

The Threefold Body in Eschatological Perspective

With and Beyond Henri de Lubac on the Church

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Abstract

In this article, I draw from Henri de Lubac's ecclesiology to delineate the relations between the three forms of Christ's body (historical, ecclesial, and sacramental). Using the heuristic frameworks of scholastic sacramental theology and of spiritual exegesis, I demonstrate that language concerning the ecclesial body is significantly more complex than with the historical or sacramental bodies. The ecclesial body is at once entirely provisional—the sacrament of Christ—and the fulfillment itself—the *totus Christus*. This leads me to pose the question: what aspects of the Church endure through eternity and which pass away? I argue that it is the faithful who abide, while the visible institutional structures of the Church will be no more. I clarify how the institutional aspects of the Church relate to the *congregatio fidelium* and suggest that academic ecclesiology concern itself with the lives of the faithful rather than simply with faith and order.

Keywords

Henri de Lubac – threefold body – spiritual exegesis – sacrament – eschatology – *totus Christus* – *congregatio fidelium*

In *Corpus Mysticum*, Henri de Lubac described the Church sacramentally, drawing from the scholastic categories of *res* and *sacramentum*.¹ Elsewhere,

1 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons; trans. Gemma Simmonds, Richard Price and Christopher Stephens (London: SCM, 2006), pp. 171–172, 244–247. See also Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999),

de Lubac identified the Church as the sacrament of Christ,² making the application of sacramental terms to ecclesiology profoundly apt. In sacramental theology, the *res* is the reality to which the sacrament points—the invisible grace of which the sacrament is the visible sign. The *sacramentum* is the sign which signifies the *res*. *Sacramentum tantum* refers to this sign itself, which is not itself a *res*. The *res tantum* is the ultimate reality to which the sacrament points, not itself the sign of any other reality. The *res et sacramentum* is an intermediate category: both a reality signified by the *sacramentum tantum* and itself a sign of the *res tantum*'s greater reality. In this article I apply this framework to the sacrament which is the Church within the context of a theology of history. I must note from the outset that by setting *res* and *sacramentum* in the context of a theology of history, I am deploying the terminology in a manner different than the scholastic usage. This is necessary because a theology of history requires me to analyze diachronic relationships, while scholastic sacramental theology tends toward synchrony. However, this is not a distortion of the categories, but rather a necessary adjustment given the nature of my analysis. Within this diachronic framework, *res* refers to reality understood as fulfillment, while *sacramentum* refers to figures and signs which prefigure that fulfillment. Though a modification of scholastic usage, such a move is not without precedent. Susan Wood and others have demonstrated that de Lubac's theology of spiritual exegesis is also a theology of history, and that history itself is sacramental for de Lubac.³ If history is indeed sacramental, then the categories of sacramental theology, with the necessary adjustments, ought to be illuminating in this connection.

Therefore, I shall use the heuristic framework of spiritual exegesis and the scholastic sacramental theological categories of *res* and *sacramentum* to examine the relationships that obtain between the 'threefold' body of Christ (historical, ecclesial, and sacramental).⁴ These three forms of Christ's body

pp. 132–133. I would like to record my thanks to Susan Wood, S.C.L. and John Laurance, S.J. for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2 e.g., Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 202–235.

3 Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 1; Joseph Simeon Flipper, 'Sacrament and Eschatological Fulfillment in Henri de Lubac's Theology of History' (Ph.D. diss, Marquette University, 2012); Matthew Thomas Gerlach, 'Lex Orandi, Lex Legendi: A Correlation of the Roman Canon and the Fourfold Sense of Scripture' (Ph.D. diss, Marquette University, 2011), pp. 290–296; Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 157.

4 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*. See also Dennis M. Doyle, 'Henri De Lubac and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology', *Theological Studies* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1999): pp. 209–227; Lisa

are the body born of the Virgin, the body of the Church, and the body present on the altar. In particular, I explore the relationships of signification and causation between these bodies and their surpassability or unsurpassability in light of the eschatological consummation. I attempt to delineate more precisely the relationship of the Church as it exists in history to its fulfillment in eternity by considering which aspects of the Church will endure into and throughout eternity and which will pass away with the coming of the eschaton. The *res tantum* endures, while the *sacramentum* passes away. The faithful of the Church are the point of continuity between time and eternity.

By this analysis I show that predication regarding the ecclesial body is significantly more complex than with either the historical or sacramental body. In order to negotiate these complexities, I highlight a different aspect of de Lubac's thought: the relationship between the allegorical and anagogical senses of Scripture, which allows for a better application of the categories of *res* and *sacramentum*. By highlighting that it is the faithful who will endure throughout eternity, a healthier perspective on the Church's visible institutional structures emerges. The sacraments and hierarchy do not exist for themselves, but to nourish and form the faithful who make up Christ's body. The Church's structures, while indispensable, are penultimate. Recognizing the faithful's eschatological endurance ought to fund a greater pastoral concern among the hierarchy. Further, it demands a greater academic attention to the lives of the faithful.

