

Henri de Lubac: The Church as the Body of Christ and the Challenge of Ethnic Nationalism

THOMAS G. WEINANDY, O.F.M., CAP.

*Capuchin College
Washington, DC*

IN ALL likelihood, Henri de Lubac will be remembered primarily for his contributions in three areas of theology. The first, and the one that caused the most debate during his lifetime and persists today, is that of the relationship between nature and grace.¹ The second is his innovative and comprehensive study of patristic and medieval exegesis. This initiated a renewed and deeper appreciation of the exegetical presuppositions and methods employed by the Fathers and Scholastics, and of their resulting scholarly theological achievement.² This appreciation continues to mature in reaction to the theological sterility of much contemporary biblical scholarship. The third, and the one I would argue de Lubac pursued with the deepest inner conviction, is that of fully grasping and

¹ See Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études Historiques: nouvelle édition* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991). For recent discussions of this issue, see John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) and David Braine, "The Debate Between Henri de Lubac and His Critics," *Nova et Vêtera* 6 (2008): 543–90.

² See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

For a good overview of *nouvelle théologie* and patristic exegesis, see Brian Daley, S.J., "The *Nouvelle Théologie* and Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and the Science of Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005): 362–82.

On the significance of *nouvelle théologie* in general and of de Lubac in particular, see M. D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement Theology, *Aggiornamento*, and the Hermeneutics of Tradition," *Communio* 18 (1991): 530–55; Avery Dulles, "Henri de Lubac: An Appreciation," *America*, September 26, 1991: 180–82; and R. Voderholzer, "Dogma

clearly articulating the nature of the Church, specifically as constituting the Mystical Body of Christ.³

De Lubac was not a systematic theologian in the traditional sense, for he never addressed in a methodical manner the various mysteries of the faith that comprise the whole of dogmatic theology, nor did he even articulate a complete systematic ecclesiology. Yet, when addressing the authentic nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, he did, by necessity, address other doctrinal themes that are essential for fully appreciating this particular mystery of faith, for example, natural human solidarity, the Fall and its effects, Christ and redemption, the hierarchical and sacramental nature of the Church, evangelization, and eschatology. De Lubac rightly perceived that the Church is, “as far as we are concerned, the meeting-place of all mysteries.”⁴ So central is the Church for de Lubac that he could say that “the Church is not only the first of the works of the sanctifying Spirit, but also that which includes, conditions and absorbs all of the rest.”⁵

The purpose of this essay is to argue that de Lubac’s understanding of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ is a robust theological

and History: Henri de Lubac and the Retrieval of Historicity as a Key to Theological Renewal,” *Communio* 28 (2001): 648–68.

For an excellent study of the relationship between de Lubac’s understanding of exegesis and his theology of the Church, see Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

³ In *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, Hans Urs Von Balthasar wrote: “The Church stands clearly in the center of what we can call de Lubac’s work” ([San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991], 105).

In his early works de Lubac identified the Roman Catholic Church with the Mystical Body of Christ. In his last works the Mystical Body included all Christians of every denomination. As Wood states: “Regarding the relations of the Church to the Mystical Body, we can conclude, despite the lack of clarity, that de Lubac’s thought developed from *The Splendour of the Church* to *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, the former strongly reflecting *Mystici Corporis* and the latter reflecting *Lumen Gentium*” (Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, 85).

Paul McPartlan observes that de Lubac’s writings on the Church influenced key figures at the Second Vatican Council, for example Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Paul VI, and Bishop Carol Wojtyła, and he also notes the immense impact that his thought had on *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. For example, McPartlan states: “Joseph Ratzinger pays a remarkable tribute to de Lubac when he affirms that: ‘in all its comments about the Church, [Vatican II] was moving precisely in the direction of de Lubac’s thought.’” McPartlan, “The Eucharist, the Church and Evangelization: The Influence of Henri de Lubac,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 780. The quotation is from Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 50.

⁴ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

response to one of the most challenging issues of his day and one that is even more perilous today—the ascendancy of aggressive, and frequently militaristic, ethnic nationalism. To demonstrate this, this essay is composed of three parts. The first part will examine briefly the cultural and theological milieu out of which de Lubac articulated his theology of the Church as the Body of Christ. The second part will more extensively consider his understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ in some of her variously related aspects. The final section will address the contemporary relevance of de Lubac's theology of the Church as the Body of Christ in the light of contemporary ethnic nationalism.

The Cultural and Theological Setting

De Lubac initially took up the topic of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ in his *Catholicism: A Study in the Corporate Destiny of Mankind*, which he first published in 1937.⁶ At first glance, to address the ecclesial notion of the Church as the Body of Christ appears inappropriate and even an irrelevant topic at a time when Europe was on the verge of actually being devastated by its second war in less than fifty years, a war that for the first time in the world's history was truly global in nature. Would there not have been more pressing issues to examine, issues more politically, culturally, and globally germane, given the extremely belligerent conditions that existed? Moreover, at a time when the Church in Europe was itself under political and military duress, why expound upon a topic that is seemingly so ecclesiastically confined, so religiously provincial, and so theologically erudite as to render it impractical? Little thought is

⁶ However, de Lubac stated in the introduction that his book is “no treatise on the Church or on the Mystical Body—although these pages refer continually to both.” English translation taken from the fourth French edition, 1947: *Catholicism: A Study in the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Mentor-Omega Book, 1964), xi. He refers to previous works by K. Adam, E. Mersch, and M.-J. Congar which develop more thoroughly and systematically these topics.

