SOLIDARITY AND MEDIATION IN THE FRENCH STREAM
OF MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST THEOLOGY

Dissertation
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology

By
Timothy R. Gabrielli
Dayton, Ohio
December 2014
SOLIDARITY AND MEDIATION IN THE FRENCH STREAM
OF MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST THEOLOGY

Name: Gabrielli, Timothy R.

APPROVED BY:

________________________________________
William L. Portier, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor

________________________________________
Dennis M. Doyle, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

________________________________________
Anthony J. Godzieba, Ph.D.
Outside Faculty Reader

________________________________________
Vincent J. Miller, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

________________________________________
Sandra A. Yocum, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader

________________________________________
Daniel S. Thompson, Ph.D.
Chairperson
ABSTRACT

SOLIDARITY MEDIATION IN THE FRENCH STREAM OF
MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST THEOLOGY

Name: Gabrielli, Timothy R.
University of Dayton
Advisor: William L. Portier, Ph.D.

In its analysis of mystical body of Christ theology in the twentieth century, this dissertation identifies three major streams of mystical body theology operative in the early part of the century: the Roman, the German-Romantic, and the French-Social-Liturgical. Delineating these three streams of mystical body theology sheds light on the diversity of scholarly positions concerning the heritage of mystical body theology, on its mid twentieth-century recession, as well as on Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical, Mystici Corporis Christi, which enshrined “mystical body of Christ” in Catholic magisterial teaching. Further, it links the work of Virgil Michel and Louis-Marie Chauvet, two scholars remote from each other on several fronts, in the long, winding French stream.

After encountering Lambert Beauduin and his French-stream mystical body theology during his study tour of Europe, Michel returned to the U.S. to begin its arm of the liturgical movement and brought Beauduin’s unique link between the liturgy and social questions with him. Further, he developed “mystical body of Christ” as a
fundamental theological norm to hold together the many arms of his stateside labors. For Michel, the mystical body of Christ was solidarity formed in the liturgy and rooted in Christ.

Around mid-century, mystical body theology began to recede from its prominence in Catholic theology, which had been facilitated by the Tübingen School’s recovery of the image in the nineteenth century. Though nowise forgotten, later twentieth and twenty-first century works of ecclesiology treat “mystical body of Christ” or simply “body of Christ” as one image among others for the church. The dissertation argues that several factors, including the Second World War and Catholics’ embrace of historical-critical biblical scholarship, contributed to its decline.

Though it faded after mid-century, the mystical body theology of the French stream endured under the surface. The study demonstrates an academic/ecclesial genealogical connection between contemporary French sacramental theologian Chauvet and the French stream. Establishing this connection situates Chauvet’s work within that stream and enables us to see in it an example of the postconciliar provenance of mystical body theology, not immediately recognizable as such. Chauvet’s project in his major work, Symbole et Sacrement, is in line with the French stream’s understanding of mystical body theology as a pervasive theological norm. From this angle, Chauvet’s emphasis on the body or “corporeité” can be seen as a development of the thinking of the French stream before him in dialogue with some of the dominant voices in French philosophy in the seventies and eighties. The dissertation concludes with some sketches concerning possible implications and future directions of the study.
Dedicated to

my wife, Jessica

On the Feast of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

Patron of Immigrants and First American Saint

13 November 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a magnificent experience indeed to write about the mystical body of Christ, while being graced by so many profound expressions of it. This work is indebted to so many people without whom it surely would not have come to completion. First and foremost, I am grateful to William Portier, who advised me throughout the dissertation process. His encouragement, direction, care, speedy replies, and intercessions on my behalf were instrumental in completing the project on the timeline it followed.

The genesis of this dissertation is indebted to several important people who helped me to conceive of it, its possibility, and its importance: Tim Brunk’s mention of Virgil Michel in his important work on Chauvet, got my wheels turning about the wider reasons that one might mention them in the same breath; William Portier’s curiosity early on that “mystical body was everywhere…what happened to it?”; Sandra Yocum’s insistence that there is more to mystical body talk among American Catholics than meets the eye; Vince Miller’s interest in the ways that mystical body theology might apply to our contemporary context as well as his concern with the ways that Chauvet’s project could be fruitfully developed. I am not sure that I have done any of their insights justice in my treatment of the twentieth century development of mystical body theology and, of course, all of the shortcomings of the work remain entirely mine. Nevertheless, their encouragement and interest fired my own.
In addition to Sandra Yocum and Vince Miller, Dennis Doyle, and Anthony Godzieba graciously served on the dissertation committee and offered helpful feedback on the completed manuscript.

The Graduate School at the University of Dayton generously supported the research for this dissertation in four Graduate Student Summer Fellowships in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. With one of those fellowships, I traveled to the Michel Papers at St. John’s Abbey Archives, where Br. David Klingeman generously aided my cause. Br. Bernard Montgomery at Conception Abbey Archives sent me several of Michel’s letters from the Cummins Papers. Tim Brunk sent me obscure Chauvet article, after obscure Chauvet article, with helpful bibliographical notes. Glenn Ambrose shared his paper on Chauvet and Lacan with me, as well as several other leads on the 1980s French philosophical context. My old friend, Al Liberatore, offered a remarkably thorough, astute, and careful reading of the manuscript.

My fellow graduate students at the University of Dayton, many of whom remain dear friends, inspired and stimulated many theological thoughts. Adam Sheridan shared conversations about Chenu and the mystical body of Christ over lots of good food. Derek Hatch encouraged me at every turn. Michael Cox—with his library carrel down the hall from mine—made long hours of research a bit less lonesome. Katherine Schmidt shared some of her research on the de Lubac/de Certeau connection and, with her husband Jordan Goldmeier, her home, on trips back to Dayton. Ethan Smith shared insights and research on Alan Segal’s Paul. Michael Lombardo offered numerous comments, research leads, moral support, and some specific recommendations for the introduction.
The hard-working bunch of creative minds at Meadowlark Restaurant in Dayton gave me needed respite from writing, grounded conversations, and camaraderie in honest work. My brother, Karan Singh, repeatedly pointed to the significance (and insignificance) of this work and dared me to think grand thoughts, often while buying me comfort food.

My colleagues at Seton Hill have humbled me in their generosity. They encouraged me throughout the final stages of writing, gave me as much space as possible to complete it, and heartily celebrated with me at the end. Student worker Katie Smith spent a good bit of time cheerfully cross-checking footnotes to bibliographical entries.

I could not have succeeded without the boundless support and abundant love of my father and my sister. Their patience with me, and that of my in-laws, when I holed away during holidays and family visits made it easier to do so.

My daughters, Sofia and Lidia, who both learned how to say the word “dissertation” during the time it took me to complete the project, were rays of light when I returned home from a long day of writing.

I owe my most profound gratitude to my wife, Jessica. She had the courage to agree to be engaged to me two months before I began doctoral work. Having heard of the terrifying divorce rates of those who pursue a Ph.D., I now know what remarkable generosity of spirit, deep commitment, and self-sacrifice it takes on the part of a spouse to make it through together. Jessica has been all of these things and more to me. Her humble, steadfast witness to Christ’s agape has inspired me and pulled me through the darkest moments.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMING TO THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE LEGACY OF THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THESIS</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOLIDARITY AND MEDIATION</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I. RESURGENT BODY: MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEOLOGIES IN INTERBELLEUM EUROPE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST”</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE DEEPER CONTEXT OF MYSTICI CORPORIS CHRISTI</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEBASTIAN TROMP AND THE ROMAN STREAM OF MYSTICAL BODY THEOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KARL ADAM AND THE GERMAN-ROMANTIC STREAM OF MYSTICAL BODY THEOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MERSCH, BEAUDUIN, AND THE FRENCH-SPEAKING SOCIO-LITURGICAL STREAM</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OF MYSTICAL BODY THEOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supernatural Solidarity in the Project of Émile Mersch</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beauduin’s Social-Liturgical Mystical Body Theology</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II. JOURNEYED BODY: THE CASE OF VIRGIL MICHEL</strong></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MICHEL THE SCHOLASTIC</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE FRUIT OF EUROPEAN STUDY</strong></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRAVERSING THE SEA: MICHEL’S MYSTICAL BODY THEOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formed by the Liturgy</strong></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solidarity Rooted in Christ</strong></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER III. RECEDED BODY: MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST</strong></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AFTER MID-CENTURY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MYSTICAL BODY AT THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL</strong></td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table of Contents

**FADING MYSTICAL BODY BEFORE VATICAN II** ................................................................. 125
- *Broken Body after the War: Europe* ........................................................................ 127
- *Broken Body after the War: United States* ......................................................... 127
- *Conclusions* ........................................................................................................ 145

**CHAPTER IV. VESTIGIAL BODY I: THE CONTOURS OF THE FRENCH STREAM** .................................................................................................................. 149
- *The French Stream and the Institut Supérieur de Liturgie* .................................. 152
- *Sacramental Body: Henri de Lubac in the French Stream* ............................... 162
  - *Real or Metaphor?* ......................................................................................... 162
  - *Corpus Mysticum and Mediation* ................................................................. 168
  - *Paradox and Individualism in the French Context* ........................................ 174
- *Conclusions* ........................................................................................................ 178

**CHAPTER V. VESTIGIAL BODY II: CHAUVET AND THE (MYSTICAL) BODY** .................................................................................................................. 180
- *“In the Sacraments” with Chauvet* .................................................................... 180
  - *Corporality in Chauvet’s Reinterpretation* .................................................... 187
  - *Chauvet’s Intellectual Milieu and the Body* .................................................. 194
  - *Chauvet and Corpus Mysticum* ........................................................................ 203
- *Conclusions: At the Risk of the (Mystical) Body* ............................................. 209

**CONCLUSION** ........................................................................................................ 216
- *Body, Absence, and Theology in the French Stream* ........................................ 217
- *Directions and Implications* ............................................................................... 222
  - *Historically Speaking* .................................................................................... 222
  - *“Direct Access”* ............................................................................................. 223
  - *Bodies in Our Contemporary Context* ............................................................ 227

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..................................................................................................... 234
INTRODUCTION

Among the members of this Body... there must be solidarity of interests and reciprocal communication of life. One member must therefore help the other; no one may remain inactive and as each receives he also must give. Now, as every Christian receives the supernatural life which circulates in the veins of the Mystic Body of Christ—that abundant life that Christ Himself said He came to bring on earth—so he must transfuse it into others who either do not possess it, or who possess it too scarcely and only in appearance.

~ Virgil Michel, OSB¹

The Spirit is precisely the agent that makes possible the expression of the crucified Word by removing it to another space than that of the concept: the space of the conversion of attitudes, the space of the body. Hence, the primary mediation of God’s revelation in Christianity is... that of the body and living.... Where human beings give flesh to their confession of the Risen One by following him on the way of the cross for the liberation of their brothers and sisters (and thus for their own as well), there the body of Christ comes forth. Of this body, the Church is the eschatological promise in and for the world.

~ Louis-Marie Chauvet²

Coming to the Mystical Body of Christ

At the end of his history of the liturgical movement in the United States, Keith Pecklers laments, as have many others since, the contemporary disconnect between liturgy and “social consciousness.” Pecklers suggests that perhaps a recovery of the theology of the mystical body of Christ would reignite this connection that Virgil Michel

---

and others so passionately articulated. Suffice it to say that there has not been a raging theological response to Pecklers’s clarion call from sixteen years ago. Why? There could be a variety of answers to that question ranging from disinterest to lack of confidence in the purchase of a theological category to do what Pecklers describes.

My own interest in mystical body theology began with earlier research on the sacrament of Confirmation. Virgil Michel was a key figure in the early twentieth century history of Confirmation at the intersection of Catholic Action and the Liturgical Movement. Michel was always discussing the mystical body of Christ. It struck me that the phrase did not have the same currency today as it did then. Teaching Dorothy Day’s *The Long Loneliness*, I noticed that Michel’s contemporary referred to the mystical body of Christ in likewise interesting ways.

Theologically speaking, one of the main arguments of *Confirmation* is that a theology of Confirmation that conceives of and celebrates the sacrament as the time when young Catholics choose Catholicism for themselves is misguided. The over-emphasis of choice in the U.S. context supports the opposite effect (disengagement from public Catholic life) from what is intended (deeper engagement). In this light, the almost explicitly non-voluntarist characteristics of mystical body theology struck me as fascinating and worth exploring.

---

5 The dissertation takes up the significance of Day’s understanding of the mystical body, and the scholarly reception of Day’s mystical body theology in several spots, including at the end of Chapter I and in Chapter III.
Meanwhile, I had begun engaging the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet. Chauvet’s more complex, layered account of Christian identity and deep theological engagement with bodiliness or “corporality” struck me as relevant to many of the same questions, especially as I continued to meet Catholics who either have rejected the tradition based upon an overly narrow interpretation of it or, on the other side of the coin, assert a very narrow subset of the tradition as “truly Catholic.”

In his 2007 book (a converted Marquette dissertation), Timothy Brunk analyzes an array of attempts, preceding Chauvet, to conceptually bring together “liturgy” and “ethics.” I was interested to see Michel standing among those Brunk analyzes as a lone pre-conciliar voice. Brunk recognizes Michel as a pioneer in making the link between liturgy and ethics the primary concern of his work, but finds Chauvet’s work superior because he attends, anthropologically, to how ritual qua ritual informs the lives of believers outside of liturgy. Brunk’s excellent work provokes consideration of this other commonality between Michel and Chauvet: their relentless emphasis on the importance of the body.

**The Legacy of the Mystical Body of Christ**

Nevertheless, it is clear that any turn to mystical body theology is fraught with difficulty. There is widespread scholarly disagreement about the nature of this theology that was itself so pervasive among Catholics in the early twentieth century. For some, it was too abstract, for others, it was too rigid. For some, it was socially poignant, for others, a socio-political failure. For some, an ecumenical boon, for others, a narrow,

---

triumphal image. For many, an ecclesiological image or model, for a few, not a theology at all, but a way of living in the world.\footnote{Several of these sources are cited in Chapter I and Chapter II.}

Attempting to sort through these various positions, it became clear through my research that mystical body of Christ theology in the early twentieth century is variegated into distinct streams. These differences in overall perception of mystical body theology’s heritage can be explained by delineating these streams and their implications.

As a relatively early body theology—indeed an extended reflection on the Christian tradition’s earliest engagement with bodies in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians\footnote{See 1 Corinthians 11:17–13:13.}—perhaps it should not be surprising to us that the theology of the mystical body of Christ was always a bit nebulous, more suggestive than determinative. It eschews attempts at rationalistic calculus, while at the same time opening the doors to less appealing, and sometimes downright appalling, applications. A major player in the French-speaking stream, Émile Mersch, says that mystical body theology “necessarily retains a certain vagueness.”\footnote{Émile Mersch, The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition, trans. John R. Kelly (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938), 452. This is not to say that more clear and distinct approaches to theology in the early twentieth century did not themselves support, retrospectively, clearly misguided political positions. In fact, Mersch has some tongue-in-cheek critiques of contemporary neo-scholastic theology.} Less sympathetically, Edward Hahnenberg alludes to the same characteristic.\footnote{Edward Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels,” Irish Theological Quarterly 70, no. 1 (March 2005): 13.}
Thesis

The thesis that I argue throughout the dissertation is that Virgil Michel and Louis-Marie Chauvet share more than a common emphasis on the social implications of the liturgy of the church; they both inhabit the long, winding French-speaking socio-liturgical stream of mystical body of Christ theology. As we shall see, this thesis has ramifications not only for understanding mystical body theology in the twentieth century—a necessary prelude to any attempts at a recovery à la Pecklers—but also places Chauvet, a contemporary figure whose thought has generally been examined only at the conceptual level. If Chauvet is indeed an heir to the French stream, engaging his thought—consciously situated in that stream—is a path toward a critical recovery in our own context.

In developing the thesis across five chapters, the method is that of historical theology. Thus, I contextualize mystical body theologies in order to clarify their major norms, assumptions, and implications. As the French stream emerges as deeply influential upon Michel and genealogically relevant for understanding Chauvet’s work, I trace some of its mutations across the twentieth century.

The Shape of the Argument

Chapter I argues for a certain plurality among theologies of the mystical body of Christ operative in the first half of the twentieth century. In so doing, it aims to make sense of the varying descriptions and later critiques of mystical body theology. Some have described the theology as excessively hierarchical, others, as unable to mount sufficient political critique, and still others, as lacking any substantive form. Chapter I
aims to understand these various critiques and explain them historically by arguing that what scholars often refer to as “the ecclesiology mystical body of Christ” was, in fact, not a monolith. Three distinct, though overlapping, streams of mystical body theology can be discerned in early twentieth century Europe: the German-Romantic, the Roman, and the French-speaking social-liturgical. The differing estimations of the theology—as well as the tensions within Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical on the mystical body of Christ—are at least partially explained by the theology’s own variegation. Out of this historical-theological study emerges several reasons for tracing the French stream throughout the rest of the dissertation, especially its unique “grounding” of mystical body theology in the sacraments, its strong social implications, and its character as a fundamental theological norm.

Chapter II follows the French stream across the ocean as incarnated in the person of Michel, who develops the theology in an American context. Michel was sent to Europe to study neo-scholastic philosophy and he maintained a fundamental scholastic intellectual posture throughout his short career. However, he found many European neo-scholastics uninteresting and disengaged with pressing social problems. Much more exciting on his study tour were the various Benedictine centers of the burgeoning liturgical movement. Chief among these was Mont César, the abbey of Lambert Beauduin—a compelling professor at Sant’ Anselmo and chief early representative of the French-speaking stream of mystical body theology. When Michel returned to the U.S. to begin its arm of the liturgical movement, he brought Beauduin’s unique link between the liturgy and social questions with him. Further, he developed the mystical body of Christ as a fundamental theological norm to hold together the many arms of his stateside labors.
For Michel, the mystical body of Christ was solidarity formed in the liturgy and rooted in Christ.

When Michel returned to the U.S. in 1925, mystical body theology was not often mentioned. Joseph McSorley had published what is likely the first English-language article on the topic in 1905 and several others had mentioned it. By the thirties and early forties, “mystical body of Christ” was veritably ubiquitous on both sides of the Atlantic. However, by the sixties it is no longer mentioned in the same vein. It faded from its erstwhile central place in Catholic theology. There are fewer specific treatises dedicated to the topic. But even further, it is no longer explicitly visible as a fundamental theological norm, as it was for many in the French stream. Though nowise forgotten, later twentieth and twenty-first century works of ecclesiology treat “mystical body of Christ” or simply “body of Christ” as one image among others for the church. Something had changed. Chapter III investigates the sources and causes of this sea change, arguing that the theology began fading before the Second Vatican Council. The ties between the German-Romantic stream and Nazi race rhetoric damaged the theology following the Second World War. Catholic historical-critical biblical scholarship, picking up after 1943, was also a factor. Here again, looking at each stream of mystical body theology helps us to understand more clearly the various reasons for its eclipse.

Though it faded after mid-century, the mystical body theology of the French stream endured under the surface. Chapter IV introduces another way of looking at the effects of the early twentieth century mystical body recovery. It works to demonstrate an academic/ecclesial genealogical connection between Louis-Marie Chauvet and the French stream of mystical body theology. Establishing this connection situates Chauvet’s
work within that stream and enables us to see in it an example of the postconciliar provenance of mystical body theology, not immediately recognizable as such. In situating Chauvet’s work, this chapter also examines Henri de Lubac’s seminal work *Corpus Mysticum*, which has been at the center of conversations about—and criticisms of—the theology of the mystical body of Christ. Viewed against the backdrop of the Roman stream of mystical body theology, de Lubac’s work can be understood as advancing the French stream, rather than undercutting it.

Chapter V picks up Chapter IV’s contextualization of Chauvet by turning to Chauvet’s “sacramental re-reading of Christian existence” to trace out the concerns of the French stream as they are manifest in Chauvet’s treatment of de Lubac and in his work more broadly. It argues that the thrust of Chauvet’s project is, in itself, in line with the French stream’s understanding of mystical body theology as a pervasive theological norm. From this angle, Chauvet’s emphasis on the body or “*corporeité*” can be seen as a development of the thinking of the French stream before him in dialogue with some of the dominant voices in French philosophy in the seventies and eighties. The dissertation concludes with some sketches concerning possible implications and future directions of the study.

**A Note on Terminology**

Throughout the dissertation, I have found myself employing more than a few watery images: streams, tributaries, ebb, tide, splash, flow, recede, dissolve, currents, paddle, swim, etc. It seems that the fluidity of mystical body theology is served well by
the aquatic. Indeed, I have settled upon the term “stream” to describe the variegation of mystical body theology in the first half of the twentieth century.

“Stream” has a variety of senses and, therefore, evokes a variety of images. In one sense, it means something that comes relentlessly, as in a “stream of praise,” a “stream of insults,” or a “stream of electrons.” In another, thoughts that come, one upon the other in no reflective order, as in a “stream of consciousness” or “stream of thought.” A third commonly used sense involves a continuous circulation, as in “bloodstream” or “bit stream.” A stream, maybe most commonly, involves water, which may come from a hose or a larger body of water. I intend my metaphorical uses of “stream” in its watery sense, particularly as a body of ground water.

These kinds of streams always connect to other bodies of water. They are, by their nature, messy. A stream moves in a common direction, but is at times diverted around rocks and trees. Eddies form. Sticks and other debris are gathered into the flow, which nevertheless continues in direction together. Streams cross; they interpenetrate. Currents change. The character of the water upstream can be rather different from that downstream, but it is still recognizable (at least from a helicopter) as the same stream.

It is this variety of images that I care to evoke with my analysis of mystical body theology. I see the metaphor of “stream” as distinct from that of “model.”

The classic work on models in theology, and one that bears upon this particular study, is Avery Dulles’ *Models of the Church*. Anyone familiar with the work knows that Dulles is very clear that various models of the church amalgamate in particular theologians or at least that theologians can “straddle two or more models.”11 Though,

11 Ibid., 205. See also 11–12.
perhaps for clarity’s sake, he refrains from discussing particular theologians in more than
one chapter. Nevertheless, with the image of a model, those who stand at the intersection
of them are understood as working with distinct paradigms. This is helpful as a heuristic,
but does not always do historical justice to the flow of theology.

A stream is different from a model in a variety of ways. Models are independent,
although persons can hold aspects of several in a particular configuration, so can they
overlap (or be “straddled”). They are conceptual, often idealized, types based often upon
a common terminology. They are “irreducibly distinct” and aim at solutions to
problems.\(^\text{12}\) Thus, a model is better the more potential it holds for deductions adequate to a task.

Solidarity and Mediation

At a transitional point of Models of the Church, Avery Dulles writes,

we have noted a certain tension between the institutional and the mystical visions
of the Church. The institutional model seems to deny salvation to anyone who is
not a member of the organization, whereas the communion model leaves it
problematical why anyone should be required to join the institution at all. In order
to bring together the external and internal aspects into some intelligible synthesis,
many twentieth-century Catholic theologians have appealed to the concept of the
Church as sacrament.\(^\text{13}\)

Thus begins the Chapter IV “The Church as Sacrament,” which follows upon
“The Church as Mystical Communion.” For a variety of reasons, not the least of which is
Pope Pius XII’s claim that “the Mystical Body of Christ” is the most “noble,” most

\(^{12}\) Avery Dulles, Models of the Church, Expanded Edition (New York:
\(^{13}\) Dulles, 63.
“sublime,” and most “divine” way to describe the Church, mystic body theology has been considered under the lens of ecclesiology. As we have noted, for the French stream it was more than an ecclesiological image. Nevertheless, Dulles’s excellent work has had the downside of leading us to see more readily the distinctions between mystical body theology and reflections on the sacramental character of the Faith, rather than their convergences. This has some historical warrant, as the theology of the church as sacrament came into tension with the ecclesiology of the mystical body at Vatican II. Nevertheless, exploration of the French stream demonstrates, a certain friendliness of these two notions—a rich understanding of mediation, paired with a sense of communion, or better solidarity. Solidarity because in the French stream most commonly, the unity of the body is often conceived as grounded in the church, but as opening up to a broader collaboration with, and often instantiated, bonded-ness to other people.

In the long French stream, there is a consistent emphasis on the mediating power of the liturgy and sacraments of the church as well as the extension of that sense of mediation to the wider Christian life. With a clear Christological reference point, among these theologians, the theology portends an eschatological unity that is realized in pockets

---


16 On collaboration as the proper act of solidarity, along with an exhortation that “interdependence must be transformed into solidarity,” see Pope John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: On the Twentieth Anniversary Of Populorum Progressio (30 December 1987), §39.
at times surprising and always at the “risk of the body.”\(^{17}\) That deep sense of bodiliness at its best pairs an attention to mediation with a sense of the corporate that is bounded, but not in a strict fashion, in other words, a deep attention to solidarity.

\(^{17}\) This is a translation of the second part of the subtitle to Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Sacrements: Parole de Dieu au Risque du corps* (Paris: Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1993).
CHAPTER I
RESURGENT BODY:
MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST THEOLOGIES IN INTERBELLUM EUROPE

On 29 June 1943 Pope Pius XII promulgated the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, which gave official sanction to the theology of the mystical body of Christ that had been bubbling on the continent for decades. It was not the first time a pope had formally referred to the “mystical body of Christ” but it was the first time that the theme had been treated extensively in a curial document. Often the encyclical has been understood to have brought together the burgeoning mystical body movement with a more juridical understanding of the church as *societas perfecta*. As one might then expect, a comprehensive look at *Mystici* reveals an encyclical marked by several tensions.

---

18 The clearest example of Pius’s endeavor to connect mystical body and perfect society approaches is in his explanation of the modifier “mystical,” “We come to that part of Our explanation in which We desire to make clear why the Body of Christ, which is the Church, should be called mystical. This name, which is used by many early writers, has the sanction of numerous Pontifical documents. There are several reasons why it should be used; for by it we may distinguish the Body of the Church, *which is a Society whose Head and Ruler is Christ*, from His physical Body, which, born of the Virgin Mother of God, now sits at the right hand of the Father and is hidden under the Eucharistic veils; and, that which is of greater importance in view of modern errors, this name enables us to distinguish it from any other body, whether in the physical or the moral order,” Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, § 60, emphasis added. Commentators often emphasize the encyclical’s identification of the mystical body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. For some examples see: Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2004), 279;
The first tension involves the relationship between participation in the mystical body of Christ and concrete, bodily action. At the outset, the pope insists that the reality of the mystical body of Christ calls Christians to reflect, despite the horrors of World War II, upon what unites them. Even soldiers on opposite sides can take solace in being bonded in the mystical body. These initial reflections tend toward abstraction. They suggest that an awareness of participation in the mystical body of Christ confers a vague feeling of unity regardless of what we happen to be doing with our bodies. However, when the pope reflects on why the church is called a body, he emphasizes its visibility. In this respect, Pius draws upon his predecessor Leo XIII in a clear rebuttal of the Reformation emphasis on an invisible church.


20 Mystici, § 14. He refers to Pope Leo XIII, Satis Cognitum: On the Unity of the Church (29 June 1896), “the Church is visible because she is a body.” Pius continues, “Hence they err in a matter of divine truth, who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, a something merely ‘pneumatological’ as they say, by which many Christian communities, though they differ from each other in their profession of faith, are united by an invisible bond.” One sees here the clear influence of Sebastian Tromp who would say to Yves Congar at the Second Vatican Council, “THEY [the non-Catholic observers] insist on the Holy Spirit because they have eliminated the magisterium… Jesus Christ
predicates the visibility of the mystical body upon concrete, bodily actions. The pontiff exhorts “all good men” to respond “in supernatural charity” to “bodies racked with pain” and thus “the inexhaustible fruitfulness of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ [will] shine resplendently throughout the whole world.” The implication here is that the mystical body is broken by the sufferings of particular people throughout the world and only fortified by hands-on charitable action.

The second tension concerns membership in the mystical body of Christ, specifically the extent to which we can discern its outer boundaries. Toward the beginning of the letter Pope Pius describes the Roman Catholic Church as the mystical body of Christ. Yet, toward its end, Pius mentions those who are separated by schism, who “represent the person of Jesus Christ on earth”—a frank admission that non-

could have acted on human beings without the Church, through his Holy Spirit alone, but he chose to act on them THROUGH THE CHURCH, by putting his Holy Spirit in the Church.” This comment is recounted by Congar in My Journal of the Council, trans. Mary John Ronayne, OP and Mary Cecily Boulding, OP (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2012), 711–12. Emphasis original.

21 Mystici, § 97.
22 Ibid., § 13. “If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ—which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church—we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression ‘the Mystical Body of Christ’—an expression which springs from and is, as it were, the fair flowering of the repeated teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Fathers.” After “Roman Church,” Pius cites Chapter I of Vatican I’s Divine Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Dei Filius (24 April 1870). Thus, he effectively adds “Roman” to his list of the classic four marks of the church. It is important to note here that the encyclical describes the church as the mystical body of Christ and does not define the mystical body of Christ as the church. It is this distinction that seems to have opened up the possibility for the Second Vatican Council to declare in that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church,” after asserting that “the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities.” “Roman” is notably absent from this formulation in Lumen Gentium, as well as from the list of the marks of the church in the same section. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium (21 November 1964), § 8.

23 Mystici, § 102.
Catholic Christians represent Christ. In the following section, Pius says that those who are not members of the visible church nevertheless “have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer.” At first, Pius seems to draw hard boundaries, but then, toward the end of the encyclical, those boundaries are revealed to be more porous. This openness to the possibility of salvation for those outside the visible bounds of the Roman Catholic Church gave a boost to Catholic participation in ecumenical questions, which, according to one commentator “became more and more pressing” in the years following Mystici.

It was not only Christian unity that the encyclical was commonly seen as furthering, but, especially in the United States, racial unity. For example, “The stupendous Encyclical Letter of His Holiness on the ‘Mystical Body of Christ’ left me weak and ever so happy. For now none who will read it, will be able to justify any kind of prejudice against the Negroes.” And another, “If one tenet of the Church may be called all-inclusive, it is this doctrine of the Mystical Body. And in its perfected application it has no common ground with racial discrimination of any sort.”

The contrast between two contemporary commentators, William Cavanaugh and Robert Krieg, on this score serves as a poignant example. Cavanaugh is sharply critical of

---

24 Mystici, § 103. Tempering the claims of the beginning of the encyclical with these assertions at the end further illustrates why it is not entirely accurate to claim in terms of the encyclical that the mystical body of Christ is coextensive with the Catholic Church.


Mystici, which, he claims, places “The church…above merely human institutions like states and civil societies.” In Mystici, Pius claims that the horrors of World War II “naturally lift souls above the passing things of earth to those in heaven that abide forever,” and Cavanaugh concludes that “the Pope’s words would be slight comfort to the Christian on the battlefield who finds that a fellow member of the mystical body of Christ is trying to blow his legs off.” Robert Krieg, on the other hand, lauds the very same passages in Mystici of which Cavanaugh is so critical. Krieg, informed by his deep study of World War II German Catholicism, appreciates Mystici’s clarification that mystical body theology “highlights the church’s universality” and so leaves “no conceptual room for theologians to link the church and nationalistic talk about ethnicity and race.” Cavanaugh worries that mystical body theology in general has a tendency to abstract ecclesiology into a disembodied, spiritualized realm and Krieg worries that mystical body theology has a tendency to root itself too deeply in particular, even nationalistic, rhetoric à la Nazism. Cavanaugh reads Mystici as indicative of the danger he sees and Krieg reads the encyclical as a corrective to the one he sees.

The ambiguities of the encyclical are indicative not only of the nature of Roman documents, but also of the plurality of mystical body theologies in early twentieth century Europe. Some commentators have given a silent nod to these tensions by acknowledging that the encyclical was influenced both by Émile Mersch—the Belgian theologian of the

---


30 Robert A. Krieg, *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 169, though Krieg does find the encyclical lacking in its restrictive, highly “institutional” ecclesiology.
mystical body—and Roman-trained Dutch theologian Sebastian Tromp, though all agree that it was ghostwritten by the latter. That both Jesuits lived and worked on different parts of the continent, and were influenced by different developments in Catholic theology is significant for understanding the variegation in mystical body of Christ theology at the time. The “virtual explosion” of mystical body theology in the 1920s and 1930s was not monolithic. While some have at least obliquely acknowledged this fact in writing about the mystical body of Christ, few have made it thematic to their conclusions about it, which have been, in general, rather sweeping.

31 Yves Congar, *L’Église: De Saint Augustin à l’époque moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 469–72. That Tromp was the dominant hand in its composition does not mean that he was responsible for its entirety. Pius XII had a famously independent streak as well as a confidence in his own abilities to complete a given a task. It is, therefore, likely that Pius’s concerns were wider than Tromp’s and that those concerns are responsible for the encyclical’s tensions. See also Alexandra von Teuffenbach, *Aus Liebe und Treue zur Kirche: Eine etwas andere Geschichte des Zweiten Vatikanums* (Berlin: Morus, 2004), 40.

32 Scully, 58.

There were several schools of thought that emphasized different aspects of the theology, with varied results. The purpose of this chapter is to identify those schools, or ‘streams’ as I prefer to call them, and some of their major differences in order to establish the unique emphases of the French stream, which are important for the following chapters. To delineate the differences is not to suggest that these streams of mystical body theology held nothing in common. Across the mystical body movement, there was a nearly universal emphasis both on the centrality of Christ and on unity—people bound to Christ and to one another. Likewise, admitting a certain family resemblance among those paddling in each stream does not discount differences that obtain among them.

However, the chapter will illustrate how those emphases played out differently in the three streams of mystical body theology: the Roman, the German-Romantic, and the French socio-liturgical. As their names indicate, these streams were less demarcated by attention this ancient but long-neglected understanding of the Church, even though the encyclical itself, under the influence of Sebastian Tromp, opted for an interpretation of ‘mystical body’ that stressed the institutional aspects of Christianity. By 1965, the momentum of historical, biblical, and liturgical studies had prepared for Vatican II’s ‘remodeling’ of the Church, so that Lumen Gentium could once more raise up the vision of Christianity as the historical unfolding of the Christ-mystery and understand ‘mystical body’ much more according to the organic life view espoused earlier by Emile Mersch and Yves Congar.” As we shall see, these distinctions are helpful, but are even more complex.

Kenan Osborne argues a common position that these more theological, Christological elements of the church were brought to the fore in the encyclical, but that they stand uncomfortably next to the institutional, hierarchical elements. See his A Theology of the Church, 86–88. Part of the burden of this chapter is to illustrate that the tendency of theologians such as Tromp was to ground the sometimes slippery theology of the Mystical Body of Christ in the more concrete reality of the church’s structure.

With respect to the French stream, for example, Congar critiqued Mersch in the thirties for coming close to making the whole Christ the sole proper subject of theology. See Fergus Kerr, “Congar and Thomism” in Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church, edited by Gabriel Flynn (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 74–75. This critique fits into Kerr’s project of arguing that Congar is more of a Thomist than his later interpreters often suggest. Romano Guardini, discussed below, offers an interesting case that does not fit neatly into a particular stream.
the lines of religious orders, and more identifiable by linguistic and geographical bounds. Benedictine Lambert Beauduin’s sensibilities, for example, were more in line with the Jesuit Émile Mersch than with the Benedictine monks at Maria Laach in Germany. The streams can be distinguished by, among other factors, where they tend to “ground,” “locate,” or “anchor,” the slippery mystical body theology. For the Roman theologians, the mystical body of Christ was grounded in the structures and offices of the Roman Catholic Church. For a cadre of German-Romantic theologians, especially leading up to and during the Second World War, the mystical body was grounded in the national body, the German Volk. For the French socio-liturgical theologians, the mystical body was anchored in the liturgy and sacraments of the church. Over and against the Roman stream, and to a lesser extent the German, in the French socio-liturgical stream, mystical body theology was not only an ecclesiological image or descriptor, but rather pervaded theology such that it can be described as a fundamental theological norm.

Unearthing the distinctions between these streams of mystical body theology not only helps to explain the ambiguities of the encyclical, but also why the two encyclicals of Pope Pius that followed it, Mediator Dei (1947) and Humani Generis (1950), emphasized alternatively different aspects of the mystical body of Christ.36 In terms more

36 Pope Pius XII, Mediator Dei: On the Sacred Liturgy (20 November 1947); idem, Humani Generis: Concerning Some False Opinions Threatening to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine (12 August 1950). In Mediator Dei, the mystical body has more porous boundaries. Humani Generis, by contrast, offers a more restrictive interpretation of Mystici Corporis, “the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing” (§ 27). Though there are some sections of Mediator Dei that emphasize the more hierarchically ordered aspects of the liturgy, there are significant sections that broaden participation in the mystical body and, in turn, in the priesthood of Christ. Two important excerpts: “By the waters of baptism, as by common right, Christians are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ the Priest, and by the “character” which is imprinted on their souls, they are appointed to give worship to God.
specific to the wider goals of the present project, this analysis contextualizes Virgil Michel’s appropriation of mystical body theology, which he derives predominately from Beauduin of the French stream. Lastly, these distinctions help to sort—as we shall see in Chapter III—the various reasons why mystical body theology recedes just after mid-century.

“Mystical Body of Christ”

The phrase “mystical body of Christ” is, prima facie, a curious amalgamation. “The very name puts us on our guard,” warns British Jesuit Alban Goodier. “The two words [mystical and body] almost contain a contradiction.”

“The very nature of the sacrifice, as offered by the Mediator between God and men, must be regarded as the act of the whole Mystical Body of Christ” (§ 88). Thus they participate, according to their condition, in the priesthood of Christ” (§ 88).

“The very nature of the sacrifice, as offered by the Mediator between God and men, must be regarded as the act of the whole Mystical Body of Christ” (§ 106).