The Threefold Body

The necessity of a theory of the threefold body of Christ is readily apparent. The man Jesus of Nazareth lived, died, and rose again in his human body. On Holy Thursday, taking bread into that body's hands he announced to his disciples, 'This is my body.' Not long thereafter, the Apostle Paul would write to his churches that they are the body of Christ. Some framework for making sense of these diverse predications of Christ's corporeality was needed. In what follows, we must remember that there is but one body of Christ. Despite the ambiguities of language, the historical, ecclesial, and sacramental bodies are not three bodies, but one. Therefore, though I shall make distinctions in this essay, none of these distinctions should be seen as considering the realities involved as

Wang, 'Sacramentum Unitatis Ecclesiasticae: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Henri De Lubac,' *Anglican Theological Review* 85.1 (2003): pp. 143–158.

somehow separate. However, as this section will show, there are differences of relation and predication between them.

Before I begin this analysis an introduction of de Lubac's theology of spiritual exegesis is in order.⁵ For de Lubac, following Patristic and Medieval usage (which was not uniform), there are four senses of Scripture: history, allegory, tropology, and anagogy. The literal/historical sense is the basis from which the three spiritual senses are developed. It refers to the historical (Old Testament) event. Allegory, the first of the spiritual senses, refers to the deeper, inmost truth of the historical sense fulfilled by Christ. Tropology is the (predominantly individual) moral sense, understood in light of the Christ event. Finally, anagogy refers to the eschatological fulfillment.⁶ This framework is invaluable for understanding the threefold body's inter-relations and the place of the Church in time and eternity. In particular I ask three questions of each form of the body of Christ: to what extent is it *res* and to what extent is it *sacramentum*? In other words: to what extent is it the reality and to what extent is it the figure of another reality? To what extent is it surpassable (i.e., passes away, superseded by another reality) and to what extent is it unsurpassable (i.e., eternally endures)? What are the relations of causation between it and the other forms of the body?

The Historical Body

Fundamentally, Jesus must be understood as *res*. Christ is the content of divine revelation, the fulfillment of the Old Testament's figures, indeed the fulfillment of history itself.⁷ This is owing not to a passive fulfillment in the mode of predictions, but rather to a decisive action on Jesus's part whereby he takes up and transforms the revelation of the Old Testament, exercising a 'retroactive causality' upon the signs of the Old Testament.⁸ This fulfillment as transformed meaning is essentially what de Lubac means by the allegorical sense of Scripture.⁹ So strong is this sense of fulfillment that readings of the Old Testament which fail to take into account the Christological fulfillment are

5 For a more detailed overview see Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, pp. 26–46.

6 Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O'Neill (New York: Crossroad, 2012), pp. 14, 31, 200–201, 217.

7 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 182–194, 200; Henri de Lubac, *Révélation divine; Affrontements mystiques; Athéisme et sens de l'homme*, Oeuvres Complètes IV (Paris: Cerf, 2006), pp. 71–77; Henri de Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Shannon, Ireland: Ecclesia, 1969), pp. 14–15.

8 Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', pp. 129–134 (133). See also Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 7, 31, 34–35, 85, 90, 105.

9 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, p. 31. See also Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, p. 33.

invalid, even 'contaminated' and 'defiled'.¹⁰ Given Christ's status as the content and fulfillment of salvation and revelation, he is unsurpassable.

However, despite this unsurpassability, there is an important sense in which Jesus must also be seen as *sacramentum*. De Lubac's first application of sacramental language to Christ runs thus: '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.'¹¹ Additionally, though, throughout de Lubac's writings, there is an insistence that Jesus Christ is a figure of the Church.¹² Specifically, he is a sign of his own fullness as the eschatologically complete *totus Christus*.¹³ For all Christ's character as the fulfillment and reality of the Old Testament, he does indeed await a greater eschatological fulfillment. This is why the historical body is the *res et sacramentum* of the Eucharist: the reality signified by bread and wine, which in turn signifies the *totus Christus*.¹⁴ In the current analysis, though, the *sacramentum tantum* is not the species of bread and wine, as in the Eucharist, but the Old Testament's figures. Joseph Flipper notes that for de Lubac the coming of Christ, the fulfillment, before the final consummation 'created a new Christian differentiation in eschatology.'¹⁵ Already the fulfillment is here, but not yet has it come in its fullness. The Christian dispensation is at once the fulfillment and figure of a greater fulfillment.

It is this differentiation which allows and creates the need for sacramental mediation.¹⁶ As in the Old Testament, God mediates Godself in figures. Unlike the Old Testament, though, these figures themselves partake of the reality they mediate. Though the figures will pass away, this does not render Christ surpassable. This is demonstrated most clearly in the character of the senses of tropology and anagogy. These two senses unfold within the allegorical sense (i.e. they unfold within Christ) in order to disclose the depth and riches of the Christ event.¹⁷ So, while the New Testament has fulfilled the Old Testament by assimilating the Old to itself in such a way as to forever change its meaning, it is not so with Christ's fulfillment in the *totus Christus*.¹⁸ Although Christ does pass

10 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 90, 176 [176].

