

A Sociological Reading of Catholic Theology of Social Sin

GERRY M. LANUZA

Introduction

The notion of social sin is a recent development in Catholic theology. This, of course, does not entail that only recently has personal sin gained social connotation (Shindler, 1991:136). For Catholic theology has always recognized the social dimension of even the most private, individual sin (*Reconciliatio et Penitentia*, no. 16). What the contemporary understanding of social sin does entail is the recognition that Christian sacrament of confession can no longer be restricted to forgiveness of individual sin; but more pointedly, it must also denounce collective sins which "often tend to become fixed and fossilized as mechanisms relatively independent of the human will, thereby paralyzing or distorting social development and causing injustice" (*Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, no. 74).

As a theological category, social sin has been identified with the tradition of Catholic social teachings (Mynatty, 1991:7). Unfortunately, this tradition has unduly stressed the subjective and personal side of social sin. As a result, it has focused much of its attention to the responsibility of persons involved, the degree of freedom available given such a situation, and tracing the ultimate cause of unjust structures to people's collective egoism. In contrast but not in opposition to, Latin American liberation theology has recovered the objective dimension of Christian theology of sin.

Liberation theology rightly insists that social sin cannot be circumscribed within the narrow confines of personal guilt. It has

to address the powerful constraints provided by social structures. This pungent emphasis on the objective dimension of sin has led liberation theologians to put priority on changing unjust social structures. It is also to the credit of liberation theology that social sciences are invoked to mediate in analyzing social structures. And most liberation theologians have been vocal in openly admitting their preference for Marxist structural analysis over and against competing social scientific paradigms, particularly functionalism. This open admittance of critical appropriation of Marxism has solicited the furor of the Catholic Magisterium. The debate seems to amount to this: is social sin reducible to individual action and responsibility, or is there something more to social sin? This polemic is basically the mirror image of the debate in sociology between methodological individualism and holism/structuralism. The *Magisterium* seemed to have taken the philosophical position similar to methodological individualism, while liberation theologians have taken the position of structuralism. My discussion below is to assess the arguments of both sides from strictly sociological point of view. Now as to the question of how can this move fit into the overall theological discussion I will leave it to theologians of both camps. What I will suggest is that both camps can learn a lot from the recent debates in sociological theory.

I - THE ROOTS OF THE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL SIN

The Vatican II Council and Ecclesiological Revolution¹

Discerning the signs of the times. The “aggiornamento” initiated by Pope John Paul XXIII in this opening address at the inauguration of the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in October 1962 and its subsequent realization in the documents of the Council

¹ The achievements of Vatican II can be construed in several conflicting ways. It can be characterized as a liberal council that caters to the problems – almost exclusively – of European Catholicism. See, for instance, Donal Dorr (1983:117-138). Alternatively, it can be read as “reflection of postwar European capitalism.” See Enrique Dussel (1976:117). But Leonardo Boff (1984:15) speaks of “receptio” which means appropriation and transcending the spirit of the documents of the Council.

contributed tremendously to the development of the theology of social sin by dint of its explicit and implicit imports. "Aggiornamento, or updating," says Harring "signifies an evangelical attitude toward the present with all the concrete possibilities of salvation that it affords (1966:13-27)." The Catholic church, by "throwing open the doors and setting out on a journey of discovery" (Schillebeeckx, 1966:84) has dramatically embraced the joys and hopes, the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 1). Going a step further, this outlook depends not only on looking towards the world at large but more so within this world (Harring, 1981,3:129). *Gaudium et Spes*, in particular, admits that the "Church must continually examine the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel" (No. 4). At this point, the church can no longer retreat into the ivory tower of revelation and natural law. Finally, She has learned that the world has something to teach and enrich Her (Nos. 44 and 58).

This form of "Christian secularism," as some authors put it (Schillebeeckx, 1966:48), enables the church to humbly confess that she has no ready-made blueprint for the reconstruction of the world order, let alone political systems (p. 48). The Council, therefore, distances itself pretty well from Christendom mentality and from the ubiquitous temptation of new-Constantinianism with its accompanying triumphalist attitude (Fierro, 1977:67; Gutierrez, 1973:58; L. Boff, 1985:1-4). Having freed herself from such theological ineptitude, the church felicitously encourages the use of social scientific tools in mediating Christian message in a pluralist world marked by divergences of motley cultures.² This would later spur progressive and liberal theologians to diagnose conflict-ridden reality called "contrast experiences."³

The Church in and for the world. Another impetus that stirred the church to acknowledge the reality of social sin lies in the area of church-world relation. *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* are mostly responsible for moving the Church away from

² It took some time for the Catholic Church to recognize the most obvious truth that Christian faith is always historically mediated. See Charles Curran (1986:174-195, esp. 117).

³ The term employed by Schillebeeckx (1966:29).

too much focus on the sacramental model to the ecclesiological model of "church-as-people-of-God" (Dulles, 1974:95). The shift from purely ecclesiocentric concerns to a more positive relationship with the world, the Church now respects the autonomy of culture and pluralism in the secular realms. In this manner, the focus is directed vigorously to scrutinizing the worth and achievements of the world vis-à-vis the radical demands of the kingdom of God (*Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 44 and 59). This paradigm shift, to use Kuhn's famous phrase, made possible the critical assessment of the performance of existing socio-political systems in terms of the amelioration of the human conditions and the anticipation of the future promise of salvation. Ultimately, this leads to the recognition of social structures that either block the realization of the kingdom of God or inaugurate its partial manifestations (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Nos. 31 and 35).

The Church as servant. Out of the foregoing considerations, some Catholic theologians, like McBrien (1969), have developed the popular ecclesiological theme of "church as servant." The Church in this model is seen as offering Herself as one of the principal agents whereby the human community is made to stand under the judgment of the enduring values of the Gospel of Jesus the Christ (Dulles, 19:103; McBrien, 1969:229). The Church, according to this view, passes ethical judgment upon the world in the light of Christian faith and tradition. In later European brand of political theology, the church becomes a prophetic witness to God's kingdom and thereby relativizing all existing, secular orders. And recognizing the mysterious relationship between the growth of the kingdom and temporal progress, Christian faith serves as a critical utopia that gauges the quality of earthly life (Moltman, 1967:330). As a utopia, Christian faith transcends all secular ideologies. Yet it is this utopian element that propels Christians to be for the world.⁴ From this vantage point, it becomes the essential mission of the

⁴ Pope John Paul II (1979) has this to say at the opening of Puebla Conference: "She (the Church) therefore does not need to have recourse to ideological systems in order to love, defend, and collaborate in the liberation of man: at the center of the message of which she is the depository and herald she finds inspiration for acting in favor of brotherhood, justice, and peace, against all forms of domination, slavery, discrimination, violence, attacks on religious liberty and aggression against man, and whatever attacks life" (p. 58).

church to denounce all forms of servitude and announce the integral liberation of Christ (L. Boff, 1979:78-91; Schillebeeckx, 1969:50). The "dangerous memory" within Christian faith and tradition is invoked to challenge Christian complacency with the status quo (Metz, 1972:9-25).

The Renewal of Theology

From orthodoxy to orthopraxis. As the Church painfully purge Herself of extreme and unhealthy ecclesiocentrism, Catholic theology also follows the same direction. Necessarily, this trend provides the fecund ground from which the later conceptualization of social sin as a theological category draws its main sources. The theology heralded by Vatican I did not take seriously the challenge of the modern world as demonstrated by the rather unfortunate rejection of the so-called Modernist Movement in the early twentieth century.⁵

In the pre-Vatican II Catholic theology, the main emphasis is on the understanding "the belief of... a particular church tradition" (Tracy, 1975:24). Inevitably, it is self-centered in the sense that the exclusive task of theology is defined as the fortification and reasoned defense of the received truths (Wostyn and de Mesa, 1986: 12-13). In another context, the task of theology is simply to "provide an analogous and systematic understanding of the Catholic church's beliefs... and a reasoned defense of these beliefs" (Tracy, 1975:25). Interestingly, sin in this model is treated both in its formal and material aspects in terms of controversies, misconceptions, history of the doctrine, scriptural arguments, refutation of heretical views, and then, a synthesis. Almost forgotten is the reality of ontic evils that permeate the world and its structures.⁶

Theological presence and not opportunism. This orthodox model was gradually stymied by the rapid ascendancy of modernism, secularism, and the wide acceptance of the evolutionary thinking in theology (Dolch, 1967:75-83), thanks to pioneering efforts

⁵ See Buhlmann (1990:21). A brief historical account of modernist controversy is found in Roger Haight (1973).

⁶ This is evident even in Karl Rahner's (1969, 4:328-337) entry on "Original Sin" in *Sacramentum Mundi*.

of Teilhard de Chardin. The unprecedented expansion of the natural and social sciences by leaps and bounds shook the very foundation of scholastic theology ensconced within the fortress of static, immutable, and eternal truths. Theology was forced to either reject modernism *in toto*, or accommodate it as a *modus vivendi*, or to assert its presence in the modern world without losing its own unique identity.

Theology accepted the third option. But the acceptance of this option, which would provide the impetus for the development of the theology of sin, was initiated by the German Protestant pastor-theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. His clamor for a "religionless Christianity" in the "world comes of age" has meant for theology the full appreciation of the secular world in all its deformities and inhumanities. It raises the Christian theme of responsibility towards the world of men and women. Bonhoeffer's clamor served as an inspiration for theologians grappling with the secular world (Gutierrez, 1983:222-234).

To carry such difficult but important project, another Protestant theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, proposes to make Christian faith present in the "world comes of age" through an existential demythologization of the Gospel. In this enterprise, theology puts human beings right into the center stage of theologizing, which hitherto has been preoccupied predominantly with the God-talk. "It is therefore clear," declares Bultmann (1966:55), "that if man will speak of God, he must evidently speak of himself at the same time." In the same vein and direction but in different paradigms, the humanism of some Marxists (Sartre, Korsch, Fromm), of secular humanists (Kurtz, Nielsen, Lamonte, Huxley), of Christian humanists (Marcel, Mounier, Gilson, Maritain), highlighted the alienation of modern human beings who belong to the "lonely crowd"⁷ in advanced industrial societies, the crippling of human freedom under the Stalinist terror (Kolakowski, 1982), and the consumerism of capitalist societies. Consequently this desire to recover the "authentic" subject under the weight of alienation will have far reaching effects on the development of the concept of social sin when it is linked to the socio-political structures that shape the existential life of human beings (Fierro, 19: 84-85).