In 1939 de Lubac completed his more scholarly treatise *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, which was not published until 1944 (English translation taken from the second edition, 1949 [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006]). This study traced the historical and theological evolution of the term “Mystical Body” as first pertaining to Christ's presence in the Eucharist and only gradually coming to designate the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. De Lubac states that “[t]he first chronological instance of its appearance [referencing the Church] would seem to be the famous Bull *Unam Sanctam* of Boniface VIII (18th November 1302)” (*Corpus Mysticum*, 3). While the term progressively and incrementally came close to referring to the Church, “[n]onetheless, there is no writer of Christian antiquity or of the high Middle Ages in whose work the word itself appears as a description of the Church” (*ibid.*, 6).

required to perceive that de Lubac recognized that an articulate and convincing study, such as *Catholicism*, on the “corporate destiny of mankind” as found and realized within the Church as the Body of Christ is precisely what the war-torn global situation demanded. Moreover, this is specifically what the Catholic Church in Europe needed at a time when it was militarily and intellectually attacked from without and emotionally and spiritually wracked from within.

In the introduction to *Catholicism*, de Lubac noted that, while agnostic philosophies still undermined belief in the Gospel and while doubts about the truth of the biblical narratives and the authenticity of the Church’s origins and historical development still prevailed, there had arisen a new and deeper distrust that went to the very heart of Catholicism. “‘How,’ they ask in particular, ‘can a religion which apparently is uninterested in our terrestrial future and in human fellowship offer an ideal which can still attract the men of to-day?’”⁷ When civilization itself appeared to be on the verge of collapse, what relevance could Christianity have when its seemingly primordial, if not sole, concern pertained to a life beyond, located in some heavenly realm? While authors had argued that the Gospel is social by its very nature, nonetheless “[w]e are accused of being individualists even in spite of ourselves.” Catholicism is, nonetheless, “social in the deepest sense of the word: 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 dogmas. It is social in a sense which should have made the expression ‘social Catholicism’ pleonastic.”⁸ Thus de Lubac did not see his little book *Catholicism*, nor would he consider his later writings on the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, purely as an exercise in satisfying academic curiosities, thus rendering them practically irrelevant. De Lubac was resolutely convinced, as we shall see, that the mystery of faith that Christ is the Head of the Church, which is his Body, is the only reality that is theologically hardy enough to nurture and strengthen the bonds of unity and peace among Catholics, a unity and peace that can stand against and overcome the violent antipathy that seeks to destroy both the Church and civil society itself. Moreover, as Christians and Catholics intellectually grasp the profound nature of their mutual brotherhood in Christ and live it within a world beset by war, such societies can be transformed once more into cultures of peace and justice. Thus, it is only the reality of the Body of Christ that is able, practically and concretely, to transcend and so unify

⁷ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, ix.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

racess and nations, compelling peoples of various countries to sheath their swords and live in harmony.⁹

The external political, intellectual, and cultural circumstances, as well as what was taking place intellectually and pastorally from within, forced the Church to examine who and what she is. De Lubac observed that “[t]hirty years ago Romano Guardini drew our attention to a fact which has asserted itself more and more strongly ever since—that the Church has reawakened in our souls. The reality of the Church has, somehow, soaked itself deeper into the core of the Christian consciousness, and alongside that development has gone a general flourishing of ecclesiological studies.” For de Lubac, this truth was confirmed in Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*. “In a word, it seemed as if, as far as the development of doctrine is concerned, the twentieth century is destined to be ‘the century of the Church.’”¹⁰

How then did de Lubac, over the years, articulate his understanding of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ so as to address these and other issues that concern the wellbeing of the world and the vibrant life and mission of the Church?

The Church as the Body of Christ: Overcoming Sinful Divisions

De Lubac takes as his starting point the Thomistic axiom that grace builds upon nature. “Thus the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human

⁹ Joseph A. Komonchak states: “In 1933, during a period of exacerbated tensions between France and Germany, he [de Lubac] wrote an essay on patriotism and nationalism in which he explicitly criticized Maurras’s absolute nationalism and contrasted to it the transnational community of Christians.” Komonchak, “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 597. See also page 598. Komonchak notes de Lubac’s “Patriotisme et nationalism,” *Vie intellectuelle* 19 (1933): 283–300.

¹⁰ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 10–11. De Lubac was referring to Guardini’s *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, 1923, p. 1.

Pope Pius XII published on 29 June, 1943 his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*. De Lubac’s early works and studies, as well as works by other authors at the time, gave impetus to the pope’s encyclical, and it is not surprising that many of the same cultural and theological concerns are reflected both in de Lubac’s early works and in Pius XII’s encyclical. See, for example, *Mystici Corporis*, §§1–6, where, similar to de Lubac, Pius XII perceives that the Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, is the only workable cure that can adequately heal the deadly wounds that nationalistic wars have inflicted upon the world. I will note and/or quote throughout this essay some relevant passages from *Mystici Corporis*, the documents from the Second Vatican Council, and later papal encyclicals in order to show their relationship to de Lubac’s thought.

race.”¹¹ The Fathers of the Church marveled that God did not simply create isolated individuals; rather he created humanity to be a unified whole. The sin of Adam and Eve destroyed that unity. Not only was humankind separated from God, but it was equally splintered from within. Following Origen and Maximus the Confessor, de Lubac “considers original sin as a separation, a breaking up, an individualization it might be called, in the depreciatory sense of the word.” In contrast, “God is working continually in the world to the effect that all should come together into unity.”¹² The work of redemption is precisely the healing of the sinful wounds of division. Redemption is “a work of restoration”; it is “the recovery of lost unity—the recovery of the supernatural unity of man with God, but equally of the unity of men among themselves.”¹³ In anticipation of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*, de Lubac does not perceive the Incarnation to be merely the Son of God assuming an individual human nature, though he did do that, but that, in so doing, he united himself to the whole human race and, in turn, united the whole of humankind to himself.¹⁴ “Christ the Redeemer does not offer salvation merely to each one; he effects it, he is himself the salvation of the whole, and for each one salvation is a personal ratification of his original ‘belonging’ to Christ, so that he be not cast out, cut off from the Whole.”¹⁵ The supernatural uniting of the whole of humankind to Christ is the great mystery revealed in the fullness of time—“to re-establish all things in Christ” (Eph 1:10). For de Lubac, this is the great mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ whereby humankind is not simply once more restored to that original natural unity but now elevated to a supernatural communion that finds its source and end in God himself.¹⁶

In designating the Body of Christ as “Mystical,” de Lubac explains that Catholic doctrine is distinguishing it from other usages of the term “body.” It “is a supernatural organism which should be thought of in the image of a natural body, but by the same token contrasted with it.”¹⁷ The Body of Christ is like a “natural body” in that it is one living reality made up of many members. However, unlike a natural body, it is supernatural;

¹¹ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴ “For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself to each man” (*Gaudium et Spes*, §22).

