

# Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac

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## Abstract

This essay argues that for Henri de Lubac, a sacramental ontology provides the link between a Eucharistically based ecclesiology and the issue of the relationship between nature and the supernatural. For de Lubac it is the sacramental order of reality that draws humanity to a deeper participation in the divine life. Maurice Blondel's substitution of Tradition for the dilemma between extrinsicism and historicism shapes de Lubac's sacramental ontology. The latter's concern for the social character of the Church and his opposition to an individualist ecclesiology are key to his understanding of the relationship between the supernatural and the Eucharistic character of the Church. Arguing that Eucharist and Church are mutually constituting, de Lubac wants to counter both extrinsicist and historicist approaches to the Church. For de Lubac, the Eucharist provides an avenue for the mutual interpenetration of nature and the supernatural, thereby overcoming the dualism between extrinsicism and historicism. It is through the sacramental means of Christ, the Church, and the Eucharist, that God is present in the world. This presence means for de Lubac neither an acceptance of the State on its own terms nor an exaggerated spiritualist critique of Constantinianism.

## Keywords

Henri de Lubac, Maurice Blondel, Eucharist, sacramental ontology, supernatural

## Introduction

While the numerous attempts to find a central key to unlock the theology of Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) have yielded many an insight in his thought, the quest for a central or focal point has nonetheless

remained somewhat elusive. One of the reasons, no doubt, is simply the great variety of de Lubac's work. It is a variety in terms of the topics that he addresses in his writings<sup>1</sup> as well as in terms of the approaches that he takes, with some of his books being the result of meticulous historical theological research and others being occasioned by more immediate needs.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of topic or genre, however, de Lubac desires to be—using the phrase of his beloved Origen—a *vir ecclesiasticus*. As a result, the doctrine of the Church is one of his key concerns. Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his book on de Lubac's thought, makes the comment that the Church “is the real center of his whole life's work: the meeting point of God's descending world and man's world ascending to him.”<sup>3</sup> A focus on de Lubac's ecclesiology, therefore, gives insight into one of the deepest motivations permeating his life and work.

Merely observing the centrality of the Church in de Lubac's thought is not sufficient, however. Questions remain: is there an element within his ecclesiology that gives insight into his overall doctrine of the Church? Is there a particular link that we can discern between his ecclesiology and his overall theological approach? Does de Lubac operate on the basis of a certain metaphysical or ontological approach that gives shape to his ecclesiology? John Milbank, recognizing that de Lubac never explicitly presents a distinct metaphysic, playfully suggests that de Lubac offers a “non-ontology” by way of return to authentic Christian discourse. Milbank is surely right to claim that much of de Lubac's “non-ontology” represents an exploration of the field of the “suspended middle” between nature and the supernatural, something that I will explore in detail in this essay.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, I believe that at the heart of de Lubac's theology lies a concern for sacramentality, which informs not only his ecclesiology, but

<sup>1</sup> De Lubac's theological writings broadly cover four overall areas: (1) nature – supernatural relationship; (2) spiritual interpretation of scripture; (3) ecclesiology; and (4) non-Christian worldviews.

<sup>2</sup> As a result of his involvement with Vatican II, for example, de Lubac interacted with *Lumen Gentium* in *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Editions Mouton, 1967); with *Gaudium et Spes* in *Athéisme et sens de l'homme: Une double requête de "Gaudium et Spes"* (Paris: Cerf, 1968); and with *Dei Verbum* in *La révélation divine: Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la Constitution "Dei Verbum" du Concile Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio, Michael M. Waldstein, and Susan Clements (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Milbank clarifies: “By ‘non-ontology’ (my term) I must stress that I do not mean that de Lubac refused ontology: rather I mean that he articulated an ontology between the field of pure immanent being proper to philosophy on the one hand, and the field of the revelatory event proper to theology on the other” (*The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 5). The term “suspended middle” originates with Von Balthasar, *Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 16–17.

also his understanding of the nature – supernatural relationship.<sup>5</sup> The conviction behind this essay is that de Lubac does, therefore, consciously operate with a particular ontology, one that is sacramental in character.<sup>6</sup> One could elucidate each of his main theological concerns through a focus on his understanding of the sacramental character of all created existence.

Numerous scholars have traced Henri de Lubac's ecclesiology and, in particular, the role of the Eucharist in his doctrine of the Church.<sup>7</sup> A number of theologians have also discussed de Lubac's opposition to the regnant neo-Thomist separation between nature and the supernatural.<sup>8</sup> None, however, have extensively analyzed the connection between these two topics. The close chronological proximity of de Lubac's first publications on the Church and those on the supernatural indicates that he was mining the Church Fathers and the later medieval theologians on both of these topics at the same time. While

<sup>5</sup> While it lies beyond the scope of this essay, it seems clear to me that de Lubac's sacramental ontology also shapes his approach to the interpretation of scripture and his evaluation of non-Christian belief systems.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis M. Doyle uses the term "sacramental ontology" to describe Henri de Lubac's approach ("Henri de Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 60 [1990]: 226-27).

<sup>7</sup> Christofer Frey, *Mysterium der Kirche, Öffnung zur Welt: Zwei Aspekte der Erneuerung französischer katholischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); Robert Franklin Gotcher, "Henri de Lubac and Communion: The Significance of His Theology of the Supernatural for an Interpretation of Gaudium et Spes" (Ph.D. Diss. Marquette University, 2002); Doyle, "Henri de Lubac," 209-27; Austin J. Lindsay, "De Lubac's Images of the Church: A Study of Christianity in Dialogue" (Ph.D. Diss. Catholic University of America, 1974); Paul McPartlan, "Eucharistic Ecclesiology," *One in Christ* 22 (1986): 314-31; idem, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993); idem, "'You will be changed into me': Unity and Limits in de Lubac's Thought," *One in Christ* 30 (1994): 50-60; idem, "The Eucharist, the Church and Evangelization: The influence of Henri de Lubac," *Communio* 23 (1996): 776-85; Mark Pelchat, *L'Eglise mystère de communion: L'ecclésiologie dans l'oeuvre de Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Mediaspaul; Montreal: Editions Paulines, 1988); Hubert Schnackers, *Kirche als Sakrament und Mutter: Zur Ekklesiologie von Henri de Lubac* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1979); Jean Stern, "Henri de Lubac et le mystère de l'Eglise," *Gregorianum* 78 (1997): 647-59; Christopher J. Walsh, "De Lubac's Critique of the Postconciliar Church," *Communio* 19 (1992): 404-32; idem, "Henri de Lubac and the Ecclesiology of the Postconciliar Church" (Ph.D. Diss. Catholic University of America, 1993); Lisa Wang, "Sacramentum Unitatis Ecclesiasticae: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac," *Anglican Theological Review* 85 (2003): 143-58; Susan Karaus Wood, "The Church as the Social Embodiment of Grace in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac" (Ph.D. Diss. Marquette University, 1986); idem, "The Church as Communion," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Minn.: Michael Glazier – Liturgical, 2000), 159-76.

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 579-602; Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003); Milbank, *Suspended Middle*; Hans Boersma, "Accommodation to What? Univocity of Being, Pure Nature, and the Anthropology of St Irenaeus," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): 266-93.

the storm of controversy surrounding *nouvelle théologie*, and de Lubac in particular, centred on *Surnaturel*, published in 1946, this historical study on the supernatural had of course been preceded by his wide-ranging *Catholicisme* (1938), in which de Lubac had presented an initial exposition of the Eucharist and the Church, which he had subsequently outlined in detail in his *Corpus mysticum* (1944).<sup>9</sup> There seems to be little doubt that de Lubac developed his Eucharist-focused ecclesiology and his approach to the relationship between nature and the supernatural roughly around the same time.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that de Lubac's reaction against neo-scholasticism concerned both the nature-grace relationship *and* the Eucharist, and that the French theological establishment was deeply concerned about the relativism that de Lubac's more historical approach seemed to advocate.

In this essay, I will focus primarily on de Lubac's understanding of the Eucharist and the Church, while throughout pointing out connections with his understanding of issues surrounding the supernatural. I will argue that these two topics were closely connected in de Lubac's mind and that it was his sacramental ontology that provided the link between the two. For de Lubac it was the sacramental order of reality that drew humanity to a deeper participation in the divine life.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Cerf, 1938); idem, *Corpus mysticum: L'eucharistie et l'église au moyen âge* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1944); idem, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1946).

<sup>10</sup> The course of events makes clear that, particularly in the late 1930s, questions both concerning the Church and concerning the supernatural occupied de Lubac's mind. De Lubac completed *Catholicisme* and *Corpus mysticum* at around the same time, before the end of 1938. The intervention of the war meant a delay in the publication of *Corpus mysticum* till 1944. Already in 1939 and 1940, however, he published several articles on the topic: "Corpus mysticum: Etude sur l'origine et les premiers sens de l'expression," *Recherches de science religieuse* 29 (1939): 257-302, 429-80; 30 (1940): 40-80, 191-226. De Lubac wrote his first sketch for *Surnaturel* in the late 1920s while still a theology student. He published the first three chapters, on Baius and Jansenius, in a 1931 essay: "Deux Augustiniens fourvoyés: Baius et Jansénius," *Recherches de science religieuse* 21 (1931): 422-43, 513-40. He also wrote an article on the history of the word "supernatural" in 1934: "Remarques sur l'histoire du mot 'surnaturel,'" *Nouvelle revue théologique* 61 (1934): 225-49, 350-70. In 1939, he published an initial sketch of the second part of *Surnaturel*: "Esprit et Liberté dans la tradition théologique," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 40 (1939): 121-50, 189-207. Due to circumstances of the war, de Lubac was unable to continue working on his manuscript until 1943. See Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 28-29, 34-36. For exhaustive bibliographies of de Lubac's writings, see Karl H. Neufeld and Michael Sales, *Bibliographie Henri de Lubac 1925-1974*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1974); Henri de Lubac, *Questions disputées et résistance au nazisme*, vol. 2 of *Théologie dans l'histoire* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990), 408-16.

