

THE CHURCH AS A HUMAN REALITY: ECCLESIOLOGY AND SOCIAL THEORY

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Abstract

Ecclesiology cannot be restricted merely to the interpretation of statements – biblical, liturgical, theological and in the Catholic dispensation, magisterial – about the church but must rather, in addition, take cognizance of the fact that the church is a social reality constituted by the common consciousness of its members. To understand the church one needs to understand her members – how they live, how they function and how they relate, for this makes them the Church. This paper will investigate the ideas of Bernard Lonergan, Joseph A Komanchak and others who link ecclesiology and the human sciences in discovering a theology of the Church for today.

Keywords: Ecclesiology, Social Theory, B Lonergan, JA Komanchak

Introduction

Ecclesiology cannot be restricted merely to the interpretation of statements such as biblical, liturgical, theological and in the Catholic dispensation, magisterial statements *about* the Church but must rather, in addition, take cognizance of the fact that the church is indeed a social reality constituted by the common consciousness of its members. To understand the Church one needs to understand her members – how they live, how they function and how they relate, for this makes them the Church.

The Second Vatican Council declared that the Church is a single but complex reality composed of both divine and human elements (*Lumen Gentium*: 8). In Catholic theology neither element may be denied without sacrificing the element of the mystery of the Church (Komanchak 1995: vii). On the one hand, the Church is transcendent in her origin and purpose for she results from the work of Christ and lives by his Spirit. On the other hand, she comes to be as a human community realising herself through common communal experiences, understandings and commitments. Thus the transcendent and supernatural dimensions of the Church do not remove her from concrete historicity, rather, they proclaim and realise the real meaning of human history. Thus:

... 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 (Komanchak 1995:82).

Catholic theology's distinction between grace and nature can allow, then, for a relative autonomy of sociology from theology. As Lonergan contends:

Grace perfects nature, both in a sense that it adds a perfection beyond nature and in the sense that it confers on nature the effective freedom to attain its own perfection. But grace is not a substitute for nature, and theology is not a substitute for empirical human science (Lonergan 1957:767).

This means, then, that theology can incorporate the work of the social sciences. Ecclesiology is a division of theology that deals with social realities so the social sciences can never be a mere afterthought. I contend, then, that the insights of the social sciences need from the beginning to be integrated within certain theological discourses such as ecclesiology. Bernard Lonergan contends:

[The Church] will have to recognise 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 when theology unites itself with all the other relevant branches of human studies (Lonergan 1972:361-364).

In the light of the above observations this article will argue that as Catholic theology has made an "anthropocentric turn", ecclesiology will of necessity, have to be grounded in categories that express a basic anthropology. This will mean that in some respects theologians will find themselves closer to the methodological base of social scientists. Consequently, this paper will first investigate the church as a human and social reality and show that a systematic theological understanding of the Church will be similar in some respects to other systematic understandings of social realities. The next section will seek to investigate further the relationship between sociology and theology and its application to ecclesiology. Special attention will be given to the British anthropologist, Victor Turner's [1920-1983] studies of "structure" and "communitas" in order to find the proper relationship between authority and creativity in ecclesiological theory. Next, will follow an exposition of Lonergan's theory of history. He states: "I will incline to the opinion that its formal element¹ [here, the Church] remains incomplete as long as it fails to draw upon a theory of history" (Lonergan 1957:742). Lonergan's theory of history is a tale of progress and decline and of recovery and its generating principles are intelligence, sin and grace. The theory of history leads logically to Lonergan's and Komanchak's (a disciple of his method) ecclesiology for the Church is both the sign and agent of God's redemptive purposes in history as the new community, with new experiences, new insights and new values in response to the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Komanchak 1995:87).

The conclusion will analyse the contributions of Lonergan and Komanchak and suggest that theological work will increasingly need a sociological understanding of the human condition in order to shed light on a contemporary understanding of the Christian message regarding sin, salvation and the Christian community.

Church as Human Community

In approaching this section I sound a note of caution. Ecclesiologists need to be alert to any kind of sociological reductionism. The Church is a mystery known ultimately by faith and consequently its transcendent elements can only be received and described by faith. However, such transcendent claims contained in images such as the "People of God", the "Body of Christ" and the "Temple of the Holy Spirit" never exhausts the reality of the Church. Rather, they are not dealt with adequately from a theological angle unless they relate to the mission of the Church in history as an agent of God's redemptive purposes for this world.