11 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), p. 76.

12 Ibid., pp. 202–203; Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 71.

13 Gerlach, 'Lex Orandi', pp. 280–283; Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', p. 137.

14 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 111.

15 Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', p. 143.

16 Ibid., pp. 155, 196. See Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 68, 77.

17 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, 200–203.

18 Ibid., pp. 203–204.

into the Church, at the same time the Church also passes into Christ, and in such a way that the head assimilates his members.¹⁹ He will remain the head of the Church even throughout eternity.

This brings us to the causal relations that obtain between the historic Christ and the other two forms of his body. Christ causes the sacramental and ecclesial bodies. His causing of the sacramental body is obvious from his confecting the first Eucharist at the Last Supper and from the doctrine that since there is only one Eucharist, the bishop or priest celebrates *in persona Christi*.²⁰ Christ causes the ecclesial body insofar as it is his act, particularly his act of sacrifice, which gathers into one body his members, the redeemed.²¹

The Sacramental Body

The sacramental body of Christ, present on the altar, is also spoken of as fulfillment and reality.²² For this reason, in the heuristic framework we are employing, it might be understood as *res*, yet in a far more specific way than was the historical body.²³ The Church Fathers speak of the Eucharist as *res* because it is seen as the fulfillment of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and it is seen as this fulfillment because it sacramentally-mystically represents the sacrifice of Calvary, which fulfilled these sacrifices.²⁴ It was seen as a fulfillment because the sacraments of the New Testament are fuller than those of the Old. They are the truth of which the Old Testament's were shadows and figures, which was the typical way of expressing the relation, rather than the *res* and *sacramentum* framework I employ here.²⁵ This, more than an account of real presence, funds the patristic identification of the sacramental body as 'true'. To be sure, real presence is assumed in the patristic mind. However, de Lubac

19 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 24; Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 203–204.

20 Henri de Lubac, *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), pp. 171–211; Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 140–144.

21 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 204–205; Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 68; Lubac, *Catholicism*, pp. 25–45.

22 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 58–66, 187–193.

23 I retain the terminology of *res* and *sacramentum* here despite the fact that in sacramental analysis of the Eucharist itself, they would be used differently. I retain it for the sake of consistency with my argument as a whole. It must be noted, though, that this usage is restricted to the theology of history under investigation, and not to analysis of the sacrament itself.

24 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 59–60, 62.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65, 188–189, 198.

is quick to stress that the outlook is more dynamic than static. What is present is an action (the sacrifice of Christ) rather than a thing.²⁶

So the Eucharistic body is *res* when considered in its place in the economy of history over against the Old Testament. However, its must also be described as *sacramentum*. The Eucharist is a sign. As I noted above, even its character as *res* owed to the fact that it is the *sacramentum* of Calvary. The Eucharist is a memorial of the salvific acts of Christ in history. But its signification is not unidirectional. It is also the *sacramentum* of the ecclesial body. The whole burden of *Corpus Mysticum* was to recover this ecclesial referent, which through the Church's first centuries was primary.²⁷ As de Lubac notes, 'In his Eucharistic mystery, Christ can indeed signify himself, either in his earthly life and his historical sacrifice, or in his existence at the right hand of the Father, or in his spiritual work and above all in his Church.'²⁸ Above all, though, the Eucharist is the *sacramentum* of an anticipated future: 'It has a double symbolism. It is a sacrament of memory but also a sacrament of hope.'²⁹ The *res tantum* of which the Eucharist is the *sacramentum* is the eschatologically complete *totus Christus*.³⁰

Unlike the historical body, the sacramental body not only is surpassable, but must be surpassed. De Lubac is clear that though the present economy demands sacramental mediation, in the eschaton such mediation will be no more, for sign will have given way to reality, and faith to sight.³¹ In the meantime, though, the Eucharist, as the means to this end, is indispensable. 'The Eucharist makes the Church.'³² There is no such causal relationship between the sacramental body and the historical body.

The Ecclesial Body

In turning to the ecclesial body, we approach the 'real center' of de Lubac's 'life and work.'³³ We also enter a far more complex terrain. At this point, I shall merely provide a cursory treatment of the ecclesial body along the lines I already have for the historical and sacramental bodies. This sets the stage for a fuller treatment in the next section. Indeed, much of the work for this

26 Ibid., pp. 193, 220; Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 156–157. See also Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, pp. 55–59.

27 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 13–36, 75–119.

28 Ibid., p. 71.

29 Ibid., p. 66.

30 Ibid., pp. 68–69, 199.

31 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 73–74, 77.

32 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 88, 13; Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 143, 151–155.

