

Toward a More Hospitable Church: A Dialectic of the Ecclesiology of Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) and Peter C. Phan (1943-...)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the interconnection between the phenomenon of migration and ecclesiology by analyzing the thoughts of Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) and Peter C. Phan (1943-...). Utilizing qualitative method and literature study, this research seeks to elucidate how Lonergan's idea of historical consciousness and Phan's theological-ecclesiological reflection upon the Church could bring about a fresh understanding of the Church which is more hospitable and hence more inclusive. This is certainly not an easy task as the Church has undergone a lot of dynamics. Looking back at the history of this more-than-two-thousand-year-old institution, one will find that it is indeed a history laden with accounts of migrations. Consequently, while Phan's project of doing a theological reflection on migration can pave the way towards a more hospitable Church, Lonergan's proposal to resort to historical consciousness may serve as the key element in ecclesiology.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi keterkaitan antara fenomena migrasi dan eklesiologi dengan menganalisis pemikiran Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) dan Peter C. Phan (1943-...). Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dan studi literatur, penelitian ini berupaya menjelaskan bagaimana gagasan Lonergan tentang kesadaran historis dan refleksi teologis-eklesiologis Phan mengenai Gereja dapat menghadirkan pemahaman baru tentang Gereja yang lebih ramah dan dengan demikian lebih inklusif. Ini tentu bukan tugas yang mudah, mengingat Gereja telah mengalami banyak dinamika. Jika melihat kembali sejarah institusi yang berusia lebih dari dua ribu tahun ini, kita akan menemukan bahwa sejarah tersebut sarat dengan kisah-kisah migrasi. Oleh karena itu, sementara proyek Phan dalam melakukan refleksi teologis tentang migrasi dapat membuka jalan menuju Gereja yang lebih ramah, usulan Lonergan untuk

menggunakan kesadaran historis dapat menjadi elemen kunci dalam eklesiologi.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Migration, as a global phenomenon, has significantly affected various dimensions of society: social, political, and even ecological (Oko & Ndubuwa, 2021). In ecclesiological dimensions, it has also posed a challenge including inclusivity, adaptation, and acknowledgment toward diverse communities (Gray, 2016). So significant is the challenge that the Church as both a spiritual and social institution should be able to correctly address the phenomenon of migration in order to stay relevant. It is pressing that the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the migrants should be taken into consideration in ecclesiology in such a manner that this contemporary challenge is sufficiently tackled (Groody, 2013).

Studies have been conducted on the issue of migration and they have shown that theological approach to the issue can be divided into several categories. Magezi (2017) identifies that the phenomenon of migration has raised different theological responses, from purely pastoral to systematics, focusing on doctrinal formulation. Hanna (2024), with the hope of introducing the theme of migration in such a way so that it can shape and even change Christian theology, emphasizes the import of "Theology of Migration" to address the issue. Ralston (2016) and van Erp (2018) also study the relevance of theology vis-a-vis migration, focusing on how the Church can address this challenge in ways that are inclusive and relevant. However, a gap still needs filling: a lack of integration between ecclesiology as a theoretical exercise and practical response to migration, taking into account history as a context and the historicity of the Church.

The salient argument of this paper is then intended to fill this gap by doing a dialectic between Lonergan's idea of historical consciousness and Phan's theological reflection on migration. By doing so, it is hoped that a purely academic and theoretical ecclesiology can be reconciled with that which readily addresses a certain social issue at the level of praxis. The author wishes to elucidate that the dialectic of the two theologians can do the groundwork for being a Church that is more inclusive and hospitable to migrants.

1. RESEARCH METHOD

The research focuses on the dialectics between Lonergan and Phan and how this very dialectic may help with a sufficient ecclesiological response to the issue of migration. The research is conducted by studying the writings of the two theologians that one can justifiably use as lenses to view the phenomenon of migration, perusing the primary sources (Samosir, Djunatan, Haq, & Viktorahadi, 2023). As secondary resources, the author uses additional books which deal with the contemporary issues in ecclesiology and migration. The research is qualitative in nature, concentrating upon theological analysis through literature investigation (Lune & Berg, 2017; Setia & Haq, 2023; Viktorahadi et al., 2022).