In order to distinguish more clearly the transcendent and human aspects of the Church, Lonergan suggests a twofold division into "general" and "special" theological categories. Special theological categories refer to that which is proper to theology alone: concepts

¹ Lonergan distinguishes in theological works between the *material element* and the *formal element*. The former involves the data to be taken into account and the latter the patterns, relations and categories used to arrive at a coherent understanding.

known only by revelation and unknown to reason and which are not within the competence of the human sciences. On the other hand, general theological categories refer to objects studied both by theology and various human disciplines. These would include categories such as “community”, “institution”, “society”, “history” (Lonergan 1972:361-363).

To turn our attention to the “human” aspects of the Church, we need to note the work of James Gustafson, *The Church as a Human Community* (1961). In this work he criticises “theological reductionism” by which he means “the exclusive use of biblical and doctrinal language in the interpretation of the Church” and “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” (Gustafson 1961:100).

The search for a “human” ecclesiology must begin with reflection on the constitutive role of meaning. Lonergan understands meaning as “a constitutive element in the conscious flow that is the normally controlling side of human action” (1972:178) [and which is] ... his horizon, his assimilative powers, his knowledge, his values, his character” (1972:356). This search for understanding, meaning, reflection and consequent decision is what constitutes human subjective consciousness. However, the search is not just individual: Communities, too, are constituted by a common meaning (1972:356-357). A reality, then, that is constituted by meaning is then socially mediated: Through language (1972:72, 235, 304); “in [a] symbiotic fusion within a far larger context of [community] beliefs” (1972:41-42); through understanding and judgment which “...arranges it in an orderly whole of almost endless differences partly known and familiar...” (1972:77) and through belief so that “[t]o appropriate one’s social, cultural and religious heritage is largely a matter of belief” (1972:41).

To turn to the community of faith, the church, too, is mediated and constituted by meaning. Indeed, “[r]eligious conversion is the experienced fulfilment of the very transcendental notions which propel man² into the work of individual and communal self-constitution” (Komanachak 1995:36). The communal dimension is essential for ecclesiology and we note that the essence of the Church, that which makes it a community, is mediated through a common experience of the Christ event, through the creeds and doctrines that interpret that event and the common life of service it inspires (1995:39). Indeed, in relating the Church to society, Lonergan understands the Church as an effort to realise or recover the sense of “community” which is “the ideal basis of society” (Lonergan 1972:360-361). In large and complex societies, alienation, ideology, and individual, group and general bias³ undermine both community and progress. The Church, therefore, has a redemptive role in human society (1972:55):

The church is a redemptive process... 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 (1972:364).

However, the Church must forever realise that it is “not the full science of man” (1972:361). Rather, theology can cast light on only certain aspects of human reality and that the choice “can become a fully conscious process of self-constitution only when theology unites itself with all other relevant branches of human studies” (1972:364).

² “Man” is understood here to include both genders.

³ *Individual bias* is egoism which restricts intelligence and self-transcendence which might threaten his selfness. *Group bias* seeks to preserve the interests of the group from a self-transcending intelligence that would integrate groups into a common order. *General bias* generates society and history in its own image and inhibits the creative possibilities of intelligence, reason and responsibility. See Section 4 for more detail.

In concluding this section and relating the "human" Church to society on a more secure basis, a brief exposition of Lonergan's notion of "sublation" will be given.⁴ For Lonergan conversion can be intellectual, moral or religious. Intellectual conversion is sublated by moral conversion which arms it against bias and links the pursuit of truth to value (1972:242). Similarly, moral conversion is sublated by religious conversion when "religious conversion transforms the existential subject into a subject in love, a subject held, grasped, possessed, owned through a total... other-worldly love" (1972:242). Thus, as moral conversion goes beyond intellectual conversion, so religious conversion is an experience of the transcendent. "Holiness abounds in truth and moral goodness, but it has a distinct dimension of its own. It is other-worldly fulfilment, joy, peace, bliss" (1972:242). Thus "sublation" is able to integrate the diverse purposes of the Church:

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 motivate the lower; and second, that there is only one world, in which man's choosing is inefficacious without transcendent fulfilment and his knowing is mutilated and his self alienated from God (Komanchak 1995:45).