<sup>11</sup> De Lubac's sacramental ontology also underlies his re-appropriation of the patristic and medieval fourfold method of spiritual interpretation. Susan K. Wood rightly highlights the connection between de Lubac's ecclesiology and his hermeneutic. See Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids:

First, I will provide a brief sketch of de Lubac's sacramental ontology against the background of his appropriation of Maurice Blondel's opposition to extrinsicism and historicism. Next, I will sketch de Lubac's concern for the social character of the Church and his opposition to the growth of an individualist ecclesiology in the high Middle Ages. I will then proceed with a discussion of the centrality of the Eucharist for de Lubac's ecclesiology. This, in turn, leads to the question of the sacramental character of the Church herself. The final section of this essay will focus on de Lubac's concerns with regard to the Church's position in the world.

### Extrinsicism, Historicism, and the Supernatural

Perhaps no one had as strong and lasting an influence on de Lubac's theology as did Maurice Blondel (1861-1949). De Lubac mentions him, along with Joseph Maréchal and Pierre Rousselot, as the contemporaries to whom he owes "a particular debt."<sup>12</sup> This is not simply because also for Blondel, the Eucharist lay at the centre of his life and thought,<sup>13</sup> but also because it is Blondel's insistence on an organic relationship between nature and the supernatural that profoundly shaped de Lubac's own approach.<sup>14</sup> In his *Petite catéchèse sur nature et grace* (1980), de Lubac looked back to his early discovery of Blondel. Blondel, de Lubac explained,

is the one who launched the decisive attack on the dualist theory which was destroying Christian thought. Time after time Blondel demonstrated the deficiencies of the thesis of the "extrinsicist" school, which recognized

no other link between nature and supernature than an ideal juxtaposition of elements which . . . were impenetrable to each other, and which were brought together by our intellectual obedience, so that the supernatural can subsist only if it remains extrinsic to the natural and if it is proposed from without as something important only in so far as it is a supernature. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); idem, "Henri de Lubac, SJ (1896-1991): Theology of the Church," *Theology Today* 62 (2005): 318-29.

<sup>12</sup> De Lubac, *At the Service*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> McPartlan, *Eucharist Makes the Church*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Already when he studied philosophy (1920-23), de Lubac had read, "with enthusiasm," Blondel's *L'Action* (1893) and his *Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique* (1896). During this time, in 1922, de Lubac also paid Blondel a visit. See de Lubac, *At the Service*, 18-19. For a detailed account of Blondel's influence on de Lubac, see Antonio Russo, *Henri de Lubac: Teologia e dogma nella storia: L'influsso di Blondel* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> The doubly indented paragraph gives de Lubac's quotation of Maurice Blondel, *Histoire et dogme* (La Chapelle-Montligeon: Librairie de Montligeon, 1904), 67. The quotation can be found in English translation in Maurice Blondel, "History and Dogma," in *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. and ed. Alexander Dru and Illyt

Then, attacking in turn both of these “monopohorisms”, he overcame the opposition between an extrinsicism which ruined Christian thought and an immanentism which ruined the objective mystery which nourishes this thought.<sup>16</sup>

Blondel’s opposition both to what he called “extrinsicism” and to what he termed “historicism” provides, I believe, the key to de Lubac’s sacramental ontology.<sup>17</sup> In his book, *Histoire et dogme* (1904), Blondel was concerned to find a way out of the difficulties raised by the introduction of higher biblical criticism. Where the more traditional Catholics tended to take their starting-point in ecclesial dogma, others looked to historical research to establish the truth of the Christian faith.<sup>18</sup> Blondel’s thesis was that while the opposition between the two positions was certainly real, their shared underlying and erroneous presuppositions were much more significant than their differences:

I shall make use of certain barbarous neologisms with a view to fixing attention and throwing into relief the exclusive character of each thesis. *Extrinsicism* and *historicism* offer two answers—each in their way incomplete, but equally dangerous to faith—to the essential problem now before the Christian conscience; they are opposite extremes, but of the same kind, based on similar habits of mind, suffering from analogous philosophical lacunae, and aggravating one another by their conflict.<sup>19</sup>

Extrinsicism, according to Blondel, exalted the supernatural by taking its cue in the interpretation of scripture from the Church’s dogma. This position looked at supernatural or miraculous facts in complete isolation from their historical context. Extrinsicism moved from the miraculous fact, observed by means of sense perception, via an intellectual argument, to the conclusion of supernatural revelation: “Thus the relation of the sign to the thing signified is extrinsic, the relation of the facts to the theology superimposed upon them is extrinsic, and extrinsic too is the link between our thought and our life and the truths proposed to us from outside.”<sup>20</sup> The result was a “perpetual docetism” with regard to the Bible, whose texts could only be read literally.<sup>21</sup> Historicism, by contrast, took account only of the realm of

Trethowan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 283.

<sup>16</sup> Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984), 37-38.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of Blondel’s views and the distinction between historical and dogmatic tradition, see Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (San Diego, CA: Basilica; Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster, 1966), 215-21, 361-68.

<sup>18</sup> Blondel, “History and Dogma,” 224.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

nature, by reading scripture within the contours of the testimony of history. Here, history was regarded as autonomous, independent, and self-sufficient.<sup>22</sup> Historicism, therefore, was only interested in “determinist explanations,”<sup>23</sup> forgetting that “while the historian has, as it were, a word to say in everything concerning man, there is nothing on which he has the last word.”<sup>24</sup>

Blondel rejected both extrinsicism and historicism as he sought a resolution to the problem of the relationship between faith and dogma. He believed to have found such a resolution in the Tradition of the Church. Tradition, Blondel maintained, was more than a collection of historical facts or accepted teachings that could potentially be captured in written form. Tradition, for Blondel, was a living reality through which dogma developed. Thus, he maintained, “I would say that Tradition’s powers of conservation are equalled by its powers of conquest: that it discovers and formulates truths on which the past lived, though unable as yet to evaluate or define them explicitly, that it enriches our intellectual patrimony by putting the total deposit little by little into currency and making it bear fruit.”<sup>25</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of the developing Tradition of the Church, both extrinsicism and historicism appeared to fall short. On the one hand, for extrinsicism’s “fixism,” doctrine never changed or developed.<sup>26</sup> “So the sacred deposit of faith was simply an aerolith, to be preserved in a glass case safe from a sacrilegious curiosity which, if allowed to analyse it, would only discover in it elements which are identical with those of mere earthly bodies!”<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, for historicism, the supernatural seemed to be “no more than another name for the divine or for a sort of concentration of it in nature itself, so that, if it is not entirely confused with nature, that is because after all one must have a word for the phase at present reached by our religious aristocracy.”<sup>28</sup> Tradition properly understood, maintained Blondel, allowed one to escape both the Scylla of extrinsicism and the Charybdis of historicism: “Dogmas cannot be rationally justified either by history alone, by the most ingenious application of dialectics to the texts, or by the efforts of the individual; but all these forces contribute, and they converge in Tradition, the authority of which, divinely assisted, is the organ of infallible expression.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

Throughout his writings on the doctrine of the Church, de Lubac comes back to the two alternatives that Blondel has rejected. Invariably, de Lubac, too, rejects both of them. As is well known, de Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946) focuses particularly on the danger of extrinsicism, which he believes had wrongly managed to entrench itself as the dominant mode of theological discourse in the Church.<sup>30</sup> Particularly through the sixteenth-century impact of the neo-Thomist theologians Cajetan (1469-1534) and Suárez (1548-1617), the realm of the supernatural had turned into a "separated theology" without any intrinsic connection to philosophy, which had been relegated to an independent realm of nature.<sup>31</sup> This conservative Thomist tradition speculatively posited the notion of *pura natura*, completely unaffected by the realm of grace and as a result without any natural desire (*desiderium naturale*) for the eternal vision of God. While the purpose was no doubt to safeguard the gratuitous character of the beatific vision, de Lubac observes in this neo-scholastic approach an extrinsicism or "separated theology," which regarded grace as something that came strictly from the outside and had no intrinsic connection with created human nature.<sup>32</sup> The results, de Lubac believes, can be observed in at least three contexts: in the political acceptance of fascism, in the misdirection of hierarchical authority as domination, and in the Eucharistic focus on transubstantiation and real presence.<sup>33</sup>

In the period leading up to Vatican II, it is consistently the extrinsicist conservatism that de Lubac opposes by means of his return to the Church Fathers. The Council, however, represents a turning point in his intellectual development. More and more, de Lubac comes to regard as the real threat to the Church not so much a conservative extrinsicism but instead a liberal immanentism, which ironically bases itself on the very same separation between nature and the supernatural. Both, in other words, fail to return to the sacramental ontology that had been integral to the theology of the Fathers and most of the

<sup>30</sup> Much of the material of *Surnaturel* is reproduced in modified form in two later books: Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard, introd. Louis Dupré (New York: Herder & Herder – Crossroad, 2000); idem, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, introd. David L. Schindler (New York: Herder & Herder – Crossroad, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> De Lubac, *Augustinianism*, 105-83.

<sup>32</sup> Throughout his ecclesiological writings, de Lubac opposes "extrinsicism" and "separated theology." See, for example, Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (1950, rpt.; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 313; idem, *Brief Catechesis*, 37-38, 48.