¹⁵ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 22–23.

¹⁶ See De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 25. This understanding is also reflected in *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹⁷ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 87.

that is, Christ, as the Head of the Body, enlivens it through the divine life of his Holy Spirit and so simultaneously, through the same Spirit, makes it one living reality in union with himself. Thus, while the Body of Christ differs from a natural body, it equally must not be thought of as simply a “moral body”—a group of loosely knit individuals united by some common purpose. For de Lubac, “if this happened there would no longer really be any question of the Body of *Christ*, His ‘living body,’ which is animated by His Spirit as our own bodies of flesh are animated by our souls, the body which is really Christ.”¹⁸ It is the mystical nature of the Body of Christ, then, that provides a living supernatural unity that transcends all “earthly” unities, for the bond of communion exceeds all “earthly” associations—political, racial, or social—and so heals the sinful divisions that these can readily spawn.¹⁹

The Church as the Body of Christ: Historical and Visible

The Mystical Body of Christ, therefore, cannot be something that is ethereal or invisible. While this unity is supernatural in origin and so beyond human and finite potential, it is concretely present and visibly manifested within the world of time and history. If the Mystical Body of Christ were not actually visibly ensconced within the reality of this world, it would be of no benefit to it. But where do we find the tangible expression, the living reality, of the Body of Christ in our historical, finite world? For de Lubac, following St. Paul, there is only one answer. The Body of Christ here on earth is the Church (see Col 1:24). It is impossible to consider the mystical aspect of the Church as Christ’s Body “apart from her visible existence in time.”²⁰ As the Son of God brought salvation to the world only by becoming a visible physical man within time and history, so the visible Church incorporates this incarnational principle throughout all ages so as to be a continuing sacrament of salvation—the visible efficacious sign of salvation. Without the visible, historical, and concrete presence of the Church, Christ himself would not be present, and so neither would his Body, the Body through which communion with him and among all peoples is ultimately founded. The mystery of the Church “is not that of some purely spiritual ideal or invisible reality, without a tangible structure, but is a communion that at least

¹⁸ Ibid., 89–90.

¹⁹ For similar articulations of the Mystical Body of Christ, see Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis*, §§52–63 and *Lumen Gentium*, §7. In *Mystici Corporis* Pius XII speaks of the unity between Christ and his Body the Church as forming “one mystical person” (§67).

²⁰ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 116.

in one of the qualities that constitutes her is a visible society, organized and possessing a power of government. The Church is the ‘visible and mystical body of Christ.’ She is ‘instrument, sign, and sacrament of union with God and of the unity of all human kind.’”²¹ It is within the very historical institution of the Church that all of humankind finds its unity within every historical age and among the myriad of diverse peoples.

By virtue of the divine power received from her Founder the Church is an institution which endures; but even more than an institution, she is a life that is passed on. She sets the seal of unity on all the children of God whom she gathers together.²²

This gathering together is not simply a uniting of contemporaries, but of peoples of every age and culture—Christians recognize their brothers and sisters from ages past and from societies and cultures radically different from their own. They “indeed form one single whole, united by the love of Christ.”²³

There is a brotherhood of common responses; they answer the same appeal and enjoy the same communion in the same love; it is as if one and the same blood flowed in their veins. They are children of the same Church; fed by the same faith, they are “given to drink of the same Spirit,” who produces in them one and the same spontaneous reaction, and thus provides the sign by which they recognize one another.²⁴

The common bond that unites all the members of the Church into a brotherhood of love, spanning historical epics and diverse cultures, is not a horizontal love among themselves, but a transcendent love that is founded upon their communion with Jesus as their Head, who, as their Head, subsumes them into the very divine communion of the Trinity itself. Quoting Origen, de Lubac emphasizes that the Church is “full of the Trinity.” “The Father is in her ‘as the Principle to whom one is united, the Son, as the medium in which one is united, the Holy Spirit

²¹ De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 34. For de Lubac, to reduce the Church to an invisible and so simply an intellectual principle would be to mold it into a Platonic “idea” devoid of actuality. See *Catholicism*, 39 and *The Splendour of the Church*, 56. On the visible nature of the Church as the Body of Christ also see *Mystici Corporis*, §14 and *Lumen Gentium*, §8.

Space does not permit a treatment of de Lubac’s understanding of the hierarchical nature of the visible Body of Christ and in particular the office of Peter. See, however, *The Splendour of the Church*, 47–49, 101, 202.

²² De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 31.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32; see also 33–34.

as the knot by which all things are united; and all is one.’”²⁵ Employing Augustine’s concept of the city of God, de Lubac states: “Among those who are received within the heavenly city there is a more intimate relationship than subsists among the members of a human society, for among them there is not only outward harmony, but true unity.”²⁶ How does the Church, as the Body of Christ, establish and foster this unity?

The Church as the Body of Christ: The Sacrament of Christ

The Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, is able to establish this true communion among all peoples of every age because she is the instrument and means of salvation—overcoming the sin that divides by the cleansing and unifying power of the Holy Spirit. For de Lubac, the Church is the authentic herald of the Gospel of salvation, for in her the Gospel itself is lived out. “Thus this Church . . . as a visible and historical institution is the providential means of this salvation.” While peoples of every age strive for a “common life,” such human striving never achieves its desired goal. Only the Spirit of Christ inspires men and women “to work for their own spiritual unity” and it is “only through the leavening of the Gospel within the Catholic community and by the aid of the Holy Spirit that this ‘divine Humanity’ can be established, *unica dilecta Dei*.”²⁷ The Church is the means through which Jesus and his communion of salvation is visibly found, for she “is an organism of salvation, precisely because she relates wholly to Christ and apart from him has no existence, value or efficacy.”²⁸

The efficaciousness of the Church’s activity by which she acts and matures as the Body of Christ is founded upon her being the primordial sacrament of salvation. Anticipating Vatican II, de Lubac states:

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 which 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.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 175; also 159–60. See also De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 140 and *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 24.

