FOUNDATIONS IN ECCLESIOLOGY

Joseph A. Komonchak

FOUNDATIONS IN ECCLESIOLOGY

Joseph A. Komonchak

Supplementary Issue of the *Lonergan Workshop* Journal
Volume 11

Fred Lawrence, editor

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

EDITORIAL NOTE

Joseph A. Komonchak belongs to a generation of Catholic theologians formed in what was essentially the pre-Vatican II system of seminary education. This system combined the very forces of renewal that made the Council possible with the drawbacks of closedness and downright aridity that made Pope John XXIII's fresh air necessary. If he was exposed to much in the seminary and church that needed reform, he also had the opportunity to have solid scholars teaching him, such as Myles M. Bourke for scripture, in his New York diocesan seminary, and equally respectable men like Rene Latourelle and Juan Alfaro in Rome, not to mention the person who exerted the most influence upon him, Bernard Lonergan.

In one of the most trenchant passages he ever wrote Lonergan said:

> The breakdown of classical culture and, at least in our day, the manifest comprehensiveness and exclusiveness of modern culture confront Catholic philosophy and Catholic theology with the gravest problems, impose upon them mountainous tasks, invite them to Herculean labors. ... Classical culture cannot be jettisoned without being replaced, and what replaces it cannot but run counter to classical expectations. There is bound to be formed a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists. There is bound to be formed a scattered left, captivated by now this, now that new possibility. But what will count is a perhaps not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half-measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait.

There is a widely shared conviction among respected theologians that Joseph A. Komonchak belongs to Lonergan's "perhaps not numerous center." I would like to stress that whereas today anyone starting out in theology who desires to be "big enough to be at home in both the old and the new" has to go to out of his or her way to attain any deep knowledge of the old, Komonchak's generation was lucky

enough to experience the old and the new in a single life-span. Before then the seminary student of the post-1815 Roman Catholic regime so brilliantly adumbrated in Komonchak's historical studies would have had to go to extraordinary lengths in order to "be at home in the new." This is what Komonchak's heroes did — people like John Courtney Murray and Bernard Lonergan on this continent, and Henri de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and the Joseph Ratzinger who was a very influential *peritus* at Vatican II in Europe. These theologians embodied the 'perhaps not numerous center' during his formative period, and he spent years understanding, assimilating, and emulating their achievements in his own work.

Among the group of philosophically inclined American theologians formed by Lonergan, including people like John Dunne, Ben F. Meyer, David Burrell, David Tracy, Matthew Lamb, and Robert Doran (to name but a few), only Joseph Komonchak took up the challenge implied in Lonergan's statement in the Epilogue to *Insight* about the need for a contemporary "treatise on the concrete universal that is mankind in the concrete and cumulative consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the message the Gospel (473)." Komonchak was preoccupied with the question of a systematic theology of the church long before doing his doctoral dissertation tracing John Henry Newman's changing views of the church. Yet the dissertation gives us a clue to a major characteristic of Komonchak's cast of mind. Besides being a tough-minded systematic thinker, Komonchak is equally if not more gifted as a historian. This is evidenced in his articles and lectures devoted to discovering what happened to the church's life and theology at the Second Vatican Council.

Needless to say, the vast historical work needed for adequate ecclesiology today makes up no small portion of the "mountainous tasks" and "Herculean labors" indicated by Lonergan in the earlier citation above. Ironically perhaps, Komonchak's talent and penchant for history together with his conscientious awareness of the immense historical background demanded for a historically minded ecclesiology have set up the risk that his unique work in the systematic theology of the church might be prevented from seeing the light of day. Nevertheless, an adequate contemporary ecclesiology must also confront the perhaps even more challenging 'grave problems' that pertain to the functional specialty Foundations. It is no accident that

Komonchak has chosen to give this collection the title *Foundations in Ecclesiology.*

Many readers will recall that foundational theology thematizes the horizon within which theological discourse in doctrines, systematics, and communications makes sense. On top of articulating the basic orientation of one's theological horizon as provided by religious, moral, and intellectual conversion, foundational theology is concerned with working out the general and special categories that condition the theologians' horizon as they do doctrines and systematics. Thus, Komonchak's articles linking Lonergan and the task of ecclesiology and his essays on ecclesiology and the human sciences are engaged in discovering the general and special categories needed for a theology of the church. His St. Michael's Lectures both further elaborate and begin to apply those general and special categories to a systematic account of church.

Anyone confused or overwhelmed by their awareness of the complexities attending a genuinely contemporary ecclesiology will find immeasurable help and solace in this collection of writings. One would be hard pressed to find a clearer or deeper contribution towards an explanatory theology of the church, to use a favorite phrase borrowed by Lonergan from Ortega y Gasset, 'on the level of our times.' The *Lonergan Workshop* is enormously privileged and proud to publish such seminal work by the church's finest ecclesiologist since Congar.

The four first chapters have appeared in print before:

1. "History and Social Theory in Ecclesiology," *Lonergan Workshop,* vol. 2 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press 1981) 1-53.

We are grateful for permission to reprint:

2. "Lonergan and the Tasks of Ecclesiology," in *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan, S.J.* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 1981) 265-273.
3. "Ecclesiology and Social Theory: A Methodological Essay," *The Thomist* 45 (1981) 262-283.
4. "The Church," in *Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Paulist Press 1988) 222-236.

We also thank Kevin McGinley, SJ, Director of the St. Michael's Institute at Gonzaga University for permission to publish "Part II: Some Foundations for Ecclesiology."

Finally, our deepest thanks to Anne O'Donnell for all she has done to get these articles into print as a Supplementary Issue of *Lonergan Workshop*.

Fred Lawrence
Boston College

PREFACE

The essays collected in this volume concentrate on questions of method in ecclesiology and approach them from a perspective heavily influenced by the thought of Bernard Lonergan. Colleagues and students have suggested the usefulness of gathering them in one place and I am grateful to Fred Lawrence for providing a place for them in the supplementary volumes of the Lonergan Workshop.

I began teaching ecclesiology at St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, in the fall of 1967. It took me some time to grasp what the real questions in the area were and more time still to begin to grope towards a critical method for addressing them. My studies under Father Lonergan in Rome had given me some idea of what a real theological question is and some sense of how to go about answering it. But questions vary with the area under consideration, and questions arose in ecclesiology that Lonergan himself had not explicitly addressed. Similarly, the critical sophistication of the different theological disciplines varied considerably, and in the late 1960s by this criterion ecclesiology did not rank high. Everyone knew that one couldn't do ecclesiology as the authors of the manuals had done it — Vatican II had pretty well shattered the old paradigm — but there was little agreement about what was to take its place.

Over several years I became convinced that one of the chief challenges was to bridge the gap between the lofty theological language which the Council had restored to the center of ecclesiology and the concrete reality of the Church as realized in communities of believers. Were 'People of God,' 'Body of Christ,' 'Temple of the Holy Spirit' concepts the ecclesiologist must deal with simply because the Scriptures and tradition require it, or did they also describe dimensions which one could identify and help others to identify in the concrete reality of the Church? When the Council declared that the Church is a single complex reality composed of a divine and a human element (*Lumen gentium* 8), it set out the real 'mystery' of the Church, in a fashion similar to the Chalcedonian identification of the central mystery in the inseparable yet unconfused two natures of the one person of Christ. Deny either the divine or the human element and

there is no longer mystery. Separate one from the other and there is no mystery. Mystery — in the strict theological sense, and, therefore, not just puzzle — sets the challenge of understanding the presence and the activity of the divine in the at times all-too-human.

Somewhat oddly, perhaps, I was helped to see the issue most clearly by the work of such Protestant scholars, often quoted in these essays, as James Gustafson, Claude Welch, and John Knox. These men were reacting to a nearly exclusive emphasis on the invisible and divine elements of the Church and trying to rehabilitate the created reality of the human community of the Church. Most Catholic ecclesiologists seemed to be moving in the opposite direction. In reaction to the nearly exclusive attention of the old textbooks to the institutional dimensions of the Church, they were now so stressing its transcendent, spiritual dimensions whose relationship with concrete communities of believers they often left quite undeveloped. And I did not think matters were helped — in fact I thought they were hindered — by simply resigning oneself to a plurality of 'models,' some of which would emphasize the transcendent and some the quite human dimensions of the Church. The real task, I thought, was to try to understand how the quite human could be the locus of the quite transcendent.

Eventually, I came to see the point of Lonergan's insistence, in the Epilogue to *Insight*, often referred to in these essays, that ecclesiology is the area in which to work out a theology of history. Once again, the analogy is with Christology. In a conversation when I was a student, Lonergan had once remarked that he thought that redemption could not adequately be dealt with simply in terms of the Aristotelian causes, something which theologians in the early 1960s were undertaking in order to explore the redemptive causality of the resurrection. One had to conceive the question, he said, in terms of Christ's historical causality, of his effect on history. Later I came to recognize the link between this comment and the Epilogue and to begin to conceive the Church as the community through which Christ continues to have a redemptive impact on history. In this way I thought I could give concrete meaning to Vatican II's teaching about the Church as the sacrament, the sign and instrument, of Christ's reconciling salvation.

To do this requires a certain transposition, analogous to the one Lonergan thought necessary in the theology of grace. As the shift from

a metaphysically mediated theology to a theology grounded in intentionality-analysis and conversion yields a theology of grace as transformed subjectivity, so a critical ecclesiology must be grounded in an analysis of the social and historical conditions and consequences of conversion. In working all this out, the ecclesiologist will be greatly aided by various forms of social theory.

The essays reprinted here reflect this personal journey. They appear under the general title, "Foundations in Ecclesiology." They do not pretend to offer a complete ecclesiology, but to set out some basic questions that need to be asked and to identify and propose some categories that may prove useful for such a project. In these pieces there are some repetitions of argument, but there are enough differences in perspective to warrant including them all.

The first four of the essays have been published before. They are primarily expository in purpose. The last four form a unity and represent an elaboration of ideas I first presented as the St. Michael's Lectures in 1975 at Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington. They represent an effort to show how a Lonergan-inspired theological anthropology necessarily opens out upon an ecclesiology or, put the other way around, how an ecclesiology can be grounded in an anthropology that explores the concrete conditions of personal existence. While these are more systematic in character than the earlier essays, they too have a limited purpose and scope; and there is much that I would like one day to add to them. Meanwhile, there may be some benefit to publishing them: comments and criticisms may help me to clarify my thought further and even, if they are thought a helpful beginning, to return to the subject.

I would like to thank in particular Rev. William Ryan, who invited me to give the Gonzaga Lectures and who has patiently (I think!) waited an inordinate time to see them finally in print. My thanks also to the original publishers of the other essays for permission to reprint them here.

Joseph Komonchak
The Catholic University of America

CONTENTS

Part 1:

Method in Ecclesiology

HISTORY AND SOCIAL THEORY IN ECCLESIOLOGY

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY has been called 'the century of the Church.'[1] The characterization refers not to any expected or verified triumph of Christianity, but to the remarkable way in which ecclesiology has become a central subject of theological reflection. Trutz Rendtorff has described this development in Protestant theology, especially among the dialectical theologians. Roman Catholics have the opportunity to observe a parallel development, most simply by comparing the documents on the Church of the two Vatican Councils, more fully by tracing the development from one Council to the other in Leo XIII's opening of the Church to the modern world and his restatement of the relation between Church and State, in the biblical, patristic, Thomist revivals, in the liturgical and ecumenical movements, in the recovery of such themes as the Mystical Body and the People of God, in John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento*.[2] These several developments bore their fruit in the Second Vatican Council, of which Karl Rahner felt able to remark "that in all of its sixteen constitutions, decrees and explanations it has been concerned with the *Church*."[3]

The Second Vatican Council, if it lies at the end of one development, itself precipitated another, whose strength is more easily experienced than its direction is charted. Obviously, there are few areas in theology in which theory and practice more directly intersect than in ecclesiology. The pre-conciliar developments in the theology of the Church resulted in a series of reforms which in 1962 the most optimistic did not anticipate, and to evaluate which the historian must certainly review centuries of previous church history and perhaps must await decades more of development. The practical reforms have

---

[1] Otto Dibelius, *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche* (Berlin: Furche, 1926).

[2] P. Stanislas Jaki, *Les tendances nouvelles de ecclésiologie* (Rome, 1957).; Yves M.-J. Congar, *L'Eglise de saint Augustine à l'époque moderne* (Paris, 1970) 459-477.

[3] Karl Rahner, "The New Image of the Church," *Theological Investigations X*, trans. D. Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973) 3.

in turn brought about a new experience of existence in the Church, which itself receives a variety of evaluative interpretations in a spate of books on the general question: What in God's name is going on in the Catholic Church?[4] And with few exceptions most of the recent work in Roman Catholic ecclesiology has been a mixture of more or less theoretical reflections and practical suggestions.[5]

This paper will be largely devoted to theoretical considerations, which I at least like to think are faithful to my own Church-experience and not without practical implications. I propose to review briefly the twentieth-century 'recovery of the Church' in Roman Catholic theology, suggest what I believe has been its principal defect, and then to outline ways in which Bernard Lonergan's thought can help to supply for it. I cannot resist noting the appropriateness of studying Lonergan if Patrick Burns is correct in describing American Catholic theologians as "drifting somewhere off Nova Scotia on their voyage toward an American ecclesiology."[6]

NEW AND OLD MODELS OF THE CHURCH

In 1961, James Gustafson published a very useful little study on "The Church as a Human Community"[7] . The book is a sustained criticism

---

[4] Garry Wills's metaphor is attractive: for many, Catholics and non-Catholics, the Roman Catholic Church was "the extreme taken as a type, the least changeable part of our religious landscape, theological North Star." Only, such was the post-conciliar development, "The North Star has not only dimmed, but wandered." Garry Wills, *Bare, Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972) 1.

[5] Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (London: Collins, 1971); *Why Priests? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*, trans. Robert C. Collins (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972); and *The Church*, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Burns and Oates, 1967). Richard P. McBrien, *Church: The Continuing Quest* (Paramus, NJ: Newman, 1970); and *The Remaking of the Church: An Agenda for Reform* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[6] Patrick J. Burns, "Precarious Reality: Ecclesiological Reflections on Peter Berger." *Theology Digest* **21/4** (1973) 323.

[7] Gustafson's essay is contextualized in Robert S. Paul, *The Church in Search of Itself* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 165-225. Paul links Gustafson's book with Claude Welch's *The Reality of the Church* and Langdon Gilkey's *How the Church can Minister to the World without Losing Itself* as examples of serious attempts to explore theologically the human and sociological aspects of the Church. They stand,

of what Gustafson calls 'theological reductionism,' that is, "the exclusive use of Biblical and doctrinal language in the interpretation of the Church," "the explicit or tacit assumption that the Church is so absolutely unique in character that it can be understood only in its own private language."[8] To supplement a theological interpretation of the Church, Gustafson draws upon the work of Durkheim, Malinowski, Troeltsch, Mead, Royce, and others to elaborate a 'social interpretation' which shows the Church to be a human, natural, political, community of language, interpretation, memory, and understanding, belief, and action.

Gustafson's critique may be usefully applied to the development of Roman Catholic ecclesiology in this century. Avery Dulles has suggested that this development has seen four models challenge the near-monopoly enjoyed for centuries by the 'institutional' model. The new models see the Church primarily as 'mystical communion,' 'sacrament,' 'herald,' and 'servant.' The first model, 'mystical communion,' includes the ideas of the Church as 'Mystical Body' and as 'People of God.' While Dulles does point out the parallels between these ideas and sociologists' discussions of *Gemeinschaft* and of 'primary groups,' still the ideas are essentially biblical, and on the first Dulles writes, "The image of the Body of Christ is organic, rather than sociological."[9]

The model of the Church as 'sacrament' attempts to unify the distinctive emphases of the institutional and mystical models, especially by exploring the Christological parallel. While some exploration of the 'sacramental' or symbolic character of human living usually accompanies the exposition, still it is of some significance that this model's analogue is itself a theological category.

The third model, the Church as 'herald,' is kerygmatic, emphasizing the Church as 'event,' the actual congregation gathered together by the preached Word. Dulles notes that the model tends to underplay the institutional aspect of the Church and that some of its advocates fall into an ecclesiological occasionalism.[10]

---

then, somewhere between an exclusively theological treatment of the Church and the surrender of American Protestant ecclesiology to 'relevance' in the late 1960s.

[8] James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961) 100.

[9] Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974) 46.

[10] Dulles, *Models of the Church* 72-82.

Finally, the model of the Church as 'servant' can build upon *Gaudium et Spes* and the social encyclicals. It is turned out towards the world, which it tends to interpret positively; and emphasizes the brotherhood of those who, in imitation of the suffering Servant, serve the world's progress. Dulles notes a danger that the distinctiveness of the Church's service may be overlooked.[11]

Now none of these models draws very seriously upon social theory. Their underlying analogues (or, in the case of the servant-model, the paradigm of service) are either biblical or liturgical (sacramental). As I will argue more fully later, their distinctive emphases provide needed correction or supplements to the institutional model. But it is the experience of many today that, while the models have their theological attractiveness, they do not often reflect the common experience of members of the Church. One reason for this, of course, may be the failure to realize the practical implications of the newer models for the life of the Church.[12] But the more fundamental reason may also be the failure of the exponents of the newer models to work through the fundamental social terms and relations necessary for an integral and concrete ecclesiology.[13]

From that standpoint at least, the institutional model more clearly escapes the criticism of 'theological reductionism.' It draws, after all, on a social or political theory, devised in the course of centuries of struggle for effective institutional freedom and eventually elaborated in a form which was, for its time, of considerable sophistication. Since the development of recent ecclesiology — at least on the level of theory — has been largely a departure from the institutional model, it might be of some interest briefly to review its history and then to attempt some explanation of its fall from grace.

---

[11] Dulles, *Models of the Church* 93-96.

[12] For example, it has recently been argued that the revival of interest in the term *koinonia* to describe the Church is a sign of the failure to realize effective community (Pier Cesare Bori, *KOINONIA: L'idea della communione nell' ecclesiologia recente e nel Nuovo Testamento* [Brescia: Padeia, 1972] 76-77).

[13] Gregory Baum has proposed 'movement' as a new sociological model of the Church in *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 193-210). I find the model attractive, but it needs more extensive development.

Nearly everyone today rejects Rudolph Sohm's fantasy of a primitive, 'charismatic' Church to which the very notion of law was foreign.[14] Several New Testament traditions reveal at least the outline of the 'Catholic' understanding of the Church and of church order;[15] and Sohm himself admitted that his ideal stage of the Church had come to an end by the time of I Clement. By the time of Nicaea, the Church had developed certain 'structures' of its own, modeled often on those of the late Empire; and, in rejecting Montanism, it had already, to use Troeltsch's ideal-types, chosen the church-model over that of the sect.[16] The 'institutionalization' of the Church was carried out more as a sociological necessity than as a reflexively conscious decision, and later distinctions between 'visible' and 'invisible' Church were largely unknown.[17]

'Institutional' self-consciousness was accelerated by the struggles in the Eastern Empire over final doctrinal and disciplinary authority, and the development of papal authority in the Church as a counter-weight to the Emperor's ecumenical authority can be seen as an effort to maintain the independence and transcendence of the Church.[18] Juristic categories and procedures are already common during the Carolingian era in the West, where they function both in the disputes between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* and in the controversies between papal monism and conciliarism.[19] But an 'institutional' model still did not predominate. In liturgy, homily, even in conciliar debate, the Church was still described mainly in biblical and liturgical images and

---

[14] Yves M.-J. Congar, "R. Sohm nous interroge encore," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* **57** (1973) 263-294.

[15] Ernst Käsemann has done as much as any Protestant to show the *frühkatholische* elements in the New Testament; in fact, in some ways their presence appears in almost all of his work. Briefly, 'early Catholic' notions admit that the Church has a mediatorial role.

[16] Robert F. Evans, *One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought* (London: Allenson, 1972); Louis Bouyer, *L'Eglise de Dieu: Corps de Christ et Temple de l'Esprit* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1970) 27-40.

[17] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1978) 191. Various of the symbols and images used of the Church are studied in Elert and Hugo Rahner.

[18] Trevor Gervase Jalland, *The Church and the Papacy: An Historical Study* (London: SPCK, 1944).

[19] Karl Frederick Morrison, *The Two Kingdoms: Ecclesiology in Carolingian Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1964).

symbols and understood principally as the *congregatio fidelium*, never more the Church than when gathered for the Eucharist.[20]

A turning-point seems to have been reached with the Gregorian Reform, in which the *libertas Ecclesiae* was argued on the basis of an explicitly juridical ecclesiology, clerical and papal in character, and defended in practice by a series of administrative reforms which generally favored a centralization of power in Rome. In defense of both theory and practice, Hildebrand himself encouraged collections of canons, for one of which he seems to have composed his own *Dictatus Papae*. The reform-collections drew rather heavily upon the False Decretals, and Congar has pointed out that their inclusion hid from the Middle Ages the fact of historical development in church order and especially in papal administration.[21] The liberation of the Church from lay dominance was purchased at the cost of a considerable clericalization and juridicization of the notion of the Church, which Congar, again, illustrates by the clerical monopolizing of such texts as I Cor. 2:15: "The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one."[22] Around 1140, Gratian published his *Concordia discordantium canonum* which, it has recently been argued, should be read as a juridical theory of the Church meant to buttress the threatened reform-movement, now championed mainly by monastic theologians such as Bernard, themselves operating with a 'pre-Gregorian' ecclesiology.[23] However that may be, Gratian's work led to the formation of the great schools of canon law and to the development of the science of jurisprudence which would provide the series of lawyer-popes of the next two centuries with the fundamental categories in which to state their notion of the Church and their defense of their growing power.

---

[20] Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An historical and a theological essay.* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966); Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'Eglise au moyen âge,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Aubier, 1949).

[21] Yves M.-J. Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut moyen âge. De saint Grégoire le Grand a la désunion entre Byzance et Rome* (Paris: Editions du Cerf 1964) 226-232.

[22] Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut moyen âge,* 873.

[23] Stanley Chodorow, *Christian Political Theory and Church Politics in the Mid-Twelfth Century: The Ecclesiology of Gratian's* Decretum. (Berkeley: University of California, 1972). Reviews of this work are mixed.

It would be a mistake, however, to think the interest in law and juridical considerations to be a clerical or papal intrigue. Behind the gradual growth of the conciliarist movement lies a juridical or canonistic statement of a theology of the Church in terms of corporation-theory.[24] And the great Church-State controversies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were argued out, on both sides, in political and juristic categories. Law was the social theory available at the time.[25]

The whole history of this 'institutional' model of the Church is an exciting and creative moment in the history of ideas. Throughout the period, from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, there is a dialectical relationship between ecclesiology and political thought. Brian Tierney has argued that the development of constitutional theory in the West was greatly influenced by conciliarist theory; and Antony Black has more recently traced the influence of the fifteenth-century triumph of papal monism on the ideology of monarchy.[26] And perhaps the best indirect indication of the mutual influence of ecclesiology and social theory may be seen in the impossibility of writing a history of the ecclesiology of the Middle Ages without considerable acquaintance with the political thought of the period, with corporation-theory, with the rise of new forms of association, urban and communal, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and so on.[27] It is not clear that a similarly broad knowledge would be necessary to write the history of ecclesiology from Trent to the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the movement briefly described here, ecclesiology was not confined to institutional considerations; but, after a time in which juristic and more 'spiritual' ways of thought co-existed, the 'institutional' came to dominate, and ecclesiology became

---

[24] Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory, The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Cambridge: University Press 1955).

[25] Congar, *L'Eglise de saint Augustine,* 269-295.

[26] Tierney, "Canon Law and Western Constitutionalism," *Catholic Historical Review* **52** (1966) 1-17; Antony Black, *Monarchy and Community: Political Ideas in the Later Conciliar Controversy, 1430-1450.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970).

[27] Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut moyen âge; L'Eglise de saint Augustine;* M.-D. Chenu, "'Fraternitas': Evangile et condition socio-culturelle," *Revue d'Histoire de Spiritualité* **49** (1973) 385-400.

'hierarchology,' a treatise in public law. That development may be said to have been completed by the time of Trent, certainly in a figure such as Bellarmine, who deliberately worked with minimalistic definitions in order to maintain the political visibility of the Church alongside the Kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice.[28] The centralization of the Tridentine Reform in Rome only reinforced the dominance of the model, and soon in a series of retreats, the Church would feel itself obliged to preserve its own unique and privileged social order before the threats of the Enlightenment, the political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the general secularization of modern European life.

During this period, the Church ceased to be in creative contact with the forces shaping the modern world and sought to preserve its identity by insisting upon its uniqueness and by making the transcendence of its origin, center, and goal apply to nearly its every feature. What contact there was between ecclesiology and wider political thought tended to follow defensive or even reactionary lines as, for example, in Möhler's dependence on Romanticism or de Maistre's *apologia* for infallibility.[29]

As ecclesiology thus lost contact with contemporary social theory and especially with the development of modern, empirical sociology, the articulation of the institutional model took on more and more of the features of what Lonergan calls 'classicism.' Society was defined normatively, and the Church was shown to possess that definition's characteristics, and this by the express will of Christ. Historical development in church order was either ignored or denied, and in few other treatises were the marks of anachronistic historical interpretation more visible. Something of an 'ontology' of social structures came to dominate, and even if the celestial hierarchies were denied their

---

[28] Robert Bellarmine, *De membris Ecclesiae militantis Clericis, Monachis, et Laicis*. Opera Omnia, vol. III, ed. J. Fevré (Paris: Vivès, 1870).

[29] Congar, "L'ecclésiologie de la Révolution Française au Concile du Vatican, sous le signe de l'affirmation de l'autorité," *L'ecclesiologie aux XIXe siècle*, ed. M. Nedoncelle (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1960) 77-114. Consider two examples of de Maistre's logic: "There can be no human society without government, no government without sovereignty, no sovereignty without infallibility." "Without the pope, there is no Church, without the Church, no Christianity, without Christianity no society; so that the life of the nations of Europe has ... its source, its only source, in the power of the pope."

relevance to secular society, they could still appear in the vindication of the 'monarchical' or 'aristocratic' structure of the Church.

In the end, the institutional model became totalitarian in its claims. Bellarmine reduced the Church to its minimal components. Pius XII attempted the Procrustean task of identifying the Mystical Body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church. Parallels drawn between structures and offices in the Church and those in other social relationships were looked upon with suspicion. The function of 'teaching' in the Church, for example, was a *magisterium authenticum* (having force, not because of the reasons advanced, but because of the 'authority' of the one teaching) in distinction from the *magisterium mere scientificum* of the rest of the world's experience, in which a teacher's 'authority' rests on his ability to offer reasons for what he teaches.[30] Roman Catholic ecclesiology, as exemplified by the manuals, was marked by what Gustafson called 'social reductionism,' only the social theory was a sort of 'supernatural sociology.' The emphasis fell, not on the reality being mediated, but on the structures of mediation.[31]

The indifference to social theory in recent ecclesiology is perhaps more understandable in the light of this history. Most twentieth century ecclesiologists seem to have presumed that there was little danger that the institutional elements of the Church would pass unnoticed and so devoted their energies to proposing the distinctive features of the Church, its special union in Christ, its concrete centering around the Word and the Eucharist, its sacramental nature and function, its service of the Kingdom. But, while the newer models of the Church

---

[30] Perhaps the most straightforward statement of the position is Thomas Stapleton's: "In doctrina fidei non quid dicatur, sed quis loquetur a fideli populo attendendum est" (quoted by Congar in *L'Eglise de saint Augustine* 371).

[31] For illustrations, one might consider the loss of *recta ratio* as the principle of a law's obligation in favor of mere promulgation by a legitimate authority (Jean Touneau, "The Teaching of the Thomist Tract on Law," *Thomist* 34 [1970] 18-84); or the reduction of tradition to magisterium — the latter itself having changed its reference-point from content to form (Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*); or the restriction of apostolic succession to a matter of ritual (Congar, "Apostolicité de ministère et apostolicité de doctrine. Essai d'explication de la Réaction protestante et de la Tradition catholique," *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1971] 51-94). One could also refer to Lonergan's description of "the shabby shell of Catholicism" (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1972] 326-327).

certainly permit a more adequate exploration of its reality than the institutional model alone, I do not believe that the plurality of models today should be assigned anything like the status of a scientific ideal. Ecclesiology will not move out of this pre-scientific stage until some serious effort is made to think out basic social and historical categories. Until these are elaborated, I do not see how the theology of the Church will escape the positivism I see to be present in Hans Küng's *The Church* and also, though to a lesser degree, in those ecclesiologies which use the splendid biblical, patristic, and liturgical images of the Church without inquiring whether, to what degree, and how they tie in with the faithful's experience of the Church. I do not believe that this experience *always* reduces the Church to merely another social group among many. But without reference to it, the Church is transposed off into a realm of mystery or, rather, of mystique, a move which only reinforces the sectarian tendencies of post-Tridentine Catholicism.[32] When the Church is considered only in specifically theological terms, its relevance to the wider world of human experience is lost to view, and the privatizing tendencies of post-Enlightenment religion are encouraged.

LONERGAN AND THE REDOING OF ECCLESIOLOGY

The criticisms advanced in the first section suggest that we have not advanced far beyond the situation which Lonergan regretted in the

[32] 'Supernatural sociology' is one example of sectarianism; but I am not sure that a sociologist would be able to make much sense out of the terms in which, for example, the relation between episcopacy and primacy is usually discussed even by proponents of the newer 'models.' One longs for the sober good sense displayed even by so uncompromising a papalist as John of Turrecremata in his interpretation of a gloss on the *Decretum* asserting the superiority of council to pope: "videtur quod hoc non sit verum de maioritate potestatis iurisdictionis, existente vero et indubitato Papa, cum semper caput praestantius sit authoritate regiminis toto residuo corpore, et concilia robur accipiant ab Apostolica sede ... Sed bene regulariter verum est de maioritate authoritatis descretivi iudicii secundum quod dicimus, quod qui magis ratione utitur, eo maioris authoritatis eius verba esse videntur, ... quae praesumitur maior est in toto concilio quam in uno homine" (quoted by Congar, "La 'réception' comme réalité ecclésiologique," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* **56** 401).

'Epilogue' to *Insight*. Since the rest of this paper will outline his attempts to supply for the defect noted, I will quote his remarks in full.

> It may be asked in what department of theology the historical aspect of development might be treated, and I would like to suggest that it may possess peculiar relevance to a treatise on the Mystical Body of Christ. For in any theological treatise a distinction may be drawn between a material and a formal element: the material element is supplied by Scriptural and patristic texts and by dogmatic pronouncements; the formal element, that makes a treatise a treatise, consists in the pattern of terms and relations through which the materials may be embraced in a single, coherent view. Thus, the formal element in the treatise on grace consists in theorems on the supernatural, and the formal element in the treatise on the Blessed Trinity consists in theorems on the notions of procession, relation, and person. Now while the Scriptural, patristic, and dogmatic materials for a treatise on the Mystical Body have been assembled, I would incline to the opinion that its formal element remains incomplete as long as it fails to draw upon a theory of history. It was at the fullness of time that there came into the world the Light of the world. It was the advent not only of the light that directs but also of the grace that gives good will and good performance. It was the advent of a light and a grace to be propagated, not only through the inner mystery of individual conversion, but also through the outer channels of human communication. If its principal function was to carry the seeds of eternal life, still it could not bear its fruits without effecting a transfiguration of human living and, in turn, that transfiguration contains the solution not only to man's individual but also to his social problem of evil. So it is that the Pauline thesis of the moral impotence of Jew and Gentile alike was due to be complemented by the Augustinian analysis of history in terms of the city of God and the city of this world. So it is that the profound and penetrating influence of liberal, Hegelian, Marxist, and romantic theories of history have been met by a firmer affirmation of the organic structure and functions of the Church, by a long series of social encyclicals, by calls to Catholic action, by a fuller advertence to collective responsibility, and by a deep and widespread interest in the doctrine of the Mystical Body. So too it may be that the contemporary crisis of human living and human values demands of the theologian, in addition to treatises on the unique and to treatises on the universal

> common to many instances, a treatise on the concrete universal that is mankind in the concrete and cumulative consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the message of the Gospel. And as the remote possibility of thought on the concrete universal lies in the insight that grasps the intelligible in the sensible, so its proximate possibility resides in a theory of development that can envisage not only natural and intelligent progress but also sinful decline, and not only progress and decline but also supernatural recovery.[33]

Before indicating how, in *Insight* itself, Lonergan attempted to meet the need he here describes, certain comments are perhaps in order. First of all, the 'Epilogue' was presumably written as part of 'the process of rounding things off' necessitated by Lonergan's appointment to teach in Rome.[34] While its outline of the relevance of the book to theology is frequently provocative, it reflects more the notion of theology still maintained in his treatises on the Trinity than the breakthrough to the ideas now elaborated in *Method in Theology*. Thus, for example, there is no indication he had yet seen the possibility or need for 'the transition from theoretical to methodical theology' which he often illustrates by the theology of grace and which, presumably, could also be effected with regard to the theology of the Trinity.[35] Perhaps it was the nature of the object of ecclesiology that permitted the more 'existential' character of his suggestions for that treatise.

Secondly, with regard to the 'material element' of an ecclesiology, Lonergan was perhaps too confident that they had already been assembled. The history of ecclesiology has been considerably broadened and deepened since *Insight* was completed, and the theological evaluation of the material is still in process.

Thirdly, Lonergan's remarks in the 'Epilogue' raise a question to which ecclesiologists have not yet seriously addressed themselves,

---

[33] Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957) 742-743.

[34] Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) 12.

[35] *Method* 288-289. The extension to the theology of the Trinity is suggested on page 291 and was also alluded to in a remark at a Toronto seminar in 1969, when Lonergan described his analysis of the Trinity as 'existential,' deriving from another context than that in which questions about 'necessity' and 'contingency' in God are relevant.

namely, the relation between the Church as an historical reality and the Church as an explicit theological theme. It has appeared in certain comments on the difficulty of writing a history of ecclesiology before ecclesiology became a separate treatise;[36] but the relation between ecclesiology and the concrete life of the Church, including the doing of theology, is only now being investigated.[37] It may be suggested that it took the rise of historical consciousness to raise the question directly and that its solution will bear some resemblance to the relation between the sociology of knowledge (at least as described by Peter Berger) and the everyday 'social construction of reality.'

Fourthly, Lonergan's description of the 'formal element' in a theological treatise provides a link with the different approach of *Method* and suggests an interpretation of the purpose of *Insight*. The formal element is described as "the pattern of terms and relations through which the materials may be embraced in a single, coherent view." This description evokes immediately the section in *Method* on 'categories,' in which Lonergan spells out the claim that 'theology in its new context' must draw upon reflection on conversion for its foundations.[38]

Categories are there described as either 'general,' regarding objects common to many subjects, or 'special,' regarding objects proper to theology. To be useful to a religion meant for all men, they must be transcultural; and a base for such categories is provided by the founding religious experience of God's love and by the transcendental method employed in *Insight* and further expanded in *Method*. The

---

[36] "For the historian to limit himself to treatises which bear exclusively or *ex professo* on the Church, would be for him to condemn himself to a fragmentary and unilateral view of the ecclesiology of the ancients. They speak of the Church *à propos* of everything. They do not consider it as a particular object, but rather as the factor which conditions the whole movement of return to God and as a manifestation of the glory of God in Jesus Christ" (E. Lamirande, "L'Ecclésiologie peut-elle se constituer en traité spécial?" *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* **34** [1964] 211*).

[37] Trutz Rendtorff, *Church and Theology: The Systematic Function of the Church Concept in Modern Theology*, trans. R. H. Fuller (Philadelphia: Westminster). Karl Rahner has recently offered the following analogy: "ecclesiology is related to the other departments of dogmatic theology as grammar, the techniques of poetry, and semantics are related to poetry itself" (Karl Rahner, "The New Image of the Church," *Theological Investigations X*, trans. D. Bourke [New York: Herder and Herder, 1973] 27).

[38] *Method* 282-293.

desired transcultural categories become valid when they form 'interlocking sets of terms and relations' or models (ideal-types), which will always have heuristic value and will have descriptive value when a theologian is able to affirm that the reality they heuristically intend actually exists.

In those terms, *Insight* can be read as at least partially an attempt to derive general theological categories.[39] Their base is the operating subject, his operations, the structure within which the operations occur, the objects they intend, and the society and history they constitute. The description Lonergan gives on pages 286-288 of *Method* of the differentiation, expansion, and development of the basic terms and relations is essentially a summary of *Insight*, filled out with the developments of thought and vocabulary between the two works.

As for special theological categories, these have their base in the authentic Christian. Their use involves a shift from a theoretical to a methodical theology. The inner determinant of the founding reality of conversion is God's grace; outer determinants are also provided by the store of Christian tradition. Successive sets of these categories are developed by moving (1) from the basic religious experience, to (2) the community and the history which converted subjects constitute, to (3) the principle of their loving, which is God's love for them, to (4) the dialectic of inauthentic Christianity, to (5) the persistent facts of progress, decline, and redemption.

Both the general and the special categories are derived by self-appropriation and by employing the resultant 'heightened consciousness' both as a methodical control on oneself and as providing an *a priori* for understanding others. In terms of the functional specialties described in *Method*, the categories are purified by dialectics and the foundational conversion; and they are used, first as models, in foundations, and then, perhaps, as hypotheses or descriptions, in doctrines, systematics, and communications. Their use here, however, occurs in interaction with data, by which they may be further specified, clarified, corrected, and developed. The resultant theology will be both *a priori* and *a posteriori*, "the fruit of an ongoing process

[39] The criticism of the newer models in ecclesiology might thus be expressed as the exclusive use of 'special' theological categories, or else as drawing them exclusively from revelation and tradition.

that has one foot in a transcultural base and the other in increasingly organized data."[40]

Method's discussion of theological categories, then, provides a context in which to understand Lonergan's call in *Insight* for a theory of history from which to derive the 'formal element' of an ecclesiology. Since it is often overlooked to what an extent Lonergan undertook to outline the required theory of history in *Insight* itself, it might be well to review the work rather closely for its contribution to ecclesiology.

INSIGHT

At first sight, *Insight* seems to be an uncomfortably private work, not only as the remarkable personal achievement it is, but also for the essentially private self-appropriation to which it invites the reader. The impression is perhaps supported by Lonergan's decision to postpone extensive consideration of interpersonal relations to his work on method in theology. The impression, I believe, is mistaken, however; and I have never been inclined to agree with the criticism that *Insight* neglects the political dimension of human living. In the first place, there is the insistence upon the collaborative nature of scientific inquiry and progress, which later, in the analysis of belief, is shown to be no special characteristic of scientists, but an inevitable condition of human living in society.

But the social context of individual existence is clearly maintained elsewhere, too. Common sense, after all, is *common*:

> the communal development of intelligence in the family, the tribe, the nation, the race. Not only are men born with a native drive to inquire and understand, they are born into a community that possesses a common fund of tested answers, and from that fund each may draw his variable share, measured by his capacity, his interests, and his energy.[41]

---

[40] *Method* 293.

[41] *Insight* 175. "Man knows himself in the intersubjective community of which he is just a part, in the support and opposition the community finds in its enveloping world of sense, in the tools of its making, in the rites and ceremonies that at once occupy its leisure, vent its psychic awareness of cosmic significance, express its

If the discussion of 'the subjective field of common sense' concentrates on the individual bias of the dramatic subject,[42] still this is not described without reference to social relationships; and in the next chapter Lonergan maintains that in the relationship between the dialectic of community and the dialectic of the dramatic subject, "the dialectic of community holds the dominant position, for it gives rise to the situations that stimulate neural demands and it moulds the orientation of intelligence that preconsciously exercises the censorship," and the qualification quickly appended leads itself to the socially pertinent observation that "what happens in isolated individuals tends to bring them together and so to provide a focal point from which aberrant social attitudes originate."[43]

It is in this chapter, "Common Sense as Object," however, that the social order comes directly under study. Here common sense is presented as originating a technology, economy, polity, and culture; and these are studied less as affecting nature than as adding "a series of new levels or dimensions in the network of human relationships."[44] The chapter outlines what Lonergan calls 'the social structure of the human good.' The structure rests upon the recurrent intervention of intelligence producing the mechanical arts and, today, technology. With these as 'initial instances of capital formation,' there develops an economy, which in turn evokes 'the political differentiation of common sense.'[45] None of this takes place, of course, apart from culture, man's 'capacity to ask, to reflect, to reach an answer' to the question 'what he himself is all about.'[46] Where all the elements work harmoniously, there functions the good of order, a scheme of recurrence that assures that the diverse particular goods of the social order are regularly achieved.[47] This good of order is dynamic: "It possesses its own normative line of development, inasmuch as elements of the idea of order

---

incipient grasp of universal order and its standards of praise and blame." *Insight* 536.