<sup>33</sup> I have elaborated on the connection between de Lubac's understanding of the supernatural and his opposition to the fascist Vichy regime in "Accommodation to What?" In the present essay, I will make several observations on de Lubac's apprehension of authority as extrinsically conceived, but the main emphasis will be his sacramental theology itself.



medieval Church.<sup>34</sup> Mostly, de Lubac regards the secularizing and individualizing impact of “immanentism” as the result of a misappropriation of Vatican II. At the same, however, it is clear that he is not entirely happy with some of the direction set by the Council itself. In particular, he questions the centrality of the metaphor of the “people of God” in *Lumen Gentium*. While he considers this strictly “a matter of stress and nuance,”<sup>35</sup> de Lubac does regret that the Church as Mother and as Spouse has become “subordinated to that of the people of God.”<sup>36</sup> The result of this stronger focus on the “people of God,” de Lubac believes, is a focus on history and on the Church as a pilgrim people. By emphasizing the temporal more than the eschatological aspect of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* could not avoid “a certain narrowing of the patristic horizons,” de Lubac maintains.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, there is little doubt that for de Lubac it is mainly the misappropriation of the Second Vatican Council that has allowed the spirit of immanentism to infiltrate the Church.<sup>38</sup> In the period following Vatican II, it is consistently the dangers of immanentism and accommodation to contemporary culture that de Lubac cautions against.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Remarkably, considering today’s focus on nominalism, both in Radical Orthodoxy and in Louis Dupré’s work (*Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993]), de Lubac rarely discusses the nominalist turn in the late Middle Ages as lying at the root of the separation between nature and the supernatural. To be sure, he shows his awareness of the serious impact that nominalism did have on ecclesiology. See Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (1956, rpt.; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 129 n. 9. And, of course, de Lubac connects both his attempted recovery of spiritual interpretation of scripture and his critique of the developments of Eucharistic theology in the high Middle Ages to a move from symbolic to dialectical theology (idem, *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O’Neill [1968, rpt.; New York: Herder & Herder – Crossroad, 2000], 55-72; *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, with Richard Price, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (London: SCM, 2006), 221-47). For my critique of the late medieval abandonment of the Platonic-Christian synthesis in favour of a nominalist approach, see Hans Boersma, “Theology as Queen of Hospitality,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 79 (June 2007): forthcoming

<sup>35</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (New York: Ecclesia, 1969), 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 51; cf. p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> See de Lubac’s repeated post-Vatican II warnings against immanentism and accommodation to culture (*Splendor*, 224-26, 291-301; *Brief Catechesis*, 22, 94-96, 110-12, 170-71), as well as his denunciations of the misappropriations of Vatican II (idem, *The Motherhood of the Church Followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk*, trans. Sergia Englund [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982], 165, 221-22; *Brief Catechesis*, 191-260).

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the following characteristic passage in *Brief Catechesis*: “Christian faith does not exist piecemeal; and any effort to ‘adapt’ this or that element in it to nonbelieving interlocutors in order to justify it to them runs the risk not only of remaining barren, but of producing the opposite effect” (130).

The loss of a sacramental ontology has resulted, he believes, in a utilitarian and technological society devoted to progress. This approach fails, however, by offering “no ‘way out’ to our desire: refusing to know God, insensible to his revelation, it imprisons us in a closed world without love and without hope—and we are in danger of dying there, suffocated.”<sup>40</sup> Christopher Walsh accurately captures de Lubac’s post-Vatican II attitude by commenting that what de Lubac “rejected was the ‘*secularism*,’ or *immanentism*, which separated the natural and supernatural orders in order to exalt the former while compromising or dismissing the latter.”<sup>41</sup>

De Lubac clearly shares Blondel’s rejection of the two extremes of extrinsicism and historicism. He also shares his substitution of Tradition as a means of overcoming the weaknesses of a separation between nature and the supernatural. Like Blondel, he regards Tradition not as a mere conserving factor. The true churchman, insists de Lubac, “will have no ‘petrification’ of Tradition, which is for him no more a thing of the past than of the present, but rather a great living and permanent force that cannot be divided into bits.”<sup>42</sup> For de Lubac, as for Blondel, the Tradition overcomes the false dilemma between extrinsicism and historicism. As we will see, however, de Lubac goes beyond this by insisting on the sacramental relationship between nature and the supernatural. Just as Tradition encapsulates both history and doctrine, so also the sacraments are signs that not only point beyond themselves to the supernatural but also make present that to which they point. Whether it is the extrinsicist conservatism of neo-Thomism or the secularist immanentism of historicism that he opposes, in both cases, de Lubac is concerned to safeguard a sacramental ontology that he believes constitutes a truly patristic and Catholic understanding of reality.

### The Social Character of the Church

One of the most obvious and consistent elements of de Lubac’s ecclesiology is his deep concern for the social character of the Church and his strong antagonism toward all forms of individualist Christianity. This concern ties in directly with his sacramental understanding of the relationship between nature and the supernatural, as is evident from

<sup>40</sup> De Lubac, *Motherhood*, 149.

<sup>41</sup> Walsh, “De Lubac’s Critique,” 407.

<sup>42</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 243. Cf. *Motherhood*, 91: “Tradition, according to the Fathers of the Church, is in fact just the opposite of a burden of the past: it is a vital energy, a propulsive as much as a protective force, acting within an entire community as at the heart of each of the faithful because it is none other than the very Word of God both perpetuating and renewing itself under the action of the Spirit of God; not a biblical letter in the individual hands of critics or thinkers, but the living Word entrusted to the Church and to those to whom the Church never ceases to give birth; not, moreover, a mere objective doctrine, but the whole mystery of Christ.”

the very opening words of his first book, *Catholicisme* (1938): “The supernatural dignity of one who has been baptized rests, we know, on the natural dignity of man, though it surpasses it in an infinite manner: *agnoscere, christiane, dignitatem tuam—Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti*. [Recognize, O Christian, your dignity—God, who in a wonderful manner created and ennobled your human nature.] Thus, the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race.”<sup>43</sup> Here de Lubac affirms both the unity of and the distinction between our natural dignity, on the one hand, and our sacramentally conferred supernatural dignity, on the other hand. His reason for making the connection between the ecclesial question and the issue of the supernatural is that he wants to affirm the unity of the human race as created with a view to the supernatural end of human life in fellowship with the triune God.<sup>44</sup> Laced from beginning to end with quotations from patristic and medieval sources, clearly intended to represent the normative view of the Tradition, de Lubac’s *Catholicisme* attempts to correct the misunderstanding, among Catholics and non-Catholics alike, that Catholicism is only concerned with the salvation of individuals. Quite the contrary, de Lubac insists. Catholicism is social “not merely in its applications in the field of natural institutions but first and foremost in itself, in the heart of its mystery, in the essence of its dogma.”<sup>45</sup>

De Lubac focuses, therefore, on the unity of all humanity, both in its origin and in its ultimate goal: “Christ from the very first moment of his existence, virtually bears all men within himself—*erat in Christo Jesu omnis homo*. For the Word did not merely take a human body;

<sup>43</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> The subtitle of the English edition—*Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*—seems particularly well chosen, since for de Lubac “Christianity alone continues to assert the transcendent destiny of man and the common destiny of mankind” (*Catholicism*, 140-41). De Lubac links this common destiny with our created nature: “The human race is one. By our fundamental nature and still more in virtue of our common destiny we are members of the same body” (*ibid.*, 222). For similar expressions of a “common” or “transcendent” destiny, see *ibid.*, 232, 299, 353.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. De Lubac’s emphasis on the unity of humanity, as well as his sacramental ontology, fits well with the Platonist-Christian synthesis that dominated the theological landscape until the Middle Ages. Indeed, Wood comments that de Lubac’s understanding of the relationship between Eucharist and Church—the latter being the real (*verum*) body—is highly Platonic (“Church as the Social Embodiment,” 146). De Lubac realizes that his sacramental ontology has certain affinities with the Platonic tradition (*Catholicism*, 307), and he laments the “fashionable anti-Platonism” (*Splendor*, 69). Nonetheless, he does not make too much of this affinity (*Catholicism*, 40) and remains careful to point out that Christianity rejects the Platonist “individualist doctrine of escape” (*Catholicism*, 137; cf. 141) and its depreciation of the created order (*Splendor*, 180). He also has serious reservations about the neo-Platonic “hierarchy of being” (*Catholicism*, 334). Milbank is clearly too eager to draw de Lubac into his own neo-Platonic ontology (*Suspended Middle*, 18).

his Incarnation was not simple *corporatio*, but, as St. Hilary says, a *concorporatio*.<sup>46</sup> It is the Church's mission, therefore, to reveal to the world its pristine, organic unity, as well as to restore and complete this unity.<sup>47</sup> Quoting Paul Claudel, de Lubac makes the comment: "The Bride of Christ never ceases to be aware of that total humanity whose destiny she carries in her womb."<sup>48</sup> Understandably, de Lubac sees the social character of Catholicism as intimately tied in with its historical character and as implying the necessity of the historic, visible Church for salvation. All of history, de Lubac insists, and in particular that of the Old Testament, is taken up "by the Church; the world made spiritual by man, and man consecrated by the Church."<sup>49</sup>

Throughout his writings, de Lubac maintains this emphasis on the social aspect of Catholicism. Individualist forms of Christianity strike at the root of the Church: an "individualist Christianity" is "something unthinkable" because of the Pauline identity between redemption and the building up of the Church.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, while, in the words of St. Peter Damian, the individual may have the appearance of a "Church in miniature,"<sup>51</sup> this does not mean that the individual can stand on his or her own: "The kiss [Christ] has for the Church is a kiss in which every one among the faithful will have a part 'inasmuch as a member of the Church', for while each soul is loved individually, none is loved separately."<sup>52</sup>

To be sure, de Lubac at the same time cautions that his emphasis

<sup>46</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>48</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 184.

<sup>49</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 274.

<sup>50</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 177 n. 47. Cf. de Lubac's critique of an individualism that rejects the institutional framework of the Church (*Motherhood*, 9, 12–13).