Attention will now turn more specifically to the church and its relationship to social theory. This is indeed a relationship that is complex.

Church and Social Theory

Ecclesiology investigates the reality called the Church. In the previous section we focused on the church as a human community constituted by human actions, interests and decisions. This will inevitably involve engagement with the social sciences. The first section proposed that the grace/nature distinction in catholic theology would permit the contribution of the social sciences as an exercise of human reason in the study of theology.

Neil Ormerod notes:

The Council of Nicaea could not have spoken of the unity of Father and Son without evoking the general philosophical category of "substance" transforming the category in the process. So, too, ecclesiology speaks of the existence of the Church in history drawing on appropriate categories that seek to explain processes, social structure, cultural identity and historical change, again transforming these categories in the process if needed (2002:11-12).

Ormerod (2002:13) further notes four clear identifiable, interrelated categories in any human society which resonate in ecclesiology: Structure, identity, authority and change. He notes that, as every society is concerned with the question of identity, so the Church, too, must define the processes and institutions that mark her identity. The Church claims a special type of authority. In what way, then, is authority in the Church different from other human societies? How do we understand the nature of change in both human societies and the Church? A democratic society can be subjected to fundamental revision; if the church is of divine origin does this mean she can never change (2002:13-15)?

Komanchak (1995:68) draws attention to what he calls "implicit ecclesiology": An ecclesial aspect can be acknowledged without explicit attention to the Church and further, developments and events in the life of the Church can occur without being specially directed by a reflection on the Church as such, for example, the canonisation of the New Tes-

⁴ "An intellectual conversion involves a choice to live by intelligent inquiry and critical reasoning. A moral conversion is a choice to live responsibly and for the sake of genuine value. Religious conversion meets the self-transcending thrust of the first two conversions and anticipates a free appropriation of God's loving self-gift" (Komanchak 1995: 98).

tament writings, the emergence of the threefold ministry, the development of conciliar practice etc. He notes: "As often as not, these developments preceded and prompted the theories that legitimated them" (1995:68). These developments are examples of the self-realisation of the church, what we may call the life of the Spirit, and here the ecclesiolgist's work will resemble the work of the sociologist who interprets other social realities (1995:68). Furthermore, according to Komanchak, ecclesiology will look to the social sciences for both method and assistance in understanding certain fundamental categories such as 'individual', "community", "society", "change", 'structure', "institution", "relationship" (1995:69). He asks a very pertinent question: "Can an ecclesiolgist address the question whether the Church is a 'community' or a 'society' or an 'institution' without learning from social theorists what these words mean in concrete social life?" (1995:70).

As noted earlier, there are two sorts of data which the Catholic ecclesiolgist must investigate: Scripture, tradition, liturgy and magisterial teaching on the one hand and the concrete self-realisation of the Church on the other hand. The social sciences can be applied to the concrete reality of the church but, as Komanchak suggests, the relationship between the two types of data is, indeed, very complex and can be described in terms of an "hermeneutical spiral" (1995:71). This can be defined as follows: "An interpretation of one set of data conditions and is conditioned by the interpretation of the other set" (1995:71). This raises the relationship between second-order and first-order language: The authoritative statements about the church are second-order interpretations; first-order statements involve a language by which the Church first realises itself (1995:72). Thus, according to Komanchak (1995:73): "The second-order statements which the Church receives as authoritative may perhaps be understood as steps beyond constitutive immediacy toward a reflexive and eventually critical self-consciousness on the part of the Church."

I turn next to the work of the British anthropologist Victor Turner for a concrete, contemporary example of the value of social theory in further understanding the creative diversity that must exist in true ecclesial unity. His is an exploration into the dynamics animating every socio-cultural community. Turner's research demonstrates that society is a dynamic process "... consisting of two mutually interactive poles that he came to call 'structure' and 'communitas'" (Starkloff 1997:645). Turner (1978:252) defines structure as "... the patterned arrangement of role sets, status sets, and status sequences consciously recognised and regularly operative in a given society and closely bound up with legal and practical norms and sanctions". "*Communitas*", on the other hand, is "... a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities which arise spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations and circumstances" (1978:250). "*Communitas*" is important for ecclesiology for it leads to an investigation of the role of marginalised [liminality⁵] groups both in the Church and secular society. Turner (1967:129) argues that:

Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of *communitas* outside of or against "the law". Exaggerations of *communitas*, in certain religious political movements of a levelling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, over-bureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification.