The analyses are performed in several interconnected steps (Silverman, 2013). First of all, data are collected by organizing and categorizing primary texts from Lonergan and Phan. Next, the data are reduced by summarizing the main arguments from both to identify key concepts pertaining to the issues of ecclesiology and migration. After that, more categorization and codification are

carried out so that one has clear organization of the concepts. The next step is to conduct thematic analysis in which the author explores how Lonergan's ideas and those of Phan are interrelated and may contribute to the understanding of how the Church addresses the issue of migration. Finally, a synthesis is formulated, which sheds light on a deeper understanding of ecclesiology, especially one that is more inclusive and hospitable.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Ecclesiology as an Intersection

Ecclesiology is a branch of theology that studies the nature of the Church (Carson & Cerrito, 2016, p. 36; Davie & others, 2016; Kärkkäinen, 2021; Wehbe-Alamah & McFarland, 2020). This seemingly clear definition is by no means easy to understand (Battin, 2022). Ormerod (2014) writes that some works in ecclesiology seem to despair of the possibility of a systematic account of the Church, preferring to view the Church using various models or paradigms, while others view the current state of the subject as a clash of various root metaphors, each one seeking dominance as the "true" form of ecclesiology. Some take the notion of *communio* as their starting point, while others begin with the Church's mission. While this rich diversity helps us to fill out the complex reality of the Church, one may be left wondering how these diverse approaches might fit together into a single coherent understanding.

Studying the nature of the Church should result in a systematic account (Chivu, 2024). However, instead of doing so, ecclesiology seems to move to the opposite direction leading to a miscellany or even miscellanies of different opinions (Ormerod, 2014, p. 4). An ecclesiologist might construct his notion based on almost any elements in theology: bible, the tradition of the Church, the *magisterium*, the fathers, or Vatican II (Roper & BTheol, 2021). Up to a certain point, Avery Dulles' *Models of the Church* (1987) is indeed the most influential English-language study of Catholic ecclesiological paradigms: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant. Nevertheless, as he does not systematically relate all the models, they merely serve as a diplomatic way of resolving the tensions arising from the clash of ecclesiologies (Ormerod, 2014, p. 17).

The difficulty in doing a systematic ecclesiology is also amplified by the fact that it is an intersection between abstract theological ideas and the concrete life of the Church (Fahey, 1991, p. 72). It is completely understandable that ecclesiologists tend to overemphasize one particular dimension of the Church, neglecting or even forgetting other dimensions altogether. One clear example is what Yves Congar (1946) would satirically call 'hierarchology,' that is, a theological reflection on the Church reduced to its institutional-judicial-clerical dimension. After a long period of such reductionism in ecclesiology, the idea of doing systematic ecclesiology comes as a new awareness. With the hope of avoiding any forms of reduction of the complexity of the Church to only one or some of its dimensions, a systematic ecclesiology should be a collaborative exercise: while drawing on multiple discipline in theology, it also embraces the concrete dimension that necessitates the findings from the social sciences (Komonchak, 1995, p. 10).

Covering many issues and incorporating all into a theological reflection, a systematic ecclesiology might collaborate with different branches of theology and social sciences, all for a constructive means to an end (Lonergan, 1988, p. 135). This collaborative approach aims at integrating empirical and historical account to the normative judgments, both ecclesiology and theologically, so as to come to a comprehensive understanding of the Church as an on-going historical process (Lonergan, 2016, p. 202). Furthermore, the development of the doctrines in the Church cannot be understood outside of its historical context. As a result, this challenges the Church to revise, reconsider, and reformulate its doctrines contextually to deal with concrete and specific issues. In other words, Lonergan's idea of historical consciousness is of help when one is doing ecclesiology. Hence, one can discover a vision of the Church which is sensitive to the

changes in socio-cultural contexts affecting the Church's life. Finally, such collaboration may revise and reformulate the doctrines in such a way that they are capable of tackling contemporary issues.

b. Lonergan's Approach in Ecclesiology

It is clear now that ecclesiology is always an intersection and that historical consciousness plays an important role in doing a systematic reflection. Therefore, a deeper look at Bernard Lonergan's reflection on the Church may be fruitful. Although Lonergan never published any writings which focused on what is now known as ecclesiology, a careful reading on his works will actually give directions in ecclesiology. There are two parts in Lonergan's writings that are significant for doing ecclesiology: the first one is Lonergan's epilogue to *Insight*; the second, his short definition of the Church in *Method in Theology* (Lonergan, 1972, p. 361).