[42] *Insight* 181-206.

[43] *Insight* 218.

[44] *Insight* 207.

[45] *Insight* 208-209.

[46] *Insight* 236.

[47] *Insight* 209-210.

are grasped by insight into concrete situations, are formulated in proposals, are accepted by explicit or tacit agreements, and are put into execution only to change the situation and give rise to still further insights."[48] And because of this dynamism, Lonergan can even insist that "the thesis of progress needs to be affirmed again."[49]

Still, the actual social order is seldom ideal, and just as the individual develops only over time and his development is subject to dramatic bias, so also there is a tension and dialectic of human community. The tension arises from the dual source of human social relationships, the spontaneous intersubjectivity of primitive community and the 'new creation' that is a social order or civic community devised by practical intelligence and developed to the point of becoming "an indispensable constituent of human living."[50] This duality of origin becomes a tension when the self-transcendent nature of practical intelligence is related to "the more spontaneous viewpoint of the individual," himself conceived, not as a monad, but as affected from the beginning by "the bonds of intersubjectivity."[51] The tension is inevitable, for the intersubjectivity is spontaneous and the practical direction of human living not a matter of choice; and because such intersubjectivity and practical common sense are the linked but opposed and mutually related principles of social living, there exists a 'dialectic of community.'[52]

Consequently, besides the bias arising from the psychological depths of the individual, there are other biases to which common sense is subject, which are directly related to the social order. The individual bias of the egoist refuses to raise the further questions that would relate his clever solution to his own problem of living to a larger social order, even that of his own intersubjective community. Secondly, group bias builds upon the powerful bonds of one's intersubjective group to deflect the group-transcending dynamism of intelligence to the defense of the group's well-being and usefulness. The wheel of progress can no longer turn smoothly, for now insights are operative or inoperative, not

---

[48] *Insight* 596-597; xiv.

[49] *Insight* 688.

[50] *Insight* 211-214.

[51] *Insight* 215.

[52] *Insight* 215-218.

solely in terms of whether they meet the given situation, but also in terms of whether they are supported or opposed by powerful enough social groups. In the end, the social order develops in distorted and twisted fashion: the social order becomes stratified, classes are distinguished by their success and, lacking any coherent order, the society heads towards the alternatives of reform or revolution.[53]

Finally, there is the general bias to which common sense is congenitally subject, the assumption that intelligence is irrelevant to human affairs. This bias becomes critical in an age in which man discovers that he is himself "the executor of the emergent probability of human affairs."[54] For, once the meaning of this responsibility becomes clear, there arises the necessity of common sense's "being subordinated to a human science that is concerned ... not only with knowing history but also with directing it."[55] This means, of course, that common sense must acknowledge its own incompetence, and such good sense is uncommon indeed. The result is the repudiation of theory, a growing confusion of intelligence with 'practicality' (itself leagued with force), the cumulative deterioration of the social situation, the emergence of the social surd, and finally, "the surrender of detached and disinterested intelligence," most fatally on the level of the human sciences which thereby become radically uncritical.[56]

In the end, the decline threatens man's very freedom. For his effective freedom is not only restricted by time and circumstance, but also by his "incomplete intellectual and volitional development."[57] The fourfold bias produces a moral impotence within individual, group, and general society, the gap between their actual effective freedom and the hypothetical effective freedom they might enjoy were the circle of progress not subject to the biases. The general bias especially disables man and society by producing a social situation which is "a compound of the rational and irrational"[58]; and this, because it constitutes the materials, conditions, and reality to be dealt with, lends support to the

---

[53] *Insight* 218-225.

[54] *Insight* 227.

[55] *Insight* 227.

[56] *Insight* 228-232.

[57] *Insight* 627.

[58] *Insight* 628.

series of mistaken philosophies that repudiate critical intelligence. At last, the civilization drifts into "the sterility of the objectively unintelligible situation and ... the coercion of economic pressures, political force, and psychological conditioning."[59]

At first view, the problem can be met "only by the attainment of a higher viewpoint in man's understanding and making of man,"[60] "the discovery, the logical expansion and the recognition of the principle that intelligence contains its own immanent norms and that these norms are equipped with sanctions which man does not have to invent or impose."[61] This higher viewpoint will distinguish clearly between progress and its principle, liberty, and decline and its principle, bias; and it will result in a critical and normative human science. Lonergan calls this higher viewpoint 'cosmopolis,' "a representative of detached intelligence that both appreciates and criticizes, that identifies the good neither with the new nor with the old, that, above all else, neither will be forced into an ivory tower of ineffectualness by the social surd nor, on the other hand, will capitulate to its absurdity."[62] This cosmopolis is not a group, nor super-state, nor organization, nor academy, nor court. "It is a withdrawal from practicality to save practicality. It is a dimension of consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical possibilities."[63]

But, for all its high goals, cosmopolis is not the answer. For cosmopolis is a higher viewpoint arising out of a critical human science, itself "conditioned by the possibility of a correct and accepted philosophy."[64] But so long as there is a priority of man's living to his learning how to live, man will suffer from "an incapacity for sustained development."[65] And so long as the living suffers from incomplete development, the correct philosophy and critical science will be achieved only after long struggle and will be unacceptable to disorientated minds and to wills rendered ineffective by the failure of intellect

---

[59] *Insight* 629.
[60] *Insight* 233.
[61] *Insight* 234.
[62] *Insight* 237.
[63] *Insight* 241.
[64] *Insight* 690.
[65] *Insight* 630.

to develop, biased in the ways outlined, and in effete flight from self-responsibility into self-forgetfulness, rationalization or renunciation. In the world of God's creation, such "bad will is not merely the inconsistency of rational self-consciousness; it is also sin against God. The hopeless tangle of the social surd, of the impotence of common sense, of the endlessly multiplied philosophies, is not merely a cul-de-sac for human progress; it also is a reign of sin, a despotism of darkness; and men are its slaves."[66] This reign of sin is 'the expectation of sin,' which, if it finds its material component in 'the priority of living to learning how to live,' derives its proper evil from 'man's awareness of his plight and his self-surrender to it.'[67]

A mere higher viewpoint, then, is not enough. "The solution has to be a still higher integration."[68] From it, indeed, the higher viewpoint may proceed; but the solution itself is not on the level of theory, but on the level of man's living, where the priority of living to learning and being persuaded to live rightly must be overcome.

The argument has so far outlined the first two of what Lonergan, in lectures on the "Philosophy of Education," given in 1959, called 'the differentials of the human good.'[69] In a recent article, Lonergan has provided a helpful indication of his method and purpose in *Insight*.

> It was about 1937-38 that I became interested in a theoretical analysis of history. I worked out an analysis on the model of a threefold approximation. Newton's planetary theory had a first approximation in the first law of motion: bodies move in a straight line with constant velocity unless some force intervenes. There was a second approximation when the addition of the law of gravity between the sun and the planet yielded an elliptical

---

[66] *Insight* 692.

[67] *Insight* 693.

[68] *Insight* 632.

[69] In these lectures, Lonergan was outlining his 'notion of the human good,' which, he said, was 'inter-convertible with a notion of the structure of history.' This began with 'the general notion of the human good,' went on to consider 'the invariant structure of the human good' and the parallel threat of evil, and then introduced as 'differentials' accounting for the diverse realizations of the invariant structure, the three principles of intellectual development. sin, and redemption. The presentation has obvious similarities to *Insight*, but decline is here called 'sin,' and the three biases give the notions of 'sin as crime,' 'sin as a component in social process,' and 'sin as aberration.' I quote from my own transcription of the tapes of the lectures.

orbit for the planet. A third approximation was reached when the influence of the gravity of the planets on one another is taken into account to reveal the perturbed ellipses in which the planets actually move, The point to this model is, of course, that in the intellectual construction of reality it is not any of the earlier stages of the construction but only the final product that actually exists. Planets do not move in straight lines nor in properly elliptical orbits; but these conceptions are needed to arrive at the perturbed ellipses in which they actually do move.

In my rather theological analysis of human history my first approximation was the assumption that men always do what is intelligent and reasonable, and its implication was an ever increasing progress. The second approximation was the radical inverse insight that men can be biased and so unintelligent and unreasonable in their choices and decisions. The third approximation was the redemptive process resulting from God's gift of his grace to individuals and from the manifestation of his love in Christ Jesus. The whole idea was presented in chapter twenty of *Insight*. The sundry forms of bias were presented in chapters six and seven on common sense. The notion of moral impotence, which I had studied in some detail when working on Aquinas's notion of *gratia operans*, was worked out in chapter eighteen on the possibility of ethics."[70]

An alert reading of *Insight* itself could pick up the clues to his intention. On pages 596-597, Lonergan outlines the first two approximations and compares them with the first two steps in an understanding of planetary orbits. And later, as he begins his description of the solution to the problem of evil, he is at pains to indicate that it is already operative in the actual universe.

...since a solution exists, our account of man's moral impotence and of the limitations of his effective freedom cannot be the whole story. There is a further component in the actual universe that, as yet, has not been mentioned. Because it has not been mentioned, our statements on man's plight are true as far as they go, but they are not the whole truth. They are true hypothetically inasmuch as they tell what would be, did the further component not exist; but they are not true absolutely, for they

[70] Bernard Lonergan, "*Insight* Revisited" *A Second Collection*, ed. W. Ryan and B. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 271-272.

> prescind from a further component that both exists and is relevant to the issue.[71]

It is this 'further component,' third 'differential,' which Lonergan outlines under the title, "The Heuristic Structure of the Solution." This heuristic anticipation of the redemptive solution begins where the description of the problem had left off. Essentially the solution will consist "in the introduction of new conjugate forms in man's intellect, will, and sensitivity," providing man with habits that, as operative throughout living, reverse the priority of living to learning and being persuaded.[72] These new forms constitute the desired 'higher integration of human activity' and "solve the problem by controlling elements that otherwise are non-systematic or irrational,"[73] the chief of these being, of course, sin.

But, if this description seems rather individualistic, Lonergan goes on to insist that, to leave intact the original nature and laws of man's living, the solution "will come to men through their apprehension and with their consent."[74] And, in accord with the enduring significance of emergent probability, the solution will first appear as 'an emergent trend in which the full solution becomes effectively probable' and then as 'the realization of the full solution' itself.[75] Both of these will meet man as both sensitive and intersubjective, and will do so in such fashion as to "command his attention, nourish his imagination, stimulate his intelligence and will release his affectivity, control

---

[71] *Insight* 694. It is worth noting that this insistence that only the 'third approximation ' describes the actual universe has its significance for the notion of the supernatural. The word has lost much, perhaps all, of its usefulness today, but properly understood, 'supernatural' and not the word 'natural' has concrete reference to the actual universe.

[72] *Insight* 696-697.

[73] *Insight* 697.

[74] *Insight* 697.

[75] *Insight* 698. Some indication of what Lonergan meant by the emergence of the effective probability of the full solution may be given by his including among the illustrations of 'vertical finality' the fact that "only when and where the higher rational culture emerged did God acknowledge the fulness of time permitting the Word to become flesh and the mystical body to begin its intussusception of human personalities and its leavening of human history" (Bernard Lonergan, "Finality, Love, Marriage" *Collection. Papers by B. Lonergan*, ed. F. E. Crowe [New York: Herder and Herder, 1972] 21).

his aggressivity and, as central features of the world of sense, intimate its finality, its yearning for God."[76] In other words, the solution will appear, not as myth, but as mystery, not as fiction, but as history.

But, if the solution is to meet men as they are, it cannot build upon the probability of man's coming to acknowledge its need and its existence by his immanently generated knowledge; for it is the unlikelihood of such knowledge that constitutes the problem.[77] The solution, therefore, must build upon 'the general context of belief,' namely, 'the collaboration of mankind in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge' and will itself be 'some species of faith,'[78] by which man will collaborate 'with God in solving man's problem of evil'[79] first by assenting to the truths he reveals and secondly by himself communicating and transmitting the solution to successive generations and different classes and cultures of men.

Since, however, one cannot expect the solution to eliminate deficiencies and failures from man's collaboration in it, the solution will be threatened by heresy. "But the one human means of keeping a collaboration true to its purpose and united in its efforts is to set up an organization that possesses institutions capable of making necessary judgments and decisions that are binding on all. Accordingly, it will follow that God will secure the preservation of faith against heresy through some appropriate institutional organization of the new and higher collaboration."[80]

The solution will be concretely effective, "not by suppressing the consequences of man's waywardness but by introducing a new higher integration that enables man, if he will, to rise above the consequences, to halt and reverse the sequence of ever less comprehensive syntheses in which theory keeps surrendering to practice, to provide a new and more solid base on which man's intellectual and social development can rise to heights undreamed of, and

---

[76] *Insight* 724.

[77] *Insight* 702-703.

[78] *Insight* 703.

[79] *Insight* 719.

[80] *Insight* 723.

perpetually to overcome the objective surd of social situations by meeting abundant evil with a more generous good."[81]

That 'more generous good' will be charity or love, a being-in-love with God, with his creation, and with all persons within his creation, which contributes to the solution that 'dialectical attitude of will' which returns good for evil. "For it is only inasmuch as men are willing to meet evil with good, to love their enemies, to pray for those that persecute and calumniate them, that the social surd is a potential good. It follows that love of God above all and in all so embraces the order of the universe as to love all men with a self-sacrificing love."[82]

Finally, such love will inform man's intellect with a hope that repudiates man's despair, especially "the deep hopelessness that allows man's spirit to surrender the legitimate aspirations of the unrestricted desire."[83]

Such is an outline of Lonergan's 'rather theological analysis of human history,' and it may serve to illumine the suggestion that *Insight* be read as a first attempt to derive general theological categories. In our case, the categories are desired for the doing of ecclesiology, and before going on to *Method*, it may be well to indicate briefly what this first work has to contribute to a theology of the Church.

First, there is its insistence on the social context of individual existence. A man's consciousness is embodied and it needs symbols and intersubjectivity to become effectively active. He develops within the common sense of his native community, and that community provides the concrete conditions of his own self-knowledge.

---

[81] *Insight* 724.

[82] *Insight* 699.

[83] *Insight* 701. Lonergan has himself provided a summary of the argument of *Insight*: "If human historical process is such a compound of progress and decline, then its redemption would be effected by faith, hope and charity. For the evils of the situation and the enmities they engender would only be perpetuated by an even-handed justice: only charity can wipe the slate clean. The determinism and pressures of every kind, resulting from the cumulative surd of unintelligent policies and actions, can be withstood only through a hope that is transcendent and so does not depend on any human prey. Finally, only within the context of higher truths accepted on faith can human intelligence and reasonableness be liberated from the charge of irrelevance to the realities produced by human waywardness (*Insight*, ch. XX)" ("Transition from a Classicist World-view" 8).

Secondly, there is Lonergan's description of the social and historical embodiments of sin. The threat to genuine human development is not outlined only in terms of individual psychological and selfish bias, but also in terms of distorted social process and cultural aberration.

Thirdly, the first two elements provide a context within which to understand the Church. Itself the fruit of God's intervention through a history and mystery that transform intersubjectivity,[84] the Church, as a community of faith, hope, and love, is the bearer of the concrete possibility of a new self-understanding, of a reconciled social order, and of a cultural reintegration.

Fourthly, these elements can combine to describe a concrete Church existing and active in the actual universe. The description is of the polar opposite of a ghetto-community, of a Church whose 'catholicity' has the breadth and depth of the biblical, patristic, and early medieval images and symbols of the Church, whose origin transcends creation, but whose purpose includes the integration of the one world that exists, so that Lonergan did not think it too much to claim that it had a role "in the unfolding of all human history and in the order of the universe."[85]

Though this summary is brief, it may perhaps show that there is more for ecclesiology to draw from *Insight* than an argument for an authoritative magisterium. And here and there in his earlier writings, one may find statements of the notion of the Church heuristically described in *Insight*, as for example, the following, written in 1941:

> ... just as there is a human solidarity in sin with a dialectical descent deforming knowledge and perverting will, so also there is a divine solidarity in grace which is the mystical body of Christ; as evil performance confirms us in evil, so good edifies us in our building unto eternal life; and as private rationalization finds support in fact, in common teaching, in public approval, so also the ascent of the soul towards God is not a merely private affair but rather a personal function of an objective common

---

84 "... a mystery that is at once symbol of the uncomprehended and sign of what is grasped and psychic force that sweeps living human bodies, linked in charity, to the joyful, courageous, whole-hearted, yet intelligently controlled performance of the tasks set by a world order in which the problem of evil is not suppressed but transcended" (*Insight* 723-724).

85 *Insight* 724.

> movement in that body of Christ which takes over, transforms, and elevates every aspect of human life.[86]

It remains that *Insight* is not *Method in Theology*, and before considering the latter in more detail, it might be well to point out some of the more important differences, especially as these relate to ecclesiology.

A first manifest difference is the degree to which the mediating and constitutive roles of meaning are an explicit and central theme of *Method*. Lonergan has himself described how the experience of teaching in Rome, with the plurality of backgrounds and interests of his students, required him to come to terms with the European philosophical tradition. "The new challenge came from the *Geisteswissenschaften*, from the problems of hermeneutics and critical history, from the need of integrating nineteenth century achievement in this field with the teachings of the Catholic religion and Catholic theology."[87] Those who sat in on his seminars on method in the 1960s will recall how these concerns entered more directly in successive years. The later development was implicit in *Insight*, as for example in the remarks on the human sciences, but in *Method* the role of meaning is addressed directly and early.

Secondly, in Lonergan's analysis of human consciousness in *Method*, the fourth level, the level of value and decision, enters much more forcefully than it did in *Insight*. Evidence may be cited in the repudiation of faculty-psychology, in the dismissal of 'speculative intellect,' in the controlling role assigned to existential horizon, in the insistence upon conversion.

Thirdly, the primacy of grace is differently stated in the two works. The prevenience of grace is described in *Insight* as God's reversal of the priority of living to learning and being persuaded, but the higher integration is described in rather 'classical' terms as the 'habits' of faith, hope, and charity. The central importance of Rom. 5:5 is not anticipated, nor the occurrence within consciousness of the enabling 'sanctifying' grace. Faith is not distinguished from beliefs. The consideration of redemption appears limited to Israel and the Catholic

---

86 "Finality, Love, Marriage" 26.

87 "*Insight* Revisited" 277.

Church, and the ecumenical significance of God's intervention is not explored.

On all these points, *Method* represents an advance. Religion is not introduced by a consideration of man's individual and social moral impotence, but rather as a God-given fulfillment of the native thrust of consciousness towards self-transcendence. Nor is this early and constant reference to religion explained merely by the fact that *Method* is more explicitly a work on theology than *Insight*. It derives from a fundamental shift in Lonergan's approach, which has startled and even disoriented more than one reader who has come to *Method* from *Insight* and which Lonergan has himself tried to explain at least twice.[88] In *Method* itself, he describes a position on the existence of God which in the latter book he admits was his own when writing the final chapters of *Insight*; and to it he contrasts his developed view.

> As long as it is assumed that philosophy goes forward with such sublime objectivity that it is totally independent of the human mind that thinks it then, no doubt, there is something to be said for issuing a claim to such objectivity for preliminary matters of concern to the faith. But the fact of the matter is that proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon, that the formulation of horizons varies with the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, religious conversion, and that conversion is never the logical consequence of one's previous position but, on the contrary, a radical revision of that position.
>
> Basically the issue is a transition from the abstract logic of classicism to the concreteness of method. On the former view what is basic is proof. On the latter view what is basic is conversion. Proof appeals to an abstraction named right reason. Conversion transforms the concrete individual to make him capable of grasping not merely conclusions but principles as well.[89]

The issue, obviously, is basic and requires more extensive treatment than can be given here; but one or two remarks may be made here. Lonergan's shift seems to rest on two basic considerations, the

---

[88] *Method* 337-340; *Philosophy of God and Theology* 11-13.

[89] *Method* 338.

controlling role of fourth-level operations and the primacy of grace. The first excludes a proof or attempted 'critical grounding' that would ignore that arguments are only expressed and understood within horizons, that horizons are correlatives of existential stances, and that the differences between converted and unconverted stances ground incompatible horizons. The second consideration is a hoary theological principle, whose truth seems to have struck Lonergan with new force with regard to the teaching of the First Vatican Council on the possibility of proving the existence of God. Interiority-analysis permits that ancient truth to be considered in terms of consciousness, and such consideration turns the discussion of the existence of God from a matter of 'speculative' intellect to the question of existential self-understanding and self-realization. And it may be that the position on God then filtered down to transform Lonergan's consideration of intellectual and moral conversion as well.[90]

However that may be, the differences between Lonergan's two major works are profound and are likely to provoke debate for some time. My purpose in the next section will be simply to indicate how the advances briefly indicated above have filled out and altered the possibility of deriving categories for ecclesiology which I have outlined in my review of *Insight*.

METHOD IN THEOLOGY

The grounds for an ecclesiology might begin to be laid with reflection on the constitutive role of meaning. Human consciousness unfolds itself in the dynamic structure of questions for understanding, for reflection and for decision. The process intends self-transcendence through correct knowledge and genuine choice; but by intending real-

[90] Lonergan notes that "what gives plausibility to the notion of pure intellect or pure reason is the fact that cognitional self-transcendence is much easier than moral self-transcendence." Intellectual conversion can even seem to be accomplished through proof, say by 'the dialectic of performance and concept' (*Method* 122). But even in *Insight* he had remarked 'the startling strangeness' of that event, and the work was intended as an essay 'in aid of' (not in proof of) self-appropriation (*Method* xxviii). The book is an invitation to intellectual conversion; the difficult illustrations are intended to lead the reader to experience his own consciousness in act and *from within that experience*, to take conscious control of it.

ity and value, the subject is also constituting himself as the person he is. Especially is this so in 'the existential moment' in which "we discover for ourselves that our choosing affects ourselves no less than the chosen or rejected objects, and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself."[91] The existential subject then knows himself as the creature of his past, can perhaps write his autobiography as a sequence of horizons, and can take a new responsibility for his future. In such self-appropriation, a man can know that meaning is "a constitutive element in the conscious flow that is the normally controlling side of human action,"[92] constituting namely "his horizon, his assimilative powers, his knowledge, his values, his character."[93]

But communities as well as individuals are constituted by meaning. In *Method,* Lonergan fills out his earlier sketch of community, locating its 'formal constituent' in common meaning: 'a common field of experience,' 'common or complementary ways of understanding,' 'common judgments,' and 'common values, goals, policies.'[94] To be a member of the community is to share its meaning, and the community ceases to exist when no meaning is shared by a group of individuals. And, as among different individuals, the noteworthy differences between communities will be differences in meaning and value.

From this central meaning of community, the reflection can be extended to a consideration of 'the social structure of the human good' and of the constitutive function of meaning in social institutions and in cultures.[95] And, again, as the question arises about the authenticity of the existential subject, so also questions will arise about the authenticity of the meaning and value which inform the social order and the culture.[96]

---

[91] *Method* 240.

[92] *Method* 178.

[93] *Method* 356. The appropriation of one's own past can be a very useful introduction to the sociology of knowledge (Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1963]; Peter Berger and Brigitte Berger, *Sociology: A Biographical Approach* [New York: Basic Books, 1972]).

[94] *Method* 356-357.

[95] *Method* 47-52.

[96] A help in locating Lonergan's approach to community and society within the history and present diversity of sociology is Berger, *Invitation to Sociology.*

This reflection on the constitutive role of meaning parallels the first step in the dialectic of social existence as this has been described by Berger and Luckman: "Society is a human product."[97] And their second step, "Society is an objective reality," considers the elements which Lonergan discusses under the rubric, 'the world mediated by meaning.'

To indicate the meaning of this notion, Lonergan usually appeals to the way in which the infant and child move out of 'the world of immediacy,' in which objects are immediately present as sensed, feared, enjoyed, into the 'real world,' mediated to them by language and by the other carriers of meaning. It is a world beyond immediacy, for it includes the absent, the past, the future, the possible, the ideal, the normative, the fantastic. It is "the far larger world revealed through the memories of other men, through the common sense of community, through the pages of literature, through the labors of scholars, through the investigations of scientists, through the experience of saints, through the meditations of philosophers and theologians."[98]

Now, for reality to be mediated by meaning is for it to be socially mediated, for, in the first place, language has a social origin. "It is the work of the community that has common insights into common needs and common tasks, and, of course, already is in communication through intersubjective, mimetic, and analogical expressions."[99] Different groups have their different languages, distinguished by their different specializations, different horizons, different differentiations of consciousness.[100]

But, secondly, the real world is not known to the individual principally by his own experience and his own immanently generated knowledge.

> His immediate experience is filled out by an enormous context constituted by reports of the experience of other men at other places and times. His understanding rests not only on his own

---

[97] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967) 61.

[98] *Method* 98.

[99] *Method* 87.

[100] *Method* 72, 236, 304.

> but also on the experience of others, and its development owes little indeed to his personal originality, much to his repeating in himself the acts of understanding first made by others, and most of all to presuppositions that he has taken for granted because they commonly are assumed and, in any case, he has neither the time nor the inclination nor, perhaps, the ability to investigate for himself. Finally, the judgments, by which he assents to truths of fact and of value, only rarely depend exclusively on his immanently generated knowledge, for such knowledge stands not by itself in some separate compartment, but in symbiotic fusion with a far larger context of beliefs.[101]

Human knowledge of the world, then, is a common, public fund, which has developed over the ages and in which one first shares by sharing the common sense of one's own community.[102]

Thirdly, 'the real world,' then, is not the world of the individual's immediate experience — no one's world is that small — nor the sum-total 'of all worlds of immediate experience.' For meaning goes beyond experience to understanding and judgment.

> This addition of understanding and judgment is what makes possible the world mediated by meaning, what gives it its structure and unity, what arranges it in an orderly whole of almost endless differences partly known and familiar, partly in a surrounding penumbra of things we know about but have never examined or explored, partly an unmeasured region of what we do not know at all.[103]

Fourthly, that the real world is mediated by meaning and, therefore, socially, is commonly overlooked. Lonergan traces the oversight to the myth that knowing is a matter of taking a look.

> For the world mediated by meaning is a world known not by the sense experience of an individual but by the external and internal experience of a cultural community, and by the continuously checked and re-checked judgments of the community. Knowing, accordingly, is not just seeing; it is experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. The criteria of objectivity are not just the

---

[101] *Method* 41-42.

[102] *Method* 43-44.

[103] *Method* 77.

> criteria of ocular vision; they are the compounded criteria of experiencing, of understanding, of judging, and of believing. The reality known is not just looked at; it is given in experience, organized and extrapolated by understanding, posited by judgment and belief.[104]

Fifth, in the mediation of the world by meaning, belief has a fundamental role. But, while in *Insight* the analysis of belief seemed to have a secondary, ad hoc role in the argument, in *Method* the concrete role assigned to belief is central: "To appropriate one's social, cultural, religious heritage is largely a matter of belief."[105] Lonergan suggests its importance when he notes, "The same facts are treated by sociologists under the heading of the sociology of knowledge,"[106] where by 'sociology of knowledge' he means that study as understood, for example, by Peter Berger.[107]

The third step in the social dialectic describes the social conditions of individual existence, which Berger and Luckman state as the fact that, "Man is a social product." The social origin of meaning does not merely concern the individual's knowledge of the 'real world'; it also basically influences the development of his own consciousness. Language, we have said, is a community-product; but the individual's "conscious intentionality develops in and is moulded by its mother tongue."[108] It names things and by naming them draws them to his attention and permits him to speak about them, and it accentuates certain of their aspects, relations, movements and changes. "Not only

---

[104] *Method* 238; also see Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism," *A Second Collection*, ed. W. Ryan and B. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 239-261.

[105] *Method* 41.

[106] *Method* 41, note.

[107] *The Social Construction of Reality* is essentially a study of a statement by Berger and Luckman that parallels Lonergan's programmatic statement about belief: "Reality is socially defined" (116). Both remarks evoke something of the 'startling strangeness' which Lonergan associates with intellectual self-appropriation, and this in turn explains Berger's frequent mention of the 'debunking' role of sociology. Pedagogically, the experience may be communicated by taking students through the "Exercises in Alternation" Berger concocted in his early work (Peter Berger, *The Precarious Vision: A Sociologist Looks at Social Fictions and Christian Faith* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1961] 23-47.

[108] *Method* 71.

does language mould developing consciousness but also it structures the world about the subject" spatially, temporally, and existentially.[109]

Ordinary language is the expression of the common sense of a group, and there can be as many brands of common sense "as there are differing places and times."[110] And the communities in which the individual is reared and in which he lives out his life shape the possibilities of his individual existence.

> As it is only within communities that men are conceived and born and reared, so too it is only with respect to the available common meanings of community that the individual becomes himself. The choice of roles between which he may choose in electing what to make of himself is no larger than the accepted meanings of the community admit; his capacities for effective initiative are limited to the potentialities of the community for rejuvenation, renewal, reform, development. At any time in any place what a given self can make of himself is some function of the heritage or sediment of common meanings that comes to him from the authentic or unauthentic living of his predecessors and his contemporaries.[111]

These initial considerations have outlined the social conditions of individual existence: man makes himself by meaning, both as an individual and in community; but, as an individual, he knows the 'real world' largely through the common sense of the community, and that

---

[109] *Method* 71. Compare Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971) 192: "The grammar of language games links symbols, actions, and expressions. It establishes schemata of world interpretation and interaction. Grammatical rules establish the ground of an open inter-subjectivity among socialized individuals. And we can only tread this ground to the extent that we internalize those rules — as socialized participants and not as impartial observers. Reality is constituted in a framework that is the form of life of communicating groups and is organized through ordinary language. What is real is that which can be experienced according to the interpretations of a prevailing symbolic system."

[110] *Method* 303.

[111] *Second Collection* 245-246. The same argument is presented less compactly and, perhaps, with less force in *Method* (79-81), for example: "So it is that man stands outside of the rest of nature, that he is a historical being, that each man shapes his own life but does so only in interaction with the traditions of the communities in which he happens to have been born and, in turn, these traditions themselves are but the deposit left him by the lives of his predecessors."

social definition of reality, in turn, directs and limits his self-constitution by meaning. The notions of the mediating and constitutive roles of meaning are Lonergan's own; but I have tried to indicate where they may be illustrated and supported by the work of Peter Berger.

The next step may consider the fragility of the worlds constituted and mediated by meaning. Individual and communal authenticity are precarious achievements, seldom reached without struggle and never achieved once and for all. The fragility of the self and community constituted by meaning is matched by that of the world mediated by meaning. "Because it is mediated by meaning, because meaning can go astray, because there is myth as well as science, fiction as well as fact, deceit as well as honesty, error as well as truth, that larger world is insecure."[112] *Insight* had analyzed the threat to meaning in terms of psychological bias, the individual bias of egoism, group bias, and the general bias of common sense. *Method* draws upon that analysis at several points (most neatly in pages 52-55) and relates them to the disregard of the transcendental precepts and to the absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. "As self-transcendence promotes progress, so the refusal of self-transcendence turns progress into cumulative decline."[113]

Besides progress and decline, there also is the possibility of redemptive recovery, and concretely that possibility is given in religious conversion, which then founds moral and intellectual conversion.[114] Religious conversion is the experienced fulfillment of the very transcendental notions which propel man into the work of individual and communal self-constitution.[115] Since Lonergan's analysis of religious conversion is by now familiar, I will concentrate only on its communal dimensions, which are of most interest for ecclesiology.

The root of religious conversion is God's gift of his love, and it is important to note that this gift is not itself mediated. If Lonergan does speak of it as an 'inner word,' still he insists that it "pertains, not to the world mediated by meaning, but to the world of immediacy, to the

---

[112] *Method* 117.

[113] *Method* 55.

[114] *Method* 242-243, 267-268.

[115] *Method* 101-107.

unmediated experience of the mystery of love and awe."[116] The insistence is not superfluous, as even a slight acquaintance with the history of ecclesiology can reveal; and Lonergan does not hesitate to point out some of its ecclesiological implications.[117]

The founding religious experience, however, is not solitary. In the first place, it finds spontaneous expression "in that harvest of the Spirit that is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control."[118] The intersubjective significance of these transformed attitudes can hardly be ignored.

Even such transformed intersubjectivity as 'incarnate meaning' is called a 'word' by Lonergan.[119] But along-side this spontaneous embodiment of religion and such other expressions of it as art and symbol, special attention is given to the spoken and written word. For "by its word, religion enters the world mediated by meaning and regulated by value."[120]

> It endows that world with its deepest meaning and highest value. It sets itself in a context of other meanings and other values. Within that context it comes to understand itself, to relate itself to the object of ultimate concern, to draw on the power of ultimate concern to pursue the objectives of proximate concern all the more fairly and all the more efficaciously.[121]

This religious word is not secondary, but constitutive of the full reality of the love between God and man, giving the object of man's transformed self a name, enabling the individual to draw on the word of tradition for its wisdom, on the word of fellowship for the experience of religious community, on the word of revelation, it may be, for God's own interpretation of his love.[122] The outer religious word, then,

---

[116] *Method* 112.

[117] See, for example, p. 123 on the role of the apologist; p. 327 on the 'real root and ground of unity' of faith; and p. 352 on the continuity of systematics. As for the history of ecclesiology, aspects at least of the Protestant Reformation can be seen as a protest against the claim of the Church to mediate all dimensions of the religious experience.

[118] *Method* 108.

[119] *Method* 112.

[120] *Method* 112.

[121] *Method* 112.

[122] *Method* 113.

interprets man's new self to himself, unites him with others similarly graced, and provides him with a language through which to relate his unmediated experience to the world mediated by inner-worldly meaning.

A communal dimension attends the religious experience itself, then, and not merely in the context of a positive revelation.

> Conversion is existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate. But it is not so private as to be solitary. It can happen to many, and they can form a community to sustain one another in their self-transformation and to help one another in working out the implications and fulfilling the promise of their new life. Finally, what can become communal, can become historical. It can pass from generation to generation. It can spread from one cultural milieu to another. It can adapt to changing circumstances, confront new situations, survive into a different age, flourish in another period or epoch.[123]

But besides that perdurance over generations by which its expression becomes traditional and its community historical, religion can be historical in the far deeper sense that "there is a personal entrance of God himself into history, a communication of God to his people, the advent of God's word into the world of religious expression."[124] And should this occur, then "the word of religious expression is not just the objectification of the gift of God's love; in a privileged area it also is specific meaning, the word of God himself."[125]

This is as far as the methodologist will go; whether there has been a revelation, what are its sources and the means of its transmission, what fidelity to it and deviance from it are, are questions, Lonergan argues, for the theologian, prepared by Dialectics and Foundations, to decide in the sixth functional specialty, Doctrines.[126] It is not clear that Lonergan respects his own limitation on the methodologist, however (or, better, his own claim to be doing method and not theology), for in his discussion of 'Communications,' he presupposes Christian revelation when he speaks of the Church as "the community that

---

[123] *Method* 130-131.

[124] *Method* 118-119.

[125] *Method* 119.

[126] See *Method* 269.

results from the outer communication of Christ's message and from the inner gift of God's love."[127] Still, what he has to say about the Church here presupposes nothing but a revelation for specific features of the Church. Whether from the methodologist or from the theologian, the following outline of the Church emerges.

First, the Church is an achievement in the world mediated and constituted by meaning and value. Its substance is the inner gift of God's love, embodied and interpreted by Christ's message. The inner gift has its own communal dimension, for the love of God re-evaluates the world and expresses itself spontaneously in transformed living. Community in the experience of God's love constitutes the new fellowship in the Spirit, an intersubjectivity of grace.[128] But besides the outer word of tradition and of fellowship, which objectify the inner gift commonly experienced, there is also the outer word of God's revelation in Christ. This word is "congruent with the gift of love that God works within us"; it "announces that God has loved us first and, in the fulness of time, has revealed that love in Christ crucified, dead, and risen."[129] It is "God's own entry into man's world mediated by meaning."[130]

The revealed word has a cognitive, constitutive, and effective function, issuing in beliefs, overt Christian fellowship, and Christian service.[131] The new Christian fellowship centers around the common experience of God's love in the Spirit and in Christ, in the beliefs or doctrines that interpret that experience, and in the common life of service it inspires. This is the substance of the Church, the common meaning that makes it a community.

The Church, then, is constituted by redemptive meaning, and as such, it is (in part) the effect of the mediation of that meaning from its originating moment in Christ's revelation by the history and tradition that revelation has produced. 'Tradition' here does not refer to any

---

[127] *Method* 361.

[128] This fellowship transcends denominational or religious boundaries and founds a fully ecumenical dialogue. This dimension of the Church is represented in the tradition by the theme of the *ecclesia ab Abel*, and also by such interpretations of the *corpus mysticum* theme as that of St. Thomas, *Summa theologica* (IIIa, q. 8).

[129] *Method* 113.

[130] "The Origins of Christian Realism" 260.

[131] *Method* 362.

special doctrine of tradition, and 'history' does not mean critical history; they are rather the tradition and history implied in the assertion that man is a historical being:

> an existential history — the living tradition which formed us and thereby brought us to the point where we began forming ourselves. This tradition includes at least individual and group memories of the past, stories of exploits and legends about heroes, in brief, enough of history for the group to have an identity as a group and for individuals to make their several contributions towards maintaining and promoting the common good of order.[132]

It is pre-critical history, having as one of its functions "the highly important educational task of communicating to ... fellow churchmen a proper appreciation of their heritage and a proper devotion to its preservation, development, dissemination."[133] It is tradition in the sense in which it is said that "classics ground a tradition. They create the milieu in which they are studied and interpreted. They produce in the reader through the cultural tradition, the mentality, the *Vorverständnis*, from which they will be read, studied, interpreted."[134]

For a community constituted by meaning, doctrines will have a central role.[135] Above all, in a religion that is shared by many, that enters into and transforms cultures, that extends down the ages, God will be named, questions about him will be asked, answers will be forthcoming."[136] And, since there has been a revelation, "Church doctrines are the content of the church's witness to Christ; they express the set of meanings and values that inform individual and collective Christian living."[137] For that reason, "doctrines are not just

---

[132] *Method* 182.

[133] *Method* 185.

[134] *Method* 162.

[135] Discussing the conciliar formula, "If anyone says ..., let him be anathema," Lonergan remarks: "What is said is all-important to a group whose reality, in part, is mediated by meaning" ("The Origins of Christian Realism" 250).

[136] *Method* 342.

[137] *Method* 311.

doctrines. They are constitutive both of the individual Christian and of the Christian community."[138]

The Church today, then, is the effect of the communication of the Christian message through doctrines but especially through the existential history and tradition of earlier generations of Christians who sought to bring others to share the cognitive, constitutive and effective meaning that informed their lives. The contemporary Church is, in turn, about the same business of communication. Constituted the Church by the communication of its central meaning, it perfects itself as the Church by communicating it to others. "Accordingly, the Christian church is a process of self-constitution, a *Selbstvollzug*."[139]

It remains to relate the Church to society. Lonergan makes the important point that in modern sociology, the word 'society' can refer to any concrete instance of social relationships and that, since the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, it is not inappropriate to speak of a worldwide 'society.'[140] Classically, of course, Church and State were considered 'perfect' (autonomous) societies, each an instance of an "organized collaboration of individuals for the pursuit of a common aim or aims."[141] On the modern view, however, the State is merely a territorial division within human society and the Church should be spoken of "as a process of self-constitution occurring within worldwide human society."[142]

Within that universal society, Lonergan understands the Church as part of the effort to realize, support, or recover 'the ideal basis of society,' which is 'community.'[143] In a large and complex society, responsible freedom demands long and difficult training; but besides the "ignorance and incompetence" thus likely, alienation and ideology add the distorting factors of egoist, group and general bias. "There are

---

[138] *Method* 319.

[139] *Method* 363. A link with the tradition may perhaps be found in the alternate translations of *ekklesia* as *congregatio* and *convocatio* or in the theme of the *ecclesia congregans et congregata* (see Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956] 69-75); but de Lubac's synthesis of the two aspects is not adequate.

[140] *Method* 359.

[141] *Method* 359.

[142] *Method* 363.