Turner sees that liminality is the source of symbolic creativity in society,⁶ but that spontaneous "*communitas*" must develop structure and rules and become normative "*communi-*

⁵ Turner (1967b:106) defines liminality as "the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the future of existence."

⁶ Turner has three subdivisions of *communitas*: spontaneous, normative and ideological. *Spontaneous or existential communitas* is the initial stage of becoming in a marginalized group. *Normative communitas* is "the at-

as". Turner's point is that all forms of historical existence call for structure. However, in his view, the Church can and does benefit from "*communitas*" experiences as all structures can become self-serving and uncritical.

Carl Starkloff (1997:657) appraises the value of liminal and marginal groups for the Church. "[T]he Church can continue critically to draw spiritual strength from marginal *communitas* groups, and thus resist its own ossification as well as absorption by secular structure.

Jean-Marie Tillard (1992:206), in similar vein, asks how the church can, without surrendering its historical and visible structure, avoid the rigidity that stifles communion. Like Turner, the anthropologist, Tillard, the theologian, seeks to link structure (the concrete, visible aspect of the Church) with the dynamic creativity of *koinonia*. Put differently: What is the proper relationship between authority and creativity?

Having demonstrated that social theory has a clear function in theological discourse, certain problems need to be addressed: The social sciences are not a unified body of knowledge; the social sciences often present a self-enclosed body of knowledge encompassing a given theory; the method of verification of theories makes engagement with theologians difficult. Gregory Baum (1974:22) is especially concerned with the first issue, namely "the problematic unity of sociology". He has previously listed several fields of interest: Sociology of institutions, sociology of organisation, sociology of religion, sociology of knowledge, sociology of culture (1974:23). He observes, however, that "[s]ociology is actually a conflictual field of learning ... they [sociology departments] look upon society from different perspectives" (1974:24). He then lists the various trends found in contemporary departments of sociology of which I mention four: Positivist-empirical sociology⁷, functional sociology⁸, critical or conflict sociology⁹ and phenomenological sociology¹⁰ (1974:25-28).

In a clarification of the relationship between theology and the social sciences in the light of the above observations, I wish to stress the following points:

- The social sciences do enjoy autonomy from theology but this can only be a relative autonomy. Indeed, theology can broaden the scope of sociology.
- Lonergan has noted that theology cannot give a total account of reality: It needs the natural and human sciences. Neither can the social sciences give a complete account of human data. Human living is also touched by divine grace.
- There is a particular concern that the social sciences neglect the problem of evil. In the next section particular attention will be given to Lonergan's analysis of "bias" (the secular equivalent of sin) in social life. This is a radical lack of intelligibility, rationality and responsibility that impedes progress and advancement. Bias distorts the field of data for the social sciences. Expressed differently, then, a neglect of the problem of evil can make the social sciences less than scientific.

In concluding this section, then, I affirm that theology, and especially ecclesiology, can incorporate the work of the social sciences. Any theological work that deals with social

tempt to capture and preserve spontaneous *communitas* in a system of ethical precepts and legal rules" (Turner V&E 1978:252). *Ideological communitas* is a "formulation of remembered attributes of the *communitas* experience in the form of a utopian blueprint for the reform of society" (*ibid.*).

⁷ With the natural sciences as model, its conclusions must be scientifically verifiable.

⁸ Any social action must be understood within a total social system. In striving for balance this model can be said to adopt a conservative position.

⁹ Hidden conflicts in society need to be brought to light so as to lead to a reconstruction of social life.

¹⁰ Society is studied from within so as to clarify the constitution of a particular society.

realities such as ecclesiology cannot give a proper theological analysis without integrating a re-orientated or re-constructed social science from the beginning. The social sciences can never be added as a mere afterthought. Neil Ormerod (2005:840) summarises this position well: “What is required is a theological *gestalt*, a framework that is at once theological and social scientific.” The framework that is required, according to Lonergan, is a theology of history – which is the subject of the next section.