²⁶ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 65.

²⁷ Ibid., 119–20.

²⁸ De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 15.

²⁹ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 147.

For Vatican II’s teaching on the Church as a sacrament, see *Lumen Gentium*, §§1, 9, 48; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§5, 26; *Gaudium et Spes*, §§42, 45; and *Ad Gentes*, §§1, 5.

Hans Boersma states that “[t]here seems to be little doubt that de Lubac had a significant impact on the common acceptance of this approach [Church as

As the Son of God acted salvifically through his humanity, so now Christ acts salvifically through the Church, especially through the sacraments. It is precisely because Christ, as Head, personally acts through his visible Body, the Church, that the Church is the sacrament of Christ himself. For de Lubac, this sacramentality of the Church is at the heart of her being the Body of Christ. "The Church is the sacrament of Christ; which means, to put it another way, that there is between her and Him a certain relation of mystical identity."³⁰ Moreover, it is the sacramental actions that Christ performs as the Head of the sacrament that is his Church that establishes and nourishes the life and unity of his Body. "Since the sacraments are the means of salvation they should be understood as the instruments of unity. As they make real, renew or strengthen man's union with Christ, by that very fact they make real, renew or strengthen his union with the Christian community." Thus it is only in "union with the community that the Christian is united to Christ."³¹

The first effect of the sacrament of baptism "is none other than this incorporation in the visible Church." This is not merely a juridical event, but a thoroughly social event as well. "So it is that by being received into a religious society one who has been baptized is incorporated in the Mystical Body."³² Equally, the rationale behind the sacrament of Penance is to re-establish the bond of unity with the Body of Christ that was severed due to sin. "The whole apparatus of public penance and pardon made it clear that the reconciliation of the sinner is in the first place a reconciliation with the Church, this latter constituting an efficacious sign of reconciliation with God."³³ The fullest expression of unity within the Church, as the Body of Christ, is found within the Eucharist. For de Lubac, this is ultimately what the whole of humanity longs for—true communion with God and one another.

Sacrament] within the Catholic Church." Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac," *New Blackfriars* 88 (2007): 262; see also 262–68.

For a further treatment of de Lubac's understanding of the Church as the sacrament of salvation, see Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, 105–17. She enumerates the differences between de Lubac and Schillebeeckx. On this last point, see also Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology," 268–72.

³⁰ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 152.

³¹ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 48.

³² *Ibid.*, 48–49.

³³ *Ibid.*, 50. Vatican II understands the sacraments in a way similar to that of de Lubac: see *Lumen Gentium*, §11.

The Church as the Body of Christ: The Eucharist as the Body of Christ

Very insightfully de Lubac articulates the reciprocal causal relationship between the Church and the Eucharist. As it is only within the Church as the Body of Christ that the Eucharist is celebrated as the sacramental summit of unity, so the Eucharist, as the sacramental summit of unity, establishes, fosters, and effects the fullness of communion within the Body of Christ, the Church.

Thus everything points to a study of the relation between the Church and the Eucharist, which we may describe as standing as cause each to other. Each has been entrusted to the other, so to speak, by Christ; the Church produces the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also produces the Church. In the first instance the Church is involved in her active aspect (as described earlier)—in the exercise of her sanctifying power; in the second case she is involved in her passive aspect, as the Church of the sanctified. But in the last analysis it is the one Body which builds itself up through this mysterious interaction in and through the conditions of our present existence up to the day of its consummation.³⁴

In a similar manner de Lubac speaks of the Eucharist as making the Church more fully what she truly is: fellowship with one another through their mutual communion with Christ, their Head.

Now, the Eucharist is the mystical principle, permanently at work at the heart of Christian society, which gives concrete form to this miracle. It is the universal bond, it is the ever-springing source of life, thus all “drink of the one Spirit,” who truly makes them into one single body. Literally speaking, therefore, the Eucharist makes the Church. It makes of it an inner reality. By its hidden power, the members of the body come to unite themselves by becoming more fully members of Christ,

³⁴ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 92–93. In *Corpus Mysticum* de Lubac states that the early medieval theologians, following Augustine, recognize that “the Eucharist corresponds to the Church as a cause to effect, as means to end, as sign to reality” (13).

The Fathers of Vatican II stated: “Likewise in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ, is both expressed and brought about. All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed” (*Lumen Gentium*, §3). Pope John Paul II develops this notion of the Church making the Eucharist and the Eucharist making the Church in his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §§21–26. For an excellent study of this notion in de Lubac, see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

and their unity with one another is part and parcel of their unity with the one single Head.³⁵

It is precisely because the Church, within the Eucharist, is united to Christ, her Head, that this supreme unity is achieved. "The Head makes the unity of the Body, and that is how it is that the *mysterium fidei* is also the *mysterium Ecclesiae*, *par excellence*."³⁶ Thus the unity, which the whole of humankind seeks, is found principally within the Church as the Body of Christ, and the fullest expression of the unity is achieved by participating in the Eucharistic sacrifice in which the members of his Body partake of Christ's Eucharistic body and blood. "The sacrament in the highest sense of the word—the sacrament 'which contains the whole mystery of our salvation,' the Eucharist, is also especially the sacrament of unity: *sacramentum unitatis ecclesisticae*."³⁷ For de Lubac, then, "the Church is entirely concentrated in the Eucharist" for within the Eucharist the Church becomes what she truly is—the Body of Christ living in communion with Christ her Head.³⁸

None of this could be possible if it were not for the twofold reality of the Church and the Eucharist. If the Church, as the Body of Christ, were merely a spiritual reality or a moral association of like-minded people and not the concrete living reality that she is within the world of history, she could not effect the real sacramental presence of Christ within the Eucharist. Similarly, if Christ were only spiritually or morally present, in a representational manner, and not really and truly present, in a sacramental manner, the Eucharist could not effect the true and real communion of the whole Church with Christ her Head.