<sup>51</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 358.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 359. Paul McPartlan, while roundly acknowledging de Lubac's "sustained attack upon individualism" (*Eucharist Makes the Church*, 14), argues that nonetheless in the end he falls prey to an individualist mysticism (*ibid.*, 19, 48, 67, 302–03). The reason for de Lubac's return to individualism, McPartlan believes, is twofold: (1) for de Lubac, the Incarnation does not establish a corporate personality, since Christ's achievement is universalized only after the Ascension (*ibid.*, 64–65); and (2) for de Lubac, the one (Christ) unites the many (believers), while the many (believers) do not constitute the one (Christ) (*ibid.*, 19, 67). With regard to the first point, it seems to me that de Lubac does insist on the universal embrace of the Incarnation itself (*Catholicism*, 37–40; cf. the quotation above, n. 47). This more or less Platonic move seems to me to underlie his entire argument that the Incarnation has for its aim the redemption of the new humanity, not just of separate individuals. With regard to the second point, the reason for de Lubac's *ressourcement* of the medieval tradition lies in his attempt to recover the unity of the Eucharistic and ecclesial "body of Christ" as one. This "mystical body" is "not only the 'real body', once born of the Virgin, but the 'true body', the total and definitive body, the one for whose redemption the Saviour sacrificed his body of flesh. . . ." (*Corpus Mysticum*, 68). The sacramental connection between the *signum* of the Eucharist and the *res* of the Church's unity implies, for de Lubac, that the many (believers) constitute the one (Christ). I am grateful to Fr. McPartlan for the stimulating e-mail conversation on this point.

on the social is not meant to downplay individual personhood or the mysticism of the individual interior life. The two concluding chapters of *Catholicisme* make clear that de Lubac does not mean to “diminish or dangerously obscure that other no less essential truth that salvation is a personal matter for every individual.”<sup>53</sup> He wholeheartedly accepts, and even embraces, Christian mysticism, along with the importance of individual detachment and solitude: “How indeed could Christian mysticism, the foretaste of the Beatific Vision, the ‘novitiate’ and the ‘anteroom’ of eternity, the secret entry into the City of God and, at the same time, the return to original purity, how could it be anything but the very opposite to Solipsism? The community supports the mystic with it, and in its turn is supported by him.”<sup>54</sup>

The emphasis on the historical and social character of Catholicism also does not imply a denial of the Eternal and his unchanging transcendence. In fact, for de Lubac a “common destiny” is dependent on the supernatural character of divine transcendence.<sup>55</sup> Throughout his oeuvre, de Lubac insists that he wants to do justice to the place of transcendence. Faced with his conservative neo-Thomist antagonists, who consistently play the gratuity of the realm of the supernatural as their trump card, de Lubac’s pleas for transcendence are perhaps rather muted in the early part of his career. Nonetheless, the insistence that we do justice to the role of transcendence, as well as the warnings against an ill-conceived immanence, are already part of his 1938 *Catholicisme*: “‘Becoming’, by itself, has no meaning; it is another word for absurdity. And yet, without transcendence, that is, without an Absolute actually present, found at the heart of reality which comes to be, working upon it, really making it move, there can only be an indefinite ‘becoming’... If there is ‘becoming’ there must be fulfillment, and if there must be fulfillment there must have been always something else beside ‘becoming’.”<sup>56</sup>

### The Eucharist as Sacrament

There seems to be little doubt, then, that the motivating factor underlying much of de Lubac’s work is his insistence on the “social character” of the Church—“the common destiny of man.” We would do de Lubac an injustice, however, if we separated this social concern from his understanding of the Eucharist. For de Lubac, an interest in the social aspect of Catholicism *as such* would not be sufficient to overcome the dualism between nature and the supernatural.

<sup>53</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 326.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

His monumental historical study, *Corpus mysticum* (1944), provides the Eucharistic and ecclesial dimension necessary for a full-orbed understanding of these social concerns in de Lubac's thought.<sup>57</sup> While this study traces in detail the development of the meaning of the term "mystical body," the book reaches beyond a purely historical interest. The opponent, also in this study of the Eucharist, remains the individualist understanding of the Church that de Lubac perceives in the extrinsicism of neo-scholasticism. *Corpus mysticum*, we could say, looks at one particular key aspect of the social character of the Church. It traces the connection between Eucharist and Church.<sup>58</sup> De Lubac begins his book by explaining that throughout the first nine centuries of the Church, Eucharist and Church had been closely connected: "[T]he Eucharist correspond[ed] to the Church as cause to effect, as means to end, as sign to reality."<sup>59</sup> It was always the unity of the Church that had been in view in the celebration of the sacrament.<sup>60</sup> The *sanctorum communio* in the Creed had involved, therefore, a twofold communion: "For, in the same way that sacramental communion (*communio in the body and the blood [communio corporis et sanguinis]*) is always at the same time an ecclesial communion (*communio within the Church, of the Church, for the Church ... [communio ecclesiastica, Ecclesiae, ad Ecclesiam ...]*), so also ecclesial communion always includes, in its fulfilment, sacramental communion."<sup>61</sup> This close link—indeed, the identity—between sacramental and ecclesial communion was also borne out, de Lubac avers, by the fact that the theologians of the Middle Ages had consistently emphasized the unity of the one body of Christ, even when they had distinguished its threefold character as historical, sacramental, and ecclesial body (*corpus triforme*).<sup>62</sup> The sacramental and the ecclesial had always been regarded as one and the same.

What is more, de Lubac demonstrates a common medieval usage of the term "mystical body" that had been different from our

<sup>57</sup> For analyses of this text, see Wood, "Church as the Social Embodiment," 102–18; Walsh, "De Lubac's Critique," 52–61; Wang, "*Sacramentum Unitatis Ecclesiasticae*," 150–54.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. the account of de Lubac in Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 158–66.

<sup>59</sup> De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> "Thus the *bread of the sacrament [sacramentum panis]* led them directly to the *unity of the body [unitas corporis]*. In their eyes the Eucharist was essentially, as it was already for St. Paul and for the Fathers, the *mystery of unity [mysterium unitatis]*, it was the *sacrament of conjunction, alliance, and unification [sacramentum conjunctionis, federationis, adunationis]*" (ibid., 17). Here, as well as elsewhere, I have added to the English translation de Lubac's Latin terminology as he provides it in the original French edition.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 23–28. De Lubac explains that the term *corpus triforme* originates in Amalarius of Metz (d. ca. 850). See ibid., 24–25. De Lubac presents an extensive discussion of Amalarius's "threefold body" and its development in ibid., 263–301.

contemporary understanding of the Church as the mystical body. In the Eucharistic controversies of the ninth century between Paschasius Radbertus (d. 865), on the one hand, and Ratramnus (d. 868), Rabanus Maurus (d. 856), and Gottschalk (d. ca. 868), on the other hand, both parties had referred to the sacramental body, rather than the ecclesial body, as the *corpus mysticum*, an identification which they, in turn, had adopted from Hesychius of Jerusalem in the fifth century.<sup>63</sup> This usage was understandable, de Lubac maintains, against the background of the liberal use of the term “mystical,” throughout the Tradition, in connection with the Eucharist.<sup>64</sup> The difference between *mysterium* and *sacramentum*, explains de Lubac, was that in the ancient sense of the term a mystery “is more of an action than a thing.”<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the term *mysterium* does not simply refer either to the sign or to the intended reality, but speaks of their mutual relationship and interpenetration. We could say, therefore, “that it is the secret power [*virtus occulta*] by which the thing operates across the sign and through which the sign participates, here again in widely differing ways, in the higher efficacy of the thing.”<sup>66</sup> De Lubac’s not so subtle message appears to be: the Eucharist is something dynamic, not something static. The active and ritual character of the term *mysterium* is, needless to say, an indication to de Lubac that the focus ought to move away from the neo-Thomists’ extrinsicist approach, which had regarded the Eucharist too much as a supernatural intervention unconnected to the life of the Church. Instead, he wants theology to pay due attention to the Eucharist as an activity that creates the unity of the Church.<sup>67</sup> De Lubac summarizes his discussion by insisting that, certainly in the ninth century, *corpus mysticum* had served as a technical term that distinguished the Eucharistic body from the “body born of the Virgin” and from the “body of the Church,” while keeping the three closely connected.<sup>68</sup>

According to de Lubac, this traditional unity of the *corpus triforme* first began to show signs of disintegration in the early twelfth century

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 28–36.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 41–45.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>67</sup> De Lubac distinguishes three essential aspects in the Eucharistic mystery: (1) by way of presence, the body of Christ lies hidden in the element of the bread, *in mysterio panis*; (2) by way of memorial, the body of Christ is a mystery of commemoration, which renders Christ’s sacrifice present *in mysterio passionis*; and (3) by way of anticipation, the body of Christ is the reality of the hope of edification and unity of the Church, and so *in mysterio nostro*: “[The Eucharist] signifies us to ourselves—*our own mystery, a figure of ourselves [mysterium nostrum, figura nostra]*—in which we have already begun to be through baptism (*one baptism [unum baptisma]*), but above all in what we ought to become: in this sacrament of unity, *is prefigured what we will become in the future [praefigurat quiddam quod futuri sumus]*” (ibid., 66–67).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 73.

with Gilbert of Nogent (1053-1124) and Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129). The former distinguished the historical body as *corpus principale* from the sacramental body as “relative body” (*relativum corpus*), “derived body” (*derivatum corpus*), or “vicarious body” (*vicarium corpus*).<sup>69</sup> While at this time Eucharist and Church continued to be connected, the distinctions in terminology betrayed an initial drifting apart of the historical and sacramental body, on the one hand, and the ecclesial body, on the other hand. By the time of Peter Lombard (c. 1100-64), the expressions “mystical flesh” (*caro mystica*) and “spiritual flesh” (*caro spiritualis*) were reserved for the Church at the exclusion of the Eucharist, which was considered the “proper flesh” (*caro propria*). Lombard, as well as the great scholastic theologians of the high Middle Ages, clearly distinguish the Eucharistic body (as “sacrament and reality” [*sacramentum-et-res*]) from the ecclesial body (as “reality and not sacrament” [*res-et-non-sacramentum*]).<sup>70</sup> Soon the ecclesial meaning of “mystical flesh” would induce theologians to transfer the expression “mystical body” from the Eucharistic body to the body of the Church. As de Lubac puts it: “*Mystical body* [*corpus mysticum*] would follow on closely from *mystical flesh* [*caro mystica*]. It was as if one called forth the other.”<sup>71</sup>

As a result of this widening gap between Eucharist and Church it became possible, by the fourteenth century, to interpret the “body of the Church” (*ecclesiae corpus*) by drawing analogies with juridical, social, and political bodies.<sup>72</sup> These comparisons, de Lubac maintains, would in turn radically alter the meaning of the Church as *corpus mysticum*.<sup>73</sup> When the Reformation dissociated the mystical body of Christ from the visible Church, the Catholic Church had no response: the common premise of both sides of the Reformation divide was a separation between the Eucharistic body and the ecclesial body.<sup>74</sup> The

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 114–16.