38 While the phrase “mystical body of Christ” never appears in Scripture itself, μυστήριον (sacramentum in the Vulgate) describes God’s revelation reaching its apex in Christ in several Pauline epistles: Romans 16:25–7; Ephesians 3:4–6; 6:18–20; Colossians 1:24–7; 4:2–4. In Pauline usage μυστήριον enables communion with God in a profoundly new way. Christ is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 3:10). Therefore, the deprivation of the senses inherent to “muein (μειν)” (literally, “closed” in the sense of eyes and lips), the root of “mysterion (μυστήριον),” is reduced significantly. Chapter III shall further explore some questions surrounding the Pauline understanding of the Body of Christ. Commenting on Mystici Corporis, Michael Connolly wrote, “the relation of the Church to Christ, in virtue of which she is called the Body of Christ, is something more than the mere, extrinsic, juridical relation by which, for instance, the King is called head of the body politic. To call attention to this ‘something more,’ as well as to distinguish Christ’s Church from His physical Body, hypostatically united to the Word of God (59, 60), Christian usage has added the adjective ‘mystical,’ calling the Church the ‘Mystical Body of Christ’. The Pope’s Encyclical is chiefly concerned with bringing out the implications of this term ‘Mystical Body of Christ.’ He wishes to underline the inner, spiritual, super natural life of the Church—its greatest glory and title to our esteem (61).”

21
There are quite a few theories about the impact of the term as applied to the Body of Christ. *Mystici Corporis* indicates that the term “mystical” distinguishes the church from the historical body of Christ, the latter of which, in the encyclical, is more closely associated with the Eucharist, as well as from any other body, physical or societal.  

Holding a distinction between Pauline phraseology and the doctrine not widely seen at the time, Gerald Ellard, associate editor of *Orate Fratres*, writes, “Body of Christ is Scriptural; the word Mystical has been added by theologians to designate the mysterious unity of the whole.” More than thirty years later, Avery Dulles echoes Ellard’s perspective, noting that “mystical” indicates a deeper, more profound union than a mere sociological one. There is consensus that his union grants broader, even universal, significance to the more immediate, concrete community. Paul Hanly Furfey emphasized that “mystical” indicated a nevertheless real union with those who are not in

---


*Mystici*, § 60.

Gerald Ellard, *The Mystical Body and the American Bishops* (St. Louis: The Queen’s Work, 1939), 14. Ellard’s reflections in this regard were notably pneumatological: “the mysterious (or mystic) unifying bond between Christians and the Holy Ghost and between individual members of The Mystical Body is sanctifying grace, which is accompanied by the actual indwelling of the Holy Ghost” (33). Ellard cites Martin Cyril D’Arcy, SJ, who claims that mystical body theology answers secular forms of unity across space (e.g., Communism) (35).


Sandra Yocum emphasizes this aspect of the doctrine in her study of the graduates of St. Mary’s pioneering graduate program in theology for women. She writes of, “the Mystical Body of Christ, the theological framework which highlighted the universal significance of all local activities. This theological-biblical image, which reached its peak of popularity in the decade preceding the council, provided a location for this sense of the inter penetration of the local and universal. The biblical image, of course, comes from the Pauline corpus. The additional qualification, ‘mystical,’ subtly but significantly shifts the phrase to emphasize Catholicism as transcending temporal and spacial categories.” In “‘A Catholic Way of Doing Every Important Thing’: U.S. Catholic Women and Theological Study in the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13, no. 2 (1995): 62–3.
visible or physical proximity.\textsuperscript{43} In this vein, Mersch pushes more toward the sense of mystical theology or mystical experience when he says the term “signifies something which in plenitude and reality surpasses the things of nature and the positive concepts that our reason can elaborate.”\textsuperscript{44} That is to say, for Mersch, “mystical” is roughly equivalent to “supernatural.” Nevertheless, it is not a qualifier that in itself brings immediate clarity. For instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher warns that “mystical” is “an expression which is better avoided, as much in its good as in its bad sense, because of its lack of precision.”\textsuperscript{45}

“Body” is much more located, drawing us into our fleshiness—though not limited to it—and, perhaps, those to whom we stand in immediate concrete relation, in the sense of a corps. Then there is the prepositional phrase, drawing all of this together with the Redeemer, rooted, of course, in the words of institution and the practice of the Eucharist. Many saw the phrase as predicated upon, and continuous with, the hypostatic union. This was significantly part of the image’s recovery at the hands of the nineteenth-century Tübingen School, especially Johann Adam Möhler.\textsuperscript{46} The meaning of the image also depends on where the breath is taken when it is uttered. There is either “the mystical body…of Christ,” distinguishing this mystical body from every other mystical body. Or rather “the mystical…body of Christ,” distinguishing the mystical body of Christ from every other body of Christ, or at least every other form of the body of Christ. Thus,

\textsuperscript{43} Paul Hanly Furfey, \textit{Fire on the Earth} (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936), 43.
\textsuperscript{44} Mersch, \textit{The Whole Christ}, 9.
\textsuperscript{45} Quoted in Michael Himes, \textit{Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology} (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 111.
\textsuperscript{46} Himes’s \textit{Ongoing Incarnation} provides an excellent overview of Möhler’s project, especially its emphasis on the church as the continuation, throughout history, of the hypostatic union.
before even entering into the specific contextual differences of its application and development, the phrase itself evokes a variety of interpretations. Variance is, it seems, endemic in the formulation of the phrase. As such, the image of the mystical body of Christ and its theological purchase is precarious. In Christological terms, there are both Arian and Docetic temptations. Each flattens out the sacramental or mediatory sense of the modifier “mystical.” The Arian tendency shears off the vertical impact of “mystical” and therefore means to indicate a merely sociological or moral union, effected by any type of deeply held or felt common characteristic or cause. There is this “body of believers,” that “body of soldiers,” or another “body of politicians.” All that remains is a corporate sense. The opposite error, the ungrounded or Docetic one, is a tendency to erase any necessary res medians between humans and Christ. That error—or at least one version of it—is mentioned explicitly in Mystici Corporis and functions as the encyclical’s counterpoint. In response to, or in anticipation of, this potential error, theologians tend to ground, locate, or anchor mystical body theology in the concrete.

The Deeper Context of Mystici Corporis Christi

On 18 January 1943, five months before the promulgation of Mystici, Archbishop Conrad Gröber of Fribourg wrote a letter to his German confrères in which he questioned the tendencies of mystical body theology. “I am concerned by the sublime supernaturalism and the new mystical attitude that is spreading in our theology,” he

47 These ambiguities extend, as far as I can tell, to the other relevant languages: Corps mystique du Christ (French), Mystici corporis Christi (Latin), and mystischen Leib Christi (German).
wrote, “it can degenerate into a mysticism in which the borders of creation vanish.”

Gröber was particularly critical of Karl Pelz’s *Der Christ als Christus* in this regard. Pelz was a parish priest in Berlin who argued that, in that text of 1939, according to the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ (a rather Docetic version), Christians *are* Christ. Pelz’s was something of a theology of Christification (or deification) on steroids, a kind of Christic pantheism. Quoting texts from the Fathers, he asserted that by Christ’s sacrifice, the hypostatic union has been extended to all, effectively eradicating the sacramental mediation of the church. Gröber feared the implications of this “sublime supernaturalism”: “The future will tell where we will be led—in preaching, in catechesis and in the Christian life—by the devaluation of the historical Christ, with his stupendous closeness to mankind, his exemplary glory and his liberating reality, in favor of a more sublime Christ located entirely beyond space and time.”

While Gröber explicitly mentioned Pelz, World War II is not an unimportant context for reading the archbishop’s letter. By 1943, Gröber had abandoned his early conciliation approach to National Socialism and involved himself in efforts help Jews escape from Germany. He was also the only prelate to write a public defense of Max Metzger, the Catholic founder of the ecumenical *Una Sancta* movement who was

---

49 Maas-Ewerd, 548. I am thankful to Lorenzo Capelletti for having pointed me toward this source and I have followed his translation in Lorenzo Capelletti, “Sixty Years After Mystici Corporis: The Distinction between Creator and Creature,” *30 Days in the Church and in the World* 21, no. 6 (2003): 46.


52 Gröber in Maas-Ewerd, 552. Capelletti, 47.

53 Krieg, *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany*, 141–44.
executed in 1944 for his public opposition to the Reich.\textsuperscript{54} When Gröber voiced concern about the vanishing boundaries between creator and creature, and particularly for the youth in Germany who were increasingly becoming “perfect unbelievers,”\textsuperscript{55} he was likely concerned about some efforts to use mystical body theology in Germany to prop up Nazism. Gröber’s long letter also explicitly wondered about the perils of inaction, asking “Can we German bishops remain silent, can Rome remain silent?”\textsuperscript{56} He got his answer from Rome five months later in the form of \textit{Mystici Corporis}.

The encyclical was addressed to ordinaries throughout the world, but was primarily, though not solely, a response to the rather unique situation in Germany.\textsuperscript{57} Jerome-Michael Vereb explains Pius’s alarm at Hitler’s attempt to nationalize the Protestant church in Germany as well as his deep concern for the suffering of German Catholics during the war. Vereb concludes that “fear was certainly a factor when in 1943 he issued a papal encyclical about ecclesiology entitled \textit{Mystici Corporis}.”\textsuperscript{58} Avery Dulles also thinks that Pope Pius had Karl Pelz in mind when he wrote of the “false mysticism,” which attempts “to eliminate the immovable frontier that separates creatures


\textsuperscript{55} Gröber in Mass-Ewerd, 549. Capelletti, 46.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 569.

\textsuperscript{57} Pius XII also was concerned with the French context in the 1940s, especially as regards the lack of a Catholic pastoral presence among French working-class Catholics, the Worker-Priest experiment that sought to address it, and the theology that supported the movement.

\textsuperscript{58} Vereb, 131. See also Susan Wood, \textit{Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 65–73. Wood says that the strong grounding in the structures of the Church in \textit{Mystici} occurred because of extensive fear of the opposite tendency, which separated the “invisible communion of grace from the visible Church” (73).
from their Creator” and, in so doing, “falsifies the Sacred Scriptures.” Pelz’s book had been placed on the Index in 1940. Kevin McNamara, too, reads the encyclical as primarily a response to the tumultuous German situation. While there was a growing ecumenical sensibility among German theologians discussing the mystical body, there was also a tendency to separate the unitive aspects of mystical body theology from its sacramental aspects. Pelz represents the extreme of this tendency. According to Donald Dietrich, in 1940, Dominican Mannes Koster argued that mystical body theology was only a metaphorical description of the instrumentalist institution and should be dismissed as irrelevant to our age. While many have cited Mystici as joining mystical body

59 Mystici, § 9. Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” Theological Studies 50 (1989): 422. Thomas Merton dedicates a chapter to “false mysticism” in his The Ascent to Truth: A Study of St. John of the Cross (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1951), 44–54, explicitly connecting a type of false mysticism to Nazi ideology. He writes, “We are living in a time when false mysticism is a much greater danger than rationalism. It has now become much easier to play on men’s emotions with a political terminology that sounds religious than with one that sounds scientific. This is all the more true in an age in which the religious instincts of millions of men have never received their proper fulfillment. A nation that is starved with the need to worship something will turn to the first false god that is presented to it. Hitler showed the world what could be done with an ersatz mysticism of ‘Race’ and ‘Blood’” (44). Mersch had warned of “false mysticism” before the encyclical in The Whole Christ, 7. Mersch seems to understand the term to mean “sentimentalism,” “spiritual ambition,” “aspirations to extraordinary, ecstatic, sometimes morbid states,” and cites all of these potential (and actual) misunderstandings of mystical body theology. Tromp’s own use of the term will be explored later in this chapter. The genealogy of “false mysticism” needs further exploration. With respect to “immovable frontier,” the Latin is “immobiles limites.” “Limites” derives from “limes,” meaning “path.” For the Roman military, it was used to indicate a boundary line or reinforced frontier, but it was also used to mean “distinction”; this latter is a more helpful shade of meaning here.

60 Kevin McNamara, “The Ecclesiological Movement in Germany in the Twentieth Century,” Irish Ecclesiastical Record 102 (November 1964): 351.

61 Donald J. Dietrich, “Catholic Theology and the Challenge of Nazism” in Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence and the Holocaust, Papers from a Workshop at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum In Washington, D.C., Summer 2004, edited by Kevin P. Spicer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 88. The work in question is Mannes Dominikus
theology to a more juridical “perfect society” vision of the church, the context into which the encyclical was thrust explains why that was the case. Pius’s concern in the encyclical is to save mystical body theology—and its numerous theological, pastoral, and spiritual fruits—while grounding it to resist the Docetic Pelzian tendency. He does this by planting it firmly in the Roman Catholic Church and, ultimately, the pope. In the neo-scholastic mind of ghostwriter Sebastian Tromp, emphasis on the structures of the church was a clear way to emphasize mediation.

**Sebastian Tromp and the Roman Stream of Mystical Body Theology**

Before discussing Tromp’s theology in particular as representative of the Roman stream of mystical body of Christ theology, we must understand how it is that the mystical body theology renewal got to Rome in the first place. As de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* illustrates, the language of “mystical body” has been with the church since the patristic era, though its sole ecclesiological application did not begin until after Berengar Koster, whose work would influence later ecclesiology, argued that the phrase “People of God,” the church as the new chosen people, drove more to the heart of Pauline theology and described the church as it really was. Nevertheless, Koster was interested in maintaining the German–Romantic organic view of the church, which he thought was best done by the image “People of God.” By contrast, the mystical body movement moved too quickly and hastily from the “cold” view of *societas perfecta* to the “warm” communitarian vision and, in so doing, failed to distinguish properly between ecclesiology, the theology of grace, and Christology. In the words of Napiwodzki, “Problematisch ist vor allem die ekklesiologische Verwendung des Bildes, das grundsätzlich zur Beschreibung der Gnadenökonomie angewandt wird” [“The main problem is the ecclesiological use of an image that is generally used to describe the economy of grace” (my translation)] (74). In contrast to the conventional view of Koster’s book as a polemic against mystical body of Christ ecclesiology *tout court*, Napiwodzki argues that Koster specifically finds the predominately Christological metaphor of the mystical body of Christ, used in ecclesiological isolation, to tend toward Luther’s “Heilspersonalismus” or personal salvation (46, ff.).
in the eleventh century. After that point, “mystical body” was present in theological reflections from St. Thomas to St. Robert Bellarmine. Its twentieth-century “explosion” is directly indebted to the nineteenth-century Romantic Catholics at the University of Tübingen, especially Möhler, whom Joseph Ratzinger calls “the great reviver of Catholic theology after the devastation of the Enlightenment.”

Characteristically, Möhler’s approach to the mystical body emphasized a developing, organic body, extended through time and was developed via a deep engagement with the Fathers of the Church. Introducing his Unity in the Church, Möhler wrote to his friend Joseph Lipp, “A careful study of the Fathers has stirred up much in me. While undertaking [the project] I discovered a living, fresh, full Christianity.” Möhler’s ideas traveled to Rome through Jesuits Giovanni Perrone (d. 1876) and Carlo Passaglia (d. 1887) and down the generations of important Roman College theologians: Klemens Schrader (d. 1875), Johannes Baptist Franzelin (d. 1886), and Matthias Scheeben (d. 1888). Their sensibilities, though, were different from the purer manualist

---

62 Henri de Lubac, Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages, trans. Gemma Simmonds with Richard Price and Christopher Stevens (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). Though de Lubac’s work had a wider-ranging impact on mystical body theology and is a much more complex piece of scholarship, about a decade before the first publication of that work, Archbishop Edward Myers noted that “mystical body of Christ” was originally ascribed to the Eucharist and not to the church in The Mystical Body of Christ (London: Burns and Oates, 1930), 27–28. We will have occasion to consider de Lubac’s Corpus Mysticum in Chapter IV.


theologians that preceded them. Like Möhler, they emphasized the Christological, incarnational character of the church, rather than merely its societal aspects. They were, however, still interested in writing theology in the more positive scholastic treatise style, rather than the freer essay/narrative style of Möhler or John Henry Newman. The Roman College was deeply influential in constructing the schema for Vatican I and, as Mersch and also Michel would later relish repeating, the tabled schema on the church began with a reflection on the mystical body of Christ. According to Mersch, the schema was criticized by a minority of the bishops in their vota for its overly abstract and ethereal qualities and never given full consideration because the Franco-Prussian War precipitated the early conclusion of that Council.66

---

Augustus Kerkvoorde, OSB offers a brief overview of the contributions of the Roman College to the mystical body recovery in “La théologie du Corps Mystique au dix-neuvième siècle,” Nouvelle Revue Théologique 67 (1945): 417‒30. Kerkvoorde explains that Scheeben studied in Rome from 1852 to 1859. It was in 1857 that Passaglia and Schrader left the Gregorian and were replaced by Franzelin and Raphaele Cercia. Passaglia left the Jesuits shortly thereafter (423‒24). Kerkvoorde describes Franzelin in this way, “Esprit moins brillant que Passaglia, mais plus précis, plus sobre, ennemi de toute exagération, il avait cependant été forme à son école et ne prenait pas encore place parmi les thomistes rigoureux. Il se basait aussi sur l’étude positive, sur l’Écriture et les Pères” (425). The Roman College would later become the Pontifical Gregorian University.

66 Mersch, The Whole Christ, 564. Mersch remarks that of the one-third of bishops (230 out of 639) whose written opinions are on record, precious few (4) thought that “mystical body” should be left out of the schema entirely. A more substantial, but still small number of the respondents (25) were not utterly opposed to the idea of centering the document on the church around the mystical body, but nevertheless found it “too complicated, obscure, or vague.” A particular problem for the bishops, one deeply significant for the future debates about the composition of the mystical body, was that “the concept of the Mystical Body does not coincide perfectly with that of the Church.” Henri de Lubac argues that there were quite a range of criticisms among the bishops. For some it was too metaphorical, for others too abstract, and still others too pious instead of dogmatic. See de Lubac, Corpus Mysticum, 117. Patrick Granfield finds societas perfecta to be much more fundamental to the work of Vatican I’s preparatory commission and
Sebastian Tromp, Dutch Jesuit and chief representative of the Roman stream of mystical body theology in the twentieth century, had inherited some of the cutting-edge emphases of his forebears in Roman theology, but applied them in a different ecclesial and theological context. After Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris* (1879), and even further after Pius X’s condemnation of “Modernism” with *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), the next generation of Roman theologians tightened the screws on their custodial bearing of the neo-scholastic manual tradition. The Romantic impulses of Möhler’s ecclesiological turn were further muted in favor of greater clarity.

---

finds much less enthusiasm among the bishops than does Mersch. He writes, “The theology of the Body of Christ did not permeate the rest of the Constitution. It was used in the text and canons only fifteen times and was not a central, unifying theme. Furthermore, many of the fathers were opposed to it. The French bishops in particular found it ‘too abstract and mystical,’ claimed that it belonged rather to mystical theology, and argued that one could not construct a schema on the Church on a metaphorical term. Cardinal Trevisanto, Patriarch of Venice, along with thirteen other bishops (twelve Italians and one Brazilian) questioned the prudence of using ‘the doctrine of the Mystical Body which the Jansenists used to introduce their own errors.’ The term ‘societas,’ however, played a much more significant methodological and theological role in the schema than the Body of Christ.”

“The Church as Societas Perfecta in the Schemata of Vatican I,” *Church History* 48, no. 4 (1979): 434–35. In this same discussion, Granfield also indicates that it was Schrader who edited the entire schema and left his mark on chapter one: “The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ”; Granfield suspects that Perrone, who wrote paragraph five of the *Syllabus of Errors* on the Church as perfect society, was responsible for thematizing *societas* in the schema. Granfield’s conclusions indicate the complex character of the Roman School. Perrone was, after all, the Roman Jesuit that John Henry Newman, upon his conversion, deemed most receptive to his ideas on doctrinal development, favoring Perrone over Passaglia to read his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which he had translated into a scholastic treatise. See John Henry Newman, *Roman Catholic Writings on Doctrinal Development*, trans. and comm. James Gaffney (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997). The affinities between Newman and Möhler have, of course, been well documented. See, for example, James Hennesey, “Leo XIII: Intellectualizing the Combat with Modernity,” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 7 (Fall 1988): 395.

---

Tromp was trained in Classics in the Netherlands and then came to the Gregorianum for theological study in the twenties after his ordination. His engagement with the revival of mystical body theology made him more broad-minded than some of his colleagues in Rome. Yves Congar called late nineteenth-century Roman College theology “patristico-dogmatic,” and that descriptor fits Tromp’s work well. There is in Tromp’s work not a slavish parsing of Thomistic commentaries, but an engagement with and appreciation for patristic texts. In a reflection preceding the bibliography of his work on the mystical body of Christ, Tromp speaks highly of his predecessors at the Gregorian University in Rome:

Because this dissertation was especially intended for students at the Pontifical Gregorian University, special mention should be made of the professors of sacred theology in this University who have shed light on our topic. Nor do I wish to slight those who taught in the Gregorian University in the middle part of the nineteenth century, and who deserve high praise for their part in the revival of the sacred sciences. Anyone who reads the works of Fathers Passaglia, Perrone, Schrader, Franzelin, etc., will see that at the time when Scheeben himself was a student, the professors did more than simply explain the catechism, and were highly versed in the study of the Fathers, especially the Greeks. 

Tromp did not have an overly narrow view of theology. He directed the dissertation of Julius Döpfner, future cardinal archbishop of Munich and Freising, on the relationship

---

between nature and the supernatural in John Henry Newman. Tromp’s bibliography shows that he read widely on the topic of the mystical body, including even so-called “nouvelle theologiens.” Tromp appreciates his formation in the patristic sources of the tradition and wields them competently, but directly toward the telos of his work, reflected in the second part of its title: *Corpus Christi, Quod Est Ecclesia*. The task of Tromp’s work is to illustrate why it is that the mystical body of Christ is properly understood as the Roman Catholic Church. Tromp was not without some nuance in this respect:

Whereas not a few modern writers, when they discuss the structure of the Mystical Body, seem to have in mind almost solely the hierarchical organization, which, it is true, as the perpetual continuation of Christ the teacher, king, and priest, is the primary element in the spiritual edifice of the Church; the ancients enjoyed a much broader vision…. To give one example which is rather near to us today: matrimony is sometimes called a special ‘office’ in the Body of Christ (cf. Augustine); rather often, a ‘degree’ (ibid.)…an ‘order’ (cf. Gregory the Great, Bede, Berengaudus); an ‘ecclesiastical order’ (cf. Theodoret)…

The idea I have just explained is absolutely necessary in order that one may properly understand how Catholic Action is related to the total organism of the Church herself; and in order that none may suppose that all organs which belong by right to the Church are jurisdictional organs.

Characteristically Tromp argues here, based on mystical body theology, that the organization of the church is not the sole domain of the hierarchy, as in the framework of Catholic Action, but that organization extends to the rank and file, the laity, who even

---

71 In a section of the bibliography inexplicably not included in the English version of Tromp’s *Corpus Christi*, Tromp refers his readers to de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum*. He explains de Lubac’s argument that “mystical body” was not applied to the church until the eleventh century, but disputes de Lubac’s reading of Hesychius of Jerusalem, insisting that the latter’s references to *corpus mysticum* have ecclesial purchase. Tromp, *Corpus Christi*, Latin rev., 222.
72 Tromp, *Corpus Christi*, English, 9.
hold particular offices in the church. In Scripture, Tromp finds incipient traces of this
structure: “in Paul’s thought the Body of Christ is that visible hierarchical organization
such as existed at the time.”

Tromp asserts that for Paul, the Church is Christ. Aware of the dangers of such an
identification, Tromp invokes St. John Chrysostom, “certainly not a man prone to false
mysticism [pseudomysticism]” in order to corroborate the identification of the Church
and Christ in Corinthians. Tromp concludes with a pneumatological resolution, “when
Christ is spoken of as the quasi-hypostasis of the mystical Body, the reason is that by
means of His Spirit, and through His Spirit He works all supernatural things in all the
members of the Church.”

Mystici Corporis uses the more direct English equivalent in the phrase also translated as “false mysticism,” “falsus subrepit mysticus.” Because the exact same formulation appeared in the pre-Mystici (1937) edition of Tromp’s work, it makes sense to attribute this formulation—“false” or “pseudo” mysticism—to Tromp’s own concern about eradicating any difference between God and humans, a concern that, as we have seen, is very important in the encyclical.

For Tromp, there are two major aspects of the church—the spiritual and the
juridical: “If we consider the final goal at which the Church aims and the proximate
efficient causes of sanctity, she is undoubtedly spiritual; but if we consider those in
whom the Church consists and the things that lead to the spiritual gifts, she is external
and necessarily visible.” Though he spends considerably more time developing the

74 Tromp, Corpus Christi, English, 196.
75 Tromp, Corpus Christi, Latin rev., 83. Cf. Tromp, Corpus Christi, English, 98.
76 Tromp, Corpus Christi, English, 85.
77 Tromp, Corpus Christi, Latin orig., 77.
78 Tromp, Corpus Christi, English, 10.
former, it is, ultimately, anchored by the latter. Even in his reflections on the spiritual aspect, the bishops hold a primacy of place. Rightly, he concludes, do we identify the bishops, and especially the bishop of Rome, with the head of the mystical body because they serve as Christ’s vicar on earth.\textsuperscript{79} Tromp says, “The Roman Pontiff is the bridegroom of the Church, by the power of the divine Bridegroom; he is the foundation, by the power of Christ the Foundation; he is the head, by the power of Christ the Head.”\textsuperscript{80}

The book arrives at its final destination that—in both its spiritual and visible aspects—the “the Mystical Body of Christ [on Earth] is the Roman Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{81} Tromp says that “although it has not been solemnly defined that the Roman Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, the matter is so clearly contained in the deposit of faith that denial of it should be said to be heresy.”\textsuperscript{82} Tromp’s emphases are clear. His engagement with the long tradition of the church, and especially with the Fathers, is extensive. However, these readings stand in ultimate service to illustrating that the mystical body of Christ is firmly grounded in the hierarchy and, ultimately, in the pope.

My point here is not that Tromp is objectively wrong in this analysis, but rather that his emphasis in elaborating a theology of the mystical body of Christ was that it be strictly identified with the Roman Catholic Church; indeed, evidence certainly suggests that this may have been the real goal of his project. For Tromp, that identification necessarily entails a strong and juridical emphasis on the bishops as the head of the body.

\textsuperscript{80} Tromp, \textit{Corpus Christi}, English, 198.
\textsuperscript{81} Tromp, \textit{Corpus Christi}, English, 194. This is the title of the final part of the book.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. It is interesting that even in the revised edition of his work, after \textit{Mystici}, that Tromp does not understand the identity between the Roman Catholic Church and the mystical body of Christ to have been solemnly defined.
The precariousness of mystical body theology was such that it needed to be grounded, to be rooted in some fleshier, concrete matter in order that it not become a “false mysticism.”

**Karl Adam and the German-Romantic Stream of Mystical Body Theology**

Of course, a theological lineage of mystical body theology also remained in Germany, most especially in those on the faculty of the Tübingen School.

The formidable Tübingen theologian Karl Adam, one of the major proponents of mystical body theology during this period in Germany, ultimately grounded his theology of the mystical body in the *Blut und Boden* of the German *Volk*. Adam was both deeply influenced by the German-Romantic movement spearheaded by his university-mates in the previous century and stood at the vanguard of Catholic theology in the twenties and thirties. Because of Adam’s notoriety and long-lasting influence in Catholic theology, he serves as a suitable representative of the German-Romantic stream of mystical body theology. That Adam absorbed Nazi race rhetoric and found in it the firm grounding for the mystical body of Christ is not to say that every German thinker on the mystical body moved in the same direction, although some such as Karl Eschweiler and the influential ecumenical historian Joseph Lortz also did. Adam does illustrate both the enormous potential of mystical body theology and, at the same time, its danger, detached from the

---

83 After stints at Strasbourg and Regensburg, Adam took on a chair at Tübingen in 1919 and also a good bit of the theological tradition of the university. See Krieg, *Karl Adam: Catholicism in German Culture*, Foreword by Walter Kasper (Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 4–27.

84 Walter Kasper calls him “one the most celebrated Catholic theologians”; “one of the great forerunners of the Second Vatican Council and of the postconciliar renewal of the church” in “Foreword” to Krieg, *Karl Adam*, vii. Pope Benedict XVI lists Adam’s work among a several “exhilarating” books about Jesus in the thirties and forties in *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xi.
sacramental life of the church, to veer into justification for other more nefarious englobulating visions.

Influenced as Adam was by the Tübingen heritage, he employed mystical body theology to argue against both neo-scholastic juridicism and individualistic congregationalism, both seen as overly Enlightenment-driven, in his early and deeply influential book, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (1927). Adam emphasized the solidarity of the mystical body, whose members share in both sin and redemption by Christ’s paschal mystery. The dominant meaning of St. Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians concerning the different functions of the body was that “The ultimate meaning of every vital Christian function lies precisely in its close relation to the complete organism, in its solidarity with the whole.”

Yet Adam was fully aware that, “The supernatural reality is not manifested in naked truth, as it is in itself, but enters into the particular age and therefore in a form determined by that age” or, as he wrote in 1939, “the historical milieu will…be able to impress upon the external development of the Church its own individuality.” For Adam, there were important ecumenical ramifications of the demand that the milieu places upon the church. The persecution of heretics, now forbidden by canon law, was not of the church’s essence, but rather due to the particular character of the Middle Ages, in which “every revolt against the Catholic faith seemed… to be a moral crime, a sort of murder of

---

86 Ibid., 210–15.  
the soul and of God, an offense more heinous than parricide.” The rejection of the persecution of heretics allows Catholicism’s embrace of non-Catholic baptism and the Catholic conviction that the grace of Christ is unbounded to shine more brightly. There is an inner unity or solidarity in the Church that spans the bounds of heaven and earth.

There was also a darker side to Adam’s mystical body theology, which was rooted in his understanding of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. In the 1939 essay, “The Mystery of Christ’s Incarnation and of His Mystical Body,” Adam spells out the character of the Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Germanic influences upon the Church. While the Greek, Roman, and Germanic emphases on philosophical speculation, structured authority, and restless profundity, respectively, have both their advantages and excesses, the “Jewish mentality” that deeply shaped Christianity’s beginnings offered only the negative influence of legalism, which still “endangers… certain unenlightened pious souls.” In line with Nazi propaganda, Adam saw the Jewish influence as a particular threat to the unity of Christianity in his own day. As late as 1943 Adam argued, contrary to some influential German scholars, such as immigrant Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who tried to completely dissociate Jesus from Judaism, that Jesus was indeed Jewish, but a Galilean, and therefore likely of mixed race. Further because of the Immaculate Conception, Jesus’ mother shared no “physical or moral connection with those ugly dispositions that we condemn in full-blooded Jews.”

---

88 Adam, The Spirit of Catholicism, 170–75.
89 Ibid., 99.
90 Adam “The Mystery of Christ’s Incarnation and of His Mystical Body,” 397.
Because of the Incarnation, Adam says, Christianity is not about separating but about uniting heaven and earth, the divine and the human. But Adam’s particular construal of the relationship of nature and the supernatural posited the necessity of a “natural” unity as a prerequisite to the supernatural solidarity of the mystical body of Christ. Unlike fellow German theologian Karl Eschweiler, Adam never joined the Nazi party and refused to give the Nazi salutation of “Heil, Hitler,” yet he came to see Hitler as the bearer of a rejuvenated national “blood unity” and, therefore, as building the necessary natural foundation to the mystical body of Christ. As late as 1943, returning to his earlier emphasis on the interaction between the Church and its encounter with particular cultures, Adam wrote in a letter to priest friend Josef Thomé, “I have always judged Nazism as a necessary, indeed a healthy reaction to certain excesses inside the

92 Adam, “The Mystery of Christ’s Incarnation and of His Mystical Body,” 344. 93 While the jury is still out on Pope Pius XII’s record during the Second World War, as Secretary of State in 1933, Cardinal Pacelli had initiated canonical proceedings against Karl Eschweiler and Hans Barion for their support of Nazi sterilization law. Both were subsequently removed from priestly ministry until they recanted that support (Krieg, Catholic Theologians, 50). Eschweiler, who was buried in 1936 in his Nazi uniform, had argued that, based upon the Thomistic maxim that grace perfects nature, states had the right to sterilize those whom it found unfit to become parents precisely because God’s grace cannot make up for such a natural deficiency. This same understanding of the relationship between nature and grace fueled Eschweiler’s and Adam’s understanding of the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ. The supernatural union of the mystical body of Christ, he reasoned, must be predicated upon a natural racial-ethnic union of the Volk. The supernatural solidarity of the mystical body of Christ is only possible insofar as there is first a natural solidarity of the national body. If the swastika offends some Christians, it is because they hold a negative, Augustinian view of human nature, marred by a dualistic understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, rather than a Thomistic one, which posits an intrinsic union between the natural and supernatural orders (Krieg, Catholic Theologians, 48–49, 166). As an interesting precursor to Mystici, Krieg notes that Pacelli worked to keep Adam’s The Spirit of Catholicism off of the Index in the thirties (Krieg, Karl Adam, 51). 94 Krieg, Catholic Theologians, 97. Krieg explains that at certain points in his career, especially when he publicly critiqued the neo-pagan strains in Nazism, Adam was even harassed by the S.S. 95 Quoted in Connelly, “Reformer and Racialist,” 11.
Church and inside Christianity. I am thinking here of the Nazis’ deep respect for the ‘blood,’ and in general for the realm of the body and of the senses against the Gnostic-Platonic overemphasis on the purely spiritual.”\textsuperscript{96} This is an example of the Germanic spirit correcting the Hellenistic.\textsuperscript{97}

It is clear that Adam’s particular appropriation of mystical body theology led him to some profound ecumenical insights. Further, his theology was not abstracted in the manner of Karl Pelz’s, that is sanctioning a view of deification in which the Christian is Christ \textit{tout court}. Instead, Adam was concerned to ground mystical body theology in the concrete, but he did so in the particularity of the German nation—the national unity that would support the supernatural solidarity of the mystical body theology.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{97} With broadly different concerns, Charles E. Coughlin in America also engaged with mystical body theology to support his own anti-Semitism. Coughlin’s version of mystical body theology came from Irish Holy Ghost father Denis Fahey. Fahey’s (and Coughlin’s) mystical body theology would require further research to be conclusive, but it appears that Fahey derived mystical body theology out of the Roman stream. He studied at the Gregorian in the early twentieth century, but does not engage any of the key thinkers of that school in his work on the mystical body. See Mary Christine Athans, \textit{The Coughlin-Fahey Connection: Father Charles E. Coughlin, Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., and Religious Anti-Semitism in the United States, 1938–1954} (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), esp. 183–192. See also Denis Fahey, CSSp, \textit{The Mystical Body of Christ and the Reorganization of Society} (Cork, Ireland: Forum Press, 1945), 135–240. Fahey describes “the Jewish Nation,” along with Satan and the Free Masons, as “organized anti-supernatural forces” of opposition to the mystical body of Christ. Though Fahey explicitly denounces any correlation between Hitler’s vision and the mystical body of Christ (367). Virgil Michel denounced Fahey’s earlier \textit{The Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World}, explaining that the book is not about the mystical body as such, but rather about the cosmic struggle of the Church with contemporary “satanic forces of darkness” including not only Rousseau and his disciples, but also “the conspiracy of Jewry, of which the author is overwhelmingly convinced.” Michel’s one hundred-word review of this 326-page book ends with “Quotations from papal encyclicals constitute much of the text for pages at a time.” Virgil Michel, “The Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World,” \textit{Oorate Fratres} (1936): 236.
While Adam discusses the sacraments in many of his writings—his *Habilitationsschrift* was on Augustine’s theology of the Eucharist—98—he rarely, if ever, does so in conjunction with talk about the unity of the mystical body. *The Spirit of Catholicism*, for example, connects the unity of the mystical body to the Incarnation—the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ—but there is not an intrinsic relationship to the liturgical life of the Church. Adam elevates the seven sacraments, which “sanctify all [of life’s] heights and depths,” as the Church, through them, conveys God’s grace to the members. 99 However, when Adam discusses the basis of the mystical body, instead of turning to the sacramental action of Eucharist, for example, he turns toward the primary unity of an ethnic-racial people. In order for the mystical body to be truly alive, it must build upon “the concrete person with his blood-determined condition.” 100

By contrast with Adam, fellow German Romano Guardini explained the mystical body this way:

Their fellowship consists in community of intention, thought and language, in the direction of eyes and heart to the one aim; it consists in their identical belief, the identical sacrifice which they offer, the Divine Food which nourishes them all alike; in the one God and Lord Who unites them mystically in Himself. But individuals in their quality of distinct corporeal entities do not among themselves intrude upon each other’s inner life.” 101

For Guardini, there is, perhaps idealistic, interplay between the unity of the mystical body and the individual, grounded firmly in the liturgical celebration of the Church. Guardini was critical of Nazism as early as 1935, with an article that impugned Hitler for inserting

---

himself in people’s lives in the place that only Jesus should stand.\textsuperscript{102} In 1939, Guardini was dismissed from his post at the University of Berlin by the Nazi party.\textsuperscript{103}

It should be clear that these differences among Adam and Guardini are not reducible to any conventional construal of “conservative” or “liberal” characterizations. In fact, Robert Krieg characterizes both, along with Eschweiler, Lortz, and Engelbert Krebs, as “progressive theologians” who “contributed in their respective ways to the fermentation in Catholicism that eventually eroded neo-scholasticism.”\textsuperscript{104} In other words, all of these theologians were challenging the received narrowness of theology as commentary on St. Thomas’s commentators, arguing instead for a more dynamic theology engaged with the contemporary. As such, they all have common cause with the ressourcement movement in France.

Guardini’s deep involvement in the burgeoning liturgical movement connected him not only with the monks at Maria Laach in Germany,\textsuperscript{105} but also with the other centers of liturgical renewal in Europe. Clearly, with some important variance in context, those involved in the liturgical movement, and also involved in the recovery of the

\textsuperscript{102}Krieg, \textit{Catholic Theologians}, 107.
\textsuperscript{104}Krieg, \textit{Catholic Theologians}, 172.
\textsuperscript{105}Odo Casel’s “mystery theology” is an interesting study here. Keith Pecklers claims that Casel’s “interpretation of the sacraments gave way to a very positive and rich view of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ which expresses itself relationally and symbolically through sacramental participation,” in \textit{The Unread Vision}, 6. Like Guardini’s, Casel’s involvement in the liturgical movement likely grounded his mystical body theology firmly in the Church’s public worship.
theology of the mystical body of Christ, expressed a theology of the mystical body that was, not surprisingly, firmly grounded in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church.\footnote{Keith Pecklers argues that the German liturgical movement was much more intellectualist and elitist, while the Belgian one was aimed at the parish-level, \textit{The Unread Vision}, 14. He also mentions Beauduin’s somewhat demure regret that “we are aristocrats of the liturgy” (11). Of course, much of Beauduin’s work illustrates his attempts to overcome the bourgeois gulf.