³⁵ De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 88.

³⁶ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 107. De Lubac makes the same point in *Corpus Mysticum*: "Through the Eucharist each person is truly placed within the one body. It unites all the members of it among themselves, as it unites them to their one head" (23).

³⁷ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 51. In *The Splendour of the Church*, de Lubac also writes: "The Church, like the Eucharist, is a mystery of unity—the same mystery, and one with inexhaustible riches. Both are the body of Christ—the same body. If we are to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture, as Tradition interprets it, and wish not to lose anything of its essential riches, we must be careful not to make the smallest break between the Mystical Body and the Eucharist" (110).

³⁸ De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 5. Pius XII also expresses a similar teaching on the Eucharist establishing the supreme bond of unity between Christ and the Church and among the members of his body. See *Mystici Corporis*, §§81–84. For a further presentation of de Lubac's Eucharistic theology, see also Boersma, "Sacramental Ontology," 254–62.

Eucharistic realism and ecclesial realism: these two realisms support one another, each is the guarantee of the other. Ecclesial realism safeguards Eucharistic realism and the latter confirms the former. The same unity of the Word is reflected in both. Today, it is above all our faith in the “real presence,” made explicit thanks to centuries of controversy and analysis, that introduces us to faith in the ecclesial body: effectively signified by the mystery of the Altar, the mystery of the Church has to share in the same nature and the same depth.³⁹

While the Church, as the Body of Christ on earth, is the only temporal communion that not only transcends, and so supersedes, the earthly unities of race and nationality, but also overcomes the divisions caused by sin, this communion does not find its consummation within the earthly historical order. It is a reality that fosters and so prefigures, especially within the Eucharist, its heavenly completion. The Church’s “outlook remains, as it was in her early days, essentially eschatological.”⁴⁰ It is at the Second Coming of Jesus in glory that his Body will obtain the fullness of his resurrected life and so achieve its ultimate union with him and among its members. For de Lubac, at the end of time, “the earthly Church enters upon her definitive status as the heavenly Church.”⁴¹ She is the same earthly Church, “living and progressing laboriously in our world, militant and on pilgrimage,” that will “see God face to face, bathed in His glory.”⁴²

³⁹ De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 251.

⁴⁰ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 146.

De Lubac comments on the eschatological teaching in Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* in his *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 47–54. De Lubac anticipated much of what the Council taught. For example, *Gaudium et Spes* states: “The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as a perfect man he could save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history and civilization, the center of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations. . . . Animated and drawn together in his Spirit we press onwards on our journey towards the consummation of history which fully corresponds to the plan of his [Father’s] love: ‘to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph. 1:10)” (§45).

Pius XII also wrote in *Mystici Corporis*: “For nothing more glorious, nothing nobler, nothing surely more honourable can be imagined than to belong to the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, in which we become members of one Body as venerable as it is unique; are guided by one supreme Head; are filled with one divine Spirit; are nourished during our earthly exile by one doctrine and on heavenly Bread, until at last we enter into the one, unending blessedness of heaven” (§91).

⁴¹ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 41; see also 42–54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

The Saints in heaven may enjoy the beatific vision, yet they are not without longing, for they share in the very longing of Christ himself. The reason for this longing is that the Church, as the Body of Christ, has not reached her full stature—the Body of Christ has not yet obtained her full complement of members. For Fathers of the early Church, it was not simply that individuals would find salvation. “They loved to think of the Church entering heaven after she had won her victory. As long as she was the Church militant, so it was more or less vaguely supposed, none of her members could enjoy the fullness of triumph.”⁴³ As long as the earthly Body of Christ continues along the path of maturity, “as long as the Body is not fully grown, how shall one member of it realize his full stature?”⁴⁴

So profound is this solidarity between the Church triumphant and the Church militant as the one Body of Christ that not only do the earthly members already share in and anticipate, especially within the Eucharist, the glory of their heavenly brothers and sisters, but also the heavenly members share in the sufferings and trials of their earthly brothers and sisters. Perceptively de Lubac takes up this ancient and often forgotten ecclesial theme. While Christ is the risen Lord of glory and while the Saints reign with him in glory, as long as the earthly members of his Body continue to suffer, so do Christ and the heavenly members suffer in communion with their brothers and sisters. “As he [Christ] still suffers in his earthly members, so, according to this view, Christ hopes in himself and in his heavenly members: and taking this suffering and this hope completes the work of redemption.”⁴⁵ Only at the consummation of the world, when all will be fully one in the risen Christ, the Head, will the Body of Christ obtain its full maturity in the Holy Spirit to the praise and glory of God the Father.

Having extensively, but not exhaustively, examined de Lubac’s understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, I want now to consider three themes where his understanding is of contemporary relevance—nationalism and ethnicity, ecumenism and religious pluralism, and global evangelization.

The Church as the Body of Christ: A Response to Contemporary Ethnic Nationalism

I argued at the onset of this essay that de Lubac’s ardent study of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ was undertaken within the context

⁴³ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 69.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 74. For a fuller study of the notion that the risen Christ continues to suffer in relation to his earthly body, see Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap., *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), 252–59.

of the political nationalistic aggression of the mid-twentieth century that fermented global warfare. De Lubac, throughout all of his writings on ecclesial topics, stressed that the only reality that could establish unity among the whole of humankind was that of the Church as the Body of Christ, for only she provided a transcendent truth—salvation in Christ and the Spirit's living bond of loving peace—that could both heal divisions and foster unity among all races, nations, and cultures. Today the relevance of the reality of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ has not lessened; rather it has increased appreciably.