⁷ This is captured well by David Reisman's (1953) critique of American culture in *The Lonely Crowd*. See also Philip Slater (1976).

From humanism to political struggle. The humanistic critique of modern alienation of human beings has led to the radical questioning of theologies that evacuate human beings from history and political conflicts. Political theologians refused to reduce religion to privatistic definition of "I-Thou" relation between God and human beings (Metz, 1968). Humanism is reconstructed along the Marxian lines: "Man is nothing but an ensemble of social relations." Influenced by Sartrean existential Marxism and critique of capitalism advanced by the members of the Frankfurt School or Critical Theory, "de-privatization of faith" began and so with the theology of sin.⁸ Sin is situated right into the heart of profane history. Sin is that which resists the entelechy of the world toward the hominization of human beings, the Omega Point of Teilhard de Chardin.⁹ The unity between the love of neighbor and the love of God – initiated by Bultmann's anthropocentric theology – means that the notion of sin is wedged right into the relationship among human beings in society. "Neighbor" is politicized so as to mean the anonymous mass of people suffering from human-induced miseries (Gutierrez, 1975: "Introduction").

*"Correct ideas don't fall from the sky."*¹⁰ The deconstruction of the privatistic religion has meant for theology the abandonment of essentialistic approach to human nature in favor of an historical, inductive approach. Human beings become the active maker of the world. They shape the world through praxis and labor. Theology becomes praxis, the unity of theory and practice. The rejection of deductivist approach – theology as contemplation of absolute, revealed truths – forced theologians to historicize their claims to religious truths and the definition of truth itself. Historical consciousness, as some theologians put it (Kasper, 1967:53ff.), compels theology to look for foundational elements outside its own sphere of influence. And the Vatican II Council captures this very well when it declares that the church and theology "can and ought to be enriched by the development of human social life" in order to

⁸ "De-privatization" is the term used by Gregory Baum (1975:193-226) in his early analysis of social sin. He derived it, however, from his readings of Laing, Freud, Marx, and the criticisms made by Frankfurt school against capitalism.

⁹ For an exposition of Chardin's theology of sin, see Henry de Lubac (1965:99ff).

¹⁰ Taken from the title of Georges Cassalis' (1986) book.

better understand it “more penetratingly, express it better, and adjust it more to our times” (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 44).

Whereas traditional theology accentuated “theoria” and contemplation of God’s beatific vision, “praxis theology” defines its method as “a critical reflection on praxis in the light of Christian faith” (Gutierrez, 1972).¹¹ This radical epistemic break from scholastic theological method makes the socio-political experience of Christian communities as the starting point for theologizing. Inspired by critical theory and neo-Marxist analyses of society theologians become critical in grasping reflexively the personal, historical and ideological determinations of their own theologies (Lane, 1976; C. Boff, 1987:159; Segundo, 1976:10, 102). Theology, then, is only a second step. Commitment to change the objective reality precedes it (Gutierrez, 1972; Segundo, 1976:98). From this commitment ensues “ideological suspicion” of all realities including theology itself (Segundo, 1976:9; Cook, 1985:90ff.). Finally, this self-reflection leads to a new way of seeing reality that paves the way to a totally new way of doing theology. The hermeneutic circle – the relationship between theology and its context – that is established in this process allows theology to pass judgment on the ethical status of social conflicts as either liberating or dehumanizing (Segundo, 1976).

Renewal in Catholic Moral Theology

From casuistry to personhood. The fresh renewal pervading the Church and theology has swept, too, into the system of Catholic moral discourse. The deprivatization of theology finds its way within the legalistic tradition in moral theology. But the casuistry in moral theology proves itself to be the gravest obstacle to the development of the concept of social sin. This tradition ruled supreme in Catholic thought up to the eve of Vatican Council II (Gallagher, 1990:20). It is worth noting, however, that while political theology assimilated advances in sociology, the renewed moral theology appropriated the psychological insights from the humanist psychologists like Rollo May, Abraham Maslow and Gordon Allport, and of course Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (Hopper, 1987, 2:115-117).

¹¹ A Protestant critique of this definition that puts primacy on praxis is found in J. Andrew Kirk (1979:195ff.).

Sin in pre-Vatican II falls neatly within two provinces of discourse as far as moral theology is concerned, namely, in the "*Summa Confessorum*" which was originally designed as an aid to both secular and mendicant clergies in the administration of the sacrament of reconciliation, and the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas which contain the scholastic approach to sin and Christian life in general. The former lists sins like items on a shopping list with corresponding penalties such as fasting, prayers, and alms giving (Gallagher, 1990:20). The latter, on the other hand, develops an "act-oriented" approach to sin that treats the person's existential and psychosocial dimensions as secondary appurtenances in considering the gravity of sin. This moral approach dominated Catholic tradition and reached its zenith in the canonization of Thomistic philosophy by Pope Leo XXIII in *Aeterni Patris*.

It need scarcely be stressed that it took considerable time to challenge this tradition. The seeds of reform, of course, had already sprouted prior to Vatican II Council. There were, for instance, the modernist school in France and the Tübingen School of moral theology (Gallagher, 1990:171; Curran, 3-19). Bernard Haring, in particular, influenced by the latter school, replaced the essentialistic concept of "human nature" in the manualist approach with the notion of "personhood," that is, "human persons in their concreteness... both in their individuality and sociality, their body and spirit, their instincts and soul" (Gallagher, 1990:171). The neo-Thomistic emphasis on "legalistic, extrinsic, and minimalist" categories is replaced by the supreme law of Christ – love. From a heavy accent on natural law method, moral theology shifts dramatically to the complex study of biblical theology as the renewed source of moral theology. Biblical studies, for instance, discovered "conversion" as the central element of Christian life and not simple and plain legalism (Curran, 1970:64). Then, conversion is seen in all its aspects: personal, interpersonal, and societal (Curran, 1972). Individualistic morality – "save your own soul" mentality – turns out to be outdated in a highly interdependent world (McCormack, 1979: 19-20). Sin is viewed as always social, that is, involving other people, society at large (Haring, 1978, 1:209; Pittinger, 1978).

In a nutshell, moral theology becomes conscious of "all the aspects of reality including man's relationship to all other people, institution, and the cosmos itself as well as his connections with

the past and responsibility for the future" (Curran, 1970:254). This holistic approach, as Curran calls it,¹² no longer consider sin as a single act but is rather related to the whole life-orientation of the individual, his "fundamental option" in life (Regan, 1971::33-35; Cooper, 1983; Harring, 1978, 1:164-223). The person's psychological maturity and his or her social environment play a decisive role in the final moral judgment of an act as either sinful or not. Later, liberal theologians will further stretch this notion of fundamental option so as to argue for the existence of society's fundamental option either for liberation or worship of idols of death (Mynatty, 1991:10).

The Christian-Marxist Dialogue

Recovery of revolutionary Christianity. The world to which the Vatican Council II opens itself includes the non-believers¹³ and believers of different faith traditions.¹⁴ The atmosphere of pluralism and tolerance entailed by the spirit of Vatican II Council allowed for the animated dialogue between Marxists like Roger Garaudy, Adam Schaff, Gardavsky, and Christian theologian like Johann Metz, Karl Rahner, Jules Girardi (Catholic theologians), Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Protestant theologians) (McGovern, 1979:113). The Church finally lifts the veil of anathema against non-believers to enter into profound dialogue with the secular world (see especially Garaudy, 1970).

One of the astonishing fruits of this dialogue is the accentuation of utopian character of Christianity that relativizes temporal orders and political values that demand absolute allegiance. This is grounded on Christian theology of hope. Christian hope announces what is yet to come but ought to be and denounces whatever subverts the path to the future (Moltman, 19; Braaeten, 1968; Peters, 1976). Surprisingly enough, Christians find themselves hand-in-hand with all humanist movements, including Marxist humanists

¹² C.E. Curran, (1970: 242-264, spec. 254) and George Regan (1971), 33-35.

¹³ On church's relation to atheism, see *Gaudium et Spes*, Nos. 19-21.

¹⁴ See the Vatican Council II's *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions*.

themselves, who seek the emancipation of people from earthly concentration camps and Gulags (Kolakowski, 19:257; Norris, 1970).

Religion as dynamite of transformation. Out of this dialogue, too, the emphasis on praxis, nourished by Christian imperative of love of neighbor, takes the precedence over orthodoxy (Gonzales-Ruiz, 1976).¹⁵ Religion is no longer the opium of the people, much less, of the poor, but a leaven for social change. A Marxist-inspired hermeneutic pre-understanding permits theologian to recover the revolutionary roots of Judaeo-Christian tradition that is shrouded by the Hellenization of Christian theology (Dussel, 19: 23-26; Schmidt, 1968).¹⁶ The prophetic function of the church and theology gains its political currency. Salvation is linked with liberation (L. Boff and C. Boff, 1984; Gutierrez, 1978:149-78).

For the development of the concept of social sin, this meant the abandonment of privatistic and individualistic interpretation of sin. Marxism squarely puts the social being of human beings on par with religious nature of human beings. As a consequence, the individual's most personal and private sins affect society, nature, and the entire cosmos (Girardi, 1968).

The Rise of Biblical Hermeneutics

A new way of looking at scriptural studies. It is interesting at this point to observe how the renewals in theology and ecclesial practices are made possible by the recourse to the ultimate norm of Christian faith: the Scriptures. And Biblical scholarship had received positive affirmation from the Vatican Council II. Hence the rise of critical biblical studies serves as a major pillar in the development of theology of social sin. With the set back of Catholic biblical scholarship owing to Pope Pius XI's condemnation of modernism and its approach to biblical studies, the new hope augurs in the horizon when *Divino Afflante Spiritu* was issued by Pius XII on September 30, 1943 which exhorts biblical scholars to study the Scriptures in scientific manner. Given this encourage-

¹⁵ For emphasis on orthopraxis over orthodoxy in relation to Christology, see L. Boff (1978:46) and Jon Sobrino (1980:59-60).