}\footnote{For example, Yves Congar writes, “the establishing and unifying of the Mystical Body are, in St. Paul, dependent on sacramental activity,” in \textit{The Mystery of the Church} (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965 [French orig. 1953]), 30. Those few words illustrate that for Congar, mystical body theology was grounded in the sacramental life of the Church. It brings the differences into sharp relief placed next to Tromp’s line quoted above: “in Paul’s thought the Body of Christ is that visible hierarchical organization such as existed at the time.” Congar himself did go through some development on the question of the mystical body, as Elizabeth Teresa Groppe ably demonstrates in her \textit{Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit}, The American Academy of Religion Academy Series, edited by Kimberly Rae Connor (New York: Oxford, 2004). Marie-Dominique Chenu, for his part, never tired of emphasizing the social ramifications of a theology of the mystical body that pervaded the Christian life. For example, “The continuing incarnation, the Mystical Body of Christ; such will be the future classic theme of a spirituality in which the world of work will find its level and its place in Christianity, and not by the acquisition of merits alone.” See Marie-Dominique Chenu, \textit{The Theology of Work: An Exploration}, trans. Lilian Soiron (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1963, French orig. 1955), 24. Or, again, “The convergence of the tendency to class solidarity and the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ is the perfect example of the just balance of the Christian plan. The divine brotherhood is not something confined to extraordinary mystical cases but is made incarnate from day to day in the most human, most earthly solidarities.” See \textit{Faith}}

\textbf{Mersch, Beauduin, and the French-Speaking Socio-Liturgical Stream of Mystical Body Theology}

In the French-speaking sphere, mystical body theology had always had a bit of a different cast. It was at the same time less grandiose, less sweeping (and therefore less amenable to the all-encompassing vision of National Socialism) and more theologically pervasive. Theologians such as Chenu, Congar, de Lubac, and other scholars of the mystical body stream in France during this period share a general approach with Mersch and Beauduin, who are engaged with mystical body theology in Belgium.\footnote{Keith Pecklers argues that the German liturgical movement was much more intellectualist and elitist, while the Belgian one was aimed at the parish-level, \textit{The Unread Vision}, 14. He also mentions Beauduin’s somewhat demure regret that “we are aristocrats of the liturgy” (11). Of course, much of Beauduin’s work illustrates his attempts to overcome the bourgeois gulf.} However,
my treatment here will focus on Mersch, because he is recognized as the major exponent of mystical body theology during this period, and Beauduin, because he is perhaps the paramount early influence upon Virgil Michel.

**Supernatural Solidarity in the Project of Émile Mersch**

Mersch’s groundbreaking series of studies on the mystical body of Christ situated the doctrine in a wider historical context, in a *ressourcement* mode. Mersch was trained in philosophy and then theology at Leuven in the second decade of the twentieth century. In philosophy, Mersch was influenced by the early transcendental Thomists Pierre Scheuer and Joseph Maréchal. Mersch became enthralled with the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ after giving a seminar presentation on it in 1917. One of the theologians present for that presentation was Pierre Charles, who was influenced by Pierre Rousselot. When, in 1920, Father General Wladimir Ledochowski sent an inquiry into Charles and another Jesuit professor on account of their espousal of Rousselot’s ideas, Mersch wrote to Ledochowski, taking up their support. A few months after defending his confrères from suspected modernist tendencies, Mersch received a letter from his provincial, assigning him to teach philosophy and minister to lay students at the

---

*and Theology*, trans. Denis Hickey (New York: Macmillan, 1968, French orig. 1964), 200. In the beginning of this chapter, Chenu refers to the occasion of collaborating on a First Communion feast that transcended the boundaries of social classes and thus, like the early Christians, “made concrete…vague aspirations of human solidarity (185–87). My thanks to Adam Sheridan for alerting me to Chenu’s further development of these themes.

University of Namur. He was a bit disheartened, but continued his theological work privately.  

In 1933, Mersch published *Le corps mystique du Christ: Études de la théologie historique.* At the beginning of what came to be received as the *tour de force* of the twentieth-century renewal of mystical body theology, Mersch anticipates the error that Karl Pelz would make six years later. He describes the “false view” that the faithful are made really and absolutely into Christ Himself. Such a view leads either to disdain for human actions because they are not those of Christ or exaggerated esteem for them because they are those of Christ Himself. For Mersch, mystical body theology works against this pantheistic or “panchristic” error.

It is particularly important for Mersch to begin by disavowing the pantheistic (or false mystical) position because he intends to follow a line of theological thinking not well-developed in the West, but more dependent upon patristic thinking in the East. Mersch explains two orthodox views of mystical body theology. One emphasizes an ontological union with Christ, “a unity that transcends the biological realities from which they are taken.” “It must be clearly understood,” Mersch continues, “that this term is by no means synonymous with ‘nebulous’ or ‘semi-real.’ On the contrary, it signifies something which in plentitude and reality surpasses the things of nature and the positive concepts that our reason can elaborate.” Mersch eventually draws upon the great opponent of the Nestorians, Cyril of Alexandria, to explain that the Eucharist is the

---

112 Ibid., 9.
means of effecting the real union of the mystical body. This sacramental action is indeed real but not hypostatic.\textsuperscript{113}

The second view, an unnamed but clear characterization of the neo-scholastic approach, also upholds a real union with Christ, but a more tenuous one, a union only of the moral order, that is a union of accord in action. Applying terms from the \textit{theotokos} debate, Mersch eventually contrasts Cyril with the theology of Cyprian, whose mystical body theology produces only a “moral” unity, not “realism.”\textsuperscript{114} Mersch explains that, while both have their value, he favors the first approach, which is “richer in doctrine,” more mysterious, and more in line with Scripture and the long view of tradition. The second has the advantage of greater clarity and “is easier to explain and understand.”\textsuperscript{115} Mersch’s preferences are even clearer when his historical study reaches the scholastics, where he finds little of the richness he found in earlier, especially Eastern, articulations of the theology of the mystical body. “The doctrine,” he confesses, “always and necessarily retains a certain vagueness which, to judge from the mentality of many of the Scholastics, was scarcely calculated to win their sympathy.”\textsuperscript{116} At the end of this section, Mersch

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 346–47, 355.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 383. Though Cyril’s denunciation of “moral union” comes from his characterization of fellow easterner Nestorius’s position on the union of human and divine in Christ, Mersch enjoys pointing out that the major difference between the East and the West during this period, explains Mersch, is that the latter had a “special and profound interest in moral problems and in rules of conduct” (367).
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 452. Joseph Clifford Fenton wrote a vigorous defense that mystical body theology is to be found in scholastic theology in “An Accusation Against School Theology,” \textit{American Ecclesiastical Review} 110, no. 3 (1944): 213–222. True to his methodology, Fenton breaks down the doctrine of the mystical body into component doctrinal pieces and then finds them in various scholastic treatises. The following lines sum up his position, “There is not one dogmatic element in the \textit{Mystici Corporis} neglected or overlooked in the standard literature of school theology since the Middle Ages. Obviously not every author taught every point. Again, there were various
sums up his reflections: “though the picture is more distinct, it is also less vivid. The
Scholastics indicate more clearly the nature of the mystery, but they do not describe it
with vigor and forcefulness. Their doctrine possesses neither the amplitude and richness
in which St. Cyril had clothed it, nor the depth of interior life that characterized it in the
writings of Augustine.”

Throughout his study, Mersch does not engage the work of Möhler substantially,
only citing his study of Athanasius in the patristic section. And, though he explores the
preparatory schema at Vatican I based on the mystical body, he does not mention the
Roman school’s recovery of the image, ascribing the schema on the church that featured
the mystical body of Christ simply to the “Fathers of the Vatican Council.” Mersch
does mention Jesuit neo-scholastic Josef Kleutgen’s revision of the same schema, which
only served to push the mystical body of Christ to the background.

The most recent source of vibrant mystical body theology is to be found in the
early modern French school: “The energy and richness which the doctrine of the Mystical
Body loses at the hands of the Schoolmen is restored by the masters of the French
Oratory and of St. Sulpice.” Mersch is particularly impressed by—“echoing,” as it
does, “the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria”—Pierre de Bérulle’s account of the

individual writers and teachers who presented elements of the Mystical Body doctrine
imperfectly and incompletely. The charge however is leveled at school theology as such,
and that charge cannot be sustained” (215).

117 Ibid., 484–85.
118 Ibid., 250.
119 Ibid., 560–65.
120 Ibid., 564–65. Kleutgen was German by birth and served in several Vatican
posts in the mid nineteenth century. He played a large role in the neo-scholastic revival
and is chiefly known for composing Aeterni Patris, which made St. Thomas’s philosophy
normative for Catholic theology.
121 Ibid., 531.
Eucharist drawing us into the divine life, making us into Christ’s mystical body, “a real and substantial union.”¹²² For these thinkers, the mystical body of Christ “becomes a sort of system of spirituality” whereby the Christian life is the prolongation of the Incarnation. However, Mersch explains, since Bérulle found Christ’s human nature to lack personality, Christian existence demands a total renunciation of the self.¹²³ In the end, Mersch finds the account of the French School—especially after Bérulle—too negative, too rigorist, but the achievement—a lively theology of the mystical body that pervaded the whole of Christian doctrine and life—was nevertheless an inspiration to Mersch.¹²⁴

Upon reaching the end of his study, Mersch confesses that initial forays into his topic returned minimal results. He had expected to find scores of references to the mystical body among the writings of the Fathers, but, looking primarily at discussions of the Church, he found the doctrine “only dimly visible.” It was only when, Mersch explains, he broadened his range of vision that he discovered mystical body theology suffused throughout patristic treatises:

What we discovered was far better than we had hoped for. Life is not something juxtaposed to what it animates; it lies within. Similarly, the truth of the Mystical Body is not restricted to any one part of Christian teaching; it is everywhere. Just as the Christ of whom it speaks is present in all the faithful in order to communicate light and strength to all, so the Mystical Body is somehow present in every dogma, giving each truth a new meaning for the interior life and a new lesson to guide the actions, thoughts, and affections of men.…

¹²² Ibid., 536. These latter words are Bérulle’s, quoted by Mersch from the former’s Discours de l’eucharistie, I, no. 8, 457.
¹²³ Mersch, The Whole Christ, 539.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 544. Mersch has an interesting theory about the French School’s “degradation of nature.” He writes, “Absolute monarchy and enlightened despotism were beginning to assert themselves in politics; the deference and self-effacement of courtiers in the presence of human majesties offered a convenient illustration of the proper attitude to be taken before the King of Kings. At all events, rigorism was in vogue; nature had to be degraded, all but crushed, lest it spoil God’s work.” One wonders about the character of the difference in monarchies that Mersch sees during this period.
The fathers taught the truth of our incorporation in Christ in connection with practically every dogma of our faith; or rather, they presupposed this truth in their explanations of dogma. They proclaimed the dogma of the Trinity, but in teaching and defending it they spoke of the mysterious union whereby Christians are made divine and become sons of adoption through grace in Christ. They did battle for the dogma of Christology, but in order to illustrate this truth of two natures in the one Person of Christ they spoke of the two elements, divine and human, grace and nature, that are united in the members of the Savior. They fought for the dogmas of ecclesiology, of grace, of the Real Presence, of the value of good works; and each time, in order to give these truths a better expression, they have mentioned the Mystical Body. They all followed this method.  

In the end, Mersch found that the mystical body of Christ was not limited to ecclesiological reflections, but was to be found in writings on the Trinity, Christology, sacraments, ascetic practice, and deification.

This methodological insight explains Mersch’s appreciation for the French School, whose mystical body theology is diffuse, but lively, in contrast to the wooden tones of scholasticism. In addition to its rigorism, the theology of the French School tended to emphasize the unity of the person with Christ over the union of the person with other persons in Christ. Mersch himself articulates a theology of the mystical body that upholds the role of the individual, but emphasizes the union with others that comes with growing closer to, becoming the mystical body of, Christ.  

For Mersch, mystical body theology addresses a host of contemporary problems: naturalism, individualism, that “more dangerous and more aggressive egoism which is

---

125 Ibid., 580.
126 Avery Dulles sums up Mersch’s approach nicely in scholastic terminology: “Dissatisfied with the Western scholastic tendency to depict the relationship of Christ to the Church in terms of principal and instrumental causality, Mersch adhered to the Eastern patristic tradition, especially Cyril of Alexandria, who stressed the physical and organic union between the head and the members. The Church according to this view is a prolongation of Christ, who acts upon it from within rather than as an external efficient cause.” Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 421–22.
known as nationalism,” and “unbridled economic liberalism.”\(^{127}\) The mystical body of Christ is, rather, “supernatural solidarity.”\(^{128}\) This characterization signifies a key difference between Mersch and Tromp. For Mersch, the mystical body of Christ is not determined by the bounds of the visible Roman Catholic Church.\(^{129}\) Rather, in terms of act and potency, the mystical body encompasses, in some sense, all of humanity. A translator’s note from Mersch’s more dogmatic work, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, confirms what is implicit throughout his scholarship, “like the Greek Fathers, Mersch sometimes uses the term ‘mystical body’ in a wider sense, including not only actual members, but also potential members of the Church.”\(^{130}\) Further, Mersch differs from Adam’s understanding of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural in terms of the mystical body. Like Adam, Mersch describes the supernatural unity of the mystical body, but neither limits the range of what constitutes natural unity, nor finds such a firm distinction between the two. He writes, “The ‘mystery’ is before all else a prodigy of unity. God has raised to a supernatural perfection the natural unity that exists between [sic] men.”\(^{131}\) The unity of the mystical body, then, brings to completion the potentiality already present among human beings. Mersch expresses this even more clearly when he explains that the Stoic and Platonist conceptions of the world as a gigantic body are amenable to the patristic development of mystical body theology. He

\(^{127}\) Ibid., 573–73.
\(^{128}\) Ibid., 584.
\(^{129}\) Ibid., 50, 480, 487.
\(^{130}\) Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, trans. Cyril Vollert, SJ (St. Louis: Herder, 1951), 197. The final version of this work was published posthumously in 1944, compiled from several drafts that Mersch left behind. This translation is from second edition of that work, published in French in 1946.
\(^{131}\) Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 3.
says, “The supernatural order…is not simply superimposed upon the natural order; it takes the natural order, and adapts its elements to its own purposes.”\textsuperscript{132}

Mersch’s project brought together the whispers of the mystical body recovery circulating in the first years of the twentieth century. He brought the depth of the tradition in order to bolster the nascent movement. He died, tragically, in France trying to help a wounded priest during a German air raid in May of 1940. A barely unfinished draft of the third, heavily revised, version of \textit{La théologie du corps mystique} was lost in the suitcases from which he had been separated in the chaos.\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{Beauduin’s Social-Liturgical Mystical Body Theology}

His fellow Belgian, Benedictine liturgical reformer Lambert Beauduin, had been thinking about the mystical body in the years before Mersch undertook his major work. Beauduin, who has been called the “father of the twentieth century Liturgical Movement,”\textsuperscript{134} saw the recovery of a deeper sense of the liturgy as his primary work, flowing out of the Benedictine monastery at Mont César in Leuven. First, it must be said that Beauduin’s interest in renewing the liturgy was deeply shaped by his turn-of-the-century role as a labor chaplain with the \textit{Congrégation des Aumôniers du Travail}, a localized Belgian response to the emphasis on labor in \textit{Rerum Novarum}. Beauduin took that position in 1897, shortly after his ordination, and left to join the Benedictines in 1906, after the group ceased direct contact with the workers, that is, when they pulled

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 100.  
\textsuperscript{133} Arraj, 18–19.  
\textsuperscript{134} Alcuin Reid, OSB, Introduction to Lambert Beauduin, \textit{Liturgy, the Life of the Church}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} edition (Hampshire: Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, 2002), 9.
back in their exercise of concrete solidarity.\textsuperscript{135} The \textit{Aumôniers} emphasized the solidarity of the church with the workers, especially in striving for a just wage.\textsuperscript{136} They were, in a way, precursors to the worker-priest movement in France a few decades later, although, unlike the worker-priests, they kept their formal priestly ministry. Beauduin oversaw the group’s construction of several buildings to provide housing for workers in Montegnée.\textsuperscript{137} He would consistently maintain, however, that there is a Christological core to authentic efforts at human solidarity. In 1930, he wrote to his friend Jean Jadot: “The whole of the great supernatural organism, of the tremendous reality of the visible world (but much more real than the visible world), of the mystical body which envelops us, is the glorified body of the risen Christ.”\textsuperscript{138} This all-encompassing vision of Christ’s mystical body is what drove Beauduin’s efforts at solidarity, but after his Benedictine formation, Beauduin came to see the centrality of the liturgy in supporting his work on behalf of justice. In the context of Benedictine prayer life, Beauduin came to the conclusion that, in the words of Keith Pecklers, “it was the liturgy and only the liturgy that was capable of giving the necessary grounding to Christian social activism.”\textsuperscript{139} His statement represents an integration of the Benedictine emphasis on liturgical prayer shaping all of life with his own earlier social efforts. But more than that, it represents a way of thinking about the ramifications of mystical body of Christ theology that fueled a particularly socially-inflected form of liturgical reform.

\textsuperscript{136} Pecklers, 9–10.
\textsuperscript{137} Pecklers, 10.
\textsuperscript{139} Pecklers, 11.
Methodologically, Beauduin wanted liturgical reform in the vein of the *ressourcement* movement. He thought that blatant calls for reform would be too hasty and short-sighted. Rather, Beauduin insisted, reformers must first strive to understand the liturgy as received in the tradition. This required the methods of history, philology, and archaeology. Once the “spirit of the liturgy” was discerned by wrestling with the tradition, then obsolescence would fall away. A key component of Beauduin’s recovery of the “spirit of the liturgy” involved the centrality of the Eucharist in the liturgical celebration. Pius X’s revitalization of the Eucharist in Catholic piety, thought Beauduin, was the beginning of a re-orientation of Catholic life, but he was disappointed that Pius didn’t emphasize Communion as an integral part of the Mass. Beauduin’s biographer recounts the enthusiasm with which he told his students what he had discovered while celebrating Mass—that in the Eucharistic celebration the church takes on flesh.

As the church is constituted in the liturgy, the latter is also morally formative; it challenges the worshipping community to live concretely as the mystical body of Christ. “There is no doubt,” Beauduin wrote,

that the liturgical books have nothing of the scientific exposition about them; they are not treatises, any more than are the holy Gospels or the apostolic writings. Dogma is not proposed there under the form of canons or theses; revelation is not

---

142 Quitslund, 17ff.
143 Ibid., 16.
systematized and abstracted but is found in its pristine state — as the schoolmen say, *exercita*, intertwined with life itself."\(^{144}\)

The Eucharist is a privileged place of encounter with the sublime reality of the mystical body because of its efficaciousness, but the liturgy more broadly speaking had a grounded pedagogical function, unlike the scholastic treatise.

Dissatisfied with what had been written for the Catholic in the pew, Beauduin was concerned that the liturgical movement be deeply pastoral—he began journals for priests and laity, emphasized the connection between liturgy and daily life, and aimed at translating the symbolic complexities of the liturgy into widely understandable language. The apex of the liturgy is the celebration of the Eucharist, about which Beauduin wrote, “the chief aim of our Lord in instituting the Eucharist was not that of being a permanent Host in our tabernacles, but that of realizing every day and in every member of Christ the mystery of the death and life of the head by means of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sacrament.”\(^{145}\) His Eucharistic theology was not limited to individual piety, but flowered into an impulse toward the union of all of humanity. In the words of Beauduin’s biographer, “The sacred species enflesh Christ in the Christian, initiating his slow resurrection into Christ’s glorified humanity.”\(^{146}\) Since Christ came for all, Christians, having received the body and blood of Christ, willingly give themselves up for all.

Foremost, then, was the imperative toward Christian unity that flowed out of the Eucharist. In fact, in the midst of World War I, Beauduin’s social efforts and emphases began to alarm his brother Benedictines. His biographer reports that “his version of

\(^{146}\) Quitslund, 245.
Benedictine spirituality had become overwhelmingly non-Benedictine in their eyes with its emphasis on the social dimensions of human relations.\(^{147}\)

Louis Bouyer explains that Beauduin avoided the extremes of the apologists who wanted to have “death on the corporal” ("la mort sur le corporal") in order to make the sacrament real, and those who spiritualized the sacrifice of the altar, acting as if it were “the affair of disincarnate souls for the isolated” ("l’affaire d’âmes désincarnées et pour autant isolées").\(^{148}\) Beauduin’s approach to the Eucharist emphasized that as the elements themselves are transubstantiated into the body of Christ, so too is the church made one symbolic offering. In fact, Beauduin uses the term “mystical body of Christ” interchangeably for Eucharist and for assembly, taking advantage of the wordplay in saying that Christ offers his mystical body on the altar.\(^{149}\)

Like Mersch’s, Beauduin’s mystical body theology has a different genealogy than those that flourished in Germany and in Rome. In the same year (1906) that he left the Aumôniers, Beauduin joined the monastery of Mont César in Leuven. There, he was inspired and guided by Prior Columba Marmion. Marmion, who was beatified in the same September 2000 ceremony as Pius IX, John XXIII, and William Chaminade, helped to found Mont César and was its first prior before returning to Maredsous in 1909. When Beauduin entered Mont César he was 33 years old. He had a developed spirituality that was not particularly Benedictine and, as he would later admit, was not very liturgical.\(^{150}\)

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 51.


\(^{150}\) Quitslund, 9–11.
Marmion was a key figure in acclimating Beauduin to the Benedictine life—Beauduin called their relationship one of “respectful intimacy”\(^{151}\) and, even though they disagreed on some matters, it appears that Beauduin received mystical body theology initially through Marmion’s spirituality.\(^{152}\) Marmion provided the intellectual underpinning that led to Beauduin’s prayerful insight about the centrality of the liturgy.

As Bouyer, himself of the oratory, has argued, Marmion was the father of the “spiritual movement’s” strain of mystical body theology in France, which was centered on divine filiation and emphasized the Christian as *alter Christus*.\(^{153}\) Around 1933, Beauduin read and enjoyed Mersch’s two volumes on the Mystical Body.\(^{154}\) As we have seen, Mersch argues that the French Oratory and the Sulpicians restored vibrancy to

\(^{151}\) Beauduin, “Abbot Marmion and the Liturgy” 303, n. 1. In this same article, Beauduin calls the liturgy “the language of the Church” (305). Beauduin critiqued Marmion for being a bit too presentist, a bit too static in his approach to the liturgy, for not having enough of a sense of *ressourcement* as it pertains to the liturgy (306). These shortcomings, Beauduin claims, were related to Marmion’s insistence on “scrupulous and single-minded adherence to the Church’s presentday [sic] law,” which “preclude[ed] criticism in any other sphere” (305).

\(^{152}\) Pecklers, 10.

\(^{153}\) Bouyer, *The Church of God*, 154–7. Though Bouyer finds “Body of Christ” a very rich image for the Church, Bouyer thought that mystical body of Christ theology was sometimes dangerous because it often resulted in a highly spiritualized (ungrounded) ecclesiology that tended toward a devaluation of the visible church and “warps the biblical texts” (165). He had laid out these arguments more fully in his “Où en est la théologie du corps mystique?” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 28 (1948): 313–333. Henri de Lubac calls this latter article “a study written in reaction against Wikenhauser’s unilateral exegesis in *Die Kirche als der mystische Leid Christi nach dem Apostel Paulus (1937)” in *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 120, n. 151. In the article, Bouyer argues that in France, theologies of the mystical body have tended to play fast and loose with the tradition, resulting in a parallel problem to that of Karl Pelz in Germany. Wikenhauser’s exegesis in question argues that Paul has a more individualized understanding of deification. Thus, when he discusses “Body of Christ” in 1 Corinthians and Romans, he is referring primarily to the union of the individual with Christ. Bouyer rejects this outright (328).

\(^{154}\) Quitslund, 243. He also said that Henri de Lubac’s *Catholicisme* (1938) was a book that he wished he had written himself.
mystical body theology that had been lost by the scholastics. It is from this stream of French spirituality that the mystical body theology of Marmion\textsuperscript{155} and, in turn, Beauduin traces its roots.

When in 1907 Beauduin was assigned to teach a course on the church, he developed it around the mystical body of Christ.\textsuperscript{156} But fundamentally, for Beauduin, the mystical body of Christ was a claim about life after the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{157} Beauduin wrote regarding the Incarnation, it “groups all humanity into a vast moral organism of which Christ is the head…. His whole terrestrial work is above all collective and belongs to the whole of humanity.”\textsuperscript{158} Beauduin differed from Marmion in at least two respects: first, Beauduin saw radical liturgical and social implications bound up in the theology of the mystical body; second, Beauduin thought that the profundity of the liturgy should be brought to the faithful in the pews.\textsuperscript{159}

Amidst some friction with his Mont César brethren after returning from service in the First World War, Beauduin had taken a position in Rome as a lecturer in liturgy at San’Anselmo in 1921, and eventually pioneering ecumenical work. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} centenary

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156} Belsole, 117–8.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Quitslund, 243. Quitslund’s analysis of Beauduin’s mystical body theology under that heading leaves much to be desired because, like many others, she restricts that consideration to ecclesiology. The more interesting points concerning the mystical body theology arise in her explanation of his Christology.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Lambert Beauduin, \textit{Notre piété pendant l’avent} (Louvain, Belgium: Mont César, 1919), 45–6. I am thankful to Sonya Quitslund for pointing me to this source. I have followed her translation (254).
\item \textsuperscript{159} Beauduin even attributes Marmion’s lofty sense of the liturgy to his Irish background—that Irish Catholic churches had to be underground and discreet during Cromwell’s reign. See Beauduin, “Abbot Marmion and the Liturgy,” 308–09. He says further that Marmion’s contacts with parishioners were infrequent, that his apostolate was exercised primarily in religious houses.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of the Council of Nicaea—1925—Pius XI encouraged Benedictines to foster studies and programs that would address the profound division between Roman Catholics and the Orthodox. Beauduin established a priory at Amay-sur-Meuse in order to engage with the Orthodox on the common ground of monasticism in their respective traditions.\textsuperscript{160} To his friend Olivier Rousseau in 1924, Beauduin described this project as rooted in the mystical body: the “\textit{Principe ascétique unique}” of Amay, he wrote, was “\textit{ut unum sint, le Corps mystique}.”\textsuperscript{161} In 1926, he established the ecumenical journal \textit{Irénikon}. In 1928 Pope Pius XI was concerned about the direction of Beauduin’s work and asked him to step down as prior.

The Eucharistic-ecumenical emphasis of Beauduin’s mystical body theology eventually led him to found another ecumenical monastery, located in Chevetogne, in which Western monks would worship, study and write about Christian unity as well as make sojourns to Eastern monasteries.\textsuperscript{162} Angelo Roncalli had met Beauduin on a chance encounter at the Greek College in Rome in 1925. Roncalli had just been appointed apostolic delegate to Bulgaria and asked Beauduin about a secretary. Beauduin recommended his friend Constantin Bosschaerts, who served Roncalli throughout his

\textsuperscript{160} Quitslund, 110–116.
\textsuperscript{161} Beauduin to Olivier Rousseau, Rome, 29 May 1924. Quoted in Raymond Loonbeek and Jacques Mortiaux, \textit{Un pionnier: Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873–1960): Liturgie et unité des chrétiens}, University of Louvain Works of History and Philology, vol. 1 (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Éditions de Chevetogne, 2001), 427. These authors also note the intrinsic connection between the liturgy, the mystical body, and ecumenism for Beauduin: “\textit{Sa docilité a la liturgie, culte du Corps mystique, le conduit inévitablement—cela devient pour lui une évidence—à une mentalité œcuménique; il découvre aussi que les célébrations liturgiques orientales constituent un moyen privilégié de pénétrer de l'intérieur l'âme de l'orthodoxie}” (546).
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 115.
tenure, while keeping his employer abreast of Beauduin’s developing work. Roncalli kept in touch with Beauduin throughout the years. They met several times in southern France while Roncalli was nuncio in Paris, and Roncalli later reflected, “The true method of working for the reunion of the churches is that of Dom Beauduin.”

It was in these concrete ministries that Beauduin elaborated upon the theology of the mystical body, which flowed out of the liturgy. For him, the account of the mystical body impels toward unity, but not a unity grounded in a particular national or racial (i.e., natural) union as a prerequisite of a mystical (i.e., supernatural) union. In a post-Mystici celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Chevetogne he wrote, in a section titled, “Our Spiritual Life,”

There is only one doctrine in terms of which we may think about the concept of the union of the churches, if indeed we wish to think about it in all its supernatural profundity and divine richness: it is the doctrine of the Church, the mystical body of Christ. At the base of their spiritual life, the workers of reconciliation must place the growth of the body of Christ; they must realize profoundly that the only thing which interests us is the full measure of Christ….

One may hope that then the day will come when Christians will have finally relearned what is so familiar to St. John and St. Paul, the devotion to the body of Christ….

All of our spiritual goods assume immense proportions in the irradiation of the total Christ; they are integrated into what is more profound and more authentic in the Christian mystery: the unity of the mystical body, the Church.

---

163 Quitslund, 54–55.
These reflections demonstrate both the way in which mystical body theology supported Beauduin’s monastic ecumenical endeavors, but also the tendency, common in the French stream of mystical body theology, to function as a theology of the church, but also as a more pervasive theological theme.

If Beauduin’s reflections on the mystical body sound somewhat abstract and amorphous, we should note that, for him the mystical body did not connote a collapse of the distinction between Christ and Christian. In fact, he lamented the tendency to limit the mediation of Christ and substitute for it with various other mediations. Most irritating to Beauduin was the exaggerated cult of Mary which, in one case, he called “a blasphemy against the whole economy of the incarnation.”\(^{166}\) Beauduin was fond of repeating what he called “the great truth” in the face of abuses, that Christ is the sole mediator between God and humanity, an assertion made often by Marmion as well.\(^{167}\) This repeated assertion, late in life, by Beauduin is fascinating for a man who founded Chevetogne so

---

\(^{166}\) Lambert Beauduin to Charles Moeller, Chatou, 9 April 1951. Quoted in Quitslund, 250. The full quotation demonstrates Beauduin’s Christocentrism: “The Holy Virgin is closer to us than our Lord—what a blasphemy against the whole economy of the incarnation…and the effect of this Mariology on our separated brothers… You probably think I am willing to sacrifice truth for the sake of reconciliation. But this is very serious: there is only one priest… one victim, and it is this singular sacrifice of the only priest which has reconciled us. No creature can intervene in order to add some additional efficacy to this redemption by the only eternal priest… Christ man-mediator between us and his Father—that is the great truth. What is serious is that for this unique, visible, human, divine, eternal, priesthood, they substitute a sanctifying action, invisible and transcendent, in which Mary and the Holy Spirit collaborate mysteriously outside the visible and priestly economy of Christ and his Church…. It’s a kind of Catholic Protestantism.” Emphasis original.

\(^{167}\) Beauduin, “Abbot Marmion and the Liturgy,” 312–3. Beauduin clearly shared with Marmion the suspicion of giving Mary the title “Mediatrix.”
that Catholic monks may “go to school in the East” in order to foster deeper appreciation. It was, after all, interaction with Orthodox theologians at the Second Vatican Council that Yves Congar would later claim fueled both his critique of Catholic theology as at times Christomonist and his later work on pneumatology.\(^{168}\) Practically, emphasizing Christ’s sole mediatorship meant for Beauduin work for union with the Eastern Orthodox and his aforementioned work on behalf of labor. It cut against individualism.\(^{169}\)

Like Karl Adam, Beauduin railed against Docetic tendencies and heavily emphasized the importance of Christ’s humanity. Unlike Adam, who found a remedy in the concrete German Volk, Beauduin emphasized the liturgy. Raymond Loonbeek and Jacques Mortiau discuss a gradual development in Beauduin’s mystical body theology from 1911 to 1926. What was only present in seed in his 1911 course outline was more fully developed and integrated by 1926.\(^{170}\) More than once, Beauduin relayed insights that he had gained while celebrating Mass—most of them were related to the social nature of the Eucharist.

He thought that St. Thomas tended toward monophysitism when he spoke of Christ’s humanity as the instrument of his divinity, and further that the most pressing

\(^{168}\) The term “Christomonism” appears to originate with Paul Althaus’s critique of Karl Barth. Congar thematized this term, taken from Eastern interlocutors. See “Pneumatologie ou ‘Christomonisme’ dans la tradition latine ?” in Ecclesia a Spiritu sancto edocta: Mélanges théologiques, hommages à Mgr. Gérard Philips, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 27 (Gembloux: J. Duclot, 1970), 41–63. Congar understood it to mean a deep neglect of the theology of the Holy Spirit. Barth claimed that the term “was invented by an old friend of mine whose name I will not mention. Christomonism would mean that Christ alone is real and that all other men are only apparently real.” Karl Barth, “A Theological Dialogue,” Theology Today 19, no. 2 (1962): 172. Apropos of Barth’s comment here, the critique leveled against him was usually oriented toward his theological anthropology and theology of grace rather than his doctrine of God.

\(^{169}\) Beauduin, “Jubilé du Monastère de l'Union,” 375–76.

\(^{170}\) Loonbeek and Mortiau, 540–45.
Christological problem of his day, which he seemed to stress more as his life progressed, was a forgetfulness of Christ’s humanity. In a letter to Charles Moeller, he called this amnesia “the singular want of modern Christian life; there is no longer any human mediator to go to the Father; therefore there is no longer any Christianity.” Of neo-scholastic apologists, he remarked, “The incarnation bothers them.” Thus, Beauduin’s mystical body theology, as we have seen above, was paired with a robust sense of the humanity of Christ and, yet, a challenge to a singular emphasis on operative power of the hypostatic union. “He is a man, not a human nature,” Beauduin wrote. Christ’s mediation was found most viscerally and truly in His mystical body, which was firmly grounded in the liturgy.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have uncovered three sources for the tensions within Mystici Corporis—(1) the slipperiness of the use and application of “mystical body of Christ,” (2) the situation in Germany, and (3) the wider, variegated landscape of mystical body theology that surrounded the encyclical. This last element has led us to a key point to take with us throughout the rest of the study: There were three major streams of mystical body theology in the early twentieth century. These streams are not univocal, but can be

---

172 Lambert Beauduin to Charles Moeller, Chevetogne, 30 March 1953. Quoted in, and trans. Quitslund, 255. In an earlier letter, Beauduin boldly stated the failure of neo-scholastic theology to support a robust life of faith: “Je crois vraiment que si ma foi était basée sur la théologie des grands séminaires, sur le traité de l’Église, ... je l’aurais depuis longtemps perdue: heureusement, tout cela c’est de la contrefaçon” (Beauduin to Jadot, 1933, quoted in Loonbeek and Mortiau, 547).
distinguished by how they explicitly or implicitly avoid the error of “false mysticism” by grounding mystical body theology in something more concrete.

The tendency of mystical body theology to become mystified, to float free of mediation, as *Mystici Corporis* recognizes, and as Karl Pelz proves, is a real danger of the theological image. Each stream evinces a different way of grounding mystical body theology in the particular. Those in the Roman stream, represented by Tromp, planted the mystical body firmly in the Roman Catholic Church (and ultimately in its pope). Several in the German-Romantic stream, represented by Adam, insisted that the supernatural unity of the mystical body required a natural, even racial/ethnic, unity of the German nation. Thus, the organic fleshiness of the body image fit nicely with Nazi race rhetoric. And lastly, the French speaking-liturgical stream, represented most profoundly by Beauduin, grounded mystical body theology in the celebration of the Eucharist. While, across the board, mystical body theology buttressed strides in Catholic ecumenism, the mystical body theology of Beauduin, and others in the French stream, was particularly precocious because of its intrinsic link to the sacramental, liturgical life of the Church. This not only disabled “false mysticism” but, in the case of Beauduin, also radiated into concrete social action.

All three streams of mystical body theology manifest a universalizing tendency, but in different ways. The Roman version is universalizing in the sense of a *philosophia perennis*; it is appropriate and valid in all times and places. Thus Pope Pius XII writes, “we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression ‘the Mystical Body of Christ’.”174 For its part, the German-Romantic version is all-

---

encompassing in the Romantic sense of the mystical body of Christ standing at the culminuation of a natural unity which fit well with the totalizing vision of Nazism. For Adam, and others, the Christological moment of the doctrine is less fundamentally transformative of the natural order, that is national unity. In retrospect we can see that his mystical body theology, and that of some others of the German stream, held too much sanguinity with respect to the correspondence between the natural and supernatural orders. Lastly, the French-liturgical stream, as noted in both examples of Mersch and Beauduin, tends toward a pervasive theology in terms of how Christians live all of life. It is a vision through which all of the Christian life makes sense, and it does so with “a sacramental emphasis, helping to explain the inner and the outer, formal realities of the Church and of Christian life.”

In *The Catholic Counterculture in America 1933–1962*, James T. Fisher argues that Dorothy Day’s articulation of mystical body theology was idiosyncratic. She used the dominant symbol of “triumphalist exclusion” in a radically egalitarian way. Indeed, she did. But she was not alone. As we cross the Atlantic in the next chapter to take a deeper look at how Virgil Michel, one of Day’s good friends, developed the French stream in the U.S., it is important to keep in mind that Beauduin, Mersch, and the others in the French stream articulated a mystical body theology that did not begin Catholic Worker houses, but did support radical movements and challenge ecclesial juridicism even as it hewed closely (as did Day) to the liturgy and sacraments of the Church. Fisher notes Mersch’s surprise, when he turned to the patristic era, to find only a few mentions

---

175 Scully, 58.
of mystical body theology.\footnote{Fisher, 48.} Indeed he was so surprised. But Fisher fails to note how Mersch exclaims that it was only in looking to reflections on various other elements of Christian doctrine—beyond treatises related to the church—that he found mystical body theology in abundance.\footnote{Mersch, 580.} Michel will develop this key aspect of the French stream: Mystical body theology was not limited to the contours of the ecclesiastical or even ecclesiological, but it pushed to a more integrated vision of the Christian life that necessarily included other doctrinal questions, and certainly ethical ones.
CHAPTER II

JOURNEYED BODY:

THE CASE OF VIRGIL MICHEL

Chapter I suggested that mystical body theologies in the French-speaking socio-liturgical tradition were more productive than their Roman and German counterparts in terms of Christian social action and theological possibility. For these theologians and liturgists, any elaboration of Christ’s mystical body was necessarily grounded in the sacramental life of the church, and specifically the Eucharist. Lambert Beauduin is emblematic of this tradition. This second chapter shall demonstrate how Benedictine monk Virgil Michel picked up the banner of this socio-liturgical mystical body theology and made it uniquely American.