Bernard Lonergan’s Theory of History

I begin an exposition of Lonergan’s theory of history by relating this theory to Turner’s categories of “structure” and “communitas”. Lonergan’s *Insight*, too, speaks of a tension within human community that arises from the spontaneous intersubjectivity of primitive community and the social order that is derived from practical intelligence. There is thus a “dialectic of community” (Lonergan 1957:211-214). While intersubjectivity is spontaneous, practical human living is not. Consequently, society develops in a distorted and twisted manner, bereft of any coherent order alternating between reform and revolt (Lonergan 1957:215-218). Lonergan proposes 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” (1957:218-225).

Having surveyed the initial dynamic of historical development, Lonergan outlines three principles that guide its development: Progress generated by intelligence and freedom, human decline generated by what he calls “bias” and historical recovery or redemptive intervention. Each of these generative principles will be addressed in turn.

The quickening of human consciousness through questioning meaning, truth and values leads to self-transcending insights, judgments, decisions and then actions (Lonergan 1957:228) which are intelligent, reasonable and responsible. Such a sustained quality of action is cumulative, leading to new reasonably judged and responsible possibilities. Genuine human progress is the result and its guiding principles are intelligence, reason and responsibility (1957:53).

However, progress is not easy and is impeded and distorted by what Lonergan (1972:48-51) calls “bias”. Bias can arise on the one hand from the inner depths of the individual¹¹ and on the other hand from the “dialectic of community” mentioned earlier. These two origins of biases are parallel: Individual spontaneous immediate desires are subordinated to practical intelligence and its technical mastery of nature;¹² intersubjective spontaneity is subsumed and integrated into a larger ordered societal whole. Lonergan (1957:213) expresses the tension thus: “Intersubjective spontaneity and intelligently devised social order possess different properties and different tendencies yet to both by his very nature man is committed.”

From their common origin, three biases can be discerned leading to social and cultural decline. First, individual bias is egoism: The inability to permit critical intelligence and responsibility to relate personal living to the common good in a self-transcending move beyond the subject (Lonergan 1957:215). Second, group bias alienates group from group so that social progress is either to the advantage or disadvantage of diverse social groups. Group interest is paramount and society is ossified into classes serving self-justifying cumulative success:

¹¹ See footnote 3 above.

¹² See Chapter VI in Lonergan 1957.

Just as the individual egoist puts further questions up to a point, but desists before reaching conclusions incompatible with his own egoism, so also is the group prone to a blind-spot for the insights that reveal its well-being to be excessive or its usefulness at an end (Lonergan 1957:218-222).

Bias, then, shuts out the development of a self-transcending intelligence both for the individual and the group. Both are unable to move beyond themselves: They are thus locked into social and cultural decline.

Third, general bias finds its source in common sense. Komanchak (1995:131) explains common sense thus: "For Lonergan, common sense is a specialisation of human intelligence which deals with the concrete and immediate, with things and persons in their relationship to us, for the purpose of finding practical solutions to practical problems" (Lonergan 1957:173-181). Common sense can be thought of as "uncritical thought" for it is loath to look beyond what is immediate and practical. It is the abdication of intelligence, reason and responsibility and surrender to "mere facts": Intelligence is then confused with what is practical. This abdication is at root a misuse of human freedom and leads to what Lonergan (1957:476) calls a "social surd": The unintelligent, unreasonable and irresponsible orientations that negatively influence social situations. These in turn further distort personal decisions, further contributing to the social surd. In such a situation there is a cumulative deterioration of the social situation, "a surrender of detached and disinterested intelligence" leading to radically, uncritical, social situations (Lonergan 1957:228-232) that threaten the very freedom of humanity.

What is the solution? According to Lonergan (1957:223), the problem demands a "higher viewpoint in man's understanding and making of man". Komanchak (1995:21) notes, "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". This higher viewpoint which Lonergan (1957:237) calls "cosmopolis" is defined as:

A detached intelligence that both appreciates and criticises, 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 further defines this higher viewpoint (cosmopolis) as "a withdrawal from practicality to save practicality. It is a dimension of consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical possibilities" (1957:241). However, "cosmopolis" is inadequate in the face of stifled intellectual development, lack of self-responsibility and consequent forms of social renunciation. As long as history suffers from incomplete and distorted development, a higher viewpoint will be inadequate and a still higher integration will be necessary (1957:241): A third component, beside progress and decline, a "redemptive recovery" (1957:630-633, 688-693) from individual inability and refusal to develop and from social and cultural alienation from freedom, intelligence and responsibility. Genuine human development is thus threatened both by "individual psychological and selfish bias ... [and] distorted social progress and cultural aberration" (Komanchak 1995:27).