¹⁶ An historical analysis of Hellenization of Christian theology is found in Enrique Dussel (1978).

ment Biblical scholars and theologians begun to seriously study the historical and social dimensions of the Bible.

The quest for the historical Jesus. The major upshot of the development of biblical criticisms is the search for the historical Jesus, which received wide audience in 1906 when Albert Schweitzer (trans. 1956) published his review of the search dating back down to the nineteenth century (Collins, 1983). From this historical controversy, several scientific methods of interpretation evolved and flourished, like form criticism (McKnight, 1969), historical-critical method (Krentz, 1975), and other analyses, including historical materialist methods derived from Marxism (see Gottwald, 1983), which the Catholic Church was suspicious of several decades ago.

With this significant development in Biblical studies, Christology shifts from high-descending method to low-ascending method in understanding the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Jesus' message is said to be centered on the single theme: the reign of God or the Kingdom of God (Perrin, 1967). And this reign embraces all earthly realities such as economic, political, and cultural structures (Ellacuria, 1983).¹⁸ To cut the long story short, biblical studies resurrected Jesus' historical and social message (Cassidy, 1980; Worsley, 1994; Galilea, 1986). Subsequently this has become the central element in the development of liberation theology that situates social sin in the light of the historical Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God.

From such historicized Christology, sin is viewed as anything that obstructs the realization of the reign of God on earth (Ellacuria, 1976:3-19). And inasmuch as the historical Jesus confronted sin in all its manifestations, so liberation Christology accentuates integral response to the call for conversion. Consequently, orthopraxis is accentuated over and against the one-sided emphasis on

¹⁷ The low-ascending method or Christology from below is found in the writings of L. Boff (1978), J. Sobrino (1984), and J. L. Segundo (1986, vol. 2). Segundo criticizes Boff and Sobrino's Christology as still high Christology.

¹⁸ Claus Bussman (1985) provides a survey of this theme in Latin American Christology. The output of Christological scholarship made by the members and participants of the controversial Jesus Seminar in 1984 support this trend. For instance, see Funk (1985).

orthodoxy by the traditional scholastic theology (L. Boff, 1989:46). To believe and follow Jesus Christ is to correspond to his concrete historical praxis amidst contemporary historical and political conflicts (Sobrinho, 1986:59-60).

The Radical Tradition in Catholic Social Teachings¹⁹

Modern Catholic social teachings. Christian dialogue with Marxism is partly a result of the growing socialist and other revolutionary movements in the underdeveloped countries in the world in the later half of the twentieth century. This also partly explains the continuing development of Catholic social teachings. The latter can be considered as the most forceful ingredient in the full acceptance of social sin as a legitimate theological category. In fact, a contemporary writer on the subject laments that most treatises on social sin are derived from the positions advanced in the Catholic social teachings (Mynatty, 1978:10). It goes without saying, however, that the four factors discussed so far have also influenced the development of Catholic social teachings.

The Catholic social teachings officially began with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* issued in 1892 – as a response to miseries wrought by the industrial revolution – albeit, it has its roots in Judaeo-Christian tradition and ecclesial history (Antoncich, 1987: 29). The judgment of a social situation, or an economic system as “evil” is found in this early encyclical. It condemns “slavery on the unnumbered masses of non-owning workers” (No. 6). This contains the primal germ of contemporary theology of social sin. The term “social sin” of course is not yet used by the encyclical; but the pristine meaning is detectable in its moral condemnation of “labor which is too long and hard” (No. 56). In the context of this encyclical, to judge a situation as evil means that it is contrary to God's will and the natural order of things (Nos. 12-21, 78).

¹⁹ Dominique-Marie Chenu (1980:11-18) notes that the switch from “doctrine” to “teaching” is an indication of the rejection of the so-called “middle way” approach of the early social encyclicals. The middle way approach (otherwise known as corporatism) is an attempt by the Church to stir a middle way between Marxist socialism and liberal capitalism. For a critique of corporatism, see Donal Dorr (1986).

The vestiges of essentialist thinking. Forty years after the *Rerum Novarum* was issued, Pope Pius XI issued his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. Following the Leonine tradition, Pius XI condemned the unbridled competition and its "evil consequences" (No. 113). These "great evils" are due to the apostasy of the workingmen from the Catholic faith which is ultimately linked to the tragedy of the Fall, the alienation of man from God's love (No. 137). A step farther is taken by Pius XI, however. He acknowledges the fact that evil "can solidify into a set of practices and traditions which themselves are real structures of society, affecting the most obvious political, social, and economic structures" (Dorr, 1986:58).

The modern Catholic social doctrine of both Leo XIII and Pius XI assumed that truths proclaimed by the church are immutable and eternal since they are deduced from natural law and divine revelation. The business of the Church is simply to communicate these truths and safeguard them from modern day heresies and errors. In short, modern Catholic social doctrine – with some exceptions from Pius XI²⁰ – follows a deductive and static method (Gudorf, 1978; O'Brien and Shannon, 1977). But the perception of social sin is already ominous in these encyclicals and those that were written within this period.²¹

The post-Vatican II social teachings. The shift from a deductive, corporatist approach²² of Catholic social teachings to an historical and inductive method allowed the church to examine her ideological posture. Post-Vatican II social teachings relinquish their claim to proffer a middle way between liberal capitalism and collectivist socialism. This trend is set forth perfectly in Pope Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* as well the Council's *Gaudium et Spes*. A further break is found in Pope Paul VI's controversial encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. This encyclical was prompted by the violent revolutions sweeping Third World countries impoverished by centuries-old colonialism (Dorr, 1986:145).

²⁰ Pius XI notes that the church must be cautious in technical matters to which she "has neither the equipment nor the mission" *Quadragesimo Anno*, No. 42.

²¹ Included are: *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963) of Pope John XXIII.

²² Corporatism is discussed by Donal Dorr (1984:60-62).

A year later, the *General Conference of Latin American Bishops* met for the second time at Medellin, Columbia from August 24 to September 6, 1968. This meeting produced the now famous *Medellin Documents* which for the first time acknowledged the presence of sinful social structures. This theme is further developed by the *Synod of Bishops* in 1971 which produced the document *Justice in the World*. The bishops use social sin as synonymous with "oppressive situation."

Recently, on the seventh anniversary of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, the Supreme Pontiff develops the theme of social sin in his *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*. The same emphasis is reiterated in his *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1988), and in *Centesimus Annus* (1991) which commemorates the one-hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.

Meanwhile, the *Third Conference of Latin American Bishops* held in Puebla, Mexico in 1979 confirmed the statement and commitment earlier drafted in the *Medellin Documents*. Simultaneously, the upsurge of liberation theologies in various contexts – black, feminist, and indigenous – prompted the *Magisterium* to define her teachings with regard to the theme of liberation. On this account, the *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* issued two important instructions in 1984 and 1986 respectively. These instructions canonized the label "social sin" as a theological category, albeit sternly warning about reductionism it may lead to.

Theology from the Underside of History

The havocs of modernization and the awakening of the Church. The strongest stream of theological thought that swept the whole Catholic world in the late twentieth century is the Latin American theology of liberation. This "new way of doing theology" is actually the culmination of the whole renewal of Catholic theology, and thereby represents the crucial ladder-step in the ascendancy of social sin in theological reflection.

Before I proceed any further, a brief excursion into the milieu of liberation theology is *de rigueur* at this point not only because it is demanded by theological presentation but because liberation theology is unintelligible apart from its historical genesis. To start

with, the official model of Latin American developments in the 1950's consisted purely of the "diffusionist model" which equates development with accumulation of capital and the unilateral imitation of Western path to development.²³ But the 1960's only saw the massive poverty and underdevelopment in the continent. Economic growth neither took place nor trickled down to the laboring masses. The urban bourgeoisie and the landed elites vehemently conspired against land reforms and redistribution measures (Valery, 1985). An alternative path to development saw light in the 1950's under the direction of Raul Presbich and his Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA). ECLA's solution to underdevelopment is simple: industrialization through import substitution (Hettne and Bloomstrom, 1984:19). Following Presbich's development philosophy, Brazil experienced a brief economic miracle in the 1960's. But it soon turned out that ECLA's policy was short-lived in its effects (p. 45).

In the face of this, one can speak of development theory in crisis. Out of this crisis evolved the distinctive Latin American theory of underdevelopment: dependency theory. Its major proponents include Cardoso, Faletto, dos Santos, Frank, Amin, and later Wallerstein.²⁴ In this paradigm, development is synonymous with integral development that goes beyond mere economic growth. Moreover, underdevelopment is blamed on the unequal exchange between the periphery (Third World countries) and the center (First World countries). The latter extracts surplus from its neo-colonies that prevents the periphery's development (Frank, 1967). The secret of Third World development is de-linking from the center.²⁵ Economic autonomy must dislodge dependency. But most liberation theologians go further than negative critique of Western model of development. They favor a democratic socialist path to development as a result of the dismal havocs created by colonial capitalism (Segundo, 1987).

²³ This is called "modernization theory" See for instance, Tony Barnett (1988: 10), and Hettne and Bloomstrom (1984). For a summary critique of the modernization paradigm based on dependency theory, see Chilcote and Edelstein (1974), 1-78.

²⁴ For general review, see Ronald Chilcote (1974:4-29). Current survey is found in Charles Barone (1990).

²⁵ For de-linking as a solution to Latin American economic crisis, see Enderle and Luthi (1980), and Senghaas (1980).

A Colonial Church. Historically speaking, Latin American Catholicism was a product of European colonialism and expansionism (Cook, 1986:31; L. Boff, 1987:4-5; Dussell 1978:75). This church is tied too the hierarchical-institutional model that prevailed in the Western Catholicism before Vatican II Council. As *modus vivendi*, the church erected a congenial relationship with the upper class. In educating the children of the land-owning class under Christian discipline, the Church hopes to assist the poor by persuading these future political leaders to exercise paternalistic benevolence. It is a church *for* the poor rather than church *of* the poor (Proano, 1973:66-69). In addition, the Church supported the official development strategies by involving herself in the so-called "alliance of progress" in the 1960's to contain the threats of communism (Turner, 1971:124).²⁶ The Catholic Church has also spearheaded the establishments of Catholic lay social action groups that proffered paternalistic aids to the poor (Turner, 1971:60).