There has been no shortage of scholarship on Michel and the liturgical movement that he popularized in the United States. Further, there has been no shortage of discussion of the mystical body of Christ theology that was integral to Michel’s apostolate. That scholarship has generally assumed that the best way to understand Michel’s appeal to the mystical body of Christ is to consider it under the lens of ecclesiology. Benedictine sister Jeremy Hall’s excellent 1973 book elaborating “the ecclesiology of Virgil Michel” is a case in point. Clearly working under the model of Lumen Gentium Chapter I, she argues that for Michel the church was fundamentally a mystery best expressed in a variety of
images, and that “Mystical Body of Christ” was the most substantial of the images he employed for the church.\textsuperscript{179} Unpacking their ecclesiology was, during that time in American Catholic historiography, a popular theological approach to important figures who eluded easy categorization. In Michel’s case, however, this lens obscures some of the richness of what exactly mystical body theology was and did for him.

The recent work of David Fagerberg, which demonstrates the Mystical Body of Christ as an integrative principal for Michel between liturgy and “social justice,” consistently calls it an “ecclesiology.”\textsuperscript{180} Doubtless it was. But for Michel it was an even more fundamental theological category—perhaps a way of seeing the world and acting within it—that blossomed into an ecclesiology. Keith Pecklers sees this in his unmatched history of the liturgical movement in the U.S., writing, “Michel viewed the theme of the Mystical Body…as a spirituality, as a way of living in society”\textsuperscript{181}; but then Pecklers continues, “more…than as a theological doctrine.”\textsuperscript{181} For Michel it was both. It wasn’t “pre-theological,” as Mannes Koster, the German critic of the mystical body revival, called the doctrine in 1940,\textsuperscript{182} but rather very much about God’s work in the world. However, for Michel the mystical body of Christ was, at least conceptually, pre-

\begin{small}


\textsuperscript{181} Pecklers, 132.

\textsuperscript{182} McNamara, “The Ecclesiological Movement in Germany in the Twentieth Century,” 350.
\end{small}
ecclesiological, if also ecclesiological. That is, it was a fundamental theological category from which Michel’s integrated Catholic vision of liturgical and social action flowed. In short, it describes deification with a thick sense of liturgical and corporate mediation; it is solidarity rooted in Christ.

In what follows, I hope to demonstrate at least three points: first, that Michel remained a scholastic thinker, while jettisoning the dominant neo-scholastic theology of early twentieth century Catholicism; second, that Michel imbibed the French-speaking liturgical/spiritual stream of the multi-faceted Mystical Body of Christ theology on the continent; and third, that upon bringing it to the United States, Michel saw that it held together the diverse arms of what he called his “apostolate.”

**Michel the Scholastic**

In February of 1924, Alcuin Deutsch, abbot of St. John’s in Collegeville, Minnesota, sent a promising English and philosophy professor to study in Rome. Deutsch needed a monk to teach the scholastic method to undergraduates, and Virgil Michel’s restless inquisitiveness and sharp intellect proved a perfect fit. The scholar-mentor Deutsch had in mind for Michel was Joseph Gredt at Sant’ Anselmo. Gredt was a Luxembourghan neo-scholastic philosopher, trained in the Roman school. Among his teachers were the former Apostolic delegate to the U.S., Francesco Satolli, and Pope Leo XIII’s brother, Giuseppe Pecci. Shortly after arriving in Rome, Michel expressed his lack of interest and disappointment with Gredt as well as other towering neo-scholastics. In Michel’s view, Gredt was “no teacher at all”; he was “simply his book, no more, no less,”
and he expected a good student to be “an intellectual slave.” Of towering Dominican neo-scholastic Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange Michel said that “the whole could be boiled down to ten minutes.” It was not scholasticism per se that Michel found so off-putting, but rather the particular dry manner of engaging the high scholastics, especially Thomas Aquinas, characteristic of Gredt, Garrigou, and others. Michel considered himself a proponent of the scholastic method and a participant in its renewal throughout his life. We saw in Chapter I that the dominance of Catholic neo-scholastic theology is the backdrop for the mystical body revival. So, too, in the United States. However, unlike the proponents of “la nouvelle théologie,” Michel and others like him in the U.S. participated in theological renewal from outside the field of theology proper, which makes his contributions less obvious, but no less significant.

Michel expressed and thematized his critiques of dominant Catholic approaches to scholasticism in three articles shortly after he returned to the United States in September of 1925 and digested his experience of Thomism on the continent. Here he worked out his own reception and application of the scholastic tradition. He emphasized the boldness of St. Thomas’s own (and, more broadly, the University of Paris’s) adoption of Aristotle into the curriculum “in the face of ecclesiastical prohibitions,” calling Aquinas “a bold innovator” who “suffered… episcopal condemnations in his day.” Here, Michel was taking a bit of his own advice. On 20 October 1926, Michel wrote to Patrick Cummins, OSB, his good friend and associate editor of Orate Fratres (the fledgling journal of the

---

184 Michel, Diary, 24 May 1924. Cited in Marx, 26.
U. S. liturgical movement), thanking him for a fine contribution. This was not something that Michel did regularly. In fact, the correspondence between the two is filled with playful jibes and Michel’s relentless criticism of Cummins’s writing. He thanks Cummins for making a positive case for “mysticism” instead of writing “a mere scholastic polemic against existing conditions in seminaries.” “If we state our views positively, the negative criticism follows without our stating it.”

Nevertheless, toward the end of “Why Scholastic Philosophy Lives” Michel cannot but hurl a few direct barbs at his contemporaries: “For the scholastic a fundamental disharmony between life and thought (the highest form of life), or a complete separation of the two, is unthinkable. It is ever in an all-embracing synthesis, whose disharmonies do not outweigh the harmonies, that alone he finds himself secure. Perhaps too secure at times.” Michel explains the occupational hazard of scholastics to hole themselves up, to “become too self-satisfied,” to “encase [themselves] within [their] own traditional phraseology and ideology and forget the social missionary aims of philosophy as of life”; they fall, therefore, into “a narrow and fruitless

---

186 Michel to Patrick Cummins, 20 October 1926, Conception Abbey Archives (CAA), Patrick Cummins Collection, Box 72, Folder: “Patrick, Liturgical Press Correspondence.” In fact, after Cummins had made a sojourn to Italy, Michel joked that when Cummins became sufficiently “re-Americanized” he would become more concrete and fastidious in his writing (Michel to Cummins, 15 August 1926). In telling advice, Michel often encouraged Cummins to ground the ethereal tendency in his writing by making concrete references to the liturgy. For example, in the same letter, he writes concerning an article that Cummins had submitted, “In some ways, the article gave the impression of being in the air, instead of coming down to mother earth. Would not concrete references and illustrations, taken from the liturgy, help to avoid this?” It is surprising that Cummins would go on to translate Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (St. Louis: Herder, 1950). Michel’s impressions of Cummins’s work, as well as Cummins’s own estimation of its inexactitude, contrast sharply with Garrigou’s Thomistic synthesis.
‘commentarism’.” The neologism captures neo-scholastic indebtedness to early Modern commentators on Aquinas’s work, such as Thomas Cajetan, Francisco Suarez, and John of St. Thomas. To simply repeat their insights as if nothing had changed over the four hundred intervening years was, according to Michel, to miss the point of Pope Leo XIII’s call for a Thomistic revival in 1879. Of the scholastic method itself, Michel wrote, “A philosophy based on contact with facts must expect to be in continuous readjustment insofar as contact reveals new or more definite details of the world of facts.” In terms of Leo’s call for a return to the philosophy of Aquinas in response to the intellectual problems posed by modernity, Michel says that Pope Leo desired thinking in “the spirit of Thomas” and that he “argued for a complete rejection of past views that were no longer to the point, or had been rendered untenable by the advance of time.” In pen on the back of a typewritten draft entitled “The Mansions of Thomistic Philosophy,” Michel jotted, “Task of today, not literal” and “most important that Preface of Editor = convincing and modern language.” He was reminding himself of the importance of the task of bringing the Thomistic revival into the contemporary context.

For the Leonine renewal to be successful, it needed to attend to two shortfalls of much theology of Michel’s day: It had to disavow the quaintly Modern assumptions of Thomas’s commentators, which Michel characterized as “oppos[ing] rationalism, by

---

188 Pope Leo XIII made that clarion call in Aeterni Patris.
191 Virgil Michel, “The Mansions of Thomistic Philosophy” (unpublished manuscript, SJAA, Series Z, Box 33, Folder 8).
rationalistic method.” Second, it needed to attend to the particular questions of the day, questions which involved day-to-day living as a Christian in the Depression era. Michel’s emphases are in line with Jean Daniélou’s famous critique of the neo-scholastic response to the Modernist crisis: that it failed to address the important contemporary questions raised by the Modernists and instead recoiled into a rarefied discourse inaccessible, or at least uninspiring, to the average Catholic parish priest and layperson. In other words, to quote Daniélou, much neo-scholastic theology failed in “le contact avec la vie.”

---

192 Michel’s Retreat Notes, Virgil Michel Papers, SJAA, Series Z, Box 31. Handwritten in the margin is “Diocesan Retreat” (1937?), Introduction, 3.

193 The term itself “modernism” was a creation of ghostwriter Joseph Lemius to describe “the synthesis of all heresies” (Pascendi § 39). Who exactly was a “modernist” is a controverted question, but George Tyrrell’s “The Relation of Theology to Devotion,” The Month (November 1899): 461‒73 and Alfred Loisy’s L’évangile et L’église (Paris: A. Picard et fils, 1902) are generally acknowledged as representative of the major issues raised in the controversy. The crackdown and its aftermath resulted in theological trepidation in both Europe and the U.S. Much has been written about the Modernist controversy. See, for example, William L. Portier, Divided Friends: Portraits of the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Scott Appleby, Church and Age Unite!: The Modernist Impulse in American Catholicism, Notre Dame Studies in American Catholicism (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992); Marvin R. O’Connell, Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995); and Darrell Jodock, edited by Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

194 Jean Daniélou, “Les orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,” Études 249 (April 1946): 5–21. Regarding neo-scholastic theology, Daniélou writes, “historicité, subjectivité... Il est bien claire en effet que la théologie scholastique est étrangère à ces catégories. La monde qui est le sien est le monde immobile de la pensée grecque où sa mission a été d’incarner le message chrétien. Cette conception garde une vérité permanente et toujours valable en tant du moins qu’elle consiste à affirmer que la décision de la liberté de l’homme ou la transformation par lui de ses conditions de vie ne sont pas un commencement absolu par lequel il se crée lui-même, mais la réponse à une vocation de Dieu dont le monde des essences est l’expression. Mais, par ailleurs, elle ne fait aucune place à l’histoire. Et, d’autre part, mettant la réalité dans les essences plus que dans les sujets, elle ignore le monde dramatique des personnes, des universels concrets transcendants à toute essence et ne se distinguant que par l’existence, c’est-à-dire non plus selon l’intelligible et l’intellection, mais selon la valeur et l’amour, ou la
Michel first critiques the assumptions embedded in the early Modern commentaries themselves. Cajetan and the others had read Aquinas through their own lens of nascent Modern philosophical questions, especially a certain mind-body dualism, that prevented a full appreciation of St. Thomas’s own writings. Michel wrote in 1928, “the modern scholastic is very prone to read into his [Thomas’s] words variations of meaning that have developed in scholastic tradition only after the thirteenth century.”

He thought that hidebound neo-scholastics locked in on a contextual reality (Aquinas’s corpus) and decontextualized it (read it as if it were any other Modern text). “Is it saying too much,” Michel asked in 1928, “to aver that many of us champion as traditional in the philosophia perennis views which are really quite contrary to the spirit of this philosophy?” “The writer well remembers the mixed horror and surprise with which he was reproached not many years ago: ‘Why, you wouldn’t think of teaching special metaphysics before general metaphysics, would you?’ To which the only practical answer is: ‘Wouldn’t I!’”

Michel chafes at the organization of scholastic philosophy textbooks (often used in seminaries) that begin with metaphysics as such and move to the various branches of “special metaphysics” (psychology, natural theology, etc.) especially because

Virgil Michel, Translator’s Preface to Martin Grabmann, Thomas Aquinas: His Personality and His Thought (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1928), vi. While many continue to hold Michel’s critique today, there have been several important challenges to this reading of the commentatorial tradition. See, for example, Romanus Cessario, O.P., A Short History of Thomism (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). For a good overview of the current debate on this score see Josephinum Journal of Theology 18, no.1 (2011) dedicated to “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” which republishes important essays from the early twentieth century along with some contemporary commentary on the question.

Virgil Michel, “Reflections on a Scholastic Synthesis,” The New Scholasticism 2, no. 1 (January 1928): 2. Michel does not tell us, but it would not be hard to believe, that his reference here is to Joseph Gredt.
that deductive method is more indebted to eighteenth-century rationalism than to scholasticism as such. It insists on working out a metaphysic before any practical questions can be addressed. Such an injunction, Michel thought, admits of a deep divide between the rational and practical, foreign to human life and the deeper Catholic tradition. Instead, he offers a defense of beginning with philosophical psychology (a discipline of special metaphysics) because we have good reason to “doubt whether the customary cleavage, made almost universally, between cognitional and emotional processes, holds of reality.” Further, “the body as apart from the living and thinking substance and the mind as apart from the living and thinking substance are abstractions.”197 Rather, Michel insisted, “The body is a living human body, not because in some small spot of it there is a soul, but because the soul transfuses and permeates the whole body and makes it to be alive. So close is the living union of body and soul in man that all man’s actions are performed by both body and soul together.”198 This integration of body and soul made a practical difference, theologically speaking. Instead of asserting that one celebrated liturgy for the soul, which governed the body to keep it from sinning, Michel emphasized that the entire person celebrated, worked, played, and failed together.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Michel did not think that this methodological shortsightedness was endemic to scholasticism per se. Michel appreciated the rigors of the scholastic method, its coherence. Yet, those who opposed the challenges of modernity by granting the Modern rejection of faith as irrelevant to reasonable inquiry and history

197 Ibid., 8, 9.
as mere contingency made key mistakes. This work resulted in several dualisms between faith and reason, truth and contingency, mind and body, rationality and emotion.

This brings us to the second critique: Much neo-scholastic theology, Michel argued, left many parish priests and laypeople uninspired and perhaps misled. Dry and abstract, even dualistic, theological education was a problem for the pastoral vocation of those trained in early twentieth-century seminaries. In some preparatory notes for a diocesan retreat Michel gave toward the end of his life, he writes

For generations: Formalistic in religion. What mean? Religious knowledge, possessed intellectually, definite formulas. Had to oppose rationalism, by rationalistic method. What did theology mean to us in seminary, as inspirational for life. Set forms to be believed and memorized. Karl Adam says even educated Catholics know little of fundamental life-giving truths of Christianity. Could add, many priests do not. 199

Michel saw in forms of neo-scholastic theology a tendency to over-rationalize the faith as a counter to rationalistic humanism. The efficaciousness of the liturgy was often limited to the calculation of an amount of grace refilling the soul or the precise mechanics of “confecting” the body and blood of Christ from the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine. In the process, its educative and aesthetic elements were often undervalued.

Mobilizing parish priests to his cause for social action rooted in the liturgy required a richer theological account of the necessary interconnection of the two, as well as our interconnection to one another. A key to invigorating Catholic life was to help his fellow priests understand the avant-garde in Catholic intellectual life.

It becomes obvious how neo-scholastic indebtedness to peculiarly Modern forms of discourse, perhaps ironically, leads to a lack of rooted attention to contemporary

---

199 Michel’s Retreat notes, Virgil Michel Papers, SJAA, Series Z, Box 31. Handwritten in the margin is “Diocesan Retreat” (1937?), Introduction, 3.
Catholic life. The linchpin, for Michel, was a pervasive individualism—in Modern academic discourse, and therefore in much neo-scholastic theology, in economic structures, and in some forms of Catholic devotion. The latter two individualisms will merit consideration later in this chapter. Concerning the first, Michel regrets that contemporary academic inquiry has become so diffuse and atomized. He elaborates: “Everything has been split up into elements, of which the whole, no matter how organic, has been considered merely the sum.” “Society has long been considered a mere aggregate of individuals.” That it runs counter to academic hyper-specialization is what Michel finds ultimately valuable about the scholastic synthesis at its core. Its integrative potential is also what Michel would find stirring and attractive about the theology of the mystical body of Christ.

Michel’s analysis of neo-scholasticism is not, of course, entirely unique. These critiques, rumbling underground for a decade or more, burst onto the surface in France, for example, after the publication of Henri Godin’s *France, pays du mission?* The context was different. Godin argued that the French church was bleeding members largely because of its inattentiveness to and increasing irrelevance to the working class. Therefore, it had become mission territory. During Michel’s lifetime, the growing U.S. church was still contending with its outsider status to American society. It was, in fact, only a few decades removed from official status as “mission territory,” a title removed by the Vatican in 1908. Nevertheless, the theological emphases converged, at least those of “new social Catholics” such as Michel. *Ressourcement* theologians emphasized the necessary connection between theology and the lived Christian life. Marie-Dominique

---

Chenu, whose scholarship on Aquinas emphasized the angelic doctor as a contextual thinker, denounced the fragmentation of theology, along with the divorce between theology and “la vie spirituelle.”\(^{201}\) Chenu argued that the “speculative formulae and explanations which we find in the text-books…must be considered in the actual milieu which is proposed to our faith, that is the living Church of today, where these truths find their natural surroundings, their context and their synthetic sense.”\(^{202}\) Michel ultimately conceived the Liturgical Press as a part of his mission to deliver lively theological insights to the Catholics in readable form.

In fact, Michel’s approach to Thomas, and to scholasticism more generally, was deeply indebted to German thinker Martin Grabmann. One of the first monographs that the Liturgical Press published, after translations of Beauduin’s *Piété d’église* and Italian liturgist Emmanuele Caronti’s *La pietà liturgica*, was a translation of Martin Grabmann’s

\(^{201}\) See, for example, M.-D. Chenu, “Position de la théologie,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 24 (1935): 252. Chenu writes, “la science théologique ne peut que devenir hétérogène à la vie spirituelle,—une condition encore pour bien penser, puisque la foi est la consigne des vérités reçues en dépôt, mais non point un principe interne, substantiellement surnaturel, installé en nous comme une puissance l’est dans une nature. Entre la méditation et l’oraison « mystique », l’oraison « théologale » est le statut normal de la vie spirituelle, que les dons du Saint-Esprit ensuite libéreront, pour un plein épanouissement, des servitudes humaines de l’habitus, vertueux. La théologie, la foi en œuvre d’intelligence théologique, est vraiment et proprement un facteur de vie spirituelle. On ne fait pas de la théologie en ajoutant des « corollaria pietatis » à des thèses abstraites, coupées de leur donné objectif et subjectif, mais en se tenant dans l’unité profonde de l’ordre théologal.” Chenu’s corpus on St. Thomas is highly regarded and extensive. Indicative of his contextual approach to St. Thomas, which emphasized the socially radical character of the Order of Preachers, is his *Aquinas and His Role in Theology*, trans. Paul Philbert, OP (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2002, French orig. 1959), esp. Chapter 1.

Michel deeply admired Grabmann’s work because it was much more prescient and relevant than Gredt’s or Garrigou’s. In his preface, Michel dubbed Grabmann “the foremost Thomistic student and research scholar of modern times.”

Grabmann was a German historical theologian who, like Chenu, provided fodder for those wishing to circumvent the hegemony of neo-scholastic interpretations of Aquinas. As many have noted, Aeterni patris spurred not only those theologians and philosophers that were heavily dependent upon Thomas’s modern commentators, but also those who undertook fresh historical looks at Thomas in his own milieu. Grabmann was caught in the ambiguous middle of this burgeoning Catholic theology. Called “the greatest Catholic scholar of his time” by his student Ludwig Ott, Grabmann was involved in a deep recovery of Thomas’s own texts and contexts for twentieth-century Catholic theology.

---


204 Michel, Translator’s Preface to Martin Grabmann, Thomas Aquinas, v.


James Weisheipl groups him with Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and Yves Congar as a Thomist (but not a neo-Thomist or neo-scholastic).\textsuperscript{207} Like Gilson after him, Grabmann emphasized the similarity in method (not content) among scholastics.\textsuperscript{208} Like Grabmann, Michel was convinced of the liveliness of the scholastic method if one breathed life into it by intersecting it in the contemporary.\textsuperscript{209} Grabmann argued that the fourteenth century was preoccupied with dialectic to the neglect of the Scriptural and mystical elements of the faith. This represented a departure from the high scholastics, who were only appropriated in limited fashion by these scholars. Thus, the fourteenth-century environment, with the introduction of nominalism, paved the way for the early modern, often rationalistic, defense of the faith from the rationalists.

It was necessary that theological questions pertain to those of the day, but even further for Michel that a concerted attempt be made to illustrate these connections for the laity. While in Europe, he wrote that despite the Benedictine “flight from the world,” a good monk still had to keep abreast of worldly developments in order to be able to address them, especially to educate.\textsuperscript{210} In addition to inaccessible language, failing to take stock of the real needs of the contemporary church results in a failure to reach the people in the pews. The lack of vibrancy and concern for the embodied lives of early twentieth-century Christians ultimately led Michel to embrace a popularizing vocation as a thinker in the church, which included education and coaching at St. John’s, the U.S. liturgical

\textsuperscript{209} Roseman, esp. 62–66.
\textsuperscript{210} Virgil Michel, Diary, 26 February 1924, Virgil Michel Papers, SJAA, Series Z, Box 22, Folder 1.
movement aimed particularly at parish priests and lay people, and numerous retreats for
priests and sisters. Thus, Michel’s foreword to the very first issue of *Orate Fratres*
describes the program of the journal as filling this void:

> Our general aim is to develop a better understanding of the spiritual import of the
> liturgy, an understanding that is truly sympathetic. This means that we are not
> aiming at a cold scholastic interest in the liturgy of the Church, but at an interest
> that is more thoroughly intimate, that seizes upon the entire person, touching not
> only intellect but also will, heart as well as mind.²¹¹

At its heart, Michel understood the liturgy—and we must not forget that for Michel this
was the Tridentine usage of the Roman rite—not as bourgeois, but as the “work of the
people” in a populist sense. In a discussion question for a course he taught, Michel wrote,
“The liturgy is essentially not the religion of the cultured (which often expresses itself by
abstract ideas and logical developments) but the religion of the people (which expresses
itself by being and action, by imagery and ritual). How well is this concept of the liturgy
being carried out in the parishes you are familiar with in the United States?”²¹² His own
answer to that question was, “not well enough,” hence the liturgical apostolate.

It was neo-scholastic theology that tended to distinguish the “mystical body of the
Church”²¹³ from the “mystical body of the state,” employing the phrase in a merely moral

²¹² Virgil Michel, “Course in Catholic Backgrounds and Current Social Theory,
First Semester, Christian Sociologists, Writings of Dawson, Maritain, E.A., The
Personalist and Communitarian Movement” (Unpublished, 1937, SJAA, Series WP, Box
198), 43.
²¹³ Paul Marx calls it “strange” that the brief 1911 *Catholic Encyclopedia* article
on the topic bore this title (82). See George H. Joyce, S.J., “Mystical Body of the
Church,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the
Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, edited by Charles
British theologian Joyce begins with the church as a “moral union,” but moves beyond
that unity to discuss a “supernatural “ unity with Christ. He cites, Franzelin, Passaglia,
and German manualist Christian Pesch, SJ. Interestingly, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza
sense, that is bound in common action. Thus, “mystical body” was merely another union of people across space. As we have seen, Émile Mersch was critical of this usage. Michel thought that such a definition of the mystical body of Christ was too restrictive, too “cold.” In an unpublished manuscript, he wrote,

That the mystical body is not merely a figure of speech for denoting a moral union between the members of the Church, that it is not merely such a union of mind and will, of intention and aim, as exists between members banded together in any earthly society, no longer needs to be stressed. The mystical body of Christ, far from being a mere figurative expression for such a moral union, refers to a most real and intimate supernatural union by which all the members of the fellowship constitute with Christ a living organism. As a living social organism it must express its nature and being in the immanent activity that is characteristic of all living beings, and it does this in the liturgy of the Church.  

Michel describes the scholastic method in organic terms: “It grows and therefore changes; but it also remains itself amid the variety of changes endured in its growth.”

In the early Modern examples, Michel thought that scholasticism was no longer true to itself. It is striking how this description of scholastic philosophy would also come to describes the topic of Pius XII’s Mystici Corporis as “the mystical body of the Church” in “Vatican II and the Aggiornamento of Roman Catholic Theology” in James C. Livingston, et al., Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century, second ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 239. Joyce’s is one of the earliest articles to appear on the topic in English. He appears to be preceded by: B. Conway, C.S.P., “The Communion of Saints,” Homiletic and Pastoral Review 7 (1907): 592–600, who deals with the mystical body as related to the communion of saints; and what seems to be the first English-language article, Joseph McSorley, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” Catholic World 131 (1905): 307–14. In the throes of the Modernist controversy, McSorley’s mystical body theology is rather Docetic. For him, the mystical body of Christ is a refuge of enduring faith, walled off from critique and safe from the perils of deep historical digging and scientific theories, a bastion of faith untouched by the dictates and conclusions of reasoned inquiry. McSorley calls the Church “purely sacramental,” “by which he means nearly dualist—what we see in the vicissitudes of history is simply “the human vessel,” “the material embodiment” (310). On McSorley, his contributions, and struggles during the Modernist crisis see Portier, Divided Friends, esp. chapters 9, 11, and 13.

characterize Michel’s understanding of the liturgy. Those who stifled the development of the scholastic method in the twentieth century, who preferred simply to reiterate the commentaries on Thomas, were also often the ones who were suspicious of the work of the liturgical movement.

The Fruit of European Study

Despite these critiques, Michel did encounter quite a bit that he found worthwhile while in Europe. Judging by how quickly Michel undertook to translate Grabmann’s book, it is likely that Michel had encountered his work while there.²¹⁶ He found the first rumblings of what would blossom into the ressourcement that informed Vatican II as well as the liturgical movement. As soon as he had the opportunity, he traveled throughout Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Austria, and Belgium, especially to the Benedictine monasteries, which also happened to be the centers of the budding liturgical movement. Michel was fascinated.²¹⁷ These travels were, of course, the beginnings of Michel’s commitment—with Deutsch’s endorsement—to make St. John’s the center of the liturgical movement in the United States.

The most formative of those trips was to Mont César in Leuven. Mont César’s liturgical pioneer, Lambert Beauduin, was teaching apologetics, liturgy, and ecclesiology at Sant’ Anselmo while Michel was there. Beauduin’s classes in the liturgy were the

---

²¹⁶ Paul Marx explains that he received permission to translate Caronti’s work and often remarked to his abbot that he looked forward to completing several translations. Marx, 28.

²¹⁷ It is very possible that Abbot Alcuin had intended Michel to encounter the liturgical movement. He had, after all, handed him a copy of Romano Guardini’s Vom Geist der Liturgie in 1920. See Marx, 25.
opposite of Gredt’s—interesting, perceptive, and engaging.\textsuperscript{218} As explained in Chapter I, Beauduin had spent much time in various social causes before entering the monastery—especially ones related to labor—and by the time Michel met him, he had been convinced that “it was the liturgy and only the liturgy that was capable of giving the necessary grounding to Christian social activism.”\textsuperscript{219} Michel had many private conversations with Beauduin and requested that Beauduin arrange for him to spend holidays at Mt. César. Michel would later write in his diary that Mont César was the “center of new liturgical movement.”\textsuperscript{220} “Undoubtedly,” Paul Marx, Michel’s biographer, says, “one of Michel’s greatest discoveries in Europe had been the reality of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ—a doctrine little stressed in the United States at this time.”\textsuperscript{221} It was Beauduin, claims Marx, who “fired Father Virgil’s interest in the liturgy and in the doctrine of the Mystical Body.”\textsuperscript{222}

Of all that he saw in Europe, it was Beauduin’s vision that Michel found most attractive and formative. “No one in Europe influenced [Michel] more than this scholarly and zealous Belgian monk.”\textsuperscript{223} Michel found Beauduin’s approach to the liturgy so absorbing because it was engaged with social questions and, in contrast to Maria Laach in Germany, for example, aimed for a parish-level audience. It is striking how Beauduin’s and Michel’s descriptions of the method for liturgical movement mirror one another. They both understood the goal of the movement to lay the groundwork for a reform

\textsuperscript{218} Marx, 27.
\textsuperscript{219} Pecklers, 11.
\textsuperscript{220} Virgil Michel, Diary, 26 February 1924. Virgil Michel Papers, SJAA, Series Z, Box 22, Folder 1. Quoted in Marx, 43, n. 3.
\textsuperscript{221} Marx, 36.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 28.
sanctioned by Rome, rather than to demand immediate change. They wanted to elaborate upon the richness of the liturgy in order to cultivate a fuller understanding in the pews. Therefore, they aimed at the parish priest and his parishioners. Michel was captivated by the importance of taking the newest ideas flowing from the mind of the church all the way to the pews.

That Beauduin’s mystical body theology influenced Michel is clear from the link that it served for him between liturgy and social questions. Beauduin did not write a monograph on the mystical body, but his approach, as argued in Chapter I, fits in with the emphases of the French stream. In a letter dated exactly one month before his death, Michel was asked by a chaplain at the catholic center at LSU for the best book on the mystical body of Christ. The chaplain had noticed Michel’s letter to the editor concerning a review of Mersch’s book. Michel jotted in the margin of the letter, “‘The Whole Christ’ (Bruce) – Mersch.” Both Mersch and Beauduin were enamored of the spirituality of the French Oratory founded by Pierre de Bérulle in the seventeenth century. As noted, Mersch found their mystical body theology a nice contrast to scholastic aridity, but ultimately a bit too rigorist. Beauduin encountered the spirituality predominantly through Columba Marmion’s Benedictine inflected strain of it, from whom he also first

---

224 Beauduin wrote “The action of the liturgy is not reserved to an élite… It must penetrate deeply into the great mass of the faithful” in “Abbot Marmion and the Liturgy,” 307.

225 Schexnayder to Michel, 26 October 1938, SJAA, Series Z, Box 27, Folder 5. Cited in Hall, 113, n. 22. Of course, Michel could have simply been reminding himself that his letter to Commonweal (cited below) appears to defend Mersch’s book from the characterization of the reviewer. There is no way to know exactly what he meant.
encountered mystical body theology. Beauduin found Marmion’s approach to theology and liturgy ultimately a bit too elitist.²²⁶

At the beginning of the chapter, we noted Keith Pecklers’s description of Michel’s mystical body theology as a “spirituality.”²²⁷ As mentioned above, Pecklers is

²²⁶ These connections were further elaborated in Chapter I. Marx explains that Michel was instrumental in St. John’s hiring Ermin Vitry, O.S.B., a Marmion disciple and chant expert whom Michel hoped would take over the editorship of Orate Fratres from him (40). Of course, that latter hope would never be realized. Nevertheless, it reinforces Michel’s appreciation for the strain of liturgical thought associated with Marmion. Orate Fratres published several of Vitry’s articles, predominately on liturgical music; about half of those were under Michel’s editorship. Shortly after Michel’s death, Orate Fratres published Vitry’s “The Spiritual Doctrine of Abbot Marmion,” Orate Fratres 15, no. 1 (December 1940): 7–11. Vitry had been formed as a monk at Maredsous and was then sent to study at, while serving as organist for, Mont César, the French-speaking Benedictine center of liturgical-theological formation of the era. There, Vitry encountered both Marmion and Beauduin, who were influential upon him. See Kathleen Agnes Bolduan, “The Life and Work of Dom Ermin Vitry, O.S.B.,” (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1976), 13–14.

²²⁷ Paul Marx uses a similar descriptor, while speaking in the realm of ecclesiology: “When Orate Fratres began its publication in 1926, the spiritual nature of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ seems to have been given little attention in seminaries, to say nothing of being almost unknown among even informed and intelligent Catholic laymen. The very term “Mystical Body” was for a time suspect. Today [c. 1957] the doctrine of the Mystical Body is much better understood and lived” (Marx, 408, emphasis mine). Marx seems to contrast “spiritual” here with a merely temporal/juridical approach to the church. Marx also relays that “Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand recalled that a retreatmaster that summer [1951] had preached that too much was being said about the Mystical Body and too little about the Church” (83; Marx cites Hillenbrand’s “The Priesthood and the World,” National Liturgical Week: Proceedings [1943], 14). The tension was widespread. Throughout the University of Dayton’s copy of Friedrich Jürgensmeier’s The Mystical Body of Christ as the Basic Principle of Religious Life, trans. H. Gardner Curtis (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1939), the previous owner, a “Kieran” who received the book as a gift “from Fr. Provincial, Christmas 1945,” makes numerous “corrections” to the text based on Francis Connell’s review of it in Franciscan Studies 6 (September 1946): 380–81, which is cited on the first page. The lined out paragraphs are those that elaborate on the porous lines of membership in the mystical body of Christ as well as those that heavily emphasize the humanity of Christ (182). An example of the former: “According to her principle, the Church as the mystical body of Christ embraces the whole human race” (149). Jürgensmeier makes the classic reference to Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae III.8.3.Resp. in which Thomas discusses membership of the mystical body in terms of act and potency. Malachi J. Donnelly’s review, “Magnetic Power of
“Christ,” in *Review for Religious* 5, no. 4 (July 1946) blames what he determines to be the book’s lack of theological accuracy on Curtis’s translation: “phrases, clauses, whole sentences have been omitted.” A review in *America* by W.J. Garry, on the other hand, finds “both the summary of the doctrine and the application of it…excellently done.” See *America* 62, no. 3 (28 October 39): 80.

“Spirituality” is, of course, a controverted word. Especially in a cultural context that has seen a wide appeal to the attractiveness of spirituality over religion, sensitivities have been rightly raised over the word’s use and appeal. Theologically speaking, there have been a wide array of studies on “spirituality,” which usually undertake one of two tasks. Either they reflect on the contributions and charism of a particular religious way of life, e.g., Benedictine spirituality as a particular way of living out the gospel as distinct from Ignatian spirituality, or they engage in what is otherwise called “mystical” theology, i.e., reflection on the theology of those great souls who have dedicated their lives to cultivating an intimate relationship with God through intense affective prayer, related to the Greek root *muerin*, “to close or to shut” the eyes and/or mouth. Two examples of this kind of work are: Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorf, and Jean Leclerc, eds., *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1987; and Bruce H. Lescher and Elizabeth Liebert, eds., *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2006). Sandra Schneiders wrote the landmark essay that made “spirituality” its own discipline. See Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., “Spirituality in the Academy,” *Theological Studies* 50, no. 4 (1989): 676–97.

It is notable that several others use language for the (mystical) body of Christ that pushes it either out of the realm of ecclesiology per se or out of theology altogether. Bernard Lee is one of the latter. He writes, “Body of Christ is not ‘merely’ a metaphor. It is a physical reality, a new being brought into existence among the disciples of Jesus in the resurrection of Jesus Christ into which we are baptized. Body of Christ is not a theology. It is a way of being in the world with one another and with Christ because of who God is.” Bernard J. Lee, SM, “Body of Christ,” in *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 104.

Debra Campbell is an example of the former. She writes, “The new apostolates nurtured an alternative to the individualistic, devotion centered spirituality fostered within the parish and reinforced in the large Catholic organizations. This alternative spirituality recognized the connection between the work individual members did in the secular arena and their faith, expressed most directly by their participation in the liturgy. Along with the connection between liturgy and work, it underscored the need for the laity to adopt an active rather than a passive posture in the papal strategy of ‘restoring all things in Christ.’ The emergence of this new spirituality was catalyzed by three European Catholic movements that had been imported to America by the 1930s. These included: the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, with its emphasis upon the radical interdependence of all of the members (laity included), the liturgical renewal popularized by Virgil Michel’s journal *Orate Fratres* from 1926 on, and the Jocist movement, which challenged Catholics to form small groups in the workplace and discuss ways to apply the gospel in the service of concrete ongoing, social change. Members of the small-group apostolates gradually adopted an activist spirituality that took for granted the crucial connections between liturgy and work, and the link between the human solidarity,
right to emphasize this aspect of Michel’s mystical body theology, especially insofar as Pecklers shifts the primary locus of that theology out of the realm of mere ecclesiology. The influence of the French School upon Michel helps to elicit a bit further what Pecklers might mean.

In fact, the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* explains that by the early twentieth century, the Latin substantive “spiritualitas,” with its religious (contra “carnalitas”), philosophical (contra “corporalitas”), and political (contra “temporalitas”) senses had in French scholarship developed into “spiritualité.”228 The substantive still retained its force as contrary to what was “of this world.” Employing the adjectival form, we saw how Chenu critiqued the theology of his day as disconnected from “la vie spirituelle.” He and Michel shared a commitment to theology integrated with the pursuit of holiness. This is precisely what Michel understands the theology of the mystical body to articulate. In fact, it is possible to read Michel’s apostolate as a precursor to the “universal call to holiness” embraced by *Lumen Gentium*, especially the goal of the liturgical movement in the United States to bring to the laity the connection between the celebration of the liturgy and the wider Christian life that had been far more obvious to the monks, whose daily lives were shaped by Mass and the hours.