<sup>73</sup> De Lubac reiterates his displeasure with this understanding of the Church as simply a body among many in *Splendor*, 128–30. “We no longer understand the Church at all if we see in her only her human merits, or if we see her as merely a means—however noble—to a temporal end; or if, while remaining believers in some vague sense, we do not primarily find in her a mystery of faith” (ibid., 215). Similarly, he comments elsewhere: “People generally speak of ‘Christianity’ as they do of ‘Catholicism’. There is obviously nothing to condemn in this usage, which is as justified as it is old. It is nevertheless regrettable that it too often suggests the idea of one doctrine among others, or of one society among others, even if perfect adherence is accorded this doctrine or this society. In and of themselves, these two words do not lead us much beyond this. Such an idea would not be false, but it would be entirely incomplete and superficial. It is a question of a life, of the divine life to which we are called. Into this life, the Church, the *Catholica mater*, gives us birth” (*Motherhood*, 120). Cf. also de Lubac’s objections to “man-made models” of collegiality in the Church (*Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 19).

<sup>74</sup> De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 114–17.



problem de Lubac has with this conception of the Church is that it presumes a “separated theology,” in which nature and the supernatural cannot be integrated. The result is, again, an extrinsicist conception of the Church.

At the same time that the unity of the *corpus triforme* was disintegrating, the descriptions of the Eucharistic body itself altered. For most of the Tradition, de Lubac explains, the *corpus Christi* in the Eucharist had been regarded as *corpus Christi spirituale*. This had been the traditional Augustinian position.<sup>75</sup> When Berengar of Tours (d. 1088), however, began to contrast spiritual eating to corporeal eating, controversy erupted.<sup>76</sup> Alger of Liège (1055–1131) and others reacted strongly by insisting on a bodily consumption of Christ.<sup>77</sup> To this, de Lubac adds, “From the affirmation of bodily reception, we are led by implication to the affirmation of a bodily presence.”<sup>78</sup> The result was that “‘spiritualist’ vocabulary gradually became, if not suppressed, at least rare or translated [*transformé*],”<sup>79</sup> while all the emphasis came to be placed on the real presence in the Eucharistic body of Christ. The theory of the threefold body was quickly turning into a theory of a twofold body: “the historico-sacramental body and the ecclesial body.”<sup>80</sup>

The emphasis on bodily feeding and on real presence in the Eucharist meant that the ecclesial body could no longer be regarded as the *corpus verum*. Prior to the Berengarian controversy, the identification of the ecclesial body as *corpus verum* had seemed natural: “Given that the Eucharistic mystery was thought of as a spiritual meal destined to bring about the fulfilment of that body or of that ‘plenitude of Christ’, which constitutes the Church, it was doubly natural that the effect of such a mystery should be equally thought of as its ‘truth’, at the same time as its ‘matter’: *truth and matter* [*veritas et res*], *of matters, the truth* [*rerum veritas*].”<sup>81</sup> As a result of the increased emphasis on the Eucharistic body in the twelfth century, however, the elements took the place of the unity of the Church as *corpus verum*. The overall result of the massive shifts that occurred through the Berengarian controversy was, de Lubac summarizes, a “slow inversion” of two expressions:

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 143–44.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 146–54.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 161–62.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 189. De Lubac does acknowledge that *corpus verum* also had a long history of association with the sacramental body (ibid., 187–88). Wood is correct, therefore, to observe that for de Lubac “the realism of the eucharistic presence is never called into question” (“Church as the Social Embodiment,” 103).

At first and for quite a long time, “Corpus mysticum” meant the eucharistic body, as opposed to the “corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia”, which was the “verum corpus” par excellence. Was it not in fact quite natural to designate as “mystical” that body whose hidden presence was due to “mystical prayer” and which was received in a “mystical banquet”? that body offered in forms which “mystically” signified the Church? It is possible to trace the slow inversion of the two expressions.<sup>82</sup>

The final chapter of *Corpus mysticum*, while it has not received a great deal of attention in secondary literature, is at least in one sense the most significant one. Entitled “From Symbolism to Dialectic,” this chapter moves beyond the historical changes in Eucharistic and ecclesial vocabulary. Here de Lubac intimates that the changes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were part of a much larger shift—a shift from symbolism to dialectic. Both Berengar and his orthodox opponents, he claims, took the separation between the historical/Eucharistic body of Christ and the ecclesial body of Christ for granted, with the former retaining the symbolism and the latter the “truth”: “Against *mystically, not truly* [*mystice, non vere*], was set, in no less exclusive a sense, *truly, not mystically* [*vere, non mystice*]. Perhaps orthodoxy was safeguarded, but on the other hand, doctrine was certainly impoverished.”<sup>83</sup> Berengar, maintains de Lubac, introduced a dialectical approach to theology that was unable to affirm the “mutual immanence” of the real personal presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the unity of the Church.<sup>84</sup>

The issue reached well beyond Berengar and the Eucharistic controversies: “It was not, in all honesty, a matter of one man’s influence. More profoundly, more universally, it was a new mentality that was spreading, a new order of problem that was emerging and catching people’s interest, a new way of thinking, the formulation of new categories.”<sup>85</sup> De Lubac points directly to Peter Abelard (1079-1142) and St. Anselm (d. 1109) as betraying the Augustinian symbolic approach, and he laments the outcome of a Christian rationalism that can only approach the mysteries of faith by means of intellectual demonstration.<sup>86</sup> In short, de Lubac presents a plea not just for a return to a more Eucharistic understanding of the Church, but

<sup>82</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 100 n. 68. Cf. William T. Cavanaugh’s comment on this development: “What concerned de Lubac about the inversion of *verum* and *mysticum* was its tendency to reduce the Eucharist to a mere spectacle for the laity. The growth of the cult of the host itself in the later medieval period (the feast of Corpus Christi began in the thirteenth century) was not necessarily an advance for Eucharistic practice” (*Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], 213).

<sup>83</sup> De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 223.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 236–38.

ultimately his concern is also for the restoration of a symbolic approach to theology, one that he feels has suffered greatly through the twelfth-century introduction of dialectical theology. And, as we know from de Lubac's appropriation of Blondel, it is this dialectical theology that he holds responsible for the rise of the neo-scholastic approach of the later Thomists.

In his *Méditation sur l'Église* (1952), in a chapter entitled "The Heart of the Church," de Lubac returns to the relationship between Eucharist and Church.<sup>87</sup> The chapter contains numerous echoes from his earlier *Corpus mysticum*. Here, however, de Lubac deals not so much with the historical details, as instead he lucidly explains the theological implications of his earlier historical work. He reiterates the link between the Church as "the mystical body" and the Eucharist. The first theologians to begin speaking about the Church as *corpus mysticum* meant "the *corpus in mysterio*, the body mystically signified and realized by the Eucharist—in other words, the unity of the Christian community that is made real by the 'holy mysteries' in an effective symbol (in the strict sense of the word 'effective')." <sup>88</sup>

In connection with the role of the clergy, de Lubac is at pains to avoid the two opposing errors of immanentism and extrinsicism. On the one hand, in opposition to immanentism, this later work introduces a cautionary comment. De Lubac does not want the notion of the Eucharist making the Church to be misunderstood in a secularist fashion. He does not want people to mistake his opposition to extrinsicism for a capitulation to immanentism. Thus, he also draws attention to the phrase "the Church produces the Eucharist." This must be understood in the sense that it is the hierarchical priesthood that produces the Eucharist. Without in any way regarding the priesthood of all believers as insignificant, de Lubac nonetheless cautions that the hierarchical priesthood is not "a sort of emanation from the community of the faithful."<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, and in opposition to extrinsicism, de Lubac attempts to keep a tight bond between the clergy and the Eucharist. Since the Church produces the Eucharist, for de Lubac it is the priestly role of sanctification that stands at the origin of the threefold hierarchical power of government, teaching,

<sup>87</sup> This book, published in English in 1956 as *The Splendor of the Church*, is the outcome of a number of workshops between 1946 and 1949. De Lubac's silencing in 1950 delayed their publication in the form of a monograph for some time, which gave him the opportunity to supplement the quotations and add a few pages. In 1952, the book miraculously passed censorship, so that it was published the next year under the title *Méditation sur l'Église*. De Lubac relates how the book escaped the watchful eye of Father Janssens, the General of the Jesuit Order in France. De Lubac then comments, with some glee: "When I saw him in Rome, in the spring of 1953, and thanked him for granting his authorization (the book was then at the printer), he paled and, very frankly, told me that there was no reason to thank him, that it was quite by chance" (De Lubac, *At the Service*, 75).

<sup>88</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 132.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

and sanctification. The reason for this is precisely the significance of the Eucharist as the “crucible of unity.”<sup>90</sup> The implication of this centrality of the priestly role of sanctification in the Eucharist is that “[e]ach bishop constitutes the unity of his flock,”<sup>91</sup> so that “in each one of her parts” the Church is truly Church and is complete.<sup>92</sup> De Lubac thus continues to draw attention to the intrinsic connection between authority in the Church and her Eucharistic life.

By insisting that the Eucharist realizes the Church, de Lubac obviously emphasizes the identity between Christ and the Church. Because Eucharist and Church are the same body of Christ, “there is a ‘mystical identification’ between Christ and the Church.”<sup>93</sup> While acknowledging the distinction between Bride and Bridegroom, de Lubac nonetheless wishes to emphasize St. Leo’s conviction that through the Eucharist “we pass over unto that which we receive.”<sup>94</sup> De Lubac concludes his discussion, therefore, with the comment: “If the Church is thus the fullness of Christ, Christ in his Eucharist is truly the heart of the Church.”<sup>95</sup>

It will be clear that we need to view de Lubac’s emphasis on the Eucharist making the Church in the context of his early opposition to the extrinsicism of neo-scholasticism, with its focus on real presence and transubstantiation at the cost of the identity of Church as the body of Christ. By insisting that the Eucharist makes the Church, de

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* To be sure, de Lubac does emphasize that the bishops together form one episcopate and that the bishops are in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Priests have consecrating power by sharing in that of the bishop (*ibid.*, 150). Although de Lubac looks to the Eucharist as constituting the Church, he does not draw the conclusion that various local churches are merely “federating” together to form the Catholic Church. Instead, there is—and here de Lubac quotes Yves Congar—a “mutual interiority” between the particular and the universal Church (*Motherhood*, 201). Accordingly, he insists that there is only *one* episcopacy and *one* Church. De Lubac refuses, therefore, to describe his ecclesiology as a “eucharistic ecclesiology”: “The weakness of an ecclesiology too narrowly (or rather we should say too incompletely) ‘eucharistic’ would be in privileging the ‘dimension’ of the particular church by seeming to forget this radical correlation” (*Motherhood*, 204; cf. *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 36). In personal conversation with Paul McPartlan, de Lubac reiterated that the term “Eucharistic ecclesiology” would be “too short” (McPartlan, *Eucharist Makes the Church*, 98).