The emergence of the prophetic Church. By 1960's Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of liberation theology, notes that the church finds herself at the historical crossroads after being shaken by the growing radicalization of the clergies, the politization of the basic ecclesial communities,²⁷ the critique of the official development model, and the fateful formation of Christians for Socialism in Chile under Allende. It was also the turbulent time when the youths are hailing Che Guevara as the new Jesus Christ (Trinidad and Stam, 1986). To add to the crisis, the church finds herself at the throes of national security state ideology (Comblin, 1979:Chapter 3).

However, amidst this "Babylonian captivity," as Leonardo Boff puts it, several prophetic voices dare to rise and challenge the totalitarian order like Bishop Camara of Brazil, Cardinal Arns, and Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, just to name a few.²⁸ Caught up in the dilemma between acquiescence to national security and

²⁶ For discussion on "Alliance for Progress," see Lieuwen (1965:115-116).

²⁷ The history of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) is discussed briefly in Cook (1986:61-68).

²⁸ For fuller discussion of known and unknown Christians who made prophetic stance, see Lernoux (1982).

proclaiming the Gospel's message of freedom, the Catholic Church opted courageously for the poor as reflected in the *Medellin Documents* and *Puebla*. The Catholic Church speaks in behalf of the poor in order to denounce these "institutionalized violence" and "underdevelopment."

The liberation of theology. It took the creative and brilliant mind of Gustavo Gutierrez to synthesize these converging but diverse strands of thought in Latin American Catholic Church and theologies in order to come up with his path-breaking book *A Theology of Liberation*. In this classic work, a new epoch in the theology of social sin is ushered in. From then on, sin is always linked with its social and political dimensions. Individualizing approach to sin becomes a sinful talk itself. However, useful though this category, it remains as a second step. "The starting point of liberation theology," as the Boff brothers (1987:3) in their popular primer on liberation theology have it, "is the perception of scandal accompanying underdevelopment." Faced with this "inhuman poverty" which "is the most devastating and humiliating kind of scourge" (*Puebla Document*, No. 29) theology has to "understand better the mechanisms that produce poverty and the avenue that can lead the victims away from it" (C. and L. Boff, 1987:4). It is not enough, according to liberation theology, just to pass ethical judgment on a situation. Theology needs to pass beyond mere spontaneous, commonsensical reading of social reality that reduces charity to sheer individualistic assistance (Libanio, 1982:46).

Theology has to enter the hermeneutic circle which revolves around four axes: (1) ethical judgment, (2) socio-analytic mediation, (3) hermeneutic mediation based on Christian faith and tradition, and (4) pastoral action generated by such commitment to change the sinful reality (C. Boff, 1989; concise presentation is in C. and L. Boff, 1987:1-13). In keeping up with the renewal of the theological method, the category of social sin evolved out of the concrete historical praxis directed at the liberation of the marginalized people and classes in all dimensions – material and spiritual – informed by the rigorous analysis grounded on social and political reading of the signs of the times.

II – THE THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL SIN: BETWEEN CONVERSION AND STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The treatment of social sin as a theological category finds two major expressions, namely, in the Catholic social teachings and political theology.²⁹ This is true despite the fact that the concept has rich and varied provenance as described in the first part of this paper. In this Part, the relationship between personal conversion and social transformation as they are portrayed in Catholic theology will be presented. By doing so, this section hopes to draw some problematic points that still remain unresolved, or inadequately articulated, in the light of agency-structure problematic.

The Catholic Social Teachings on Social Sin

The Latin American Bishops. The second meeting of the Latin American Episcopal conference in 1968 at Medellin, Columbia was inspired by the teachings of Vatican II and the contemporary social teachings of John XXIII and Paul VI, as well as the reality of Latin American underdevelopment as read through the lens of liberation theology (Henriot, 1988:105; O'Brien and Shannon, 1977:345). It is the first body of Catholic social teachings that has emanated from the local church but on par with the authoritative texts of the Magisterium (Gremillion, 1975:142). The documents on "Justice" and "Peace" contain the earliest exposition on social sin based on Latin American experience in the 1960's. Its theology of social sin is rooted on Christological axiom: Jesus Christ's integral mission of liberation (No. 4). Consequently, anything that conspires against this call for liberation – social, economic, and political – is deemed sinful (No. 1). The document on "Peace" equates "unjust situation" with "sinful situation," or "institutionalized violence." "Internal and external colonialism" are singled out as the main culprits of this

²⁹ By "political theology," it is meant here a theology that is politically situated in a particular historical praxis such as racism, sexual discrimination, exploitation, and ethnic marginalization. For the difference between European brand of political theology and Latin American theology of liberation, see F. Fiorenza (1975:3-29). In this chapter, "political theology" refers to European and Latin American brands (cf. Fierro, 1978:28ff.). Unless otherwise defined, it is also used here to cover both liberation theology and European political theology.

underdevelopment that thwart "peace," the "new name for development" (no. 8).

Despite pressures from conservative members of *CELAM* led by Bishop Lopez Trujilio (Lernoux, 1980; 1986:409-59). Eleven years later, the third meeting of *Latin American Episcopal Conference*, which coincided with Pope John Paul II's visit to Puebla, Mexico (Henriot, 1989:105) reaffirmed *Medellin's* main positions, albeit most of its pronouncements are compromised and often contradictory (Lernoux, 1986:432). The lengthy document starts by declaring the present situation of Latin America is laden with sin. Noting the inequities of "its social context," the document declares that, it "see(s) that they have been caused by sin, which has a very broad personal and social dimensions" (*Puebla*, No. 73).³⁰ Notables among these situations are the growing "gap between the rich and the poor" which constitutes "a situation of social sinfulness" (Nos. 330, 28, 73, 1032). And this "sinfulness destroys the divine life in human beings" insofar as Christ is the source of human life (No. 330). At the bottom of this, according to the Bishops, lies "the mystery of sinfulness" (No. 70). "Sinfulness on the personal level," the Bishops add, "is always mirrored on the level of interpersonal relations in a corresponding egotism, haughtiness, ambitions, and envy. These traits produce injustice, domination, violence at every level... Thus they establish sinful situations which, at the world-wide level, enslave countless human beings and adversely affect the freedom of all" (No. 328). Personal sins are capable of being objectified in social structures (No. 281).

The 1971 Synod of Bishops. Another authoritative document which strongly influenced the development of theology of social sin is the *Justice in the World* issued by the *Synod of Bishops* in 1971. This is perchance the most important statement yet issued by the Catholic Church concerning social justice (Dorr, 1984:178). Influenced by *Medellin Documents*, the document speaks of "serious injustices which are building around the world... a network of domination, oppression, and abuses which stifle freedom and keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and fraternal world" (No. 4). Notable among the

³⁰ For commentary, see Jon Sobrino (1980:13-26) and Jose Comblin (1980: 9-12).

situations called unjust is the obstacle posed by underdevelopment that hinders authentic development of poor countries.

Social sin in Pope John Paul II's social encyclicals. The contemporary delineation of social sin in Catholic social teachings can be found in Pope John Paul II's series of encyclicals starting with *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*³¹ (1984), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1989), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991). In *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*, a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, the present Pope defines three levels of social sin. First, to recognize social sin is to recognize that by virtue of human solidarity, each individual's sin in some ways affect others. Second, social sin also refers to direct attack on the neighbor, the second biblical commandment. And third, social sin may refer to the iniquitous social relationships between nations, classes, and communities.

But in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the Pope seems to have gone beyond the analogical definition of social sin – mere sum total of all personal sins. In this encyclical commemorating the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, the Pontiff finally recognizes that “the sum total of the negative factors working against a true awareness of the universal common good, and the need to further it, gives the impressions of creating in persons and institutions, an obstacle which is difficult to overcome” (No. 36). However, the Pope still speaks of “personal responsibility,” which means, social sin is still fundamentally rooted in personal sins.³² In No. 37, the Pope speaks of social sin being embodied in the moral attitudes of the people such as “all consuming desire for profit” and “thirst for power.” This absolutizing of human attitudes leads to “idolatry: of money, ideology, class, and technology.”

Two Instructions by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. At the height of liberation theology's vogue in Third World theological circles and sympathetic reception by European theologians, the *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, chaired by Cardinal J. Ratzinger, issued its first controversial

³¹ The main treatment of social sin is found in No. 16. For commentary, see B. Bozzell (1986:54-57).

³² According to some moral theologians, such position can lead to moral individualism. See T. Schindler (1989:137f).

instruction regarding the orthodoxy of liberation theology(ies) in August, 1984. This Vatican instruction entitled, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of Theology of Liberation*, though less authoritative than Medellin and Puebla, takes over the project of liberation theology and endorses it in most forthright terms (Haight, 1985: 257).³³ Strictly speaking, it is not "a condemnation but is a very strong warning about the deviation to which it (liberation theology) could lead" (Editorial, *Tablet*, 1984). The Instruction starts by affirming that "liberation is first and foremost liberation from radical slavery of sin" (Sec. IV, No. 12). But liberation also includes cultural, economic, and political dimensions which often "prevent people from living in a manner befitting their dignity" (*Introduction*). Furthermore, only "a correct understanding of sin will permit us to insist on the gravity of its social effects" (Sec. IV, No. 14). Interestingly, the Instruction admits, in No. 15 of part IV, that sinful social structures "are consequences more than causes." But it also sternly warns against reducing sin to social dimension (Sec. IV, No. 14).

Two years later, the *Sacred Congregation* issued another instruction, this time, with a more positive and constructive tone. *The Instruction on Freedom and Liberation*³⁴ traces the root of social sin on man's alienation from God. By this process, "man profoundly disturbs his own order and interior balance and also those of society and even visible creation" (No. 42). In another context, it also observes that man's estrangement from God leads to worship of wealth, power, and pleasure. This results to man's despising of his neighbor and "rubbing them unjustly" (No. 42). Following Pope John Paul II's *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*, the *Instruction* traces social sin ultimately to the "voluntary act which has its source in the freedom of individuals" (No. 75). Social sin, therefore, must be taken analogically (No. 75). Surprisingly enough, in later part of the instruction, it speaks of "sets of institutions and practices which people find already existing or which they create, on the national and international level, and which organized economic and political life" (No. 74). However, it insists, "they always depend

³³ The instruction forms part of what is called "ordinary teachings of the Holy See." Cf. Bruno Torpigliani, (1984:2).