While Pecklers is perceptive to see more than an ecclesiology in Michel’s repeated appeals to the mystical body of Christ, he misunderstands the ways in which Beauduin influenced Michel. He concludes that the liturgical movement was generally affirmed in both the Mass and the Mystical Body theology, and the mandate for social change.” Debra Campbell, “The Nunk Controversy: A Symbolic Moment in the Search for a Lay Spirituality,” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 8, no. 1/2 (1989): 83–4.

more successful among Germans, and more specifically, the link between the liturgy and
the social: “it was Germans and German-Americans who were the first to grasp the
intrinsic connection between liturgy and social justice,”229 but in his overview of the
German liturgical movement in the first chapter, he does not mention the social question,
giving credit instead to Beauduin in Belgium, as well Parsch in Austria, for eliciting those
connections. Sure, the monks of St. John’s, and Michel himself, were of German
heritage, but understanding the influence of the French-speaking Belgian Beauduin is
necessary to understand not only the connection between the liturgy and the social
question, but also the doctrine that facilitated it: the Mystical Body of Christ.

Elaborating upon the distinction that Pecklers drew between “spirituality” and
“theological doctrine,” he says of Michel, “In this way, he differed from his colleagues in
Germany from whom he had borrowed the concept in the first place.”230 Pecklers is here
referring to Möhler and the 19th-century Tübingen theologians (rather than Michel’s
contemporaries, such as Guardini and Adam) who were midwives to the entire mystical
body revival in the twentieth century. While Michel mentioned Adam and Franzelin
often,231 he read them through the liturgy. That is, their insights were absorbed by Michel
within the framework of his overall goal of liturgical pedagogy. For this reason, Marmion
and Beauduin, as Benedictines, were ultimately more formative upon Michel. His way of
understanding the theology of the mystical body of Christ—as a way of living in the
world—is connected also to Beauduin’s more populist approach to liturgy. Pecklers

229 Pecklers, 283.
230 Pecklers, 132.
231 We saw one example in the retreat notes, above. Michel refers favorably to
Several of Michel’s course outlines include these two thinkers on the mystical body,
among many others. Jeremy Hall confirms this observation in The Full Stature, 91–2.

88
credits this achievement to the movement on this side of the Atlantic: “Unlike the European movement that was centered in or around monasteries, the movement in the United States was more pluralistic, surfacing on college campuses and in Catholic bookstores, in social outreach centers and adult study groups.”\textsuperscript{232} Whether or not he succeeded, this was also Beauduin’s goal, as Pecklers himself writes earlier in his book: “Unlike the emerging liturgical movement in Germany, which was primarily the work of an intellectual, monastic elite, the Belgian movement was thoroughly pastoral, aimed at the grassroots level: parish communities.”\textsuperscript{233} Michel’s relative successes with \textit{Orate Fratres}, the Liturgical Press, and the propagation of the theology of the mystical body demonstrate not only his doggedness in pursuit of the cause, but also the favorable conditions in the United States that made Beauduin’s vision realizable in America.

\textbf{Traversing the Sea: Michel’s Mystical Body Theology}

H. A. Reinhold, who took over Michel’s “Timely Tracts” column in \textit{Orate Fratres} after the latter’s death in 1938, writes of Michel, “Instead of dragging his find across the border as an exotic museum piece, he made it as American as only an American mind could make it.” “Besides, his clear realism and his burning apostle’s heart had one urge none of the great masters in Europe seemed to see: the connection of social justice with a new social spirituality.”\textsuperscript{234} Patrick Carey, too, asserts that Michel’s deep interest in the social was the uniquely American characteristic of the liturgical

\textsuperscript{232} Pecklers, 281.
\textsuperscript{233} Pecklers, 14.
As the various liturgical movements developed, indeed it was. However, the social aspects of the liturgical movement were not born in the United States. Rather, as we have seen, the seeds of the interconnection between social questions and liturgical celebrations were planted in Michel’s head by Lambert Beauduin. However, it seems to have garnered much wider support in the United States than it ever did in Europe. Though the two are difficult to separate, this section will discuss Michel’s mystical body theology as it relates to the liturgy, and the next section will explore its connections to social questions.

**Formed by the Liturgy**

When Michel returned from Europe, he jumped in—almost immediately—to preparing the various arms of the liturgical apostolate at St. John’s. Deutsch had suggested, in a letter to Michel while the latter was in Europe, the possibility of a liturgical review centered at St. John’s. Michel replied to his abbot that the suggestion had “kept [him] awake for the greater part of two nights” and that he had sketched out full plans for the review, including associate editors, topics, and layout. Nevertheless, Michel only expected to be in charge of the liturgical apostolate for a limited time, after which he would return to philosophy and turn the review and press over to a confrere. But over the years he had given himself over to the work—some of his former brother Benedictines even wondered if he worked himself to his untimely death—with the gusto with which he expected the Christian to pursue God’s calling.

---

Michel knew that the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ that he found so enlivening on the continent was neither sufficiently known nor understood in the United States. “Many today,” he writes, “have not heard of it; and for many who have heard of it, it is not a doctrine, but merely a Scriptural figure of speech!” Such a misunderstanding of the mystical body as simply a metaphor or manner of speaking led Catholics to miss its depth. Judging by his commitments to scholasticism, one might expect that Michel would “ground” the mystical body in such discursive fashion as to mute its more intuitive, suggestive, even nebulous aspects. He does not. Like his forebears on the continent, he grounds mystical body theology in the liturgy, which

---

239 Years later, Michel responded to a review of Mersch’s The Whole Christ in Commonweal. The reviewer had written, “When we speak of the Mystical Body of Christ we are using a metaphor to designate the unity that should exist between Christ and all mankind.” Michel asked, “Is it correct to refer to the Mystical Body of Christ as a metaphor…? Would it not be much more correct to speak of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, or of the sublime supernatural reality of it, which we picture to ourselves under the figure of the human body? And is the M.B. merely used to indicate or declare the unit that ‘should’ exist between Christ and all mankind, and not rather the most real and living union that does actually exist between the head Christ and His living members?” (“The Mystical Body,” Letter to the Editor, Commonweal 29 (28 Oct 1938): 18). Michel was tapping into a much larger issue here. As Chapter I discussed, the major critique of mystical body theology by Mannes Koster was that it was “merely a metaphor.” Several theologians reacted strongly to that proposition throughout the years. Mersch takes up the issue in a nuanced way at the beginning of The Whole Christ: “That one should refuse to accept the words ‘Mystical Body’ and ‘members and Head’ as the statement of a thesis whence all possible consequences can be drawn—nothing could be wiser; these metaphors, for such they are, merely indicate a unity that transcends the biological realities from which they are taken. It is best to retain the traditional name and call it a ‘mystical’ union. However, it must be clearly understood that this term is by no means synonymous with ‘nebulous’ or ‘semi-real’” (9). As both Michel and Mersch indicate here, the issue is that if “mystical body” is not a metaphor, then it can be too closely identified with Christ’s physical body. If it is a metaphor, then it is not real. Michel’s contemporary Paul Hanly Furfey, in Fire on the Earth, walks a nuanced line on the question, calling mystical body a “similitude” (42), but then emphasizing, “The Mystical Body is real. It is called mystical to distinguish it not from what is real, but to distinguish it from what is visible and physical” (43). We shall have occasion to consider this issue further, especially as it pertains to the work of Henri de Lubac in Chapter IV.
provides a center of gravity for his extrapolations on social questions, but also an *esprit de finesse*, to borrow Blaise Pascal’s term, resulting from that connection. Pinning down Michel’s mystical body theology is difficult precisely because of this aesthetic dimension, the phenomenological excess built into his own liturgical imagination. In this regard, Michel’s aims are akin to Mersch’s, whose work on the mystical body aimed not at writing an ecclesiology but rather a fundamental theological treatise, and who averred that “the doctrine [of the mystical body of Christ] always and necessarily retains a certain vagueness.”

Michel’s understanding becomes clearer by contrast with Joseph Clifford Fenton, America’s consummate neo-scholastic theologian. Fenton argued with British theologian Joseph Brodie Brosnan in the pages of the *Ecclesiastical Review* about the nuances of who is acting in the mystical body in 1939. “The proper act of the Mystical Body is not different from the proper act of Christ Himself,” writes Fenton. His point is clear, if not nuanced. While he prescinds from completely identifying the acts of Christ and the mystical body, Fenton nevertheless does not allow much room for mediative distinction. As the mystical body acts, so does Christ. By subtle, but important, contrast Michel writes, “Christ lives and acts in His mystical body as truly as He lived and acted in His

---


physical body while on earth.” Fenton and Michel voice a similar sentiment here, but there is an *esprit de finesse* suffused in Michel’s prose, perhaps by the simultaneous emphasis on Christ living in His mystical body. Surely Michel’s way of describing this relationship was deeply informed by his years of reflecting on its liturgical character. The liturgy is nothing if not mediative. “The liturgy,” writes Michel, “is essentially the external embodiment of an interior soul and spirit. In fact in its sacramental mysteries it is above all else an incarnation of the truly Divine, the making present of the supernatural in its own mystical but real actuality.” In Michel’s way of speaking, the mystical body clearly mediates Christ. There is no danger of simple identification.

In fact, for Michel the liturgy is the *sine qua non* of the mystical body of Christ. “Without the liturgy,” he explains, “there would be no Church such as Christ has instituted. Without the liturgy there would be no mystical body of Christ, in which the divine mission of Christ continues.” Michel carries on Beauduin’s emphasis on Christ as mediator by identifying the rites of the Church as the locus of Christ’s ongoing mediation. “It is above all in the official acts of the Church that Christ himself lives and acts. In them He continues his active mediatorship between God and man… It is through the liturgy that the redemption of Christ is extended through all time for the constant glory of God and salvation of souls. *The liturgy is thus officially the life of the mystical body of Christ.*” One of Michel’s favored ways of discussing what it meant to be a Christian was to live the “Christ Life”; therefore, his task in the textbook from which the above quotation comes is reflected in its title: to exposit on “Our Life in Christ.”

---

The liturgical, spiritual depth of Michel’s appropriation of the mystical body of Christ is connected to its genealogy. In the same article in which Michel bemoans the widespread lack of appreciation for the mystical body, he insists that imitation of Christ is not a lofty enough goal for the Christian. After all, an agnostic could imitate him.\textsuperscript{245} Rather, as Michel spells out in his notes for a retreat given to his sister community in Collegeville, the Mystical Body calls us to a supernatural transformation: a “wholehearted oblation of self in union with Christ… linked with sacrifice of altar.”\textsuperscript{246} Here, there are clear echoes of Pierre de Bérulle. “For Bérulle, participation in the mystery of Christ is not simply ‘imitation of Christ,’ which would be something purely external; it is a union with Christ’s own life and actions.”\textsuperscript{247} Bérulle was influential upon Marmion and it is the latter whom Michel cites in his retreat notes. His description of Benedictine asceticism in the retreat notes follows directly upon Michel’s explication of the Mystical Body of Christ—that one cannot separate one’s “own spiritual life from that of fellowship in Christ.”\textsuperscript{248}

Bérulle called for self-annihilation\textsuperscript{249}—a controverted concept in his work—but Michel will have no obliteration of the individual in the Mystical Body. In a

\textsuperscript{246} Virgil Michel, Notes for Retreat given to the sisters at St. Benedict’s in Collegeville, 1937, Virgil Michel Papers, Saint John’s Abbey Archives, Series Z, Box 31, Folder 4.
\textsuperscript{248} Virgil Michel, Notes for Retreat given to the sisters at St. Benedict’s in Collegeville, 1937, Saint John’s Abbey Archives, Series Z, Box 31, Folder 5.
posthumously published article, arguing that the liturgy is the foundation of religious experience for “member[s] of Christ,” Michel clarifies the point:

The religious experience of the liturgy, more than any other, is calculated to enrich the individual for the sole reason that it brings him into such intimate real contact with Christ, the true way and life. The liturgy begins and ends with Christ as the sole mediator between God and man. The more fully the soul enters into the liturgical action, the more intimately is it united with the fellow-members of the mystical body, but only through the head Christ. The liturgical action is ever a sacrifice of oneself to God, the rendering of a proper homage to Him. In its repeated participation there is an ever closer personal union effected with Christ, the consciousness of Christ ever grows in the soul. This is the ultimate reason for the increasing growth of the individual soul, despite the fact that it seems to give up its own individuality in entering into the collective action of the fellowship. Christ is indeed infinite in His being and life. Yet the union of the finite individual with Christ, while it is a sinking of self in Him, is not a destruction of self. Rather of self, a sort of divinization of self, in which the best characteristics of the self are not destroyed but transformed into a higher supernatural richness of being. Liturgical action means the oblation of self, it is true, but never the annihilation of self except in the sense just explained. It is an oblation that has as its effect the receiving of sevenfold in return. It is a happy exchange of gifts between God and man, in which by the very nature of the case man becomes infinitely enriched. All the members participating in the common action become thus enriched, each becomes a new man in Christ, and all are assimilated to one and the same transcendent Christ. And yet all the members thus ennobled remain ever different among themselves, truer and higher individual personalities than before.”

The second sentence of this long quotation is Michel repeating one of Beauduin’s favorite lines. As mentioned in the last chapter, Beauduin never tired of emphasizing Christ as the sole mediator, challenging an over emphasis on the Blessed Mother or the pope.

Reacting explicitly to Nietzsche and his accusation of Christian slave morality, Michel rejects a juridical understanding of the Church, which is connected to a juridical understanding of sacrifice. This “destruction theory” of sacrifice whereby we celebrate the Mass to “appease [God’s] anger” easily results in a faulty conception of our

---

relationship with God, both extrinsic and juridical. Therefore, the understanding of the role of sacrifice in daily living tends toward a slave mentality, wherein one is obliterated by the Master.\(^{251}\) Instead, Michel offers the mystical body of Christ, “Thus membership in the Church is not confined to the minimum discharging of a debt, but implies an active participation in the life of the Church. To be a member of the mystic body of Christ means always to be a living member, and to cooperate actively in the life of the whole… There is in his calling nothing of the status of the slave and there is in his service of God naught of the attitude of slave morality.”\(^{252}\)

Because the self is not obliterated or subjugated, individuality remains. In a letter to Patrick Cummins more than a decade earlier, Michel wrote, “You believe the liturgy is all-comprehensive; you also must believe that every man is individual and very limited. Is not the inevitable conclusion that we must agree to look at different angles of such a catholic thing as the liturgy without feeling strangers?”\(^{253}\) The liturgy, the expression of the mystical body, admits of individuality that spills over into our particular appropriation of it. We grasp different sides of the jewel, but are still unified.

The Eucharist, the apex of the liturgical celebration, was oftentimes where the problem of unresolved individualism became most acute.

It is in regard to holy Communion, above all, that we are accustomed to speak in terms of individualism…. Christ indeed enters into individual souls according to our way of speaking. But Christ is not multiplied in the process, He is ever one and the same Christ, so that Communion is rather the more intimate union of souls in Christ. This is the teaching of the Church. St. Thomas, prince of theologians, expresses it by saying that the effect of the Eucharist is the Mystical

\(^{251}\) Michel, “The True Christian Spirit,” 137.
\(^{252}\) Ibid., 140.
\(^{253}\) Michel to Cummins, 8 September 1926, CAA, Patrick Cummins Collection, Box 72, Folder: “Patrick, Liturgical Press Correspondence”.

96
Body of Christ, i.e., the more intimate union of members with their divine Head.\textsuperscript{254}

For Michel, the Mystical Body communicates participation—participation in the Life of Christ by each of His members. This involves a sense of Church which elevates activity—“that which the liturgy offers should be translated into action”\textsuperscript{255}—over the dominant conception of passivity, of simply having one’s empty soul filled with grace or of merely “hearing” a Mass. Any approach which places the laity simply on the receiving end of teaching and sacramental grace fails to exemplify the extent to which the Christian life is really a participation in Christ’s life that elevates us.

Michel had learned from Beauduin that liturgy was the true source of the mystical body of Christ and that one enters into the mystical body by way of it. The liturgy is, of course, sanctifying, but sacramental grace does not eliminate the need for education. Therefore, a primary aim of the liturgical apostolate in the U. S. was liturgical education—to help pastoral workers and lay people see the richness of the liturgy.

According to Michel, that education could proceed in two ways. It could begin with the various concrete elements of the liturgy and proceed didactically. Or, instead, “it may work at a deeper understanding of the focal concept the liturgy, of the supreme supernatural reality of the Mystic Body of Christ,” which ultimately lights “a new flame of religious love at work in the soul.”\textsuperscript{256} Such a flame, Michel insisted, cannot but result in a deeper love of Christ encountered in the liturgy. In terms of rational explanation,

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{254} Michel, \textit{Our Life in Christ}, 10–11.
    \item \textsuperscript{255} Virgil Michel, Review of \textit{The Church Catholic and the Spirit of the Liturgy}, \textit{Oration Fratres} (1936): 238.
    \item \textsuperscript{256} Michel, “With Our Readers,” 186–7. Michel wrote, “the liturgy is the embodiment of God, who has in the liturgy descended from heaven and eternity into time and this earth of ours, and who abides and acts there throughout all time.” See Virgil Michel, “The Liturgy and Catholic Life.”
\end{itemize}
Michel claimed that “without an understanding of the mystical body of Christ it is impossible to understand the true social nature of the liturgy as the life of that body.” However, because the liturgy is “essentially the expression of the inner supernatural reality of the fellowship of all the souls that constitute the mystical body,” one could garner an understanding of the mystical body by participation in the liturgy. “All parts of the liturgy,” Michel explained, “increase knowledge of the organic fellowship in which all men are actually, or by destiny, true members with Christ of His Mystical Body, and help the mind more readily to see Christ in all men, and to serve God in them.” Thus, when Michel wrote that the mystical body of Christ “can hardly be described by those who do not understand, but it is understood by all who have experienced it,” he was thinking primarily of the liturgy, but also of the other components of living the Christ life, which include the works of mercy and other work for justice.

Solidarity Rooted in Christ

Michel returned from Europe with answers to questions that pestered him before he left. He saw the source of contemporary social problems rooted in individualism. The problem was that life was generally lived solely in terms of the material aspect of human existence. In Michel’s account, this problem was not solely political and economic. Indeed, ideas, politics, and economics always went together for Michel. Michel traced a line of progression leading to contemporary “naturalism,” the position which admits of no personal God, from the “weakened conception of God” in Deism, which was preceded

258 Ibid.
by the extrinsic, vengeful God of Puritanism and Calvinism.  

Michel emphasized the vast consequences of a deep-seated individualism. The Great Depression was not simply an economic matter, as some would claim, but rather “the logical result of the general philosophy of life that has guided human affairs for some centuries.” Its onset only confirmed the failures of individualism. “It takes but a moment’s glance,” he wrote, “to see that both the totalitarian State and the amorphous mass-rabble aggregate that individualism has made of democracy are quite out of harmony with the Christian concept of society as reflected in the mystical body of Christ.” For Michel, steeped in Benedictine spirituality, all problems are ultimately theological problems. And the root causes of the Great Depression are individualistic—a profound failure to recognize and live a communal, cooperative life. Therefore, the solution is the Mystical Body of Christ:

In every member joining the mystical body, the redemption of Christ becomes active, essentially in the same way, yet with individual differences. It is in the totality of this fellowship of souls in Christ, that the redemptive work of Christ finds its full realization. For that reason the true Christ-life is realized in the common fellowship as such. The individual realizes it in himself by joining the corporate life of the fellowship, despite the fact that the individual member always retains his own personality and his own personal responsibility.

Michel’s vision of the Mystical Body of Christ solves the problem of individualism without absorbing the individual in the manner of various “collectivisms.” In entering into the Mystical Body of Christ, one becomes ‘‘another Christ,’ carrying the divine life

---

in himself.”264 Here, again, we see the influence of the French spirituality school, which emphasized the Christian life as incorporation into Christ; the Christian becomes alter Christus.

We gain a window into Michel’s social thought, especially its reception, by listening to Eugene McCarthy’s biographer. “According to his teachers,” Dominic Sandbrook writes, “McCarthy was particularly interested in the problems of the day and was ‘very much under the influence of Virgil Michel’s ideas’.” “Fr. Virgil,” Sandbrook continues, “was probably the strongest single influence on his political thought.” McCarthy graduated from St. John’s in 1935 and returned there to teach economics and education from 1940–1943. He became known by his students at St. John’s for his articulation of Catholic social teaching, especially compassion for the poor and oppressed, referencing Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker repeatedly. Later, McCarthy described what was happening at St. John’s in the thirties: “a sophisticated, an historically advanced application of the Benedictine commitment to worship and work, not as separable, but as the essence of the creative or re-creative role of man.” Michel’s vision brought these principles firmly to the ground: “The social consequences of his teaching are clear. If we participate in the liturgy according to this teaching, we take on full responsibility for our fellow men disregarding national boundaries, differences of race, or of culture.”265 The French stream of mystical body theology had given Michel a theological apparatus to develop the implications of Benedictine life.

264 Ibid., 37.
Michel tried to inculcate appreciation of these implications even in his young students. Upon his death, Michel left a manuscript of a textbook for grade-schoolers that was published posthumously in 1939. Part One of the text is titled “Source of the Life in Christ.” After chapters on God, Original Sin, and Redemption, Chapter IV covers “The New Creation.” This last chapter is where Michel discusses the mystical body of Christ—it is the immediate implication of Redemption in Christ. It is only after that, in Chapter V, that Michel discusses the Church as such.\(^{266}\) Such organization is no accident for the scholastic-minded Michel, who was often telling colleagues to think in more organized fashion. Thus, the mystical body of Christ is theologically prior to ecclesiology. For Michel, the mystical body of Christ is the effect of the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery; the church is clearly caught up in that action of Christ, but it does not exhaust the mystical body. For Michel, this does not mean that the Church is an expendable add-on; rather the opposite. That it is the clearest place where we encounter and learn about the mystical body.

That deeper cognizance of the mystical body of Christ—the fundamental form of our salvation—cemented in liturgical practice leads to various insights about social difficulties. Two years before his death—1936—in the pages of *Orate Fratres*, Michel celebrated “the casual statement of a social worker” who proclaimed, “The only remedy against race prejudice… is to get the children to understand what their membership in the mystical body really means.” He acknowledged the myriad differences among humans and elaborated upon her claim:

How can all these natural and unnatural differences be weathered by man…? Only by a common consciousness of a bond far deeper than all these which binds

\(^{266}\) Michel, *Our Life in Christ.*
all men in a common fellowship, a bond that not only surmounts nature but elevates it supernaturally...Such a bond is the mystical body of Christ, not merely as a supernatural fellowship, but as a supernatural source of divine energy and life for each individual member of it.

In order to supplant the individualistic and nationalistic tendencies rampant in Europe and taking some root in the U.S., Christians must strive to “attain and spread consciousness of the wonderful doctrine of the mystical body of Christ as a truth to be lived and at the same time a source of spiritual inspiration and of supernatural strength for living faithful to that truth.”267 The solidarity of the mystical body led Michel to work with Catherine DeHueck Doherty to facilitate St. John’s University’s reception of African American students by way of De Hueck’s Friendship House in Harlem. It seems that in so doing, St. John’s became the first U.S. Catholic University to accept African Americans.268

Michel wearied of hearing many of his fellow Americans, even his fellow Catholics, denounce Communism repeatedly without addressing, as had Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI in their social encyclicals, the dangers posed by industrial capitalism. His exasperation leaps off the page when he writes, “If I mention the blindness ever of spiritual leaders to the immensely important trend of events, I am not referring to a disregard of the menace of communism...nor primarily to the menace of fascism...but rather to the more insidious menace that modern capitalism or bourgeois civilization has constituted for all spiritual values.”269 It was unfettered capitalism (i.e., economic individualistic ideology), after all, that led to the rubble of the Great Depression.

269 Virgil Michel, Foreword to Emmanuel Mounier, A Personalist Manifesto, trans. the monks of St. John’s Abbey (New York: Longmans, Green Co., 1938), xii.
As Michel inspired McCarthy, he also engaged various radical movements. His support of organized labor led some to think him more on their side than perhaps he ultimately was. One Catholic Communist wrote a letter to Michel expressing a “hurt protest” after Michel had argued in a *Commonweal* article that those on the side of labor were just as capable of individualism as the capitalists. And, as always, Michel attacked individualism with great vim. Like Chesterton, Belloc, and many Catholics of his day, Michel considered himself a “distribuist” in economic matters, a position based on the vision outlined in *Rerum Novarum* and, later, *Quadragesimo Anno*. Yet, he was surprised at the places he found these principles articulated. In a 1935 letter to Marvin Lowes of the *American Review*, Michel refers to Lowes’ desire to have a Catholic priest critique C. H. Douglas’s 1924 book, *Social Credit*, which espouses a distributist vision. Michel says that he approached Douglas’s work “as a scoffer and left as an admirer.” He was met with “great surprise…to find out to what high degree Douglas’s *Social Credit* is such a remarkable plan for effecting the distributist system.”

In a letter to a New York Franciscan suspicious of the Catholic Worker, Michel vigorously defends Day’s budding social movement: “As far as I know there is no more successful antagonist against Communism in this country than the Catholic Worker.” Michel thought that the rejection of Communism had to be careful not to abandon the plight of the worker. Further in 1937, Michel—tongue in cheek—lays out a program for the fight against Communism. He notes the fervor with which many American Catholics

---

270 Roberto O. Carleton to Michel, Brooklyn, 28 May 1938. SJAA, Series Z Box 23, Folder 7.
272 Michel to Adalbert Callahan, O.F.M., Collegeville, 6 February 1936, SJAA, Series Z, Box 23, Folder 7.
have been calling for a “good old American fight” against the Reds. Michel’s own eight-point “campaign” plan of Christian warfare includes preaching the mystical body and universal brotherhood of all as well as the social teaching of the Church from the pulpit, pooling extra resources for the needy, and opening all Catholic institutions as housing for the homeless. Of course Michel means to illustrate how Catholic opposition to Communism does not include opposition to shared resources. This much, he would say, could be clearly ascertained from the liturgy, which is why the most important point in his battle plan is that each “soldier” begin the day with Mass.

**Conclusions**

Michel was not, strictly speaking, a theologian. In fact, none of the group that made up what Paul Hanly Furfey referred to as the “new social Catholicism” were. Among Americans such as Michel, Dorothy Day, Furfey, Catherine DeHueck, John LaFarge, Daniel Lord, and others, the mystical body of Christ was not simply an ecclesiological image or category, but rather a descriptor of how life in Christ should be lived. Ostensibly, this is because the new social Catholicism was not driven by theologians—who were at the time largely limited to neo-scholastic thinkers, but by intelligent Catholics with a social sense. There appears no sharp division between theology and “spirituality” among the social Catholics because their theological concerns

---

273 On “the new social Catholicism,” see Joseph P. Chinnici and Angelyn Dries, eds., *Prayer and Practice in the American Catholic Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 156–59. Chinnici and Dries publish Furfey’s letter to Norman McKenna on which Furfey copied Michel, among others. Among the salient principles that appear to tie together new social Catholics, Furfey includes the conviction that “we must live the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ.”

were always resolutely practical. The theological writing and reflection of these social Catholics was not considered theology per se; they wrote and reflected, therefore, with the freedom afforded by such a distinction. As we have seen, in the post-\textit{Pascendi} era, theology was construed as a very narrow enterprise, undertaken by Roman-trained neo-scholastics who wrote treatises that either were—or read very much like—manuals. It was a very circumscribed task that often commented on Thomas’s commentators. Michel was very critical of this tradition, though he remained a scholastic. While as early as the 1920s and 1930s, \textit{ressourcement} theology had its beginnings in Europe, in the U.S. scholars thinking theologically were formally situated in other fields, writing for different audiences.\footnote{See Portier, \textit{Divided Friends}, 326ff. Portier lays out three specific post-\textit{Pascendi} avenues for theological thinking in the United States: (1) The National Catholic War Council and the Social Sciences; (2) Catholic Medievalism; and (3) History.}

Clearly, for Michel, the mystical body of Christ described the church, but blossomed forth into a way of conceiving the whole of the Christ-life, which was always corporate in its orientation and broad in its application. The mystical body of Christ was key to living the Christian life—for everyone—it wasn’t simply the domain of theologians. It was a main theme in several retreats that he gave. It was the starting point for young people to think about the implications of God’s saving work in Christ. It had implications for the structure of society, for asceticism, for the family, for education, for art and architecture.
At the conclusion of the last chapter, mystical body theology was, even beyond the twenties, roaring. That chapter illustrated the particular version of the French socio-liturgical stream of mystical body theology that Michel brought to and developed in the United States, arguing that, in line with his French-speaking counterparts in Europe, Michel’s theology of the mystical body brought together liturgical and social questions. Following his mentor, Beauduin, Michel’s mystical body theology was not limited to ecclesiological treatises and even pushed beyond an ecclesiological category or model. Michel thrust the fluidity of mystical body theology even further, allowing it to penetrate the entirety of Christian being in the world. Further, as we have seen, Michel’s pragmatic personalist vision fired a more practical theology of the mystical body grounded in the liturgy of the church and applicable to everything from economics to catechesis.

But by 1970, treatises dedicated to “the mystical body of Christ” had virtually disappeared from Catholic discourse. What had been a pervasive theological norm for Michel, and for the French stream to which he was indebted, became an ecclesiological building block, an image or model among many in composing an adequate ecclesiology.
Thus when looking back at figures such as Michel, for example, “mystical body of Christ” is often understood merely as the ecclesiology he held.

Even in terms of ecclesiology, many thought that, following the 1943 magisterial endorsement of mystical body theology by Pope Pius XII, this would be a dominant ecclesial image at Vatican II; but while this theology was thematic to the preparatory schemas, it only peppered the conciliar documents themselves. There are many, many elements at play, especially at the Council, in this shift of theological sensibility. This chapter aims to highlight and contextualize several of the factors leading to this sea change. It will argue that there is a confluence of reasons for the eclipse of mystical body theology. These include: the effects of World War II, the rise of Catholic critical biblical scholarship, and, finally, the consolidation of Roman-stream mystical body of Christ theology in the working schemas of the Second Vatican Council. It will be evident throughout the chapter that the variegation of mystical body theology established in the first two chapters is necessary to understand the complexity of the factors leading to its eclipse.

The Catholic Library Association’s *Catholic Periodical Index* tells the story. In the very first volume, covering 1930 to 1933, the heading “Mystical Body” simply refers readers to the subject “Catholic Church.” There, one finds about a dozen entries pertaining directly to the theme of the mystical body of Christ, including articles by Fr. Vincent McNabb, several from *Orate Fratres*, as well as a few reviews of a book on the theme written by Abbé Joseph Anger and translated by the Paulist editor of the *Catholic World*, John J. Burke. The next volume, which spans the following five years, from 1934
to 1938, lists seventy-three entries under the heading “Mystical Body of Christ,” including a cross-reference to “Priesthood, Universal.”

The cross-reference indicates precisely the cutting edge nature of the theology of the mystical body during this period. The question of the priesthood of believers, having dominated the Protestant Reformation, was not a mainstream topic of Catholic theological conversation in the 1930s. Reviving it was, however, a key component of Michel’s program for liturgical renewal. Indeed, the heading shows three articles, one in *Orate Fratres* itself and another in *Catholic School Journal* by Gerald Ellard, associate editor of *Orate Fratres*. The third is part of a series on the history and implications of *alter Christus* theology in the *Ecclesiastical Review*.276 Joseph Bluett, in his bibliography of mystical body theology in French, English, and Latin periodicals, describes 1937 as “the crest of the acceleration” of mystical body studies.277 Especially at its zenith, mystical body theology in the English-speaking world was connected to, and itself opening up, new avenues in Catholic theological reflection.

With its fourteenth volume in 1967–68, *The Catholic Periodical Index* merged with *The Guide to Catholic Literature*, creating *The Catholic Periodical and Literature Index*. In addition to the 123 fully indexed periodicals, there were now several thousand

276 The patristic truism, *Christians alter Christus* or “the Christian is another Christ” was also thematic to Michel’s apostolate, especially its pedagogical arm. For its most famous locus, see St. Cyprian of Carthage, *De dominica oratione*, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), § 9, where Cyprian reflects on divine filiation. Michel often used the phrase and found it supportive of his mystical body theology, even as Mersch found Cyprian’s work to render a mere “moral union” (Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 383). See Chapter I, above.

books included on the register. By this point, however, mystical body of Christ theology had slowed to a trickle. This volume showed three citations under “Mystical Body of Christ” and the next four volumes, cataloging materials through 1976, contained a total of six citations (only two in English), with no subject heading at all for “mystical body of Christ” in volume eighteen (1975–76).

**Mystical Body at the Second Vatican Council**

Clearly, something had changed over those forty years. Initial inclinations would lead us to suggest the Second Vatican Council as the primary impetus for change. The Council’s well-known privileging of the image “People of God” as the title of Chapter II in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, served as a signal of change from Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis Christi*, which enshrined the mystical body of Christ movement in magisterial teaching twenty years earlier. The phrase “mystical body [of Christ]” does appear several times throughout the conciliar documents, often when the bishops wish to indicate the Church present across space and time, but it is no longer the most “noble,” most “sublime,” and most “divine” expression for the Church of Christ, as Pius had deemed it. Chapter I explored to some extent the genesis and wider context of *Mystici Corporis*, but in order to understand what happened on the floor of the

---

278 A non-comprehensive list of “mystical body” mentions in the documents of the Second Vatican includes: *Sacrosantum Concilium*: § 7 (with reference to worship offered by Head and members in the liturgy), § 99 (regarding Liturgy of the Hours); *Lumen Gentium*: § 7, § 8 (notably here “mystical body of Christ” is paired with “the society structured with hierarchical organs” as two ends of the one pole that makes the one Church), § 23 (twice), § 26 (“mystical body” without prepositional phrase), § 50, § 54 (“mystical body” without prepositional phrase); *Gaudium et Spes*: § 50; *Ad Gentes*: § 7; *Christus Dominus*: § 33; *Perfectae Caritatis*: § 7; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: § 2 (“mystical body” without prepositional phrase), § 3 (the apostolic charge comes to the laity directly from Christ the Head into whose Mystical Body they are incorporated in Baptism).

Council, it is necessary to look at the encyclical’s ramifications in order to appreciate the influence that Mystici had upon those in attendance at the Council.

*Mystici* had shifted the ecclesiological conversation on the continent in several ways. First, it encouraged nascent Catholic ecumenical activity. As James Livingston notes, the encyclical stands in a line of “an increasingly positive attitude toward the salvation of non-Christians” by an emphasis on invincible ignorance. He favorably quotes a source who says that Pius widens the understanding of implicit membership in the Church to implicit relationship with God.\(^{280}\) However, as noted in Chapter I, the encyclical’s discussion of those not inside the physical boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church is not limited only to those who are in the state of invincible ignorance or in the words of the encyclical, those who are “not yet enlightened by the truth of the Gospel.”\(^{281}\) In the following section, Pius says that “those who do not belong to the visible Body of the Catholic Church” nevertheless “by an unconscious desire and longing…have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer.”\(^{282}\) As ecumenically-minded theologians reflected upon the encyclical with their Protestant conversation partners, the questions raised by Mystici about membership in the church were brought to direct discussion.\(^{283}\)


\(^{281}\) *Mystici Corporis*, § 102.

\(^{282}\) *Mystici Corporis*, § 103. In Latin, “*ad mysticum Redemptoris Corpus ordinentur,*” that is, “they are ordered to the mystical body of the Redeemer.”

\(^{283}\) Along with the more open notes sounded by the encyclical, there were other parts that struck a potentially more restrictive tone. For example in § 22: “Actually only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess
Second, the encyclical describes the Roman Catholic Church as the mystical body of Christ. In light of what has just been said in the preceding paragraph, this point is somewhat paradoxical. Pius firmly planted the center of gravity of the mystical body of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church, but the encyclical affirmed, in ways that previous magisterial statements had not, the relationship to the mystical body of those outside its visible bounds. In 1943—about two months after Mystici’s promulgation—Father Richard (soon to be Cardinal Archbishop) Cushing of Boston had urged a fellow priest to refrain from going on record with a hardline stance against Catholic cooperation with other religions, arguing that “it would antagonize those outside the fold at the very same time when the world needs…collaboration among those who call themselves Christians.” As archbishop, Cushing oversaw in his archdiocese the 1953 excommunication of Jesuit Leonard Feeney following upon just such a public hardline stance on extra ecclesiam nulla salus. It is important to recall that Pope Pius XII supported Feeney’s excommunication. In fact, the letter from the Holy Office to Cardinal Cushing regarding the matter makes reference to Mystici Corporis in defending the

the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed.”

284 Mystici Corporis, § 13. See Chapter I, above.


church’s openness to the salvation of those united to it by an implicit desire.\textsuperscript{287} This letter would later be quoted in \textit{Lumen Gentium}.\textsuperscript{288}

Serving as confessor to Pope Pius during this time, Augustin Bea was not present for the drafting of \textit{Mystici Corporis}, but, according to Jerome Vereb, did influence much more heavily the post-war encyclical \textit{Mediator Dei} (1947), which can be read as answering some of those questions about Church membership raised by \textit{Mystici}.\textsuperscript{289} In the latter encyclical, Pius writes, “By the waters of Baptism, as by common right, Christians are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ the Priest, and by the ‘character’ which is imprinted on their souls, they are appointed to give worship to God. Thus they participate, according to their condition, in the priesthood of Christ.”\textsuperscript{290} The move toward further recognition of the relationship of non-Catholic Christians begun in \textit{Mystici} reached a further articulation in \textit{Mediator}. Of course, the expressed topic of the latter letter was the liturgy of the Church, which Pius described as “public worship…rendered

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{287} The letter from the Holy Office to Cushing, dated 8 August 1949, rejected Feeney’s position that grave sin was not required for a person’s consignment to hell and further that anyone outside the visible bounds of the Roman Catholic Church was outside of the reach of salvation. The letter is itself a kind of commentary on \textit{Mystici Corporis}. Marchetti-Selvaggiani and Ottaviani of the Holy Office refer to the encyclical multiple times throughout their letter. They interpret the encyclical rather narrowly, but they nevertheless reject Feeney’s hardline stance. Their letter was published, with an accompanying English translation, in \textit{The American Ecclesiastical Review}, after Cushing was instructed by Rome to make the letter public. See F. Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani, Vatican City to Archbishop Richard J. Cushing, Boston, MA, 8 August 1949 in \textit{The American Ecclesiastical Review} 127 (1952): 307–15.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Second Vatican Council, \textit{Lumen Gentium}, § 16, supplementary note 19.
\item \textsuperscript{289} On Bea’s work in this regard, see Vereb, “\textit{Because He Was a German},” 131–43.
\item \textsuperscript{290} Pius XII, \textit{Mediator Dei}, § 88.
\end{itemize}
by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members” and followed up with several important liturgical reforms.\(^{291}\)

The fact remains that the encyclical did indeed narrow the conception of the mystical body of Christ—which had been variously conceived, but was often more porous in boundary definition among those connected to the French and German streams—to the Roman Catholic Church. And from the viewpoint of Pope Pius’s 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*, *Mystici* had clearly identified the Roman Catholic Church and the mystical body of Christ as “one and the same.” *Humani Generis*, ghostwritten by Sebastian Tromp, had splashed cold water on the hot and crackling *ressourcement* movement.\(^{292}\) There is another, often missed, implication of this move for Catholic theology. In so doing, the encyclical also delimited mystical body theology to ecclesiology. That is to say, after *Mystici*, ecclesiology was the indubitable proper sphere of inquiry for studies concerning the mystical body of Christ. This is an important point because it sets the framework for its consideration at the council and also narrows the

---

\(^{291}\) Ibid., § 20.