[143] *Method* 360-361.

needed, then, 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. Among such bodies should be the Christian church."[144]

It is such reflection on progress and decline that reveals the Church's "redemptive role in human society."[145]

> The church is a redemptive process. The Christian message, incarnate in Christ scourged and crucified, dead and risen, tells not only of God's love but also of man's sin. Sin is alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence, and sin justifies itself by ideology. As alienation and ideology are destructive of community, so the self-sacrificing love that is Christian charity reconciles alienated man to his true being, and undoes the mischief initiated by alienation and consolidated by ideology.[146]

To achieve its redemptive purpose, the Church must become 'a fully conscious process of self-constitution,' and this will require it "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."[147] And for this integration, Lonergan argues the method he has outlined has special pertinence.[148]

---

[144] *Method* 361. Two parallels may be pointed out. Paul Ricoeur maintains that "the irreplaceable function of a confessing community in a type of society such as ours, a society of planning ahead, of rational decision, as well as a society in which technique intrudes into consumption, into leisure, and on all levels of daily life" is "to pose continually the question of ends, of *perspective* in a society which is rather *prospective*, to pose the questions of well-being and of 'What for?'" (Paul Ricoeur, "Tasks of the Ecclesial Community in the Modern World," *Theology of Renewal*, vol. II: *Renewal of Religious Structures* [Montreal: Palm, 1968] 243.)

And in *Octagesima adveniens* (p. 25), Pope Paul VI speaks of the necessity for the social body to have within it 'cultural and religious groupings' concerned with developing 'ultimate convictions on the nature, origin and end of man and society.'

[145] *Method* 55.

[146] *Method* 364.

[147] *Method* 364.

[148] *Method* 364-367.

Finally, something should be said about the distinctive features of the Church. Classically, two aspects of the Church are usually distinguished in such familiar dichotomies as Spirit and law, divine and human, spiritual and corporal, invisible and visible, community and society. Efforts to relate them systematically have not generally been any more successful than the parallel effort to relate supernatural and natural. The consequences are predictable: either the Church is so identified with the human and so intent upon 'relevance' that it becomes unclear it is a distinct community of meaning,[149] or it retreats from the world of ordinary human intercourse to a private world of 'spiritual' concern, language, and rite. So, for example, the enthusiasm for secular relevance has in recent years been succeeded by a revival of 'spirituality,' some of whose proponents, it seems, have to be prodded into regarding the real world.

I would suggest that Lonergan's notion of the 'sublation' of intellectual and moral conversion by religious conversion may provide a helpful way out of the dilemma. Moral conversion 'sublates' intellectual by providing it with a more secure base in a self who is himself an originating value, by arming it against bias, and by integrating the pursuit of truth into "the far richer context of the pursuit of all values."[150] Similarly, moral conversion is sublated

> when religious conversion transforms the existential subject into a subject in love, a subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total and so an other-worldly love. Then there is a new basis for all valuing and all doing good. In no way are the fruits of intellectual or moral conversion negated or diminished. On the contrary, all human pursuit of the true and good is included within and furthered by a cosmic context and purpose, and, as well, there now accrues to man the power of love to enable him to accept the suffering involved in undoing the effects of decline.[151]

But as moral conversion goes beyond intellectual, so there are dimensions of religious conversation that surpass its references to intellectual and moral conversion. It is an experience of the transcen-

[149] Paul, *The Church in Search of Itself* 198-199.

[150] *Method* 242.

[151] *Method* 242.

dent, of the otherworldly. "Holiness abounds in truth and moral goodness, but it has a distinct dimension of its own. It is other-worldly fulfilment, joy, peace, bliss"[152] And it is this experience which, in the normal case, comes first, and has as its implication first moral and, then, intellectual conversion. *Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum.*[153]

Now, in somewhat the same fashion, religious community sublates communities whose principle is moral responsibility, and Christian community sublates religious community.[154] The sublation leaves intact the normally operative constituents of community, so that it is not necessary to construct a 'supernatural sociology.'[155] On the other hand, religious conversion transforms the conditions of community.

> So the human good becomes absorbed in an all-encompassing good. Where before an account of the human good related men to one another and to nature, now human concern reaches beyond man's world to God and to God's world. Men meet not only to be together and to settle human affairs, but also to worship. Human development is not only in skills and virtues but also in holiness. The power of God's love brings forth a new energy and efficacy in all goodness, and the limit of human experience ceases to be the grave.[156]

And, in turn, Christian conversion gives God a name, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, receives his own revelation of his love in Christ, and enjoys the overt Christian fellowship of the Spirit.

---

[152] *Method* 242.

[153] A remark of St. Ambrose which Newman quoted as the epigraph for the *Grammar of Assent* and which might be fairly said to sum up his approach to faith and his view of the Church.

[154] *Method* 360.

[155] The problem of church order is neglected in my treatment, at least as a special topic. It enters, of course, as an implication of the 'social structure of the human good,' which simply insists that some church order is necessary. Whether a normative church order has been bequeathed to the Church is, of course, one of the more pressing ecumenical questions today. It seems to me that the question of a *ius divinum* could stand dialectical analysis, especially in the light of Lonergan's discussion of 'classicism' and of differentiations of consciousness.

[156] *Method* 116.

It seems to me that the only way to integrate the diverse aspects and purposes of the Church is through some such notion. The distinctiveness of the Church is preserved by relating it to the sublating experience of religious and Christian conversion; and the social relevance of the Church is made to rest on two grounds: first, the fact that the higher does not mutilate the lower; and second, that there is only one world, in which man's choosing is inefficacious without transcendent fulfillment and his knowing is mutilated and his self alienated apart from God.[157] The contemporary crisis of meaning and value illustrates the result when proximate concerns are investigated and pursued on the systematic presupposition that ultimate concern is at best irrelevant and at worst illusory.

It may be also that Lonergan's approach permits one to integrate the various ecclesiological models with which I began. The 'institutional' model needs to be up-dated by a goodly dose of sociology and then it needs to learn modesty, content to mediate participation in what transcends all mediations. The model of 'organic, mystical communion' can enter as the attempt to consider the new dimensions of community, which are in Christ and the Spirit. The 'sacramental' model might be taken out of the number of 'special' theological categories and be grounded in general considerations on the embodied and social origins of human meaning. The model of the Church as 'herald' can be widened and deepened to stress the constitutive role of Christian meaning and value and its redemptive implications. Finally, the Church can be seen as 'servant' by understanding it in the light of the principles of historical process, progress, and decline.

CONCLUSION

The concrete locus of the Church is the social construction and definition of reality. The central source of its vitality is the unmediated experience of God which is, thank God, beyond the tampering of man. But, unless the revelation of God, the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, and embodied fellowship in the Spirit are to be regarded as incidental aspects of the Christian religious experience, the mediated

[157] *Method* 244.

and mediating community that is the Church has also a central role. Americans today have surely ample experience of the fragility of the world mediated by meaning, an experience from which the distinctively Roman Catholic religious history has certainly not been immune. To some degree what has been going on is a reconstitution and redefinition of the world or, minimally, the relocation of its manifold aspects. Many churchmen do not seem to know what is happening and consequently seem to prefer procrastination, equivocation, or unnuanced and selective outrage to intelligent and critical inquiry and policy. An ecclesiology of the sort outlined here would, it seems, have a contribution to make in this situation; for the terms and relations on which it would found an understanding of the church are the terms and relations within which the development of the modern world and its distinctive problems are most clearly understood and appreciated.

LONERGAN AND THE TASKS OF ECCLESIOLOGY

BERNARD LONERGAN HAS never made the Church the object of sustained theological study. Among his writings, one will find scattered references to the Church in early essays, the provocative suggestion in the Epilogue to *Insight* that ecclesiology look to history for the fundamental terms and relations of a theological treatise,[1] and the short chapter on "Communications" which concludes *Method in Theology*, in which Lonergan makes use of categories derived in earlier chapters to propose understanding the Church to be 'a process of self-constitution.'[2]

If an ecclesiologist cannot turn to Lonergan for an elaborated theology of the Church, he can, if he reads attentively enough, find a good deal that is of great heuristic value, particularly for suggesting how one might go about laying foundations for ecclesiology. It will be the purpose of this essay to indicate how a reading of Lonergan has brought one theologian to conceive the object, the foundations, and the goal of a critical systematic ecclesiology.

I. THE OBJECT OF ECCLESIOLOGY

"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."[3] In Lonergan's view 'the inner gift of God's love' is experienced as the reorientation of a person's subjectivity, forming a new self looking out upon a new world, establishing a new basis for community when those so blessed discover one another and together try to

---

[1] Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958) 742-743.

[2] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 363.

[3] *Method* 361.

understand, to celebrate, and to live out the gift now experienced also as transformed intersubjectivity.[4]

That potential for full community is given form, actuality, and realization as the Christian Church when the wordless inner gift is matched by the outer gift of God in Jesus Christ whose word mediates the movement of transformed immediacy and intersubjectivity into the world mediated by meaning and thus founds the community of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision which is called the Church.

If in general the message of Christ interprets the inner gift, then the message about the Church may be said to interpret the experienced transformation of intersubjectivity. Both inner gift and transformed intersubjectivity are experienced, are events within consciousness, but they are not necessarily understood or known. Historical revelation is a further gift which enriches greatly the original gift in both its inner and its intersubjective dimensions. The enrichment is greater with regard to the latter dimension, for while the inner gift can operate as a principle of life even without being understood or known, intersubjectivity expresses itself immediately in gesture and word, address and welcome, invitation and response, love and deed, and all these are in a sense already 'words' and call for words of understanding and judgment.

The community we call the Church arises when the gift of the Spirit enables a group of people to say "Jesus is Lord." In that common confession, prior to any other words or deeds, the Church has already come to be. Nils Dahl has argued that "the church-consciousness of the first Christians is the reflection of their faith in the Risen One," and that it developed in three moments: (1) the conviction that Jesus had been exalted, (2) the commissioning of the apostles, (3) the reception by faith of their proclamation.[5] Dahl omits what is not a separate moment, but the condition of all three: the work of the Spirit in the apostles ("Did not our hearts burn within us?" [Luke 24:32]) and in their hearers ("No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." [I Cor. 12:13]).

In the community of confession so produced, there are already realized — prior to any self-reflection — the common world of

[4] *Method* 112-119; see *Insight* 723-724, 741-742.

[5] Nils Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes*, 2nd edition (Darmstadt, 1963) 176.

experience, understanding, judgment, and decision and the patterns of interrelationship that constitute and distinguish the Church. It is these that are studied by the historian, sociologist, and ecclesiologist; but they are themselves the first expression of the Church, the first and constitutive *logos* of the *ekklesia*.

All reflection on the Church — 'ecclesiology' — is reflection on this constitutive self-expression and self-realization. The initial appropriation of terms like 'the saints,' the choice of *ekklesia* as a self-designation, the gradual differentiation of the Church as a *tertium genus* — all these refer to and derive from the constitutive self-expression and self-realization. This is even more the case with regard to the fuller 'ecclesiologies' of the New Testament, of Paul, Luke-Acts, Matthew, the Pastoral Epistles.

But these initial exercises in reflection are, of course, themselves new moments in the self-realization of the Church. To the inner and intersubjective gift of community under the Lordship of Jesus are now added the words, statements, deeds that articulate that gift in the world mediated by meaning. When the understanding, judgment, and decision of the Church regard not only the inner and outer gifts but their intersubjective and social effect as well, the Church takes a further step in the process of its self-constitution. The process continues when the views of a Paul, a Luke, a Matthew become common currency, when these and other writings are gathered together and received as an apostolic canon, when a catholic and apostolic *regula fidei* is developed and received, when an apostolic form of ministry and an apostolic shape of the liturgy are devised and received, and when all these combine to form a received notion of a normative expression of the Church. What is given to the ecclesiologist to study, then, is not only *what is said* about the Church in the New Testament, in the apostolic Symbol, in the liturgy, in descriptions of the ministry, but also *what was coming to be* as the Church in the formation and reception of all four elements.

Although this broad apostolic self-realization of the Church is regarded by Catholics as of unique authority, the process of self-constitution does not end with it. The Church cannot but realize, constitute itself, and it is the self-constitution of the Church that is going forward when, for example, councils begin to be held and their authority received, when norms of orthodoxy are introduced, when the penitential discipline is relaxed, when the baptism of heretics is received,

when sectarianism is repudiated, when the authority of the See of Rome develops and is received, and so on. The history of ecclesiology is, then, not only the history of statements and texts, but also the history of successive self-realizations of the Church, expressed in statements and texts, of course, but also through choices, actions, and events, through the development of institutions and the differentiation of roles, through the elaboration of rites and the codification of laws, and in a thousand other ways. The Church so realized in the past and so realizing itself today is the object of ecclesiology.

II. 'COMMON SENSE' AND 'THEORY' IN ECCLESIOLOGY

Some measure of reflection is intrinsic to the initial and especially to the derived self-realizations of the Church, as it is to other social bodies. But the degrees and kinds of reflection would appear to have varied greatly. Central celebrations of their new community would naturally lead the early Christians to put their distinctive experience into words and particularly to try to understand it by reference to their religious heritage and their heritage by reference to it. So, for example, the use of the word *ekklesia* to designate their community served both to relate themselves to Jewish messianic and apocalyptic hopes and to differentiate themselves from the contemporary Jewish *synagoge*.

The need for reflection would change and the process would accelerate when disputes with others or within the community itself or when the simple passage of time would force the Church towards various forms of what sociologists call 'legitimation.' Some Scripture scholars maintain that all three of Max Weber's types of legitimation can be found in the New Testament — the charismatic in Paul, the traditional in Luke, the rational in the Pastoral Epistles. Paul's use of the Body of Christ theme seems at times to draw on sacramental experience, at times on the Stoic apologia for social order, at times on cosmic speculations. In the First Epistle of Clement, Jewish and Roman commonplaces about order are drawn upon to reprove the disorderly Corinthians. In Tertullian and Cyprian, Roman legal institutions and vocabulary vindicate episcopal authority. Leo I devises the classic vindication of Roman authority by applying Roman hereditary law. Much later, Gregory VII operates much more self-consciously when his reform defends the *libertas Ecclesiae* by collecting laws and

constructing a juridically articulated notion of a Church in which all authority derives from the Bishop of Rome. Corporation-theory plays a major role in the disputes between papalists and conciliarists. Late medieval canonists and theologians will use Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius to construct the first formal treatises on the Church. Scholastic ecclesiologists after Trent often appear to work with a sort of *sociologia perennis*. In the nineteenth century, while some ecclesiologists turn to Romanticism or Idealism for a framework within which to understand the Church, others employ a theory of sovereignty owing much to Bodin and Hobbes to assist and vindicate the triumph of ultramontanism.

Where, in all these instances of reflection on the Church, 'theory' may be said to have been differentiated from 'common sense' is a nice question. Some very sophisticated political or social theory was employed in the medieval disputes. But in earlier and later reflection (at least in what is sometimes called 'classical' ecclesiology), something similar to what Lonergan calls the 'post-systematic' seems to have been operating:[6] the language of theory is often used, but outside a theoretical context, for a practical purpose, and, often enough, without its theoretical content. Theory had become simple commonplace, the taken-for-granted.

Examining the taken-for-granted in ecclesiology can serve not only to differentiate common sense from theory but also to differentiate among theories. The social theory which from the Middle Ages on was employed to understand and to defend contemporary self-realizations of the Church usually reflected what Lonergan calls the classical ideal of science. This ignored history and historical variation among societies, and it understood and defended the Church and particularly Church order by political and social theories, Aristotelian, Dionysian, and others, which it took to be normative. Normative notions of the generative and regulative principles of society controlled what responses could be given to questions and objections. Often enough the disputes concealed an overarching agreement about the taken-for-granted presuppositions.

Now as it is already a modification of the self-realization of the Church when theory or what passes for theory replaces common sense in the legitimation of the Church, so further self-realization of the

[6] See *Method* 276-279, 304-305, 311-312, 314.

Church is greatly affected (1) when the theory is not simply reflective on previous or present practice but regulative of future practice as well, and (2) when such regulative theory is conceived in classical terms. By virtue of the first movement, theoretical control begins to direct what before had happened through the more spontaneous and unself-conscious operations of common sense. But, while this might be considered a benefit in itself, that benefit is severely compromised when theory does not make the critical turn and classicist assumptions rule the interpretation of history and the assessment of present possibilities.

Today, of course, classicist assumptions are no longer taken-for-granted in the social sciences. These are resolutely empirical; they do not regard themselves as disciplines subalternate to philosophy; they do not have normative ambitions. Historical consciousness permits them to luxuriate in the enormous variety of the self-realizations of the human in society and history. They have contrived their own techniques of observation and correlation, their own methods and models of theory-construction, their own technical vocabularies and expressions. Their theories are more or less probable attempts to understand what happens to be and not certain judgments about what not only is but must be.[7]

Unfortunately, few churchmen or theologians seem eager to explore the implications for ecclesiology and for the self-realization of the Church of this differentiation within social theory. The reasons for this are complex. To some degree it reflects the not surprising reaction of the Church to a program often assumed or proclaimed to imply the discrediting of the Church's claims. To some degree it reflects the retreat of theology into a defensive and dogmatic classicism. Whatever the reasons, post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment ecclesiology has been much more estranged from developing social theory than had been the case before; and in the last century, just as the new sciences of the social were developing, the argument has been made more frequently than before that the Church, both as Mystery and as social order, has more to fear than to hope for from a use of the methods and standards of social theory in ecclesiology. The displacement of a narrowly juridical understanding of the Church by various more fully theological understandings leads thus to a curiously abstract

[7] See *Method* 85, 93-96, on 'stages of meaning.'

ecclesiology which neglects the concrete self-realizations of the Church in favor of an interpretation or simple reproduction of biblical or doctrinal statements. So the Church is said to be an 'event' or 'community' rather than an 'institution'; 'law' is contrasted to 'Spirit,' and 'office' to 'charism'; and the 'essence' of the Church is said to be 'Mystery,' imperceptible except by faith in the 'forms' of its empirical self-realizations — all of these being distinctions which only the estrangement from social theory could permit theologians and churchmen to make so confidently.

III. 'FOUNDATIONS' AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Some of this retreat into 'theological reductionism' (to use James Gustafson's phrase[8]) may be forgivable, particularly when social theorists attempt their own 'reductions' or when empirical observation is assigned normative significance. But it is less forgivable when the reluctance of churchmen rests simply on the taken-for-granted assumptions of the classical ideal of theory, for then theology easily degenerates into ideology. And it is still less forgivable when the reluctance of theologians rests on a failure or a refusal to work out for themselves basic positions — on individual and community, community and meaning, meaning and history — that could equip them to engage in critical and dialectical conversation with social theorists.

It may help to locate the suggestion being made here to say that it calls for the expansion of the foundational effort beyond the question of the hermeneutics of texts to the question of the hermeneutics of social existence. Without working on the latter question, the ecclesiologist will not be able to interpret the texts which speak of the social existence of the Church. A theologian inclined to pursue the suggestion being made need not fear that he is entering completely alien territory, for a little acquaintance with some of the first-rate literature on the methods of political and social theory will introduce him to sets of questions already familiar from more commonly pursued discussions — the nature of *Verstehen*, the role of presuppositions, the possibility of explanation, the questions of objectivity, verification, and

[8] James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 100.

the mediation of conflicting claims, and so on.[9] He will find, in other words, an extraordinary verification of the fact that foundational questions really are *foundational* and therefore basic not only to the interpretation of texts but to the interpretation also of society and history, including the society and history of the Church.

Approaching the foundational enterprise with this expanded interest will enable the ecclesiologist to understand and appreciate the significance of what Lonergan calls the 'critical' and 'methodical' exigences and the realm of 'interiority' which they yield and mediate. For entry into that realm is the only way to work through issues which now vex the social scientists as they wrestle with the problem of a method of understanding theoretically what is already understood in and by common sense and for constructing a truly critical social theory. Working through those issues will equip him (1) to understand, evaluate, and criticize the methods and conclusions of the social sciences, (2) to undertake his own understanding of the social and historical expressions and self-realizations of the Church, and (3) to articulate that understanding in the terms of a critical and methodical theology.

Readers of *Method in Theology* may have observed that this project suggests the equivalent for ecclesiology of the transposition which Lonergan effects with regard to the theology of grace. Lonergan regards the medieval, particularly the Thomist, theology of grace to have been an impressive theoretical achievement. The theory, however, was constructed in terms of a metaphysical psychology characteristic of what he calls the 'second stage of meaning.' When, in the 'third stage,' metaphysics is no longer considered the initial and grounding science but is itself derived from intentionality-analysis, then interiority and not metaphysics yields the categories of a critical and methodical theology. 'Sanctifying grace' is now conceived as the founding religious experience of other-worldly self-transcendence. So conceived, it can even be used to enable people to recognize in themselves the experience to which the biblical, doctrinal, and theological language of grace refers. So recognized and conceived by the

[9] For an introduction, see Anthony Giddens's two works, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson, 1976) and *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1977) and Richard Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

theologian, it can become the base from which other special theological categories can be derived.[10]

Applied to ecclesiology, this transposition would suggest the movement from a normatively conceived social theory to a critical and historically conscious theory founded in intentionality-analysis. Such an analysis would involve the theologian's self-appropriation of his social and historical existence both in general and in its religious form. This will mean, first, a recognition of the differentiation of common sense by theory both in his own experience and as reflected in the construction of social realities. It will mean, second, a recognition of the differentiation of common sense by transcendence, both in his own experience and in the construction of social realities. Thus, the basic categories of an ecclesiology will be derived from a self-appropriation of the realm of transcendence, only not of a private interiority, but of an interiority whose religious transformation is inescapably a transformed *intersubjectivity*, interpreted and socially and historically expressed and realized in the Church.

Such a foundational effort might enable the ecclesiologist to bring the more recent theologies of the Church, which have displaced the classical juridical theology, down from the dogmatic and theological heights to the concrete communities in which is realized what is meant by the 'Mystical Body,' and 'People of God,' the 'Temple of the Holy Spirit,' *una persona mystica*, the *Ursakrament*, and so on. Working out foundational issues might permit the theologian to differentiate among those and other statements of what the Church is, to discriminate between commonsense and theoretical expressions so that one set will not be judged by the standards of the other, to test the critical character of what theory is discovered, to search out and describe the experiences to which both commonsense and theoretical expressions refer, and to work out an ecclesiology that neither reduces theology to empirical observation nor forgets that the biblical, traditional, dogmatic, and theological language always refers to a concrete social reality constructed around the transformed intersubjectivity of concrete persons in the world. Ecclesiology badly needs something of the concreteness achieved when medieval theology spoke of 'created grace' and when contemporary theologians evoke its equivalent in religious experience. Take, for example, the notion of the 'Body of Christ': if this

[10] *Method* 281-293.

cannot simply be identified with the 'institutional Church' (as in *Mystici Corporis*), to what does it refer? What experience or sets of experiences in redeemed intersubjectivity realize it in the world? Can other experiences of intersubjectivity and social existence illumine it and the process of its self-realization? What words, gestures, rites, affections, etc. mediate it? And so on.

It is perhaps clear from this example that the ecclesiological project outlined here does not intend a 'reduction' of the Church to simply another social reality in the world. The Church remains the creation of the mysterious God's self-gift in Word and in Spirit. But the project does not forget that it is not God but Christian men and women who constitute the Church, that the Church is constructed when divine favor transforms and promotes conscious acts of human intentionality and intersubjectivity — feelings, experience, understanding, judging, speaking, deciding, loving, acting, believing, remembering, celebrating, hoping, and so on — that these conscious acts are the referent in the world to which image and symbol, doctrine and theory refer when they speak about the Church, and that, thus, ecclesiology has for its object of investigation and reflection not only such images and symbols, doctrines and theories, but also the concrete 'process of self-constitution' by which the Church comes to be in Christian men and women.

ECCLESIOLOGY AND SOCIAL THEORY

A Methodological Essay

THIS ESSAY EXPLORES some of the methodological implications of conceiving ecclesiology as a systematic discipline. Of the two questions that arise immediately — what is it that ecclesiologists seek to understand systematically? and, what does it mean to understand it systematically? — the first will here be answered heuristically and the rest of the paper will be devoted to addressing the second.

Heuristically, the object of ecclesiology may be described as the set (or sets) of experiences, understandings, symbols, words, judgments, statements, decisions, actions, relationships, and institutions which distinguish the group of people called 'the Church.' Again heuristically, the purpose of ecclesiology may be said to be to understand how and why it is that these related elements constitute that group of people as what in faith is called 'the Church.'

If, before the tasks of ecclesiology may be undertaken, these heuristic descriptions would need to be clarified, developed, and defended, it appears that these further moves depend at least in part on positions taken with regard to the second question above, namely what it means to understand the Church systematically. The remainder of this essay will be devoted to that question. A brief description of what it means (1) to understand, (2) to understand systematically, (3) to understand a human and social reality systematically, will provide the preface to an extended argument that a systematic understanding of the Church not only must draw upon social theory but itself is an undertaking similar in important respects to the effort of social theorists systematically to understand (other) social realities.

Understanding

Understanding is what is intended when attention to an experience or set of experiences gives rise to questions that ask, What is this? What is happening? Why is this happening? How often does or will this happen? Such questions are met when the various data or aspects

of the data given in experience are brought into an intelligible unity which is expressed in a concept or hypothesis. Reflection on the hypothesis asks about the conditions necessary for its verification. When reflection ascertains that the conditions are in fact fulfilled — when all the relevant data or aspects of the data are accounted for and no further relevant questions arise — it proceeds to the judgment and assertion, *This* is what this is. This is an occurrence of *that*. *This* is why it is happening. *This* is the probability that it will happen again.[1]

Systematic Understanding

This process — from experiences through inquiry to understanding and conceptualization, and from hypothetical understanding through reflection to judgment and assertion — happens all the time and everywhere: it is part of the basic business of daily living. Systematic understanding, however, is not sought always and everywhere, but represents a particular differentiation of the common effort to understand. Systematic inquiry asks questions about what is taken for granted in the understanding that suffices or appears to suffice for everyday living. It arises out of the 'scientific attitude' which Alfred Schutz contrasted to the 'natural attitude' of everyday living.[2] It pursues as its goal the 'theory' which Bernard Lonergan contrasts to 'common sense.'[3] When systematically understood, the data given in experience are intelligibly related, not to the observer, but to other data. General relationships are ascertained, patterns of relationships discovered, types of patterns distinguished, frequencies of occurrence determined. In the course of the effort, systematic understanding devises its own methods of observation, inquiry, and verification as well as its own manners and forms of expression. It is in these developments that systematic understanding appears most obviously

[1] This description reflects, in obviously very simplified form, the work of Bernard Lonergan in his two chief works, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958) and *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

[2] Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckman, *The Structures of the Life-World*, trans. Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristan Engelhardt (London: Heinemann, 1974) 3-15.

[3] See the indexes to Lonergan's *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, under 'common sense' and 'theory.'

to differ from the understanding considered to suffice for everyday living.

Systematic Understanding of Human Realities

Among systematic inquiries, a basic differentiation is that between the natural and the human sciences. While the data about the human include data common to the objects studied by physics, chemistry, biology, and animal psychology, they also include data given in and constituted by internal consciousness. Consciously given and constituted data are what is investigated when an inquirer asks about his own or others' experiences, feelings, moods, inquiries, insights, concepts, reflections, judgments, statements, deliberations, motives, choices, actions. We humans, even in the everyday attitude, do not ask questions only about our worlds; we ask them also about ourselves, and about ourselves as conscious agents. After some initial hesitation, systematic inquirers into human realities are rapidly coming to agree that the methods of their inquiries must take account from the start that their data include and are differentiated by conscious operations and acts.[4]

A systematic understanding of man attempts to bring the various data about the human into an intelligible unity. It seeks to differentiate the processes, operations, and acts that constitute the total human phenomenon, to discover the principles of their differentiation and of their integration, and to determine the patterns, types, and frequencies of their inter-relationships. The understanding thus sought goes beyond the understanding of the human that is considered to suffice for everyday living; and it, too, has, especially in the course of the last two centuries, attempted to devise critical methods of observation, inquiry, and verification and its own manners and forms of expression.

[4] Excellent discussions and illustrations of this development may be found in Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), and in Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

Systematic Understanding of Social Realities

Among the distinctive data of the human sciences are the operations and acts by which individuals are consciously related to other individuals, and these form the data of the social sciences.[5] Attention here is focused on human operations and acts in so far as they regard other individuals and their operations and acts.[6] The social theorist differentiates other-directed operations and acts from other kinds, discovers the patterns, types, and frequencies by which they form distinct intelligible unities, and relates these patterns, types, and frequencies to those that constitute the intelligible unities of the operations and acts of individuals.[7]

Social theory, as the other sciences, seeks a systematic understanding of its object, attempts to devise critical methods of observation, inquiry, and verification, and produces its own technical manners and forms of expression. But the relationship between such systematic understanding and the understanding commonly considered to suffice for everyday living is far more complicated in the human sciences, and particularly in social theory, than it is in the natural sciences.[8] For the human scientist must take into account not

[5] The word 'consciously' in this sentence is to be understood in Lonergan's sense, of a subject's concomitant awareness of himself and of his acts. It does *not* refer to knowledge, whether reflective or not. In much of the literature, the word 'consciousness' is used almost as a synonym for 'reflection' or 'reflective knowledge.' Here and elsewhere in this paper, I have meant Lonergan's notion, which I think less likely to generate confusion than the common usage.

[6] The reader may recognize an echo of Max Weber's definitions of 'action' ("all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it") and of 'social action' ("Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual [or individuals], it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course"); see *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1964) 88. What follows is also influenced by his definition of a 'social relationship' on p. 118: "The term 'social relationship' will be used to denote the behaviour of a plurality of actors in so far as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus *consists* entirely and exclusively in the existence of a *probability* that there will be, in some meaningfully understandable sense, a course of social action" (Weber's emphasis).

[7] See Lonergan on "the dialectic of community," *Insight* 217-218.

[8] A good deal of Giddens's *New Rules of Sociological Method* is devoted to the relationship between what he calls the 'mutual knowledge' by which participants

only the intelligibility but the intelligence and freedom of his object. The human sciences investigate events within consciousness which are to some degree understood, whether correctly or incorrectly, adequately or inadequately; and, in fact, this everyday understanding itself is in part constitutive of the object under investigation.[9] To this extent, the human sciences are attempts to understand understandings, and these understandings are among the operations and acts which a human scientist attempts to relate intelligibly in patterns, types, and frequencies. Psychologists study the relationships between the self-understandings of individuals and their physical, neurological, and psychic bases; and psychology is a science to the degree that (1) these relationships are discovered to display patterns which fall into types, and (2) the types of patterns ground verifiable predictions of the frequency of occurrence of the self-understandings of individuals. Sociologists study the mutual understandings of individuals-as-related-to-others and the relationships between those understandings and the processes, operations, and acts which constitute individuals; and sociology is a science to the degree that (1) these relationships are discovered to display patterns which fall into types, and (2) the types of patterns ground verifiable predictions of the frequency of occurrence of the mutual understandings of individuals-as-related-to-others. Sociology and psychology will be intelligibly related to one another (and so contribute to a unified human science) to the degree that the patterns, types, and frequencies of the self-understandings of individuals can be intelligibly related to the mutual understandings of individuals-as-related-to-others, and vice-versa. Both of these sciences, if successful, will achieve a systematic understanding of that understanding which is one constitutive component of the business of everyday living.

A further complication lies in the fact that some part of the systematic understanding of the human sciences can filter down to affect the everyday understanding of human affairs. In this process, it is probably uncommon for the concepts and categories of the human sciences to retain their systematic and critically grounded meaning; more often the technical terms will be simply used in the service of what remains basically that understanding commonly considered to suffice

---

produce and reproduce society and the knowledge of that society which the sociologist pursues. For the initial statement, see pp. 15-16.

[9] See Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method* 148-154.

for everyday living. When in common conversation people speak of the 'Id' or the 'super-ego,' of 'depressions' and 'psychoses,' of 'community' and 'system,' of 'bureaucracy' and 'ideology,' it is doubtful that the critical context within which those words may have systematic meaning has been retained. Technical terms, then, may not always be assumed to carry systematic meaning.[10]

Finally, social theory may often pursue a practical ideal, and in that case its understanding may move on to practical suggestions, plans, and policies for daily living. The frequency-schedules for the occurrence of the events which social theory studies may thus themselves be altered. This effect may be noted both when social theorists have become social planners and when the predictions of social theorists, for example, economists, turn out to be self-fulfilling prophecies.

The previous paragraphs were intended to introduce a discussion of the claim that ecclesiology is a systematic understanding of the Church. After a brief description of understanding, an effort was made to differentiate systematic understanding from the understanding commonly considered to suffice for everyday living. The special character of systematic understanding of human realities was then noted, particularly when this is an understanding of social realities. Finally, some effort was made to indicate the complex nature of the relationship between systematic understanding in the human sciences and the understanding that commonly is considered to suffice in daily living, whether individual or social.

The rest of this paper will build on this base in order to argue for the systematic character of ecclesiology and for the pertinence for such an ecclesiology of the findings and methods of social theory. The argument will be developed by explaining and defending four presuppositions which have already guided the foregoing presentation and suggest the position now to be argued. These are that (1) the Church is a human reality; (2) the Church is a social reality; (3) the Church may be systematically understood; and (4) a systematic theological understanding of the Church will be, in important respects, similar to other systematic understandings of social realities.

---

[10] This use of theoretical concepts in non-theoretical contexts in society has a certain similarity to what Lonergan refers to, in reference to the development of doctrine, as 'post-scholarly,' 'post-scientific,' 'post-systematic' literature; see *Method in Theology* 276-279, 304-305, 311-312, 314, 319, 344.

The Church as a Human Reality

A first meaning of the statement that the Church is a human reality should cause no difficulties. It simply differentiates the Church from natural realities and so suggests the relevance to the study of the Church of the methods of the human sciences as distinct from those of the natural sciences. As a human reality, the Church is an event within human consciousness, that is, it comes to be if certain events occur in men, events that are not reducible to the physical, chemical, or biological, but are rather constituted by the mutually related intelligence and freedom by which individuals become a social body.

In its negative intent, that first meaning is not likely to be denied; but it is not uncommon to meet the objection that the positive assertion that the Church is a human reality compromises the transcendent, supernatural, even divine nature of the Church. In response to this objection, the assertion can be given a second, strictly theological meaning. Whatever Christian faith may say about the divine origin, center, and goal of the Church, it never pretends that the Church does not stand on this side of the distinction between Creator and creature. The Church is not God; it is not Jesus Christ; it is not the Holy Spirit. If the Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, it is all of these as a human reality, that is, because certain events occur within the mutually related consciousnesses of a group of human beings. Just as faith is a human act, even though one impossible without divine grace; just as grace itself could be described by theologians as a created habit of the soul, even if one divinely infused: so also it is possible to say that the Church is produced and reproduced by human acts of consciousness without denying that its foundation is in Christ and its life in the Spirit.[11]

---

[11] "The church may be fully dependent on God's act, but it is not simply God acting. It is a people believing, worshipping, obeying, witnessing. Thus we can and must make fast at the outset our understanding of the church as a body or community of human beings, albeit existing in response to the activity of God. In this sense, the ontology of the church means in the first instance the humanly subjective pole of the relationship" (Claude Welch, *The Reality of the Church* [New York: Scribners, 1958] 48; see also 60-73). The same perspective guides the work of James M. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961); see also Oliver R. Whitley, *Religious Behavior: Where Sociology and Religion Meet* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964) esp. 41-61.

The Church as a Social Reality

At first sight, this association also causes no difficulties. Since the New Testament, the Church has been referred to, described, or defined by terms in common use of other social bodies: *ekklesia* itself, *hairesis*, *koinonia*, *laos*, *congregatio*, *societas*, *coetus*, and so on. But difficulties may arise when it is argued that to say that the Church is a social reality is to expect to observe in the Church the processes, operations, and acts by which social relations are constituted in other social realities and to see verified in the Church the patterns, types, and frequencies which constitute the intelligibility of other social realities. It is not uncommon for churchmen and even theologians to become somewhat uneasy at this point. Works in ecclesiology often begin (and sometimes end) with appeals to the transcendent or mysterious character of the Church, which is invoked in order to forestall or deflect attempts to apply the methods and language of social theory to the concrete life of the Church.

But it is hard to see why, if St. Thomas could appeal in his theology of faith to the principle that *cognita sunt in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis*[12] and use in his theology of justification the principle that *Deus movet omnia secundum modum uniuscuiusque*,[13] a contemporary ecclesiologist cannot appeal to social theory to learn how social realities are constituted in order to understand how the Church is constituted as a social reality. Just as one cannot construct a theology without an at least implicit philosophy, so one cannot construct an ecclesiology without an implicit social theory; and without making the implicit explicit and securing its foundations, neither construction can be considered critical.[14]

---

[12] *Summa theologica*, II-II, q.1, a.2. M.-D. Chenu has often used this text to defend the legitimacy and the necessity of introducing sociological perceptions into theology; see "Position théologie de la foi," and "Vie conciliaire et sociologie de la foi," all in *La Parole de Dieu: I, La Foi dans l'intelligence* (Paris: du Cerf, 1964) 59-62, 63-68, 371-383.

[13] *Summa theologica*, I-II, q.113, a.3 and a.6. For Aquinas's use of Aristotle in his understanding of grace, see Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) esp. 55-60.

[14] Among the more perceptive statements of similar conclusions, see Jerome Hamer, "Ecclésiologie et sociologie," *Social Compass* 7 (1960) 325-339; François Jean Remy, *Église et societé en mutation* (Paris: Mame, 1969(40-56; and J. Dhooge, "Quelques problèmes posés par le dialogue entre Sociologie et Théologie pastorale,"

Systematic Understanding of the Church

That an ecclesiologist ought to pursue a unifying systematic understanding of the Church is not today taken for granted. The problem is not confined to ecclesiology; the systematic enterprise has suffered a great decline among Roman Catholics in recent years. The reasons for this are, no doubt, many and complex. In some cases it appears to derive from a failure to acknowledge the systematic exigence, from the belief, that is, that the understanding considered to suffice for everyday living suffices for all living and that, therefore, categories not obviously and immediately relevant to the concrete conscious living of believers can have no value. More defensible perhaps is a reluctance to undertake systematic work because of the absence of a consensus on the methods, categories, or criteria of theology and the consequent necessity of the systematic theologian's undertaking the extremely difficult task of laying his own foundations carefully and critically. Finally, the decline in interest in systematic theology is often linked with a newly developed respect for theological pluralism. This is somewhat understandable as a reaction to the dominance exercised, not always by force of argument, by scholastic methods and categories. Where this reaction is still powerful, any attempt to construct a theology which makes systematic, that is unifying, claims can easily be suspected of having totalitarian ambitions.

With regard to ecclesiology, this regard for pluralism may also be linked to an appeal to the transcendent character of the Church, which, as Mystery, it is said, simply cannot be comprehended in any one theological vision. It is true, of course, that an ecclesiology which does not place the Church's life in God at its center or which claims to have exhausted its meaning thereby disqualifies itself. But this does not mean that Mystery and the systematic effort are mutually exclusive, as a reading of almost any few pages of Aquinas might make clear. In fact, it could even be argued that the systematic exigence is powered by Mystery, by the presence in Word and grace of the God towards whose inexhaustible depths one may be drawn in intellectual desire without having to suspect oneself of attempted deicide. The natural desire of the mind for intelligible unification, so far from being

---

Social Compass 17 (1970) 215-229. On a more popular level, Michel Emard, *La sociologie contre la foi?* (Sherbrooke, Québec, 1970), presents an intelligent review with a helpful bibliography.

natural desire of the mind for intelligible unification, so far from being suppressed, can be stimulated and governed by the prior awareness that the effort in the end must prove inadequate — Augustine once exclaimed, "Woe to those who do not speak of You, when those who speak most say nothing!"[15] It also helps to keep in mind that not all efforts to speak of Mystery are equally inadequate and that Mystery is not legitimately invoked as a reason for not exploring fundamental differences in the efforts or for not criticizing and evaluating them.