³⁴ For commentary see O'Brien (1992:64-77).

on the responsibility of man, who can alter them." Hence, "the first thing to be done is to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the individual and the need for permanent inner conversion" (No. 75).

Some Problematic Points in Catholic Social Teachings

The ontology of social sin. It must be noted outright that the recent Catholic social teachings are in advanced position than the previous ones on the issue of social sin. Consequently, it is largely responsible for christening the doctrine as part of Catholic theological vocabulary. However, there exist some problematic points that need to be explicated.

First, Catholic social teachings especially those issued by Pope John Paul II and the *Sacred Congregation* seem to blur, if not downplay the ontological status of society. That is, it is unclear on the question whether indeed society is objectively real or not. As noted earlier, the first instruction admits that social sin is more than its causes. But it is rather vague in just what this expression means. And this is vitiated by the fact that social sin is grounded on "free responsible persons."³⁵ It has no way of dealing with structural causation except in acknowledging that structures "often tend to become fixed and fossilized as mechanisms relatively independent of the human will, thereby paralyzing or distorting development and causing injustice" (*Instruction 2*, No. 74).³⁶ Curiously enough, it puts primacy to individual moral conversion rather than to structural transformation.³⁷ This leads to another problematic point.

Conversion or transformation? There is a consensus in the corpus of Catholic social teachings that "the uniqueness of the

³⁵ This could position easily lend itself to individualistic attitude the Catholic social teachings are trying to refute. See T. Schindler (1989:23).

³⁶ Gregory Baum (1989:110-126) argues that the analysis of false consciousness is present in John Paul II's *Sollicitudo*. However, Baum seems to overlook the fact that the Pope – within existential personalist bias – ultimately traces these "structures of sin" to individual sin. SRS, no. 36; RP, no. 16.

³⁷ *Instruction 1*, Sec. XI, No. 8; *Instruction 2*, no. 75; *Medellin*, No. 3; *Puebla*, Nos., 1221, 1155, 438.

Christian message does not much consists in the affirmation of the necessity of structural conversion, as it does in the insistence on the conversion of men which will in turn bring about this change" (*Medellin*, No. 3). This is premised on the fact that without interior conversion, structural change "in fact proves to be incomplete, of short duration, and ultimately vain and ineffective" (*Reconciliatio et Penitentia*, No. 60). In fact, to put primacy to structural change is deemed "materialistic" by the second *Instruction* (No. 75). And Puebla insists that structural change must be an outward expression of inner conversion (Nos. 1221 and 1155).

It is only perhaps in *Justice in the World* (No. 9), some sections in *Puebla* (Nos. 1250, 438), scattered notes in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (No. 37) that the primacy of structural change, owing to the obstacles it poses, is taken seriously enough. But even in these radical portions, the stress is still focused on the need for interior conversion as a way of overcoming these obstacles. But is personal conversion the right solution? While indeed these Catholic social teachings do refuse to give concrete solutions to complex political and economic problems, their insistence on the primacy of interior conversion circumvents such claim (see Tabb, 1986). The Church would have achieved a more balanced view if she had consulted recent development in the social sciences like the semiotic analysis of culture, feminist social theory, and post-structuralism in order to highlight the necessity of structural transformation. But the church's position is grounded ultimately on Christian anthropology, the topic of the next section.

Levels of conversion. What does the Church mean when she puts emphasis on personal conversion? Or, to be more exact, when she declares – quite poignantly – that structural conversion is just an outward expression of personal change (*Puebla*, No. 1221)? In this imbroglio over the term "conversion," several meanings are discernible, which can be reduced only into two major meanings. First, it may refer to "conscientization process" (as Paulo Freire, 1980:36f. understood it), which is equivalent to the call of *Synod of Bishops* for "education to justice, peace, and human rights." It means imbuing Christian conscience with strong passion for the struggle of the poor against exploitation (*Medellin*, No. 17 and 3; *Puebla*, No. 1206). Second, conversion may also refer to interior moral or personal conversion that entails the effective practice of

Christian virtues such as forgiveness and solidarity, which leads to the love of neighbor (*Instruction* 1:XI, No. 9; *Centesimus Annus*, No. 25; *Sollicitudo*, No. 38).

Bearing these distinctions in mind, the stance of the Catholic social teachings regarding social transformation remains hanging. Does the meaning conveyed in the first definition, for example, lead to social transformation? Or, alternatively, does the exercise of Christian virtues establish a new politico-economic system? The answers to these pressing questions cannot be found in the corpus of Catholic Church's social teachings. After all, it is to confuse a text on sociology of social transformation with the social teachings of the Church. Or, it is to confuse ideology (political program) with faith (commitment to certain ultimate values). This, the Church can readily admit. But this goes to show that the Church cannot rely too much on Christian tradition to solve contemporary concrete social problems, let alone propose moral conversion as key to political transformation (see Coleman, 1986; Tabb, 1987). The inadequacy of this moral idealism with regard to political transformation will be discussed more fully in the succeeding sections. Suffice it to conclude that church's insistence on moral conversion needs considerable critical examination, if not corrections.

Political Theology and Social Sin

European and North American theologians. One may well be surprised if she studies current literature on social sin and finds out that there are as many definitions as the theologians who employ and use the term and its correlates (*Instruction* 1, XI, 9; *Centesimus Annus*, no. 25; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38). Let's begin with European and North American authors. Edward Schillebeeckx (1968), a Dutch theologian, as early 1968 already suggested the term "contrast experience" to characterize collective evils such as "colonial exploitation, racial discrimination, and other injustices" (p. 29). Then, Gregory Baum (1970:285), wrestling with the problem of religion and modernism, had already incorporated the notion of "demonic" in his theological analysis of social order. The "demonic" is the evil that is objectified in social and psychical forces in history. These demonic forces "multiply evil" which "exceed the malice of men involved in it." Five years later, Baum (1975:193-226)

employs the term "social sin" in his attempt to deprivatize sin, and theology in general. He elaborates four basic levels of social sin: oppressive institution, ideological distortions, false consciousness, and collective decisions (p. 198).

Another theologian who has popularized the concept among North American audience is Peter J. Henriot. Social sin, for Henriot (1973), refers to four elements: oppressive structures, situations that facilitate selfishness, complicity to structures that generate it, and indifference. Moreover, using the sociological model of Berger-Luckmann, Henriot demonstrates the fact that sin can be objectified in social structures. A decisive breakthrough comes with Patrick Kerans' brief work, *Sinful Social Structures* (1974). Kerans uses Lonergan's analysis of "bias" to explicate the concept of social sin. Situations are judged sinful, for Kerans, either in their sources or consequences (p. 79).

Liberation theologians. Gustavo Gutierrez's treatment of social sin in his *A Theology of Liberation* (1970) is now a classic in its own right. In this groundbreaking book, sin is rescued from spiritualizing and individualizing proclivities of traditional Catholic theology (p. 175; also, Gutierrez, 1990:136-138). The father of liberation theology accepts the concept of "hamartiosphere," developed and used earlier by Fr. Jose Maria Gonzales-Ruiz (1968). This concept corresponds very well with biblical notion of "sin of the world" popularized by Piet Schoonenberg (1968). For Gutierrez, social sin is operative in "oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man... in the domain of slavery and class struggles" (1970: 136; 1980:2-24).

For Leonardo Boff (1979), on the other hand, the legitimacy of the concept of social sin is derived from the demand to "historicize sin and salvation" (p. 28). But he also, like Gutierrez, equates social sin with the sin of the world (1985:116; 1978:21-22). And using Piaget's genetic structuralism, Boff emphasizes the objective reality of evil in the world. In his Christology, he defines sin as any obstacle that hinders the advance of human community toward the kingdom of God (1978:21).

Among Latin American liberation theologians, it is only Enrique Dussel (1974) who writes polemically on the "erotic" side of social sin. And this emphasis leads him to accentuate the femi-

nist criticism of Eurocentrism. The "evil one," according to Dussel (1978:100-117), mentioned in the Lord's Prayer, "is the totalization of a system that negates the poor." Original sin, which he equates with social sin, has double meaning: rejection of the other as a person (in Cain-Abel's story), and pantheism of the self as the "unparalleled one" (pp. 24, 2, 7). He further elaborates how social sin is propagated through pedagogy and subjugation of indigenous culture through the rape of "I" (the center) of the other-object (the periphery) (pp. 22 and 28; see also 1987:Chap. 1).

Juan Luis Segundo (1976) is quite unique in refusing to follow the lead of Schoonenberg in equating social sin with sin of the world. Segundo's inhibition is derived from his search to rescue the Catholic dogma of original sin from reactionary and conservative reading (Chap. 3). Hence, he just works out a political reading of the dogma of original sin from an evolutionary point of view.

The Ontology of social sin. Liberation theologians do insist on the objective reality of sinful or unjust social structures. This is derived from the social being of every person and her political dimension (Segundo, 1973:37-38; L. Boff, 1984:74; Costa, 1982:26), which in turn is grounded in the structural tenets of neo-Marxist analysis, specifically Althusserian Marxism (L. and C. Boff, 1987: Chap. 2). And because liberation theologians stress the objective reality of these "violent structures," it is not surprising to find in their writings the advocacy of using social scientific methods to expose the underlying mechanisms of these structures (L. Boff, 1986: Grace). Corollarily, they stress the urgent need for changing these oppressive structures because they arrest integral human development (1970:237; Garcia, 1967:53ff.).