\(^{292}\) Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, § 27. In Latin, “corpus Christi mysticum et Ecclesiam Catholicam Romanam unum idemque esse.” On Tromp’s role in *Humani Generis* see Teuffenbach, *Aus Liebe und Treue zur Kirche*, 40. Teuffenbach’s archival research has demonstrated that Tromp played a key role in that encyclical as well, “Aufgrund der Archivforschung kann inzwischen auch mit großer Sicherheit gesagt werden, daß Tromp Endredaktor der Enzyklika ‘Humani Generis’ war.” Michael Kerlin has noted the obvious impact of Garrigou’s theological work, if not his direct hand, on the content of *Humani Generis*, “For years, Garrigou-Lagrange had advised pontifical congregations and had maintained an official role with the Holy Office of the Inquisition. What is more, as one who had regular conversations with Pius XII, he was surely privy to the worries of the pope and the curialists, and probably did his share to make them worry about matters philosophical and theological. When *Humani Generis* appeared, it was hard to miss his influence….” No one has ever found a ‘smoking gun’ proving that Garrigou-Lagrange shared in ghost-writing *Humani Generis* or has ever fixed his exact contribution. But…it is plain that he had a major role in its gestation.” Michael Kerlin, “Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: Defending the Faith from *Pascendi dominici gregis* to *Humani Generis*,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 1 (2007): 110–111.
view of post-conciliar commentators on the development of mystical body theology, by whom it is often considered as a “model of the Church,” or in some similar conceptual framework. As we have seen, however, in the decades before Mystici, especially for the French stream and for Michel, mystical body was not limited only to ecclesiology, but functioned more as a fundamental theological norm from which a variety of insights flowed.

Not only was mystical body theology narrowed to ecclesiology after Mystici, but ecclesiology was magisterially narrowed to mystical body theology. This is the third point, a key to understanding the place of mystical body theology at Vatican II. The encyclical laid down a new formal starting point for ecclesiology from the magisterium. While Pius X and Pius XI had made passing reference to the mystical body of Christ in some of their letters, mostly in conjunction with Catholic Action exhortations, there had never been a magisterial document of Mystici’s scope that had reflected on the Church itself. As such, Mystici Corporis made mystical body theology the de facto starting point for the discussions on the nature of the Church at Vatican II. The composition of the theological preparatory commission charged with composing schemas for the bishops’ initial consideration ensured that the mystical body theology dominant in the schema De Ecclesia would be of the Roman stream. As noted in Chapter I, Tromp—the commission’s secretary—had served as Pope Pius’s chief collaborator for Mystici and was also heavily involved in preparing the initial schema on the Church. At the Council itself, Yves Congar summed up Tromp’s approach to the schema, discussions concerning it, and related questions: “He brings everything under his one thesis: Ecclesia catholica
Thus, the theology of the mystical body articulated in the schema did not sound the same liturgical, ecumenical, quasiporous, and sacramental tones as had that of Beauduin, Mersch, and Michel.

The first chapter of the schema—a joint effort of Tromp and Ugo Lattanzi—explicated the mystical body of Christ in two paragraphs, with an emphasis on its visibility and the various roles within it, and ended with a final two paragraphs that assert the identity between the visible society and the mystical body, Roman Catholicism and the Church of Christ. A cadre of especially French and Belgian periti, including Gérard Philips, Congar, de Lubac, and Joseph Lécuyer, were intent on broadening this conception of the mystical body of Christ, as applied to the church.

When the schema was, in fact, presented on the floor of the Council, Achille Cardinal Liénart began the discussion with his now famous critique of the draft for insinuating that the whole of the mystical body was contained in the Roman Catholic Church, which began a series of calls from bishops for an entirely new working document on the Church. Following upon Liénart, Cardinal Alfrink described well the Roman (and the schema’s) approach to the mystical body when he noted that while he

293 Yves Congar, OP, My Journal of the Council, 66.  
295 Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, vol. I, no. 4 (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1970), 126–7. Cf. Congar, My Journal of the Council, 224. See also Richard R. Gaillardetz, The Church in the Making, 9–13, 43–45, 69. Gaillardetz follows the line of interpretation that the Mystical Body theology of Mystici was a precursor to Vatican II, with an important Christological emphasis that endured, but which suffered from an overly narrow “absolute identification of the mystical body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church” (69). Further, the encyclical lacked an articulation of the more sacramental character, the spiritual dynamism of the church, the pope “limited his reflections to the visibility and institutional integrity of the church” (43).
appreciated defining the Church as the body of Christ, the draft placed too much emphasis on the image’s external sense and does not adequately engage the relationship of others to the mystical body.\textsuperscript{296} Cardinal Frings, one of the most outspoken German prelates against the holocaust in the early forties, added to the chorus a few days later, describing the mystical body theology in the schema as “very sociological.”\textsuperscript{297}

It was Philips, the Leuven theologian and great conciliator, who eventually proposed the new working text in committee in 1962. It began by emphasizing—from the start—the church as mystery and only then moving to a chapter on the church as hierarchical. In so doing, Philips and his collaborators separated the two elements that the Roman school of mystical body theology had cemented together: the Christological and fundamentally mysterious quality of the Church that had been ingredient in other strains of mystical body theology, and the hierarchical structure of the church, which flowed from that mystery, but which was not the dispenser or sole arbiter of it. In his commentary on \textit{Lumen Gentium}, Philips emphasized the thoroughly Christological character of the constitution in its final form: “the Constitution on the Church adopts from the very beginning the Christocentric perspective, a perspective which is insistently affirmed throughout the development. The Church is profoundly convinced of it: The light of the Gentiles radiates not from her but from her divine Founder: yet, the Church well knows, that being reflected on her countenance, this irradiation reaches the whole of humanity.”\textsuperscript{298} Philips thus maintained the Christological emphasis of the mystical body

movement, while distancing it from the strong juridical emphases of many in the Roman school.

In emphasizing the Christological, the draft that reached the council floor in 1963 had been aided by a reference to the Church as sacrament. That emphasis came largely from the German contingent, led by theologian Otto Semmelroth. On the floor, Frings called for a more extensive treatment in *De Ecclesia* on the Church as sacrament. In the words of Dennis M. Doyle,

> “On September 30, 1963, Cardinal Josef Frings on the floor of the Council requested on behalf of sixty-six German and Scandinavian fathers that more explicit emphasis be given to the Church as *Ursakrament*. Even more extensively than the 1963 draft, the final 1964 Lumen Gentium reflects the use of the concept of the Church as sacrament as a major integrating theme and structuring element.”

Doyle emphasizes the introduction, and further elaboration, of the idea of the Church as sacrament as a major moment in the debates on the Church. He demonstrates how the idea was indebted to Semmelroth, and that Semmelroth, like Philips, “maintained an explicitly christological focus,” while Philips, like the French, maintained a more qualified endorsement of the Church as sacrament.

---

Light’ that Unites the Fathers of the First Millennium and Vatican Council II,” *Thirty Days in the Church and in the World* 29, no. 07/08 (2011): 36–40. I am thankful to Cottier for pointing me to Philips’ commentary and I have followed his translation.  
300 Dennis M. Doyle, “Otto Semmelroth and the Advance of Church as Sacrament at Vatican II,” *Theological Studies*, forthcoming, copy courtesy of the author. Doyle’s research supports the notion that the Roman stream of mystical body theology had eviscerated the theology of its deeply sacramental character.  
301 Ibid. See also Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987, German orig. 1982), 44–45. Ratzinger notes the figurative quality of the designation “sacrament” as it is first employed in *Lumen Gentium*. Further, he finds the Belgian draft “more cautious in its approach” than the German one.
As the debate continued, the suggestion arose that the third chapter, on the People of God, be placed before the second, on the hierarchy. This move was lauded by many, including Bishop Karol Wojtyla, who nevertheless argued on the Council floor that among the shortcomings of the People of God theology was a failure to emphasize that the Church was indeed a “perfect society” in the sense that it had all the means necessary for attaining the supernatural end. The effect of this shift has been well-documented. It

---

302 Acta synodalia II/3, 154–156. In Latin, “Propositio novae coordinationis capitum in schemate de Ecclesia recta mihi videtur et melior quam illa vetus, quae adhuc in schemate inventur. Praesertim autem apitus videtur tractari de populo Dei in cap. II ante quem de hierarchica Ecclesiae constitutione, seu episcopate fit sermo.... Quod iam aliquoties dictum est, ad populum Dei pertinent omnes, ministri Ecclesiae inclusi, est enim notio universalissima.... Ipsa praeterea notio 'populus dei,' etsi in se optima ad elucidandam Ecclesiae naturam socialis, non videtur tamen optime designare Ecclesiam in actu, quia rationen societatis perfectae explicere non potit. Populus... qua talis etiam in ordine naturalis... rationem perfectae societatis non attingit. Ecclesia autem in supernaturali ordine est societas perfecta, i.e., omnibus mediis as finem supernaturalem obtinendum disponens. Ut hoc ei proprium evadat, necessaria apparat constitutio hierarchica ecclesia, tam pro ratione regiminis, quam etiam pro populo dei in statu societatis perfectae constitutendo....” Wojtyla’s theology of perfect society was more nuanced than Bellarmine’s, which had been developed by neo-scholastics and reacted against by many mystical body proponents in the twentieth century. The Bellarmanian notion included the sense of “perfect” as essentially complete, but applied it to both the natural and supernatural realms. As “perfect,” the Church did not depend upon the state for its existence. Therefore, “perfect society” asserted the freedom of the church from princes and kings who sought to control it. By the late nineteenth century, this phrase had lost much of its theological energy. Here, Wojtyla is expressly concerned about the means of salvation enjoyed by the church. This was a question considered by the Council in discussions concerning ecumenism. That is, to what extent does the Catholic Church hold all of the means necessary for salvation? And what then of other Christian communions? Wojtyla wanted to ensure that the Council asserted that the Catholic Church had the full complement of those means. For a popular explication of the Council’s insistence precisely on Wojtyla’s point, with different language, see Dennis Doyle, The Church Emerging from Vatican II: A Popular Approach to Contemporary Catholicism (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992), 54–62. Nevertheless, Wojtyla’s insistence that societas perfecta not be lost makes sense in light of his wartime experience in Poland. Wojtyla saw the need for a strong Church structure that could function in parallel fashion to the state. Further, the uncertainty that mystical body theology brought in the midst of the war lent itself to usurpation by and sympathy with the Nazi Party.
situated the hierarchy within the broader framework of a church made up of everyone—
laity and clergy together. This development, of course, had major implications.

According to Joseph Komonchak, after this major shift, but also in consideration
of other revisions to *De Ecclesia*, Tromp appears to have clandestinely removed
“dogmatic” from the title of the schema *De Ecclesia* because “the initial intention was to
write a dogmatic constitution, but now other elements have been mixed in. So the value
has changed.”

303 Much was at stake here. The first chapter had taken to a description of
the church as a mystery. For Tromp, Ottaviani, and others formed in the Roman school,
this was a satisfactory mode of reflection for “spiritual” or “pastoral” discourse, but not
for a document deemed “dogmatic.” Dogmatic discourse was didactic, propositional, and
apologetic. Spiritual discourse was reflective, discursive, and open-ended. Roman
theologians countenanced “spirituality” but would never place it on par with dogmatic
theology.

304 Without the designation “dogmatic,” according to Tromp, the schema on the

---

303 Sebastian Tromp, “Relatio Secretarii,” 26, quoted in Joseph Komonchak,
304 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, a dominant figure of the Roman school before
the Council, embodies the duality. Garrigou wrote a monograph on St. John of the Cross,
and presumably assigned his future student—Karol Wojtyla—to do the same
at the Angelicum (the former was critical of the latter’s effort). Garrigou’s career in theology
was dedicated to the neo-Thomist enterprise of commenting on Thomas’s commentators
and thus advising the Holy Office. However Garrigou also published in the distinct,
considerably less objective, field of “spirituality” (or “mystical theology”). In fact, his
book on John of the Cross argued that John’s more mystical theology was completely in
line with Thomistic thinking. According to his biographer, “Catholic spirituality deals
with God’s gracious gift of himself through his Holy Spirit; it is concerned with the
human person as potential and actual recipient of utter Gratuity. When all is said and
done, Catholic spirituality is about the profound living of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—
recognizing with Garrigou that ‘no religion that is profoundly lived is without an interior
life, with that intimate and frequent conversation which we have not only with ourselves
but with God.’” See Richard Peddicord, OP, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An
Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend:
St. Augustine’s Press, 2005), 180. The internal quotation is from Reginald Garrigou-
Church “does not enjoy the same value as the dogmatic schemas of Vatican I.”

Tromp’s desperate tactics help to throw light upon the distinctions among the streams of mystical body theology introduced in Chapter I. The Roman stream differed from the French not only in doctrinal emphases and technical matters but also in sensibility. The contrast is summed up by Mersch’s critique of scholastic mystical body theology: They exchange richness for clarity.

The short discussion of the mystical body of Christ that does find its way into chapter one of *Lumen Gentium* bears the influence of the German and French streams much more so than the Roman stream, traces of which are found in chapter three on the hierarchical character of the Church. Rather than beginning with St. Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, as did St. Augustine, the constitution’s treatment of the mystical body begins with Paul’s discussion of our new creation in the death of Christ and His gift of the Spirit (Gal 6:15 and 2 Cor 5:17) and proceeds to the other *loci classici* of the doctrine: 1 Corinthians and Romans. At this point, according to Christopher O’Donnell:

> We are then left with four main suggestions as to the origin of Paul’s concept of Body of Christ: first, the Greek social metaphor [developed from Aesop’s fable by Menenius Agrippa], which he has already transcended in 1 Cor [by reflecting on the deep relationship between Christians and Christ in vv. 12 and 27]; second, his reflection on the Eucharist; third, Jewish reflections on Adam, including the

---


whole human race, a point which, however, is difficult to establish; fourth, and more probably, his doctrine of the Christian being “in Christ” (en Christô). In these texts, and in Rom 12:5, also cited in LG 7, the vision of Paul does not seem to go beyond that of the local community. 308

*Lumen Gentium* continues, however, to the deuto-Pauline epistles, drawing upon the slightly different vision of those texts, which broaden the sense of the body of Christ. Again to quote O’Donnell, “Now the Church is not the local community but the whole Church.” Christ is its head, and the notion of fullness (*plêrôma*) of the Body of Christ is introduced (see Col 2:9; Eph 1:22–23, 3:19, 4:12–13).309 It is in these Ephesians texts that the sense of the Body of Christ becomes more fully cosmic and so, too, *Lumen Gentium*’s brief consideration of the mystical body of Christ moves from the more personal to the immediate community, to its more cosmic dimensions.

Susan Wood suggests further that the deuto-Pauline texts offer a corrective to the temptation to over-identify Christ and the Church with mystical body theology, and that *Lumen Gentium* uses these texts to such an effect:

This distinction between Christ and the church makes it impossible to identify the church as a prolongation of the Incarnation in such a way that the uniqueness and particularity of the historical Jesus Christ is lost, a danger faced by strict adherence to the body of Christ model. This distinction also assures that the church always remains subordinate to its head, Christ, and does not claim for itself what belongs uniquely to Christ. Vatican II’s *Lumen gentium*, qualifies and nuances the relationship between the church and the body of Christ, in article 7. 310

---

309 Ibid.
These texts, she points out, name Christ as the head of the mystical body, distinct from its members, the Church, and set up the council’s well-known characterization of the church as subsisting in (*substitit in*) the Catholic Church.

Chapter I demonstrated that the “vagueness” of mystical body theology tends to be grounded in some firmer reality; it needs an anchor, lest it drift off into the Docetic sea of “false mysticism.” Karl Pelz’s book served as a case in point and *Mystici Corporis* explicitly highlighted the risk. Since the Roman stream of mystical body theology had taken to anchoring the theology firmly in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, the question remains whether Philips’ efforts leave mystical body theology with an open ground, to develop an electrical analogy. Because Philips and company shifted the center of gravity of *Lumen Gentium*, mystical body theology did not carry the weight in the document that it once did. Various proposals have been put forward by theologians concerning the theological leitmotif of the constitution and of the documents themselves, including, “the pilgrim people of God” and especially more recently “communion.” Tempered by the variety of theological themes in the context of the conciliar documents, as well as the variety of images in chapter one of *Lumen Gentium*, mystical body theology does not hold the same danger, nor does it hold the weight, that Pius had once given it.  

---

311 This is perhaps related to other difficulties that have been noted since the council. Godfrey Diekmann, Virgil Michel’s successor as editor of *Orate Fratres*, suggested in an interview that the council did not unlock the full potential of the mystical body movement which his forebear was committed to popularizing, especially the link between liturgy and ethics that it secured. See Seamus Paul Finn, “Michel’s Contribution to Linking Liturgical and Social Apostolates in the American Catholic Church: A 50 Year Perspective” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1991), 191–2. Finn conducted this interview with Diekmann on 27 June 1990. I am grateful to Timothy Brunk for first referring me to Finn’s dissertation.
On one reading, the Council’s achievement (beginning with Philips’ initiative) is the pinnacle of the mystical body recovery. From this perspective, the mystical body movement did its work. The dominant “other” challenged by mystical body theology in the twentieth century was Church as *societas perfecta*. Pope Pius had linked mystical body theology to a perfect society ecclesiology in his encyclical. However, joining the mystical body movement with the juridicism inherent in the perfect society ecclesiology left theologians and many bishops less than satisfied. But by mid-century, “perfect society” had been widely dethroned, opening the door for various other images of the Church to enter theological discourse. On this reading, the prominence given to “People of God” at the Council need not be seen as a rejection of mystical body theology, but rather a sublation of it in which its goals were achieved. The Christological center and emphasis on mystery in the first chapter illustrate the point. Despite the stringent critiques of mystical body theology by those who espoused a “People of God” ecclesiology prior to the Council, they were reconciled at the Council.

The late Avery Dulles has suggested that mystical body of Christ and people of God were virtually equivalent ecclesiological descriptors, especially in their “democratic” tendencies; he considers both under his “mystical communion” model. The key

---

312 Richard McBrien notes, “*Lumen Gentium*, portrays the Church according to many different biblical images, not just as the Mystical Body of Christ, which had been interpreted in the past in a highly juridical manner. If there is, for the constitution, a single dominant biblical image of the Church, it is indeed that of people of God, to which an entire chapter is devoted.” Richard P. McBrien, “The Church (*Lumen Gentium*)” in *Contemporary Catholic Theology: A Reader*, edited by Michael A. Hayes and Liam Gearon (New York: Continuum, 1998), 285.

313 Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 53. Dulles notes in his introduction that in the early development of his ideas, there were more than five models. Limiting himself to five models may explain the consolidation of people of God and mystical body of Christ into one model.
difference for Dulles is that “People of God” allows for more distance between the Church and its divine head.\textsuperscript{314} They are united in their opposition to the much more “institutional” perfect society ecclesiology.

There is indeed a sense in which Dulles is correct that those interested in a more 
\textit{ressourcement} version of mystical body were, at the Council, united with those who argued for the prominence of the people of God image. As Archbishop Denis Hurley put it, at the Council “the Church [found] itself in a ‘back-to-the-Bible’ campaign” in which a conceptual ecclesiology was replaced with an ecclesiology based on various images. Hurley was not unfamiliar with the French-speaking mystical body recovery, as he recollects about the Council, “I was on the progressive side as a consequence of reading the writings of the likes of Rahner, Congar and Chenu, which changed my theological outlook. Émile Mersch’s \textit{The Whole Christ} had a particular effect on me regarding the notion of Christ within us.”\textsuperscript{315} Insofar as mystical body theology was a major component of the push back against the overly conceptual neo-Thomistic framework, it met with success in this shift at the Council.

However, the theological debate that gave rise to the theology of the people of God began long before the Council and was not initially as conciliatory to mystical body of Christ theology as post-conciliar interpretations sometimes suggest. The catalyzing

\textsuperscript{314} The echoes of “People of God” with the opening words of the United States Constitution were not lost on American Catholics, giving the image a decidedly more liberal democratic cast. See, for example, Bruce Russett, “We the People of God: How Democratic Should the Church Be?,” \textit{Commonweal} 130, no. 15 (2003): 27–30; Sidney Callahan, “We, the People—of God: The Church Needs a Constitution,” \textit{Commonweal} 124, no. 9 (1997): 6–7.

effect of trying to overcome a certain position held by a small, powerful number at the Council—who happened also to be touting the mystical body of Christ—brought the mystical body and people of God camps closer together.

Fading Mystical Body before Vatican II

It is difficult to overstate what occurred at the council. However, a closer look at the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index gives us clues that the mystical body’s waning began even before the Council. By the time we get to Volume Four (1943–1948), there are only seventeen entries over six years. This is, of course, during the years immediately following Mystici Corporis. As noted above, Pius XII’s letter made mystical body theology the default ecclesiological position of the magisterium; however, theological work tells another story. The tide was already flowing in another direction. In Volume Five (1948–1950), there are 15 entries over three years, but the shift is evident. Of the few articles listed in this last volume, many are catechetical, elaborating upon established doctrine. Many are from American Ecclesiastical Review, a monthly known far less for its edgy positions than Michel’s Orate Fratres or Beauduin’s Irénikon. Eastern Churches Quarterly alone is pushing the theological envelope with reflections on the mystical body and ecumenism.316

Gregory Baum, writing about the nature of lay participation in doctrinal development, senses that mystical body theology has been fully integrated into Catholic life, teaching, and practice as the Council gets underway. “If we sought the conviction of the Catholic hierarchy to-day [1962],” he writes, “on the Mystical Body of Christ, we would find that the concept is part of the ordinary teaching of bishops in all parts of the

world, that it is preached and explained in pastoral letters without the slightest hesitation.”

Baum surmises that, thanks to the hard work of pastors and theologians, the heavy lifting of the mystical body recovery has been accomplished. His argument is bolstered by the fact that the *vota*, or statements of the bishops of what they would like to consider at the council, indicated a desire among many—especially the bishops outside of the West—for a dogmatic definition of the mystical body of Christ. This would be one way of explaining the shift and eventual drop-off in mystical body literature leading up to the Council.

With a decline in interest in the early to mid-forties, it is difficult to argue that mystical body theology had its full momentum going into the Council, even if the Roman theologians made it thematic to the schema *De Ecclesia*. Among those curial types, mystical body had reached a consensus; there was a certain element of *Roma locuta*, *causa finita est.*

---


318 According to Étienne Fouilloux, there were a number of bishops heading into the Council who, in their *vota*, called for the Council to formally declare a dogma. Along with Marian dogmas, which were by far the most commonly suggested, the mystical body of Christ was often mentioned. See Alberigo & Komonchak, *The History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 112, 128.

319 As mentioned above, Bluett called 1937 “the crest” of mystical body theological study and J. Eileen Scully, writing about French-language mystical body theology, called 1935, “the summit” in terms of published articles. See Scully, 59. Edward Hahnenberg also argues for a decline in the mid-forties: “In the years after *Mystici Corporis*, enthusiasm for the theology of the mystical body began to fade. The question of membership had thrown doubt on the coherence of the encyclical; meanwhile, disillusionment grew with the model’s appeal to an abstract community spirit—following the war, Germans were especially conscious of the dangers of an uncritical embrace of *Volkgeist* [sic]. While the post-war period was one of theological vitality, even before Pius XII’s encyclical critical studies had begun to appear that questioned mystical body as the comprehensive model of Church.” Hahnenberg, 13.
However, there are several other factors—relevant to both Europe and the United States—that challenged and stunted the mystical body recovery earlier in the century. We shall consider each in turn: first, the effect of World War II, and second, the impact of Catholic critical biblical scholarship, which will take us back around to the question of “mystical body of Christ” and “people of God” at Vatican II.

Broken Body after the War: Europe

As has been noted, it was the Romantic imagination of the Tübingen school, especially Johann Adam Möhler, in the nineteenth century that germinated a creative recovery of mystical body theology. Several German theologians bore Möhler’s torch into the early twentieth century. The most fruitful period of writing about the mystical body coincided with the beginning of the Second World War.

Congruent with the shift in the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index, Kevin McNamara notes that following the appearance of Mystici Corporis in 1943 there was a noticeable lack of interest in mystical body theology in Germany. McNamara mentions the war as a reason for the loss of enthusiasm. Specifically, McNamara notes that the theology of the mystical body was “ruthlessly exploited by the Nazis.”\(^{320}\) While that may be true, there were certain Catholics, on the periphery of the Nazi party, who were willing to help the link between Nazi race rhetoric and mystical body theology along.\(^{321}\)

Especially in Europe, the specter of Nazi collectivism did indeed cast a pall over mystical body theology or, at the very least, gave pause to those who would employ it broadly. Expanding upon McNamara’s point, Walter Breitenfeld wrote just after the war, “Nazis liked to talk of the ‘sacrament of blood,’ they tried to replace the conception of

\(^{320}\) McNamara, 352.
\(^{321}\) This point was developed at some length in Chapter I, above.
the Mystical Body of Christ by a crude materialistic collectivism and used even the language of the Church to this end. They attempted to displace the Communitas Sanctorum by a racial community and a veneration of national heroes.\textsuperscript{322} Breitenfeld was a lecturer in social studies at Salzburg’s Catholic University, who fled from the Gestapo to England in 1939 after helping numerous Austrians escape Nazi persecution.

Even in the midst of the war, after he too fled Austria for fear of Nazi reciprocation for his criticism, Eric Voegelin argued in The Review of Politics that Nazi race rhetoric was a perverted development of mystical body of Christ theology. The political philosopher Voegelin’s critique is both interesting and instructive in itself. Describing the “race idea” in Nazi Germany, he writes:

\begin{quote}
Its main feature is, negatively, a slow fading out of the consciousness of the mystical body of Christ, thereby opening the gates to emotional and intellectual forces which replace the Christian substance without the members of the community even becoming aware of the fact. This transformation has become possible because the body idea was thinned out to the ‘mystical’ idea;… the mystical body construction is one of two alternatives, the other one being a purely pneumatic construction of the community. When the development accentuates more the pneumatic aspect, then the way is free for a reconstruction of the spiritual meaning of community along lines diverging from the Christian. By a slight change of accents the evolution of symbols may depart from the Christological interpretation of likemindedness to other spiritual assumptions. The change is gradual, but one may say that a decisive step is reached when the pneuma hagiosynes of Christ is replaced by reason as the substance which constitutes the unity of mankind. The 17\textsuperscript{th} - and 18\textsuperscript{th}-century rationalism may still preserve deistic forms, and in that sense an element of transcendentalism; and it may try to avoid a rupture with the church as a social institution, but the ideas of man and community have become essentially secularised. And even though the idea of reason still preserves the universalism inherent in Christianity, it is obvious that once the problem of community is reduced to the problem of finding a spiritual bond, new symbols may arise which do not cover all mankind but only particular groups as in the case of the national spirit idea, or the idea of the
\end{quote}

workers’ class. In this sense, the spiritualisation of the body idea prepared the way for an era of spiritual symbols which have no connection with the more primitive type of family symbols, and prepares also the way for new body symbols which may arise independent from the earlier blood symbols.”

Typical of Voegelin’s approach, he argues that a political theory is connected to secularized theology. However, his analysis of the tendency of mystical body theology to become disembodied gets at the postwar fearfulness of its potential to be abstract and, therefore, conducive to cooption. Therefore, those who would argue that mystical body theology offered a middle road between individualism and collectivism had a more difficult time doing so after the War. Dominican Mannes Dominikus Koster is deeply concerned about the support that mystical body theology has lent National Socialism in Germany and, thus, critiques it as a stand-alone ecclesiological term. By 1965, doubtless still thinking about the events of decades past, he would worry about the potential correspondence between mystical body theology and a Marxist “mystical union.” The negative associations with mystical body theology halted its momentum, especially in Germany, but also throughout the rest of the continent.

Broken Body after the War: United States

In the United States, World War II impacted the mainstream of mystical body theology in a different manner. As it did in the European context, mystical body theology

---

323 Eric Voegelin, “The Growth of the Race Idea,” *The Review of Politics* 2, no. 03 (1940): 293. Emphasis mine. Voegelin’s work also, of course, had some influence in the United States since he took up residence here after his expulsion from Vienna.

324 Napiwodzki, OP, 47–48, 75. Koster later argues that there is an easy slide from talk about the mystical body of Christ to, on the one hand, a Marxist mystical union of people, which is required to precede and ground the mystical body or, on the other hand, an outright denial of mediation à la Karl Pelz (75, n. 12). Koster clearly identifies the two major errors of German mystical body theology.

325 The collective experience of World War II also played a role in the discussions of mystical body on the floor of the Council. Wojtyla’s assertion of *societas perfecta*, noted above, is an example.
faded—this much is clear from the Catholic Literature and Periodical Index. Farther away from the link forged between mystical body theology and Nazism, “new social Catholics,” who had been the main popularizers of mystical body theology, were undercut by the national united front of wartime politics.\footnote{For more about the wider context of united front postwar politics in the United States and its effects on scholarship and public intellectuals, see Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 281‒411. See also William C. Beyer, “Creating ‘Common Ground’ on the Home Front: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in a 1940s Quarterly Magazine” in The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society, edited by Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Hudson Parsons, Contributions in American History 161 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 41‒61 on the cultural impact of the advent of the journal Common Ground in forming a World War II united front. In terms of American Catholicism specifically, William L. Portier sums up the impact succinctly, “Post-war prosperity and consensus tended to flatten out and re-direct in more conventional directions the energies produced by the economic pressures of the 1930s” in “‘Good Friday in December’: World War II in the Editorials of Preservation of the Faith Magazine, 1939–1945,” U.S. Catholic Historian 27, no. 2 (2009): 43.} Entering the postwar consensus period, critiques of mainstream American individualism had more difficulty gaining traction. Thus, mystical body theology endured in small pockets, primarily among those directly engaging social strife.

During its heyday, Dorothy Day had written about the mystical body of Christ:

the illnesses of injustice, hate, disunion, race hatred, prejudice, class war, selfishness, greed, nationalism, and war weaken this Mystical Body, just as the prayer and sacrifices of countless of the faithful strengthen it….

Because of this dogma of the Mystical Body, Catholics may not allow their souls to be clouded with greed, selfishness and hate. They may not hate Negroes, Jews, Communists. When they are guilty of prejudice, they are injuring the Mystical Body of Christ. It is as though they wielded the scourges in the hands of the soldiers who attacked our Lord. If a man hates his neighbor, he is hating Christ….

All men are brothers. The saint as well as the sinner whom we may not judge as we wish not to be judged. This dogma of the Mystical Body precludes all ideas of class war.
And it is to promulgate this dogma—to bring it to the man in the street, that the Catholic Worker is dedicated.\(^{327}\)

Throughout the war, Dorothy Day and the *Catholic Worker*, much maligned, maintained their pacifist stance, rooted as it was in mystical body theology.\(^{328}\) After the war, in defense of her actions on behalf of Communists in the period of the red scare, Day appeals again to the mystical body of Christ, specifically describing how war undercuts the mystical body:

And as for our great masses of Catholic people, they will be dragged in, poor though they be, or workers though they be, to use the same means of force and violence, to hate their enemy, to defend the status quo, because there will be no time for fine distinctions then and the Catholic will not be able to apologize for his siding with the duPonts, the Morgans, the Girdlers, war profiteers, the cynical politicians, the literary people, the intellectuals who will use fine and exalted

\(^{327}\) Dorothy Day, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” *The Catholic Worker* (October 1934): 3. Day continued to expound upon the mystical body of Christ a year later in “Liturgy and Sociology,” *The Catholic Worker* (December 1935): 4. In this later piece she makes her well-documented admiration for Virgil Michel and his cause explicit. About the mystical body, she writes, “The Mystical Body of Christ is a union—a unit—and action within the Body is common action. In the Liturgy we have the means to teach Catholics . . . that they ARE members of one body and that ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’” For a further analysis of this article and Dorothy Day’s pacifism, see Anne Klejment, “The Spirituality of Dorothy Day’s Pacifism,” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 2 (June 2009): 1–24. Klejment’s very helpful analysis of Day’s mystical body theology suggests that she challenged the dominant understanding that the mystical body of Christ was coextensive with the Roman Catholic Church. At this time, however, that question was very much in dispute. See, for example, Michel’s review of Fulton Sheen’s *The Mystical Body of Christ* (1935) in *Orate Fratres* 10 (April 1936), 281–85 in which he skewers Sheen for his lack of clarity on this disputed question. See also, William R. O’Connor, “The Mystical Body of Christ: Reality or Metaphor?” *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 46 (1935): 136–53. O’Connor connects the mystical body to the discourse on the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:35–40)—an example of a connection that would be deeply suspect to later historical critics, but was powerful and productive for early twentieth-century theologians—and therefore identifies Christ with both members (his disciples) and potential members (the least of these), and the latter in a special way (141–42).

phrases to inspire and integrate the body and soul of the worker in one passion—the desire for sweat, blood and tears, for suffering, and they will use these mysterious cravings of the human heart and once again betray the workers into war. War, the rending of the Mystical Body of Christ, as St. Cyprian called it.329

Radical social critiques, those addressing social/civil unrest like Day’s, are the context in which a robust, socially-engaged mystical body theology endures after the war. Day continued to fight against the deep suspicion of Communists that came with the nascent Cold War red scare all the while furthering the Worker’s mission to combat destitution, which, of course, remained even as the unemployment rate dropped.330

The other key place where mystical body theology endured was in the context of those working for African-American civil rights.331 John LaFarge, SJ had written extensively of race relations and the mystical body of Christ in the interbellum period and continued to attack racial injustice as contrary to the mystical body after the war, as late as 1960, three years before his death.332 Catherine DeHueck Doherty continued her work

329 Dorothy Day, “Beyond Politics,” *The Catholic Worker* (November 1949): 2. Day’s reference to Cyprian, like Michel’s, is interesting in light of Mersch’s contrast of the mystical body theology of his own patristic hero, St. Cyril of Alexandria, with St. Cyprian. Cyprian, Mersch claims, envisions merely a moral union, rather than the more substantive, but not hypostatic, mystical union elaborated by St. Cyril. Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 382; see Chapter I of the present study.


332 See John LaFarge, SJ, *The Catholic View Point on Race Relations* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1960), esp. 68–69. See also the earlier *The Race Question and the Negro* (New York: Longmans, 1943), esp. 105–06, 238. In 1937, LaFarge had
toward racial reconciliation into the fifties and wrote about the mystical body of Christ throughout her life, emphasizing its call to oneness. In Doherty’s hands, the mystical body of Christ is the Western expression of sobornost, the Russian Orthodox idea of kenotic communion across time and space.333

Two African American Catholics who worked for racial reconciliation also merit mention here. First, Helen Caldwell Day—a convert who, in 1950 founded Memphis House, an interracial community that served single mothers. In her book about the work and example of an interracial Catholic community in the South, Not Without Tears, Day describes the makeup of the house, “The qualifications for membership were broad. A member might be white or colored, Catholic or non-Catholic, so long as he was interested in the life of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ and the welfare of the members therein.”334 Like Dorothy Day, Helen Caldwell Day often described the reach of the mystical body as extending beyond the visible bounds of the Roman Catholic Church and

written, “Christ preached moreover a unity based not on man’s natural life alone but upon the prerogatives of the supernatural life conferred upon mankind by the Redemption, and the prerogatives formed by the personal relationships of all individuals sharing in that supernatural life with His own Divine Person. Through the institution of His Church as a universal, perpetual, supra-national Society, all mankind was offered participation in a unity higher than that which the mere fact of common creation and common anthropological origin afforded. This higher unity is symbolized in the figure of the Mystical Body of Christ. As members of the one Body of which Christ is the Head the children of God enter into a unique relationship not only with one another but with the whole of mankind as well.” See Interracial Justice: A Study of the Catholic Doctrine of Race Relations (New York: America Press, 1937), 60. Though it occurred during the heyday of mystical body theology in the forties, the integration of St. Louis University is also of note here because of its connections to mystical body theology. See Daniel Van Slyke, “Claude Heithaus, S.J., and the Integration of Saint Louis University: The Mystical Body of Christ and University Politics,” in Theology and Lived Christianity, edited by David M. Hammond (Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000), 139–173. 333 Catherine DeHueck Doherty, Essential Writings, selected with an introduction by David Meconi, SJ (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), esp. 67–97, 120–1, 143–4
was deeply critical of attempts to constrain its unifying purchase, especially in the case of race relations. “We speak of the Church as if it were this building, or this group of people, and not the Mystical Body of Christ,” she writes in 1954, “And not only that. After speaking of its unity, we openly divide the Body—as if Christ could be made two—so there is not for us one Church, but two, one ‘Catholic’ and one ‘Colored Catholic.’”