Pluralism in ecclesiology may also appear as a simple failure to distinguish among various modes of discourse about the Church. These are, of course, many, and they can be variously ordered. There is the simple historical sequence of biblical, patristic, medieval, scholastic, modern, and contemporary modes. More helpful is the effort to differentiate in terms of context and purpose, as between kerygmatic, catechetical, liturgical, meditative, polemical, systematic, ideological, and so on, modes of discourse. Particularly useful differentiations can also be derived from the distinction noted above between discourse in the everyday attitude and discourse in the scientific attitude. The differences between ways of speaking about the Church are legitimate, but they do not imply an inevitable pluralism in systematic ecclesiology. If a theologian attempts to make some critical differentiations among the various modes of discourse, he can meet the claim that a plurality of biblical or liturgical images necessitates or legitimates a plurality of systematic approaches, the fear that a systematic effort poses a threat to the plurality of images, and the criticism that his constructions are not communicable in non-systematic contexts.

An argument for systematic ecclesiology must, it is perhaps now clear, be made on a number of fronts and with great and critical care. If some indication of what is here meant by systematic understanding has already been given, perhaps the most effective way of urging its possibility and necessity in ecclesiology is to clarify in what ways an ecclesiologist's work is similar to that of the social theorist.

---

[15] *Confessions* I, 5:5: *Quid dicit aliquis, cum de te dicit? Et vae tacentibus de te, quoniam loquaces muti sunt.*

Ecclesiology and Social Theory

That a systematic theological understanding of the Church will be in important respects similar to other systematic understandings of social realities, it will here be argued, follows from the three steps already taken. This argument has two further presuppositions not yet stated.

The first of these is that method in theology is not a matter of deductions from first principles. Since this should no longer need defense, the second presupposition may be addressed and defended, namely, that ecclesiology cannot be restricted to the interpretation of *statements about* the Church, whether these be biblical, traditional, liturgical, magisterial, theological, or other. Manifestly, these statements are part of the data investigated by the ecclesiologist, and, as will be argued shortly, their role in understanding the Church is crucial in differentiating ecclesiology from other systematic efforts to understand the Church.

But statements about the Church, although a part and at times a determining part, are not the whole of the Church's self-realization in any generation; and it is the whole set (or sets) of experiences, understandings, symbols, words, judgments, statements, decisions, actions, relations, and institutions which distinguish the group of people called 'the Church' that constitutes the object of ecclesiology. The Church is not simply that about which a variety of statements speak nor is it a reality accessible only through those statements; it is also a social reality constituted within the common consciousness of its members, so that access to it can also be gained by an understanding of them, of what they do, and of how what they do makes them the Church.

Perhaps the point may be clarified by a comparison with the theology of grace. It is possible to conceive this to be a matter of philological, hermeneutical, and historical interpretations of the word 'grace' as this appears in the Bible, tradition, liturgy, magisterium, and so on. But it is also possible, as a number of contemporary theologians propose,[16] to include in a theology of grace what can be learned by the investigation of religious experience, whether that of religious

[16] The efforts of Lonergan, Karl Rahner, and Piet Fransen are well known. The tradition, of course, contains many writings that are attempts to make sense of religious experience; and it is difficult to believe that a goodly measure of introspection does not lie behind these and also Augustine's and Aquinas's theories of grace.

figures in the past, or of such figures in the present, or of the theologian himself. The relationship between these two objects of study is, of course, complex and will be studied later; but for the moment it may be enough to point out that the two go hand in hand: that of which the authoritative statements speak is that which occurs in religious experience, so that the interpretation of the one requires the interpretation of the other, and skill in interpreting one can sharpen and deepen the interpretation of the other.

Something similar is here being argued for in ecclesiology. That about which the authoritative statements on the Church speak is that which occurs in the mutually related conscious operations and acts that make a group of people what is called 'the Church.' The same hermeneutical spiral operates here too: the interpretation of the one set of data requires the interpretation of the other, and skill in interpreting the one set can sharpen and deepen the interpretation of the other.

Two further considerations may help support the claim being made. The first has to do with what is sometimes called an 'implicit' ecclesiology, often noted by historians of ecclesiology. The phrase reflects the fact that a notion of the Church can be recognized even when the Church has not been made the object of explicit attention. It thus enables scholars to speak about the ecclesiology of a writer, biblical or later, who may never even have used the word 'Church' or whose use of it was not reflective. The phrase can also refer to decisions, events, movements, developments in the concrete life of the Church which were not prompted or directed by a reflective theory of the Church. One may think, for example, of the gathering and canonization of the New Testament writings, of the emergence of the threefold ministry and its universal reception, of the determination of the *regula fidei* and of 'the shape of the liturgy,' of the development of conciliar practice, of the repudiation of sectarianism, of the sacralization of the ministry, and so on. As often as not, these developments preceded and prompted the theories that legitimate them. The scholar who writes the history of ecclesiology, then, does not attend only to statements made about such developments; he studies the developments themselves, and it is not impossible or even rare that he will be able to find in them more ecclesiological significance than those who witnessed them or even promoted them. Historically, then, the concrete self-

realization of the Church is not accessible only through statements about the Church.[17]

The second consideration is more strictly theological, namely, the claim the Church makes that it lives under the promise that the Spirit of Christ will not allow it to depart substantially from the central meanings and values of Christ. That claim can be understood to imply that an access to the truth about the Church may be had not only by recourse to authoritative statements but also by the investigation of that by which the Church lives in any generation: the life of the Spirit realized in the operations and acts by which a concrete group of people are brought together as this distinct social reality.

But if a substantial part of the ecclesiologist's task is to interpret the self-realization(s) of the Church, then that part of his task may be expected to resemble in form and method the work of the social theorist who interprets other social realities and indeed the Church itself. As an interpretation of a human reality, it will naturally look to the human rather than to the natural sciences for enlightenment about its methods. One might be able to take this for granted were it not so rare for ecclesiologists to show any acquaintance with the considerable body of literature on methodology in the human sciences, a good deal of which is very pertinent to any theological method that claims to be interested in human experience.[18]

Furthermore, an ecclesiology of the sort being recommended here will look especially to the social sciences, both for a method to apply or adapt and for assistance in working out fundamental categories. Ecclesiologists, however, have not commonly been conspicuous for their attention to questions of method or for their care in critically elaborating their categories. But how can one work out a systematic ecclesiology without working out first such terms as 'individual,' 'community,' 'society,' 'meaning,' 'change,' 'structure,' 'institution,' 'relationship,' and so on, and the various relationships, or at least

---

[17] For an example, which represents a methodological breakthrough on its subject, see Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

[18] Karl Rahner's dense paragraphs on the necessarily ecclesial character of Christianity (*Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych [New York: Seabury, 1978] 322-323, 342-343) beg to be enucleated by available analyses of intersubjectivity and society. Rahner, however, seems to regard the human sciences as inevitably reductionistic; see pp. 27, 35-36.

types of relationships, that can obtain among those terms? If on all those terms and relations there already exists a substantial body of literature in social theory, it is difficult to see why it should not be expected to be very helpful to the ecclesiologist's determination of his methods and categories.

Some examples might make the point more clear and convincing. Is it not possible that the meaning of such biblical images of the Church as 'the Body of Christ' or 'fellowship in the Holy Spirit' might be illumined by reflection on the types of social relationships to which social theorists have for almost a century devoted so much attention? Can an ecclesiologist critically address the question whether the Church is a 'community' or a 'society' (or 'institution') without learning from social theorists what those words mean in concrete social life? Can an ecclesiologist hope to understand what authority in the Church is without examining first what a social relationship is and then exploring what social theorists have to say about 'authority,' 'power,' 'legitimation,' and so on and about the types of relationships in which they are found? Could not social theory help ecclesiologists to escape from such blind alleys as the dichotomies between 'institution' and 'event,' 'charism' and 'office,' 'essence' and 'forms,' and even *Wesen* and *Unwesen*? In all these areas ecclesiologists could at least learn how to frame their own questions more critically and how to go about deriving a set of general categories in which to articulate a systematic understanding of the Church.[19]

A last reason for recommending the methods and categories of social theory is that a good deal of this literature reflects the 'critical turn.' It has realized the pertinence and the sharpness of the Enlightenment's critique of institutions, traditions, communities, and authorities and has come out the other side of it with a body of social

[19] I take 'general categories' here in Lonergan's sense, to refer to categories whose objects are studied by other disciplines as well as by theology, as distinct from 'special' categories whose objects are proper to theology (see *Method in Theology* 282-291). A theology of the Church need not be confined to the latter, which seems to be the case in the 'essential ecclesiology' which Karl Rahner distinguishes from 'existential ecclesiology' — a distinction which I do not think is required, especially if one makes as much use as does Rahner of the notion of the *Selbstvollzug* of the Church; see "Ekklesiologische Grundlegung," in *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie: Praktische Theologie der Kirche in ihrer Gegenwart*, ed. F.X. Arnold *et al*, vol. I (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 117-118, somewhat loosely translated as *Theology of Pastoral Action* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 25-26.

theory that cannot easily be accused of the social equivalent of 'first naiveté.' In the process, many social theorists have had to work through problems that are very pertinent to the work of ecclesiologists who recognize the need for their constructions to be critically grounded. Unless that need is recognized and met, it is hard to see how any ecclesiology can be of more than ecclesiastical or even merely sectarian interest.[20]

It remains, however, that a theological understanding of the Church is not simply identical with a sociological interpretation. The most important difference lies in the fact that the theologian is not only bound to the data that are the self-realization(s) of the Church, but also acknowledges the authority of the Scriptures, tradition, liturgy, magisterium, and so on. These may, indeed ought to, be studied by the sociologist, but they are not normative for his discipline as they are for the theologian. As grounded in Christian experience as the ecclesiologist must be, he submits to authority in a fashion in which the empirical social scientist does not, or at least is not supposed to.

The argument being developed here has at several points noted that the relationship between the two sorts of data the ecclesiologist must investigate — authoritative statements about the Church and the concrete self-realization(s) of the Church — is far more complex than is often realized. The relationship has already been described in terms of a 'hermeneutical spiral': an interpretation of one set of data conditions and is conditioned by the interpretation of the other set. The intent of the argument in this last section has been to urge the importance of the methods and categories of the social sciences, applied to the concrete reality of the Church, for an understanding of the statements about the Church made in authoritative texts. The point is only pushed further when one recognizes that authoritative statements and their reception by the Church are themselves elements in the Church's ongoing historical process of self-realization and, as such, can be considerably illumined by social theory. There is thus a *theological* relevance to the recent emergence of a 'sociology of primitive Christianity,' to the discussions prompted by Weber's theory of

[20] The pertinence of the 'critical turn' to ecclesiology is well illustrated in the use to which J.B. Metz puts the notion of the Church as a 'second-order' 'institution of the critical liberty of faith'; see "The Church and the World in the Light of a 'Political Theology,'" and "On the Institution and Institutionalization," in *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 107-124, 131-136.

'charisma,' the 'routinization of charisma,' and the 'charisma of office,' to the sociological typifications of 'church' and 'sect,' and so on. The issues at stake here do not refer primarily to what is contained in statements about the Church, but to what was going on when they were made and received as authoritative, namely, the process of the Church's self-realization.[21]

It may also help to note that the relation between authoritative statements about the Church and the Church's self-realization(s) is only a particular case of a more general question. It runs parallel to the question of the relationship between what is called 'grace' and religious experience, between revelation and faith, between 'historical' and 'primordial' revelation, between the 'outer' and the 'inner' Word. In each of these examples, it seems, the same reciprocal relationship obtains as that between the statements about the Church and the Church's self-realization(s). In part at least, the relationship is that between interpretation and experience, between second-order and first-order language. To say that the authoritative statements about the Church are second-order, interpretative discourse, of course, is not to say that they are of secondary importance: it is simply to begin to describe their function and their relation to the first-order operations, acts, and language by which the Church realizes itself. If the first-order self-realization of the Church belongs, to use Lonergan's terminology, to the world constituted by meaning and motivated by value, it is of no small significance for both Church-members and others to have that constitutive meaning and value mediated by second-order discourse.[22] Christian belief in an historical revelation is belief that God's favor has not been shown only in the first-order mode by which individuals and communities are constituted by meaning and motivated by value, but also in the second-order process in which those individuals and communities struggle to express and interpret the first-order experience. And the Church itself, in its full and proper

[21] For an example, see Holmberg, *Paul and Power* 179-192; for an introduction to the growing literature on the sociology of the primitive Church, see D. J. Harrington, "Sociological Concepts and the Early Church: A Decade of Research," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980) 181-190. It is perhaps clear from this essay that I would grant this literature more theological significance than Harrington's concluding paragraphs do.

[22] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 282-291, for the discussions of 'the world of immediacy,' 'the world mediated by meaning,' and 'the world constituted by meaning and motivated by value.'

sense, arises only when the interpreting word illumines the constitutive experience and thus becomes, with the latter, the co-principle of a new and distinct social reality.

Finally, it may prove helpful to consider whether the first-order reality and the second-order interpretation may not be clarified by regarding the latter as serving a heuristic function with regard to the former. The self-realization of the Church does not occur outside of human consciousness — it could not be a human community if it did — but it need not occur by means of a fully reflexive consciousness. Social realities are constituted by shared experiences, understandings, symbols, words, judgments, statements, decisions, actions, and these manifestly cannot be unconscious; but social relations are not (or at least need not be) constituted by that reflective self-consciousness which knows that that is how social realities are constituted. The second-order statements which the Church receives as authoritative may perhaps be understood as steps beyond constitutive immediacy towards a reflexive and eventually critical self-consciousness on the part of the Church. The statements are not necessarily theoretical; most, perhaps all, are not. But in varying ways they are, simply as verbal statements about what is in part pre-verbal, as reflection on what is in part pre-reflective, moving towards that self-consciousness in which individuals or communities become able to take fully conscious responsibility for themselves. It might be worth considering the matter in terms of what social theorists speak of as procedures and techniques of 'legitimation,' provided that this word is not cumbered from the start by negative connotations and that it covers a wide range of possible procedures and techniques, from the pre-theoretical, through the theoretical, to the self-consciously and critically practical.

Foundations and Dialectic

Something should be said at the end about the impression that might have been given that the task of integrating social theory into ecclesiology is a simple one. It is not; and among the principal difficulties is the simple fact that an ecclesiologist who attempts it will not find himself before a unified body of social theory.[23] Social theorists

[23] This fact may have been obscured by my frequent use of the term 'social theory,' which I chose, not because I thought there existed a single such theory, but to have a general term under which to include the various philosophical, historical,

differ considerably from one another, and some of their differences are basic and methodological. The ecclesiologist will not find a single theory with the coherence and unifying power of the Aristotelian corpus or even of the *philosophia perennis*. He may be tempted to respond either by postponing his attention to social theory until its house has been put in order or by eclectic reading and borrowing. But there are some indications that there are more promising options.

For one thing, a good deal of social theory today is in the process of breaking with its positivistic past and with the somewhat totalitarian ambitions displayed particularly in the early days of sociology. The latter break is nearly complete, and it should go far to help churchmen and theologians overcome their suspicions of social theory.[24] But the former process is also in full course, as a large body of writings could illustrate.[25] The break with positivism has been mediated by an attention to questions of method which have remarkable points of contact with recent work in theological method. The issues are often the same: 'objectivity,' 'hermeneutics,' '*Verstehen*,' 'value-free research and theory,' the relation between 'theory' and 'practice,' and so on. Ecclesiologists can learn a good deal by consulting this material, and it is not even to be excluded, provided they take some pains to secure their own foundations, that they might be able to contribute to it. But the main point is that a theologian who is working on the problems of his own method will find that they center around many of the same questions now being widely debated by social theorists. Possibilities for

---

political, sociological, and psychological disciplines which study social life. Sociology, of course, is among the more important of these disciplines, but I avoided making reference to it alone, because the other disciplines have a great deal to contribute and because sociology is often, even by sociologists, regarded as a purely 'empirical' discipline.

[24] Henri Desroches borrows from J. Seguy the suggestion that the relationship between theology and the sciences of religion began as "la phase des mères abusives," moved to "la phase des vierges folles," and lately has reached "la phase des mères repenties et des filles prodigues"; see *Sociologies religieuses* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968) 178.

[25] For examples, see the works by Giddens and Bernstein cited in footnote 4, and William Outhwaite, *Understanding Social Life: The Method Called Verstehen* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), Brian Fay, *Social Theory and Political Practice* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), and *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, ed. Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).

critical discussion, dialogue, and dialectic thus exist today that did not exist even fifteen years ago.

Furthermore, if a theologian has made the 'anthropocentric turn,' he already knows the necessity of grounding his systematic theology in fundamental categories that express a basic anthropology. In an historically conscious age, that anthropology will not be constructed deductively from first principles, but by reflection on human experience, the experience of the theologian and that of others, both past and present. The foundations of theology today will thus have an 'empirical' base not always present before, and in that empirical base theologians will find themselves much closer to the methodological base of social theorists than most of their predecessors could have been. If that base is clarified by the theologian, opportunities will arise for him to be able to criticize the presuppositions, methods, and criteria of social theory, and he may be less fearful that his own work will be condemned to follow the ebb and flow of the sociological tides.

Conclusion

The subtitle declares this essay to be 'methodological'; perhaps, then, it can be forgiven that it ends having only sketched a program and a way to meet it. The interest which has governed it has been primarily theoretical or systematic. If however, with Lonergan, it conceives of the Church as 'a process of self-constitution,' the methodology it offers has an immediate practical import, since by that definition ecclesiology becomes a theory about a practice. The essay may then be read as an effort in aid of assisting the Church to become 'a fully conscious process of self-constitution' by meeting the challenge which Lonergan subjoins to that description:

> to do so [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.[26]

[26] Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 361-364.

LONERGAN AND THE CHURCH

WHEN WE WERE studying theology in Rome, David Tracy and I would occasionally go to see Fr. Lonergan and pester him with questions. He always received us graciously and was kind enough to take our questions seriously, although more than once the quality of his responses shamed our questions. In one of these conversations I asked him about redemption, phrasing my question, as I recall it, in terms of Aristotle's four causes. In reply, Lonergan suggested that redemption was one of those realities that could not adequately be dealt with in Aristotelian categories, that it required a theory of history and historical categories. I confess that at that time I was more intrigued than illumined by the remark.

Some years later, as I was beginning to teach ecclesiology, I reread the 'Epilogue' to *Insight*, which contains one of the most important statements on the Church in Lonergan's writings. It is introduced by a distinction in a theological treatise between the material element — the data to be taken into account — and the formal element — the pattern of terms and relations, or of categories — through which a coherent understanding of the data is achieved. His application to the Church read: "Now while the Scriptural, patristic, and dogmatic materials for a treatise on the Mystical Body have been assembled, I would incline to the opinion that its formal element remains incomplete as long as it fails to draw upon a theory of history."[1]

Suddenly I saw the connection between this passage and his earlier remark on redemption. Redemption had to be dealt with as an historical phenomenon, in a treatise "on the concrete universal that is mankind in the concrete and cumulative consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the Gospel." And that is also the context of a treatise on the Church. The governing, synthetic categories of ecclesiology had to be a theory of history, "a theory of development that can envisage not only natural and intelligent progress but also sinful

[1] Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957) 742.

decline, and not only progress and decline but also supernatural recovery."[2]

I write this as preface to an essay on a topic which some readers may find surprising. For Lonergan has, as far as I know, never taught a course on the Church and certainly he has never published a book or major article on what usually passes for a topic in ecclesiology. Perhaps this is at least in part because he has never considered the usual categories in which ecclesiology is discussed to be adequate to the phenomenon meant by the Church. But, if one takes seriously his remarks at the end of *Insight*, then one can say that important elements for an adequate theological interpretation and explanation of the Church are to be found in his work. They are not, it is true, worked out in full in any single place; and perhaps more than with regard to many other themes in theology, they require a certain measure of interpretation and extrapolation. They are, nonetheless, important, and even as sketched in *Insight*, prove to be remarkably prophetic of many of the methodological shifts which we have only since come to term 'the political turn' in theology.

This essay, then, will be devoted to a discussion of the context and categories of ecclesiology and of how they enable one to conceive of the genesis of the Church.

HISTORY AS THE CONTEXT OF ECCLESIOLOGY

Both in *Insight* and in *Method*, Lonergan has sketched a theory of human history which especially attempts to identify and to describe its generating principles. While three principles are identified and described separately, they co-exist, and so actual human history is what results from their simultaneous operation. Human history is the story of progress, decline, and recovery, and its principles are intelligence, sin, and grace.

Progress. The first principle of human history is the exercise of intelligence and freedom. Within given situations human beings ask questions, achieve some measure of insight, verify their ideas, and then act upon them, thus altering the original situation and them-

[2] *Insight* 743.

selves. The new situation thus produced in turn provokes new questions, new insights, new judgments, new decisions and new actions, thus producing another new situation, which in turn provokes new questions, and so on. The exercise of intelligence at once fulfills the person and generates historical progress, and were intelligence always in act and freedom always faithful to the demands of intelligence, human history would be the story of a gradual and cumulative progress.

Lonergan's description of progress and its principle serves two purposes. First, it points to a real dimension of human history. If it has known its disasters, tragedies, and crimes, history has also known achievements and triumphs, and "in the aftermath of economic and political upheavals, amidst the fears of worse evils to come, the thesis of progress needs to be affirmed again."[3] Second, an important part of any effort to avoid in the future the mistakes and tragedies of the past must be an understanding of the dynamism and structure of an intelligent, reasonable, and responsible historical subject. When evidence abounds of the decline of reason and of the banalization of progress, it is more important than ever to be reminded of an authentic human ideal.

Decline. Surely no one needs to be persuaded that the circle of human progress does not turn smoothly and move on cumulatively. Individuals, societies, or cultures do not advance in straight lines; development is always precarious and achievement fragile. Decline is as much a fact of human history as is progress.

Lonergan traces the root of decline to the deflection of human consciousness from its intrinsic and ideal norms: intelligence, reason, and responsibility. He calls this negative principle 'bias'; the Christian theological term for it is 'sin.'

Bias appears in three forms in Lonergan's analysis. *Individual bias* is a person's subordination of the demands of intelligence, reason, and responsibility to selfish needs and interests. Consciousness is made to serve egoistic purposes, and its self-transcending thrust is blunted. *Group bias* is a sort of collective selfishness by which the needs and interests of a group within the larger society constitute the primary criterion for its actions. Intelligence, reason, and responsibil-

[3] *Insight* 688.

ity here are deflected from their service of the common good of the whole society to serve local and particular interests. Finally, there is a *general bias*, a culture-wide surrender of transcendent exigencies to the tyranny of 'common sense.' It is the surrender of criticism, resignation to the habitual, the rationalization of the 'real.'

While Lonergan has his own terms for these instances of decline and his own explanation of them, what he is analyzing is not unfamiliar. Individual bias is what Christians normally mean by sin or crime. Group bias has parallels with what lately has come to be known as 'social sin.' General bias is perhaps less well-known, but it is not unfamiliar especially to cultural critics, whether they draw on classical sources or on later, critical social theory.

A few remarks are in order. First, the analysis of decline presupposes the analysis of progress. All criticism presumes an ideal of personal and social human integrity. This gives a further value to the description of how human consciousness would unfold itself, both in individuals and in societies and cultures, were it not deflected from its ideal and normative goals. Second, the relationship between the three levels of bias itself needs analysis. For individuals are born and reared within groups and cultures, and much of the challenge they face in their own tasks of self-constitution and much of the resources with which they may face them derive from the meanings and values realized in groups and cherished in cultures. On the other hand, groups and cultures are achievements of individuals, whose distinct and personal existence embody the group and cultural ethos or gradually begin to alter and even to transform it. This relationship will be particularly important in our consideration of the role of the Church.

Recovery. The Christian faith rests on and centers in the conviction that God has not left the human race to its own devices, but that he has intervened to repair the evil we have done, to reverse its momentum, and to restore its creative powers. In other words, in the only world that concretely exists, it is not enough to speak of the opposed principles of intelligence and bias; there is a further component, God's grace and revelation, a redemptive principle of human history.

On the Catholic understanding, redemption is the healing of the human mind and heart and the restoration of the basic human potentiality for intelligent and responsible action through its sublation

into a supernatural life in imitation of, obedience to, and union with Jesus Christ. To our tendency to lose faith in the powers of our minds to reach the truth (cultural bias) comes the faith which receives the unfailing Word of God. To our tendency to surrender in despair to the endless cycle of power and weakness (group bias) comes the hope that rests on the assurance of Christ's victory over even death and on his promise of the Spirit and eventual triumph. And to that egoism that puts our own interests and good above all others (individual bias) comes the love which finds it highest exemplar in the forgiving and absorbing love of Christ for those who did him evil.

Where minds have been clarified by the revelation of God, where spirits have been fortified by his promise, and where hearts have been liberated by his love, there exist in and among human societies people who can be the agents or subjects of historical action which breaks the reign of sin and permits the recovery of the native powers of the human soul. The doctrine of redemption is the articulation of this possibility within human history. In its full range, soteriology is a theology of history. And as concretely articulated, soteriology requires a theology of the Church as an event within the endless struggle of the three historic principles of progress, decline, and redemptive recovery.

CATEGORIES FOR A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

The outline given above of a theology of history is not the context of ecclesiology in the sense of a starting-point which one may articulate and then leave behind. It is the context in the sense that it must always inform one's attempts to make sense of the Church as an historical achievement, as a community brought to be among the variety of other human communities and as a moment in the historical self-realization of mankind.

To the degree that the genesis of the Church is a constitutive element in the divine response to the problem of human evil, ecclesiology must always include and try to make coherent sense of the strictly theological dimensions of the Church, that is, those elements which only faith can receive and which describe the unique and transcendent character of the Church as the People of God, the Body of

Christ and the Temple of the Spirit. Ecclesiology has, therefore, rightly always been suspicious of various kinds of sociological reductionism. The life which Christians live and the intersubjectivity which they enjoy in the Church are 'supernatural,' beyond our merits and even our ambitions, a reality whose very existence and whose deepest characteristics we can know only through God's revelation. Only faith can know the final truth about the Church.

But not only do such unique and transcendent claims not exhaust the reality of the Church, they are not even adequately dealt with theologically if they are not related to the historic mission of the Church as a sign and agent of God's redemptive purpose in history. Here again one must remember what Lonergan and several other theologians restored to Catholic consciousness in the two decades before Vatican II: that the 'supernatural' does not refer to an otherworldly, abstract reality. It refers to this concrete world, where it describes the great claim that what we think to be natural and reasonable does not exhaust the range of the possible and the real, but that, by God's favor, there is possible to us an historical existence that shatters the probability-schedules of sin and elevates us to a life and action beyond our merits and dreams. The transcendent, supernatural dimensions of the Church do not elevate it out of the range of concrete historicity; they declare the real meaning of human historicity and contribute to its realization. Participation in the supernatural life of the Mystical Body, for example, is not a retreat from historical responsibility into sectarian escapism; it is itself a response to divine intervention and an exercise of that historical responsibility by which history is freed from its false to its true self. The Church is the community in which history can come to full consciousness of itself, where the *communio peccatorum* can be healed and transformed into a *communio sanctorum*, revealing and serving the redemptive recovery of human history.

In others words, if ecclesiology must avoid the danger of sociological reductionism, it must be no less careful of avoiding the opposite, a theological reductionism that articulates the inner dimensions of the Church in a way that neglects the redemptive role of the Church within human history and alongside other human communities. A sect might be content with such a vision of the Christian Church; but because redemption is not liberation from the world into a safe because

separate world but a liberation that enables us to be the redeemed and redemptive subjects of the world's self-realization, a Church cannot but understand even its most distinctive features in terms of what is fundamentally at stake in the drama of human history.

In discussing theological categories, Lonergan suggests a twofold division into 'general' and 'special' categories. 'Special' theological categories refer to objects proper to theology. In relation to the Church, I take these to refer to dimensions of the Church which are not knowable by reason alone, but only by revelation, and which thus escape the competence of the human sciences. Examples are the biblical notions of People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit, and so on. Only theology would make use of these categories in order to make sense of the Church. 'General' theological categories refer to objects that are studied by other disciplines as well as by theology — in other words, dimensions of the Church that the human sciences can also interpret and explain. Among these I would include such categories as 'community,' 'institution,' 'society,' 'history,' and so on.

Both sorts of categories appear in Lonergan's brief description of the Church in *Method in Theology:* "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," and when later he suggests that the Church be conceived of as a 'process of self-constitution, a *Selbstvollzug.*'[4] The genesis of the Church by the Word of Christ and the grace of the Spirit includes elements of the Church that only a theology living by faith can study. But these transcendent principles produce within this world a human community among other communities, a process of self-constitution alongside other such processes. In these respects and in these dimensions the Church is studied not only by theologians but also by sociologists, students of religion, historians, political theorists, and so on.

To understand what Lonergan means by the general theological categories of 'community' and 'self-constitution,' we must turn to some important notions which he develops in the course of this discussion of meaning. Human beings are born not only into a natural world, physical, chemical, and biological, but also into a human world of

[4] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 361, 363.

families, communities, societies, economies, polities, cultures, and so on. The difference between the human world or worlds and the natural world is that, while the latter is not created by human beings, the human world is. Both of the worlds can be considered to be 'objective,' in the sense that they stand over and against the newborn individual as a pre-given world within whose massive reality he must work out his own destiny. But, as much as human beings may master nature and as much as the transformations of nature may fundamentally condition the way in which they live their lives, nature is not a human product, and society is.

To describe the distinctively human world Lonergan uses the phrase 'the world constituted by meaning.' Social realities (to use a shorthand phrase) are brought about by the conscious operations of groups of human beings. They express and embody shared ways of understanding and evaluating the world and the relationships among people. They are expressions of the efforts of past and present generations to make sense of the world and to live in it intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly. They are realities which cannot be understood without understanding what their creators have meant and valued. In this they differ from purely 'natural' realities as a wink differs from a facial tic, an arrowhead from a piece of flint, and a city from a beehive.

A community is an example of a world constituted by meaning. For Lonergan, community is an achievement on four levels. It is made possible by some measure of common experience, a common history which the members can think and talk about together. Community is given form and reality through common understandings and common judgments, an agreement as to the meaning of the common experience. And community becomes effective through common commitments for the sake of common values. Communities, then, are not primarily to be defined spatially; they begin and end where a community of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision begins and ends.

A second, related notion must be introduced at this point, that of 'the world mediated by meaning.' This world Lonergan distinguishes from the world given immediately either to sense or to internal consciousness. This latter world is a narrow world, restricted to the range of one's own personal experience. But no human being lives in so narrow a world. We all live in a world, which we would vigorously

insist is also 'the real world,' which is known to us at least originally and in good part only because it has been mediated to us by others. Through their communications to us we come to know of past and distant things, persons and events which we will never personally experience. Our own efforts at understanding this far larger world are greatly assisted by hearing what others have understood of it. We sort out what is true and false about it not only by our own efforts and by reference to our own experience but also by testing various claims against the vast number of things we already hold to be true in part because of the testimony of others. And when we try to distinguish good and evil, we do so in dependence on and in dialogue with the evaluations of the world we have learned from others. Thus, by far the greater part of the world we inhabit, both natural and human, is mediated to us by the acts of meaning of predecessors and contemporaries.

With these two notions of the worlds constituted and mediated by meaning and value, we have two basic elements in an attempt to locate the place and role of the Church. For they describe the concrete social context within which we as individuals and as a group attempt to live out our lives. As personal as is the project of existential self-realization which each of us must assume, it is never an isolated or merely private effort. It occurs within an objective matrix, partly natural and partly social or historical. We had no choice over the world into which we were born and within which important moments of our socialization took place. And that pre-given world in large measure determines the concrete range of historical possibilities over which we will be able to exercise our freedom.

But it is not only that we must work within and deal with the objective world, as already constituted by the meanings and values of predecessors and successors; the concrete selves which we become are also profoundly affected and conditioned by the worlds constituted and mediated by meaning and value. The world constituted by meaning and value is a social world created by others and so embodies in its language and symbols, roles and institutions, economic and political development, a certain understanding and appreciation of human life. It is on this culture that others draw when they mediate its richness to us. The language with which they speak to us already interprets and orders the world. The symbols they use promote affective and cognitive

responses appropriate to that world. The roles and institutions channel our freedom into expected and rewarded kinds of life and activity. The stages of economic and political development provide an outer limit of what we are likely to be able to do with our own energies. Through the mediation of others, what is commonly called socialization, we are raised to be persons who can be at home in the world those others have made and sustained. And, should there come a time when we take conscious control of our own lives, we always do so as persons who have grown up in such a world and become the persons we are in good part because of it.

This account so far is simply one version of what today is often called 'historicity.' Human existence is historical, concretely located in time, space, and culture. Each generation has to try to live intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly at its time, in its place, and with the resources of its culture. Each new generation's historic responsibility begins where another's has left off.

But the real drama of each succeeding generation's responsibility is seen in its full concreteness only when it is recalled that history is no straight-line or ever ascending progression. That there has been progress cannot be doubted, and much of what anyone of us can do today we owe to the labors of past generations. But besides progress, there is also sinful decline. And among the creations of past generations, embodied in the world constituted by meaning and mediated to us by those who have socialized us into that world, there also are the historical and cultural effects of past and present generations' failures to act intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly. The world we have entered by birth and by socialization is a confused mixture of intelligence and folly, of reason and irrationality, of responsibility and irresponsibility. In our families, communities, societies, economies, polities, and cultures, we have encountered individual and group bias and the surrender of critical reason to the demands of practicality. Not only that, there is a good chance that we have ourselves assimilated as the obvious way of living our lives a similarly confused view of the world and sense of values. We do not begin our lives as did Adam and Eve, innocents in an innocent world; we are born somewhere east of Eden, and we are ourselves, unfortunately, all too much at home in our exile.

But for Christian faith, there is not only progress and decline; there is also the gift and hope of redemptive recovery. In the message of Christ, there is given God's own interpretation of our condition and of a way to overcome it. In the person of Christ himself there is given a personal incarnation of a human life that can undo the effects of sin in forging a life and surpass the fear of death in the power of resurrection. In the grace of the Spirit there is given the possibility of a personal conversion that can prevent sin from bringing us under the reign of egoism and resigned irresponsibility. Christ has brought us a truth that can set us free, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

At the core of this redemptive possibility stands the individual person, given the possibility of free and authentic life before God in imitation of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. But concretely this redemptive possibility works itself out historically, and this means in accordance with the general laws of concrete existence outlined above. A new community, defined by new experiences, new insights and judgments, new values and commitments, came to be in response to the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That community, which we call the Church, was and is the concrete social and historic difference he has made. It is the enduring sign of his life and work because it is their effect. A new community of meaning and value has been constituted in this natural world of ours: a new intersubjectivity in grace, with its own language and symbols, its own roles and institutions, its own interpretative and evaluative culture. Among the many worlds constituted by meaning and value there exists one which defines itself by reference to Jesus Christ and lives by the grace of his Spirit.

And because this community of meaning and value exists, there is the concrete possibility that when successive generations have the world mediated to it, that world will be the world of God's creation, Christ's redemption, and the Spirit's power. The language and symbols a person learns now speak of God as well as of man, of both sin and forgiveness, of resurrection as well as of death, of freedom and not merely of constraint. Personal examples will be not only of selfishness and alienation but of generosity and reconciling love. Roles and institutions will direct people toward authentic living. The community that is the sign and effect of Christ thus becomes the instrument of his

enduring redemptive efficacy. The Church continues to be the concrete difference Christ makes in human history and society.

As Christ's message and life is the outer communication and interpretation of the inner gift of the Spirit by which God calls all human beings to salvation, so the Church is the social and historical articulation of the redemptive meanings incarnate in Christ and of the redeemed subjectivity made possible by the Spirit. It is, on a first view, the redeemed community brought about by Christ and the Spirit, an intersubjectivity transformed by grace, the fellowship of the Spirit, which embodies in fellow-feeling and mutual service, forgiveness and reconciliation, gesture and rite, common beliefs and values, the gathering of individuals out of their particularity and alienation into one body under one God and in one Spirit. The daily re-gathering of this people is itself already an occurrence of salvation, the triumph of Christ's word and grace over sin and the realization of redemptive communion.

On a second view, the Church so gathered is also the historical instrument of the redemptive work of Christ and the Spirit. In its fellowship, witness and service, the Church gives visible social expression to the interpretation and evaluation of human life which are summed up in Christian faith, hope, and love. For its members the Church becomes the matrix by which we are sustained in our way of understanding reality, in our hope that we can escape the determinisms to which we are so often tempted to surrender, in our efforts to love as Christ has loved. For others the Church, as the embodied communal bearer of Christian meanings and values, determines the concrete probability that they will take the Gospel seriously and ask for themselves whether this might not be what human life could possibly be like. A sociologist might speak of the Church in this respect as a 'plausibility-structure' for the Christian interpretation of existence. If that description does not necessarily warm our hearts, we might give thought to the process by which we have each come to appreciate the world in the light of Christ or been encouraged to try to live in imitation of him, and then ask whether in fact it has not been the Church which at almost every crucial point has supplied us with words for our groping efforts, with examples to demonstrate its value, and with prayers and rites to strengthen and illumine our resolve.

THE CONCRETE GENESIS OF THE CHURCH

When Lonergan speaks of the Church as 'a process of self-constitution,' he alludes to a central feature of the Church's existence. For, like other human communities, the Church is also something which is made to come to be, under grace, by the conscious operations of its members. This is not at all to deny the divine initiative in the genesis of the Church; but it is to specify how that initiative is effective in the world. The Venerable Bede put it metaphorically: "Every day," he said, "the Church gives birth to the Church." With a little help from social theorists, the theologian might say that every day the Church reproduces itself by reproducing its constitutive acts of Christian meaning and value, by everyday believing, hoping, and loving again. The day that the Church ceases to believe, hope, and love is the day that the Church dies.

There are two inseparable moments in this daily genesis of the Church, an objective moment and a subjective. The objective moment involves reference to the founding and perennially constitutive meanings that center around the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These meanings are the insights, judgments, and values that give form, act, and effect to the community of the Church. The Church finds these meanings objectively represented in the Scriptures, in the tradition, in dogmas, in the liturgy, in the examples of holy lives, past and present, and so on. These stand over and against each generation of Christians as the criterion of their fidelity to Christ's word. They are the objective principle of the unity of the Church across generations and across cultures. And without these meanings it would be something other than the Church that is realized.

But the objective meanings that make the Church a distinctive community do not effect the Church except in so far as they are received and appropriated by each successive generation of Christians. They are of themselves only potential principles of unity; they become effective principles of a single communion amidst historical and cultural diversity only when they are affirmed and embraced in acts of historical self-responsibility. Faith comes from hearing, St. Paul said, but he also said that no one can say that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit. And it is the act of personal and communal appropriation

of the Gospel that is the second, subjective moment in the Church's daily genesis.

This perhaps helps to explain why Lonergan's most extensive discussion of the Church in *Method in Theology* occurs in a chapter on "Communications." For the Church is the effect of God's self-communication in word and grace; its fundamental existence is that of communion in meaning and value; it continues in existence as a process of communal self-constitution; and it fulfills its role in history by communicating the word and grace by which it lives. "Communications," then, refers not only to an activity of the Church outward, but to the very process by which it continues to exist at all.

When the subjective moment in the genesis of the Church receives attention, the focus necessarily shifts to the particular situations in which its constitutive meanings and values are communicated and received. And with this focus the role of the Church as an instrument of the redemptive recovery of history comes immediately to the fore. For the Gospel is always preached to individuals and groups living in specific historical moments, in communities and societies shaped by human progress and marred by human sin. The call to Christian hope is always a challenge to withstand the temptations to be content with the horizons in which local varieties of sin are comfortable. The invitation to Christian love is always a call to overcome quite specific temptations to selfishness and alienation. If, on a rather formal and abstract level, there is a general and universal Christian meaning and value, the Gospel only liberates in the concrete, as a word and grace which makes people free in the ever different here and now.

There is not, then, a first moment in which the Church comes to be through its constitutive faith, hope, and love and then a second moment in which it looks around at the world to see what it might bring to it. The preaching of the Word of Christ is already an act within and with reference to the historical moment, and the decision to believe is itself an act of free response within and in terms of that moment. Preaching the Word and receiving it in faith are acts which interpret the world not only in general but also in its particular and specific character here and now and which constitute first the preacher and then the believer as historical agents. In other words, the communication and reception of the central Christian faith is a process constitutive of redemptive recovery. And the same holds true of the

acts of hope and love. In that sense, the basic process by which the Church constitutes itself in response to Christ's word and the Spirit's grace is already a 'political' act, that is, an act that decides for and/or against specific options about the character of human society and the direction of human history. It is the process by which God's redemptive intervention in man's making of man becomes historically and socially visible and effective.