33 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio and Michael M. Waldstein (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), p. 105.

cursory treatment has already been done above. Insofar as the Eucharist is the *sacramentum* of the Church, the ecclesial body must be understood as *res*. Insofar as Christ is the figure of the Church, the ecclesial body must likewise be *res*. Indeed, insofar as the ecclesial body is fulfilled as the body of Christ its head in and as the *totus Christus*, with which it now has an intrinsic relationship, there is a sense in which it is the *res tantum*.

At the same time, though, the Church must be understood as *sacramentum*. De Lubac famously and consistently argues that the Church is the sacrament of Christ.³⁴ This sacramentality must be understood as referring both back to the historical body, since de Lubac understands the Church as a continuation of the Incarnation,³⁵ and forward to the *totus Christus*, which constitutes the fulfilment of both the historical and ecclesial bodies.³⁶ Because of the Church's sacramental character, there is a sense in which it too must be surpassed. '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 into the reality they signify. She is a means—divine and necessary—but like all means, provisional.'³⁷ According to de Lubac, rather than merely passing away, the Church undergoes a radical transfiguration, analogous to that which the body will undergo in the resurrection from the dead.³⁸ Indeed, 'Since, on the one hand, it [the Church] is the sign of something else, it must be passed through, and this not in part but wholly.'³⁹ Yet, while the Church will be surpassed eschatologically, it absolutely cannot be surpassed within the confines of history.⁴⁰

In terms of causal relations, not only does the Eucharist make the Church, the Church also makes the Eucharist.⁴¹ Indeed, de Lubac has the Church's hierarchy ordered toward the confection of the Eucharist by which the Church is made and the faithful are nourished.⁴² As Hans Boersma notes, this moves de Lubac away from clericalism and juridical notions of the Church and towards a more sacramental understanding.⁴³ The ecclesial body, however, does not cause the historical body.

34 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 202–235.

35 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 24; Lubac, *Splendor*, p. 49; Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 24.

36 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 66, 117, 123.

37 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 53.

38 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 68–77.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 204–207. See Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', pp. 184–187.

41 Lubac, *Splendor*, p. 133.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 133–144.

43 Boersma, *Sacramental Ontology*, pp. 259–260.

A summary and review will help to disclose the asymmetries we have seen in relationship between the threefold body. The historical body causes the sacramental and ecclesial bodies and is caused by neither; the sacramental body causes and is caused by the ecclesial body, and is caused by but does not cause the historical body; the ecclesial body is caused by both the historical and sacramental bodies and causes the sacramental, but not the historical body. Reciprocity exists between Church and Eucharist. None exists between Christ and the Eucharist or Christ and the Church. All three can be understood as *res* or as *sacramentum*. The ecclesial body alone can be understood as *res tantum*. Only the historical body, Christ himself, is in no way surpassable because he will remain head of the body even in the eschaton. Only the sacramental body is exclusively surpassable because in the eschaton there will be no more figures or sacraments. The ecclesial body, strangely, is both surpassable and unsurpassable: an oddity to which we now turn our attention.

Locating the Ecclesial Body in Time and Eternity

Dealing with the ecclesial body involves ambiguities and complexities far beyond those that pertain to either the historical or sacramental body. In this section I attempt to work through them. As we saw above, the Church must be understood both as *sacramentum* insofar as it points forward to the eschatologically complete *totus Christus* and backward to the historical Jesus; and as *res*—indeed, as *res tantum*—insofar as it is part of the fulfillment and maintains continuity with the *totus Christus*. However, this last point would seem to contradict its sacramental character, as the *res tantum* ‘is no longer the sign of anything else’.⁴⁴ Moreover, the same Church is also provisional, surpassed, indeed ‘passed through ... wholly’ and completely unsurpassable.⁴⁵ How can the Church be both at once? No wonder de Lubac referred to the Church as ‘paradox and mystery’.⁴⁶ This recognition forces us to think carefully about how we conceive and speak about the relationship between the Church within history and the *totus Christus* given the parameters set by de Lubac.

The Church's Continuity with the Eschaton

As I noted above, de Lubac is well aware of the paradox and ambiguity of the Church's nature. It is at once of God and from humanity; at once visible and

44 Lubac, *Splendor*, p. 133.

45 Ibid., p. 202.

46 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*.

invisible; at once earthly-temporal and heavenly-eschatological.⁴⁷ Hubert Schnackers and Joseph Flipper note that the sacramental economy serves to bridge the gap and mediate between the polarities of these paradoxes.⁴⁸ The visible institutional Church sacramentally participates in and mediates the eschatologically complete Church, which always exceeds the visible institutional structures. So, while one can do a sociological analysis of the Church, the Church's totality of being will always exceed the tools of sociology.⁴⁹

De Lubac writes with specific reference to the Roman Catholic Church, refusing to enclose the 'mystical body' within its institutional precincts.⁵⁰ At the same time, though, de Lubac absolutely refuses to leave behind the Church's institutional precincts. Though the Church is invisibly transcended by a reality greater than what can be observed, at the same time that reality pervades what can be observed. De Lubac offers a scathing criticism of separating the visible and invisible Church as 'giving a dream the status of an extra-mental entity and trying to separate what God has united', as amounting to 'the same thing as no Church at all', and as ultimately a denial of the Incarnation.⁵¹