<sup>93</sup> *Splendor*, 157. Cf. *ibid.*, 209–11.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 160. The emphasis on the Eucharist as providing the unity of Church explains de Lubac’s opposition to a more horizontally oriented liturgy. For de Lubac, such a focus would be a lapse into immanentism, which ignores the way in which Christ becomes sacramentally present in and through the Eucharist: “In the present welcome efforts to bring about a celebration of the liturgy that is more ‘communal’ and more alive, nothing would be more regrettable than a preoccupation with the success achieved by some secular festivals by the combined resources of technical skill and the appeal to man at his lower level. To reflect for a moment on the way in which Christ makes real the unity between us is to see at once that it is not by way of anything resembling mass hysteria or any sort of occult magic” (*ibid.*, 155).

Lubac is able to oppose a “separated theology.” As Susan Wood puts it: “Both the Eucharist and Christ are the cause of the Church, not nominally or extrinsically, but intrinsically, for within the context of spiritual exegesis Christ and the Eucharist are eschatological fulfilled or completed in the Church. The sacramental causation is intrinsic in the sense that the source of the Church is to be found in its relation to Christ and the Eucharist.”<sup>96</sup> At the same time, by adding that it is, in turn, the Church that makes the Eucharist, de Lubac avoids a lapse into immanentism. For de Lubac, the Eucharist provides an avenue for the mutual interpenetration of nature and the supernatural, thereby overcoming the dualism between extrinsicism and historicism.

### The Church as Sacrament

Perhaps de Lubac’s influence on later Catholic and ecumenical developments is nowhere as evident as in his understanding of the Church as herself a sacrament. In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council enshrined what has become known as “communion ecclesiology,” by insisting that “the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”<sup>97</sup> By speaking of the Church as a sacrament, Vatican II signalled its acceptance of an ecclesiological development that went back to the theology of J.A. Möhler (1796-1838), who had first spoken of the Church as sacrament of Jesus Christ.<sup>98</sup> There seems to be little doubt that de Lubac had a significant impact on the common acceptance of this approach within the Catholic Church.<sup>99</sup>

De Lubac succinctly describes the sacramentality of the Church at the beginning of an entire chapter on this topic: “The Church is a mystery; that is to say that she is also a sacrament. She is ‘the total *locus* of the Christian sacraments’, and she is herself the great sacrament that contains and vitalizes all the others. In this world she is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ himself, in his humanity, is for us the sacrament of God.”<sup>100</sup> This statement is revealing, as

<sup>96</sup> Wood, “Church as the Social Embodiment,” 144. Cf. *ibid.*, 104: “[T]he unity of the eucharistic body and the ecclesial body is never an extrinsic unity because the ecclesial body is not another body than the body of Christ, but the *totus Christus*, the fullness of Christ.”

<sup>97</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1. Quoted from *The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol. 1 of *Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery, rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello; Dublin, Ireland: Dominican, 1975), 350.

<sup>98</sup> McPartlan, “Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” 317. Cf. de Lubac’s admiration for Möhler in *Splendor*, 92–93, 266 n. 114; *Motherhood*, 278–79, 310.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Doyle, “Henri de Lubac,” 220–21.

<sup>100</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 202.

it establishes a sacramental link not only between the Church and Christ, but also between Christ and God. Since, as we have already seen, de Lubac regards the Eucharist as the sacrament that makes the Church, we may infer that for de Lubac there is a sacramental chain, as it were, that points from the Eucharist to the Church, from the Church to Christ, and from Christ to God. Put differently, through the sacramental means of Christ, the Church, and the Eucharist, God is present in the world. This is no doubt the most poignant instance that we have noticed thus far, in which de Lubac's sacramental ontology comes to the fore.

For de Lubac, it is his sacramental ontology that enables him to overcome both the extrinsicism of neo-scholasticism and the immanentism of secularism. The sacrament of the Church as a divine as well as a human institution overcomes both extremes. It is in the Church that the transcendent Christ truly enters into the history of our world. And so, already in *Catholicism*, de Lubac links his rejection of extrinsicism and individualism with his notion of the Church as sacrament:

But the Church, the only real Church, the Church which is the Body of Christ, is not merely that strongly hierarchical and disciplined society whose divine origin has to be maintained, whose organization has to be upheld against all denial and revolt. That is an incomplete notion and but a partial cure for the separatist, individualist tendency of the notion to which it is opposed; a partial cure because it works only from without by way of authority, instead of effective union. If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term; she really makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but she is his very continuation, in a sense far more real than that in which it can be said that any human institution is its founder's continuation. The highly developed exterior organization that wins our admiration is but an expression, in accordance with the needs of this present life, of the interior unity of a living entity, so that the Catholic is not only subject to a power but is a member of a body as well, and his legal dependence on this power is to the end that he may have part in the life of that body.<sup>101</sup>

Several elements stand out in this quotation. First, we again observe the sacramental ontology that posits a link between the Church, Christ, and God. Second, de Lubac maintains that as a sacrament of Christ the Church "really makes him present." In other words, as we have noted above, there is a mystical identity between Christ and the Church.<sup>102</sup> For de Lubac, it is this mystical or sacramental

<sup>101</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 76.

<sup>102</sup> This sacramental identity between the Church and Christ lies behind de Lubac's repeated allusions to St. Augustine's dictum, "Nec tu me in te mutabis, sicut cibum carnis

identity that allows the Church to continue Christ's very life in this world. ("[S]he is his very continuation.") We are reminded again of Blondel's insistence that we find Christ's life in the Tradition of devotion and adoration, not in a past to be accessed by means of historical reconstruction.<sup>103</sup> Christ's presence in the Tradition of the Church and through her sacraments overcomes, for de Lubac, the false dilemma between extrinsicism and immanentism. Sacraments, after all, are not some kind of *tertium quid* occupying a distinct space in between nature and the supernatural. In de Lubac's words, they do not function as "intermediates." Instead, they are "mediatory": sacraments are sensible bonds that unite the transcendent to the immanent, the supernatural to the natural.<sup>104</sup>

Third, it is clear that at this point—*Catholicisme* being published in 1938—de Lubac is primarily concerned with the extrinsicism of his neo-Thomist detractors. His warnings concern not so much historicism's immanentism as the authoritarianism and individualism that are the direct result of the sealing off of transcendence from any real connection with the historical and Eucharistic life of the Church. Authority should, therefore, not be constructed in an extrinsicist fashion.<sup>105</sup> One of de Lubac's greatest fears about authoritarian attitudes in the Church is precisely that they do not take seriously the close link between the Bishop and the Eucharistic life of the Church and, therefore, fall into the trap of extrinsicism: "Although he is the Head of his Church, Christ does not rule her from without; there is, certainly, subjection and dependence between her and him, but at the same time she is his fulfillment and 'fullness'. She is the tabernacle of his presence, the building of which he is both Architect and Cornerstone."<sup>106</sup>

To be sure, in no way is de Lubac simply out to downplay the authority of the hierarchy or the need of obedience to the Church. Consistently, from his earliest works, de Lubac is deeply committed to the authoritative role of the Magisterium. One cannot but be

tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me." See McPartlan, *Eucharist Makes the Church*, 67–74; idem, "'You will be changed into me': Unity and Limits in de Lubac's Thought," *One in Christ* 30 (1994): 50–60.

<sup>103</sup> For Blondel, the latter would mean "to immure [Christ] in the past, sealing him in his tomb beneath the sediments of history and to consider only the natural aspect of his work as real and effective; it would be to deprive him of the influence which every master communicates to his immediate disciples..." ("History and Dogma," 247).

<sup>104</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 202. De Lubac takes the distinction between "mediation" and "intermediaries" from Louis Bouyer (*Motherhood*, 93–94).

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Fergus Kerr, "French Theology: Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 115.

<sup>106</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 209. Cf. de Lubac's discussion of papal infallibility as "an infallibility that is not something *separate* from that of the whole Church..." (ibid., 271; emphasis added). Cf. also ibid., 266.

impressed how, even after losing his teaching position in 1950, he continued to insist on the imperative of obedience and love for the Church: “Even where [one] has a duty to act, and in consequence a duty to judge, he will on principle maintain a certain distrust with regard to his own judgement; he will take good care to have himself in hand, and if it so happens that he incurs disapproval, he will, far from becoming obstinate, if necessary accept the fact that he cannot clearly grasp the reasons for it.”<sup>107</sup> If in his later years de Lubac emphasizes more strongly the need to submit to the authority of the Church, this is not because of any major shift in his thinking. Throughout his career he insists on the importance of the hierarchy as fulfilling a sacramental function in the Church. When de Lubac observes, however, that people misinterpret the Second Vatican Council by democratizing the Church, he believes that the pendulum has swung from supernaturalist extrinsicism to naturalist immanentism.<sup>108</sup> While clergy are called to serve the Church, they do have real authority: “[I]n no case is it from the Christian people that these ministers hold their commission, nor, consequently, the authority necessary for its achievement.”<sup>109</sup> The activists of what he terms the “para-Council” are not satisfied with an *aggiornamento* that seeks a renewal in the Church by means of patristic *ressourcement*. Instead, what “the para-Council and its main activists wanted and demanded was a *mutation*: a difference not of degree but of nature.”<sup>110</sup> For de Lubac, the neo-scholastic overemphasis on hierarchical authority and the liberal critique of authority stem from one and the same source: a sharp disjunction between nature and the supernatural, resulting in a “separated theology” that fails to see how divine, supernatural means of grace play a divinely ordained role within the Eucharistic life of the Church. Both approaches, de Lubac insists, fail to locate the clergy within the divine life of the Church and, therefore, undermine the true authority of the hierarchical priesthood.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 264. Christopher Walsh points out that after 1950, de Lubac likely added passages to his completed manuscript of *The Splendor of the Church*, in which he autobiographically reflects on his difficult circumstances in relationship to the Church (“Henri de Lubac,” 35–38).