For all these reasons, the interplay between faith and culture is a crucial question. There is, on the one hand, the constitutive faith which derives from and interprets the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and which is objectively represented in the Scriptures, tradition, dogma, liturgy, and so on. On the other hand, there is the mandate to preach this Gospel to all nations so that all peoples and cultures may be saved by receiving, appropriating, and living out the Gospel. Throughout the two millennia of its existence, the Church has always been engaged in this process of cultural communication. It began even within the New Testament, where the tension between Jewish and Hellenistic culture is already visible, as, for example, when Paul and Peter must try to settle how much of Judaism is necessary when the Gospel is preached to and lived by non-Jews. The process continued when the Church moved out into the various cultures of the ancient world, when it attempted to convert the 'barbarian' tribes, when it became the religious center of medieval Christendom, and when it undertook the vast missionary activity of the modern era.

For Lonergan this process of transforming contemporary culture represents the key challenge of the contemporary Church. At the Second Vatican Council the Church entered upon a grand effort of self-assessment and reform. The twentieth century Church was the heir of those previous efforts to make Christian faith the directing force of Western culture and of the transformations of Christianity which those efforts had effected. But for Pope John XXIII to have called the Council under the banner of *aggiornamento* was to admit that the Church had not yet adapted itself to the specific challenges of contemporary culture and history. It was still too dependent on decisions made in other historical circumstances and with the resources of a culture long past. The near-explosion of familiar 'Roman Catholicism' after the Council, Lonergan argues, is less a crisis of faith than of

culture. It is the crisis entailed in the new appropriation of the faith required for the Church to be an active and effective force in changed historical circumstances and by using new cultural resources.

This is the context in which to make sense of Lonergan's distinction between 'classical' and 'historical' consciousness. He offers a description of the culture that until fairly recently was still dominant in the Church:

> it was named simply culture. It was conceived absolutely, as the opposite of barbarism. It was a matter of acquiring and assimilating the tastes and skills, the ideals, virtues, and ideas, that were pressed upon one in a good home and through a curriculum in the liberal arts. This notion, of course, had a very ancient lineage. It stemmed out of Greek *paideia* and Roman *doctrinae studium atque humanitatis*, out of the exuberance of the Renaissance and its pruning in the Counter-reformation schools of the Jesuits. Essentially it was a normative rather than an empirical notion of culture, a matter of models to be imitated, or ideal characters to be emulated, of eternal verities and universally valid laws.[5]

The problem with this notion of culture is twofold. First, it failed to perceive its own particularity and relativity, and, second, it has disappeared, apparently forever. Because of the first defect, the Church found itself bound to a cultural form and to historical decisions and policies which might have been appropriate in one set of cultural circumstances and in one historical moment but which were quite inadequate to different circumstances and moments. The Church could not effectively be present and active in a world which had abandoned the normative and universalistic presuppositions of classical culture. And if, secondly, this abandonment appears to be irreversible, the Church is faced with the tremendous challenge of articulating its central faith and of structuring its own redemptive activity within and for a culture whose emergence it had often vigorously resisted.

This challenge itself has two dimensions. First, in areas long since evangelized, it requires the Church to deal with the distinctively modern culture which has replaced the classical culture, and, second, in other cultures it requires it to undertake a task of evangelization

[5] *Second Collection* 101.

without the normative and universalizing presuppositions of that now obsolete cultural ideal. The difficulties of this twofold challenge should not be underestimated. The Church begins this task, inevitably, as the historical subject which has become what it is through that vast project of cultural interaction outlined above, whose most recent form was the assimilation of a notion of culture which did not admit of the need for change. In this situation, it is very difficult to sort out the Gospel from the way in which the Gospel has developed in that historical and cultural interaction. Inevitably there will be disagreements as to what may or may not be reformed or even discarded as simply culturally specific forms of the Christian faith or life. This has made the task of an appropriate and effective historical and cultural self-constitution of the Church in the new culture of the West and in the varied cultures of the world a much more difficult task than it might have been conceived to be when earlier cultural self-constitutions were regarded as permanently fixed, normative and universalizable.

With this analysis of the modern cultural crisis for the Church, Lonergan offers a way of understanding the chief challenges the Church faces both in Western European cultures and as it strives now to permit the Gospel to become, in non-European culture, "not disruptive of the culture, not an alien patch superimposed upon it, but a line of development within the culture."[6] And what is at stake here is not simply whether there shall be a Church tomorrow, but whether, by entering into, transforming and being transformed by the variety of cultures, the Church shall be what it is supposed to be, the historical and social bearer of God's intervention for the redemption of human history and culture.

CONCLUSION

One should not turn to Bernard Lonergan's writings for a complete and systematic theology of the Church nor even for discussions of most particular ecclesiological topics. But in his thought one can find extremely interesting and fruitful foundations for the effort to situate the Church as one of the actors in the drama of human history. The

[6] *Method* 362.

result of such an effort may be not only to gain new insights into the reality of the Church, but also to assist the Church to become 'a fully conscious process of self-constitution,' ready and able critically and confidently to undertake its role as an instrument of the redemptive recovery of human history.

Part 2:

Some Foundations for Ecclesiology

95
ℓ

THE SOCIAL MEDIATION OF THE SELF

AUTHENTIC SUBJECTIVITY

BERNARD LONERGAN'S WORK, particularly *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, pursued a single basic aim: the promotion of a method to uncover and appropriate the normative dimensions of human subjectivity. In the first part of *Insight*, Lonergan first analyzed the conspicuously successful methods of modern scientific inquiry and then the more ambiguous achievements of common sense. In one sense, the analysis was phenomenological, asking, first, what in fact do I do when I am knowing? It uncovered a process of spontaneous inquiry about the data of experience, a desire first to understand — What is this? What does it mean? — and then to understand correctly — Is this so? Is this what it really means? The analysis then moved on to the critical question: Why is doing this knowing?, and, on the basis of the first step in the analysis, grounded objectivity in the unconditional act of judgment. Finally, in the long and ambitious chapters of the second part of *Insight*, Lonergan explored the implications of his analysis for metaphysics, ethics, natural theology, and even for a heuristic anticipation of a redemptive religion — all of this a response to a third question: What do I know when I do that?[1]

Between *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, Lonergan began to encapsulate the normative demands of human subjectivity in the set of 'transcendental precepts': 'Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.' These became the foundations for a method which would be appropriate and adequate to the complex tasks of theology in an historically conscious age. The foundations for a contemporary and critical theology were laid in three conversions that articulate the normative dimensions of consciousness: an intellectual conversion, choosing to live by intelligent inquiry and critical reasoning; a moral

[1] Lonergan used these three questions not only to summarize the subjects of *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1958), but also to indicate the essential contribution of philosophy to the foundations of theology; see *A Second Collection*, ed. W. Ryan and B. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), pp. 37, 86, 138, 203, 207, 241; and *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 25.

conversion, choosing to choose responsibly, for the sake of genuine value; and a religious conversion, in which the self-transcending thrust of the first two conversions was met and, indeed, anticipated by the free appropriation of God's own loving self-gift.[2] The theologian's task was to build upon these conversions, not as upon premises for conclusions, but on the converted self, an authentic subject, self-aware, self-critical, self-responsible, self-transcendent.[3] Only such a subject could undertake the complex work of research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, systematics, and communication — the eight functional specialities in which, Lonergan argued, the theological task consists.

Although his work is not commonly described in these terms, there was a real existentialist thrust to Lonergan's project. His two major works present an ideal of genuineness or authenticity through a conscious and critical appropriation of one's own subjectivity. Both the method and the aim are analogous to those of existentialist philosophers: the starting-point and constant reference-point is subjectivity, and the aim is a recovery of man's lost and alienated self. By definition, the aim must be pursued personally by each reader, and it will be reached only by a difficult self-reflection and self-criticism which no one else can undertake for oneself. Great differences exist, of course, between Lonergan and the existentialists, but in this at least they are similar, the insistence that authenticity is possible only through a process of self-understanding and self-appropriation.

By making authentic subjectivity the foundation and critical reference-point of his theological method, Lonergan took his place among those twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologians who have made what is sometimes called 'the anthropocentric turn' or 'the turn to the subject.' For these theologians the key to rendering intelligible the deliverances of religious authority, whether revelation, the Bible, tradition, dogma, or magisterium, is attention to the human subject in the world. This subject and his experience provide the interpretative center around which Christian doctrines are to be understood and articulated. The central experience to which all religious statements are referred is the subject's self-project, his inescapable responsibility for his individual and collective history.

---

[2] See the index to *Method*, under 'conversion.'

[3] See "The New Context of Theology," *Second Collection*, pp. 55-67.

For many people, the assumption of this self-responsibility has followed upon what Lonergan called an 'existential moment' in which "we discover for ourselves that our choosing affects ourselves no less than the chosen or rejected objects and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself."[4] There is an inescapably personal dimension to this moment of discovery. It does not seem that we can be forced into experiencing it; we may even be rather successful in preventing its intrusion into our consciousness. No one else can make the discovery for us. It is rooted in depths of the self that only God can touch. But if made, it makes everything and everyone else in our lives stand in a new light; and it can affect every subsequent moment, every thought, every word, every deed. It is the creative source from which springs the one great work of art that each of us produces.

But although the existential moment is so personal, one may still ask about the conditions for its possibility and its probability. In asking that question, one must quickly move to a realm larger than the personal, to the objective framework, the world, in which existential discovery is possible or probable. Even a biographical or autobiographical approach, as in certain forms of 'theology as story,' requires this move. For biographies are never merely private accounts. They place a person's life in time and space, in families and among friends, communities, and societies, before given difficulties, opportunities, challenges, and demands, under sets of circumstances and constraints. Even when their titles do not say so, biographies are always accounts of 'the life and times' of individuals. To be fully concrete, a description of a person's existential moment and its articulation in a life-project must take account of what I will call 'the social mediation of the self.'

THE SOCIAL MEDIATION OF THE SELF

The modern philosophers and theologians who have made the turn to the subject have in the main vigorously opposed a Cartesian dualism which counterposes soul and body. In one way or another, they have all spoken of the human person as embodied or incarnate subjectivity. In doing so, they have also sought to overcome the abstraction of those

[4] *Method*, p. 240.

forms of philosophical idealism in which the individual is lost in the objective and necessary movements of spirit. Not spirit in general, but spirit as embodied in this free person or that, became the center of reference. The turn to the subject was the turn to the embodied and free individual.

There has always been a danger, however, that this turn to the concrete subject will itself suffer from a certain abstractness, conceiving of the individual, if not as a Leibnizian monad, then as the lonely existential hero. But incarnate subjectivity is not envisaged in its full concreteness if it is referred only to the embodied character of human spirit. The analysis must include as well the fact that this embodied spirit is also always concretely located communally and socially, economically, politically, and culturally. The individual subject is the child of the intersubjective communion of his parents and he is formed within the community of his family, shaped by the language, beliefs, and ethos of his culture, set within and before a world mediated by meanings and regulated by values he did not create or choose, placed within situations not constituted solely by his own subjectivity, oriented towards already defined roles within already established institutions, assisted or restrained by intersubjective relationships that may either promote or impede authentic subjectivity.

Such is the fully concrete subject who may or may not achieve the existential moment of self-discovery. To fill out this description, the following pages will discuss three ways in which the emergence of the existential self is socially mediated.

Language

As a first approach to the significance of language, we may begin with Lonergan's distinction between 'the world of immediacy' and 'the world mediated by meaning.'[5] The world of immediacy is the world given to experience without the controlling influence of higher levels of consciousness. The world of the infant, for example, is the world he sees and hears, feels and touches, grasps and sucks, a world of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, satisfaction and frustration. An adult may try to return to this world by relaxing vacantly on a beach or by watching an escapist, mindless movie. Immediate experience is the

[5] See the index to *Method*, under 'world.'

principle of this world; higher-order controls have either not yet emerged or are temporarily suspended.

But there is also what we call 'the real world,' to which adults must eventually return and into which the infant is very soon introduced, as, for example, when he learns that parents do not exist solely to satisfy his immediate demands. Much more significantly, it is the immensely larger world of other people's experiences, communicated in stories, pictures, statements. It is the world of persons and events of long ago and far away, the world of the future and the possible, of the real and the mysterious. One of my nephews once became distraught when told that his parents planned to take a trip on an airplane. He knew automobiles: they went away, but they also came back. All he knew of planes is that when they disappeared from view above him, they did not come back; and he did not want his parents to go away and not come back. He had yet to make the move from the world of immediacy, for which the real is what you can see, to the 'real world' which includes what cannot be seen. This world had to be mediated to him by his parents' assurances. We first learn of this world because others speak to us about it.

This larger world does not consist solely of what others have experienced and recounted to us. It also includes structural and interpretative elements as well. A person is not considered to inhabit the real world until he has made at least elementary distinctions between the actual and the fanciful, fact and fiction. The world communicated to the developing child is an interpreted world, a structured and ordered world, a world in which others have already made distinctions between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, a world which includes their criteria for such distinctions. Listen to the hundreds of questions that pour out of a three-year-old, and watch how their parents offer him their world to inhabit.

One of the most important instruments of this mediation of the world is language. Language itself represents a move beyond the world of immediacy. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman argue that "we can begin to speak of language only when vocal expressions have become capable of detachment from the immediate 'here and now' of subjective states. It is not yet language if I snarl, grunt, howl, or hiss...."[6]

---

[6] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 37.

Language may originate in face-to-face encounters, but it can be detached from them and can transcend them, so that a person can encounter in imagination and thought realms of reality he will never experience directly or immediately. "Language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations."[7]

A language comes to a child, then, bearing the world it expresses. That world includes both the experiences of previous generations and their interpretation, ordering, and evaluation of their experience. To receive and to make use of a language is to enter this ordered world. As Berger writes:

> It is impossible to use language without participating in its order. Every empirical language may be said to constitute a nomos in the making, or, with equal validity, as the historical consequence of the nomizing activity of generations of men. The original nomizing act is to say that an item is this, and thus not that. As this original incorporation of the item into an order that includes other items is followed by sharper linguistic designations ..., the nomizing act intends a comprehensive order of all items that may be linguistically objectivated, that is, intends a totalizing nomos.[8]

A language represents one of the ways in which a society successfully copes with the world. To deal with their physical world, Eskimos have elaborated many different words for 'snow.' The two hundred words which Zulus use for 'cow' serve the differentiations of their social world. Most languages distinguish various types of address appropriate to different types of people or to different types of situations. It may be an exaggeration to speak of linguistic determinism or of an absolute linguistic relativism; but there is no doubt that a language reflects, confirms, and legitimates the world as encountered, interpreted, and created by a community's history.

Nor is it only the world within which one must live that is at stake. The communication of a language is also an effort to produce in the recipient a self that can be at home in that world. This is clear first

---

[7] Berger and Luckman, *Social Construction*, p. 37.

[8] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 20-21.

in the sense that the language will include words to describe what a person should be like or should do: what it means to be a boy or girl, man or woman, father or mother, parent or child, and so on. But the society also seeks to communicate how its members, both past and present, have met the problem of existence in the world of nature and in the world of human creation. Both semantically and syntactically, the language communicates "a socially and historically charted 'topography of reality,'"[9] which includes directions for getting one's bearings and responding appropriately. As Alfred Schutz puts it, "language can function as a socially objective system of signs and as a component of the 'social-historical a priori,' as a 'model' for 'everyone's' subjective experiential structures."[10] It is a linguistic typification of the self and not only of the world which Schutz describes in the following passage:

> Language determines what is usually differentiated in the subjective experience of a typical member of society, and which potential differences are disregarded. It determines which objects, properties, and events are routinely related to each other, and which belong to heterogeneous provinces of meaning, systems of classification, etc.; which goals are binding generally or only under special circumstances, and which are approved, disapproved, or tolerated; which are desirable and praiseworthy, etc.; which typical means lead to such goals; and finally, which typical moments of typical experiences are conjoined with typical attitudes.[11]

In Lonergan's words:

> So it is that conscious intentionality develops in and is moulded by the mother tongue. It is not merely that we learn the names of what we see but also that we can attend to and

---

[9] Thomas Luckmann, *The Sociology of Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), p. 48.

[10] Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structure of the Life-World* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 247.

[11] Schutz and Luckmann, *Structures of the Life-World*, p. 248. In *The Sociology of Language*, p. 48, Luckmann quotes a shorter statement by Schutz: "The native language can be taken as a set of references which, in accordance with the relative natural conception of the world as approved by the linguistic community, have predetermined what features of the world are worthy of being expressed, and therewith what qualities of these features and what relations among them deserve attention, and what typifications, conceptualizations, abstractions, generalizations and idealizations are relevant for achieving typical results by typical means."

> talk about the things we can name. The available language, then, takes the lead. It picks out the aspects of things that are pushed into the foreground, the relations between things that are stressed, the movements and changes that demand attention.[12]

If there is in these senses a coercive element involved in the learning of a language, one so strong that Adam Schaff speaks of it as performing its role "in a dictatorial manner independent of the individual's control and awareness (except in cases of particularly penetrating reflection),"[13] its enabling and liberating power should not be overlooked. As Schaff himself puts it, "By learning to speak and by learning to think, we acquire the achievements of past generations rather easily. We need not rediscover everything, and the necessity for such a rediscovery would make all intellectual and cultural progress impossible."[14] For Schutz, "a historically pregiven language relieves the individual of the burden of independently forming types. In language, as a pregiven element of the biographical situation, the world is pretypified."[15] In that world, the self too is pretypified: "Language provides me with a ready-made possibility for the ongoing objectification of my unfolding experience."[16]

None of these authors denies the possibility of an individual's or a community's linguistic and existential creativity. But all would insist that such creativity arises "from a background of common cultural configurations of meaning."[17] What Schutz means by the 'social-historical a priori' is what Schaff means when he speaks of language as 'the social point of departure for individual thinking.'[18] The possibility or at least the probability of the emergence of a creative existential self is mediated by the achievements of earlier generations reflected and expressed in the language they have transmitted.

---

[12] Lonergan, *Method*, p. 71.

[13] Adam Schaff, *Language and Cognition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 143.

[14] Schaff, *Language and Cognition*, p. 143.

[15] Schutz and Luckmann, *Structures of the Life-World*, p. 235.

[16] Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, p. 39.

[17] Luckmann, *Sociology of Language*, p. 43.

[18] Schaff, *Language and Cognition*, p. 143.

Although the previous paragraphs have spoken of language in general, there are, of course, only particular languages in use within particular societies. To deal with the reciprocal and even dialectical relationship between society and language, the disciplines of 'sociolinguistics' and the 'sociology of language' have recently emerged.[19] These disciplines seek to overcome the abstractness of earlier linguistic studies and of 'psycho-linguistics,' which concentrate on the individual. This effort is necessary if the study of language and even of its appropriation by individuals is to be adequately concrete. For language, or at least ordinary language, is, as Marx and Engels put it, 'practical consciousness,'[20] reflecting and promoting a society's practical and political articulation of its world. The study of the linguistic mediation of the self, therefore, becomes part of the study of the concrete practical conditions under which a person can become a person of a certain type.[21] But a fuller discussion of this larger context must await the discussion of other features of the social mediation of the self.

Beliefs and Believing

We have seen that the 'real world' which is mediated to us by language is an interpreted and evaluated world. What we learn from others as they speak to us is not simply what they have experienced but also what they have understood, affirmed or denied, loved or hated, decided and done. Through them we enter a pretypified, predefined world, and the first things we learn about it are the community's definitions.

In the great majority of cases, these are also the only things that we learn. "Ninety-eight percent of what a genius knows," Lonergan

---

[19] Luckmann's pamphlet, *The Sociology of Language*, provides a bibliography for his subject. For the other discipline, see P. Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) and R.A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), both of which also contain good bibliographies.

[20] Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, "The German Ideology," in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, transl. and ed. L.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 421.

[21] For an interesting work of this sort, see C. Mueller, *The Politics of Communication: A Study in the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization, and Legitimation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

once remarked, "he believes."[22] In both his major works Lonergan devoted important pages to the role of belief. If in *Insight* they formed part of a heuristic justification of religious faith,[23] in *Method* they have a more general application and intend the same facts which "are treated by sociologists under the heading of the sociology of knowledge."[24] But if the sociology of knowledge builds upon the fundamental statement that 'reality is socially defined,'[25] then this study could just as appropriately be called, as Edward Farley remarked, the 'sociology of belief.'[26]

Of the sum-total of what an individual may consider to be his 'knowledge' of the world, beliefs constitute by far the greatest part. There are, no doubt, things which he has experienced, understood, affirmed by and for himself; but besides this personally, independently, immanently generated knowledge, there are the many more experiences, insights, and judgments which he simply believes.

> His immediate experience is filled out by an enormous context constituted by reports of the experience of other men at other places and times. His understanding rests not only on his own but also on the experience of others, and its development owes little indeed to his personal originality, much to his repeating in himself the acts of understanding first made by others, and most of all to presuppositions that he has taken for granted because they commonly are assumed and, in any case, he has neither the time nor the inclination nor, perhaps, the ability to investigate for himself. Finally, the judgments, by which he assents to truths of fact and of value, only rarely depend exclusively on his immanently generated knowledge, for such knowledge stands not by itself in some separate compartment but in symbiotic fusion with a far larger context of beliefs.[27]

So understood, belief is central also to the scientific enterprise. Without belief there could be no scientific collaboration and no

---

22 Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, p. 219.

23 Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 703-18.

24 *Method*, pp. 41-47.

25 Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, p. 116.

26 Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 188.

27 *Method*, pp. 41-42.

progress. The common stock of knowledge — of methods, techniques, procedures, conclusions — that constitutes the scientific community is largely a body of beliefs which no single scientist or particular group of scientists has independently worked out for themselves. Even for the scientist, then, reality is socially defined.[28]

This role of belief is also confirmed in ordinary social groups. The community bears within it certain understandings and evaluations of things; and in the measure that these are both common and distinctive, there is a distinct community. Its body of beliefs interpret, order, and evaluate the external world of nature but also, and more significantly, the world of human construction, history and society, as well. Within the great world mediated by meaning and motivated by value, there is 'the world constituted by meaning,' including, of course, the community itself.[29]

For the community itself is the product of the shared knowledge or beliefs of its members. Anthony Giddens offers an insightful explication of the assertion that society is 'the outcome of the consciously applied skills of human subjects':

> The difference between society and nature is that nature is not man-made, is not produced by man. Human beings, of course, transform nature, and such transformation is both the condition of social existence and a driving force of cultural development. But nature is not a human production; society is. While not made by an single person, society is created and recreated afresh, if not *ex nihilo*, by the participants in every social encounter. *The production of society* is a skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings. It is indeed

---

[28] In *Method*, pp. 42-43, and *Second Collection*, pp. 88-89, Lonergan described the 'indirect verification' that provides the 'more effective control of belief' that distinguishes the role of belief in the scientific community from the one it plays in common sense knowledge. What Thomas Kuhn calls 'normal science' describes a community of inquiry within a shared paradigm; scientific revolutions occur when the indirect verification ceases to be given and the paradigm ceases to be commonly accepted. The revolutions themselves, however, confirm the role of belief in science insofar as they are often delayed because of the power of the common acceptance of the earlier paradigm and they are not considered to have succeeded until a new approach has become paradigmatic for a new generation or community of scientists. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[29] The constitutive function of meaning is introduced in *Method*, p. 78, but it is a recurrent theme in the whole book.

> only made possible because every (competent) member of society is a practical social theorist; in sustaining any sort of encounter he draws upon his knowledge and theories, normally in an unforced and routine way, and the use of these practical resources is precisely the condition of the production of the encounter at all.[30]

This production of society by human beings is explicated when Lonergan offers a heuristic description of the constitution of community by meaning and value:

> A community is not just a number of men within a geographical frontier. It is an achievement of common meaning, and there are kinds and degrees of achievement. Common meaning is potential when there is a common field of experience, and to withdraw from that common field is to get out of touch. Common meaning is formal when there is common understanding, and one withdraws from that common understanding by misunderstanding, by incomprehension, by mutual incomprehension. Common meaning is actual inasmuch as there are common judgments, areas in which all affirm and deny in the same manner; and one withdraws from that common judgment when one disagrees, when one considers true what others hold false and false what they think true. Common meaning is realized by decisions and choices, especially by permanent dedication, in the love that makes families, in the loyalty that makes states, in the faith that makes religions. Community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgment, common commitments begin and end.[31]

What was said above about the relationship between belief and immanently generated knowledge also holds for the self-production of communities. Very few communities are established on the principle that no one may belong who has not come to the community's understandings and judgments by his own personal and independent effort. Not even the scientific community has such demanding entrance-requirements. In great part the community's distinctive and constitutive meanings and values are shared by a process of communi-

---

[30] Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), pp. 15-16.

[31] *Method*, p. 79.

cation and belief. Commonly, members do not *know* that things are or should be as the community maintains; they believe it, and believing what the community believes, they are members of it. The routine and taken-for-granted way in which people apply their social resources and skills (to use Giddens' language) is by believing.

This also holds for particular elements of the social reality. Roles and institutions, for example, are the commonly understood and commonly accepted and therefore typical patterns of social relationship and cooperation.[32] A socially available 'stock of knowledge' declares what it means to be a parent or child, teacher or student, elected official and voter, friend, spouse, and so on. Societies may often attempt to ensure that these typical patterns of relationship will be repeated by giving the impression that they go without saying or by claiming that they embody universally normative demands. But in fact the patterns are what they are because the members of the societies understand and accept that they should exist and function as they do. And once again, this, the constitutive reality of the social relations, is not grounded in some common *creatio ex nihilo* by which a new generation reconceives and reconstitutes the social fabric. The roles and institutions are expected patterns of behavior, and the expectations, more often than not, are grounded in the process of communication and believing.

If belief grounds co-operation and collaboration in the production and ordering of the community in the present, it also provides the principal link with the community's past. That link, of course, is no secondary element, for community may also be said to be constituted by a common memory. An individual, were he to suffer total amnesia, would lose his selfhood, since, as Josiah Royce remarked, "my idea of myself is an interpretation of my past."[33] Similarly, since "a true community is essentially a product of a time-process,"[34] it sustains its

---

[32] See Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction,* pp. 72-79. See also Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 118: "The social relationship thus consists entirely and exclusively in the existence of a probability that there will be, in some meaningfully understandable sense, a course of social action." This probability, of course, is not merely the one discovered by the sociologist, but the one reflected in the reciprocal expectations of the participants in the social relationship.

[33] See *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce,* ed. J.K. Roth (New York: Crowell, 1971), p. 363, citing *The Problem of Christianity,* vol. II, lecture IX.

[34] *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce,* p. 361.

identity by the memory of founding figures and events, in stories, legends, songs, works of art, rites, and celebrations that recall the foundation and the tradition which it produced and thus propose them for re-appropriation. The past is not recalled in its brute and full facticity, but selectively and as interpreted, that is, as the past that accounts for the reality as presently constituted. By sharing in the constitutive interpretation of the past, a new generation come to share the community's memory, to accept its memory as *their* memory. "A community constituted by the fact that each of its members accepts as part of his own individual life and self the same past events that each of his fellow-members accepts, may be called a *community of memory*."[35] This 'ideal extension' of the self backwards to a common past event, as Royce calls it,[36] is accomplished by believing. By that believing, an individual's self-interpreting memory expands beyond the experience of his own life-time to include the dimensions of his community's experience and the interpreted world it has engendered.

The community's memory is communicated and appropriated in many different ways. Language itself is one of the chief bearers of the common memory, for it is an achievement of the community's past and carries its meanings into the present.[37] Communal roles and institutions play a parallel role insofar as they are traditional, that is, embody interpretations and evaluations of social existence and purpose transmitted from the past.[38] To accept a role within an institution is to trust the community's self-understanding and the past from which it arose, an implicit act of belief. Even if the community did not formally celebrate its past, then, the every-day distribution of roles is an enduring confirmation of the meanings and values that constitute and differentiate it in the world.

An individual's self-interpretation, then, his self-constitution in the world of meaning and value, therefore, occurs against the background of an enormous community of meaning and value of which he

---

35 *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce*, p. 366.

36 *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce*, p. 370.

37 See James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 135.

38 This, I take it, is what Maurice Halbwachs means when he says that "social thought is essentially a memory" (*Les cadres sociaux de la memoire* [New York: Arno, 1975], p. 296). This work is especially good on the social framework of individual memories.

is not himself the author. Since self and world are correlative terms, the task of self-interpretation and self-constitution is, in ways that usually escape reflective awareness, concretely conditioned by what worlds of meaning and value are socially available. An individual may and perhaps even should criticize the social stock of knowledge or be able to choose among several worlds of meaning and value. But this possibility itself has its concrete conditions, which will most effectively be considered if we turn to the social mediation of freedom itself.

Freedom

It may appear at least paradoxical and perhaps even contradictory to speak of a social mediation of freedom. We rightly regard freedom as an individual's most sacred possession. On the one hand, we have inherited a healthy Christian instinct to defend it in theory against theories of biological, psychological, or sociological determinism. On the other hand, we are the beneficiaries also of the modern history of freedom which since the Enlightenment has sought to define and to defend freedom in practice over and against authority, tradition, community, and institution.[39] In anticipation of the clarifications offered in the following pages, it may already be said that mediation is not determination and does not exclude a dialectical relationship between freedom and its social conditions.

That is the point, of course: that freedom does have its general and concrete conditions. Lonergan distinguished between essential and effective freedom.[40] Essential freedom is what is usually meant by free will. Lonergan grounds it in a double contingence, the contingence of the act under consideration, which, until chosen and executed, is only a possibility, and the contingence of the actor himself, who is not determined in his choice even by the knowledge that a particular act should be accomplished. The indeterminate, merely possible course of action becomes determinate and actual in and through the same act by which the subject determines or constitutes himself as not only a

---

[39] J.B. Metz uses this modern history of freedom as the characteristic of the modern world in terms of which the Christian message can be articulated; see *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980).

[40] *Insight*, pp. 616-24.

knower but as a doer, an actor, who is authentic because his choosing is consistent with his knowing. "For it is one and the same act of willing that both decides in favour of the object or against it and that constitutes the subject as deciding reasonably or unreasonably, as succeeding or failing in the extension of rational consciousness into an effectively rational self-consciousness."[41]

Freedom, then, is not merely a negative indeterminancy, but a positive self-determination or self-constitution. This points up the critical nature of the existential moment, already mentioned, when "we discover for ourselves that our choosing affects ourselves no less than the chosen or rejected objects and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself."[42] The moment is critical because the existential discovery permits a person to move from a stance in which attention focuses principally or exclusively on the series of objects presented for choice to a stance in which self-determination is not only understood to be implied in the series of choices but itself now becomes the object of explicit and responsible choice, the understood and accepted implication of the many and varied choices that define a life.

There can be an alienating dimension to this moment when essential freedom becomes one's own existential self-project. Historically, it was visible in the injunction, *Aude sapere*! Dare to think!, with which Kant contrasted the Enlightened individual to the determinations of authority and institution, community and tradition. Lonergan drew a parallel contrast between deliberate and responsible self-determination and 'drifting':

> The drifter has not yet found himself; he has not yet discovered his own deed and so is content to do what everyone else is doing; he has not yet discovered his own will and so he is content to choose what everyone else is choosing; he has not yet discovered a mind of his own and so he is content to think and say what everyone else is thinking and saying; and the others too are apt to be drifters, each of them doing and choosing and

---

41 *Insight*, p. 619. As the sentence indicates, a good deal of what Lonergan stresses in *Method* as the primacy of the fourth level of consciousness (decision) over the third level (judgment) is already present in *Insight* in the importance assigned to rational self-consciousness.

42 *Method*, p. 240. Karl Rahner has a similar view; see "Theology of Freedom," *Theological Investigations*, vol. VI (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), pp. 178-96.

> thinking and saying what others happen to be doing, choosing, thinking, saying.[43]

In both cases, the enlightened or authentic individual discovers and achieves his own self-determination by discovering and rejecting simple determination by others.

Freedom, however, is always concrete freedom; and it is the conditions under which any person is concretely free that Lonergan addressed in his notion of effective freedom.[44] Effective freedom defines the range of possible options over which a particular individual can exercise his essential freedom. The conditions of effective freedom concern both the range of possible options and the ability of the person to choose among them.

The range of options is limited, in the first place, by external circumstances. Different times and places make effectively possible different types of social and individual action. Time and place refer here, of course, not simply to the natural categories of all human action, but also to the transformation of time and space by human history. Temporal and spatial constraints are radically altered in the course of history, as, for example, by modern developments in industry and technology, communication and transportation. Time and place vary greatly across differences in culture and society, and these variations imply objectively and concretely different possible options among which to choose.

The external circumstances of the exercise of freedom, in other words, include what other people have done or are doing with their freedom. Culture and language, economy and polity, community and family, society and religion, although they are all themselves the products of human freedom, take on an objective existence in the sense that they are there, already in existence and in power, when any individual begins his own task of self-realization, and we cannot escape the necessity of defining ourselves within and over and against them.[45] A person's effective freedom is always conditioned by the fact

---

[43] Lonergan, "*Existenz* and *Aggiornamento*," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 242.

[44] *Insight*, pp. 622-24.

[45] See Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, pp. 53-67, especially their statement of the three 'dialectical moments in social reality:' "*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.*"

that it must first be exercised in response to the already exercised effective freedom of others. Everyone's personal drama takes place before a backdrop he did not paint and in a play in which he did not have the first lines.

But the external conditions of effective freedom are not simply external to the individual but from the beginning of his life have begun to affect his very ability to choose. This ability is first of all dependent on one's physical health, which itself is dependent not only on one's genes but on the physical health of one's mother as she carried him in the womb and nourished him in his early years. The latter in turn may depend on the family's economic, social, and political circumstances. One's very ability to choose, and not simply the range of available options, is a function thus of traditions of pre- and post-natal care and of the physical and social circumstances of one's parents.

Effective freedom is also conditioned by one's psychological health and development. We did not choose our parents and family. We had no say in their affective response to our births or in the care, or neglect, they showed us in our first years. They defined what it would be for us to confront a father and a mother and to become an acceptable child and adult. In all of this, as a host of psychological schools maintain, they were in good part determining what the task of our own personal development and integration would be, perhaps for a lifetime. And, of course, they undertook their parental roles in cultural and social settings and under political and economic conditions which define the role of the family and set the standards for being a parent and a child.[46]

Thirdly, an individual's effective freedom is conditioned by his own intellectual development. While this is, of course, dependent upon

[46] The large body of recent literature on the history and sociology of the family is relevant here, particularly when it relates the fortunes of the family to larger cultural, political, and economic issues, as in Christopher Lasch's book, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1979). This larger perspective also governs Lasch's later works, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminished Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), and *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: Norton, 1984), as well as Russell Jacoby's book, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing* (Boston: Beacon, 1975), and efforts to broaden the framework within which stages of personal development are considered, such as Jurgen Habermas' essay, "Moral Development and Ego Identity," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1979).

native talent, which may even have a genetic base, the possibilities of intellectual development are also some function of one's physical and psychological health and of their conditions. It is even more a function of the cultural worldview one has inherited, of the language in which one has been taught to address the world, and of the social stock of knowledge embodied in and communicated by the community in which one is reared. All that was said above about the central role of beliefs and believing is here applicable: we radically review and criticize only a small portion of what we think we know. Whatever creative genius we possess and display has a social and historical context that gives our most personal abilities and achievements a cultural dimension and quality.

Finally, effective freedom at any moment is related to the existential patterns and orientations already realized in one's life. We do not utterly recreate ourselves in each successive moment of decision. Through the development of habits of choosing and acting, we form our character, an antecedent willingness that follows a "law of psychological continuity."[47] Concretely, this law is the simple probability that we will choose and act in a typical fashion when confronted with a typical problem. One's personal character describes expected or typical patterns of behavior, known, if not to oneself, to one's family and friends.

While there is something inescapably personal about the history that has made anyone of us a person of the character that he possesses, this unique history itself has its social context. It is some function of the social definitions of the good that we have learned from and seen displayed in our communities. It is related to the ethos of the community of discernment in which we have been reared. It has been shaped and supported by the interpersonal relationships of family and friends. The oriented self that at any particular moment faces a choice has a history, is the creature of a history in which it has not been the only nor even, perhaps, the leading actor. The next lines in the drama may be ours to say, but they will be spoken to other actors and they are likely to be in character.

Effective freedom, we have been arguing, is defined by a concrete set of possible options and by the concrete possibility and probability of

---

[47] See *Insight*, p. 623, and, for the 'law of psychological continuity,' Lonergan's *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 48-53.

a person's choices. Only under such concrete conditions is a person essentially free. Essential freedom exists only as effective freedom. Lonergan gave several powerful descriptions of this in his later writings:

> As it is only within communities that men are conceived and born and reared, so too it is only with respect to the available common meanings of community that the individual becomes himself. The choice of roles between which he can choose what to make himself is no larger than the accepted meanings of the community admit; his capacities for effective initiative are limited to the potentialities of the community for rejuvenation, renewal, reform, development. At any time in any place what a given self can make of himself is some function of the heritage or sediment of common meanings that come to him from the authentic or unauthentic living of his predecessors and his contemporaries.[48]

He later put the issue in terms borrowed from genetic biology and psychology:

> From the 'we' of the parents comes the symbiosis of mother and child. From the 'we' of the parents and the symbiosis of mother and child comes the 'we' of the family. Within the 'we' of the family emerges the 'I' of the child. In other words the person is not the primordial fact. What is primordial is the community. It is within community through the intersubjective relations that are the life of community that there arises the differentiation of the individual person.
>
> It follows that 'person' is never a general term. It always denotes this or that person with all of his or her individual characteristics resulting from the communities in which he has lived and through which he has been formed and has formed himself. The person is the resultant of the relationships he has had with others and of the capacities that have developed in him to relate to others.[49]

One may be tempted to ask at this point whether the social mediation of freedom does not in the end mean social determination and thus an effective denial of freedom. The issue can be joined by

---

[48] *Collection*, pp. 245-46.

[49] Lonergan, *Philosophy of God, and Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), pp. 58-59.

recalling, first, the importance that Lonergan assigned to the existential moment of self-responsibility and, secondly, that something like this moment is not absent from the sorts of sociological theories we have echoed in our description. Not only do sociologists study what they call 'unsuccessful socialization' and 'deviance,' but humanistic sociologists of various stripes are not reluctant to apply to societies standards of authenticity, one of which is the degree to which societies provide occasions and opportunities for individuals to take self-generated stances vis-a-vis what is widely taken for granted. Such perspectives suggest the apparent paradox that the existential moment may itself be socially mediated.

It is a mistake, it seems, to conceive the existential exercise of 'vertical freedom'[50] as if it were accomplished by a transcendentally pure subject, heroically alone in an alienating world, unencumbered by the burden of social and personal history. Such an idea is as much a myth as the notion of a human spirit unencumbered by the weight of his bodily existence. If there are moments of transcendent self-constitution, they are the acts of selves constituted by previous histories. They are posed, precisely as self-transcending, in terms of their former selves, their earlier histories, and their social contexts. And they occur within social or communal settings that condition both the probability of their occurrence and the concrete character they will possess.

This view is supported by at least one type of sociological inquiry. Peter Berger, for example, stressed in an early work the coercive force with which society can impose its meanings on an individual. While this may appear to excuse an individual from an authentic assumption of his self-responsibility, the choice is not simply one between lonely existential hero and alienating society:

> But it is also true that authentic existence can take place only within society. All meanings are transmitted in social processes. One cannot be human, authentically *or* inauthentically, except in society. And the very avenues that lead to a wondering contemplation of being, be they religious or philosophical or

[50] See *Method*, p. 40, where Lonergan distinguishes horizontal and vertical freedom: "Horizontal liberty is the exercise of liberty within a determinate horizon and from the basis of a corresponding existential stance. Vertical liberty is the exercise of liberty that selects that stance and the corresponding horizon." Vertical freedom is what is at stake in the existential moment.