So then, de Lubac will allow no separation between the Church as it exists in history and as it will exist in eternity. And this is what complicates matters. It would be simple enough to say that the Church is 'really' the *totus Christus* complete only at the end of time. In this case, the surpassable Church in history could be seen as just that, surpassable, and as somehow not 'really' the Church. However, this is precisely what de Lubac will not allow. 'We must always keep a firm hold on the continuity of the one Church in and through the diversity of her successive states, just as we see the unity of Christ in his life on earth, his death, and his glorious Resurrection.'⁵² He even goes so far as to state that 'The Church we call our Mother is not some ideal and unreal Church but this hierarchical Church herself; not the Church as we might dream her but the Church as she exists in fact, here and now.'⁵³ The force of such statements

47 Ibid., p. 23; Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 84–125.

48 Hubert Schnackers, *Kirche als Sakrament und Mutter: Zur Ekklesiologie von Henri de Lubac* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1979), pp. 160–169; Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', pp. 225–231.

49 Lubac, *Splendor*, p. 101.

50 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 27. As an Anglican, I affirm the general contours of de Lubac's Catholic ecclesiology, while demurring at others. I do not prosecute my disagreements in this article.

51 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 84–88 (84, 88), citing Louis Bouyer, *Dieu Vivant*, 2:140.

52 Ibid., p. 79. See also Boersma, *Sacramental Ontology*, pp. 259–260.

53 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 264–265. See also Lubac, *Motherhood/Particular*, pp. 75–84; Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 4.

requires that we uphold not only continuity between the Church in history and the *totus Christus*, but also an identity between them. In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is all these things not separately, but 'as one complex reality'.⁵⁴

The perspective of continuity articulated above by de Lubac and Vatican II highlights the intrinsic relationship between the historically instantiated Church and the *totus Christus* from a synchronous perspective. It is essential in analyzing the Church to keep this synchrony in view. However, from the perspective of a theology of history, it is also vital to recognize the diachronic dimension. In the eschatological fulfilment constitutive elements of the 'complex reality' will be no more. My intention is to explore the implications of this diachrony while also maintaining the positive contributions of synchronic analysis.

Both the historical body and the ecclesial body in time figure the *totus Christus*. Both are *res* insofar as they are both an aspect of the allegorical sense, which discloses the realities signified by their figures. Both will be transcended by the *totus Christus*. Yet as head of the body, Christ will remain unsurpassed, while the Church, according to de Lubac's above quoted statements, will be superseded. The Church's fulfillment as *res tantum* is none other than as the body of Christ the head, and its historical instantiation is also as the body of Christ the head. Why the body is superseded while the head is not, particularly given this continuity, remains unclear. This invites further consideration of what it means for the Church to be called the body of Christ.

Susan Wood notes that identifying the Church as the body of Christ is not without problems. For instance, while the historical body (and soul) of Christ was the object of a hypostatic union with the Second Person of the Trinity, the Church is not only not hypostatically united to the Son of God, but is rather united to the Incarnate Christ, placing it at two removes from the historical body in this regard.⁵⁵ This hesitation was shared by de Lubac, who warned against giving the image of the Church as body of Christ 'a too material application'.⁵⁶ To supplement the image of the Church as body, Wood points also to the images of bride of Christ, which gives a covenantal modality to the union, and to the image of the Church as sacrament of Christ.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, despite his reservations and recognition that no one image can exhaust the Church's meaning, de Lubac was particularly partial to the body image, which he saw as

54 *Lumen Gentium*, § 8.

55 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, pp. 85–86, 128.

56 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 20.

57 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, pp. 96–104, 127.

'best fitted for integrating all the elements' involved in ecclesiology.⁵⁸ To maintain the primacy of body language, while also avoiding its potential distortions, greater attention needs to be devoted to the Church's sacramentality and the temporal interspace between the Church now and in eternity.

The Sacramentality of History

This returns us to the structure of history disclosed in the spiritual senses of Scripture. Although the New Testament has fulfilled and transformed the meaning of the Old Testament, one cannot dispense with the literal sense in favour of the spirit.⁵⁹ Allegory preserves the literal sense, even as it transcends and transforms it. Wood notes that the literal sense was fundamentally historical, which at once gives to historical events a spiritual meaning, and ties that spiritual meaning to history.⁶⁰ As Flipper helpfully elucidates, 'Because God acts within history, there is an infinite depth to those actions and history possesses symbolic or sacramental dimensions.'⁶¹ In other words, the relationship between letter and spirit is not extrinsic, but intrinsic. The result, notes Wood, is that the allegorical sense is 'fundamentally sacramental'.⁶² Flipper draws this out further and contends that history itself is sacramental for de Lubac.⁶³ The Church in history is the arena of God's eschatologically pregnant saving activity.

