spirit and of the Word. The meaning of the message is at once cognitive, constitutive, and effective. To communicate it is to bring others to share in the church's cognitive, constitutive, and effective meaning, and so to establish community on the basis of moral responsibility, religious love, and Christian proclamation. That message is to be proclaimed to all cultures, and as it is done effectively it becomes a line of development within a culture, whether morally or religiously or with explicit Christian commitment, or all three. If the church truly enters into the various societies to whom it is to proclaim the moral, religious, and Christian dimensions of the principle of community, it becomes, not so much a distinct society as a process of self-constitution within worldwide human society, a process engaged in mutual self-constitution with the rest of the human family. Its substance is 'the Christian message conjoined with the inner gift of God's love and resulting in Christian witness, Christian fellowship, and Christian service to [humankind].'<sup>27</sup> That self-constitutive process is structured, outgoing, and redemptive, but the meaning of each of these adjectives requires sustained discernment and bold decision on the part of the church – discernment and decision regarding the structure of ministry, the meaning of mission, and the role of the church in catalyzing non-violent responses to evil, responses that return good for evil. The aim of that process is the establishment of the reign of God in the whole of human society, not only in a life after death or a life after life after death, but also in this historical life of humankind. The redemptive process, overcoming evil with good, has to be realized not only in the rest of human society but in the church itself, which is no stranger to the biases, to alienation, and to the ideology that would justify alienation. As the *Wendung zur Idee* has already occurred within the church,

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27 Ibid. 334-35.

largely through the development of theology over the centuries, the church is not only a process of self-constitution but increasingly a self-conscious process of self-constitution.

In our time, though, the church ‘will have to recognize that theology is not the full science of man, that theology illuminates only certain aspects of human reality, that the church can become a fully conscious process of self-constitution only when theology unites itself with all other relevant branches of human studies’<sup>28</sup> and so admits that its own self-constitution is actually mutual self-mediation and mutual self-constitution. This is especially true of the distinctly intellectual and largely academic dimension of the mission of the church.

The aspect of Lonergan’s heuristic of the church’s mission that is most relevant to our present concerns has to do with the three principles of community: moral, religious, and Christian. The effectiveness of all three is crucial if the ideal base of society, the achievement of common meaning that is community, is actually to exist and function. Instances of the exercise of the Christian principle are obviously found in the many efforts at ecumenical dialogue, consensus, and collaboration. Instances of the church’s exercise of the moral principle beyond the explicit boundaries of ecclesial communion may be found in the social encyclicals of the popes and, perhaps more concretely, in such extremely friendly dialogues as those that Pope Benedict XVI entered into with the profoundly moral concerns of Jürgen Habermas and that Pope Francis seems ready to engage in with all who wish. But it is the exercise of the religious principle that requires comment. That principle, again, is ‘God’s gift of his love,’ as it ‘forms the basis of dialogue between all representatives of religion.’<sup>29</sup> The basis of dialogue between the

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28 Ibid. 335-36. This has been a constant theme in the work of Joseph Komonchak.

29 Ibid. 332.

representatives of religion is the universal gift of what Christians know as the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God. And if that is the case, then Christians must approach the dialogue expecting to find the Holy Spirit, to find grace, operative in their interlocutors.

This expectation vastly expands the range of the data relevant to Christian theology. The data relevant for Christian theology include all the data on the religious living of human beings everywhere and at all times.<sup>30</sup> In terms of Lonergan's functional specializations, if all the data on human religious living, whether the religious dimension of that living be explicit or compact, are now to be made available for Christian theology itself, they are also to be interpreted in accord with the critical-realist hermeneutic theory presented in both chapter 17 of *Insight* and chapter 7 of *Method*, and the relevant history for Christian theology itself expands to include the religious history of all of humanity. That such a proposal does not mean the collapse of theology into positivist religious studies is guaranteed by accepting the functional specialization of theological tasks; for then, beyond research, interpretation, and history, which is where religious studies would stop, there remains, in the first phase, the dialectic that would mediate the differences, and then there is the normative subject, the concrete universal moving the whole of theology to a second phase; and in that second phase there will emerge vastly expanded functional specialties of categories, doctrines, systematics, and communications. The result will be a vast collaboration constructing what we may call a world theology or a theology for a world church, a theology that takes its stand on the theological and ecclesial doctrine of the universal mission and gift

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30 See Robert M Doran, 'Functional Specialties for a World Theology,' Essay 36 in *Essays in Systematic Theology: An E-book*, on [www.lonerganresource.com](http://www.lonerganresource.com); also found in *Lonergan Workshop 24*, ed. Fred Lawrence, at 99-111.



of the Holy Spirit, and that applies the methodological doctrine of functional specialization to the task of mediating from data to results an entire worldwide community of men and women receiving and responding to what Christians know as the third divine Person, the Holy Spirit of God, proceeding Love in the Trinity poured out in the hearts of all by the gift of the triune God to all.<sup>31</sup> The content of all functional specialties is expanded vastly when we take our stand on the development that I have here suggested of Frederick Crowe's basic theological position.

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31 2018: The material from 'proceeding Love ...' was dropped from the version of this essay that appeared in the Komonchak Festschrift.