> aesthetic, have social locations. Just as society can be a flight from freedom or an occasion of it, society can bury our metaphysical quest or provide forms in which it can be pursued.[51]

The question about the concrete possibility or probability of such authentic questioning thus becomes the question "whether there are social contexts or groups that particularly facilitate such consciousness."[52]

One answer to that question was provided in a later work by Berger and Luckmann. It follows the lines drawn in their programmatic statement that "the possibility of 'individualism' (that is, of individual choice between discrepant realities and identities) is directly linked to the possibility of unsuccessful socialization."[53] In complex societies, they argue, unsuccessful socialization occurs when the agents or bearers of socialization (the 'significant others') mediate different worlds to an individual. All the bearers may mediate one world, but from considerably different perspectives. Different bearers may mediate significantly different worlds during primary socialization. Or there may be significant discrepancies between primary and secondary socialization, especially if the latter proposes alternative realities and identities as subjective options.[54]

This explanation resembles Robert Nisbet's claim that freedom lies in 'the interstices of authority.'[55] Freedom takes root and grows in the cracks opened by the conflict and opposition between the bearers of socialization. This view bears directly upon our question, because it asserts that in the statistically normal case (excluding, therefore, the heroes, who are by definition few in number), the ability to conceive of the possibility of becoming a new self inhabiting a new world and the ability to take up one's responsibility for one's self and one's world is

---

[51] Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 149.

[52] Berger, *Invitation*, p. 137.

[53] Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, p. 171. By itself, this statement may seem to imply that freedom is impossible where socialization is completely successful; but, on their analysis, it may be doubted that completely successful socialization is really possible.

[54] Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, pp. 163-73.

[55] Robert A. Nisbet, *Community and Power* (New York: Galaxy Books, 1962), p. 270. By 'authority' Nisbet here means 'the structure of the association;' his remark could equally as well be stated in terms of community.

some function of the presence to oneself of persons and communities which represent alternative interpretations and evaluations of the world.

But if that is true, then the suspected tension, if not contradiction, between the notions of existential self-determination and of the social mediation of freedom is transcended. Community itself becomes the condition for the probability and perhaps also of the possibility of the existential moment. A 'total personal revolution' — as Rosemary Haughton defines 'transformation' — is possible; but, as she brilliantly argues and illustrates, it seldom happens apart from an intervention from without into one's prior world, and the possibility that it will occur or endure is related to the 'formation' already achieved within the old community or to be achieved in a new community.[56]

This perspective underlines the importance of a larger society's admitting within it a variety of communities of meaning and value. This variety socially guarantees the possibility of authentic freedom. The alternative is that a society or state will have "an unchallenged monopoly on the generation and maintenance of values," which is the essence of totalitarianism.[57]

This position also requires that the Enlightenment's opposition of freedom to community, institution, tradition, and authority be overcome in an effort to conceive and to effect communities and institutions which are self-critically founded for the service of the existential exercise of vertical freedom.[58] Institutions, roles and relationships, languages, symbols and rites are needed which embody the convictions that no formation guarantees or substitutes for transformation and that transformation, existential self-determination, is both the goal and the transcendent criterion of formation. Such communities, institutions, and languages are very rare achievements; but they provide the only conditions under which authenticity can be achieved without

---

[56] Rosemary Haughton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1967).

[57] See Peter Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Power* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), p. 30; and Nisbet, *Community and Power*, esp. pp. 189-211.

[58] This may be what Johann Baptist Metz means by 'second-order institutions of critical liberty,' among them the Church itself; see *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 115-17, 131-36.

alienation and that achievement can be less rare, less difficult, and less lonely.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a brief description of human authenticity as existential commitment to a life lived in accordance with the immanent yet self-transcending norms of intelligence, reason, and responsibility. But the greater part has been devoted to showing how that self-defining and self-constituting commitment is embodied not only in the physical organism of the human body but also in the language, traditions of belief, and communities of meaning and value in which a person is born, reared, and shaped. The effort was designed to overcome a certain abstractness that often characterizes theological descriptions of the religious subject. It will have succeeded if readers are able to recognize themselves in these pages, both in the subjects who can become what they ought to be only by reaching for the transcendent goals and in the communities which not only set the framework and define the character of their own project of self-constitution but also render it credible as a goal and possible achievement.

AUTHENTICITY IN HISTORY

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER attempted to speak more concretely of the human person than is common in those theologies which only discuss man's 'transcendental *a priori*.' The individual was situated within linguistic, cognitive, and moral communities which provide what Schutz called the 'social-historical *a priori*' from which anyone of us sets out of his own self-project. In this description, however, the historical dimension appeared only as a minor theme; it must now be considered in and for itself.

Two considerations recommend this move. First, the communal matrices are themselves products of history. No generation begins its task of collective self-realization *a nihilo*, but only by dealing with and acting within the world created by a previous generation. This new generation's freedom is exercised as an encounter with the products of previous generations' exercise of their freedom, products which they may either confirm and further or modify and undo. The society that sets the conditions for an individual's self-responsibility is itself the product of the self-responsibility of earlier individuals and groups.

Second, as that consideration implies, self-responsibility is not the unavoidable lot only of individuals but of communities and societies as well. Distinctively modern consciousness is historical consciousness, which includes not only a recognition of the historically situated character of any generation's efforts but also an acknowledgement of its own self-responsibility, that is, its responsibility for what it will have done and become as a community, society, nation, and, increasingly, as a race. Peter Berger states it well: "Modernity means (in intention if not in fact) that men take control over the world and over themselves. *What previously was experienced as fate now becomes an arena of choices.*"[1] The emergence of historical consciousness is the cultural equivalent, now of worldwide dimensions, of the existential moment in an individual's development. As in the life of an individual, this is an irrevocable moment: to refuse self-responsibility, to try to return to

[1] Peter Berger, *Pyraminds of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1976), p. 20; see also P. Berger, B. Berger, and H. Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House: 1973), esp. pp. 63-82); P. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1979), pp. 1-31.

drifting along in fate's way, can now only be an exercise of free self-determination. Not to choose will be to have chosen. We now know that "the challenge of history is for man progressively to restrict the realm of chance or fate or destiny and progressively to enlarge the realm of conscious grasp and deliberate choice."[2]

The problem of authenticity is thereby transposed: it no longer affects merely the individual's self-definition, but also constitutes the question of the meaning of all history as a human product. It is not surprising, then, that the last two centuries have seen the emergence and the conflict of speculative and practical philosophies of history, all of them attempting in one way or another to offer explanations of historical progress, decline, and recovery — transpositions onto the great scale of the historic themes of Christian anthropology: nature, sin, and grace.[3]

In this context, this chapter will present Bernard Lonergan's theory of human history. If the previous chapter offered a description of the social location of individuals which appears to be applicable to any individual at any time, this one will describe what accounts for the differences between social locations, particularly in terms of the dialectically related principles of development both in individual and social history.[4]

The analysis proceeds in three steps. Lonergan once compared this procedure to the apparently rather remote process by which a correct and adequate theory of planetary orbits is constructed.[5] That construction involves three successive approximations. The first appeals to the first law of motion, that a body will move in a straight line with constant velocity unless interfered with by another body. The second recognizes such an interference in the gravitational pull of the sun, so that the planets are now known to move in elliptical orbits. But

---

[2] Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 228.

[3] "*At the heart of the world* there dwells the mystery of man discovering himself to be God's son in the course of a historical and psychological process in which constraint and freedom, as well as the weight of sin and the breath of the Spirit, alternate and struggle for the upper hand" (Paul VI, *Octagesima adveniens*, #37; emphasis added).

[4] In *Method*, pp. 47-55, the section on 'the structure of the human good' is followed by that on 'progress and decline.' In a still unpublished set of lectures on the philosophy of education, Lonergan spoke of 'differentials of the human good.'

[5] *Second Collection*, pp. 271-272; an alert reading of *Insight* will discover the same comparison in pp. 596-597, 694.

the full and accurate account is reached only when the gravitational influence of the planets upon one another is taken into account to yield the actual perturbed ellipses in which the planets revolve around the sun. The adequate theory requires all three steps, each of which by itself is only approximative.

Similarly, Lonergan outlines three principles to account for the actual development of human history. In a first approximation, human intelligence and freedom are discovered to be the generative principle of development and progress. But since, manifestly, human history has not known any straight and constant progress, another principle must be interfering, which Lonergan calls 'bias,' the principle of human decline. But the actual course of human history is known only when a third component is included, God's redemptive intervention in human history, the principle of historical recovery. The real course of human history is not known unless all three principles are acknowledged and inter-related; taken singly, any one of them is only an approximation.

Progress, decline, and recovery — and their respective principles — thus define the theme of this chapter.

PROGRESS

The first step requires a measure of imagination: picture a world in which only authentic individuals and communities exist. Human consciousness unfolds there in a process of questioning by which, on the basis of experience, we inquire after meaning, truth, and value, and our questions lead to self-transcending insights, judgments, decisions, and actions. The normative dimensions of consciousness, articulated in the transcendental precepts, are consistently respected as we construct our lives together.

> Being attentive includes attention to human affairs. Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities. Being reasonable includes the rejection of what probably would not work but also the acknowledgement of what probably would. Being responsible includes basing one's decisions and choices on an unbiased evaluation of short-term and

long-term costs and benefits to oneself, to one's group, to other groups.[6]

The effects of such attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible living is cumulative and progressive. The responsible decision implements the reasonable and intelligent policy, thus altering the objective situation, which in turn suggests new possibilities to be reasonably judged and responsibly chosen. This new choice further advances the situation, and the cycle of question, policy, judgment, and decision recurs. The regular recurrence of the cycle produces a genuine human progress as the efforts and desires of all individuals and groups meet in co-operation and collaboration within an intelligent good of order promoting authentically chosen values. By choosing these values, individuals and groups constitute themselves as 'originating values,' authentic subjects of an authentic human history.[7]

This description, of course, is so contradicted by the facts of actual human history as to raise the question whether there is any point to this exercise. If the analogy with planetary orbits is kept in mind, the point is clear. The analysis of progress and the identification of its principle is indeed not adequate, but if attention, intelligence, reason, and responsibility are not the only principle at work in human history — this does not mean that they can be overlooked. In fact, Lonergan believed that there was a special need to acknowledge it: "Yet as things are, in the aftermath of economic and political upheavals, amidst the fears of worse evils to come, the thesis of progress needs to be affirmed again."[8] This critical reaffirmation of progress is needed not only to avoid capitulation to experienced or feared evil, but also and especially to provide a criterion by which the evils themselves may be discerned and measured, so that a foundation may be laid for a recovery that will not occur, however much it may depend upon divine grace, except as a human achievement.[9] Horror at the evils itself

---

[6] *Method*, p. 53.

[7] See *Method*, pp. 48-51, and *Insight*, p. 223.

[8] *Insight*, p. 688.

[9] In an important essay, "Healing and Creating in History" (*A Third Collection*, ed. F.E. Crowe [New York: Paulist Press, 1985], pp. 100-109), Lonergan described healing as 'development from above downwards' and creating as 'development from below upwards' and insisted that *both* are necessary.

presupposes some sense of the good that they betray, corrupt, and prevent; 'negative dialectics' includes some positive notion of the 'threatened *humanum*.'[10]

One may perhaps invoke as a contemporary parallel Jürgen Habermas' attempt to construct an ideal speech situation that serves, in part, as a criterion by which to analyze and transform systematically distorted communication.[11] But there also is a classic theological precedent in the critical and systematic role played by the technical concept of 'human nature' in medieval Scholasticism. At least for St. Thomas, 'nature' did not apply in a pure sense to any existing human being. It described rather the norm by which the sinfulness of sin and the graciousness of grace could be understood. It provided, in other words, a first and necessary approximation of an adequate description of actual men and women, who, of course, were known in their full concreteness only when known to be both sinners and graced by God. Today when more than one religious leader appears to believe that the only appropriate categories for analyzing contemporary crises are those of sin and grace, Lonergan's transposition of the medieval attempt into the social and historical spheres is even more pertinent. What the technical distinction between nature and supernature permitted Aquinas to accomplish in a theoretically guided analysis of concrete human existence, Lonergan's notion of progress and its principle seeks to accomplish for an historically conscious age and on the basis of a critical theory of human intentionality.[12]

---

[10] See Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1974), pp. 91-95.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, "On Systematically Distorted Communication," *Inquiry* **13** (1970), 205-218; "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence," *Inquiry* **13** (1970), 360-375. For good introductions see Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), pp. 171-236; T.A. McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA; MIT Press, 1978).

[12] Two essays in *A Third Collection* are particularly helpful here. "Healing and Creating in History" sets out a theory of historical development which stresses the necessity of *both* downward, divinely initiated healing *and* of upward, humanly creative development. "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness" (pp. 169-83) includes a discussion of successive 'plateaus' on which the expansion of cultural meanings occurs and the argument that simple appeals to "fate or destiny or again of divine providence" belong on the first plateau where practical common sense predominates (see pp. 176-78) and the differentiations of theory and interiority-analysis have not yet been made.

DECLINE

The analysis of progress remains, however, only a first approximation of a theory of human history. In fact, progress does not occur easily, freely, smoothly, and in a straight line. The force that impedes, deflects, distorts progress Lonergan calls 'bias': "While there is progress and while its principle is liberty, there also is decline and its principle is bias."[13]

Lonergan discussed bias at length in chapters VI and VII of *Insight*.[14] Chapter VI analyzed the bias that arises from the psychic depths of the individual, and Lonergan's treatment represented a first attempt to relate the aim and method of psychoanalysis to the clarifying and liberating role of insight in self-appropriation.[15] But since Lonergan suggested that the problems of social existence exercise an at least relatively dominant role in the occurrence of psychological bias in individuals,[16] we will turn directly to the analysis in chapter VII of the biases that have their source in social existence.

That source lies remotely in what Lonergan calls 'the tension of community' and proximately in 'the dialectic of community' that results from the tension. The tension arises because man belongs at once to two different communities and because this double community is rooted in a duality within the individual himself.[17] As an individual, a person has spontaneous desires and fears which he seeks to realize and to avoid, and to do so, not brutishly and randomly, but regularly and with a certain artistry. Even in this respect, however, he is not a monad. Child of his parent's communion, he lives his life within a community whose "primordial basis ... is not the discovery of an idea but a spontaneous intersubjectivity." Linked in some ways with pre-human patterns of association, this intersubjective community opens out into the larger and historical forms of clan or tribe, ethnic group or nation, where "a sense of belonging together provides the dynamic premise for common enterprise, for mutual aid and

---

[13] *Insight*, p. 235.

[14] *Insight*, pp. 173-244, pages which Lonergan referred to whenever he introduced the topic of bias in *Method*.

[15] In later writings he appears to have conceived that relation rather differently; see *Method*, pp. 284-285, and *Second Collection*, p. 271.

[16] See *Insight*, p. 218.

[17] See *Insight*, pp. 211-218.

succour, for the sympathy that augments joy and divides sorrows."[18] It is a form of association which persists through even the most rationalized developments of society.

The other community to which man belongs has its roots in the self-transcending intentionality of human subjectivity. Even in very simple intersubjective groups, a certain social order begins to grow which pursues objectives beyond the immediate and can require the subordination to itself of immediate desires. Practical intelligence may have begun simply, but it has since developed to the point that it affects every aspect of the spontaneous fabric of human living, producing not only a technical mastery of nature but also, in economies and polities, "vast structures of interdependence for the mastery not of nature but of man."[19]

In such interdependence there appears a good which can only be appreciated by transcending the standpoint of the spontaneous individual and his desires and fears. This good of order is not the sum-total of all particular goods, but the "intelligible pattern of relationships that condition the fulfilment of each man's desires by his contribution to the fulfilment of the desires of others and, similarly, protect each from the object of his fears in the measure he contributes to warding off the objects feared by others."[20] If ever it was, this good of order is no longer 'an optional adjunct,' but 'an indispensable constituent of human living.'[21]

The tension of community arises because the self which man transcends in constructing and acknowledging the good of order is not left behind. In the civil community he must permit his own fears and desires, joys and sorrows, work and leisure to be subsumed, integrated, ordered as instances of a larger whole. But he remains the one who fears and desires, rejoices and grieves, works and plays; and these experiences have an immediacy and power which only the intersubjective community really seems to appreciate, respect, and share. The tension is inescapable: "Intersubjective spontaneity and

---

[18] *Insight*, p. 212.

[19] *Insight*, p. 213.

[20] *Insight*, p. 213, 596; *Method*, pp. 49-50. Compare the discussion of 'particularity' and 'universality' with which Hegel introduced the discussion of 'civil society' in *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), #182-83, pp. 122-23.

[21] *Insight*, p. 214.

intelligently devised social order possess different properties and different tendencies. Yet to both by his very nature man is committed."[22]

From this tension derives the historical 'dialectic of community,' "the concrete unfolding of [these] linked but opposed principles of change."[23] Social events can be traced to the two communities and their distinctive principles, intersubjectivity and practical intelligence. The principles are linked to one another, opposed to one another, and modified by the changes they each produce. In happy times the good of order comes to terms with the intersubjective communities:

> It commands their esteem by its palpable benefits; it has explained the intricate demands in some approximate yet sufficient fashion; it has adopted to its own requirements the play of imagination, the resonance of sentiment, the strength of habit, the ease of familiarity, the impetus of enthusiasm, the power of agreement and consent.

But in times of crisis, this harmony can dissolve. New policies will be needed which require an adaptation of spontaneous attitudes. While the new policies are being debated, the old attitudes will continue to operate; and there is no guarantee that even intelligent new policies will satisfy the intersubjectively grounded needs and desires:

> The time of crisis can be prolonged, and in the midst of the suffering it entails and of the aimless questioning it engenders, the intersubjective groups within a society tend to fall apart in bickering, insinuations, recriminations, while unhappy individuals begin to long for the idyllic simplicity of primitive living in which large accumulations of insights would be superfluous and human fellow-feeling would have a more dominant role.[24]

In the unfolding of this dialectic three biases can be seen at work, leading to social and cultural decline.

---

[22] *Insight*, p. 215.

[23] *Insight*, p. 217.

[24] *Insight*, p. 216.

Individual Bias[25]

Individual bias is egoism, "an interference of spontaneity with the development of intelligence." The egoist is not unintelligent, but he restricts intelligence to "sizing up the social order, ferreting out its weak points and its loop-holes, and discovering devices that give access to its rewards while evading its demands for proportionate contributions." He will not permit intelligence to develop to the point where he might begin to relate his own living to that of others within a common order. To move from the moral criterion supplied by his own desires and fears to the raising and addressing of questions for intelligent and critical responsibility would mean to transcend himself, and egoists do not move beyond themselves. If there is any hope for the egoist, it lies in the uneasy conscience which a frustrated intelligence may exact in tribute and in the intersubjective group which, if it does not completely transcend its own interests, still seldom identifies them with those of any single member. Failing these, there are always the police and the jails.

Group Bias[26]

If individual bias alienates the egoist even from his intersubjective group, group bias defines the alienation of group from group and from the general social order. 'Group' here can mean not only the intersubjective communities, but any group of people distinct from other groups by function or role, status, income, success, power, education, and so on. Group bias interferes not only with the integration of these groups into a common order but with the development of the meanings and values that constitute and distinguish the groups themselves.

Even in an ideal social order, one might expect a certain tension between these groups and the intelligently devised good of order. Even groups devoted to the most abstract and technical functions develop a

---

25 *Insight*, pp. 218-222, where all quotations in the text can be found. In the lectures on the philosophy of education, Lonergan called individual bias 'sin as crime.'

26 *Insight*, pp. 222-225, where the quotations may be found. In the lectures on the philosophy of education, group bias was described as 'sin as a component in social process.'

common ethos which has its roots in intersubjectivity as well as in sweet reason;[27] and they notably succeed when the force of fellowship reinforces the pursuit of intelligent and reasonable goals. But social progress means social change. New policies change the social situation; but, since that situation concretely is the set of social groups and their interrelationships, social changes means changes in individuals and in the groups to which they belong. While self-transcending intelligence may acknowledge the practical wisdom of the new policies, spontaneous intersubjectivity is not always as eager:

> Just as the individual egoist puts further questions up to a point, but desists before reaching conclusions incompatible with his own egoism, so also the group is prone to have a blind-spot for the insights that reveal its well-being to be excessive or its usefulness at an end.

The occurrence and implementation of practical insights, therefore, does not happen according to the ideal regularities of smoothly functioning and self-transcending intelligence, reason, and responsibility. Practical intelligence now must ask not only whether a policy is reasonable or not, but also whether it will be opposed or not and whether the group has the power to impose it in spite of opposition. The wheel of social process is thus deflected to work for the advantage of one group and to the disadvantage of others. Time and energy are no longer devoted simply to the pursuit of genuinely practical policies but to the defense of the group's own interests. The process becomes cumulative: success increasingly distinguishes one group from another, society becomes more and more stratified into classes, distinguished now by success, by self-justifying labels, and by opposed feelings. The social situation comes to mirror the distortion of its generative principle:

> The social order that has been realized does not correspond to any coherently developed set of practical ideas. It represents the fraction of practical ideas that were made operative by their conjunction with power, the mutilated remains of once excellent schemes that issued from the mill of compromise, the otiose structures that equip groups for their offensive and defensive activities.

---

[27] See Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, pp. 138-139.

In time the twisted development may produce the seeds of its own reversal, when the refusal of intelligence becomes inescapable and reforming or revolutionary ideas mobilize the formerly unsuccessful groups into action.

As the egoist shuts out a development of intelligence that might threaten his selfishness, so the group has to preserve itself and others from the too clear light of self-transcending intelligence. If in the egoist, hypocrisy is the tribute which vice pays to virtue, in the group ideology is the tribute which power pays to intelligence.[28] The group becomes "a market for opinions, doctrines, theories that will justify its ways and, at the same time, reveal the misfortunes of other groups to be due to their depravity." In the end, the group becomes "blind to the real situation, and it will be bewildered by the emergence of a contrary ideology that will call to consciousness an opposed group egoism."[29]

General Bias[30]

The analysis of group bias included a consideration of what Lonergan called 'the shorter cycle,' in which ideas neglected by successful groups are eventually proposed and realized by other groups as these reach power. But there is also a 'longer cycle' in which is manifest what he calls the general bias to which common sense is prone. For Lonergan, common sense is a specialization of human intelligence which deals with the concrete and the immediate, with things and persons in their relationship to us, for the purpose of finding practical solutions to practical problems.[31] Lonergan's notion has its parallels with what Alfred Schutz called the 'natural attitude' that suffices, or appears to suffice, for everyday living.[32] It may also cover in good part what Marxists regard as 'uncritical thinking.'

---

[28] See *Method*, p. 357: "the basic form of ideology is the self-justification of alienated man."

[29] The last two quotations are from *Method*, p. 54; see also p. 55 where Lonergan proposes that "the basic form of alienation is man's disregard of the transcendental precepts," while "the basic form of ideology is a doctrine that justifies such alienation."

[30] *Insight*, pp. 225-242, where the quotations in the text may be found. In the lectures on the philosophy of education, Lonergan refers to general bias as 'sin as cultural aberration.'

[31] See *Insight*, pp. 173-181, and the index to *Method*, under 'common sense.'

[32] See Schutz and Luckmann, *Structures of the Life-World*, pp. 3-15.

It is almost of the essence of common sense to be uncritical, unaware of its own limitations. It is impatient if not intolerant of ideas and policies that require it to look beyond the immediate and the practical. In the words attributed to Lord Keynes, "In the long-run, we'll all be dead," which was once paraphrased by a friend of mine: "In the long-run, it's the short-run that counts."

The uncritical character of common sense reveals its true implications in an historically conscious age. In the language of *Insight*, historical consciousness means that "man becomes for man the executor of the emergent probability of human affairs." The notion of 'emergent probability' plays an important role in Lonergan's analysis of both natural and human development.[33] For our purposes it is enough to note its connection with the theme of human self-responsibility, "the human contribution to the control of human history." This requires an exercise of intelligence, reason, and responsibility that aims at making intelligence, reason, and responsibility more probable and more effective in the development of society and history: intelligence concretely promoting intelligence, reason encouraging reason, freedom liberating freedom.

But to pass through the existential moment to historical consciousness in this sense is to recognize also that "common sense has to aim at being subordinated to a human science that is concerned, to adapt a phrase from Marx, not only with knowing history but also with directing it." Common sense itself is inadequate to that task:

> The challenge of history is for man progressively to restrict the realm of chance or fate or destiny and progressively to enlarge the realm of conscious grasp and deliberate choice. Common sense accepts the challenge, but it does so only partially. It needs to be guided but it is incompetent to choose its guide. It becomes involved in incoherent enterprises. It is subjected to disasters that no one expects, that remain unexplained after their occurrence, that can be explained only on the level of scientific or philosophic thought, that even when explained can be prevented from recurring only by subordinating common sense to a higher specialization of human intelligence.

[33] See the index to *Insight*, under 'emergent probability.'

This general bias generates a society and history in its own image. As ideas that look beyond the immediately applicable and fruitful to the generally and enduringly valuable are excluded in favor of less coherent ideas, the social situation deteriorates and becomes the social and historical embodiment of the underlying incoherence and short-sightedness. As the situation mirrors the minds and hearts that produced it, intelligence, reason, and responsibility appear less and less relevant to practical human affairs. "Culture retreats into an ivory tower. Religion becomes an inward affair of the heart. Philosophy glitters like a gem with endless facets and no practical purpose." The alienation of intelligent and critical responsibility accelerates the social decline until, at the limit, the social situation is a social surd, no more intelligible than the policies that brought it about, "the dump in which are heaped up the amorphous and incompatible products of all the biases of self-centered and short-sighted individuals and groups."[34]

In time, intelligence, reason, and responsibility surrender to 'the facts,' to what 'everyone knows,' to *Realpolitik*. Absorbed in 'the facts' uncovered by empirical study, the human sciences lose their critical stance, for they now have no normative base and become either 'value-free' instruments of the powers that be or ineffective tools of reform or revolution, incapable of critical discernment because founded on a flight from self-reflection and self-responsibility.[35] In a series of 'ever less comprehensive viewpoints,' theory contracts to coincide with an increasingly unintelligible reality. "In the limit, practice becomes a theoretically unified whole, and theory is reduced to the status of a myth that lingers on to represent the frustrated aspirations of detached and disinterested intelligence."

In the last pages of his treatment of general bias, Lonergan suggested that the solution must be found in a rediscovery of theory in a higher viewpoint that builds upon a critical science of man erected on "the principle that intelligence contains its own immanent norms and

---

[34] "Healing and Creating," *A Third Collection*, p. 105.

[35] That Lonergan's analysis is directly relevant to the contemporary debates on method in the human sciences can be seen by reading such works as Bernstein's *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* or Anthony Giddens' two works, *New Rules of Sociological Method* and *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1977). Hugo Meynell offers a first statement in "Lonergan's Theory of Knowledge and the Social Sciences," *New Blackfriars*, 56 (1975), 388-398.

that these norms are equipped with sanctions which man does not have to invent or impose." The needed viewpoint must be reflected in a cultural "representative of detached intelligence that both appreciates and criticizes, that identifies the good neither with the new nor with the old, that, above all else, neither will be forced into an ivory tower of ineffectualness by the social surd nor, on the other hand, will capitulate to its absurdity." Lonergan calls this recovery of a genuinely critical and responsible theory 'cosmopolis.' This, summarily stated, "is a withdrawal from practicality to save practicality. It is a dimension of consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical responsibilities." It is, it seems, the theory for which Lonergan throughout his life attempted to lay the foundations.

RECOVERY

The first two approximations to a theory of history counterpose progress and its principle to decline and its principle and describe the fundamental problem as 'an incapacity for sustained development.'[36] In the ideal of 'cosmopolis,' Lonergan proposed a solution in a higher viewpoint which would articulate a critical philosophy and science of concrete historical existence. But already by the end of *Insight*, it is clear that this is not his solution after all. For the critical theory and practice which cosmopolis might seek to communicate to men will find them already living and, on the analysis, living inauthentic lives under the influence of the biases. As long as their living suffers from incomplete and distorted development, the critical philosophy and human science will be achieved, if at all, only after long struggle and even then will be unacceptable to disorientated minds and to wills rendered effectively unfree by the force of their biases and their flight from self-responsibility. Described theologically, a 'reign of sin,' which Lonergan defines as 'the expectation of sin,' governs individual and social life. It consists in the existential 'priority of living over learning how to live' and in 'man's awareness of his plight and his self-surrender to it.'[37]

---

[36] *Insight*, p. 630.

[37] *Insight*, p. 693.

In fact, then, the solution to the problem of individual, social, and cultural decline cannot come from theory or argument, for arguments can only be heard by selves living within horizons, and inauthentic horizons do not include the materials for their own reversal.[38] Inauthenticity is an existential condition, a practical alienation of freedom and intelligence from their self-transcending goal. If that alienation cannot be overcome, there is no solution. A new and higher *viewpoint* is not enough; there must be a new and higher *integration* of human living itself. The problem of liberation from decline, then, is the question whether there is not a third component, besides progress and decline, a possible and realized redemptive recovery.[39]

In the last chapter of *Insight*, Lonergan outlined at some length a 'heuristic anticipation of the solution to the problem of evil.'[40] Liberation from individual, social, and cultural impotence was described as a divinely initiated higher integration of human living which reverses the priority of living over learning how to live, overcomes the aberrant effects of bias, and liberates by restoring and transforming the generative principles of progress, intelligence and freedom. To meet the deteriorating effect of cultural aberration, faith would root man in the truth of God's word. To overcome the debilitating and alienating effect of group bias, hope would enable man to undertake his efforts in society by relying on God's power. To root out the corrosive and self-perpetuating egoism of individual bias, a self-sacrificing love would go beyond strict justice in a forgiveness that halts the spiral of evil.[41] As decline had its roots in a neglect or repudiation of the normative implications of conscious intentionality, so also redemption

---

[38] See *Method*, p. 55: "A civilization in decline digs its own grave with a relentless consistency. It cannot be argued out of its self-destructive ways, for argument has a theoretical major premiss, theoretical premisses are asked to conform to matters of fact, and the facts in the situation produced by decline more and more are the absurdities that proceed from inattention, oversight, unreasonablenss and irresponsibility."

[39] See *Insight*, pp. 630-33, 688-93. In his critique of Lonergan's notion of praxis, Charles Davis does not give enough attention to his insistence on the priority of the higher integration to the higher viewpoint; see "Lonergan's Appropriation of the Concept of Praxis," *New Blackfriars*, 62 (1981), 114-126.

[40] *Insight*, pp. 696-730. This description is sometimes misunderstood as an attempt to deduce the necessity of Catholic faith. It is more properly seen as an effort to relate the central features of Catholic Christianity to the fundamental analyses already presented throughout the book.

[41] *Insight*, pp. 698-703, 718-21; *Method*, pp. 117-118.

would be rooted in this threefold transformation of consciousness, initiated by God but effecting the recovery of the genuinely human.

In this brief presentation the proposed solution may appear rather individualistic. That this is not so might already be clear from what was said earlier about the social and historical location of the drama of individual existence. But Lonergan's description itself also includes a transformationn of sensitivity and intersubjectivity as well as the intelligent and free cooperation of men in the reception and communication of the divine solution. Both of the principles of human community are thus touched and healed. What might appear as an abstract individualism is neither abstract nor individualistic. Individuals need redemption not only because of their own inability and refusal to develop, but because they live within historical communities which have been corrupted by bias and sin. The concrete redemption of individuals will only be effective if it makes possible and real different communities and a different history; but these will not be really different if they do not embody the transformed subjectivity and intersubjectivity of their members and architects. The concrete social dialectic of individual existence is present throughout the description: societies are products of men, but men are products of society.[42]

It is difficult to see how this dialectic can be neglected or faulted. The first moment requires attention to the conscious activities which constitute social relations. But this attention, if it must include reflection on 'the transcendental *a priori*,' that is, the conditions for the possibility of all knowing or choosing, nevertheless becomes fully critical and concrete only if it includes 'the social-historical *a priori*,' the social and historical conditions under which any knowing or willing is possible or probable. The divine solution to the problem of human evil respects this concrete dialectic, even when, with respect to both *a prioris*, it transforms the concrete possibilities and probabilities by the gift of grace and by the embodiment of redemptive meaning and value in a person or in a community.[43]

In this light it becomes clear why, in the Epilogue to *Insight*, Lonergan proposed the relevance of his account of the historical aspect of human development to a treatise on the Church. He argued that while much work had been done to compile the scriptural, traditional,

---

[42] See Berger and Luckman, *Social Construction*, p. 61.

[43] See "Healing and Creativity," *A Third Collection*, pp. 106-108.

and dogmatic elements that need to be integrated in a systematic theology of the Church, there was still lacking "the pattern of terms and relations through which the materials may be embraced in a single, coherent view." To fill this need, he proposed his own theory of history, "a theory of development that can envisage not only natural and intelligent progress but also sinful decline, and not only progress and decline but also superntural recovery."[44]

While in *Method in Theology* the account of redemption and of religious conversion and community differs somewhat, particularly in vocabulary, from the one heuristically outlined in *Insight*, this fundamental conviction of the relationship between ecclesiology and a theory of history is presupposed throughout. It is the attempt to show its usefulness and power that has guided these two chapters and leads to the two which follow.

SUMMARY

Before moving on to a discussion of the Church as the concrete social and historical bearer of redemptive meaning and value, it may be helpful to bring together the perspectives of these first two chapters.

The first chapter situated the individual's own quest for authenticity in his linguistic, cognitive, and moral communities. These are the matrices in which he is conceived, born, and reared, 'the social-historical *a priori*' from and within which he undertakes his own existential project. They give him words with which to discover and speak about the world and a language with which to order it. They hand on a historical interpretation of that world, a social stock of knowledge which relieves him of the necessity to reinvent the wheel, which he makes his own by believing, on which he can build, to which he can contribute his own efforts. Within that world, they describe for him values to pursue, standards to apply, roles to perform.

In all these respects the community helps to define the concrete character of a person's self-project, both with respect to the self he brings to it and with respect to the world in which he attempts that project. The self who stands, say, at the brink of an existential moment

---

[44] *Insight*, pp. 742-743.

of self-responsibility, is not identifiable with or even intelligible without the language with which he experiences, thinks, and speaks, without the traditions of knowledge he inherits and appropriates, without the history of freedom he has himself witnessed, assimilated, and lived. The world in which he is to realize himself is not just the world of external nature immediately available to his senses. It includes as well realities he has never sensed and never will sense. It includes also the transformation of nature effected by the labor of predecessors and contemporaries. It includes, finally, the world created by the exercise of their intelligence and freedom: families, communities, institutions, states, traditions, cultures, religions, and so on. An individual is an already formed self facing an already formed world, and his essential and existential freedom is his reponsibility to try to make something of such a self in such a world.

All of this means that any individual at any moment is a self with a history confronting a world with a history. Should he feel moved by the challenge of fidelity to the transcendental and normative dimensions of consciousness, he will not address that great challenge as a sort of *creatio ex nihilo*, some pure, unconditioned, originating act of self-constitution. His commitment to a self-transcending authenticity will mean taking a stance towards the already lived history of his own freedom and the self it has created. The hoped-for, intended new self will in some respects look out upon a new world of possibilities; but these possibilities concretely will be changes or, though perhaps rarely, transformations of the world already realized by his history and that of his predecessors and contemporaries. When Paul rose from the ground, he did not cease having once been the man called Saul, and the 'new creation' he was given to be, to know, and to serve became real and effective in the religious, cultural, political, social and economic circumstances and structures of the first-century Roman Empire.

For all these reasons, the discussion of individual authenticity must open out, as the second chapter argued, upon a consideration of social and historical authenticity. For the substance of the world in which a person has been formed and which he confronts is mediated and constituted by historical and social acts of meaning and value. The persons who mediated or constituted that world lived their lives and produced their world by exercises of intelligence and freedom that were more or less faithful to the intrinsic demands of human

consciousness. Cultures and societies, as well as individuals, know stages of linguistic, intellectual, and moral development. Nor are they distinguished or measured only by temporal and spatial conditions: cultures and societies also know linguistic, cognitive, and moral decline. And, in a world of grace, there will also be communities of language, belief, and value which represent redemptive recovery. The worlds mediated and constituted by meaning and value, then, reflect and embody the historical dialectic of development, decline, and recovery.

It is within such worlds that individuals are born and reared. Their selves are shaped linguistically, cognitively, and morally in accordance with the probabilities operative in conditions that are some mixture of development, decline, and recovery. One's own history prior to an experience of existential self-discovery was not the history of a pure self facing out upon and having to deal with a pure world. The self now facing the task of self-responsibility is the achieved creation of a personal and social history in which the great dialectic has already been at work. The world of nature and of persons in which he is now to act responsibly is not some fresh, infinitely malleable clay, needing only his creativity to be made good and beautiful. It is, if the metaphor can be extended, clay already worked over, perhaps already hardening, and what goodness or beauty he can create is limited by what other hands have made or are making. He may be able to perfect a beauty already half-formed; he may have to spend his life struggling to make something less ugly of the clay he has been handed.

In all these respects, then, it is not the individual person, but the society, the culture, the community that is the original fact. We are the persons we are, in all our individuality and originality, because of the communities, societies, cultures we have encountered. If we are lucky, we have had some opportunity to be introduced early on into linguistic, cognitive, and moral worlds of great breadth and depth, integrity and beauty, where persons live whose lives describe an authentic human ideal, so that the vision of authentic selves to realize is not fleeting and the task is not lonely. If we are unlucky, the worlds mediated to us have been small and shallow, cheap and ugly, so that to be authentic selves there is a very lonely, difficult, and painful task. Perhaps it is most likely that we have been shown worlds which are something in-between, and we can only hope that at the opportune time a word will be spoken, a gesture made, an invitation extended so that we can,

alongside others, attempt to sort out in ourselves and in our world what is authentic and what is not and then commit ourselves to the one and refuse the other.

It is in some such perspective, the argument is, that most sense can be made of the community of meaning and value called the Christian Church.

THE CHURCH AND THE MEDIATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SELF

THE FIFTH CHAPTER briefly noted the importance of 'the anthropocentric turn' in twentieth-century Catholic theology. It was also argued that the typical anthropology which underlies this theology needs to be opened up to include the social-historical *a priori* if it is to be able to address human subjects in their full concreteness. Similarly, this chapter on the mediation of the Christian self will begin with a brief discussion of religion and the individual's quest for authenticity and then will move on to discuss the role of the Church in the mediation of religious experience.

RELIGION AND THE AUTHENTIC SELF

Several years ago, Edward Schillebeeckx met the objection that an anthropocentic theology is a contradiction in terms by an argument that is neatly summarized in his statement that "God belongs to the full definition of man."[1] It is not possible, in other words, to speak about the human person adequately without introducing the question or even the reality of God. One may begin with man, but one will not have finished speaking about him if one does not also speak about God. A similar claim is central to most of the major efforts of contemporary Catholic theologians to construct a theology that does not suffer from a radical extrinsicism.

Bernard Lonergan has articulated this claim through an explication of the dynamics and finality of the emergence and exercise of human consciousness. Human beings do not only experience; spontaneously and insistently they ask questions about their experience: questions about meaning, about truth, about value. Prior to all particular questions about this or that, there is what Lonergan called "the pure question," that 'primordial drive,' that 'wanting' that we not

[1] "Faith Functioning in Human Self-Understanding," in *The Word in History*, ed. T. Patrick Burke (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 47. The point is also argued at some length in his *God and Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969) pp.160-223.

only have but *are*.[2] St. Augustine's restlessness is here identified with the experience of the unrelenting, insatiable eros of the mind and heart.

For Lonergan, the question about God arises as the question about this primordial questioning. We spontaneously seek to know the meaning, the intelligibility of things. We presume that things are intelligible, and we ask our questions and live our lives on that assumption. The question about God can arise in the form of two questions: why are things intelligible? and, can they be intelligible without an intelligent ground?

We also ask questions that seek the truth of things, how things really are; and we are not satisfied short of a judgment that meets all the necessary conditions for saying a Yes or a No. The question about God can arise as an impatience with the simple brutal facticity of things, as the question whether in fact anything can simply in fact exist, whether, that is, the existence of what need not exist does not itself need explanation.

And we also spontaneously ask questions about the value of things, particularly about the value or worth of our own existence, and about how to make it worthwhile. The question about God can arise as the question about whether such questions are themselves worthwhile, whether, that is, they can really be worth our while if responsible human self-constitution is the only instance in the universe of personal and free realization of the good.[3]

In all three forms, the question about God arises out of the very experience of the basic and primordial human drive towards meaning, truth, and value. It seeks to explore the implications of a desire which it is impossible to deny. It implies that the religious question is not some late addition to an already constituted and functioning human consciousness, but the unstated implication of the meaning, truth, and value of the very pursuit of meaning, truth, and value that

---

[2] See *Insight* 9. Compare Paul Tillich's comment: "Man is the question he asks about himself, before any question has been formulated" (*Systematic Theology*, I [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951] 62), and Karl Rahner's brilliant essay, "Thomas Aquinas on the Incomprehensibility of God," in *Celebrating the Medieval Heritage*, ed. D. Tracy (*The Journal or Religion*, vol. 58, Supplement, 1978) S107-S125.