The reverse causality of Christ upon his antecedent signs in the Old Testament helps drive this even further. The Church as *totus Christus* must be seen as not only the future of the Church as it exists here and now, but also as pervading and acting upon it here and now.⁶⁴ As Flipper notes, 'the eschatological is not merely the future, but the depth dimension of the present.'⁶⁵ Though I have highlighted historical movement and development, the Church cannot be understood merely diachronically. All its aspects are simultaneously and synchronically active.⁶⁶ De Lubac himself writes, 'The eschatological is not something simply absent from the present, any more than what is transcendent is exterior to everyday reality; on the contrary, it is the foundation of

58 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 120–124 (124).

59 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 31, 37, 85, 87, 90.

60 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, pp. 31, 34, 36.

61 Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', p. 99.

62 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, p. 39. So also Boersma, *Sacramental Ontology*, p. 151.

63 Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', pp. 137, 155.

64 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 27.

65 Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', p. 200.

66 Gerlach, 'Lex Orandi', p. 294.

the present and the term of its movement—it is the marrow of the present, as it were, and exercises over it a hidden power.⁶⁷

The Relationship between Allegory and Anagogy

However, this does not quite resolve the problem of surpassability noted above. Not only is the ecclesial body the means to the end of the *totus Christus*, it is also itself that end. This means that the Church cannot be transcended and transformed in the same way that the spiritual sense transforms the meaning of the literal sense. The logic of relationship between the literal and allegorical senses is inadequate to articulate our understanding of the ecclesial body. Instead we must advert to the anagogic sense.⁶⁸ The relationship between anagogy and allegory is analogical to the relationship between allegory and history.⁶⁹ At the same time, they do not relate in precisely the same way, for the Old Testament figures are absorbed by Christ, who himself is never to be surpassed or absorbed. The fact that the relationship is analogical, and that anagogy is itself part of the allegorical sense, allows much of the basic structure to remain intact. What needs to change is not so much the preservation in fulfilment characteristic of the allegory-history relation as the way we understand the first term in the relationship. In other words, the relationship cannot be historical Church : eschatological Church :: history : allegory, but rather historical Church : eschatological Church :: allegory : anagogy.

The most immediate effect of this shift is that it recognizes that the Church as it exists in history is itself a 'spiritual meaning', which means that whatever its eschatological fulfilment means, it cannot be turned into another literal sense, for that would be a superseding of Christ.⁷⁰ Tropology and anagogy both unfold within allegory, not as something separate from it, but as its depths.⁷¹ This helps to account for de Lubac's strong insistence upon the continuity and identity of the successive states of the Church. It is within this sacramental juncture of mutually interior inclusions that the Church finds itself situated in its historical existence.⁷² While it is provisional 'it can never be discarded ... We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which

67 Lubac, *Splendor*, p. 117.

68 The ecclesiological significance of the anagogical sense has been widely recognized. See Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, pp. 44–46; Gerlach, 'Lex Orandi', pp. 315–317. However, it remains underdeveloped (so Flipper, 'Sacrament and Fulfillment', p. 224).

69 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 203–204.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 204–205.

71 Gerlach, 'Lex Orandi', pp. 325, 340.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 278.

we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superseded, and its bounds cannot be broken.⁷³ This recognition provides a partial answer to the question of how the Church in time and in eternity are related, but not yet a full answer. To provide a fuller answer, I shall return to the framework of sacramental theology and ask a slightly different question.

Provisionality, Permanence, and Sacramental Predication

We have been considering to what extent the Church is surpassable and to what extent it is unsurpassable. We have seen that we cannot simply identify the Church as it exists now as provisional and the eschatologically complete Church as permanent because they are intimately related, continuous, and identified with one another. Thus far I have used the scholastic terminology of *res* and *sacramentum* as an heuristic. Now I shall put it to more constructive use to describe the Church's relationship to itself across its successive states in time and eternity. These categories allow us to more explicitly ask what aspects of the Church pass away and which will endure. De Lubac makes distinctions between the active and passive aspects of the Church, and distinguishes between the Church as of God (*de Trinitate*) and from humanity (*ex hominibus*).⁷⁴ His treatment is quite nuanced in this regard. The divine and human elements, for instance are operative in both active and passive aspects of the Church, which avoids simplistic bifurcations.⁷⁵

I propose that, in light of the diachronic and historical perspective that I have highlighted, the conversation is advanced if instead of asking what the Church *is* in its essence, we attend to the finality to which the Church is oriented. In other words, we would no longer be asking about the 'essence', but rather the *res tantum*, and about what aspects of the Church will remain throughout eternity and which will pass away. The ecclesial body's finality as the *totus Christus* would remain the *res tantum* of which its historical life is the *sacramentum*. However, this historical life is not the *sacramentum tantum* but rather *res et sacramentum*. Part of its character as a dimension of the economy of allegory is that it can never be the *sacramentum tantum* because it is necessarily a part of the fulfillment. It is both the fulfillment and a sign manifesting that fulfillment at the same time.