The contemporary rise of aggressive ethnic nationalism and tribalism continues to divide peoples and nations on every continent, and all of the present military conflicts are its fruit. Even when particular ethnic peoples have legitimate grievances and just demands, these are often entwined with inflated ethnic pride frequently nurtured on reciprocal hatred of their ethnic neighbors. Ethnic pride and national patriotism are virtues to be honored, encouraged, and esteemed. However, when ethnicity, tribalism, and nationalism are not tethered to some transcendent principle that prevents them from becoming the supreme and only standard of unity, they assume a status that is detrimental to themselves and destructive of others. They cultivate a political culture that is completely inward looking and self-absorbed. Such a culture seeks only its own perceived good and aggressively advances, often militarily, its own ethnic, tribal, and national self-aggrandizement. Because of this, peoples, tribes, and nations do not become their authentic selves with their own authentically unique cultural traits, character, virtues, and qualities; rather they radically disfigure themselves, becoming less human, less cultured, less creative, and less civilized and so undermine the very integrity they seek to enhance—their proper ethnic and national identity.

What we perceive here, as de Lubac insisted, is the primordial effect of sin—division and separation. What de Lubac perceived in his day is still relevant in our day—only the Church, as the Body of Christ, offers what all races, tribes, peoples, and nations truly seek and long for—a unity that is not founded upon some worldly philosophical principle or some human ethical mandate, but upon the living person of Jesus Christ. Only in him is the forgiveness and healing of sin, only in him is found the life-giving and unifying gift of the Holy Spirit, and thus only in him does the whole of humankind, as members of his Body, find the bond of love that leads to peace. The Christian understanding of the Body of Christ not only permits but also promotes authentic ethnic, tribal, national, and cultural identity, as well as offering a transcendent overarching communion of fellowship in Christ that is far more intense than any unity of human origin.

Thus the Church, as the Body of Christ, must be at the heart of a culturally renewed and economically and politically unified Europe. She must be at the heart of Africa's effort to ensure economic prosperity, to promote just and stable governments, and to calm tribal hostility so as to foster inter-tribal and national solidarity. Equally, the Church, as the Body of Christ, must be the impetus within the First World countries to rein in their materialistic lifestyles of consumerism and exploitation so as to come to the aid of their economically deprived brothers and sisters throughout the world. The list of relevant examples could continue, but what is evident is that the Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ, is not peripheral to global stability, justice, and peace. Rather, only the Church, as the Body of Christ, guarantees peace and justice in the world, for only within the Body of Christ do peoples and nations find their true source and bond of mutual fellowship, a fellowship that finds its consummation in the heavenly communion of Christ and his Body.⁴⁶

The Church as the Body of Christ: A Response to Ethnic Christianity

The greatest of all scandals is that the very reality, willed by the Father, established in Christ, and made present in the Spirit, that is to be the answer to the virulent discord among peoples and nations is itself splintered and divided. The Body of Christ itself is fractured by schism and denominationalism. As de Lubac wrote:

This makes it possible to understand why schism has always inspired the true believer with horror, and why from earliest times it has been anathematized as vigorously as heresy. For destruction of unity is a corruption of truth, and the poison of dissension that is as baneful as that of false doctrine.⁴⁷

De Lubac recognized the horror of schism—"schism is the sin that leads to death"—for it is the mutilation of the Body of Christ.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* equally emphasized this point: "As the firstborn of many brethren, and by the gift of his Spirit, he [Christ] established, after his death and resurrection, a new brotherly communion among all who received him in faith and love; this is the communion of his own body, the Church, in which everyone as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each. This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day when it will be brought to fulfillment; on that day mankind, saved by grace, will offer perfect glory to God as the family beloved of God of Christ their brother" (§32).

⁴⁷ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149. De Lubac argues, following the patristic tradition, that one must be a member of the Body of Christ to receive the Body of Christ (see *Corpus Mysticum*, 80–83).

To add to the scandal, these very divisions within the Body of Christ were not simply the result of theological and dogmatic disagreements, but were also rooted in ethnic nationalism. This is witnessed in the nationalism that wove itself into the very fabric of the conflicts surrounding the Reformation. Because the Protestant reformers discerned the sin residing in the institutional Church of their day, they jettisoned the visible Church, claiming her to be “a mere secular institution.” However, “as a matter of course it abandoned it [the Church] to the patronage of the state and sought a refuge for the spiritual life in an invisible Church, its concept of which had evaporated into an abstract ideal.”⁴⁹ The principle, established by the Augsburg Peace of 1555, *cuius regio eius religio*, was the ultimate dethronement of Christ as Head of his Body and the triumphant coronation of nationalism. The resulting established national churches of England, Germany, Scandinavia, etc., confirmed the truth that nationalism had trumped the Church as the one universal Body of Christ. Even though the United States did not fall prey to the evil of sanctioning an established church, not infrequently today do some American Christian denominations and bodies promote a “God and Country” posture where one is not convinced that God actually does take precedence.

Moreover, the centuries-old schisms between the Roman Catholic Church and the various Eastern Churches were not and are not simply divisions over doctrinal issues. These schisms possess their own historic nationalistic components. While the Roman Catholic Church has, in recent times, attempted to purify herself of her cultural elitism born of Western arrogance, it is difficult to perceive any reciprocity from the Eastern Churches. Within these Churches, nationalism often continues to loom large. The various Eastern Churches are often designated by nationality: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, etc. What is not evident at times is which is of the utmost importance—the ethnicity of the Church, or the Orthodoxy of the Church.⁵⁰

This is confirmed in the manner in which they relate to Rome, and in the manner in which they relate to one another. While all belong to the Orthodox tradition, it is not infrequent that they are at odds with one

⁴⁹ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 42.