<sup>108</sup> At the same time, also after Vatican II, de Lubac continues to express his objections to extrinsic accounts of authority, warning against ecclesiologies that “assume a positivist conception of the Church or that systematically confine themselves to her exterior aspects, without linking her structure to her underlying nature” (*Motherhood*, 21).

<sup>109</sup> *Motherhood*, 99. De Lubac regards the various methods of selecting bishops as “contingent particulars” (ibid.).

<sup>110</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Brief Catechesis*, 236. Cf. his scathing critique of “small pressure groups” engaging in “an insidious campaign against the papacy—under the pretext of a fight against that eccentricity which is dogmatism, a rejection of dogmatics, which is to say a rejection of the Christian faith in its original twofold character comprising an objective content received from authority . . .” (*Motherhood*, 26).

<sup>111</sup> By resorting to a view of ministry as “an external, completely ‘sociological’ function,



Fourth and last, de Lubac's comment that the hierarchical organization of the Church is "in accordance with the needs of this present life" is key to another aspect of the sacramentality of the Church. While in some sense the Church will continue forever, there are aspects of the Church that are merely penultimate, "in accordance with the needs of this present life." From a purely historical perspective, as "proper subject for sociological investigation," the Church is only a means, not an end: "A necessary means, a divine means, but provisional as means always are."<sup>112</sup> If the Church is provisional inasmuch as she is a "means" of salvation, this implies that it is the sacramental character of the Church that will not cross over into the eschaton: "Insofar as she is visible and temporal, the Church is destined to pass away. She is a sign and a sacrament, and it is the peculiar quality of signs and sacraments to be re-absorbed in the reality they signify."<sup>113</sup> Again, de Lubac is concerned here to counter a view of the hierarchy that in its obsession with authority forgets its limited, mediatory character. The hierarchy's authority is not eternal. "With the idea of strengthening the authority of those who are in this world Christ's representatives and the Apostles' successors, they sometimes go so far as to want to make eternal not only the imprint of the sacred character they have received—which would be legitimate—but the exercise of their power."<sup>114</sup> Such a focus on the hierarchy's authority ignores, de Lubac argues, that the "exterior cultus" "will subsist no longer in the Kingdom of Heaven, where nothing will take place in symbol but all in naked truth."<sup>115</sup> The reason for the eschatological disappearance of the hierarchy of the Church is that it serves a sacramental and, therefore, mediatory function. The priest's role is to make present the Eucharistic body of Christ, which in turn makes present the ecclesial body. It is only the latter, the unity of the mystical body, that remains in the end: "The sacramental element in the Church, being adapted to our temporal condition, is destined to disappear in the face of the definitive realm it effectively signifies; but this should not be thought of as one thing's effacing of another. It will be the manifestation of sacramentality's own proper truth; a glorious epiphany and a consummation."<sup>116</sup>

a mere profession," we would turn it into "an arbitrary law." "But besides the fact that all authority recognized in [priestly] ministry would in this case have lost its foundation, this would not only deny Catholic tradition but in actual fact repudiate the very reality of the Church by emptying the Christian mystery" (*Motherhood*, 139; cf. *ibid.*, 353).

<sup>112</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 70.

<sup>113</sup> De Lubac, *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 53.

<sup>114</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 73.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 68. This last comment is again an indication that we should not misidentify de Lubac's cautioning against a conservative authoritarianism as a progressive rejection of authority. He is merely concerned to point out the hierarchy's proper sacramental role

We can identify that which de Lubac regards as sacramental and provisional in the Church by means of his distinction between two different aspects of the Church. De Lubac maintains that we can look at the one mystical body of Christ from two different angles: an active and a passive aspect. When we consider the active aspect, we look at the mystical body in its divine essence. Here, the Church is the gathering Church (*ecclesia convocans, congregans*).<sup>117</sup> From this viewpoint, the Church is sheepfold, mother, and bride.<sup>118</sup> This is the institutional, this-worldly Church,<sup>119</sup> in which the clergy offer us the sacraments (*communio sanctorum*),<sup>120</sup> so that here the Church produces the Eucharist.<sup>121</sup> Put differently, here the Church as Mother Mary gives birth to Christ in her members.<sup>122</sup> In its passive aspect, however, we look at the same body of Christ in its human form. Here, the Church is the gathered Church (*ecclesia convocata, congregata*).<sup>123</sup> From this viewpoint, the Church is the flock of sheep, the people of God, and the daughter.<sup>124</sup> This is the mystical, other-worldly Church,<sup>125</sup> in which the laity form the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*),<sup>126</sup> so that here the Eucharist produces the Church.<sup>127</sup> Put differently, here the Church as Virgin Mary renders the Church's *fiat*.<sup>128</sup> It is important to de Lubac that we keep these two aspects of the Church together in paradoxical unity.<sup>129</sup> He refuses to speak of an invisible Church,<sup>130</sup> and he continually stresses

vis-à-vis a conservative extrinsicist conception of authority. This explains why de Lubac balked at what he saw as a secularist and historicist democratization after Vatican II, which he believed was not true to the Council's intent.

<sup>117</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 104.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 108. Cf. the beautiful collection of patristic passages on the motherhood of the Church in de Lubac, *Motherhood*, 47–58.

<sup>119</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 124.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, 106.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 321, 337–38.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 108.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, 106.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 321, 337–38.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. For de Lubac, “paradox” is a key notion, intimately connected to the notion of “mystery.” See de Lubac, *Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 1–29. The paradox of the Church goes back to the paradox of the Incarnation, but in a sense the mystery of the Church is even more paradoxical than that of Christ: “If a purification and transformation of vision is necessary to look on Christ without being scandalized, how much more is it necessary when we are looking at the Church!” (*Splendor*, 50)

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. For de Lubac, it is important we understand that the word “mystical is not synonymous with ‘invisible’, but that it refers rather to the sensible sign of a reality that is divine and hidden . . .” so that it would be a serious misrepresentation “to separate the *mystical* body from the *visible* Church” (*ibid.*, 131–32). “The Body of Christ is not an invisible Church or an invertebrate people” (*Motherhood*, 85).

that it is the one body of Christ that we view in its two different aspects. At the same time, the ultimate reality of the Church is the unity established through communion. This means that the institutional and hierarchical aspect of the Church is always the provisional means that serves the mystical and communal aspect.<sup>131</sup>

### The Church in the World

De Lubac's sacramental ontology also influences the way in which he views the place of the Church in the world. On the one hand, he is clearly aware that the Church may often find herself in conflict with the State. As a "perfect society" (Pius IX), the Church "in a sense duplicates civil society,"<sup>132</sup> and the Church's power "extends to all that is spiritual in every human affair in which it is engaged."<sup>133</sup> Since the State "always tends to overstep the domain it has inherited,"<sup>134</sup> it should not be surprising that the Church "must clash with the powers of this world."<sup>135</sup> Indeed, de Lubac cautions Christians that the decline in anticlericalism in society may well be a sign that Christians have "adapted themselves to [the world]—to its ideas, its conventions, and its ways."<sup>136</sup>

On the other hand, de Lubac's oppositional logic is in no way absolute. His theological starting-point is again the relationship between nature and the supernatural: "Man's nature is twofold—he is animal and spirit. He lives on this earth and is committed to a temporal destiny; yet there is in him something that goes beyond any terrestrial horizon and seeks the atmosphere of eternity as its natural climate . . ." <sup>137</sup> Nature and the supernatural, the temporal and the eternal, co-inhere. The two domains are not "mutually extrinsic."<sup>138</sup> The fact that divine revelation takes historical form and reaches us through Tradition means, for de Lubac, that the Church cannot ignore the temporal realm of the State as belonging to a separate order. De Lubac cautions, therefore, against "an exaggerated or misguided

<sup>131</sup> Cf. de Lubac's comment: "Of the two intimately connected characteristics of the Church, institutional and mystical, hierarchical and communal, if the second is assuredly the principal in value, the more pleasant to contemplate and the one which alone will continue to exist, the first is its necessary condition. . . . Communion is the objective—an objective which, from the first instant, does not cease to be realized in the invisible; the institution is the means for it—a means which even now does not cease to ensure a visible communion" (*Motherhood*, 34–35).

<sup>132</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 161.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

critique of what is freely labelled ‘Constantinian Christianity’,<sup>139</sup> insisting that those whom he calls *spirituali* may dangerously restrict the Church’s sphere of action, so that they end up “striking a compromise—without wishing to do so—with the forces that wish to suppress [the gospel] by either suppressing or subjugating the Church.”<sup>140</sup> Charity, he warns, “has not to become inhuman in order to remain supernatural.”<sup>141</sup>

Despite this ecclesial interest in the affairs of the world, the Church needs to beware, de Lubac feels, of an immanentism that drags the Church down and doesn’t recognize her eschatological calling. As already noted, de Lubac fears that a misapprehension of the Second Vatican Council is directly tied in with an immanentism that downplays the supernatural in favour of a strictly historicist approach. The result is that de Lubac’s emphasis, in his later writings, tends to be distinctly different from that of his earlier material. No longer is it the “separated theology” of extrinsicism that is the main opponent. Now, de Lubac turns instead against a “separated philosophy”: “In the past a theocratic temptation may have threatened; today, on the contrary (but because of a similar confusion, and with less excuse, given the historical context), the secularist temptation has come to the fore very strongly.”<sup>142</sup>

This new focus on the danger of immanentism is evident particularly in de Lubac’s *Petite catéchèse sur nature et grâce* (1980). One cannot but be struck by the structure of the book, which distinguishes sharply between “Nature and the Supernatural” (Part I) and the “Consequences” of their relationship (Part II), on the one hand, and “Nature and Grace” (Part III), on the other hand. This structure implies a sharp distinction between the supernatural and grace. It is necessary to make this distinction clearly, de Lubac believes, to take full account of human sinfulness: one can speak of the relationship between nature and the supernatural without taking sin and grace into account. In this book, de Lubac links the incarnation with the supernatural, while he connects redemption to grace.<sup>143</sup> When talking about the relationship between nature and grace, de Lubac shows himself quite willing to acknowledge a sharp difference between the two orders. While throughout the Part I (on “Nature and the Supernatural”) de Lubac speaks of the supernatural as merely “elevating,”

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 175. Cf. de Lubac’s insistence that the papacy maintained the independence and orthodoxy of the Church against semi-pagan emperors “in the first few centuries of what is so often called in an appalling oversimplification the ‘Constantinian era’” (*Motherhood*, 301).