Responsibility, guilt, and accountability. The emphasis on ideology and false consciousness made by political theologians like Kerans and Baum demand the re-conceptualization of the notion of responsibility vis-à-vis guilt (Schindler, p. 137; Baum, Structure of Sin, p. 113). According to Henriot (Concept of Social Sin), the complexities of modern society would make inculpable ignorance³⁸ much more common, and, therefore, social sin much less frequent. This is so because social sin in most cases arises from "ignorance, in-

³⁸ This is also called "vincible ignorance." See Paul Glenn (1930:28).

attentiveness, and other objectifications of the sin of the world" (Mynatty, 1991:12, 18). As Gregory Baum (*Religion and Alienation*, 200) puts it, "people are involved in destructive action without being aware of it" (see also Dorr, 1986:52; Dussell, *Ethics and Community*, Sec.12.7). What is more tragic is that people engaged in the charitable aids for the poor "are at the same time helping to maintain unjust structures of society."³⁹ This may be due to "group bias" or "egoistic bias," says Kerans (p. 89).

In these cases, guilt does not arise. It only occurs in a willful and deliberate participation in sinful social structures and processes. Hence, a person living in a sinful situation need not feel guilty about his or her acts due to the individual's egoistic bias sustained by the common group bias. However, this does not exculpate the person from his or her responsibility to such structures and actions. The person is not only responsible for his or her intended consequence of actions – individually or collectively – but more so for the unintended consequences, albeit he or she may be blind to them. That is why, some writers prefer the term "accountability" to highlight this point rather than "responsibility" (Mynatty, 1991).

From accountability to solidarity. Responsibility towards sinful social structures leads to commitment to change these situations as well as commitment to be in solidarity with the poor, the victims of exploitation (Pieris, 1984; Aroskiamy, 1987:95). Such commitment to solidarity "leads to a transformative praxis" (Sobrino and Pico, 1985:65, 67). However taking into account the fact that sinful social structures are not products of just a single individual, it should also be noted that change calls for collective solidarity, a unified and concerted effort by the underdogs of society (ibid.). It involves taking side with the oppressed against their oppressors (Nolan, Gutierrez, Truth, 75ff.). Only in this partiality that the universality of God's salvific love is realized (*Pope*, 1993).

Forgiving sinful reality. Just as one is justified in calling a situation sinful so is one also allowed to speak of "forgiveness of reality" (Sobrino, 1970). Thus, "a Christian must be prepared to

³⁹ See note 87 above.

forgive," says Sobrino, "the sinner, and forgive reality, to free sinners from sin and heal reality from the misery of sin" (p. 45). One cannot by any means, reconcile evil structures with God's grace (Sobrino, 1992; Aroskiamy, 1987; Nolan, 1987). Forgiveness of sinful reality in the final analysis is the eradication of ontic evils. It connotes a building of new relations which would reclaim the humanity of both the victims and the perpetrators of these evils.⁴⁰ It calls for a profound "spirituality of forgiveness" (Sobrino, 1970). Commitment to the eradication of social evils must be grounded ultimately in God's mercy and justice. This will ensure that Christians will not fall victims to revolutionary terrorism and atavistic resentment rightly criticized by Nietzsche (see Byrne, 1993).

Forgiveness of the sinners. The priority given by liberation theologians to the forgiveness of sinful social reality does not entail reducing sin to its social dimension. On the contrary, liberation theologians are aware of the fact that human beings created these structures. These structures are crystallized in the actions of unscrupulous capitalists, human rights violators, torturers, and military dictators. Hence human beings can also change these structures. In this situation, forgiveness means extricating the operators and victims of these social evils from such dehumanizing situations. It is to redeem their freedom and humanity through love and revolutionary praxis in the hope that this will transform their personal and existential situatedness in sinful social structures.⁴¹ It is therefore naïve and irresponsible to forgive sinners without at the same time destroying the structures and situations that allow them to continually practice their sinful actions (L. Boff, *Lord's Prayer*, 95; Peters, 1970; Couturier, 1991:406).

⁴⁰ L. Boff (1982:49), for instance, speaks of the dehumanizing effects of poverty and capitalism on the poor and the rich.

⁴¹ Bernard Ramm (1985) points out that "forgiveness re-establishes vertical communion with the Most High; forgiving those who have offended us re-establishes our horizontal communion with our fellow men" (p. 144). However he also warns that the notion of social sin in liberation theology should not downplay the inhuman, the brutal and the demonic in the personal level. While multinational corporations can indeed be exceedingly brutal in the consequences of their global operation, nevertheless we should not lose sight of the brutality of the child molesters, violent sexual offenders, wife-beaters, and torturers.

Some Unresolved Difficulties

Inadequate articulation of ontology of the "social" social sin. The version of social sin shared among Catholic political theologians has some continuities as well as discontinuities with its articulation in Catholic social teachings. However, the former has a considerable proclivity in highlighting the ontological status of social structures that are deemed sinful. But despite of this right emphasis, it still possesses some weak spots in its treatment of the reality of social sin and society.⁴²

Both Leonardo Boff (1988) and Juan Luis Segundo (1985), for instance, forcefully accentuate the social dimension of human beings.⁴³ Boff (1983:95), in particular, uses and advocates structural analysis derived from neo-Marxist model of Louis Althusser to supplant functionalist model of society.⁴⁴ Yet they fail to provide any convincing argument as to the ontological status of society. Even some liberation theologians' passing reference to Berger-Luckman's (1967) phenomenological model of society also fails to note the weakness of this approach (see Lichtam (1978) for critique of phenomenological analysis if agency and structure). It seems that the elaboration of the ontology of the "social" in liberation theology is its Achilles hill. In this sense, it has not gone beyond the subjectivist position of the Catholic social teachings. It has a poor working model for the ontology of society, and impoverished analysis of the dialectic between agency and structure.

Conversion or transformation? The whole problematic of the debate between the *Magisterium* and political theologians regarding conversion-transformation is aptly stated by Antonio Moser (1982): "If our focus is egoism, we will insist on educating the conscience; if sinful structures are stressed, social change will have priority" (p. 29). Political theologians in general, adopt the safest position: juxtaposition of the two dimensions (see Sievernich, 1987). Henriot,

⁴² Interestingly, liberation theologians and political theologians do not provide any precise definition or model of society or collective entities.

⁴³ This is also true for Catholic theology and social teachings of the Church, see Curran (1991:79).

⁴⁴ But this model is now bankrupt because it fails to consider human agency (see Giddens, 1978).

in particular, at the outset rules out any temporal sequence, that is, moral conversion preceding social change. Perchance it is only Juan Luis Segundo (1973:69) who addresses this issue polemically. For him, moral conversion only facilitates social transformation and is not the cause of the latter. But what does Segundo mean by "interior conversion" as the "liberation of the minorities"? In the context of his analysis, it means being politically aware of the direction of social transformation. But it misses the whole point upon which the entire conundrum revolves, namely, conversion versus structural transformation. Segundo evades the dilemma by equating conversion with ideological conversion. He therefore equivocates on his use of conversion.

Political theologians and liberation theologians rightly stress the relative importance of structural transformation over moral conversion. But they fail to argue convincingly that there is no symmetrical relationship between personal conversion and structural change. One need not follow the other. As Andrew Collier (1990) points out, a whole society can be converted to Buddhism, yet the fundamental social relations rooted in the mode of production of such society may still remain intact. In this sense, moral conversion can only lead to superficial social changes.

Conversion or levels of conversion? In evaluating the Catholic social teachings on conversion in Part I, it was pointed out that there are two meanings that can be attached to it, namely, conscientization and moral renewal. Political theologians add another clarification by defining conversion in terms of ideological conversion. This definition is similar to "conscientization" but spells out a more elaborate meaning that includes false consciousness (Marsch, 1970), group and individual biases (Kerans, 1974), and ideological distortions (Baum, 1975).⁴⁵ Aside from ideological conversion, liberation theologians also insist on political conversion, or the need to see social realities from the lens of the poor (Garcia, 1987). Yet in spite of this rich terminological contribution, liberation theologians fail to produce a systematic discussion of the interrelationship of

⁴⁵ Liberation theologians are quite aversive towards moralism. Moralism connotes the reduction of condemnation of social problems on mere moral grounds without using social scientific analysis to chart out the paths of social transformation. See C. Boff (1987:8-10).

these different levels of conversion. For instance, does moral conversion lead to ideological conversion, and vice versa? Or, does ideological conversion suffice for social transformation? Again, the central problematic here is the relationship between agency and structure: whence does social transformation arise? Liberation theologians and the social teachings of the Church agree that it must come from conversion. This is the subjectivist solution. But what kind of conversion? Conversion to what? What, then, is the proper role of social transformation? To untangle these questions I will now turn to sociological theorizing of the dialectic between agency and structure. This last part of my essay, the sociological part, I hope, can illuminate some of the unresolved difficulties in the articulation of social sin in Catholic theology.

III - TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLICATION OF SOME OF THE UNRESOLVED ISSUES IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF SIN

Bearing in mind the problematic points raised above in connection with the conceptualization of agency and structure in the light of Catholic theology of social sin, I will now propose some directions, grounded in sociological analysis, in order to suggest a more adequate working model for conceptualizing social sin. Let me remind the readers that I will proceed below from strictly sociological vantage point. For the philosophical anthropology needed for this discussion, I leave it to further discussions with theologians.

The dualism of agency and structure in social theory and social sin. In sociological tradition, there has been constructed a seemingly unbridgeable binary opposition between agency and structure, individual and society (Layder, 1989). This dualism has led to the polarization of sociological traditions into two opposing camps.⁴⁶ There are the holists or structuralists⁴⁷ who argue that

⁴⁶ An earlier variant of this is the debate regarding the presence of two sociologies (see Dawe, 1967; Corrigan, 1967).

⁴⁷ Other terms associated with this are: wholism, organicism, collectivism, and sociological realism (see Bunge, 1996:242ff.). There are sub-traditions within this tradition, namely, the functionalism (Parsons, Malinowski), structuralism

society is a reality *sui generis* (James, 1984). Society as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Society has emergent properties that cannot be reduced to individual characteristics (Wright, et.al., 1987; Lukes, 1968; Gellner, 1976; Ruben, 1986). They argue, following Emile Durkheim (1985), that society and social structures exist relatively independent of human consciousness (Hund, 1986). Accordingly, society is seen as a pervasive entity that strongly influences human behavior. Hence they argue that sociological explanation must be grounded on social facts and structural explanation (Mandelbaum, 1986; Miller, 1978). Structuralist explanation brackets the intentions and motivations of the actors (Giddens, 1978). The focus rather is on macro processes that have recurring patterns through long period of time. And the business of sociologists is simply to codify these patterns.