[3] See *Method* 101-103, and *Philosophy of God, and Theology* pp. 52-55, which takes the argument to a further stage.

distinguishes human existence. If that pursuit defines the existential project of each individual quest for authenticity, then the religious question is part of the very stuff of that existential moment in which we ask not merely about the world we inhabit but about the self we shall become and the world we shall create.

For most people, however, the question about God does not arise in the rather philosophical form described above. Few people, it seems, spend a great deal of time asking questions about their own questions. It is much more likely that the question about God will arise from within or as a reflection upon some kind of personal experience. Descriptions of these experiences may vary greatly from person to person, from time to time, from culture to culture. But Lonergan believed that there is some evidence for a common experiential 'infra-structure' that supplies the object for the historical and comparative sciences of religion.[4] Philosophers and theologians have attempted to describe this common experience, as, to refer to only a few examples, when Rudolf Otto spoke of the experience of the holy as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, or Paul Tillich of 'being grasped by ultimate concern,' of Karl Rahner, following Ignatius of Loyola, of a 'consolation without a cause,' or Lonergan himself of 'being in love without qualification.'

While these and other descriptions often differ significantly from one another, there also are some common features. First, the descriptions, either grammatically or by implication, are in the passive voice: it is an experience of *being* terrified and fascinated, grasped and accepted, comforted, of having *fallen* in love. At the heart of the experience is a moment of passivity or receptivity, when one is acted upon, receiving, being given a gift.

Secondly, the descriptions suggest that the experience does not occur with a label identifying it as 'religious' or naming its object (or subject) as 'God.' It is, in a first moment, a conscious experience of what is not yet named or known, of 'mystery,' of something or someone. The experience is thus less the end of all questions than the source of a whole new kind of question.

Implied in these two features is a third: the descriptions are sets of words, but the experience these words describe is itself wordless.

---

[4] See "Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of our Time," in *A Third Collection* pp. 55-73.

They are describing something prior to insights, concepts, words, judgments, statements, decisions or acts, something prior even to the questions that might arise later when people wonder what it is that is happening within and among themselves.

In all these respects, the religious experience occurs in what Lonergan calls 'the world of immediacy.' It is an experience of an altered or transformed consciousness, of the emergence of a new self, differently oriented in the world, feeling now what it had not felt before, now loving what once it had not loved. The new self may be conscious of the changes underway, but it need not understand them or know them or even be able to name them. It is the tension between the consciously given and the unnamed and unknown that gives rise to a fourth and far more common way in which the question about God can arise. For the little word 'God' is one of the ways in which people have tried to name the nameless Mystery which is the source of the experience.[5] 'God' here refers not merely to the anticipated goal of the desire of mind and heart, but to that which gives itself in the transforming experience. The tremendous variety of images and symbols, gestures and rites, beliefs and doctrines, philosophies and theologies that mark the religious history of mankind are so many efforts to understand, name, and express not only the new self given to a person nor only the new world that gift reveals and makes possible, but also the One who is the gracious creator of the new self and the new world.

Lonergan himself, of course, uses the words and symbols of the Christian tradition to articulate the founding experience. He uses Rom 5:5 ("God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us") to describe what is immediately given and experienced. He invokes Paul's description of 'the harvest of the Spirit' in Gal 5:22 to describe the new life to which the originating experience gives rise. These transformed attitudes and actions are the first expression into the world of the unmediated gift of God. Through them the transformed self becomes an incarnate bearer of meaning,[6] and religion

[5] See Karl Rahner, "Meditation on the Word 'God,'" in *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury, 1978) pp. 44-51.

[6] See *Method* p. 73. The theme, of course, is an ancient one. Aelred Squire quotes Gregory Palamas: "It is said that every argument refutes another argument, but what is the argument that can refute a life?" (*Summer in the Seed* [New York: Paulist Press, 1980] 182), and Newman preached a lovely sermon on "Personal

ventures out into the world mediated by meaning to become an element in the historical constitution of the world by meaning.[7]

But, as necessary as it is to stress the ineradicably personal character of the religious experience, it is a mistake to think that it is purely private. For the attitudes and actions of the transformed self relate him to other persons, and in these encounters transformed selves can discover one another and there can thus begin to develop another expression into the world of the founding gift: religious intersubjectivity or community. If the gift of the Spirit has been given to many, "the many can recognize in one another a common orientation in their living and feeling, in their criteria and their goals. From a common communion with God, there springs a religious community."[8] This transformed intersubjectivity is itself another incarnate bearer of meaning. Within it, however, there gradually emerge other words, words to unfold the meaning of the 'inner word' heard in the heart, words to spell out its power in act, words to speak of its transcendent source, center, and goal. The community thus creates a history and a tradition and so constitutes itself in the larger social order as a distinctive matrix for human development, a place where the individual's quest for authenticity can be encouraged and promoted, interpreted and challenged, where especially people can be given the chance to face the possibility that at the heart of the project of self-realization there is a moment in which the long-sought self is discovered to be a self given by an Other.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

When Lonergan spoke of a religious community, history, and tradition as a 'supra-structure' erected upon the 'infra-structure' of a founding religious experience,[9] he provided a first entry into an understanding of the religious community known as the Christian Church. The distinctiveness of Christian religious community does not lie in the

---

Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth" (*Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* [London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906] pp. 75-98.

[7] See *Method* pp. 112-115.

[8] *Method* p. 118.

[9] See "Prolegomena," cited in note 4 above.

founding experience, for Christians speak of it as the experienced grace of the Holy Spirit, which is possible outside of their numbers. It is found rather in the supra-structure of images and symbols, rites and gestures, beliefs and doctrines, relationships and institutions which is built upon the experienced infra-structure and articulate its meaning, value, and power.[10]

Christians argue, of course, that theirs is a historical religion not only in the sense that it too arose from the inner gift of God to historical men and women, but also because they believe that God himself has entered into and taken part in human history.[11] In Jesus Christ the Christian Church sees and affirms God's entry into the world of religious interpretation and expression, into the worlds mediated and constituted by meaning and value. The core of this community, then, is not simply the inner word of grace but also the outer word of revelation, God's word in the history of Israel and of Jesus Christ, echoing the word heard in believers' hearts. It is not as if other religious individuals and communities have not received the self-gift of God; but in Jesus Christ God has, as it were, spoken out his love and declared its depths.[12] It is only when both gifts of God are conjoined that the Church exists: "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."[13]

The point may also be illustrated by applying Lonergan's heuristics of community. Community is an achievement of common meaning and value. It is potential when a group of people share a common field of experience, when they have something to think and

---

[10] Note that it is the *distinctiveness* of Christian community that is found in the supra-structure. By no means unimportant or inessential, it is nonetheless quite secondary in importance to the founding experience of the Spirit. At least that is how it was seen by Aquinas for whom the new law was essentially the grace of the Holy Spirit, for which everything else was either preparatory or explicative and without which the letter, even of the Gospel, killeth; see *Summa theologica*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1.

[11] "So it is that a divine revelation is God's entry and his taking part in man's making of man. It is God's claim to have a say in the aims and purposes, the direction and development of human lives, human societies, human cultures, human history" ("Theology in its new Context." *Second Collection* p. 62).

[12] In *Method* 112-13, Lonergan compares this act of God's self-disclosure to the creative power known in human relations when a couple declare their love for one another.

[13] *Method* p. 361.

talk about together. If without this common experience, community is not possible, it is not by itself a sufficient principle of full human community. The group needs also to think and talk about their experience and to reach some measure of common understanding and common agreement: Yes, that is what it means and implies; No, that is not what it means or implies. And, on the basis of this common experience, understanding, and judgment, the group needs also to act in common, and to do that they must be committed to common values, goals, and means. The full and actual achievement of common meaning and value — the realization of community — is the result of common experience, common understandings, common judgments, and common commitments.[14]

According to this formal structure, the potential for Christian community lies in a common experience. This can have several dimensions. There is, first, the experience of the basic business of human living: of being born, growing up, marrying, succeeding and failing, enjoying and suffering, hoping and fearing, growing old and dying. Every religion speaks to and about the fundamental features of human existence. A second dimension of experience is the primordial drive towards meaning, truth, and value, the insistent movement beyond present achievement, the presence-by-its-absence of a desired goal and fulfilment. And there is, finally, the kind of experience described above, in which some moment of transcendent fulfilment or transformation is experienced, which Christians call an experience of grace, but which does not occur with that name attached, but rather as an unnamed and not yet understood re-orientation of the self.

But if without such community of experience, there is not even the potential for Christian community, neither are these experiences by themselves sufficient to constitute a distinctive community. On no one of the levels is the experience unique to Christians, at least not in the technical sense of experience intended here, namely as that which is in need of interpretation and critical judgment.[15] The basic stuff of human living, the drive towards the transcendent, the transformation of self are all possibilities of human experience outside the Christian

[14] See *Method* pp. 79, 356-357.

[15] However broad and differentiated the experiences may be, when they are made the object of inquiry, they stand in the same functional relationship to understanding and judgment as do elementary sense experiences.

Church. Something more is needed to give form and actuality to Christian community.

The distinctiveness of Christian community first appears, thus, on the levels of understanding, judgment, and decision. It consists in the fact that Christians center their understandings, judgments, and decisions about their basic experiences around the figure of Jesus Christ. The Church remembers what he has said and done as the words and deeds of its own foundation; it witnesses to him now in word and deed; and it looks forward to his coming. Around his figure, the Church builds its common interpretation of human experience, discovers the criteria for its judgments and evaluations, and chooses and acts in the world. Human existence is in him known to be a gift to be received and treasured; in him the goal of our primordial desire is named 'God;' through him we can name 'Father' the One who terrifies and fascinates, grasps and accepts, comforts and draws us on in love. It is in this whole vast supra-structure of *Christian* meanings and values that the distinctive religious community known as the Church is fully realized.

Applying this heuristic structure of community to the Church is only a first step towards a concrete description of the Church, but before filling it out later in this chapter, it may be wise to note the advantages of this or a similar approach. First of all, it permits one to locate and to define with a certain measure of precision the distinctiveness of the Church. Theologians are often haunted by the fear that the unique character of Christian community, reflected in such biblical images as People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit, will be compromised if it is compared with other communities or is studied by the techniques used by social scientists in investigating other social bodies.[16] That this is a legitimate fear may be acknowledged. The Church, after all, does make unique claims about the origin, center, and purpose of its life, claims which are clearly part of its self-definition and of what it considers to be its very self-constitution in the world. It can also be admitted that for various reasons attempts

[16] This is what James Gustafson calls 'theological reductionism:' "the exclusive use of Biblical and doctrinal language in the interpretation of the Church. Many make the explicit or tacit assumption that the Church is so absolutely unique in character that it can be understood only in its own private language" (*Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* [New York: Harper & Row, 1961] p. 100.

are sometimes made to so flatten out its features that it appears indistinguishable from other communities of good will or to give it a meaning and purpose that are not grounded and centered in God, Christ, and the Spirit.

On the other hand, the appeal to the distinctive and transcendent dimensions of the Church can be made so imprecisely or indiscriminately that the Church is almost elevated out of the human condition. Not only can this lead to an alienation both of its members and of others who know it to be something also quite human, it can also serve as an ideological smokescreen behind which traditions and authorities, roles and institutions can be preserved from criticism. Vague acknowledgements that the Church is both divine and human do not suffice. Some constructive effort is needed to indicate how the transcendent and distinctive reality is realized precisely in the human and self-constituting community of actual men and women.

Lonergan's framework avoids both extremes. It makes central on all four levels of the Church's common meaning the divine intervention in the Spirit's grace and in Christ's words and work. The Church results from the work of Christ and lives by his Spirit. On the other hand, as transcendent as the origin, source, and purpose of the Church's life are, the Church comes to be as a human community, and what God makes to exist he brings about through a realization of common meaning and value which is achieved through the same sort of human operations and actions as that by which other human communities realize themselves: through common experiences, common understandings, common judgments, common commitments. The Church is not distinctive or unique by being exempted from the human task of self-realization, but by the fact that, as it believes, the principles of its constitutive meanings and values have the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as their origin, center, and goal.[17]

This approach also allows a more positive attitude towards those social sciences that include the Church among the objects of their study. Such sciences study the actual self-realization of the Church in particular times and places, and they do so by studying the operations and acts, beliefs and practices, relationships, roles, and institutions

[17] This is the central argument of Gustafson's *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* and is well represented also in Claude Welch, *The Reality of the Church* (New York: Scribners, 1958), particularly in chapters I and II. See also my article, "The Church: God's Gift and Our Task," *Origins* **16** (April 2, 1987) pp. 735-741.

that constitute the group or groups that call themselves the Church. The results of such studies are often startling and even disconcerting to churchmen and theologians whose only or customary language about the Church is strictly or abstractly theological. But the Church is not always what theology says the Church should be, nor is it ever what it should be in ways which only theology can illumine. In other words, social scientific study of the Church can not only enable one to discover what the actual state of the Church is; it can also considerably facilitate the theologian's theoretical task of describing how the transcendent community comes to be in groups of men and women.

To speak of the self-constitution of the Church and to try to explain this by comparison with other examples of social self-constitution is not to deny that the Church is the result of a divine initiative. It is, rather, to locate and define the character of this dimension of God's entry into the process of mankind's self-realization. As in the individual the effect of God's grace is the possibility of the sustained construction of a new self, so God's historical intervention makes possible the construction of a new social world. In neither case does the divine initiative deny or render unnecessary the acts by which individuals and groups constitute themselves. Rather, the divine initiative is realized precisely in the transformed abilities and activities of men and women.

In other words, the members of the Church are together the historical subject of the Church's self-realization. This might be considered too obvious to need statement were it not absent from many theological discussions of the Church. Much theological language about the Church commits what Langdon Gilkey calls a 'category mistake,' whereby "symbols expressing the *relation* of God to the life of the existing churches have been mistaken for the substantial *elements* out of which the church is itself composed ... [T]he actual human beings who make up the ecclesia, with all their cultural habits, activities, and goals, not to mention their weaknesses and sins, are left completely out of the picture, and quite holy but unactual abstractions result."[18] In many classical Catholic treatises, on the other hand, the human element was certainly not neglected; but the clergy or hierarchy were often considered to be the only active subjects of the Church's

[18] Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) p. 134.

self-constitution and the only social relationships discussed were structures of authority. The laity were presented as the subjects only of their obedience, and all of the other elements that generate and sustain social relationships were largely neglected. This, of course, created its own kind of abstractions, not all of them holy.

Against the holier abstractions, it is necessary to insist that the Church is not the divine initiative itself, but the human social response to God's grace and word. As much as it must be acknowledged that this response is itself the fruit of grace, it remains that it is a *response*, the work of the freedom of those who have been given to believe, to hope, and to love. The community generated out of this common meaning and value is precisely the social and historical effect of God's redemptive intervention in Christ. John Knox so insists on this point that he can even say that "the sole residuum of the event [of Christ] was the church:"

> The only difference between the world as it was just after the event and the world as it had been just before is that the church was now in existence. A new kind of human community had emerged; a new society had come into being. There was absolutely nothing besides. This new community held and prized vivid memories of the event in which it had begun. It had a new faith; that is, it saw the nature of the world and of God in a new light. It found in its own life the grounds — indeed anticipatory fulfilments — of a magnificent hope. But the memory, the faith, and the hope were all its own; they had neither existence nor ground outside the community. Only the church really existed. Except for the church the event had not occurred.[19]

The revelatory and redemptive event of Christ was thus the emergence of the Church, and the Church emerged as the community of men and women who remembered Jesus Christ and by the power of his Spirit confessed him to be the Lord. The human community of believers, in their common memory and hope, is the event of redemption.

As for the abstractions of classical Catholic ecclesiology, these lie in the common failure to note that structures of authority, as other social relationships, are produced by their participants, so that there is

---

[19] John Knox, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1957) 45. This argument was anticipated and developed at greater length in Knox's *On the Meaning of Christ* (1947), later republished as the third part of *Jesus Lord and Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

a sense in which authority itself is in fact co-produced by the freedom of those who trust it. Furthermore, authority rests upon a community of meaning and value, a social world which authority itself does not create and of which it is only one of the social articulations. The body of common experiences, understandings, judgments, and commitments which constitute that social world also constitute the field and set the limits within which authority functions. All the members of the Church, then, participate in the very constitution of authority, and the establishment of authority-relations is itself an act of the whole Church's self-constitution. So far is this from denying that structures of authority derive from the will of Christ for his Church, it states precisely what this means and how it is true.

These perhaps somewhat abstract statements are confirmed by the history of the Church. The Church first arose when the memory of the disciples of Jesus was transformed by an experience of the Spirit into the conviction that he had been raised from the dead. That common experience and conviction became the principle of a new community, a new association of human beings in a common interpretation and evaluation of the world. This community was furthered by their effort to comprehend what had happened in Christ and in themselves, to reconsider their religious heritage and their relationship to contemporary Israel, to determine their attitudes to the pagan nations. Very early on, their new community began to find expression in distinctive prayers, rites and practices, in a creative re-appropriation of Israel's religious language, in the adoption of their own patterns of leadership. Opposition and misunderstanding led to an eventual understanding of themselves as a distinct body, a *tertium genus*. They wrote Gospels and letters, apocalypses and apologias. Some of their literature they gathered into an authoritative canon of Scriptures. In their baptismal entrance-rites they forged a common rule of faith. Their ritual celebration of the *memoria Christi* became the shape of a common liturgy. The guidance of their community-life they entrusted to a ministry in which they saw apostolic functions. Through all of this there was developing a distinct tradition, carrying on the memory of a common life. In all these and in many other ways, men and women were constituting themselves as that social and historical phenomenon known as the Christian Church, a distinct community of meaning and value in the history of the world, the concrete difference which Jesus Christ has made.

The Church did not arise nor did it develop historically by a series of purely vertical interventions by God, nor is there a point at which the Church ever found or finds itself face-to-face with a pure, unmediated presence of God. The Word of God is found only as received and expressed in the words of men; the grace of the Spirit is active only as received and expressed in the transformed hearts and lives of individuals and communities; the People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Spirit only has body, shape, and life in concrete men and women gathered in quite specific human communities. The transcendent, divine principles of the Church's existence are present and powerful only as productive of the conscious human operations and acts by which men and women constitute themselves as the community of faith, hope and love.

This is a first approach to what is meant when the Church is said to be a 'sacrament,' as when Vatican II spoke of it as the 'sign and instrument' of redemptive union with God and of the unity of the human race (*LG* 1). The Church is a 'sign' of redemption first of all as the effect or creation of grace, as the appearance in the world and among other human societies of a new community of meaning and value embodying in its constitutive principles the self-gift of God in Christ and the Spirit. It is this 'new creation,' realized in concrete human inter-relationships, that has been intended by the previous pages. What it means for this sign of grace to be also an 'instrument' of grace can now be approached by returning to the ideas presented in the earlier chapter on the social mediation of the self.

THE COMMUNITY OF LANGUAGE

The Church comes to be as an event within the world constituted by meaning and value. It is an event, an achievement, of common meaning and value, of experiences that are not so personal that they cannot be talked about with others. That conversation brings the community of experience into the world mediated by meaning. Words are sought and found to describe and identify the originating experience, illuminating it for oneself and for others. And out of this common reflection and common speech something new emerges, a new community of language, one generation's achievement, its gift to a new generation, describing a world they are invited to enter.

Two men were once walking from Jerusalem towards Emmaus, and on the way they were talking about what had recently happened in the holy city. A third man joined them and asked what they had been talking about. They told him of the fate of a man named Jesus in whom they had, mistakenly, they feared, placed messianic hopes. The stranger rebuked them for their denseness and then began to explain how what the prophets had said long ago illustrated such a fate and how, therefore, this Jesus illustrated all their Scriptures. When the three men paused for the evening meal, the two recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell this encounter to others of their company.

This finely wrought account in the last chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke is a paradigm of the genesis of the Church. Something happened to a few people, something extraordinary enough to focus the hopes that had defined the Jewish people, something brutal enough to have dashed those hopes — and they were talking about it. Meeting the stranger, they spoke about it with him, and he talked about it with them and found words for them, utterances of their own prophets, enabling them to retrieve their hopes and to gain the courage to believe what they had not dared to believe. Through his words and his gesture at supper, they came to know that Jesus was alive. They talked about the effect of his words upon their own hearts and could not wait to talk about him to their fellows in Jerusalem.

As the early Christians talked to one another, they began to construct a new social world; and wherever that social world has been reconstructed in every generation since, the principal agent has been someone talking about Jesus Christ. That social world was and is the Church, a community of the Word — and of words about the Word.

In constructing their linguistic world, the early Christians had two main sources on which to draw: their religious heritage and their memory of Jesus. These were not, of course, completely distinct, for Jesus himself was an heir of the religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage of Judaism, whose riches he employed when he spoke of his Father, of God's imminent reign, of the response demanded of those who wished to be ready for it. Even when he spoke most creatively and most originally — in his prayer and when he counterposed his demands to what his hearers had heard it said of old — he spoke as a Jew, in the language of Judaism, and to and for a group of Jews. When his hearers were in turn asked to say what they thought of him, they

too turned to that same religious heritage to find words for their nascent faith.

When, after his death, a group of his hearers became convinced that God had vindicated Jesus' claims and made him Lord even over the Law by which they had previously interpreted their lives, they had to look for words with which to express what had happened in him and in them. Again they turned naturally to their own Scriptures for anticipations of what they themselves had at first failed to understand, for the defence of their extraordinary new conviction about him, to articulate, to themselves as much as to others, what they had experienced. The words of the Scriptures began to speak as they had not spoken before and became the bearer of the meanings and values of which Jesus had spoken. In those Scriptures they found their first words to describe Jesus himself — 'Messiah,' 'Lord,' 'Son of God' — and to describe themselves, too — 'the saints,' 'the Assembly' (*ekklesia*). The appropriation of the inherited language, at once illumining and illumined by the memory of Jesus, gradually began to distinguish them first within and later from the linguistic world in which they had once lived.

When they became convinced of their duty to tell of all this to others, not of Israel's linguistic tradition, they did not hesitate to spoil the Egyptians of their treasures of words and ideas. Borrowing them, they often infused them with new meaning and reference, making them serve the articulation of the memory of Christ, but also being aided by them to understand and communicate the truths revealed and realized in him. Eventually something new began to appear, a third world of language, neither Jew nor Greek, a new way of speaking about God, about the world, about the self. Upon the basis of these initial linguistic self-realizations, the Church has ever since been engaged in the task of finding words to communicate to others what was communicated to it, to mediate to the great variety of cultures the meaning, truth, and power of a Mystery it is convinced embraces all times, cultures, and languages.

The Church is thus today the repository of a great linguistic treasure. Its chief bearers are the Scriptures, the monuments of the tradition, and the liturgy. But the treasury includes as well the peculiar shapes and styles of languages produced by a long and varied history, by the great cultural encounters of the past, and by the denominational experiences of the different churches. Concretely, the

Church's language is seldom simply that of the Bible or the liturgy. What the Church has been historically, for good or ill, is also reflected still in the words it uses. If Western Christians do not speak like Easterners, nor Baptists like Catholics, it is in part because they have different stories to tell, because, often unfortunately, their languages convey today the history of their estrangement and hostility. That is why today one of the first tasks of ecumenical encounter is the clarification of the freight of different meanings sometimes carried by the same biblical or traditional words.

When an individual today is brought into the Church, he is brought into a whole new world of meaning and value. It is the world given to be known and appreciated by the use of words like God and Christ and the Spirit, of words like sin and death but also forgiveness and life, of words like justification and adoption, of words like love, joy and peace, of words like freedom, hope and trust, of words like promise, Kingdom, and eternal life. This lexical treasury opens up a world, promises a self and a community, and invites a person to enter and rejoice. The Christian language is one of the chief bearers of the invitation and challenge to undertake the self-constitution of the self made possible because of Jesus Christ.

That invitation is not likely to be accepted, of course, if, besides mediating the origins and tradition of the Church, the words do not also mediate the individual's experience. As an event within the world of constitutive immediacy, this experience is, as such, not necessarily named, understood or known. But as an event within consciousness, it becomes the subjective principle of a person's self-realization and serves therefore as a touchstone for assaying the value of any names, understandings, or claims to know the new self and the world it is given to enter. If in that respect the experience transforms the reference of the words of the tradition from the notional to the real and in that sense mediates the religious language itself, it remains that the words also mediate the experience. They do so by offering a name for the experienced but nameless Mystery, words for experiences perhaps otherwise unnoticed and ineffable, interpretative aids for events a person might not otherwise dare to admit to or hope for. In the words of Coleridge, speaking about the Bible, "I have found words for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs, and

pleadings for my shame and my feebleness;" and, as he goes on to remark, it is less that I find those words than that *they find me.*[20]

In this linguistic mediation of the Christian self is found another example of the dialectic of formation and transformation so acutely described in Rosemary Haughton's *The Transformation of Man.* An introduction into the Christian linguistic world cannot guarantee the occurrence of the transforming experience of the Spirit. Perhaps the most it can do is to keep it before one's eyes as a genuine possibility, to enable one to anticipate its shape and character, to desire it, and to sense its presence. On the other hand, the quality, power, and endurance of the transforming experience depend in part on the linguistic resources of the interpreting community. As Mrs. Haughton puts it, "the explicit self-awareness of the community in which conversion occurs limits the way the conversion works out in the individual convert."[21] In the case of the Church, centuries of reflection on the event of Christ and on the experiences of the Spirit are crystallized in the words it can offer an individual for experiences of which he may be conscious, but in whose very reality he may find it difficult to believe and whose transformative power he may not be able to support without a language and a community for which those experiences are real and trustworthy. Within such a community, however, the experience and the language together mediate the new self, shape and direct the spontaneities of one's attention, perceptions, questions, insights, judgments, sympathies, decisions, love, action — in short, they mediate the emergence and growth of the Christian self.[22]

While this discussion has focused on words, it should not be forgotten that the Christian language-system is far larger and far richer than words may suggest. It includes images and symbols, gestures and rites, and especially that confluence of them all which Christians call the sacraments. The tradition has often spoken of the sacrament as a *verbum visibile,* but, of course, it is not only a visible

---

[20] Samuel T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 1967) pp. 42-43.

[21] Haughton, *The Transformation of Man* pp. 105-106.

[22] For a splendid development of the theme, see Newman's sermon, "Christian Sympathy," *Parochial and Plain Sermons,* vol. V (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1891) pp. 116-127.

word, but a word, a meaning, that is also heard and felt, tasted and smelt. The splash of water, the taste of bread and wine, the feel of a hand upon one's head, the smell and feel of oil all become the bearers of a forgiveness, a strength, a life, a courage, experienced as pure gifts, bearers into the present of the One by whom these gifts were won, bearers also of a future in which the gifts recede before the unmediated presence of the Giver himself. Newman spoke of the sacraments as 'the gestures and accents of Christ.' Augustine called them the *vestigia*, the traces left by Christ's journey among us. Aquinas saw them as signs commemorative of Christ, demonstrative of his presence and power, anticipating his promise.[23] They are sacraments of faith, symbolic expressions at once of the faith by which we experience and receive the gifts of God and of the faith by which what God has given is again announced and given. The sacraments are the concrete moments in which the two great principles — the event of Christ and the grace of the Spirit — meet to create the Christian self; and they are thereby the occasion and the cause of the daily regeneration of the Church as the community of word and grace.

In all these respects and in all these ways, the language by which the Church is constituted as a distinctive community is also the principle of the emergence of the distinctive Christian self. The language does not only tell of a new world of God's creating; in that very telling it invites one to become the new self possible within and appropriate to such a world before such a God. The Christian self is mediated within and by the community of language that distinguishes and constitutes the Church.

---

[23] For Augustine see *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 16:5; for Aquinas, see *Summa theologica*, III, q. 60, a. 3. While looking in vain for the precise reference to Newman, I found the following text: "At times we seem to catch a glimpse of a Form which we shall hereafter see face to face. We approach, and in spite of the darkness, our hands, or our head, or our brow, or our lips become, as it were, sensible of the contact of something more than earthly. We know not where we are, but we have been bathing in water, and a voice tells us that it is blood. Or we have a mark signed upon our foreheads, and it spake of Calvary. Or we recollect a hand laid upon our heads, and surely it had the print of nails in it, and resembled His who with a touch gave sight to the blind and raised the dead. Or we have been eating and drinking; and it was not a dream surely, that One fed us from His wounded side, and renewed our nature by the heavenly meat He gave. Thus in many ways He, who is Judge to us, prepares us to be judged — He, who is to glorify us, prepares us to be glorified, that He may not take us unawares; but that when the voice of the Archangel sounds, and we are called to meet the Bridegroom, we may be ready" ("Worship, a Preparation for Christ's Coming," *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. V 10-11).

THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEF

One of the earliest designations of the Church is *congregatio fidelium*, the assembly of believers. This community in faith is achieved through the achievement of common understandings and judgments. As in most other communities, this achievement is not realized through the separate and independent efforts of the Church's members, working out for themselves an understanding and reaching their own judgments, only later to discover that they share these with others and so form a community. Community is much more often achieved by a process of communication and belief. If "reality is socially defined,"[24] belief is the primary principle of that definition.

If communities are distinguished by their common understandings and judgments, beliefs or doctrines clearly play a central and constitutive role. 'Doctrines' should not be taken here to mean initially or primarily reflective or critical propositions. While at a certain stage of development such propositions may be important and even necessary, they are preceded by, refer to, and build upon insights and judgments that pertain to the everyday world of the Church's self-constitution. A community builds and expresses its understanding and evaluation of the world through the telling of stories, the evocation of memories, the ritual re-enactment of earlier events, the demonstration of living examples. It may be pushed to reflective and critical articulations of its constitutive meanings and values by the opposition of other interpretations, or the threat of internal betrayal, or even by a kind of spontaneous exigence towards the theoretical. These, or at least the last two of them, may at times have such an urgency that the integrity of the distinctive community of meaning is at stake. In such moments, in defining its beliefs, the Church is really defining itself, stating what its constitutive interpretation of God, world, and self is and indicating thereby what it means to belong to it. Such defensive articulations thus become themselves also constitutive of the community itself. If these should lead some of its members to try to put some theoretical order into the whole body of beliefs, this is a further differentiation within the community. Very seldom, however, do genuinely theoretical meanings become themselves constitutive of a community

[24] Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* p. 116.

whose primary self-realization is in the world of commonsense meaning.

By beliefs and doctrines, then, is here meant the whole vast body of insights and judgments that express and mediate the Christian understanding and appreciation of God, world, and self. While it may make some sense to put these into some sort of 'hierarchy of truths' or to seek some relatively short confessions of faith or elementary catechisms, the full reality is varied and diffuse. In any generation, within a particular cultural or social setting, certain portions or dimensions of the body of beliefs are likely to be favored over others. But history has its own dialectic, and what one generation neglects is likely to be rediscovered by the next, as images and words, statements and options, perhaps only dimly remembered or repeated by rote, a new crisis or concern suddenly invests with new light and power.

Entering the Church, an individual enters a world already interpreted and evaluated. It is a world with its own stories and memories, and to become a member of it is to find the memories recounted by others becoming one's own memory. The past whose interpretation in part constitutes the self is vastly extended as one is introduced to the memories of others and to their memories of the memories of others still.

The creation and recitation of such memory-linkages is vividly illustrated in the primitive credal statement enjoined upon Israelites in Deut 26:5-10. "A wandering Aramean was my father," it begins; "and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous." But suddenly it is no longer a tale about others in a distant past; now it becomes the story of the worshipper himself: "And the Egyptians treated *us* harshly; ...and the Lord brought *us* out of Egypt...." This shift from the third person to the first does not simply reflect the generation to which Moses is presented as addressing himself. Every Israelite of every subsequent generation could recite that creed as the story at once of his forebears and of himself. *He* was there in Egypt, and *he* was delivered by the Lord. Thus could Israel be sure "not to forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deut 6:12).

As Isreal remembers Egypt and the Exodus, the Church remembers Jesus of Nazareth. As in the case of Israel, this remembering is no minor element; it is constitutive of the common understandings and

judgments in which the Church now gathers and it is the ground of its hope. A first definition of the Church is that it is the community of those who remember Jesus Christ. As John Knox puts it:

> The remembrance of Jesus ... is the central element in a whole complex of remembrances, comprising what H. Richard Niebuhr in an eloquent passage calls 'the internal history' of the Church. Just as my own memories of the past, my 'internal history,' make up no small part of the substance of my personal existence, so the concrete being of the Church, not only depends on a common remembering of the past, but to a large degree, actually consists in the substance of these memories. Its 'body' is in large part a body of remembrances.[25]

The interpreted memory of Christ is also the Church's self-interpretation, and the self-constitution of the Church is the continued occurrence of the event of Christ himself. In its preaching, symbolizing, and celebrating of the memory of Christ, the Church offers to the individual the possibility of that self-identification which occurs when he makes the Church's memory part of that interpretative memory by which he locates himself in the world. To become a member of the Church is to find oneself interpreted by what the Church remembers.

The vast body of Christian beliefs thus becomes so many attempts to interpret and evaluate God, world, and self in the light of the remembered Christ. They mediate to the Christian a world created by God and redeemed by Christ and the possibility of his receiving and constructing a self appropriate to such a world: a self created by God, loved by God despite his failures and sins, recreated by the Spirit's grace into a new and transcendent life in the image of Christ. It is against the backdrop of these beliefs that the individual acts out the drama of his own task of self-realization. Because of the Church, his 'social-historical *a priori*' includes the name and the knowledge of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the memory of Christ, and the fellowship and works of the Holy Spirit. He may begin where the non-Christian does not begin, and, difficult as the task begun is, it is no small blessing to be able to start there and to be part of a community with others who have also begun there and with him undertake the same great task.

---

[25] John Knox, *The Church and the Reality of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 58; see also Gustafson, *Treasure* pp. 71-85, 113-137.

THE CHURCH AND REDEMPTIVE COMMUNITY

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter the ideas outlined earlier on the social mediation of the self were employed in order to present the Church as the matrix of Christian religious experience. But as the social mediation of the self needed to be related to the dialectic of historical progress, decline, and recovery, so an effort must be made to explain how the Church functions as an instrument of redemptive recovery. But to place this effort in context, certain fundamental theological developments must first be briefly described.

THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH'S REDEMPTIVE ROLE

The problem to which Christianity addresses its message and its mission is primarily and basically practical. In Lonergan's terms, it consists radically in the incapacity for sustained development caused by existential, social, and cultural bias. Frustrated and distorted development takes on an inertial force. Individuals are guided and governed by self-interest; societies are ruled by a competition among interest and power groups; cultures are shaped and defined by ever narrower visions of human existence. Any new generation finds these biases already in power, and it requires a rare ability to stand back from already achieved self, from already powerful social forces, from already persuasive cultural values, in order to attain an intelligent, critical, and free attitude and practice. No individual, society, or culture reaches the point of self-determination in some pure state. Authenticity is always a withdrawal from inauthenticity.

To a practical problem the only adequate response is a practical solution. A theory about the problem cannot supply the solution, for the achievement of such a theory is itself possible only to a self, a society, a culture that has overcome the practical problem at its root. Authenticity is not persuasive to the inauthentic. Furthermore, if from one point of view the problem lies in a distorted existential orientation, this is not a purely private fault but in large part also follows from and

beliefs, set free by its values. The self that he becomes as a Christian he owes, under God, to this community of meaning and value. But secondly, the individual and his companions in the Church become themselves the subject of the next moment in the dialectic. They themselves are now together the subject of the next historical self-realization of the Church. The Church which is the product of the experiences, understandings, judgments, and decisions by which they realize the community of faith, hope, and love becomes the concrete possibility of a new generation of believers.

Much of what this chapter has presented is perhaps more familiar in symbolic or strictly theological language. The Venerable Bede said that "every day the Church gives birth to the Church."[27] Theologians have distinguished the *Ecclesia congregata* and the *Ecclesia congregans*. The Second Vatican Council spoke of the Church as a sacrament, the sign that is at once the effect and the instrument of God's saving grace. This chapter has attempted to explain in other terms what this properly theological language means, first, by comparison with the constitutive principles of human communities and, second, by reference to the social mediation of the self. It has been undertaken under the conviction that the true mystery of the Church is precisely that which the Scriptures, the tradition, and the liturgy describe in their splendid images and language is true precisely of the communities of faith, hope, and love in which men and women encounter and become the Church.

---

[27] "*Nam et Ecclesia cotidie gignit Ecclesiam*" (PL 93, 166d), quoted in Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1963) pp. 65 and 269, n. 102.

CONCLUSION

Berger and Luckman proposed a neat statement of what might be called the dialectic of social existence: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product."[26] This chapter has suggested that a similar dialectic operates in the case of the Church: The Church is a human product. The Church is an objective reality. The Christian is an ecclesial product.

That the Church is a human product, it was argued, does not deny the Church's transcendent origin, nature and goal. It simply affirms that what God's word and grace have produced in the world is the human community whose historical subject is the group of men and women who are its members. These men and women gather around common meanings and values which they consider to be God's own self-communication, and even their very gathering in this faith they attribute to the grace of the Spirit. Still it is they who gather, and, under grace, in ways so similar to the ways in which other communites assemble that it can also be said that the Church is a human product.

That the Church is an objective reality describes the priority of the Church to its members. As an historical reality, the Church is one of the communities of meaning and value which a person may encounter in the course of his own history. It stands before him as a distinctive community, making distinctive claims, inviting him into a distinctive world, promising him a distinctive self. It is not the only community of meaning and value, nor even of religious meaning and value, that an individual encounters; and the loss of the monopoly which it once enjoyed, at least in the West, entails its much greater responsibility to render its distinctive claims plausible by embodying them in its life. But there the Church is, a community of language and beliefs, claiming to mediate a new freedom, an objective reality for a person to deal with, to choose or to reject.

Where its claims are met by the acceptance of the individual, two things happen. First the individual becomes a Christian by learning to share the language and beliefs and to enjoy the freedom the Church offers him. His story becomes part of the existential history of the Church. He finds himself described by its language, interpreted by its

[26] Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* p. 61.

negligible. The unmediated gift, in other words, becomes effectively constitutive of a life-long existential project only when mediated by an interpreting community's language and beliefs.

In the case of the Christian, it is the Church that thus mediates the unmediated gift. The Church traces its historical and present origins to a similar gift, experienced by Christians of every generation and known to them by the name 'Holy Spirit.' Along with that name, everything that the Church offers to mediate an understanding and an effective appropriation and existential articulation of that gift it draws first and foremost from the person of Jesus Christ. It is Christ whom it proposes as the one who exegetes the unseen Giver, whose life embodies the depths of the gift and the character of the life it must shape, whose own fate spells out the cost of accepting the gift and the assurance of its worth. From its knowledge of Christ and from its historical experience the Church draws a wealth of language and a body of beliefs that can enable a person to await and to anticipate the unfailing gift, to recognize it when it occurs, to cherish it and to foster it, to safeguard and to develop it. The Church's sacraments are not only celebrations of the gift, but the favored occasions of its offer and reception. In the existential memory of previous generations and in its own effective communion of lives touched by grace, it offers living demonstrations that the incredible gift can be trusted and the impossible challenge be embraced. Itself the creature of God's free gift in Christ and the Spirit, the Church thus mediates the effective freedom of the Christian self.

The affective intersubjective links through which this mediation takes place supply a good part of the concrete meaning of many of the biblical and traditional metaphors for the Church, particularly those of an organic character, such as the Body of Christ. For the common experience of the Spirit, the common interpretation of that gift around the figure of Jesus Christ, and the common pursuit of a loving service of God and men constitute a new and distinct communal life. This common life is the life of Christ himself, not only because it is he who won such a life for others, but because they are given to live in the world he inhabited, before the God whom he called Father, with the love which compelled him. Their concrete life is in Christ, and he lives in them — so really and so closely that they, this concrete social and historical body of men and women, are *his* Body, the living historical effect of his work and the event of its power.

receptive. But is is immediate in another sense also, because its created effect in us is not mediated by any deliberate act of ours, whether a question, an insight, a word, a judgment, a decision, and so on. The effect of God's self-gift is much rather the source from which spring the questions, insights, and so on that first give conscious expression to what has already been at work and in this way raise the question of what is happening within us. How else can one interpret both the biblical and the traditional insistence on the absolute priority of grace and the fact that both symbolically and reflectively the fundamental religious experience is usually described in the passive voice?