Redemptive recovery, then, according to Lonergan (1957:703), must involve what he calls "some special species of faith" which will involve some co-operation with God in solving the problems outlined above (1957:713). This provides a context within which to understand the church: A new community, the bearer of a new individual, integrated self-understanding and of a reconciled, re-integrated social order "in the unfolding of all human history and in the order of the universe" (1957:724).

In the next section we will investigate Lonergan and Komanchak's ecclesiology. Human communities deformed by bias and sin call for a new community where human consciousness will be thrust toward self-transcendence and the negativity of alienation and ideology undone.

Lonergan's and Komanchak's Ecclesiology

The previous section Lonergan's theory of history prepared the ground for his ecclesiology. As suggested earlier, Lonergan (1957:743) proposed that a theory of history would provide the categories for ecclesiology: "[A theory of history would provide] 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."

Intelligent progress and bias (sinful decline) are thus not enough. The redemptive principle of human history, the articulation of hope and possibility within human history through God's grace and revelation is the third component. Redemptive recovery is a restoration of human potential through intelligent and responsible actions in union with Jesus Christ.

Lonergan's *Insight* provided a foundation for a theology of the church: The social context of individual existence, the social and historical embodiment of sin, the church as the bearer of a new understanding of reality in a reconciled social order and the Church's historical and cosmological role in the re-ordering of the cosmos.

We turn now to Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. Here, the consideration is not that of individual and social impotence but God's grace meeting the push of consciousness towards self-transcendence. For Lonergan the Church is a "supra-structure" erected upon a founding religious experience. However, the core of the ecclesial community is not only the inner word of grace but the outer word of revelation expressed in the history of Israel and the event of Jesus Christ: "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" (Lonergan 1972:361).

The basis for Christian community, however, lies in the nature of community as common experience, common understanding, common judgments and common commitments (Lonergan 1972:79, 356-357). It is common experience, however, built on basic human living, seeking meaning, truth and value, and the transformation of the self that provides the fulcrum for Christian community. Komanchak (1995:148) finds, however, that the distinctiveness of Christian community is on the level of understanding, judgment and decision:

It consists in the fact that Christians centre their understanding, judgments, and decisions about their basic experiences around the figure of Jesus Christ. ... 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.

Komanchak, while acknowledging theological fears that the unique character of the Christian community may be compromised by comparison with other social communities, nevertheless, insists that the transcendent and distinctive reality that it is must be realised "in the human and self-constituting community of actual men and women" (1995:149). He affirms that such is Lonergan's framework. The Church, for Lonergan is the result of the work of Christ and lives in his Spirit but it comes to be, as noted earlier, as a human community through common experiences, common judgments and common commitment. It, like any human community, is committed to the task of self-realisation without any denial of a divine initiative (1995:149).

The Church is indeed a new community of meaning and value; a "new creation", a "sacrament" or sign and the instrument of redemptive union with God and of the unity of the human race (*Lumen Gentium*: 1). Komanchak sees in the Church a community of language, a community of belief and a community of freedom. As a community of language the Church brings the believer into a new world of meaning and value: "Within such a community ... 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 radiate the emergence and growth of the Christian self" (Komanchak 1995:157). As a community of belief the believer enters into a world already interpreted and evaluated: A world created by God and redeemed by Christ and a world in which a new self can be constructed in conforming to this new world (1995:157). As a community of freedom, the Church supports the immediacy of the believer's free religious relationship with God through grace. Thus:

The unmediated gift ... becomes effectively constitutive of a life-long existential project only when mediated by an interpreting community's language and beliefs ... Itself the creation of God's free gift in Christ, the Church thus mediates the effective freedom of the Christian self (Komanchak 1995:161).