In the epilogue to *Insight* (2002, p. 764), Lonergan writes that while the scriptural, patristic, and dogmatic materials for a treatise on the mystical body have been assembled, its formal element remains incomplete as long as it fails to draw upon a theory of history. He goes further (2002) by stating that it was at the fullness of time that there came into the world the Light of the world. 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 that contains the solution not only to man's individual but also to his social problem of evil.

Lonergan begins his description of the Church by laying out the distinction of the 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 (Komonchak, 1995, p. 77). Although it sounds complicated, it is basically what theology has been saying since time immemorial about what the Church is. Yet, one more element should be brought to the fore to make “a treatise on the mystical body” complete: a theory of history. The universal salvific will of God does not take place outside of this temporal reality. On the contrary, it happens within this temporal reality, within this framework of time. Its consummation is even carried out at a certain time in history, that is, in the cross of Jesus Christ! The narrative of the salvation is then retold over and over to bring back the anamnesis of the once and for all redemptive act through the cross that invites the faithful to do likewise in their concrete life: to keep finding solution to the problem of evil.

The question, then, will be: what is this “mystical body” actually? In *Method in Theology* (1972), his next masterpiece, Lonergan proceeds even further on his ideas on ecclesiology. Starting off by stating that the Church is a community that results from the outer communication of Christ's message and from the inner gift of God's love, Lonergan emphasizes the divine origin of the Church as a result of divine communication. Once it is established, the community will keep communicating the experience to others, resulting in more people sharing in the same cognitive, constitutive, and effective meaning and hence the Church is always in the process of self-constitution. He goes on further by stating that this very process of self-constitution is characterized by four features (1972, pp. 361–362): (1) it is always structured, (2) it is out-going, (3) it is redemptive, and (4) it is a fully-conscious process of self-constitution.

Lonergan, thus, highlights the idea that the Church has both human and divine reality (Komonchak, 1995, p. 82). The supernatural dimension of the Church does not exhaust its historical concreteness. As a matter of fact, the Church's participation in history is a response to divine intervention and a responsible act toward the world. This Lonerganian ecclesiology always includes in its reflection the fact that *the Church is an historical-concrete body*, consisting of men and women living in the contemporary world. Ecclesiology can never shy away from the daily struggle

and the 'messiness' of life. It is amid this personal and social topsy-turvy that the Church exists (Komonchak, 1995).

Lonerganian ecclesiology deals with both what is inside the human psyche and the socio-cultural reality. The progress-decline-redemption in history includes the human inner dynamics and what is going on in the society. The long history of the Church is 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 choices, actions, and events have a lot to do with decisions made by men and women out of common-sense (Komonchak, 1995, p. 109).

c. A Migrant Church

So remarkable is the influence of historical consciousness in doing a reflection on the nature of the Church that it should now be regarded as normative for a systematic ecclesiology that is true to its own history (Lawler, 2005). Being true to its own history is by no means collecting past facts and cherishing them as useless artifacts but it is a serious attempt to see the continuity of identity and hence an invitation to live it out in such a way that is relevant for today's world (Hamill, 2012). One salient feature that is often overlooked in the history of the Church is the fact that the history of the Church is marked strongly by migration (Brouwer, 2022). Lonerganian systematic ecclesiology is to embrace this part of identity.

As its etymology suggests, migration refers to any type of movement, whether temporary or permanent, voluntary or forced, of individuals and groups of people crossing territorial boundaries (Padilla & Phan, 2013, p. 1). Along with globalization, migration has become a burning issue today. The number keeps growing with the multi-crises that hit many parts of the world. It is about time that theology, especially through systematic ecclesiology as the intersection of the abstract and the concrete should begin to reflect upon this phenomenon without ignoring the fact that this attempt would never exhaust the complexity of the issue.

1. *Theological Perspective*

Indeed, ecclesiological reflection on how migration has been affecting the shaping of the Church cannot be separated from its theological reflection. Despite the many reasons and needs for leaving home to settle in a new terrain, civilizations have been colored with numerous accounts of migrations for a more transcendent reason. It is then necessary to have a brief look into the theological reflection on migration to give a more solid basis on the exploration of migration in the Church (Irvin, 2013, p. 73).