<sup>140</sup> De Lubac, *Splendor*, 175.

<sup>141</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 365.

<sup>142</sup> De Lubac, *Brief Catechesis*, 110.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 122, 168.

“penetrating,” and “transforming” nature, his discourse changes in Part III (speaking of “Nature and Grace”) to “conversion” language: “There is an antagonism, violent conflict (*‘natura filii irae’* says St. Paul). Between grace and sin the struggle is irreconcilable. Consequently, the call of grace is no longer an invitation to a simple ‘elevation’, not even a ‘transforming’ one (to use the traditional words); in a more radical fashion it is a summons to a ‘total upheaval’, to a ‘conversion’ (of the ‘heart’, i.e., of all one’s being).”<sup>144</sup>

De Lubac’s *Petite catéchèse* gives evidence, in a variety of ways, of de Lubac’s renewed emphasis on transcendence and the supernatural. In connection with de Lubac’s ecclesiology, it is particularly his rather sharp attack on Edward Schillebeeckx that is of interest.<sup>145</sup> As already noted, de Lubac’s sacramental ontology entails that he regards the Church as *sacramentum Christi*. For de Lubac, the Eucharistically constituted body of Christ signifies Christ and makes him present in the world. The unity of the Church as the truth of the Eucharist is an embodiment of the eschatological unity of the *totus Christus*. While the Second Vatican Council adopted language identical to that of de Lubac by speaking of the Church as “sacrament,” it did not refer to the Church as “sacrament of Christ,” the way de Lubac had put it. As we have seen, *Lumen Gentium* stated that “the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”<sup>146</sup> Schillebeeckx commented on this passage by saying: “The Church is the ‘sacrament of the world’. Personally, I consider this declaration as one of the most charismatic that have come from Vatican II.”<sup>147</sup>

Of course, if de Lubac’s *sacramentum Christi* is not found explicitly in the documents of Vatican II, neither is Schillebeeckx’ *sacramentum mundi*. And for de Lubac, the latter betrays a foundational error in ecclesiology. He is willing to speak, with Von Balthasar, of the Church as sacrament *for* the world, or as sacrament of the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>148</sup> He is also quite ready, in line with his sacramental ontology, to acknowledge that one could speak of the Church as *sacramentum mundi* in the sense that the world itself is a sacrament.<sup>149</sup> But de Lubac’s problem with Schillebeeckx is precisely that the Belgian theologian is giving up on a truly sacramental ontology. He senses in Schillebeeckx an apprehension of a “theophanic world” and of “sacralising religion,” “in order to return the ‘world’ fully to

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 191–234. For analyses of de Lubac’s attack on Schillebeeckx, see Wood, “Church as the Social Embodiment,” 179–89; Walsh, “Henri de Lubac,” 245–61.

<sup>146</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1.

<sup>147</sup> As quoted in de Lubac, *Brief Catechesis*, 191.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 213.

its 'worldly state'.<sup>150</sup> For de Lubac, such a focus on the *saeculum* makes it impossible to retain a sacramental ontology. As Walsh puts it: "In de Lubac's view, the Christian mission is to bring the *lumen Christi* into a world that does not know Christ, and thus to illuminate the darkness of the age with the splendor of him who abides, according to his promise, mysteriously, obscurely, yet really in his Body the Church. For him, this instrumental, mediatory role of the Church is intrinsic to what the council meant when it described the Church as sacrament: i.e., the Church is a sign that *effects* what it signifies."<sup>151</sup>

Deeply suspicious of Schillebeeckx' notion of the world as "implicit Christianity," of his celebration of "desacralizing secularization," and of his acceptance of liberation theology, de Lubac complains that Schillebeeckx eliminates the distinction between nature and the supernatural by equating salvation with the pursuit of purely natural ends:

[D]oes the "eschatological kingdom" not appear, in all this [i.e., in Schillebeeckx], as the culmination of our "earthly expectations", as their supreme fulfillment and consummation? . . . . So, in practice, human history and salvation history would be one and the same. "In this respect there is no difference between the Old and the New Testament." Consequently, "today's Christian reflection" eliminates "the ancient problem of nature-supernature", traces of which, in the early days of the Council, could still be found in the first drafts of what was then called Schema 17. "Creation and divinization together make up the unique supernatural order of salvation."<sup>152</sup>

De Lubac is clearly afraid that Schillebeeckx replaces the sacramental relationship between nature and the supernatural with a collapse of the supernatural into a purely natural realm. As a result, de Lubac warns that we ought not "to confuse the progress or the 'construction' of the world with the new creation or even to suppose that the latter is an outgrowth of the former."<sup>153</sup> De Lubac feels that Schillebeeckx falls into the trap of accepting nature as an isolated given, which is exactly the problem Blondel had described as "historicism." The result, de Lubac is convinced, would be an immanentist and secularist mindset, in which the Church would have nothing to convey to the world.<sup>154</sup> In short, de Lubac sees Schille-

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 215–16.

<sup>151</sup> Walsh, "Henri de Lubac," 261.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 224–25. The various quotations within this quote are statements made by Schillebeeckx.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 228. I am not assessing here whether or not de Lubac interprets Schillebeeckx correctly on this point. Walsh argues that this part of de Lubac's critique does not do justice to Schillebeeckx' position ("Henri de Lubac," 257–59).

<sup>154</sup> Wood captures the difference between the two theologians well when she comments that with Schillebeeckx it seems that the Church is merely the visible embodiment of a unity that already exists prior to the Church as the unity of the human race, while for de

beeckx as undermining a sacramental ontology. By describing the Church as a sacrament of the world rather than of Christ, we end up naturalizing and secularizing the Church.

### Conclusion

In his 1988 foreword to the English edition of *Catholicisme*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger draws our attention to the immediate historical context of de Lubac's opposition to ecclesial individualism: "The narrow-minded individualistic Christianity against which he strove is hardly our problem today." Instead, Ratzinger is convinced that "we are now in danger of a sociological levelling down. Sacraments are often seen merely as celebrations of the community where there is no more room for the personal dialogue between God and the soul—something many greet with condescending ridicule. And so there has been a kind of reversal of the previous individualism . . ." <sup>155</sup> This essay has made clear that de Lubac would have no difficulty at all echoing these words. Over time, his emphasis shifted rather radically to a reaffirmation of transcendence and of the supernatural. More and more, de Lubac began to express his strong reservations regarding the immanentism of modern culture, which he believed was also infiltrating the Catholic Church.

This is not to say that de Lubac's attacks on extrinsicism have become irrelevant in today's context. De Lubac was well aware of the shared presuppositions of extrinsicism and historicism and could easily envisage, therefore, a "separated theology" over time giving rise to a "separated philosophy." The popular affirmations of the secular age in the 1960s and 1970s were possible in part, no doubt, because the modern separation between nature and grace had provided the soil in which such secularism could take root. De Lubac's keen awareness of the deep philosophical problem of the modern malaise cannot fail to impress as we witness the late modern flowering of immanentism in contemporary thought and culture. <sup>156</sup>

De Lubac's sacramental ontology also has profound ecumenical implications, since the separation between nature and the supernatural cuts across our ecclesial divides. Several of de Lubac's concerns had, of course, been those of the Reformation, as well. The focus on the real presence and on transubstantiation, the neglect of the communal aspect of the Church, and the extrinsicist construction of authority were key elements in the Protestant critique of the Catholic Church.

Lubac the unity of the human race only exists *through* the Church ("Church as the Social Embodiment," 187–88).

<sup>155</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Foreword," in de Lubac, *Catholicism*, 12.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Tracey Rowland's appeal to de Lubac in order to counter modern and late modern tendencies toward immanentism (*Culture and the Thomist Tradition*).

De Lubac's attempt to correct each of these issues is deeply significant, particularly at a point in time in which the current Pontiff stands squarely in the tradition of de Lubac's *ressourcement* of the Tradition. At the same time, de Lubac issues a challenge, not only in the direction of Catholic extrinsicism, but also in the direction of Protestant immanentism. In particular, it seems to me that evangelicalism, with its common neglect of sacramental and ecclesial theology, has a great deal to learn from de Lubac. His overall sacramental ontology is a healthy antidote to the current cultural mood of nominalist atomism, with its tendency to celebrate the here and now without regard for its supernatural *telos*. And the Eucharistic focus of his ecclesiology may challenge evangelicals to recover the intimate connection between Eucharist and Church. Furthermore, it is not only Protestant-Catholic dialogue that may benefit from de Lubac's theology. De Lubac's focus on the Eucharist, as well as the Platonizing tendencies of his theology, may prove to be of great benefit for ecumenical discussions between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.<sup>157</sup>

Thus, even if de Lubac's attack on the ecclesiastical supernaturalism of neo-Thomism has lost some of its immediate relevance, the underlying concern that nature is intrinsically and sacramentally oriented to the supernatural remains of abiding interest. De Lubac's argument for a sacramental ontology as the solution to the modern dilemma between extrinsicism and historicism is perhaps more urgent today than it was when he first presented it. A sacramental ontology enables us to re-assert the divine significance of the created order, in general, and of the Eucharist and the Church, in particular. Only a sacramental worldview keeps open the human horizons, so that in faith we can see the transcendent God come to us in the flesh in Jesus Christ.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Indeed, McPartlan's comparative analysis between de Lubac and Zizioulas is a hopeful sign in this regard (*Eucharist and the Church*).

<sup>158</sup> The original context for this essay was a seminar on 'Liturgy and Politics: Is the Church a *Polis*?' held at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan in July 2006 under the capable leadership of Dr William T. Cavanaugh and funded by the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship and the Lilly Endowment, Inc. I am grateful for the hospitality extended by the staff of Calvin College's Seminars in Christian Scholarship program, and also for the encouragement offered by its Director, Dr James K. A. Smith.