⁵⁰ For a forthright and robust discussion of this issue even among the Uniate Churches, specifically from within a Ukrainian Catholic Church perspective, see P. Galadza, “The Structure of the Eastern Churches: Bonded by Human Blood or Baptismal Water?” *Pro Ecclesia* 17 (2008): 373–86. Galadza provides some very relevant bibliography regarding this issue.

another over issues that bear more on ethnicity and national pride than on theological and ecclesial concerns. What is even more troubling is when the various ethnic Eastern Churches are seemingly intractably conjoined with their secular counterparts—both conspiring together in promoting and fueling a resurgent ethnic nationalism that often expresses itself in military aggression. When a Church uncritically baptizes ethnic and nationalistic movements, she is no longer baptizing people into the universal Body of Christ.⁵¹

The present state of ecumenical relations and the pursuance of full Christian unity are often not hopeful. The answer lies not simply in a renewed effort at overcoming the doctrinal differences and the ecclesial divides, however important they may be. The answer also lies in the purg-

⁵¹ I would argue that the Eastern Orthodox Churches, in losing Peter, lost the overarching principle, actually “the person,” that/who personifies Christ as the unifying Head of the Body. Thus they lost that which would compel them to think beyond their own ethnic identity and so identify with the broader universal Church as the one Body of Christ. Over the centuries, in an effort to legitimize and solidify their own independent ethnic patriarchal status, the ethnic identity of the various Eastern Churches gradually took precedence over being in union with the one universal Body of Christ, the Church. The only solution to this sad situation is for the Eastern Orthodox Churches to come into communion with Peter, but even then it will take centuries of saintly example and teaching of scores of holy men and women before the balance between the particularity of ethnicity and universality of the Church is set right within the Orthodox tradition.

Insightfully, Galadza argues that Rome herself has contributed to this false aggrandizing of ethnicity. “If we study the statements of the last pontificate for the years 1978 to 1988 gathered in a booklet entitled *Pope John Paul II Speaks to Ukrainians*, we find that not only has Rome never challenged the partitive, ghettoizing ecclesiology operative throughout large segments of Ukrainian Catholicism, but it has actually reinforced it. References to ethnicity abound, while references to mission, outreach, evangelization, and the need to combat the idolatry of a temporally based sense of community are virtually absent” (“The Structure of the Eastern Churches,” 383).

The absence of Peter within the Protestant traditions is even more calamitous. Many, if not most, Protestant denominations, especially those of a local congregationalist or fundamentalist tradition, have little, if any, concept of being a part of a larger Christian body other than through their own local assembly, which is vaguely perceived as being conjoined with some spiritualized invisible communion of all “true” believers, the members of the Catholic Church often being excluded from the elect. Despite their claims to being solely and exclusively biblical, such denominations have not heeded the preaching of their most revered apostle—Paul—for it is he who recognized most clearly, as his letters to the various individual churches bear witness, the universal and visible nature of the one Church as the one Body of Christ.

ing of an ethnic nationalism that is revered, treasured, and honored more highly than the Church as Christ's one Body. This can only be achieved within a renewed appreciation of the biblical and traditional notion that the whole Church is the one universal Body of Christ. Until Christians of all denominations groan in sorrow that Christ's Body is rent asunder and thus inflicting immense suffering and pain not only on itself but also on the whole of humankind, and until Christians of all denominations long for Christ's Body to be one, not only for its own vitality but also for the life of the world, nothing of real substance will take place on the ecumenical stage. The whole Body of Christ itself must come, ardently and prayerfully, to long for and cry out for, in the unity of the Spirit, its own healing. Only then will the Spirit be able to bind up and cure its wounds. Only then can the Church, as the universal Body of Christ, truly take up her supreme task and commission—that of evangelizing the whole of the world.⁵²

The Church as the Body of Christ: The Challenge of Global Evangelization

Despite the teaching of Vatican II and subsequent popes, there has been a noticeable flagging in zeal to evangelize.⁵³ This absence of evangelizing zeal is witnessed not only with regard to those non-believers among whom Christians live, but also among those non-believers who abide throughout the world. I believe that there is at least a twofold reason for this. The first is a naïve understanding of other religions. It is common for Christians to assume today that all religions are basically good, even if one thinks that Christianity is the best.⁵⁴ The second reason for the

⁵² Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, states that the division within the Body of Christ "openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature" (§1). For similar comments, see Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §77 and Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, §98.

⁵³ In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II, while noting that all Catholic people and institutions are called to evangelize, states: "Nevertheless, in this 'new springtime' of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency, and the present Document is meant to help overcome it. Missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium" (§2). See also Vatican II's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes* and Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

⁵⁴ Because *Lumen Gentium* enumerates the various religions in a hierarchical fashion, emphasizing the truths that each contains and positioning them in relation to the beliefs of Catholicism, which resides at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, the impression can be given that all religions are good, Christianity merely being the best.

demise in evangelistic zeal resides in the mediocrity of the practice of the Christian faith that is so prevalent today. If one does not personally glory in the knowledge that Jesus is the supreme Lord of all and does not perceive that the salvation that he brings is the greatest of all gifts, one will be reluctant, at best, to bear witness to Jesus and his Gospel of salvation. Moreover, if one does not appreciate that the goal of human history as a whole and of human individuals in particular is the completion of the Body of Christ, and that it is within that Body that all find the fullness of unity, peace, and joy with God and one another, then one will hardly be compelled, in love, to go forth and proclaim the Gospel to all nations. De Lubac wrote: "If I cease evangelizing, it is because charity has withdrawn from me. If I no longer feel the need to communicate the flame, it is because it no longer burns in me."⁵⁵ The contemporary lack of missionary zeal among many Christians lies precisely in a lack of faith in Jesus as the one supreme Lord and only Savior, resulting in a lack of appreciation of being members of his Church—the Mystical Body.⁵⁶

This can easily undercut the need to evangelize. See also Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, §2. What is often forgotten is the further acknowledgement that "[w]hatever good or truth is found amongst them [other religious traditions] is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel," and, moreover, that "very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, having exchanged the truth of God for a lie and served the world rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:21). . . . Hence to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all these, the Church, mindful of the Lord's command, 'preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mk. 16:16) takes zealous care to foster the missions" (*Nostra Aetate*, §16). Thus today, in the desire to affirm the good that resides within other religions, the error, and the evil that necessarily flows from such error, is frequently overlooked or even denied and so, then, the necessity of bringing the Gospel to all.