Ever since the first ancestors ventured out of East Africa some 100 thousand years ago, human beings have been globalizing. The ideas of home and settlement did not always relate to permanence for everybody in the group, nor do they do so for the next generations. Necessity, survival, commerce, conquest, enquiry, or spiritual visioning are but few reasons to move to new territories. For the Abrahamic religions, the figure of Abraham as one who migrated due to God's call is to be recognized as a meaningful event. In the case of Abraham, migration is a trope for salvation (Irvin, 2013b, p. 13).

Genesis 11:27-25:11 provides us with a narrative of Abraham and migration. It begins by the migration from the city of Ur to Haran. Although settling in Haran proved to be profitable, at a certain point God spoke directly to Abram and instructed him to go to a new land that God would show him. This instruction was accompanied by a promise of blessing in the future. Abram followed the instruction and set out to the promised land. Following the instruction did not mean that he would be free from troubles. Famine forced him to go to Egypt until finally he could return

to Canaan and remain to be nomadic. In the end, what he and his wife had was the field where they were buried (Irvin, 2013b, p. 13).

The memory of Abraham is preserved in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 3:25; Acts 7:2b-3; Romans 4:17-18; Galatians 3: 8-16). Furthermore, the first Christians saw themselves as members of the household of Israel, known as the Nazarenes. The scattering of those disciples-turned-apostles ("sent ones") followed at first in the footsteps of the scattering (*diaspora*) of the rest of Israel. Within a decade or two, the apostolic horizon widened to embrace Gentiles in the "scattering." Even as Christians began to separate their own identity from that of being Jewish, they kept to the pattern of going out and coming back, scattering and gathering, as central theological themes.

The dialectics of being settled and finding something has always been the leitmotif in Christian theology. Even the idea of *exitus* and *reditus* has something to do with these dialectics. Salvation is only achieved after a journey of searching for it. What lies between the *exitus* and *reditus* is but a process of "making sense" of reality, creating a coherent and intelligible system of meaning shared by the community and communicated to everyone outside the community in such a way so that it remains relevant to any circumstances.

2. *The Church Embracing Its History*

Embracing one's past means having the courage to accept one's own identity that is shaped by so many events. Some events might create good memories; but some others might create haunting nightmares and traumas. Therefore, embracing the long history of the Church should also include embracing the historical facts characterized by migrations especially since the Church itself has always been migratory. In other words, the Church is a *community of migrants* with an eschatological orientation, *i.e.*, a religious community of faith constantly on the march toward its final fulfillment in the reign of God (Phan, 2013, p. 10). Peter C. Phan (2013) observes that there are seven major migrations that have left an indelible mark on the Church.

The first one is the Jewish diaspora, beginning before the fourth century BC. This diaspora changed the religious structure: less centralized and more focused on the Torah (Phan, 2013). This Jewish community played an important role in the spread of Christianity. Paul preached first to this diaspora and the first Christian leaders were actually the converted Jews. The second migration followed as the Christian community was forced out of Jerusalem and Palestine after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Historical record has shown that there are five areas of destinations: Mesopotamia-Syria, Greece-Asia Minor, western Mediterranean, Egypt, and East Asia.

The third major movement in early Christianity was the migration of the Germanic tribes, which not only threatened the security of the Roman Empire but also posed severe challenges to the rapidly growing Church. The coming of so many migrants by the middle of the fifth century caused massive changes in social life in such a way that many would misleadingly call this period the Age of Barbarian Invasions. The transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium and the subsequent establishment of the imperial court at Constantinople was the fourth migration which had an enormous and permanent impact on the shape of Christianity. This shifted the center of gravity of Christianity, creating a "different kind" of the religion known as "Orthodox Christianity." In one way or another, the 1054 schism was the result of this migration (Phan, 2013, p. 16).

The fifth mass migration coincided with the so-called discovery of the New World during the "Age of Discovery" under the royal patronage of Spain and Portugal. This migration was marked by the movement of massive numbers of religious missionaries and secular Europeans to Latin America and Asia, which gradually developed distinctive ways of being Christian that reflect cultures and religious traditions of the indigenous people. Between 1650 and World War I, the sixth migration came about as the continuation from the previous one and, indeed, it played a vital role for Christianity. The colonization expanded Christianity to Africa and Asia and created different

ways of living the Christian faith. The seventh happened during the period of World War II. Massive migration was spawned by events such as decolonization which was accompanied by the return of former colonists to their country of origin and the migration of colonial subjects to colonizing countries (Phan, 2013, p. 20).