This tradition has been the main bellwether in the project of streamlining sociology into a science like the natural sciences (Benton, 1978). These postulates of holism have been attacked mainly for dissolving human freedom via structural determinism (Blumer, 1962; Homans, 1964). Actors – especially in Parsonsian version – are reduced to mere occupants of social roles (Giddens, 1978). No room is left for creativity of the actors as actors are depicted as internalizing passively social norms (Garfinkel, 1967). More importantly, holism has the tendency to reify society and collectivities (Bunge, 1996).

Partly as a reaction to Durkheimian tradition, the subjectivists or the interpretivists⁴⁸ argue that society is not real but only individuals (Bhargava, 1992). Sociologists in this paradigm usually espouse methodological individualism (Jarvie, 1959; Popper, 1957; Lachenmeyer, 1971; Roche, 1973). This tradition, rooted in the sociology of Max Weber, looks at society merely as collection of aggregate

(Merton, Kinsey), Marxist structuralism (Godelier, Althusser), structural exchange theory (Blau), and linguistic structuralism (Levi-Strauss).

⁴⁸ Other terms associated with this tradition are: individualism, atomism, voluntarism, intentionalism. There are also sub-traditions under this tradition, namely, psychological version of social exchange (Homans), symbolic interactionism (Mead and Blumer), phenomenological sociology (Schutz, Berger and Luckman), existential sociology (Tiryakian, Manning, and Douglas), hermeneutics (Weber, Rickert, Ricouer, Dilthey), dramaturgy (Goffman), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel), rational choice theory (Elster), and game theory.

properties of individuals (Watkins, 1959). The purpose of sociological analysis is to provide explanation in terms of individual psychological traits. The most controversial methodological thesis of this paradigm is that any adequate social explanation must be reduced to psychological explanation (Homans, 1967; Watkins, 1959). In contrast to its positivist cousin (Homans' social exchange, rational choice theory, and game theory), the humanistic versions of this paradigm (existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism) abandon the project of turning sociology into a science. Sociological explanation involves interpretation of symbolic meanings of social actions (Mahajan, 1992). Hence they champion rescuing human freedom from structural determination (Garfinkel, 1967). Both these schools however share the same individualistic-reductionist vision of society.

In contemporary sociological theorizing, there are several attempts to go beyond this dualism between society and individuals. The earliest attempt to synthesize these two paradigms is the dialectical model of society developed along phenomenological lines proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman (1966). In this model, society is seen as the products of individual actions ("externalization" and "objectivation"), while human action, in return are shaped by social structures ("externalization"). This model however fall shorts of elaborating the mechanism of externalization.⁴⁹

Today, the most ambitious attempt to go beyond this dualism is Anthony Giddens' (1989) structuration theory. In this model, dualism is rejected in favor of duality of structure. Under this paradigm, social structures are seen simultaneously both as the condition for human actions as well as the outcome of human actions. Stated differently, human beings do not merely reproduce the conditions of their actions but also produce and transform their conditions.⁵⁰ In the same vein, Roy Bhaskar (1987; 1989) calls this model "transformative theory of social action."

⁴⁹ The problem of reconciling human freedom with phenomenological sociology as elaborated by Alfred Schutz (that also applies to Berger-Luckman dialectical model) is found in Goreman (1978).

⁵⁰ Giddens has been rightly criticized by many sociologists for giving too much power to the subject and dissolving the ontological status of society to memory traces of individuals. See Craib (1998), Layder (1994), Thompson (1989).

Before going any further perchance it would be very useful to distinguish between the ontological and methodological claims of these competing paradigms (see Bhargava, 1992; Bhaskar, 1989; Outhwaite, 1987). For Giddens (1989) structuralism and methodological individualism are two ways of doing strategic research. In structuralism, for instance, agents and their consciousness are bracketed. But it does not follow that consciousness and agents do not exist, but only structures. The question of ontology must be separated from the question of methodology (Bhaskar, 1989). Some of the muddled issues in this debate disappear once we recognize that these two paradigms are just methodological approaches. Strictly speaking they must be separated from their ontological commitments (whether it is society or the individual that is real).

Now, following Giddens' structuration theory and Bhaskar's critical realism as well as other attempts to transcend the dualism of structure and agency I will try to draw out some their consequences to Catholic notion of social sin. Then, I will point some directions for solving impasses that plague Catholic theology of social sin.

The ontology of the "social" in social sin. It must be conceded to the objectivists and structuralists that society is irreducible to the aggregate properties of its elements (Kincaid, 1996). As Durkheim (*Rules*) had shown, society pre-exists the individual and will continue to exist long after the individual is gone. Society and its structures have emergent properties that cannot be reduced to aggregate properties of individuals composing them.⁵¹ This does not entail the acceptance of any metaphysical entities like "group mind"; neither does it connote any form of reification of the social (Copp, 1995:150).⁵² So, the structuralist presuppositions must be qualified. As Kincaid (1996:189) has recently argued, while methodological

This should remind sociologists that recovering human agency from social determination should not go as far as to undermine the ontology of society. Hence in the following discussion I will use Bhaskar's critical realist social theory as corrective to Giddens'.

⁵¹ This is the truth that is squeezed in the long-standing debate between the holists/structuralists and the methodological individualists.

⁵² Sociologists (Outhwaite, 1978; Benton, 1978) even argue that Durkheim, the staunchest defender of this tradition, is not guilty of social reification.

individualism is flawed as a good sociological explanation, nevertheless its truth must be affirmed: (1) society is composed of and does not act independently of individuals; (2) some reference to individuals is necessary for full explanation; and (3) individualist mechanisms are sometimes essential to confirmation and when not essential they nonetheless contribute to confirmation.

Following Giddens (1989), social structures can be defined as rules⁵³ and resources that enable individual to produce and reproduce their social existence. The determinism entailed by holism and the voluntarism entailed by subjectivism must be rejected. Society simultaneously provides both constraints and possibilities for persons doing otherwise. Society makes people what they are by: enabling individuals to procure necessary resources; constraining them by limiting the range of possible options; favoring certain ranges of outcomes; mediating by shaping the way one element affects another; preventing by thwarting certain kinds of changes; and determining by establishing definitively the nature, kind, or quality of actions (Fay, 1996:68). The rules and principles of patriarchy, for instance, simultaneously constrain, select, mediate, prevent, and determine the nature of relationships, status, identity, and power of men and women. This is the truth in structuralist paradigm. Patriarchy in this sense cannot be reduced to mere rules and resources for defining gender inequalities (as Giddens would seem to argue). Neither does it mean that patriarchy is reducible to individual psychological dispositions of men and women constituting it. As Bhaskar (1984) has rightly argued, society is not something produced by people. People just find themselves born into a particular society. But people are not powerlessly trapped in social determinism. For society also enables people to transform their pre-given circumstances. In the case of patriarchy, for instance, women are also able to resist, re-interpret, and negotiate the rules and resources of patriarchy to their own advantage. Consequently both men and women continuously reproduce this institutionalized violence in their everyday life. They include, for example, verbal and non-verbal communication. Clearly these violent structures cannot

⁵³ Rules can either be regulative or constitutive. For definition see Searle (1992) and Fay (1996:64-65).

– pace Giddens – be defined narrowly as rules and resources. But definitely these structures are reproduced and transformed in everyday actions of men and women. It must also be insisted “that people, in their conscious human activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (or occasionally, transform) the structures that govern their substantive activities of production... it is nevertheless the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also the necessary condition for, their activity” (Bhaskar, 1979: vol. 3:124).

Ontology and the dialectic between freedom and determinism. This acknowledgement of the objective and relative independence of social structures does not necessarily entail embracing the reservations of the *Magisterium* against liberation theologians’ use of the concept of social sin. As discussed in Part I, the Church fears that by acknowledging strongly the ontological status of society, it might lead to imputation of moral responsibility to society or collectivity.⁵⁴ However it cannot be strongly emphasized here that structuralists themselves are unanimous in rejecting any notion of metaphysical group mind or reification of the social (Searle, 1992; Bhaskar, 1989). Secondly, the Church also fears that embracing a strongly version of the ontology of the social might justify revolutionary terrorism (*Instruction 2*, Nos. 78-79); and it might allow the justification of sacrifice of human dignity in the name of insuperable, scientific “laws of history” (*Instruction 1*, XI, No. 10; *Instruction 2*, No. 74). While these apprehensions might be justified in the light of historical records of Marxist-inspired movements, nevertheless, they are not necessarily connected with non-vulgarized versions of Marxism.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Church fears that by ignoring or downplaying moral conversion, Christian

⁵⁴ In passing, it must be noted that an acknowledgement of the irreducibility of society to individuals do not necessarily mean accepting any metaphysical notion of group mind or consciousness. But a stronger case can be made that will show that a society can also have preferences, irreducible to individual preferences of its members, and these preferences can be judged normatively (see Copp, 1996: 146). Of course some philosophers argue that corporate entities and societies can be said to be morally responsible (French, 1984; Donaldson, 1980).

⁵⁵ Of course the Church can very well argue that one cannot separate theory and its historical applications. But this critique can also be turned back against the historical records of the Church.

liberation is reduced to purely horizontal dimension⁵⁶ (*Instruction I*, XI, No. 9; IV, No.15). But more importantly, such danger might lead to the rejection of the centrality of the "myth of the Fall" (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 25). Simply put, it will deprive human beings of their ontological freedom by transferring it to structures that are external to them. From this anthropology, the Church teaches that structures "can only create a better condition for the effective exercise of freedom." After all, "it is not liberation which itself produces human freedom," but "one's own acts and self-determination" (*Instruction 2*, No. 31). This position rooted in neo-Thomistic personalist⁵⁷ definition of freedom locates freedom in "interior mastery of one's own acts and self-determination" (*Instruction 2*, No. 27). It follows that "a process of liberation which has been achieved can only create better conditions for the effective exercise of freedom" (*Instruction 2*, Nos., 31 and 75).