In almost every other respect, however, the self-gift of God must be said to be mediated to us. In the first place, the gift comes to a person with a body, a personal history, and a home within a community of language and beliefs. As true as it is that the gift of God and the new freedom it creates break the necessities and alter the probability-schedules of this world, the gift is to this particular, socially located individual. The new freedom it creates, as the images and literature of religious conversion make abundantly clear, is first of all related, even if only by negation or contrast, to what that individual has so far been. It is comfort in distress, or light in darkness, or courage in despair, or strength in weakness, or acceptance in estrangement, and so on. The content and shape of the transforming gift is experienced and known first by its existential opposite.

Secondly, while the new history of personal freedom begins as unmediated gift, as soon as it becomes a genuine bodily and social history and is articulated in conscious feelings, in questions and insights, words and judgments, decisions and acts, it has entered the world mediated by meaning. This is true not only of critical and reflective acts of meaning, but also of those everyday acts in which the new self expresses itself in image and symbol, gesture and rite, word and act; all of these belong to the social world and are marked by it. The expressive power of the socially available language and the interpretative power of the socially available beliefs will in crucial ways determine both the degree to which the unmediated gift can be attended to, named, and at least in part understood and also the concrete probability that the gift will become the consciously appropriated principle of a whole new life. What is noticed, named, and in part understood has an effective existential power that is not at all

The individual Christian, therefore, must not in principle be counterposed to the Church. The very notion of the Christian, even when defined principally or even exclusively by some single bearer of Christian meaning such as the Bible or 'baptism in the Spirit,' already includes the mediation of the Church. The Scriptures themselves do not communicate some pure message of God, but the revelation of God as received, interpreted, and expressed by the believing community and 'baptism in the Spirit' does not, it seems, normally take place outside the context of a community which proclaims the possibility and and need of such an experience. In communities where a larger body of mediations of Christian meaning are acknowledged, of course, the ecclesial mediation is even clearer. To counterpose individual Christian to the Church is to posit a believer who ignores the concrete conditions of the religious world he inhabits.

THE COMMUNITY OF FREEDOM

An earlier chapter noted the tension involved in holding together the inescapably personal character of an individual's project of existential self-constitution and the fact that whether and how this task is undertaken is some function of the communities to which he belongs or which he encounters. A similar tension exists in conceiving the notion of an ecclesial mediation of Christian freedom. But two further elements complicate the issue still more. At the heart of the Gospel is the love of God for each person and each person's free access to the throne of grace. And our generation is widely marked by a strong reaction to the view that interposes the institutions and sacraments of the Church between God and the individual and between the individual and God.

There is, of course, something right and healthy in insisting on the immediacy of the person's religious relationship with God. Not only does God not need to make use of created mediations of his grace, but in one fundamental sense the gift of God is always immediate. No external event or word or community can by itself produce the transforming conversion that is at the heart of the Christian life, the substitution for the sinner's heart of stone of a heart of flesh sensitive to the touch and call of God. That gift is immediate, first, because it is *God's* act, unforced, unmerited, creating out of the nothingness of man's sin. Before this originating event, we are only passive and

is encouraged and supported by distorted social and cultural orientations. The practical solution, then, cannot address only the individual's biased consciousness, but must also address the social and cultural biases that add their own force to the individual's sinfulness. If the concrete dynamics of the reign or expectation of sin include the priority of community to person, then the solution must also include the realization of an alternate, redemptive experience of community. The Church exists in order to provide just such an experience.

To conceive of the Church in the context of the redemption of history, however, necessitates a different notion of theology from the one which has tended to dominate. For now the theologian's role within the Church is not simply of internal ecclesial significance, but is a participation in, indeed one of the instruments, of the Church's practical redemptive role in history, society, and culture.[1] Theology itself has a redemptive role.

This means, first, that a theology intended to serve the self-realization of redemptive community must be conceived as a theory about a practice. It is practice and not theory that comes first. It is the practical history of frustrated and distorted development in individuals, societies, and cultures that sets the problem. It is the practical history of Jesus Christ, the practical experiences of grace in individuals, the practical self-realization of redemptive community in the Church that describe the solution. Christian theologians undertake their critical and theoretical tasks within and as part of a history of practice; and even in their most theoretical moments, they never cease themselves to be among the subjects of a quite concrete and practical dialectic of sin and grace.[2]

---

[1] See Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Ecclesial and Cultural Roles of Theology," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* **40** (1985) 15-32.

[2] Hence the importance of the notion of praxis developed by Lonergan in "Theology and Praxis," *A Third Collection* 184-201, where he relates theology as praxis to the question "whether there are basic theological questions whose solution depends on the personal development of theologians" (185). Charles Davis, while appreciating much of Lonergan's achievement, is quite critical of this notion of praxis; see "Lonergan's Appropriation of the Concept of Praxis," *New Blackfriars* **62** (1981) 114-126. I am not convinced that Davis avoids the dichotomy of subject and object of which he accuses Lonergan, and I do not find the latter's insistence on the need for conversion all that distant from Davis' own notion of the 'mystical element' which he considers to be "the deepest source and ground of politics" (C. Davis, *Theology and Political Society* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980] 180-181).

Theology, however, is a *theoretical* mediation of a practice. It seeks to understand what there is to be understood about the problem and by this effort to begin to make its own contribution to its solution. Its effort to understand the mystery of redemption in Jesus Christ is a further and distinctive contribution to the project that Lonergan once described as "a human science that is concerned, to adapt a phrase from Marx, not only with knowing history but also with directing it."[3] Theological understanding, then, includes as a central element a critical and dialectical focus which attends not only to the unintelligible and irrational dimensions of the problem but also to the transcendent and paradoxical elements of a solution centered upon the Law of the Cross.

To conceive theology as a theory about a practice is to move into the world of inquiry made familiar today by political and liberation theology. This move presupposes three methodological shifts which must be understood in order to appreciate why much theology has moved from a primarily contemplative to a primarily practical interest. These are the shift from classical to historical consciousness, the critical correction of anthropocentric theology by the political turn, and the identification of the religious *a priori* with resistance to suffering.

Historical Consciousness

For classical consciousness, man was described in terms of 'human nature,' for which a definition was offered of such generality as to apply to every human person.[4] The ideal of a science of the human aimed at the necessary, the normative, the immutable, the universal. There often operated the Aristotelian conviction that a science of the particular, contingent, and mutable was impossible. As concretely elaborated, the description of 'human nature' often suffered from what anthropologists call 'ethnocentrism,' the assumption that one's own culture has achieved something like the human ideal, so that other cultures and societies can be described and evaluated in

---

[3] *Insight* 227.

[4] For Lonergan's analysis of the move from classical to historical consciousness, see the indices to *Method* and *Second Collection*, s.v. For an often parallel analysis, see Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 33-54.

terms of their greater or lesser approximation to that ideal, called simply 'civilization.'

For historical consciousness, the focus of attention shifts from the universal to the particular, from the normative to the empirically given, from the immutable to the changing, from the necessary to the contingent. What it finds most striking about human phenomena is precisely their tremendous variety across generations and across cultures. Historical and empirical human sciences study this variety, and the intelligibility they discover there is not that of universal and necessary principles, but that of concrete responses of individuals and groups to their concrete situations, spatial, temporal, social, and cultural.

This cultural and scientific shift creates a new set of problems for theology. Classically, theologians turned to philosophy, and especially to metaphysics, for a discipline with whose aid to articulate, both theoretically and practically, the Christian message. Among Catholics, the philosophy employed boasted of its perennial and universal character. In the modern era, however, philosophy itself has moved from being primarily a contemplation of being to being an appropriation of human consciousness, both theoretical and practical. Even while making this move, furthermore, philosophy has lost its monopoly on the human. Alongside it, the theologian now confronts the variety of the human sciences which he simply cannot ignore if his reflection is to be concerned with actual and concrete individuals and groups. Philosophy may have still a role to play, but it is of a quite different character.[5]

To maintain the universal relevance of Christianity, theologians face a new challenge. In place of the abstract philosophical definition of human nature, whose universal and normative relevance they often assumed, there is now the bewildering variety of persons, societies,

---

[5] See Karl Rahner, "The Current Relationship between Philosophy and Theology," "Theology as Engaged in an Interdisciplinary Dialogue with the Sciences," and "On the Relationship between Theology and the Contemporary Sciences," successive articles in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII (New York: Seabury, 1975) 61-102. Rahner's own performance here, it seems to me, belies his pessimism about the possibility of overcoming the pluralism he describes as 'gnoseological concupiscence.' For Lonergan's views on the same subject, see "Philosophy and Theology," *Second Collection* 193-208; "Merging Horizons: System, Common Sense, Scholarship," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 1 (1973/74) 87-99; and "The On-going Genesis of Methods," *A Third Collection* 146-165.

and cultures as described by the human sciences. The task of mediating a universally relevant message, then, is far more complex and difficult than it once appeared to be.

It is likely to be on the level of method that the problem of the relation between theology and the human sciences will have to be met. It is on that level that the questions are raised within the human sciences which most basically address the issues of theological concern. Social scientists, after all, ask questions about the universal or at least general relevance of their methods, and by identifying the objects of their inquiry and in elaborating the categories of their interpretations, they are often led to make statements that apply cross-culturally.[6] Certain methodological and anthropological constants thus emerge. The anthropological constants supply a set of terms and relations which the theologian may find very helpful for understanding the experiences, events, and interrelationships of his own study of a humanity threatened by sin and blessed by grace.[7] The methodological constants of any discipline bear comparison with those of any other, including theology; and this comparison can be quite helpful to the theologian both for clarifying the relationships among the disciplines and for analyzing and forestalling instances of conflict.

This means, of course, that theologians will have to undertake a fundamental clarification of their own methods and procedures. If theology is itself a human inquiry, it must also vindicate the legitimacy of its method or suffer being considered uncritical. If theologians wish to enter into a critical and fruitful dialogue with other human sciences, they may be led to attempt an analysis of what Lonergan calls 'generalized empirical method.'[8] That will require them

---

[6] See Wilhelm Dupre, "Ethnocentrism and the Challenge of Cultural Relativity," in *True and False Universality of Christianity*, ed. C. Geffre and J.-P. Jossua (*Concilium* **135**; New York: Seabury, 1980) 3-13.

[7] Berger and Luckman remark: "There is only human nature in the sense of anthropological constants ... that delimit and permit man's socio-cultural formations" (*The Social Construction of Reality* 49). Edward Schillebeeckx outlines seven such constants in *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 731-743. For the impact of historical consciousness on the notion of human nature, see Lonergan, "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," *A Third Collection* 169-183.

[8] This term, already employed in *Insight* 72, seems to be preferred by Lonergan to 'transcendental method' to describe his effort to address the diversity of sciences through a study of the invariant operations of human consciousness. The cognitional theory, epistemology, and heuristic metaphysics which his analysis yielded

to ask of themselves also the basic questions, "What do I do when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do that?" It is only after attempting some such inquiry that theologians can hope to ground and to clarify the ontological status of the objects of their own inquiry and to make critical use of the human sciences and the anthropological constants which they claim to interpret and explain. The need for such a grounding is inescapable once theologians recognize that the modern human sciences study, not 'man' in the abstract, but men and women in the concrete social and historical situations and processes for whose basic dramatic principles the Christian tradition supplies the terms 'sin' and 'grace.'

The Political Turn

The modern philosophical 'turn to the subject' was mirrored in the anthropocentric turn which has marked much recent theology. This methodological shift has sought to construct a fundamental theological anthropology to serve as a hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the Christian message. The central role of systematic theology has been understood to be that of showing the intrinsic relationship between Christian doctrines and the fundamental concerns of the human person. As worked out, for example, by Karl Rahner, this theology presented man as in heart and mind a being oriented towards God, whose Mystery it is that by its presence-by-absence constitutes the 'whither of man's self-transcendence,' the surpassing goal sought in every particular desire or inquiry. This God it was who revealed himself as holy Mystery in his self-gift in grace and Word. The categories in which this basic anthropology was articulated were primarily existential and personalistic. Although, as his later writings make explicit, the interpersonal and social dimensions were not absent from Rahner's basic view, still the emphasis fell upon the individual poised before the historical responsibility of a self-constitution whose

---

constitute for Lonergan the essential contribution which philosophy can make in an historically conscious age. This is not philosophy as classically conceived: "Once philosophy becomes existential and historical, once it asks about man, not in the abstract, not as he would be in some state of pure nature, but as in fact he is here and now in all the concreteness of his living and dying, the very possibility of the old distinction between philosophy and theology vanishes" (*Collection* 266).

ultimate implication was simultaneously his relationship to the Mystery that is God.[9]

If Rahner is the great representative of the anthropocentric turn in theology, his former student, Johann Baptist Metz, represents a critical correction and extension of that turn into a political theology. The motive for this turn is the desire to speak more concretely about the subject of the human and religious quest. Metz argues that much of what Rahner took for granted as the shape and character of the individual's self-project was due, not simply to universal features of the human person and condition, but also to the conditions of personal existence in late bourgeois society.[10] Metz asks why authenticity is so great and so common a problem, why so many people feel lonely and alienated today, why an existentialist and personalist representation of Christianity has struck so many and such deep chords in twentieth-century men and women. The questions themselves suggest that there is a social and cultural factor at work, one which Rahner seems either to have ignored or taken for granted. If, however, a political element is at work in the experiences to which an anthropocentric theology relates the Christian message, can a theology be redemptively effective without trying to identify that element and address it in its own terms? A theology that does not understand that 'existence is a political problem in the widest sense of the word' is dealing with an abstraction.[11]

In many ways Metz's critique parallels Marx's critique of Feuerbach: the 'man' of whom such a theology speaks is an abstraction deflecting attention away from real men and women and the actual conditions in which they face their existential problems. A presentation of Christianity that seeks principally to assuage the existential loneliness and alienation of individuals serves in fact to reconcile them to their social and cultural conditions. It induces them

---

[9] For a good brief statement, see "Theology and Anthropology," *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIII 28-45. For the sustained exploitation of the method, see *Foundations of Christian Faith*.

[10] Metz inaugurated this critique in chapters III and V of *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 81-97, 107-130. He developed it into a critique of the bourgeois theological subject in *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), especially 3-83, 154-168.

[11] Metz, *Theology of the World* 110-111.

to take those conditions for granted precisely because it concentrates the religious question and challenge in the individual's lonely self-project. Paradoxically, the very success of this theology is an index of the degree to which late industrial society has succeeded in forcing religion from the public to the private sphere. Metz argues that the very notion of the individual which lies at the heart of this view of religion is itself a social and cultural product of western modernity and must not be taken for granted as a universal and defining element of human existence. Existence is a political problem, and Christianity, to be truly and effectively existential, will have to receive a political interpretation which consciously and critically considers the general and specific social and cultural conditions under which individual existence is such a widespread problem.[12]

The Concrete Religious A Priori

The third shift in theological method follows directly from the second. It concerns the identification of the 'religious *a priori*,' that is, that dimension in the human person or condition to which religion addresses itself. The religious *a priori* becomes a theological *a priori* when it is articulated as a fundamental anthropology and serves as a hermeneutical key for an understanding of religion.

This final shift can be illustrated in the writings of Edward Schillebeeckx. In his earlier work, Schillebeeckx followed a line of argument similar in many ways to Rahner's, grounding his theology in an anthropology for which God, as the ultimate horizon of human conscious desire, 'belongs to the full definition of man.'[13] But in his later writings, Schillebeeckx argues that the theological *a priori* which makes Christian speech about God intelligible is not so much the experience of the absent Mystery of God as the experience of and resistance to the betrayal and corruption of the mystery of man.[14] This need not be understood as requiring the abandonment of the earlier

---

[12] If theology fails to exercise this critical function, Metz argues, "it delivers faith up to modern ideologies in the area of societal and political theory" (*Theology of the World* 111).

[13] See "Faith Functioning in Human Self-Understanding," 47.

[14] Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1974) 62-70, 91-95; *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 616-625.

position which Schillebeeckx shared with Rahner. But the later approach takes with fuller seriousness and with fuller concreteness their common conviction that speech about God is anthropocentric. To speak about the threatened, betrayed, corrupted *humanum* is to describe the concrete human experiences to which speech about God must be addressed. *This* is the humanity that thirsts for God; *this* is how his absence is experienced: this cry of pain, this tortured body, this oppressed spirit are the sound and feel and shape of man's need for God. Speech about God speaks to the experience of suffering and to the protest against it and resistance to it that are the constant element that remains however great may be the differences among positive descriptions of the human.

If the religious and theological *a priori* is identified with resistance to suffering, then, as Schillebeeckx recognizes, this fundamental practical protest itself implies both some notion of what it is that is threatened, betrayed, and corrupted and also some experience of the possibility or even the actuality of a better condition.[15] The latter he locates in what sounds like traditionally described religious experiences, and here is where his earlier position can be integrated into a full vision. As for the positive notion of the *humanum* implied in the experiences of negativity, Schillebeeckx, like Metz, seems rather pessimistic that it can gain any great measure of agreement about what the *humanum* is or should be. This pessimism may in part reflect his view that a description of integral humanity is not only much more difficult than has commonly been thought, but also runs the danger of an ethnocentric consecration of the cultural *status quo*.[16] On the other hand, he does make use of a description of anthropological constants in order to mediate his contemporary interpretation of the New Testament doctrine of salvation.[17] It is not clear, however, that he considers this a sufficient basis on which to clarify or to try to overcome the philosophical, theological, and ideological pluralism of views about the integrally human.

When the concrete religious *a priori* is conceived as resistance to suffering, however, the issue of pluralism may itself need to be recast. When theology is conceived primarily as contemplative theory, a

[15] Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith* 95-101.

[16] See *The Understanding of Faith* 93-94.

[17] See *Christ* 731-43.

pluralism of methods, vocabulary, and even conclusions may be tolerated or even welcomed which may be considered an unaffordable luxury when theology is conceived of primarily as a theory in the service of redemptive recovery. What is then at stake is not simply an effort to understand the world and the Church, but an effort to change the world and to make the Church a fit instrument of that redemptive recovery. For this task, too easy a reconciliation with an often contradictory pluralism may be a form of despair in the face of the threatened *humanum*. The concrete and practical character of the human problem will not be addressed effectively if all the disciplines that study the human and if all the views of what the human ought to be are not subjected to critical and dialectical analysis. Theologians ought to be attempting that in the light of the Christian message and in the light of the positive notion of the human implied in universal resistance to suffering and in such 'signals of transcendence' as are given in the experience of grace. Refusal or reluctance to undertake that task, even in the name of an often understandable appreciation of pluralism, would mean the surrender of the practical redemptive responsibilities of theology itself.

The Contemporary Theological A Priori

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the three shifts in method just described. They do not simply add new objects for theologians to consider. They concern the asking of every theological question about any object, and they imply criteria for evaluating the importance and relevance of any theological question, reducing the status of some, retrieving others from neglect, discovering others for the first time. The shifts are not minor methodological adjustments in an essentially continuous theological task, but fundamental re-orientations that affect not only the men and women whom the theologians study but theologians themselves in their practical self-realization both as persons and as theologians. This is, no doubt, why political theology and its specification in liberation theology have aroused such widespread opposition.

The shifts are describing a differently conceived theological task. They mean that the theologian brings a different self with different concerns and different questions to the body of objects which he studies. If there remain the same body of objective representations of

Christian meaning and value — the Scriptures, the tradition, the liturgy, the magisterium, and so on — these are seen differently, approached differently, interpreted and evaluated differently. The new theological *a priori* serves as the beam of light which illumines what otherwise is dark, bringing certain features into bold relief, leaving others in the shadows, accentuating what other lights left undetected or only dimly seen. Every theologian has always brought one light or another to his task of searching the Scriptures and other monuments. The methodological shifts described above represent an effort, first, to make theologians reflect on what lights they are bringing to their task and, second, to provoke them into a genuinely and historically critical self-consciousness.

These shifts, finally, provide a broader context in which to locate the basis which Lonergan provides for a discussion of the Church as redemptive community. They help to clarify his conviction that ecclesiology is in part at least an effort at a theology of history in the concrete, that is, as the dialectic of progress, decline, and redemptive recovery.

THE COMMUNAL MEDIATION OF REDEMPTIVE RECOVERY

In *Insight*, Lonergan's description of redemptive recovery was almost entirely heuristic. It anticipated a divine intervention to overcome the priority of living over learning how to live by a grace that effects a higher integration in a reoriented self and by a word that offers a higher viewpoint on the human condition and destiny. Love is the gift given to tend the downward spiral of selfishness and revenge. Hope overcomes the tendency of people to surrender to historical and social determinisms. Faith offers a true vision of God, world, and self to overcome the narrow world into which an allegedly realistic common sense would confine their minds. And all these gifts work concretely in a new community which is both the effect of these gifts and the instrument of their historical and social efficacy.

In *Method in Theology*, this analysis continued to provide the framework, but redemption now was described also in terms drawn directly from Christian revelation. There is a first general statement:

> The church is a redemptive process. The Christian message, incarnate in Christ scourged and crucified, dead and risen, tells not only of God's love but also of man's sin. Sin is alienation from man's authentic being, which is self-transcendence, and sin justifies itself by ideology. As alienation and ideology are destructive of community, so the self-sacrificing love that is Christian charity reconciles alienated man to his true being, and undoes the mischief initiated by alienation and justified by ideology.[18]

Here the redemptive role of the Church is grounded in its twofold origin in Christ's message and in the Spirit's gift of love. The message names and interprets man's plight as sin, the refusal of or withdrawal from the authentic pursuit of self-transcendence. It also names, locates, and interprets the divine response to our plight in Jesus Christ and in the love poured out into our hearts. The Spirit's love attacks sin as its root in alienated consciousness, giving a new, integrated self, while the message about Jesus Christ both interprets that gift and opens out upon a vision of the world and of human history that can undo the ideology by which we reconcile ourselves to our self-alienation.

In an earlier passage in *Method*, Lonergan directly related the Church's redemptive role to the analysis of progress and decline. Religious faith was first invoked as a concrete promoter of individual and social progress:

> For faith and progress have a common root in man's cognitional and moral self-transcendence. To promote either is to promote the other indirectly. Faith places human progress in a friendly universe; it reveals an ultimate significance in human achievement; it strengthens new undertakings with confidence. Inversely, progress realizes the potentialities of man and of nature; it reveals that man exists to bring about an ever fuller achievement in this world; and that achievement because it is man's good also is God's glory.[19]

---

[18] *Method* 364.

[19] *Method* 117. Lonergan cites Aquinas: "Deus suam gloriam non quaerit propter se sed propter nos." Irenaeus' dictum comes to mind: "Gloria Dei vivens homo, et vita hominis visio Dei" (*Adversus haereses*, IV, 20,7).

The coincidence of the human good and divine glory in this passage evokes one of the ways in which the question about God can arise: 'Is it with man that morality emerges in the universe so that the universe is amoral and alien to man, or is the ground of the universe a moral being?'[20] Faith responds that man is not the only instance of free and originating value, that is, a person who himself originates the good:

> Without faith the originating value is man and terminal value is the human good man brings about. But in the light of faith, originating value is divine light and love, while terminal value is the whole universe. So the human good becomes absorbed in an all-encompassing good. Where before an account of the human good related men to one another and to nature, now human concern reaches beyond man's world to God and to God's world. Men meet not only to be together and to settle human affairs but also to worship. Human development is not only in skills and virtues but also in holiness. The power of God's love brings forth a new energy and efficacy in all goodness, and the limit of human expectation ceases to be the grave.[21]

The support and transcendent fulfilment which faith offers to the drive towards human progress, however, is concretely the overcoming of the distortions introduced by the biases of sin:

> Most of all, faith has the power of undoing decline. Decline disrupts a culture with conflicting ideologies. It inflicts on individuals the social, economic, and psychological pressures that for human frailty amount to determinism. It multiplies and heaps up the abuses and absurdities that breed resentment, hatred, anger, violence. It is not propaganda and it is not argument but religious faith that will liberate human reasonableness from its ideological prisons. It is not the promises of men but religious hope that can enable men to resist the vast pressures of social decay. If passions are to quiet down, if wrongs are not to be exacerbated, not ignored, not merely palliated, but acknowledged and removed, then human possessiveness and human pride have to be replaced by

[20] *Method* 342; see also 102-103, *Second Collection* 85-86, and *Philosophy of God, and Theology* 54.

[21] *Method* 116. For the distinction between originating and terminal values, see pp. 50-51. God is described as originating value also on 116-117 and 141-143.

> religious charity, by the charity of the suffering servant, by self-sacrificing love. Men are sinners. If human progress is not to be ever distorted and destroyed by the inattention, oversights, irrationality, irresponsibility of decline, men have to be reminded of their sinfulness. They have to acknowledge their real guilt and amend their ways. They have to learn with humility that religious development is dialectical, that the task of repentance and conversion is life-long.[22]

In earlier descriptions of redemptive recovery, Lonergan had employed the triad of the theological virtues in a similarly structured argument,[23] and the redemptive response to cultural decline into ideology was presented as being effected through the truths of revealed faith. In the passage above, however, while not denying the importance of doctrines, Lonergan insisted that redemption does not occur fundamentally on the level of argument or propositions, but in the distinctive kind of 'knowledge born of religious love' which he calls faith. With a reference to Pascal, he describes this as 'another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love.'[24] Religious faith is the knowledge attained through the love which God himself pours into the heart of the converted individual.

This brings us to the heart of the redemptive process, the event of conversion.[25] Lonergan described a threefold conversion: intellectual, moral, and religious. Each of these events takes place, not on the level of logic, argument, or theory, but on that of value, decision, practice. One is not even argued into intellectual conversion; it represents a vertical exercise of freedom, the choice of a new horizon of the mind from which to look out upon a new and at first quite strange world of inquiry.[26] This is all the more true of moral and religious conversion. None of these existential shifts is basically or originally mediated by argument.

---

[22] *Method* 117-118.

[23] See, for example, *Second Collection* 8.

[24] *Method* 115.

[25] It is, of course, not accidental that the event that is central to the redemption is also for Lonergan the key to method in theology. What *Method* argues at length is presented more briefly in "Theology in its New Context," *Second Collection* 55-67.

[26] For the notion of 'vertical liberty,' see *Method* 40, 237-238.

Furthermore, the familiar sequence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion does not describe a likely causal succession. While in one passage Lonergan argues that 'cognitional self-transcendence is much easier than moral self-transcendence,' he takes pains to point out that it is itself by no means easy and that if it is not at least accompanied by moral self-transcendence, it is likely to be pathological.[27] The causal succession is much more likely to be from religious to moral, and from moral to intellectual conversion.[28] This is another clue to the concrete dynamics of redemptive recovery, for if human recovery and progress are linked to the occurrence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, then a practical priority must lie with the last of these, the ordinary source of the first two.[29]

For Lonergan, then, redemption is the occurrence of healing in human history. The human effort of development from below upwards is met by a divinely originated development from above downwards, where the 'above' refers not only to God's intervention but also to the primacy Lonergan consistently assigns to existential orientation and personal commitment. And these require love of one sort or another, a love that liberates from decline and unleashes human creativity:

> There is the transformation of falling in love: the domestic love of the family; the human love of one's tribe, one's city, one's country, mankind; the divine love that orientates man in his cosmos and expresses itself in his worship. Where hatred sees only evil, love reveals values. At once it commands commitment and joyfully carries it out, no matter what the sacrifice involved. Where hatred reinforces bias, love dissolves it, whether it be the bias of unconscious motivation, the bias of individual or group egoism, or the bias of omnicompetent, short-sighted common sense. Where hatred plods around in ever narrower vicious circles, love breaks the bonds of psychological and social

[27] *Method* 122.

[28] *Method* 243.

[29] This is, of course, simply a transposition of classical theological theses about the moral incapacity of fallen minds and wills. The relationship betwen intellectual conversion and religious conversion lies at the heart of Lonergan's historical argument in "The Origins of Christian Realism," *Second Collection* 239-261.

> determinisms with the conviction of faith and the power of hope.[30]

As formal as these several descriptions may appear, they clearly have been written by one familiar with the constitutive principles of genuine Christian community. The faith, hope, and love which constitute the Church as a distinctive human community are also the principles of that redemptive recovery of which the whole race is in radical need. The Church, then, does not gather around private or sectarian meanings or values, but around meanings and values whose concrete reference is to a dialectic of sin and grace that defines the drama of all social and historical existence. What distinguishes the Church from the world is precisely what relates the Church to the world.

THE LAW OF THE CROSS

This becomes even clearer in the central affirmation which Christians make about Jesus Christ: that he is the Savior of the world. In his textbook, *De Verbo Incarnato*, Lonergan, after a discussion of the biblical and traditional doctrine of redemption, offered a thesis which represented his own effort to identify and define the intrinsic intelligibility of this central belief. He called it 'the Law of the Cross' and stated it thus:

> The Son of God became man, suffered, died, and was raised from the dead because in his wisdom God ordained and in his goodness willed, not to remove the evils afflicting the human race by an act of power, but, in accordance with a just and mysterious law of the cross, to transform those evils into a supreme good.[31]

---

[30] *A Third Collection* 106. Frederick Crowe has drawn attention to the theme in his *The Lonergan Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1980) 72-73, with the references in note 37, p. 115.

[31] Lonergan, *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964) 552. William P. Loewe has studied Lonergan's doctrine of redemption and related it to contemporary discussions in: "Lonergan and the Law of the Cross," *Anglican Theological Review* 50 (1977) 162-174; "Dialectics of Sin: Lonergan's *Insight* and the Critical Theory of Max Horkheimer," *Anglican Theological Review* **61** (1979)

The thesis is an exercise in theological understanding. It presupposes the biblical symbols and affirmations about Christ's redemptive work. It attempts to bring the many elements involved in Christ's death and resurrection and in biblical and traditional reflection on them into an intelligible unity to the degree that this is possible for an event which mediates between the absurd incomprehensibility of sin and death and the mysterious incomprehensibility of a wise and good God who "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom 8:32).

The mystery encompasses the divine response to the problem of human evil. That response was not an exercise of power removing the evils that afflict us. Behind this refusal of power lies the even deeper mystery of God's permitting evil, sin, and death. All that we can know is that God has created a world in which evil can abound and that in fact he has not chosen to remove that evil by a single great act of power. Instead, his own Son experienced that evil and sin and submitted to their consequences in death. In suffering their consequences, Christ not only did not add to the weight and mass of sin and evil; by his love and forgiveness he transformed their consequences into an act of sacrificial love whose fruit is the transcendent good that is the salvation and reconciliation of the human race. The 'problem of evil,' then, is not met either with an act of power or by some facile rationalization. It is met effectively in the forgiving love by which Christ suffered men's evil and exhausted its power in his own body, so that death became the principle of the new life which the Father gave him in raising him from the dead.

What was accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection is also the law under which every Christian lives. Baptism is a dying and a rising; the Eucharist is the effective remembering of Christ's passover from death into life; the Christian life is a death to self and a life for God, the willing suffering of evil rather than either flight from suffering or retaliatory defence. All of the most distinctive and most urgent demands of the Christian life rest upon and flow from the assumption by Christ's brothers and sisters of the law of the Cross which he undertook for their sake. The Christian life is the continued

224-245; "Two Theologians of the Cross: Barth and Moltmann," *The Thomist* **41** (1977) 510-539.

add to the mass and momentum of sin and evil and in a love that would rather suffer than injure, die than kill. In its fullness, Christian faith poses the challenge of whether that practice is solely the work of man or whether it has become the practice of God himself in the death and resurrection of Christ.

It is a long way, of course, from the concrete fate of Jesus Christ and his vindication by God and from the descriptions of the Christian life given in the New Testament to the experience of human suffering and evil and its analysis today. A whole host of disciplines must today mediate the application of the law of the Cross to concrete experiences of suffering and to the healing and reversal of the individual, social, and cultural causes and conditions of that suffering. But it makes a great difference that what is to be mediated is a vision that refuses either to glorify or to deny suffering, that argues that death is not the final word to be spoken over us, that asserts that this last enemy is already in principle overcome, that professes that God himself has demonstrated that there is a love that is stronger even than death. It is the value of such love that Christian faith discerns, the power of such love that Christian hope embraces. And in the faith, hope, and love that constitute the Church as a distinct community of meaning and value in the world the Church seeks to represent, embody, make a redemptive difference in the world. If there is such a community in the world, then there is concretely at work another way of dealing with human decline, and there is concretely given to others an opportunity to resist the deadening repetition of the cycles of individual, social, and cultural decay.

In his thesis on the law of the Cross, Lonergan's schematic descriptions of redemptive recovery lose their formal character and reflect the central and distinctive features of Christian faith, hope, and love. The point should be stressed, because otherwise it might be thought that with this thesis Lonergan retreated from the world of frustrated and distorted human progress into a private and sectarian religious world. In fact, however, the law of the Cross represents for Lonergan the specifically Christian contribution to the redemptive recovery of human history. The social and historical dimensions of the reign of sin are not forgotten; they are central to the problem to which the Cross is offered as the divine response. That response, revealed and realized in the person of Jesus Christ, is, in and through its representation and continued realization in the Church, to be the

living out of the way in which Jesus Christ faced and overcame the evils of human existence.

So brief a summary cannot represent adequately the wealth of biblical and traditional material which Lonergan sought to bring together in this one thesis. It is enough, perhaps, to show how it intrinsically relates the distinctive fate of Jesus Christ and the distinctive and central meanings and values which bring men and women together as the Church. In and through them there is to continue to be present in the world what was present and first realized in Christ, the divine response to human evil. In its doctrine, its worship, and especially its daily life, the Church is to re-present that mode of redemptive recovery which God in his wisdom and goodness chose, that paradoxical power-in-weakness which the Cross represents. The Church's teaching recalls the memory of Christ and tells again and again the story of his death and resurrection. Its sacraments make the mystery present again in symbol and effective power. Its life realizes it again whenever evil is encountered, met head-on, overcome by patient hope and forgiving love.

It is, of course, as Lonergan noted, only religious faith that can acknowledge the redemptive power of the Cross.[32] For Nietzsche the Cross symbolizes to what a degree Christianity is a religion fit for resentful slaves. For Marx it represents the ideology by which the rich secure their privilege by inducing the poor to suffer their misfortunes gladly. But if, on the one hand, Christians have too often prepared a ready soil for such views by their neglect or misuse of their central symbol of life, the modern refusal of the Cross itself illustrates precisely what is at stake in the commitment of Christian faith.

For the acceptance of the Cross lies at the center of Christian religious conversion. It defines the historical and historic meaning of Jesus Christ, and it concentrates what it means to confess him as Lord and Savior. It starkly represents the choice by which men and women decide whether Jesus Christ offers the standard by which they will interpret and evaluate and order their lives in the world. The message of the Cross embodies the challenge to accept that the problem of evil is not capable of a theoretical solution, whether philosophical or theological, and that it is truly met only practically, in the refusal to

[32] *De Verbo Incarnato* 525.

social and historical light and power by which human decline is reversed and human progress liberated.

This is only to return to the point from which this section began: that what distinguishes the Church from the world is precisely what relates the Church to the world. In Lonergan's terms, the bold claims of modernity to an autonomous creativity should not be counterposed to the central Christian conviction of the need for healing through the Cross of Christ. The dialectic of progress and decline itself is a call for healing, but healing is for the sake of a new creativity, for the liberation of intelligence and freedom for a creativity which lifts man beyond the narrow confines in which he too readily limits himself, towards an historic self-responsibility undertaken all the more confidently because enlightened by the belief that it is a project which he does not assume alone and sustained by the hope and love that faith generates.

CONCLUSION

These four essays represent an initial attempt to demonstrate the potential fruitfulness of constructing an ecclesiology on the basis and with the help of a concrete anthropology. They largely take for granted the legitimacy of the turn to the subject which has characterized so much twentieth-century Catholic theology. The great advantage of this move is that it tries to overcome the extrinsicism of the nearly exclusive emphasis on formal authority found in much Neo-Scholastic theology as well as the tendency towards positivism found in those theologians who believe that the only appropriate response to the intellectual challenges of the modern era is a massive assertion of the simple Christian fact.

The anthropocentric turn may legitimately appeal to such classic theological grounds as the *propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem* of the Creed and the First Vatican Council's appeal to man's last end as an integrating factor in systematic theology. But it also has the great advantage of attempting in our age something like the courageous effort of an Aquinas to deal critically and constructively with a new, profound, and widespread cultural challenge. For the challenge of modernity has largely been that of a powerful assertion of human autonomy, which has effected the liberation of philosophy from

theology, of the natural and human sciences from both of those disciplines, and the differentiation of vast areas of human life from the control or even the influence of religion. In all these developments, it is not an easy task to separate the wheat from the chaff, and the temptation is great to consider the whole development as nothing less than an apostasy and to wish to return to the simpler age of Christendom. This is one of the versions of what some are calling 'post-modern Christianity.'

This curious combination of apocalypticism and romanticism evokes the memory of earlier disputes, most clearly the disputes between Aristotelians and Augustinians at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century. At a time when others were retreating into a simple appeal to ecclesiastical authority and an apocalyptic anti-intellectualism, Thomas Aquinas set down to work. He read Aristotle, the commentators, and those who were deriving from them conclusions inimical to the faith. What he found that was true and valuable he retained and used to construct a synthetic vision of the faith; what he found that was mistaken and dangerous he sought to refute by rational and theological argument. What emerged from this effort was a transformed theology, remarkably different in language, forms of argument, and social location from the monastic theology that had prevailed before. When the Church canonized both the man and his work, it was putting its blessing on one of the most courageous and revolutionary efforts in the history of theology.

The question today in many respects concerns the legitimacy of the Thomist effort. Are the only appropriate responses today apocalyptic choices between good and evil, faith and unbelief, grace and nature? Or is there still room for Thomas' incessant *Distinguendum est*? The turn to the subject in theology is an act of faith in the possibility and fruitfulness of the type of response which Thomas attempted. Not only does it draw upon his example, it is much indebted as well to the conviction that a powerful assertion of the powers of human nature is compatible with an equal conviction of the necessity of grace. In fact, it was the elaboration of a critical notion of human nature that enabled him to articulate the precise meaning of the dialectic of sin and grace that is central to Christian anthropology. Similarly, the efforts of theologians like Lonergan, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx attempt to take seriously the claims of modernity and to

demonstrate that they need not be considered incompatible with the Christian doctrine of redemption.

The pertinence of the earlier debate becomes particularly clear when one moves from the private individual into the second moment of the turn to the subject, when the persons are considered in their full concreteness as embodied, socially located, and affected by the historical dialectics of sin and grace. Now the issue is posed not simply in terms of the individual's existential self-project and its ending in salvation or damnation, but also in terms of our collective responsibility for the historic future of mankind. The unfortunate fact is that, for a variety of reasons, this collective self-responsibility often was defined as first requiring an emancipation from religion, as if the latter were irreconcilable with it. This repudiation of central Christian doctrines has led both to the marginalizing and privatizing of religion and to the view of those churchmen and theologians who either are content with purely ecclesial roles or identify Christianity today with a basic repudiation of the whole modern project and opt for a 'post-modernity' suspiciously like one or another form of 'pre-modernity.' That they can appeal to more than one form of 'post-modern' developments supports the view that a genuinely critical engagement with modernity is a mistake in principle.

The ecclesiology heuristically outlined in the previous chapters is an effort to sketch a more hopeful possibility. The foundations for ecclesiology are laid in a view of the concrete person, socially and culturally located, subject to sin and open to healing from above. It does not glorify either 'human nature' or 'modern man,' but neither does it fail to take both seriously. It relates the role of the Church at once to the religious experiences of individuals, for which it supplies the matrix, and to the historical dialectic of progress and decline, for which it offers the hope and reality of redemptive recovery. It is thus integrally related to even while critical of the emphases upon the individual and upon our collective historical self-responsibility which so mark contemporary consciousness.

I do not pretend that these essays represent a complete ecclesiology. Several areas need much further development: the constitutive role of liturgy and sacrament, the foundations and role of ministry, and, perhaps above all, the incidence upon the Church itself of the dialectic of progress, decline, and recovery, that is, the question of the sinfulness of the Church. I remain convinced, however, that all

these themes can be developed coherently from the foundations I have tried to lay here. And perhaps time and energy will permit them to be taken up in the future.