73 Lubac, *Splendor*, p. 203.

74 Ibid., pp. 102–117; Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 23.

75 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 86–87, 102.

De Lubac specifically notes that what will pass away in the transition to the eschaton is what is visible and sacramental of the Church, a category in which he explicitly includes the hierarchy.⁷⁶ While there will be individual hierarchs in the *totus Christus* there will be no hierarchy *qua* hierarchy—except as it is fulfilled by Christ's headship over the body. The institutional apparatus sacramentally represents an invisible divine reality (without itself being that reality). In the eschaton, the sacrament will pass away and only the reality will remain. The entire earthly life of the church, as *res et sacramentum*, is sacramental. However, it is the faithful rather than the hierarchy (or any other visible structure), which will be preserved in the *res tantum*. While here and now the hierarchically structured society is 'one complex reality' together with the 'Mystical Body [i.e., *totus Christus*],'⁷⁷ the fact remains that in the eschaton only the *totus Christus* will remain. In other words, some elements of the 'complex reality' will be no more, while other elements will abide.

Formative Institution and Congregatio Fidelium

The human members of Christ are integral to the ecclesial body's character as *totus Christus*. Indeed, apart from them there could be no *totus Christus*, but only the historical body left as a head with no body. In the Church's current temporal location the visible and institutional elements such as hierarchy and sacrament are indispensable and inseparable from the *congregatio fidelium*. Visible institutional structures are antecedent to the Church as *congregatio fidelium* (by which I simply mean that they call and gather individual Christians into the body of Christ, which will become the *totus Christus*). Their antecedence, understood in this sense, protects against individualism or understanding the *congregatio fidelium* as a mere aggregate of individuals. Such antecedence discloses that Christ is antecedent to the faithful. Apart from these visible and institutional structures Christianity would be impossible. Without it 'Christ evaporates or is fragmented or cancels himself out.'⁷⁸

This viewpoint reverses, though, when we consider that the *res ultima* in which all of these provisional elements of the Church's life in history sacramentally participate, and by which they will be superseded is the *totus Christus*—the ultimate unity of Christ and the Church as head and body. Then

76 Ibid., pp. 68, 74–76.

77 *Lumen Gentium*, § 8. I appeal to *Lumen Gentium*'s categories in the previous sentence as well.

78 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 7 (quoting Teilhard de Chardin).

the reality which the institutional elements of the Church mediate—namely the antecedence of Christ to his people, his authority over them, and the fact that salvation and grace flow from him into his members, rather than rising up in individuals—will be present itself, in Christ, rather than in figure.

Sacrifice: The Tie that Binds

This idea is strengthened by adding one further dimension, which also draws together many of the disparate elements in the foregoing pages. The line running through the threefold body from its constitution to its consummation is the cross of Christ. The sacrifice of Calvary gathers together into one the scattered members to form them into one body.⁷⁹ The sacrifice of Calvary is the historical event sacramentally present in the Eucharistic synaxis and that which gives it its character as *res* and truth relative to the sacrifices of the Old Testament.⁸⁰ The sacrifice of Calvary is the figure of the ultimate offering of the whole Christ, which is the goal of history.⁸¹ The *res ultima* is not something static, but rather a dynamic act. The exterior, visible, and sacramental—hierarchy, priesthood, sacraments—will pass away and be fulfilled in a ‘regime of perfect inwardness’ where ‘the whole Church will be one single sacrifice in praise of Christ. At the Day of the Lord when the *catholica societas* will be realized in its perfection, everything will be at once unified, interiorized, and made eternal in God, because “God [will be] all in all.”⁸²

Recognizing this, and tethering it specifically to the sacrifice of Calvary, helps to ensure that the anagogical does indeed unfold within the allegorical. The sacrifice of the cross is not other than the final sacrifice of the whole Christ, nor is the ultimate and eschatological oblation a different offering than that which was made on the cross. Though there is a temporal separation between the two, the final reality is present in the historical act as its depth dimension. The Church’s sacraments mediate between the two during this time of fulfillment and figure, with the Eucharist rendering the sacrifice of Christ mystically present in both its historical and eschatological dimensions. The life of the Church itself sacramentally participates in this sacrifice which is at once its founding and fulfillment.⁸³ The Church in history bridges the gap between the cross and its eschatological fulfillment. And this Church will

79 Lubac, *Catholicism*, pp. 37–39; Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 62, 70.

80 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 58–66.

81 Lubac, *Scripture in Tradition*, pp. 202–203, 211–213; Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 62, 67–69; Lubac, *Catholicism*, pp. 37–39, 367–368; Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 77–78, 155–157.