This notion of freedom unnecessarily reenacts the dualism between existential freedom and political freedom (Buckley, 1975). In this sense, the Church merely pays lip service to the social being of individuals. It looks at social being of individuals as a mere appurtenance appended merely to complete the essence of human beings. This position is oblivious of the fact that social structures do not merely provide the conditions for the effective exercise of human freedom, but also, to a large degree condition, determine, and limit its outcome.

Karl Rahner (1982) provides an alternative position when he argues that Christian freedom "is not a freedom which lives behind a merely physical, biological, exterior, and historical temporality of the subject. Rather it actualizes itself as this subjective freedom in a passage through temporality which freedom itself re-establishes in order to be itself" (p. 94).⁵⁸ Rahner expresses the kernel of human

⁵⁶ According to *Instruction 1*, the priority given to structural changes is an "expression of materialistic anthropology" (Sec. XI, No. 8; also *Instruction 2*, No. 75).

⁵⁷ For an exposition of the Lublin-Thomistic synthesis underlying the position of the Magisterium and Pope John Paul II's philosophy of freedom, see Woznicki (1987).

⁵⁸ In the context of original sin, Rahner writes: "The situation is not just an exterior situation which basically does not enter into the decision of freedom as such. It is not the external material which an intention, an attitude or decision

freedom and social determination so central in Giddens' transformative theory of human action (see also Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

The duality of structure also connotes that the individuals do not only reproduce social structures. Social structures are not just constraints but also enabling. Rules and resources can also be negotiated (Bourdieu, 1989). They are subject to power struggle and constant re-definition. People in sinful situations are not just passive dopes. Individuals are actors that constantly monitor their actions. This is the truth in interpretive paradigm that is central in Giddens' (1989) structuration theory. Social structures are objective, but unlike natural entities, they are only relatively independent of their creators. Hence they can be altered (Bhaskar, 1989; Benton, 1979).

Responsibility and social reproduction of sinful social structures. This proposition will have great repercussion to Catholic theology of social sin. This is in the area of responsibility. Most of the time, people intend to do achieve goal "G" by performing action "A". But they end up also producing consequence "C". There is always a disjunction between individually held beliefs and full-blown word-meanings (Bhargava, 1992:220).⁵⁹ This is the outcome of the unintended consequences of their actions. Hence people involved in a sinful social situation need not be conscious of the sinful character of their actions and the institutions that allow them to perform such actions. Of course people involved in such situations can acknowledge the reality of these sinful social structures once they are confronted with sociological analysis. Giddens (1978) calls this knowledge "discursive knowledge."

The multidimensional character of social sin. Another fruitful way to clarify the ontology of "social" in Catholic theology of social sin is to delineate its levels and ramifications. This conceptual clari-

is merely actualized in such away that the material of this free decision then drops off this decision as it were. Rather freedom inevitably appropriates the material in which it actualizes itself as an intrinsic and constitutive element which is originally co-determined by freedom itself" (p. 107).

⁵⁹ This proposition refutes the fundamental claim of methodological individualism that social explanation can be reduced to psychological explanation. Meanings are always contextual (Bhargava, 1992:251). Bhargava (1992) prefers to use contextualism rather than structuralism or holism.

fication will add perspicacity to the analysis of concrete situation. I suggest that the term “social sin” be reserved as generic term for describing the theological and moral quality of all forms and levels of sinful situation – both micro and macro. Then, we can distinguish other related or derivative terms: “structural sin” or “sinful social structures,” “institutionalized sin” or “sinful institutions,” “systemic sin” or “sinful social system,” and “discursive sin” or “sinful symbolic systems.” Structural sin refers to resources and rules that further the growth and practice of all forms of exploitation, oppression and discrimination. When these rules and resources are systematically ordered in a formal way it becomes institutionalized. When institutions are structured in such a way that they mutually reinforce and reproduce these exploitations, oppressions, and discriminations across space and time, they become systemic. Further up the scale we can also talk about global sin. This happens when systemic sins move outward and are enshrined in international bodies, treaties, laws, and intra-state relationships. This category would also include global inequalities, imperialism, and all forms terrorism. In addition, “social sin” cannot be restricted merely to situations, rules, institutions, and relationships. They can also be expressed in symbolic forms, particularly in language, narratives, and discourses.⁶⁰ Sin can also spread through discourses. Discourses are like narratives that allow people to tell their individual and collective stories. Discourses also function as regimes of truth. Following Michel Foucault (1987), regimes of truth are tied with power structures. Regimes of truth stipulate what is permissible and what is not, what can be said and what cannot be said. Homophobia, for instance, tells a narrative that condemns homosexual behavior as a disease. Capitalist discourse justifies inequalities by making them natural and results of failure on the part of the individuals. Patriarchy, on the other hand, naturalizes gender inequalities by appealing to biology. Following Pierre Bourdieu (, these sinful symbolic systems or discursive sins spew symbolic violence. This is akin to Gutierrez’s notion of structural violence. Only this

⁶⁰ If one follows the social constructionist paradigm, the term “discursive sin” is preferable; if one follows Habermas, the term “communicative sin” is very apt. The latter connotes distortions in understanding resulting from subjective and objective biases. On grander scale, the pathologies of modern society – analyzed by Habermas – might also be a candidate for the category “systemic sin.”

time, the violence constitutes the individuals rather than as constraints working against them from the outside. In this sense,

This delineation of "social sin" will allow the Church and theologians to use appropriate terms in its proper understanding of sinful situations. It will allow them to condemn precisely the root cause of the sinful situation – in symbols, in structures, in the system, or within the institution. It will also help them avoid sweeping condemnation of a situation considered sinful. For it will help them discriminate the part of the system or institutions that are sinful, while at the same time articulating the presence of "grace" in the form of resistance of agents and their freedom to refuse to participate in such sinful activities and structures. Consequently political theologians must be sensitive to the fact that structures are not just constraining but also enabling. For as post-structuralists, notably Michel Foucault (1989), have shown, whenever there is power, there is always resistance. Institutions do not merely contain structures that complete curtail human freedom. They also, at the same time, embody spaces of counter-maneuvers. And these elements are conjoined together. A new theology of social sin will have to see the nuances of situations and discriminate among these different levels. While institutions and structures can limit human freedom, they also provide means to subvert these same institutions and rules. Institutions also breed counter-practices or institutional spaces that allow the participants to counter the hegemonies created by the "evil ones." Social action could not be totally determined by social structures (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Now, as to what degree this freedom is available and extendable will be based on concrete empirical analysis. Suffice it to say that "agency is a relative trait: one can have more or less of it. Some people are more "agential" than others by virtue of their place in the social order, their skill, their dispositions, and so on" (Fay, 1996:67).

Social transformation or conversion? As stated in Part II, the main incongruity between Catholic social teachings and the stand of political theologians with regard to social sin is on the issue of conversion and revolution. Also, as stated above, political theologians and the social teachings of the church agree on the need for conversion. But they have conflicting understanding of what conversion consists of. For the Catholic social teachings, the priority

is given to the definition of conversion as personal-moral conversion. On the other hand, political theologians stress the meaning of conversion as ideological conversion. They share however a common core: the centrality of moral, interior conversion.

In this regard, I suggest that ideological conversion must be given priority over personal conversion. I am not saying of course that the need for moral conversion, that is central to Catholic and Christian tradition, be replaced by ideological conversion. This will make Christianity lose its original and distinctive flavor (*Medellin*, No. 3). Rather, what I am suggesting is that in matters involving social sin ideological conversion takes precedence. This precedence is pragmatic, not a theological or ontological position. This is premised on the fact that people may be unaware of the unintended consequences of their actions. In Marxist parlance this is known as false consciousness.⁶¹ If false consciousness is present, then, no amount of pious supplications will make sinful structures go away. People involved in such perspective-distorting situations – or what Habermas calls “distorted communication” – must first be brought to the realization that their perspectives and practices lead to the reproduction of a dehumanizing situation. This is also called “conscientization” in the Catholic social teachings. It may also be termed generally as intellectual conversion. Intellectual conversion may be akin to Thomas Kuhn’s (1972) gestalt switch that enables individuals to see things in a radically new way. But the proper role of personal and moral conversion must not be unduly underplayed. For moral and exterior conversion will ensure that genuine change is forthcoming and could be sustained in the long run. This is grounded on the Christian notion of corruptibility of human nature so central to Catholic anthropology. Once people are conscientized then we move to the next level: political conversion. In political conversion, people express their solidarity with the victims of the sinful situations. They do not remain trapped in individualistic

⁶¹ False consciousness should not be taken here to imply the existence of “true consciousness.” It only means that people have a myopic view of their situations. Whereas those who criticize false consciousness are people – who are not hooked up to the reality in any privileged way – who have a more comprehensive way of seeing things.

solutions. They side with the victims against their oppressors and the institutions and values they represent. Political conversion entails collective and mass actions. Let me repeat the sequence: people must experience intellectual conversion, then ideological conversion, finally, political conversion. All these levels must be suffused with the Church's call for moral and interior conversion. Love and forgiveness, not hatred must animate the values of revolutionary Christians. The process of social transformation must be coupled with interior conversion. Christians, in changing social structures, must incessantly change their values in anticipation of the new social order. They cannot wait to change themselves morally until the complete social transformation is achieved. This is the truth found in Catholic social doctrine on social sin. And while it can be readily admitted that social transformation can partially bring transformation to individual character, nevertheless, it is not a guarantee for integral personal transformation.⁶² Inversely, personal-moral conversion is a bad substitute for ideological conversion and social revolution. The Church must not lose sight of this other side of the coin. In shuttling back and forth in these three levels, theologians must be in constant dialogue with the social sciences to provide them with empirical data for their theological discernment (Libanio, 1987).⁶³

⁶² In this case, the position of the Church is very similar to Sigmund Freud's (1967) critique of socialist utopia, albeit for different reason.

⁶³ As sociologist, however, personally, I do not remain unaffected by this encounter. My sociological reading allows me to re-orient my values towards the commitment to eradication of sinful social situations, albeit as a sociologist, I don not talk about sin but social inequalities, discriminations, etc. "Sin" is a concept proper to the language of theology. Inequality is a language proper to my field. As to whether these two languages can fuse is a controversial issue. As for now I prefer to provide analysis and tools to theologians.