As it did for Dorothy Day, Michel, and others, the doctrine of the mystical body for Helen Caldwell Day—at the same time porous and normative—derived its origin from the Eucharist. The movement, an inclusive circle really, from Eucharistic celebration, to the link between loving God and loving others (i.e., reflection upon Scripture), to personal appropriation, to social critique is clear in a lengthy passage from Caldwell Day’s earlier autobiography Color, Ebony:

When the priest raised Our Lord, that we might adore Him in the Host, I would think that even while we gazed upon Him, we were part of His Mystical Body, members of Him and of each other.

Then I could understand how He could say that the whole of the law lay in the commandments “Love God” and “Love your neighbor.” They were really the same commandment, for neither is possible without the other. Love is the keynote of Christianity; with it, everything is possible, without it, nothing.

I could no longer justify hate nor prejudice against any person, for now I knew my neighbor was anyone whom I could love or serve me. There’s no one else left.

Second is Arthur Falls, a medical doctor, founder of a Catholic Worker house in Chicago, and tireless worker for civil rights. In the words of Lincoln Rice, “The doctrine of the mystical body of Christ…played a key role for Falls in interpreting his own life

335 Ibid., 57.
experiences and in laying a foundation for further action.”337 Especially significant is that Falls contrasted the mystical body of Christ, in which Catholics were united in solidarity, with the “mythical” body of Christ, his characterization of the failure of especially white Catholics to embrace the doctrine fully and so live concretely united to their brothers and sisters in Christ of all races. He continued his work to prompt his fellow Christians to live the true mystical body of Christ right up to, and beyond, the passage of civil rights legislation, writing reflectively in 1962, he said “that the practical application of . . . the mystical body of Christ either had to be demonstrated or else the whole structure seemed shaky to me.”338

The connection, in the United States, between the enduring appeals to mystical body theology and social critique cements the deep connection between the two. With the dawn of the postwar consensus, those critiques were neither as numerous, nor gained as much traction. The return to economic prosperity after the Great Depression softened receptivity to the more radical social critiques of those Catholics who were driving mystical body theology forward. With noted exceptions, the few who continued to discuss the mystical body of Christ in the States were only the theologians, who were far less diverse at the time than their counterparts in Europe. They primarily wrote for the American Ecclesiastical Review and debated topics such as, “The Status of St. Robert Bellarmine’s Teaching About the Membership of Occult Heretics in the Catholic

337 Lincoln R. Rice, “Confronting the Heresy of ‘The Mythical Body of Christ’: The Life of Dr. Arthur Falls,” American Catholic Studies 123, no 2 (2012): 61. Rice notes that Falls was responsible for the change in the masthead of the Catholic Worker, beginning with issue 7 of volume I to include a black worker, instead of two white workers (73). He also notes that Falls was friends with Michel (74).
Church.”339 As mystical body faded, then, there were, on the one hand, pockets of continued reference to it in the midst of ongoing social struggles and, on the other, a few neo-scholastic mentions.

There is some evidence that the connection between social critique and mystical body theology endures among some of the few who have invoked it more recently. Specifically, there have been several calls for its recovery connected to social questions. At the end of his history of the liturgical movement in the United States, Keith Pecklers laments the contemporary disconnect between liturgy and social justice. Pecklers suggests that perhaps a recovery of mystical body theology would reignite this connection that Michel and others so passionately articulated.340 M. Shawn Copeland has argued that mystical body of Christ theology can “make explicit the eschatological meaning of Christian solidarity,” especially as it pertains to oppressed and “despised” populations.341 On the other hand, there are contemporary liturgists who speak of the mystical body in “hushed reverent tones,” to borrow Michael Baxter’s characterization of these same Catholics’ appropriation of Michel, who often eviscerate the theology of its sharp, socially-critical edge.342

---

339 This is the title of an article written by Joseph Clifford Fenton in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* 122 (March 1950): 207–21, a title with potential implications for ecumenical relations, but an article not at all interested in them.

340 Pecklers, 286–7. If Pecklers is indeed correct, the recovery of mystical body theology will need to proceed by way of a broadening of its implications, that is, by way of the French stream. This is an important point, but gets ahead of the matter at hand.


342 Baxter, 499–500. For a good example of these liturgists’ use of mystical body theology, see Christopher Carstens and Douglas Martis, *Mystical Body, Mystical Voice:*
(Mystical) Body of Christ: The Rise of Catholic Historical-Critical Biblical Scholarship

The second reason that enthusiasm surrounding mystical body theology, as such, began to recede before the Council is the advancement of historical-critical methods in Catholic biblical scholarship.

In 1943, the same year in which he promulgated Mystici corporis, Pope Pius XII issued another landmark encyclical, Divino afflante spiritu. Divino spurred on Catholic biblical studies, officially acknowledging a role for the historical-critical method in Scriptural scholarship. Luke Timothy Johnson has called it “the symbolic (and real) point of pivot” in the twentieth century history of Catholic biblical scholarship. “It…changed everything.” By 1960, critical biblical scholarship among Catholics had disseminated to such an extent that simple assertions of mystical body theology’s Pauline roots were no longer tolerated. Having been part of the general intellectual furniture, especially in the U.S., for decades, the fact that the phrase “mystical body of Christ” does not appear as such in the epistles, and that perhaps Paul did not intend the more Romantic notion of an organism extended across time and space with the phrase “body of Christ,” took some time for Catholics to digest. By the end of the fifties, however, we find, for example, castigation from a reviewer of a Pauline commentary: “surely Paul did not preach the


343 Pope Pius XII, Divino Afflante Spiritu: On Promoting Biblical Studies, Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Providentissimus Deus (30 September 1943).

Mystical Body of Christ, a much later concept. Rather than following the thought of St. Paul, Father Cox seems to fit Pauline teaching into a framework of modern theology.³⁴⁵

With the benefit of critical scholarship, Catholics began to see that the Tübingen School’s resurrection of the “mystical body of Christ” imbued it with a meaning it had not had prior. For Möhler the mystical body of Christ was an organic reality that extended throughout time and across space. Scripture scholars now argued that Paul intended no such pervasive meaning in his letters to the Corinthians and Romans. Rather, when Paul instructed early Christians to be the Body of Christ, he had in a mind only a church in a specific locale. His meaning was narrower, geographically speaking. He does not discuss, for example, the church at Corinth and the church at Rome as bound together in the Body of Christ, and he did not understand the inhabitants of heaven making up, along with those on earth, various members of the body.

The critique of mystical body theology’s uncritical assumption of Pauline support had begun in Europe even before Pius’s encyclical. In 1942, Lucien Cerfaux published a philological study of the Pauline epistles in which he argues that “people of God” is a more foundational ecclesiological image than mystical body for Paul. “This notion of a spiritual organism, at which we have arrived by a synthesis of the mystical life in Christ and the unity of the Christian world, does not in any way replace the primitive and basic definition of the Church as the people of God. It may modify it, but nothing more.” And further, “The idea of the people of God remains, but it becomes more inward and more spiritual. Instead of being just his people, the Christian community is also the ‘body’ of Christ, and its unity stems from the life of Christ which flows within it and within each of

its members.” Therefore, Cerfaux, concludes, Body of Christ is “something that can be
predicated of the Church without affecting the already existing and fundamental idea of
the Church, and without necessarily coinciding with its meaning.”346 And in Cerfaux’s
reflections on the melding of these two ecclesiological realities, one hears echoes of
Lumen Gentium, Chapter I, on which he worked at the Council.347 He writes, “All
members of the Church possess a heavenly mode of living even now. They are already in
heaven. All this happens ‘in a mystery,’ so that the all-containing glory cannot yet be
seen. The Church’s secret is that it possesses a heavenly, but hidden, mode of life. It is
one of the Church’s mysteries that it exists in mystery itself.”348

Cerfaux was explicitly interested in recovering a sense of the Jewish roots of the
Church that he thought had been lost—a loss which surely facilitated the Nazi triumph in
Germany. When Cerfaux comes to exegeting the passage of Corinthians dealing with the
Body of Christ, he points out that “sōma” indicates identification with neither the
physical body of Christ nor His Eucharistic body. Further, it is impossible to think of a
“mystical Christ as distinct from Christ as a person,” which would give “to the word
σῶμα a meaning which it can never admit.” “And so,” he concludes, “it remains for us to
translate: ‘You are a body, a body which is that of Christ (dependent on him, and in
which his life flows).’” In his discussion of the “mystical allegory” in the Pauline letters,
Cerfaux rejects the application of the more Romantic sense of mystical body theology to
Paul’s theology. He even rejects any deep sense of the unity across time and space

Debate on the Church,” in The History of Vatican II, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo,
348 Ibid., 377.
indicated in patristic theology. However, he maintains the sense of the mystical identification with Christ among Christians, a theology that serves much more comfortably with a theology of deification than an ecclesiology per se. “Let us say once again that the body with which this mystical identification is made, is none other than the real and personal body of which lived, died, and was glorified, and with which the bread in the Eucharist is identified. Christians are identified in a very real, although still mystical way in the Eucharist and in another way in baptism. Identified with this body, they are one among themselves; they are all ‘one’ by reference to the body of Christ.”

Cerfaux’s theology was influential at the council even beyond his own explicit contributions, sometimes to the frustration of his fellow theologians. Describing the Leuven theologians in particular at the Council, Congar wrote in his journal, “What Cerfaux has said is a bit above the word of the Gospel.” Nevertheless, clearly Cerfaux’s explication of the notion of the people of God in the Pauline corpus was a major aid to the final form of *Lumen Gentium*.

Contemporary theologian James Livingston argues that the development of historical-critical biblical studies of Paul—like Cerfaux’s—corresponded with a lack of confidence in mystical body theology, especially because Paul himself never uses the adjective “mystical.” The adjective appears to be an unnecessary accretion. Therefore, “body of Christ” becomes much more acceptable in Catholic theology than “mystical body of Christ.” A contributor to *The Furrow* sums it up bluntly in 1953: St. Paul said

---

349 Ibid., 277–78.
351 Dennis Doyle has demonstrated that “People of God” served as a galvanizing image for those developing the more sacramental sense of the church in contrast to the mystical body-dominant ecclesiology of Tromp and the preparatory schemas. Doyle, “Otto Semmelroth and the Advance of Church as Sacrament at Vatican II.”
“Body of Christ,” not “Mystical Body of Christ.” “One phrase [the former] is a metaphor, one is not [the latter].”\textsuperscript{352} In this he echoed, with some parsing, Koster’s sharp critique of “Mystical Body of Christ” as “merely a metaphor of the instrumentalist institution.”\textsuperscript{353}

Yves Congar would later affirm Koster’s study of the Church in Pauline epistles as the first crack in the dominance of mystical body theology.\textsuperscript{354} What Koster accomplished in the German sphere, Cerfaux brought to the French.

The \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia}, first published in 1967 and revised in 2003, sums up the position of Pauline scholars,

The Pauline theme of the Body of Christ has…primarily a soteriological provenience and meaning. It always involves a reference to the individual Body of Christ, i.e., to him who has borne death up on his own Body on the cross, and who enters into heaven to become of new life in his glorious Body. The mode of this most unique of unions by which the glorious Christ compasses in himself all Christians as his members is something St. Paul is not much concerned with.\textsuperscript{355}

Theological development of the image, they argue—especially in Augustine and Gregory the Great—had strayed from Paul to emphasize solidarity throughout time and space.

There are two important points to be made about the residual questions surrounding Pauline exegesis and mystical body of Christ theology. First, the explanation above depends, of course, upon the critical distinction between the authentic Pauline epistles and pseudepigrapha. As we have seen above in the readings of \textit{Lumen Gentium} 7 by O’Donnell and Wood, the deutero-Pauline letters present a very interesting case for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{352} Sean MacCarthy, “Teaching the Mystical Body: A Suggestion,” \textit{The Furrow} 4, no. 5 (1953): 269–70.
\item \textsuperscript{353} Manses Dominikus Koster, \textit{Ekklesiologie im Werden} (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1940), quoted in McNamara, 350–51. We shall return to the debate concerning mystical body and metaphor in Chapter IV, below.
\end{itemize}
the development of the notion of the body of Christ within the New Testament canon, in which the concept extends beyond the local community. If we are interested precisely in Paul’s theology in order to understand Paul, the distinction between authentic writings and later developments is very important indeed. But if we are, as in the case of mystical body of Christ theology, interested in the development of a theological idea across the tradition, then the more canonical hermeneutic, as used by the Council, is not only relevant but imperative.

Second, with respect to Paul’s own theology of the mystical body of Christ, scholars continue the tug of war between the more Hellenistic Paul and the more Jewish Paul (to oversimplify things a bit). In Pauline studies, the extent to which Paul is indebted to Stoic categories for his image of the body, or rather to late Jewish Merkabah mysticism for his notion of the body, is very much up for debate. Scholars adhering to the predominantly Hellenistic Paul have illustrated that the Greco-Roman sense of the body itself had more cosmic dimensions than its roots in Aesop’s fable of the body would indicate. That sense of bodiliness—extending across space and adopted by Agrippa—substantiated Rome’s empirical sense of itself: one whole, with many parts extended geographically. Though Agrippa’s use of the image of the body is primarily horizontal, it is surely difficult in the Roman imagination to separate anything worldly from its godly connections. Stoics, Michelle Lee points out, often referred to the earth as the body of Zeus. The Greco-Roman imagination, then, already had an inbuilt cosmic sense of god’s body wrought horizontally.

---

Among those who emphasize Paul as a practitioner of Merkabah mysticism—a tradition rooted in Ezekiel’s vision of divine glory in the form of a human figure on God’s chariot throne (“merkabah”)—Paul’s discussion of life in Christ and the “body of Christ” takes on a much richer sense of participation in the very life of God, extended far and wide. Alan Segal foregrounds Paul’s mystical encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus and remarks that,

Paul describes his own spiritual experiences in terms appropriate to a Jewish apocalyptic-mystagogue of the first century. He, like Enoch, relates his experiences of heavenly travel, in which he sees the secrets of the universe revealed. He believes his salvations to lie in a body-to-body identification with his heavenly savior, who sits on the divine throne and functions as God’s glorious manifestation. He identifies this experience with his conversion, although it apparently characterizes a lifetime of spiritual discipline rather than a single event.  

357 The outcome of these profound experiences for Paul is no less than an understanding of his own deification—a deification that will be brought to fulfillment upon his death. For all of its congruence with Second Temple Jewish mystical texts, Paul’s vision is unique in that those texts do not extend to all believers. Segal writes, “Paul understands that he has been transformed into a divine state, which will be fully realized after his death; Paul claims that his vision and transformation is somehow a mystical identification; and Paul claims to have received a calling, his special status as intermediary. Paul specifies the meaning of this calling for all believers, a concept absent the Enochic texts…” 358 The extension, then, of Paul’s encounter with God to all of the church renders Paul’s Body of Christ language more deep and pervasive than a moral union.

357 Alan Segal, Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 35.
358 Ibid., 47.
Segal’s work suggests that Paul’s choice of body language was already deeply theologically infused from his formation in Jewish mysticism. Not only did Paul conceive of his conversion and new life in Christ in the eschatological terms given him by the Jewish mystical tradition, but that those very terms helped him to describe the here and now, a unique witness of Paul’s own mysticism. Paul’s conversion experience includes, in the manner of Ezekiel’s prophecy, an encounter with “the Glory of God.” Throughout the Jewish Scriptures God’s appearance takes human shape, called Kavod, or “the Glory of God.” Paul saw this experience as materially indistinct from the experiences of the eleven; it justified his status as an apostle.\(^{359}\) But it pushed even further. About Luke’s descriptions of Paul’s conversion, Segal writes, “This unusual feature of identification between the believer and Christ, closely related to Paul’s own conversion, is a fascinating unexplored aspect of Paul’s thought. It is the mystery than can be most clearly addressed by the serious study of Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism.”\(^{360}\) Using Paul’s conversion experience as paradigm, and his formation in Jewish mysticism that gave him the categories for explaining it, Segal moves to the impact on the ekklēsia, “Because believers on earth, by virtue of their conversion, have been transformed into the body of Christ, who is the image of God, the destiny of believers will be the same as the destiny of Christ.”\(^{361}\)

The debates concerning Pauline scholarship cannot, of course, be solved here. Nevertheless, this brief excursus has demonstrated the complexity involved in precisely pinning down the Pauline notion of the body of Christ. There is a richness and depth to

\(^{359}\) See Galatians 1 and 1 Corinthians 15.

\(^{360}\) Segal, 11.

\(^{361}\) Segal, 67.
the notion that extends beyond mere metaphor. This is suggested by the place of the famous body of Christ discussion in 1 Corinthians. Further, we have seen how post-
*Divino* Catholic biblical scholarship changed the conversation about the mystical body of Christ. Scholars pointed out that the formulation, it itself, is not directly Pauline and further that the deuter-Pauline epistles develop the “body of Christ” theology in a distinct way from Paul himself. This work clearly challenged the pervasive theology of the mystical body. We have also seen how some continuing studies of Paul have connected his theology of the body of Christ to a more “mystical” sense through different avenues (Roman or Jewish) and with different implications.

**Conclusions**

Returning to the three streams of mystical body theology outlined in Chapter I—the Roman, the German-Romantic, and the French-speaking socio-liturgical—allows us some insight to the divergent explanations of the destination of mystical body theology in the twentieth century.

Thus when in 1998 liturgist Nathan Mitchell says, “This image of the body—where some members are inherently inferior to others and all are subordinate to the head—emphasized the rational, juridical, hierarchical, and magisterial qualities of the Church, especially its structures of authority and obedience,” he is describing the Roman stream. It is fair, I think to say that the Roman stream’s mystical body theology—the one thematic in the schema first presented to the council—was challenged by the *ressourcement* movement and ultimately rejected by the council.

---

Second, there is what I have been calling the German-Romantic stream of mystical body theology. Continuing Möhler’s legacy, twentieth-century Tübingen theologians saw in the theology of mystical body a way of describing the organic reality of the Christian people, extended throughout space and time. Of course, this is the stream into which Karl Adam fits.\(^{363}\) As we have seen, Adam and others (such as Karl Eschweiler and Joseph Lortz) grounded mystical body theology in German national unity, if in horrifying fashion. It was this strain of mystical body theology that created a sour taste after the war.\(^{364}\) Contemporary theologians, such as Anselm Min, who suggest that mystical body theology failed in the political realm, are likely thinking of this second stream (and also perhaps the first). It bears repeating that not all German mystical body theology went in this direction. Romano Guardini discussed the interplay of the unity of the mystical body and the individual, grounded firmly in the liturgical celebration of the church. He directly challenged Nazi perversions and, as a result, was dismissed from his post at the University of Berlin in 1939.

Guardini studied at Fribourg and was a major player in the liturgical movement. Not surprisingly, then, he grounded mystical body theology in the liturgy and sacraments of the church. This much Guardini shared with the French socio-liturgical stream of mystical body theology. Another, second, characteristic of the French-speaking mystical

\(^{363}\) Krieg, *Catholic Theologians*, 167. Adam employed the image to argue against both neo-scholastic juridicism and individualistic congregationalism in his early and deeply influential book, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (1927). He emphasized the solidarity of the Mystical Body, whose members share in both sin and redemption by Christ’s paschal mystery. But when he discusses the basis of the Mystical Body, instead of turning to the sacramental action of Eucharist, for example, he turns toward the primary unity of an ethnic-racial people. In order for the mystical body to be truly alive, it must build upon “the concrete person with his blood-determined condition.”

\(^{364}\) See the discussion of Romano Guardini in Chapter I, above.
body stream is that mystical body theology was not limited to ecclesiology; it was not simply a “model of the church.” Rather, it pervaded the various arms of theology (Christology, theological anthropology, sacramental theology, liturgy, ethics, etc.) and, especially in Virgil Michel’s view, became a fundamental Christian vision or way of seeing the world—as Keith Pecklers calls it, a “spirituality.”365 It is this stream of mystical body theology that fails to receive full emphasis at the council, perhaps because the bishops and theologians had been soured on the first two. Following this latter stream of mystical body theology might have been a way to cement the connection between liturgy and social transformation—a connection that Margaret Kelleher, among others, insists the council missed.366

The narrowing lens of considering mystical body of Christ theology as only an ecclesiological category obscures not only the ways in which it functioned and the theological work that it did prior to the council, but also precludes us from seeing the ways in which its concerns and categories continue on, even after its mid-century eclipse. This is connected to a privileging of the theology of magisterial documents for a description of mystical body theology’s form and content (and an often limited reading of Mystici Corporis at that). Looking at the ebb of mystical body theology without the narrow lens of ecclesiology helps us to look for its theological heritage in places that we would not initially expect. The contemporary French theological project of Louis-Marie Chauvet, in which Chauvet works to offer a “fundamental sacramental reinterpretation of the Christian life,” is one such place. Chauvet was formed in the Center for Liturgical

Studies at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris and, like his forbear Beauduin (though in a very different way!) articulates an intimate connection between sacraments and ethics, with a firm emphasis on “corporality” or bodiliness. It is to Chauvet’s context and work, then, that we now turn.
CHAPTER IV

VESTIGIAL BODY I:

THE CONTOURS OF THE FRENCH STREAM

In Bonaventure’s famous *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*Itinerary of the Mind to God*), the Franciscan reflects on his founder’s vision of Christ under the appearance of a six-winged seraph. Rather than a mere Platonic ascent, Bonaventure’s itinerary is Christ-centered because of its model and driven by a robust account of creation with each of the three sets of six wings of the seraph representing particular levels of the journey to God. The first level represents the order of material objects and non-human earthly sentient beings. On this level, there is no *imago Dei* to be discerned and beheld. Nevertheless, because of their origin in God, these elements of creation bear what the Seraphic Doctor calls *vestigia* or, literally, “footprints” (or “imprints”) of God in the world. At the first stage of the itinerary, then, one looks to the created world to find vestiges of God. In Bonaventure’s construction it appears that this first step along the journey is essential to reaching its next stages.\(^{367}\)

---

\(^{367}\) St. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum* in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Episcopi Cardinalis Opera Omnia*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi: 1891). Available from: http://faculty.uml.edu/rinnis/45.304%20God%20and%20Philosophy/ITINERARIUM.pdf (Accessed 5 June 2014). In Chapter 2, Bonaventure explains the centrality of the senses to the itinerary as well as the Christological act of seeing God in God’s *vestigia*: “So analysis is an act, which, through abstraction and purification, causes the perceivable object, apprehended directly by the senses, to enter into the intellectual
In light of Bonaventure’s notion of *vestigia*, there is a dual sense in which the title of this chapter and the next, “vestigial body,” functions. In one sense, the “vestigial body” refers to a way that mystical body theology functioned for the French liturgical stream. That is, flowing out of the public worship of the church—centered in Christ—we come to see the world in a particular way, as caught up in the salvific work accomplished in the preaching, healing, suffering, dying, and rising body of Christ. Yes, the primary weight of the theology of the mystical body of Christ rests on the second set of wings in Bonaventure’s analysis—attending to others as loci of Christ, the *imago Dei*—but, as we have seen with Michel’s work particularly, and the French-speaking socio-liturgical power. And in this way the whole world has to enter the human soul through the gates of the senses and according to these three activities. All of these things are imprints (*vestigia*) through which we can look upon our God. For the perceived object is an appearance born at the core and then impressed upon the organ itself, which impression gives rise to the object with which one is to become acquainted. This clearly suggests that that which is the invisible image of God, the splendor of His glory and the form of His substance—which is universal due to His primary generation, in the same way as an object generates its appearance from its core—is united by the grace of union, as something perceivable to the bodily organs of a rational individual: that union is led back to the Father in the form of a primordial source and its object. Thus, since all things with which one can become acquainted have to generate their own perceived form, and since in them can be seen the eternal generation of the Word as in a mirror, they clearly proclaim the eternal emanation of the Image and the Son from God the Father” (Chapter 2, no. 6–7). In Latin, “Diiudicatio igitur est actio, quae speciem sensibilem, sensibiliter per sensus acceptam, introire facit depurando et abstrahendo in potentiam intellectivam. Et sic totus iste mundus introire habet in animam humanam per portas sensuum secundum tres operationes praeditas. Haec autem omnia sunt vestigia, in quibus speculari possimus Deum nostrum. Nam cum species apprehensa sit similitudo in medio genita et deinde ipsi organo impressa et per illam impressionem in suum principium, scilicet in objectum cognoscendum,ducat; manifeste insinuat, quod ille qui est imago invisibilis Dei et splendor gloriae et figura substantiae eius, qui ubique est per primam sui generationem, sicut objectum in toto medio suam generat similitudinem, per gratiam unionis unitur, sicut species corporali organo, individuo rationalis naturae, ut per illam unionem nos reduceret ad Patrem sicut ad fontale principium et objectum. Sic ergo omnia cognoscibilia habent sui speciem generare, manifeste proclamant, quod in illis tanquam in speculis videri potest aeterna generatio Verbi, Imaginis et Filii a Deo Patre aeternaliter emanantis.”
stream broadly, the theology proceeds from a biblical insight and a liturgical encounter and then ripples throughout an entire Christian vision of the world.

A second sense involves the history and development of the theology of mystical body itself. The last chapter demonstrated two major points. First, mystical body of Christ theology faded over the couple of decades that spanned the middle part of the twentieth century, due to a variety of factors. Its eclipse needs to be understood in light of the complex of critiques outlined there. The legitimate critiques did not touch the French stream in the same way that they did the other two streams of mystical body theology identified in Chapter I. Second, Chapter III furthered a point made about Virgil Michel in Chapter II, that is, a narrow focus and understanding of mystical body theology as simply an ecclesiology misses the richness of its resurgence in the twentieth century. In this sense, then, the vestigial body of the title refers to the remnants of mystical body theology that we can find after it has receded. With greater attention to mystical body theology’s own multivalence, Louis-Marie Chauvet’s sacramental reinterpretation of the Christian life emerges as an interesting and relevant example.

Two major sections will make up the present chapter. First, it shall explore the deeper context and historical trajectory of the Institut Supérieur de Liturgie (ISL) at the Institut Catholique de Paris, where Chauvet took several courses and then taught for more than thirty years, in order to establish the historical framework of Chauvet’s development of the concerns of the French-speaking stream of mystical body theology, of which Michel’s work represents a significant tributary.

Chauvet’s treatment of Henri de Lubac’s Corpus Mysticum is a major entryway into discussing Chauvet’s own impressions of the mystical body revival in the early
twentieth century and its import for his own work. Therefore, the second section will situate de Lubac’s work in the mystical body resurgence, arguing that de Lubac contributes to, rather than undercuts, the general thrust of that work.

**The French Stream and the Institut Supérieur de Liturgie**

Reflecting upon his own formation in the ebb and flow of theology, Chauvet writes, “All theological discourse depends upon the dominant discourse of the era that preceded it, either to argue against it or to reinforce it. It is obvious that mine has been partly constituted as a reaction against the scholastic discourse of my formation at the theological faculty of Angers.” As Philippe Bordeyne goes on to explain in his biographical sketch of Chauvet, that faculty was heavily, though not entirely, influenced by the neo-scholasticism of the day, in which Chauvet did not find much vibrancy. In

---


369 Neither Bordeyne nor Chauvet mention any specific professors. Mariologist René Laurentin taught at Angers during Chauvet’s time there; he was a younger member of the faculty, having arrived in 1955. Laurentin’s Thomism is more nuanced than many of his era; he would go on to write four volumes on the Second Vatican Council. Yves Congar often finds Laurentin on his side of arguments at the Council. See, for example, Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, 57, 185, 688. Research has only been able to turn up two other Angers theologians during Chauvet’s time there: In moral theology was Marie-Joseph Gerlaud and in Scripture, Pierre Michalon. In an interesting confluence, Abbé Joseph Anger’s theological synthesis via the mystical body of Christ in the thought of Aquinas was prepared as a doctoral dissertation at Angers in 1910. As noted in Chapter III, above, John J. Burke translated Anger’s book in 1931. Abbé Anger, *The Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ According to the Principles of St. Thomas*, trans. John J. Burke (New York: Benzinger, 1931). Burke himself has been acknowledged as
fact, he describes that theology as “too ahistorical and too formal (in the sense of formal logic)” to enable the students “to really think and live, and thus bring about a real collectivity.” Eventually his theological study would lead him to the thought of Martin Heidegger, whose thought would become perhaps chief among the *ancillae* in service to his theological work. At least as important as the continental critique of metaphysics that, as we shall see, frames Chauvet’s theological writing is his connection with the ISL. His teaching there was always paired with the pastoral, both because of the nature of the ISL itself and because of Chauvet’s consistent parish appointments as a priest of the Diocese of Pantoise. If his work is constituted against his early theological formation, it was stoked by, and remained in line with, the aims of his later formation at the ISL.

Two French commentators on Chauvet emphasize these points. Bordeyne, dean of the theology faculty at the *Institut Catholique*, comments, “Chauvet’s theology is difficult to understand if you omit his constant comings and goings between liturgical life, where one receives whomever comes for sacramental preparation and university teaching. Chauvet is the heir to a tradition of reciprocal interaction between pastoral practices and theological research at a high level that gives witness to the strict relations between the

---

working out a crude intrinsicism via mystical body theology. See Margaret M. Reher, “Cardinal Dougherty and the IHM’s: The Church as the ‘Juridic/Mystical’ Body of Christ,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 4 (1996): 53–62. She quotes Burke: “if Christ is the Life of our souls, and there is nothing in all the world that is not Christ, . . . There is no distinction of natural and supernatural. That distinction is theoretical” (54).

370 Chauvet, “Quand la théologie rencontre les sciences humaines,” 401. In French, “Mais, dès ces premières années 60, les étudiants que nous étions éprouvaient le discours théologique communément tenu comme trop anhistorique et trop formel (au sens de la ‘logique formelle’) pour donner vraiment à penser et à vivre, et donc pour entrainer une véritable adhésion.”
National Center of Pastoral Liturgy…and the ISL.” When offered a professorship at the Institut Catholique on the recommendation of Pierre-Marie Gy, OP, Chauvet hesitated because of his deep love for diocesan parish ministry and eventually negotiated a situation which allowed him to do both from 1973 until his retirement from the Institut Catholique in 2007.

He still continues service as a pastor at Deuil-la-Barre in north Paris. Yet, his acceptance of the teaching post coincided with “a turning point in the history of the Institut, a period of transformation aimed at responding to new needs,” observes Patrick Prétot, OSB, ISL director from 2001–2010. “From its founding and under the direction of Dom Bernard Botte, the ISL had provided an education which combined general courses in the fundamentals of liturgiology and special courses in areas of research that were sometimes very specialized.” Prétot continues to describe a transition in which professors began to take the pastoral sphere as not simply the arena where liturgical theory and sacramental theology was to be applied, but rather as a source for theological work itself. Chauvet, Prétot explains, was a driver of this transition. In this, the ISL more fully embraced the idea of its original visionary, Lambert Beauduin, who consistently emphasized the parish realm as significant for theological insight.

---

371 Bordeyne, “Louis-Marie Chauvet,” xii. “National Center of Pastoral Liturgy” is, in French, “Centre National de Pastorale Liturgique.” “Pastorale” is the noun and “liturgique” the adjective.


373 Ibid, 180.
When in 1967—a time of no small upheaval in church and society—Chauvet had completed his studies at the Catholic University of the West in Angers among mostly neo-scholastic professors, he moved on to doctoral study in Paris. Prétot alludes to the 1968 student riots as a component of the shift at the ISL. At the beginning of his doctoral work, Chauvet studied at the ISL. He took courses with eventual Vatican II peritus Gy on sacraments, the theology of the liturgy, and on the divine office. Gy’s influence upon Chauvet was substantial; this is made obvious by the themes Chauvet’s work shares with Gy’s: the unity of liturgy and sacramental theology; liturgical reflection done in light of pastoral experience, criticism of instrumental causality in sacramental theology, and an emphasis on the centrality of the gathered assembly. Further, Chauvet continued to engage Gy’s scholarship throughout his own work and contributed to a Festschrift for Gy in 1990. Later, in Symbol and Sacrament, Chauvet refers to Gy on two important points that were central to debates around mystical body theology in the French stream: the issue of the relationship between the sacraments and the gathered assembly.

---

374 Ibid. These riots had a widespread effect not only in society, but among Catholic thinkers of the day. Michel de Certeau, for example, refocused his efforts in support of pluralization and deep engagement with otherness, celebrating the challenge to those who insisted on their role as dispensers of culture to the masses, while solemnly acknowledging the deep secularization announced by the moment. De Lubac, by contrast, was troubled by the May riots. In the words of Brenna Moore, “He saw in the protestors’ demystication of old authorities merely a new form of Whiggish triumphalism and naïveté.” Brenna Moore, “How to Awaken the Dead: Michel de Certeau, Henri de Lubac, and the Instabilities between the Past and the Present,” Spiritus 12 (Fall 2012): 176–77.


ecclesial assembly; and the tendency to narrow the emphasis simply to the moment of consecration (rather than viewing the eucharistic prayer as a whole).\footnote{Chauvet, \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, 185, 468‒72.} In the French-speaking stream of mystical body theology, with its social bent rooted in the liturgy, neglect of the former and embrace of the latter were related to a narrow vision that failed to perceive the mystical body of Christ.\footnote{For example, see Beauduin, “Sur le sens des mots ‘présence sacramentelle’,” 153. Beauduin emphasizes the role of the assembly in the anamnesis, emphasizing the entire Eucharistic celebration as sacrifice: “\textit{en principe et en droit, chacun de nous est pleinement solidaire dans la passion, la mort, la résurrection, l’ascension de notre Chef (récitez le Unde et memores); mais il y faut notre consentement jusqu’à notre mort, il y faut notre Amen: et pour recueillir chaque jour tous ces « Amen », le Christ replace présent son Sacrifice sous forme de participation de ses membres: sacrifice liturgique (c’est-à-dire de toute son Église, de tout son corps mystique).}” See also Virgil Michel, \textit{My Sacrifice and Yours} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1926). This was one of Virgil Michel’s first popular-level pamphlets published by Liturgical Press and it emphasized similar points. Later in the present chapter we shall see how Chauvet reinterprets the notion of the Mass as sacrifice, without abandoning the theology.}

When Chauvet arrived as a student, Gy had recently (1964) taken charge of the ISL from its founding director, Bernard Botte, OSB. In his memoir on the French liturgical movement, Botte refers to Gy as a key collaborator in the formation of the ISL.\footnote{Botte, 65.} Botte and Gy joined four other liturgical theologians to provide a program in methods of liturgical theology for seminary professors, which began in 1953 at Mont César.\footnote{Ibid., 87.} When Botte was nominated by Louis Bouyer of the \textit{Institut Catholique} to be the first director of the ISL, he accepted, he explains, because “Père Gy at this time was too young to take upon himself the responsibilities of this position, but he was chosen as assistant-director.”\footnote{Ibid., 94–5.} Of his work at the ISL with Gy and two others, Botte writes, “I must pay homage to my main collaborators: Père Gy, Abbé Jounel, Père Dalmais: we...
came to form a perfectly unified team, and I believe we were able to work well together.”382 It is safe to say not only that Botte and Gy worked closely together, but that their collaboration was of a particularly formative kind for Gy. In fact, Gy would later mark Botte, along with Yves Congar, as the most formative influences upon his theology.383

A further examination of Chauvet’s theological family tree leads through Botte to Lambert Beauduin, the Belgian liturgical reformer who was also the greatest influence on Virgil Michel. Before founding the ISL in 1956, Botte collaborated closely with Beauduin at Mont César. He credits Beauduin with beginning the liturgical movement in 1909 with his address on active participation in the liturgy.384 This is a beginning not necessarily because of its novel ideas, but because of its orientation toward the parishes and its spur to action. Beauduin’s pastoral sensibilities were always resolutely theological and these concerns came to animate the ISL—an institution Beauduin dreamed of, but never saw come to fruition. Botte describes this sensibility, enshrined in *Questions Liturgiques et Paroissiales*, the journal Beauduin began:

A parish priest today would probably say [its pages] aren’t practical enough. But you have to understand what Dom Beauduin wanted to do….

First notice the adjective “parish” (“*paroissiales*”). It seems a little dated today and we’d replace it with the word “pastoral.” Dom Beauduin insisted greatly on this. Much later I proposed he drop the adjective, but he protested. He didn’t want the magazine to become a technical publication reserved for specialists. He really

---

382 Ibid., 105.
383 Laurance, 4. Shortly after the council, Gy had collaborated with Congar, Chenu, and others on Yves Congar and Jean-Pierre Jossua, eds., *La liturgie après Vatican II: Bilans, études, prospective*, Unam Sanctum 66 (Paris: Cerf, 1967). Gy’s essay in that volume explored the “movement” created by *Sacro sanctum Concilium* (111–126); Congar’s essay explored a theme that Gy himself never tired of emphasizing and researching: the role of the assembly as the acting subject of the liturgy (241–282).
384 Botte, 10.
wanted his audience to be the parish clergy, those who were really in touch with the people. It was a question of reestablishing contact between the altar and the nave in order to make the liturgy an act of the living community.

On the other hand, Dom Beauduin didn’t intend to give the clergy practical recipes. The priests didn’t need that. What was needed was a change of spirit to make them understand that the liturgy is not a simple ritual mechanism but a source of life for them and for their people.

Some people could see the liturgical movement only as an estheticism designed to make the house of God more attractive and draw crowds to it. But this was not Dom Beauduin’s intention and his personal contribution to the magazine showed it. Renewed esteem for the liturgy was not a question of pastoral tactics, but theological truth.\footnote{Ibid., 22–23. See also Quitslund, esp. 34–35, and Jozef Lamberts, “The Abbey of Mont-César in Louvain: One Hundred Years Young,” \textit{Worship} 73, no. 5 (September 1999): 429–30.}

Unlike others involved with the liturgical movement, especially in Germany, Beauduin aimed for the parish priest.\footnote{On the differences between European liturgical movements in this regard, see Pecklers, esp. 14.} The thinking was that without a modest liturgical training, priests would be unable to light a fire in the parishes. Pastoral orientation remained a common emphasis of the Benedictine house, Mont César, which Beauduin and Botte shared, even if these two differed on the title of the journal.