82 Lubac, *Splendor*, pp. 77–78 (brackets original).

83 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 59–69.

ultimately pass fully into that fulfilment, not as into something new or different, but as a sign is reabsorbed into its reality.⁸⁴

It is essential to recognize the ecclesial dimensions of this sacrifice for two reasons. First, if the Eucharistic and ecclesial bodies are linked, to deny the ecclesial referent of the sacrifice would be to sever the tie between Eucharist and Church, because de Lubac's account of the Eucharist is thoroughly sacrificial.⁸⁵ Second, de Lubac's theology of sacrifice is profoundly Augustinian, rooted in the notion of 'true sacrifice' from Book X of *The City of God*.⁸⁶ For Augustine true sacrifice is social in character, it binds its participants together into a holy society with God. The fullness of true sacrifice is the sacrifice of Calvary, which in turn is the offering of the whole redeemed city, and which is sacramentally commemorated on Christian altars.⁸⁷ Moreover, the vicissitudes of the Church's temporal sojourn are themselves part of what makes up the total offering of Christ. Mystically joined to the cross, the 'true sacrifices' of the faithful are also mystically joined to the Eucharist and taken up into the offering of the whole Christ to God the Father by the High Priest and Head of the Body.⁸⁸ Without these 'contributions' by the members of Christ, the total offering would be incomplete. And so the *sacramentum* of the Church existing in history is indispensable for the realization of the *res tantum* of the final and complete self-offering of Christ to God.

Hierarchy, priesthood, and sacraments, as visible and institutional signs, will pass away as they reach their fulfilment in the offering of the whole Christ, which has been their invisible *res* all along. But the lives of the women and men that have been nourished by these sacraments of the true and final sacrifice, will endure forever as themselves part of this true and final sacrifice. The Church's character as *congregatio fidelium* maintains greater continuity with its *res tantum* than does its institutional and hierarchical character. Recall that I am considering the Church's finality, not its essence. Neither the institutional aspect nor the *congregatio fidelium* are accidental to the Church. Both are essential, and both have a connection to the *res tantum*, but in different ways. The institution mediates the divine and invisible elements of it to the

84 Lubac, *Paradox and Mystery*, p. 53.

85 Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, pp. 52–69.

86 Ibid., 67; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, X.5, 6, 20 *La Cité de Dieu Livres VI-X: Impuissance Spirituelle Du Paganisme*, ed. Gustave Brady and Gustavo Combès, Bibliothèque Augustinienne; *Oevres de Saint Augustin*, 34 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), pp. 440, 442, 444, 446, 448, 498.

87 Augustine, *CivDei* X.6 (BA: pp. 444, 446, 448).

88 Augustine, *CivDei* X.5, 6, 20 (BA: pp. 440, 442, 444, 446, 448, 498).

congregatio fidelium. Yet it is the *congregatio fidelium*, not the institution, that will remain eternally existent, while the visible institution will pass away as it gives way to the reality it has mediated. While the *congregatio fidelium* is not the ultimate reality of the Church (any more than the institutional aspect is), it not only cannot be considered separate from it, but will enter into it in a way that the institution will not: as itself.

Conclusion

This essay has covered a good deal of ground—from spiritual exegesis to scholastic sacramental theology to the threefold body of Christ—and taken a good many turns. Throughout I have sought to be faithful to the structure of de Lubac's thought, even as I have at times pushed beyond it. From Henri de Lubac's theology of history and recovery of the threefold body, I demonstrated that considering the Church in sacramental terms better accounts for the tensions and ambiguities that arise in its historical life, while keeping it united as one Church throughout its origination, peregrination, and consummation. Sacramental language modified for a theology of history allows us to consider the finality of the Church and the historical means by which that finality is attained rather than dividing it up into essential and accidental elements. Finally, by recognizing that the thread connecting all three forms of Christ's body as well as the successive stages of the Church's instantiation is the sacrifice of Christ, clearer articulation of how means relate to the end emerged.

Perhaps unexpectedly, while throughout its time of pilgrimage the Church's institutional structures and sacraments are what fund the spiritual life of the faithful, enabling their growth in unity with Christ, in the eschatological consummation it will be the Church's character as *congregatio fidelium* that endures eternally. The asymmetry will be reversed. If this is the case, then ecclesiology as a discipline needs to include considerations of the faithful and not simply faith, order, and structure.

While I do not suggest that this was de Lubac's solution to the problematic, my proposal does arise in continuity to his thought. It allows for the provisionality of those elements that de Lubac saw as provisional as well as their indispensability, which he also upheld. They cannot be dispensed with because they at once make possible that which will eternally endure in the Church, and prevent it from being mistaken for simple individualism. At the same time though, it highlights something that de Lubac did not: where the continuity between the Church as it exists in history and as it will exist in eternity is to be located: in the Church's members united to their head. Because it is they who

will endure unsurpassed while all those elements by which they were formed into members of this body (sacraments and ecclesial structures) pass away like the scaffolding of a finally completed edifice: the dwelling place of God and humanity, the body of Christ to which all the forms of the threefold body have pointed, in which they have all participated, and in which they find their consummation.