⁵⁵ De Lubac, *Le Fondement Théologique des Missions* (Paris: Seuil, 1946), 41. Quotation and translation taken from McPartlan, "The Eucharist, the Church and Evangelization: The Influence of Henri de Lubac," *Communio* 23 (1996): 784.

⁵⁶ While the Fathers at the Second Vatican Council, in their dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, employed the notion that the Church is "the people of God" as its overarching template, I wonder if this notion carries the theological depth and ecclesial incentive necessary to support a committed and sustained evangelization. In one sense the whole of humankind makes up God's people even if many do not believe in him and so the necessity of faith in the Gospel is somewhat undermined. However, one becomes a full member of the people of God only when one becomes a full member of the Body of Christ.

De Lubac himself notes that within the preparatory schema the notion of the Church as the Body of Christ was emphasized in keeping with Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis*. While de Lubac does not criticize the choice of the Council, he recognizes that the notion of "people of God" does not possess the biblical grounding nor the mature theological tradition as does that of the

Because of his ardent faith in Jesus and his deep appreciation of the Church as the Body of Christ, de Lubac would never tolerate or countenance such misguided attitudes. He professed that the ultimate destiny of all humanity “consists in its receiving the form of Christ, and that is possible only through the Catholic Church.”⁵⁷ Prodded by the Holy Spirit, the Church is compelled, then, to proclaim the Gospel. “So long as the Church does not extend and penetrate to the whole of humanity, so as to give to it the form of Christ, she cannot rest.”⁵⁸ The ultimate setting, again, where this forming of Christ within the whole of humanity finds its supreme expression is within the Eucharist. For de Lubac, the authentic fruit of the Eucharist is evangelization. Having been conformed into the likeness of Christ through communion with him in the Eucharistic banquet, the Eucharistic community is then sent forth into the world, after the manner of Christ himself, to gather all men and women into the Church, his Body, so that the whole of humanity might come to partake of his body and blood, becoming one—Head and members.⁵⁹

Thus, for de Lubac, the task of evangelism will not come to an end until the coming of Christ in glory.

Her whole end is to show us Christ, lead us to Him, and communicate His grace to us; to put it in a nutshell, she exists solely to put us into relation with Him. She alone can do this, and it is a task which she never completes; there will never be a moment, either in the life of the individual or the life of the race, in which her role ought to come to an end or even could come to an end. If the world lost the Church it would lose the Redemption too.⁶⁰

Ultimately each human individual and humanity as a whole can only achieve the goal willed by the Father by being united to Christ and his Body, the Church, through the Holy Spirit. “Outside Christianity nothing attains its end, that only end, towards which, unknowingly, all human desires, all human endeavours, are in movement: the embrace of God in Christ.”⁶¹ Only the Church offers such a goal. For de Lubac, among the many philosophical and esoteric attempts to find unity, “Christianity alone

Church being the Body of Christ. See de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, 39–47.

⁵⁷ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 119.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁹ On the subject of the Eucharist and evangelization in de Lubac’s thought, see McPartlin, “The Eucharist, the Church and Evangelization,” 776–85.

⁶⁰ De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 148; see also 28.

⁶¹ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 120.

continues to assert the transcendent destiny of man and the common destiny of mankind.”⁶²

So convinced is de Lubac about the centrality and necessity of the Church for salvation that he believes that even those who are not visibly members of the Church, if they do obtain salvation, do so only through the Church.

And so it is that God, desiring that all men should be saved, but not allowing in practice that all should be visibly in the Church, will nevertheless that all those who answer his call should in the last resort be saved through the Church. *Sola Ecclesiae gratia, qua redimimur*.⁶³

It is de Lubac’s understanding of the necessary centrality of the Church that must renew and enliven all members of the Body of Christ today—clergy, religious, and laity—so that the contemporary task of evangelization can be undertaken with renewed zeal and firmness of purpose. In the love of the Spirit, Christians, and Catholics especially, must be convinced that to bring Christ to others, of every race and nation, so as to enable them to enter the communion of his Body, is to offer them what they truly seek and long for—fullness of life and union with the Father.

Conclusion

Little needs to be said by way of conclusion. I have attempted to show that de Lubac’s ecclesiology arose within a milieu of aggressive nationalism. In response, both in his early and later works on the Church, de Lubac articulated a thorough and robust understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ. In so doing, he argued not only that the Church was communal in nature, but also that she was the only institution that could

⁶² Ibid., 79. In *Ad Gentes* Vatican II echoed the very thoughts of de Lubac. “It pleased God to call men to share in his life and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together” (§2). “By means of this [missionary] activity the mystical body of Christ unceasingly gathers and directs its energies towards its own increase. The members of the Church are impelled to engage in this activity because of the charity with which they love God and by which they desire to share with all men in the spirit goods of this life and the life to come. . . . [In accordance with God’s plan the Church evangelizes so that] the whole human race might become one people of God, form one body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit; all of which, as an expression of brotherly concord, answers to a profound longing in all men” (§7). See also *Lumen Gentium*, §17.

⁶³ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 125; see also 116–28.

transcend and so unite all peoples and nations. The reason that she could do so was precisely because it was the Father's desire to unite the whole of humankind in his Son through the life and love of the Holy Spirit. Only Christ provides the communion for which all men and women long, for only in him do they all become one as members of his universal Body, the Church. This unity finds its fullest expression here on earth within the Eucharistic celebration which foreshadows its fulfillment in heaven where Christ and his Body reach full maturity—the one perfect man (see Eph 4:11).

Drawing on de Lubac's theological vision of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, I have suggested three areas where his thought still remains extremely relevant: (1) in response to contemporary aggressive nationalism, (2) as a means of cleansing Christian Churches and denominations of ethnic divisiveness, and (3) as a stimulus for a vibrant global evangelization. My hope is that this essay has accurately and clearly rendered de Lubac's thought and, in so doing, fostered a love for and commitment to both Christ, the Head, and his Body, the Church. **N·V**