There is no doubt that those seven periods of migration played such an important role in the shaping of the Church that a historically conscious reflection on the Church should take the migratory feature as part and parcel of the identity of the Church. In stating the nature of the Church in one of its documents of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the Roman Catholic Church makes it very clear that this migration is the main feature of the Church. LG chapter II states that the Church is the people of God that is always on the move and is always participating in how history is shaped. Nevertheless, this history does more than just what there is to it in this world but refers to something transcendent, that is, eschatology as stated in LG chapter VII.

To sum up, historical consciousness is an integral part of the identity of the Church and this is clearly depicted in the structure of LG, starting from the mystery of the Church (ch. 1) and ends with the mystery of the Church as represented in the role of Mary (ch. 8). This is an example of an attempt from the magisterium to make sure that the Church should always carry within itself the historical consciousness.

d. Hospitable: Being Responsible to Its Own History

To fully embrace the history of the Church means to accept happily that the Church is itself a migrant. Its development in history is coloured by a lot of migratory events. Phan formulates this very well. He states that the early Christians were well schooled in the duty of hospitality, a practice that already figures prominently in the Old Testament, perhaps due to Israel's nomadic existence and reflecting the Bedouin traditions. Hospitality is however more than a social custom. Rather, as the example of Abraham demonstrates, it is also an expression of gratitude and faithfulness to God as Israel's generous host. Abraham's welcome toward the three strangers turned out to be hospitality extended to Yahweh himself (Gen. 18:1-8). Indeed, throughout the Old Testament God is depicted as entertaining Israel with abundant and endless banquets and as deeply concerned for the stranger, as the divine provision of cities of refuge (Num. 35:9-35; Josh. 20:1-9) and care for the sojourner (Exod. 22:21; Lev. 19:10; Deut. 10:19) make abundantly clear. (Phan, 2013, p. 27).

Consequently, failure to provide for the stranger's physical needs is a serious offense, equivalent to breaching the covenant with God, and brings about God's punishment (Deut. 23:3-4). Furthermore, the duties of the host also extend to securing the safety and welfare of the guests, as the stories of Lot (Gen. 19:8) and the old man of Gibeah (Judg. 19:24-25) vividly illustrate. Thus, hospitality exceeds more than just ethics as it also keeps social and spiritual stability in the balance.

Phan's summary clarifies the continuation of the Christian ethics with its biblical root. Being hospitable then is not only about ethics but it is about being responsible to its own history (Gaziaux, 2019, p. 207). The *indicativus* that the Church is migratory entails the *conjunctivus* that the Church should be hospitable. The Church that is responsible for its own history is indicated by its readiness to accept the compelling invitation to be open to what is foreign. Putting the historical consciousness as an integral part of a systematic ecclesiology brings about a realization that hospitality to strangers is a historical responsibility.

The challenge that the Church is facing now is how to always be open to contextual issues of the modern times without betraying its tradition. Questions on the environment, ecumenical issues, inter-faith issues and issues on sexual ethics are among the many concerns that the Church has to deal with in an open perspective while still remaining faithful to its teaching. The Church is expected to be able to navigate the complexities of the modern world without letting go of its firm historical and theological context.

3. CONCLUSION

This study finds that Lonergan's idea on historical consciousness provides a new understanding about the nature of the Church as a historical entity. The Church cannot ignore the fact that throughout its history it has experienced various dynamics, both in the form of progress and decline. In this perspective, as also emphasized by Phan, the Church must be understood as a migrant community in history. Its movements not only reflect worldly dimensions but also hold theological meanings that go beyond history, journeying towards the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

Offering a conceptual framework that combines historical and eschatological perspectives, this study wishes to emphasize on the Church's responsibility to be more welcoming and open to migrants and all people so as to be faithful to its nature as a community moving towards the Kingdom of Heaven. In the context of the theology of migration, this study adds an important dimension to the understanding of the Church as an entity that does not remain in history. On the contrary, it moves beyond history.

However, this study has limitations, namely the lack of exploration of various migration contexts outside the Western tradition. Neither does it delve into the dynamics of migration in the contemporary era. With further research into how the Church in non-Western regions faces and responds to current migration dynamics, the scope can certainly extend so as to cover a multidisciplinary approach that combines theology, sociology, and anthropology; thus, providing a more comprehensive analysis of the Church and migration.

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