The Church's function is, as outlined by Lonergan, "redemptive recovery": A divine intervention to overcome alienation, effect a higher integration of a reorientated self and promote, through the Spirit, the pursuit of self-transcendence. In *Method in Theology* Lonergan (1972:116) evokes religious faith in support of transcendental fulfilment:

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. ... human development is not only skill and virtues but also 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.

Divine recovery involves, as seen earlier, the overcoming of the alienation introduced by bias and sin (1972:117-118) and the threefold process of conversion: Intellectual, moral and religious. Lonergan sees redemption as the occurrence of healing within human history. In the words of Komanchak (1995:181):

The human effort of development from above downwards, is not 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.

Finally, the cross, for Lonergan, points to both the divine and human response to the problem of human evil. Komanchak outlines Lonergan's "Law of the Cross". God has created a world in which evil can exist, and, rather than removing evil by an act of power, he has allowed His Son to experience evil and sin and submit to their consequences to the point of death. By His forgiveness and love he has transformed the consequences of sin into an act of sacrificial love which effected salvation and reconciliation for the human race. His death, then, becomes the principle of new life. Consequently, the life of the believer becomes a living out of the way in which Jesus faced and overcame the evil embedded in human existence (Komanchak 1995:183-184). The Christian community, the Church, continues the response realised in the person of Jesus and works uniquely to reverse human decline and liberate human progress:

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

met only practically, in the refusal to add to the mass and momentum of sin and evil and in a love that would rather suffer than injure, die than kill (Komanchak 1995:184-185).

How may we now assess the contribution of Lonergan, Komanchak and others mentioned in this paper to an ecclesiology informed by a theory of society, an ecclesiology, that in my opinion, demonstrates that theological/ecclesiological and sociological notions of the church can be made to complement each other in a non-competitive and mutually enriching way?

Conclusion

The dominant ecclesiology today is a theology of *communio* or *koinonia*. Walter Kaspar (1989:150) comments that "there is only one way into the future: The way pointed by the Council and its communion ecclesiology. This is the way that God's Spirit has shown us." Indeed, the models of the Church as communion, sacrament and institution play primary roles in John Paul II's ecclesiology.

However, a difficulty with communion ecclesiology could be its idealising tendency: With its strong, almost romantic and utopian appeal to the unity of the church, it makes insufficient contact with the concrete data of history. On the other hand, an ecclesiology orientated in terms of mission, the mission of the Church, envisages the Church more in terms of a future (teleological) orientation to the kingdom of God. Communion ecclesiology, in terms of the sociological terms we have used, a functionalist option: It stresses the value of interdependency, harmony, integration and unity (Ormerod 2002:27-28). Consequently, it can be said to almost idealise the *status quo* and has a difficulty in responding to change and development. Thus a communion ecclesiology may represent the ecclesiological end in being a symbol of ecclesiological integration, but does not sufficiently address the issue of the pilgrim church, a symbol of ecclesiological operation and transformation in history. Would it be fair to accuse communion ecclesiology of a tendency towards Platonising idealism in that its starting point is the primacy of the ideal?

In contradistinction, Lonergan, Komanchak and others surveyed in this paper, stand in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition with a strong emphasis on the mission of the Church in the very concrete reality of ecclesiastical history. This assessment is supported by Komanchak himself, for he situates himself, Lonergan and others adopting a similar ecclesiological position, in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. In constructing an ecclesiology with the help of anthropology and social theory, they, like Aquinas, have sought in Komanchak's words:

...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 these disciplines, and the differentiation of vast areas of human life from the control and influence of religion (1995:186-187).

Thus the efforts of Lonergan, Komanchak and others constitute a contemporary response of the type Aquinas attempted. It affirms the conviction of Catholic theology that an assertion of human nature (involving in the contemporary context, social theory and history) is compatible with an equally strong assertion of the absolute necessity of grace.

Thus an ecclesiology has been outlined that is social, concrete, embodied and strongly affected by the historical dialectical tension of sin and grace and yet open to the healing that comes from above. The Church's role is related to the historical and social dialectic of progress and decline and the offer and hope of redemptive recovery. Such an ecclesiology con-

firms that God's action comes through the structure of human experience and that God's grace is not a "substance" that God creates in the recipient, but is, instead, God's favour shown in the flourishing and wholeness of Christian life, both individual and social, as Christian life moves towards the fullness of "redemptive recovery" in the eschaton.

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