In the late 1940s, Louis Bouyer laid out some serious criticisms of the liturgical movement’s direction. Abbot Bernard Capelle of Mont César responded with an argument about the perils of narrow rubric-driven seminary formation, which ill-prepares pastors to sort out mere innovation from true strides toward reform.\footnote{See Bernard Capelle, “Crise du movement liturgique?,” \textit{Questions Liturgiques et Paroissiales} 32 (1951): 209–217. Bouyer’s criticism of “para-liturgies” can be found in his “Où en est le mouvement liturgique?,” \textit{La Maison Dieu} 25 (1951): 34–46. Bouyer wrote a similarly titled article (already cited above) just a few years before this one, critiquing aspects of the development of mystical body: “Où en est la théologie du corps mystique?,” \textit{Revue des Sciences Religieuses} 28 (1948): 313–333. Bouyer was concerned with the potentially amorphous character of mystical body theology and especially the}
is an example the monastery’s thorough pastoral orientation; it was in this sphere that Capelle wanted seminaries to improve. Further, it was in this vein, as we have seen, that Virgil Michel worked to develop the movement in the United States. *Orate Fratres*, for example, aimed not only for the parish priest, but also for the people in the pews.\(^{388}\)

Botte first came to Mont César to attend the inaugural Liturgical Week—a gathering of scholars and pastors hosted by Beauduin—in August 1910 and entered the monastery in 1912. He collaborated with Beauduin until the outbreak of World War I when Botte, a reserve, was called to mobilize in 1914. Shortly after the war Beauduin left for Rome to serve as professor of liturgy at Sant’Anselmo.\(^{389}\) Beauduin’s biographer suggests that there was less and less sympathy for Beauduin’s ideas at Mont César, and Botte suggests that Beauduin’s departure was primarily precipitated by Dom Odo Lottin, new prefect of studies at Mont César, who “was afraid of the exuberant activity of Dom Beauduin and told him so.”\(^{390}\)

Beauduin jumped at the opportunity to go to Rome because many of the younger Benedictines who entered during the war did not know him (he was engaged in a variety of wartime activities including espionage, secret trips to Great Britain, and hiding those

\(^{388}\) Michel wrote in the inaugural number of the journal, “A liturgical awakening must come through a sympathetic understanding on the part of the general faithful.” Virgil Michel, “Foreword,” 2–3. The extent to which he and the U.S. movement were successful in this endeavor is a matter of some debate. See Pecklers, esp. 281–84

\(^{389}\) Quitslund, 52. Quitslund dates his departure in the Fall of 1921. Botte suggests the date is 1923 (Botte, 35), but Quitslund seems to be correct.

\(^{390}\) Botte, 35.
in contempt of the occupation\textsuperscript{391}) and did not have much sympathy for the movement. He felt isolated at Mont César. For Botte, by contrast, with the encouragement of Abbott Capelle, Mont-César became a platform for his newfound teaching and writing about the liturgy. In a more personal vein, Botte writes with clear affection for his confrère,

His good nature, kindness, and cordiality won me over. Forty years later I had my nephew (a young chemical engineer) take me by car to Chevetogne. We saw Dom Lambert together. Then I left my nephew and went to meet another priest. When I came back, they were the best of friends. Afterwards my nephew told me that he had never met anyone so likeable. Dom Beauduin was that way. By the end of a half-hour’s conversation you had the impression you were his best friend. I had looked for an epithet that could best characterize him. I didn’t find it in the dictionary but in a title of Chesterton: \textit{Supervivant}. He overflowed with life and made it spring up all around him.\textsuperscript{392}

Like Beauduin did, Botte would eventually, in the fifties, direct his energies toward ecumenical endeavors.\textsuperscript{393} Beauduin’s vision for liturgical renewal included a school for liturgical studies that would serve as the liturgical counterpart to the School for Thomistic Philosophy at Leuven and the École Biblique in Jerusalem—a think tank for liturgical theology, which would support the pastoral engagement that Beauduin thought the heart of his own liturgical apostolate. According to Jozef Lamberts, “This plan, however, he was unable to realize. His dream was only realized in 1956 when the \textit{Insitut Supérieur de Liturgie}, a graduate institute of liturgical studies, was established in Paris as a cooperation of the \textit{Centre de Pastorale Liturgique} of Paris and the abbey of Mont-César. The \textit{Centre de Pastorale Liturgique} itself was founded in 1943 with Dom

\textsuperscript{391} On Beauduin’s stunning wartime activities, see Louis Bouyer, \textit{Dom Lambert Beauduin}, 83‒102, as well as Loonbeek and Mortiau, 57‒68. In his espionage activities, Beauduin took on at least three aliases. He was primarily known as Oscar Fraipont, wine merchant (specializing in sacramental wine), but also at times as Oscar Bronckart and Louis Lambert.

\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{393} Lamberts, 438.
Beauduin as its advisor.” In essence, then, Botte founded and initially directed the institute that Beauduin had first conceived.

Having established Beauduin’s essential contributions to the French-speaking liturgical-social stream of mystical body theology in Chapter I, this section has demonstrated a genealogical, if somewhat oblique, connection between Beauduin, some of the other key figures in the French stream, and Chauvet. It bears recalling here that Beauduin read and reread Émile Mersch’s *The Whole Christ*, and that he remarked that his friend de Lubac’s *Catholicisme* was a book he wished he had written himself. While he may have had some disagreements with these two Jesuits, Beauduin nevertheless found them *sympathique* in terms of theological priorities and emphases. Because Michel was so deeply influenced by Beauduin, the liturgical movement he kick-started, and the mystical body theology he elaborated, it makes historical sense to locate Chauvet in the same long stream of French liturgical-social mystical body thought as Michel. Much of that connection resides in the development of the ISL. This is not at all to suggest that all of those involved with the establishment and development of the ISL were involved with the mystical body recovery; however, significant figures were. On the whole, there were disagreements among them, certainly, but the theologians that swam in this liturgical-social French stream shared an emphasis on, of course, the theology of the mystical body, but also upon its rootedness in the liturgy and sacraments of the church, the need to engage social movements, and the necessity of taking insights from the tradition to the pews.

---

394 Ibid., 430.
395 Quitslund, 243.
Sacramental Body: Henri de Lubac in the French Stream

In terms of intellectual biography, Chauvet’s place in the long stream of French-speaking mystical body theology makes sense. However, these historical links should not lead us to take any continuity between Chauvet and his forbears for granted. It was Chauvet himself, after all, who commented on the discontinuity of his work from his earlier theological formation in Angers. As is clear from even a cursory read of Chauvet’s theology, his work is interested in the nature of mediation, deeply dependent on the category of “corporality” or bodiliness; it elaborates the nature of the intersection between Scripture, sacrament, and ethics; it proceeds from a close reading of the liturgical action of the Church. All of these were central emphases of the French stream. Chauvet’s explicit discussion of mystical body theology appears in his interpretation and application of de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum*. In order to understand that appropriation, we shall now turn to de Lubac’s contribution to the French stream of mystical body theology—a contribution ultimately supportive of the formulation in the title of his book and one thoroughly liturgical as well as socially engaged.

Real or Metaphor?

Among those who have written about the mystical body of Christ during the heyday of its twentieth-century revival, there are a range of opinions about precisely how we are to understand the rhetorical, and indeed denotative, force of the image.396 One

396 There is some agreement that it has both metaphorical and “real” senses. Anselm Min says that “The church is not literally the body of Christ and is not hypostatically united with Christ, but it is also the Body of Christ in more than a purely metaphorical sense”; and further, “the Body of Christ is a great metaphor.” See “The Church as the Flesh of Christ Crucified: Toward an Incarnational Theology of the Church in the Age of Globalization,” in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation*, edited by Maureen O’Connell and Laurie Cassidy, 2010 College Theology
question particularly brings the problem to light: Is “mystical body of Christ” a metaphor? 397

Chapter I mentioned Dominican Mannes D. Koster, who in 1940 argued that “mystical body of Christ” was simply a metaphor to those who had been thriving on its theological energy. Koster himself championed “People of God” (Volk Gottes) as an ecclesiological image because of its realism—it locates the Christian people in the covenant and describes who they actually are. Whereas, Koster claimed, “Mystical Body

Society Annual, Volume 56 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 97. Geoffrey Preston challenges the “metaphoricisation” of the body in Mystici Corporis and insists that “Body of Christ” is not metaphorical, but is the “expressive organ” of Christ. See Faces of the Church: Meditations on a Mystery and Its Images, text prepared by Aidan Nichols, with a foreword by Walter Kasper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 87–92. Louis Bouyer concurs with “Msgr. [Lucien] Cerfaux” who demonstrated that in Romans and First Corinthians “‘body’ is applied to the Church in an obviously metaphorical fashion. See Bouyer, The Church of God, 303. Avery Dulles suggests that there is a sense in which “Body of Christ” is metaphorical. See Models of the Church, 54. Emile Mersch outlines some of the tensions: “That one should refuse to accept the words ‘Mystical Body’ and ‘members and Head’ as the statement of a thesis whence all possible consequences can be drawn—nothing could be wiser; these metaphors, for such they are, merely indicate a unity that transcends the biological realities from which they are taken. It is best to retain the traditional name and call it a ‘mystical’ union. However, it must be clearly understood that this term is by no means synonymous with ‘nebulus’ or ‘semi-real’” See Mersch, The Whole Christ, 9. Paul Hanly Furfey has called “mystical body” a “similitude,” but further clarified, “The Mystical Body is real. It is called mystical to distinguish it not from what is real, but to distinguish it from what is visible and physical.” See Fire on the Earth, 42–43). For his part, Virgil Michel is less comfortable with the term “metaphor.” In a letter to the editor of Commonweal, responding to a review of Mersch’s The Whole Christ, Michel writes, “Is it correct to refer to the Mystical Body of Christ as a metaphor…? Would it not be much more correct to speak of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, or of the sublime supernatural reality of it, which we picture to ourselves under the figure of the human body?” See “The Mystical Body,” Commonweal 29 (28 Oct 1938): 18. See also the discussion of this point in Chapter II above.

397 As early as 1935, William R. O’Connor titled an article, “The Mystical Body of Christ: Reality or Metaphor?” O’Connor concludes, “There is in it a reality and a metaphor, and the metaphor is no less necessary than the reality to bring out its content.” “Our embodiment in Christ” is constituted by sanctifying grace “an objectively existing entity” which renders the bond real beyond the implications of the body metaphor (152–53).
of Christ,” as an ecclesial image, “was only a metaphorical description of the instrumentalist institution”—figuring Christians as Christ’s arms, legs, etc. is a helpful way of imagining the various roles of the Church, but isn’t, of course, actually real.

While he had other concerns as well (see Chapter I above), Koster was critical of those theologians who reduced the “mystical body of Christ” to a kind of corporate flow chart of the Church. In their hands, it became overly horizontal—a mystical body like other mystical unions across space, like states and kingdoms. Their emphasis on the Church as an extension of the hypostatic union made clear that there are human and divine elements in the Church, but the vertical bonds were primarily individual (between believer and Christ) and not social (among believers and Christ).

British Jesuit and once Bombay Archbishop Alban Goodier provides an interesting window into some late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century attitudes concerning the mystical body of Christ. “Some of us remember a time,” he writes, “when to be enthusiastic about [the mystical body of Christ] was to be thought in dangerous proximity to Modernism. We were warned by our spiritual fathers, and our theological professors, that to treat it as more than a vivid metaphor was, not heretical, perhaps, but at least temerarious, and liable to lead to much misunderstanding.”

Goodier entered the novitiate in 1887 and was ordained in 1903. His presumably post-<i>Aeterni Patris</i> neo-Thomist formation reflects a common Thomist concern that “mystical body” become more than a “similitudo.” In the <i>Summa Theologiae</i>, Thomas Aquinas had reflected on

---

398 Dietrich, “Catholic Theology and the Challenge of Nazism,” 88. Koster was indebted to the kerygmatic theology in Germany and thought that “Mystical Body of Christ” “did not reveal [the Church’s] essence as the ongoing historical message of Jesus and the Christian community to the world.”

399 Goodier, 289.
Christ’s headship of the Church as metaphorical and a likeness: “it must be said that in metaphorical speech we must not expect a likeness in all aspects, for thus it would be not a likeness (similitudo), but the truth of the matter.” Thomas’s language here opens up many questions about the relationship between “metaphor” and “truth.”

Henri de Lubac rejects the idea that “mystical body of Christ” should be understood primarily as a metaphor, since doing so undercuts the real, though mediated, character of the doctrine. Referring to currents in the late nineteenth-century, de Lubac writes,

> the general tendency was to emphasize the metaphorical character of the expression [mystical body of Christ], to the point of watering down the realism of the doctrine it contained. The biblical image was viewed as fitted only to put across an idea which remained that of a society undoubtedly supernatural in its origin and end, and with equally supernatural means at its disposal, but without mystical unity in the true sense of the words. It seems as if we must diagnose as a symptom of this state of mind—in some cases at least—the open refusal (in the teeth of a solid tradition, both patristic and Thomist) to grant that the Holy Spirit was Himself the Soul of this Body.

In the next chapter, we shall return to de Lubac’s claim that a thin pneumatology is a symptom of this problem, but for the moment I want to focus on the disease—a watering down of the realism and an emphasis on metaphor. De Lubac wrote this in Meditations sur l’église (translated as Splendor of the Church) in 1953, in which he employs the

---

400 Summa Theologiae 3.8.1.ad 2. My translation. In Latin, “dicendum quod in metaphorici locutionibus non oportet attendi similitudinem quantum ad omnia, sic enim non esset similitudo, sed rei veritas.” Diffusing the complications significantly, the Fathers of the English Dominican Province translate “rei veritas” as “identity” rather than the more literal “truth of the thing.”

401 de Lubac, The Splendor of the Church, 95. “The Eucharist, in its turn,” writes de Lubac, “realizes the Church, in the strict sense of the words…. And thus the social body of the Church, that corpus christianorum, united round its visible pastors for the Lord’s Supper, really does become the Mystical Body of Christ; it is really Christ who assimilates it to Himself, so that the Church is then truly the “Corpus Christi effecta” (152–3).
phrase “mystical body of Christ” multiple times favorably, either to refer to the Church or to the Eucharistic liturgical action. In fact, he specifically understands Mystici Corporis as having undercut any tendency to assume “a closed circuit of doctrine that puts an end to discussion and reflection alike and discourages the raising of new questions.” His later comments enables us to read his earlier Corpus Mysticum as a direct historical challenge to this disease. For de Lubac the burden of Corpus Mysticum (at least as he understood it in his later years) was not to contrast the corpus mysticum (or “mystical body”) of the Eucharist with the corpus verum (or “true body” of the church), but rather to challenge the abstracting tendencies of certain strains of mystical body theology—those that supported various uses of “mystical” to apply to any connection of

---

402 See also Ibid., 102–3, 127–34, 239, 334.
403 Ibid., 28.
404 Henri de Lubac, Corpus Mysticum. Reading the earlier Corpus Mysticum through the later Splendor of the Church is warranted because in that later period de Lubac himself referred to Corpus Mysticum as “naïve,” and further because his usage of “mystical body of Christ” for both the Eucharist and for the Church in the later work indicates that his intention in Corpus Mysticum was not to eradicate mystical body theology, only to refine it. Pius XII’s encyclical had not yet been published when de Lubac wrote Corpus Mysticum (1938–39). A second, revised edition, upon which the English edition is based, appeared in 1949. It is understandable that after Humani Generis (August 1950), which he feared implicated him, and the theological silence imposed upon him by his superiors two months earlier, that he would be very careful with his words for that reason in 1953. Nevertheless, de Lubac’s integral—and not simply peripheral—use of the phrase in later work supports the argument that de Lubac did not intend to wipe out “mystical body of Christ” from theological discourse with Corpus Mysticum. Viewed through the lens of the variegated streams of mystical body theology, it would make more sense in terms of de Lubac’s ecclesiological work, his wider corpus, and his own context that de Lubac offered a challenge to the Roman, and perhaps even German, streams of mystical body theology, which were more disconnected from the liturgy and sacraments of the Church, and at the same time generally more given to the sociological designation, “mystical body.”
persons across space and those that abstracted its point of reference from the liturgy, specifically the Eucharist.  

This was not merely an abstract concern for de Lubac. As has been demonstrated by several scholars, de Lubac’s fierce resistance to the Vichy regime in the early 1940s and its shadow Nazi control after 1942 was supported by his theological endeavors. Given the theological and political dynamics of the day, one could see de Lubac’s resistance to the Nazi regime and challenge to neo-scholastic theology as of a piece. Joseph Komonchak writes:

One of the Jesuit superiors in Rome who was critical of [de Lubac’s] theological views in 1946 had been quite critical of his opposition to Vichy. Garrigou-Lagrange, who was one of the first and most vigorous critics of “la nouvelle théologie,” had long supported the Action française, and his defense of Vichy had reached the point of accusing anyone who supported de Gaulle of mortal sin. Garrigou was also very close to Léon Béard, who had served as the Vichy ambassador to the Holy See and had sent back a notorious dispatch in which he not only stated that the Vatican had no major objections to the Vichy anti-Jewish legislation but defended it by citations from St. Thomas, which de Lubac believes were contributed by ‘Thomists,’ either in Rome or in France. Many of the theologians who would be lumped together as leaders of “la nouvelle théologie” had been active participants in the Christian resistance to Nazism and to Vichy.

---

405 The extent to which his efforts both had and had not been broadly received is obvious from the following narrative: “In the absence of the chaplain of a certain pious organisation, on a recent occasion, the senior member gave the talk. Speaking on the Mystical Body he showed a thorough familiarity with the encyclical and other treatises. Before concluding he let fall a bombshell, to the effect that in Holy Communion we received the Mystical Body. This, of course, is an extreme example, but it does seem to show, since the person who made the blunder was not unintelligent, that it is not enough to preach sentences about the doctrine, even if culled from the encyclical, but that a more analytical exposition is needed.” MacCarthy, 269–70. MacCarthy goes on to suggest that the image of “body” should be set aside for some time in order to emphasize “the Church as divinely instituted society” (271).


407 Komonchak, 601–602.
Though all of his references to Karl Adam’s work are positive,⁴⁰⁸ one can see how de Lubac’s exasperation with French accommodationists to Vichy ideology could also be applied to Adam’s defense of Nazi racial politics with mystical body theology. De Lubac lamented Vichy Catholics’ “naïvely supernatural’ language.”⁴⁰⁹ It is likely that de Lubac, concerned with matters at home, did not encounter some of the more horrifying implications of Adam’s mystical body theology. Insofar as Adam’s mystical body theology is separated from a thick account of the Eucharist, it is subject to the challenges presented in *Corpus Mysticum*.

*Corpus Mysticum* and Mediation

It was that 1938–39 work (published in the 1944 Vichy context, with a 1941 imprimatur, and revised for a 1949 second edition) that illustrated the linguistic shift of *corpus mysticum* from a descriptor of the Eucharist to a descriptor of the Church, especially in the late twelfth century, after the Eucharistic controversy surrounding Berengar of Tours a century earlier.⁴¹⁰ The major argument of *Corpus Mysticum* is that in discussion of the threefold body of Christ: historical/glorified, Eucharistic, and ecclesial,


⁴⁰⁹ Grumett, 39.

⁴¹⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*. William T. Cavanaugh, who makes extensive use of de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum*, has pointed out the dangers of mystical body theology as they were received in 1970s–1980s Chile. We explored his reading of *Mystici Corporis* in Chapter I, above. Cavanaugh claims that the espousal of “mystical” body theology stood in opposition to the “real” (*corpus verum*) and thus led Chilean bishops and other officials to give Catholics’ bodies over to state control while professing cure of souls. However, Cavanaugh admits that Dorothy Day employed mystical body theology in a much more embodied manner in the early twentieth century U.S. context. He ascribes this to her generally more embodied approach to Christianity as a whole. See Cavanaugh, “Dorothy Day and the Mystical Body of Christ in the Second World War,” 457–464. However, as we have seen in Chapter II, above, Dorothy Day represents only one among many for whom mystical body theology was not an abstraction.
the action of Christ comes to be more and more circumscribed as the second two become less and less closely identified in the hyper-realistic response to Berengar’s eucharistic theology. ⁴¹¹ Neither Berengar nor his opponents were able to imagine a real presence of Christ that was not physicalist. Berengar rejected it and his opponents Lanfranc and eventually Humbert accepted it. ⁴¹² De Lubac describes this methodological problem as one of rationalistic presuppositions: “if I were to seek to characterize this doctrine [Berengar’s] not so much by the arguments in which it ended, as by the spirit that animated it and by the methodology it used, it would be better to say that is presented itself as a form of rationalism and dialectic,” instead of as “symbol” pure and simple. ⁴¹³

In the chapter of Corpus Mysticum provocatively titled, “From Symbolism to Dialectic,” de Lubac argues that the richness of the patristic vision of corpus mysticum thinned after Berengar and into the scholastic period such that “Even among those who still considered it of great importance, symbolism became something artificial and unnecessary” and with it, “The essential link that bonded the Eucharistic rite to the unity of the Church…” disappeared.” Moving forward, “long established custom kept [the language of symbols]

---

⁴¹¹ De Lubac writes, “it could be said that the ultra-orthodox party fell into the trap that had been set for them by the heretic [Berengar], or again that they allied with him in mutilating that traditional teaching: one group holding to symbolism, the other to the ‘truth’. Against mystically, not truly, was set, in no less exclusive a sense, truly, not mystically. Perhaps orthodoxy was safeguarded, but on the other hand, doctrine was certainly impoverished” (Corpus Mysticum, 223).

⁴¹² See Gary Macy, The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1984), 18–72. The Oath that Berengar was made to recite at the Council of Rome in 1059 was drafted by Humbert and included the assertion that the bones of Christ were “crushed by the teeth of the faithful” in consuming the Eucharist. The trope of Berengar carried on well into the scholastic era. In a likely reference to the Cathars, who often used the Berengarian oath to mock Catholics as cannibals, St. Thomas refers to the heirs of Berengarius in Summa Theologiae III.75.1.res. Such a reference is not foreign to Thomas’s order, the Dominicans, which came into existence to fight the Cathar heresy.

⁴¹³ de Lubac, Corpus Mysticum, 225.
in place, but their ‘power of evocation’ had worn out.” that is, “the symbolism became extrinsic: from now on it could be ignored without damaging the integrity of the sacrament.”

That is to say, the problem that de Lubac exposes in *Corpus Mysticum* is a problem of *mediation*. “Symbolic” is not the difficulty. The mediated bodies of Christ—the Eucharistic and ecclesial—belong together. They cannot be separated from the Christ they mediate. It is not simply a flip-flop of the terms “mystical” and “true” that occurs with Berengar, but rather a new division between mystical, sacramental, and true that had not really existed before the twelfth century. In essence, then, the threefold body becomes merely a twofold body. Into the eighteenth century, a good many theologians, de Lubac avers, “developed an idea of [the Church] that was less and less realist, because less and less mystical.”

It is difficult here not to see in de Lubac’s clarification on these points a challenge to his own theological context in which Modernists have been associated with “symbol” and their neo-scholastic opponents have championed dialectic.

De Lubac points out that the adjective “mystical” (*mysticum*) depends upon the noun “mystery,” Greek *mystērion*, which is translated into Latin by either “mysterium” or “sacramentum.” The nuances of these two terms are many and their usage, de Lubac tells us, is not consistent. In generalizing, one is able to say that “a mystery [*mysterium*]…is more of an action than a thing,” thus “while the sacramentum is ‘confected’, carried,

---

415 de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 106, 166.  
416 Ibid., 259. Emphasis mine.  
deposed, kept, divided, broken, distributed, received, absorbed, eaten and drunk, the
mysterium itself is ‘done’, worked, celebrated, offered, completed, interrupted, re-started,
frequented. By the first [sacramentum] we are nourished, purified, fortified, vivified; we
assist, serve, and officiate at the second [mysterium]. It is the accomplishment of the
mystery which produces the sacrament.”

De Lubac’s description of the nature of “mysterium,” could be applied to his
project as a whole as it concerns the relationship between the Eucharistic species and the
ecclesial body that it constitutes: “It focuses [neither on the sign nor the hidden reality
but] on both at the same time: on their mutual relationship, union and implications, on the
way in which one passes into the other, or is penetrated by the other.” Thus, “we are
presented here…with something unclear and fluid. It conveys a dynamism and
synthesis.” Reflecting back on the nature of mystical body theology in the twentieth
century, one can detect precisely this impact of the modifier “mystical” on the various
incarnations of the theology. It was this fluidity that led to the need for mystical body
theology to be grounded in more concrete, embodied realities.

In Splendor, De Lubac also indicates another tendency that he wished to stem in
his historical study of the term “mystical body.” Once separated from the Eucharist, there
is an increasing use of the term “mystical body” (devoid of its Christological
prepositional phrase) as a merely sociological designation, as in a group of people bound
across space. Thus, he tells us, some say “The Church is a mystical body whose head is
the Pope.” Of course, the Church is a group of people bound across space, but such an

---

418 De Lubac, Corpus Mysticum, 49–50. With respect to the final sentence, de
Lubac refers to St. Athanasius.
419 Ibid., 51.
expression alone is inadequate, for it ignores that the members of the Church are the members of Christ.\(^{420}\) This would sever the first (historical/glorified) from the third (ecclesial) bodies of Christ. De Lubac is careful not to suggest swinging the pendulum to the other side. That is, to rule out any “sociological” analyses of the church which can aid us in understanding the its “accidentals.” This type of analysis can be very valuable. Yet, “if we talk of a ‘sociological Church,’ we only accentuate a dichotomy already suspect”; rather, such discourse should proceed with “due caution” so as not to behave “like the son who insults his mother.”\(^{421}\)

De Lubac highlights, in this later work, particular insights from *Corpus Mysticum*. In the earlier book, he uncovered various uses in the fifteenth and sixteenth century of simply “the body of the Church” (sans any reference to Christ or, less importantly, the word *mysticum* in any form), commenting that “Speaking of the body of the Church could therefore be nothing more than a slightly more descriptive way of talking about the ‘body of Christians,’ as the Romans used to speak of the ‘body of the Greeks,’ of the ‘body of Jews.’”\(^{422}\) Thus, disconnected from Eucharistic referent, “corpus” comes to mean simply a people collected under a particular moniker. Extending further into the

---


\(^{422}\) de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 85. De Lubac cites pages in the 1936 and 1937 volumes of the *Journal of Theological Studies* to this point. A bit of investigation demonstrates that both of these are brief notes indicating that the Greek *soma* was indeed used in pre-New Testament literature to refer to a collection of people or a society. The first claims to disprove a widely accepted notion that the Pauline usage was unique, the second elaborates several other examples. The full citations are: T.W. Manson, “A Parallel to a N.T. Use of σῶμα,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 148 (October 1936): 385, and G. C. Richards, “Parallels to a N.T. Use of σῶμα,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 38, no. 150 (April 1937): 165.
sixteenth century and into modernity (in figures such as Suarez and Kant), de Lubac exposes a notion of “mystical body” that is entirely horizontal.\textsuperscript{423} For Kant, particularly, that horizontal notion is made up of those “reasonable beings formed by the free submission of each one to the rule of moral laws.”\textsuperscript{424} This general application of “mystical body” to class structure and to various national and international groups continues to develop throughout the post-Christendom age.\textsuperscript{425}

Wrested free from the Eucharist and then even from its reference to Christ, mystical body became a sociological term. By contrast, Susan Wood comments, de Lubac’s use of the body image intends ontological, not sociological, purchase.\textsuperscript{426} The context, de Lubac’s own and that of early modernity, is not unimportant here. As the church in the modern era loses the authority it had in Christendom—albeit an authority that was always jockeying with that of kings and princes—the Christological character of “mystical body of Christ” is likewise shorn off, returning the phrase to a meaning more akin to the usage of Augustus or Agrippa, though with a distinctly modern voluntaristic quality. The deadly dichotomy between the body of the altar and the ecclesial body rendered the church susceptible to intense privatization, ill-equipped to respond theologically to the challenge of modernity on a broad scale, except by accepting its rationalistic playing field. The voluntarism of the age (Kant’s “free submission of each one”) had now substituted for St. Thomas’s vision of members and potential members of the mystical body of Christ. Thus, the Christological character of a phrase that, in its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{423} de Lubac, \textit{Corpus Mysticum}, 118.
\item \textsuperscript{424} Ibid. De Lubac cites Kant’s \textit{Transcendental Methodology} here.
\item \textsuperscript{425} de Lubac, \textit{Corpus Mysticum}, 249ff.
\item \textsuperscript{426} Wood, \textit{Spiritual Exegesis}, 87.
\end{itemize}
origin, had been tied so closely to the Eucharist, is now relegated merely to the
Eucharistic elements of the altar. The true Christ is found (only?) there.

Paradox and Individualism in the French Context

De Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* was primarily aimed at neo-scholastic theologians
of his day who accepted the rationalist ground of modern discourse for the basis of their
reinterpretation of scholastic theology. Those theologians (who fueled what I have
identified as the Roman school of mystical body theology) understood “mystical body of
Christ” in a structural/social manner to refer to the ecclesial body and then
supported/developed an individualistic Eucharistic piety that revered the consecrated
host, with little, if any, ecclesial-social connection.\(^\text{427}\) In such a configuration we have

\(^{427}\) Lawrence Paul Hemming helpfully highlights the critique of rationalism
embedded in *Corpus Mysticum*. Hemming points out de Lubac’s concern that rational
dialectic overwhelms prayer, especially the liturgical kind. He challenges Catherine
Pickstock and Michel de Certeau, who, he charges, establish a new “deadly dichotomy”
between the historical/glorified body, on the one hand, and the Eucharistic/ecclesial
bodies on the other. However, Hemming’s goal of highlighting the sense in which de
Lubac’s text takes aim at rationalism is partially blunted by his nearly dismissing the way
in which the text also goes after individualism. In de Lubac’s own context these two were
radically joined—these tendencies characterized Enlightenment intellectuals as well as
the neo-scholastics that opposed them. The challenge to individualism, beginning with de
Lubac’s *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Cerf, 1938), was central to
his own theological project and also runs through *Corpus Mysticum*. What does not (and
here is where Hemming is correct) is the necessary indictment of Eucharistic devotion
that some have linked to that challenge. To follow this latter course seems to begin with
one observation made by de Lubac at the end of the book (*Corpus Mysticum*, 259) and
make it the aim of the entire work. See Lawrence Paul Hemming, “Henri de Lubac:
Reading *Corpus Mysticum*,” *New Blackfriars* 90, no. 1029 (September 2009): 519–34,
esp. 528. Joseph Komonchak makes a point that highlights both of the major critiques
embedded in *Corpus Mysticum*—individualism and rationalism—in “Theology and
Culture at Mid-Century,” 589–593. Hemming’s critique of de Certeau is overwrought.
The latter clearly critiques two attempts to reduce the ternary character of the Body of
Christ to a binary during the Reformation. See Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The
Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992;
French orig. 1982), 82–90. Further, Hemming’s claim that “de Lubac understood the real
shift to be the triumph of rationalism, exemplified by Berengar’s thought, emerging to
merely an extrinsic relationship between individual, church, and sacrament. That is, the sacraments are moments for individuals to be filled with grace and then, guaranteed by the structure of the church, its pope, etc., these individuals are bound together in mystical union. There is a primacy of church structure in forming the union over the Eucharist.

This conclusion is borne out by the fact that de Lubac himself refers to the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ several times in *Meditations,* including an explanation of *Corpus Mysticum* itself: “The Eucharist, in its turn, realizes the church, in the strict sense of the words…. And thus the social body of the Church, that *corpus christianorum,* united round its visible pastors for the Lord’s Supper, really does become the Mystical Body of Christ; it is really Christ who assimilates it to Himself, so that the Church is then

---

assert itself as the basis and ground of theological thinking, eclipsing the grounding character of the liturgy as the source of meaning in theology” (519) is striking because of its amenability to de Certeau’s project. In fact, de Certeau explains how that process continues when “*la mystique*” becomes a discipline unto itself instead of an adjective modifying embodied practices that make the Body of Christ present in the world. He argues that in the late seventeenth century, “mystics” (like “physics” or “optics”) becomes a discrete genre, and so represents a detachment from confidence in sacramental structures and the ecclesial role of contemplation. Mysticism become its own system. The institutional structures that support such a move are informed by the rationalism of the early modern era. Thus de Certeau writes, “the history of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries might have as its general identifying characteristic the specialization of the elite classes and the marginalization of a majority of the population with respect to the codes of a world that until then had functioned as a network of relations.” Modernity begins, then, as early as the thirteenth century, as a hyper-specialization of discourse. “This problematic gave rise, among the mystics, to the invention of a different body, born of and for the discourse intending to produce reform—an alien body against which the institution of medicine would eventually win out in imposing a scientific body.” See *The Mystic Fable* 85; see also 110–112. Of course, the difference between Hemming and de Certeau (and also between de Certeau and de Lubac) is a difference in emphasis on the more subversive aspects of mystical prayer practices for de Certeau instead of on liturgical practices. See de Certeau’s complex and fascinating account of the possession of Jeanne des Anges, with its layers of ecclesial-monarchical tensions and mystical prayer, in *The Possession at Loudun,* trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Nevertheless, de Certeau understands, and even thematizes, de Lubac’s critique of rationalism in *Corpus Mysticum.*

truly the ‘Corpus Christi effecta’.”429 De Lubac is faithful to his well-known emphasis on paradox in Corpus Mysticum—the mystical body of Christ is a precarious interplay of the three bodies of Christ, on which emphasis waxes and wanes. The key is to avoid the deadly break.430

Situated in the French stream, it is not surprising that, as Raymond Moloney has argued, the main purpose of Corpus Mysticum was to defend the social nature of Catholicism and support Catholic work on behalf of social causes.431 In the ebb and flow of theology, de Lubac was not troubled by “Christomonism” but, like his North American counterparts, was more concerned with creeping individualism.432 The sociological definition of the church—as merely an organization like other organizations—was the real threat as de Lubac conceived it. He was troubled that those who were fighting for a deeper social identity—workers’ organizations, unions, etc.—often laid individualism at the foot of the Catholic Church. In response, de Lubac wanted to illustrate that the church, in its very essence, is social. Like Beauduin before him, de Lubac’s concerns were about justice. As Moloney puts it, “Apostolically he wished to provide various Catholic social movements of the day with a theology of the corporate which would

429 Ibid., 152–3.
430 Susan Wood, Spiritual Exegesis, 82–85. Susan Wood argues that de Lubac’s notion of the relationship between the Church and the mystical body of Christ developed from Splendor of the Church to his Church: Paradox and Mystery, trans. James R. Dunne (New York: Ecclesia Press, 1969, French orig. 1967). In the later work, he writes, “We shall not reduce the Mystical Body of Christ to equivalence with the forms of the Roman Church, nor will we water down the Church until it becomes a ‘body’ conceived in entirely ‘mystical’ fashion” (20). Wood remarks that de Lubac is ultimately unclear on the relationship between the Church and the mystical body of Christ or, rather, he is neck deep in the paradox of the mystery of the Church.
432 Wood concludes that some statements in de Lubac’s corpus can be considered “Christomonistic,” but that they are balanced by others. Wood, Spiritual Exegesis, 89.
ground their activities in the sources of the faith. Doctrinally he wished not only to open up Christians to their social responsibilities but also to the basis of those responsibilities in the spiritual interdependence which binds the members of Christ’s body into one.”

Perhaps de Lubac’s greatest achievement on the social question, at least one that has been neglected since, is

grounding… social involvement in a mystical vision and in a level of spiritual belonging and mutual responsibility revealed only by the doctrine of the body of Christ. This is the level on which we are all members of one another and mediators to one another of the life of God shared with us. This is the life which the Eucharist is to nourish, and this is the level of community which is the foundation of all our involvement in society.”

De Lubac’s Corpus Mysticum fits into the context of the renewal of mystical body theology shepherded by the liturgical movement and the nouvelle théologie. In fact, Belgian Jesuit Émile Mersch, whose Le corps mystique du Christ (1933) is generally considered a great spur to the revitalization of mystical body theology, wrote in that work, “the Eucharist is not simply the sacrament of the Real Presence, but it also has a necessary connection with ecclesiastical unity.” Mersch had not worked out the nuances that de Lubac’s position evinces, but clearly they were not working at cross purposes.

In de Lubac’s earlier Catholicism, he noted “The informed reader will notice that we owe much to Fr. Mersch.” In fact, toward the end of Corpus Mysticum, de Lubac, diagnosing the needs of his own era and of the liturgical movement, offers a proposal: “It seems it would therefore be of great interest, we might even say pressing urgency, given

---

433 Moloney, 342.  
434 Mersch, The Whole Christ, 426. As we have seen, Mersch himself is also rather hard on the scholastics.  
435 Henri de Lubac, Catholicism, 17, n. 7.
the present state of what remains of ‘Christendom,’ to return to the sacramental origins of the ‘mystical body’ in order to steep ourselves in it.” We need to see in the Eucharistic celebration the unity of the three bodies of Christ. “Such an assessment seems to impose itself all the more because without it the very strength of the corporate aspirations which can currently be felt at the heart of the Church, and which are in particular driving the liturgical movement, cannot be without peril.”

His work, then, aims at supporting and bolstering the connections between sacraments and social questions all while it challenges what I have called the Roman stream of mystical body theology, as well as the German-Romantic stream insofar as it disconnected the mystical body from the Eucharist.

Conclusions

This chapter situated Chauvet in the French stream of mystical body theology by unpacking his theological genealogy, especially as it is related to the ISL. The next chapter shall turn to Chauvet’s theological project, developing how it picked up and

---

436 de Lubac, Corpus Mysticum, 260.
437 In Models of the Church, Avery Dulles considers de Lubac’s ecclesiology primarily under this model, “Church as Sacrament.” This makes sense especially because the title of chapter 6 of Splendor of the Church is “Sacrament of Christ.” And, of course, Dulles does not claim that models are mutually exclusive. However, one way to understand de Lubac’s thrust, especially in his earlier work, but continuing in his later work, is to bring together that model with what Dulles has called the “Mystical Communion” model. Under that latter model, Dulles includes both “People of God” and “(Mystical) Body of Christ.” Dennis Doyle helpfully points out that these images represent different emphases in Catholic theology, in Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 18. Mannes Koster’s critique and others like it make clear the tensions even before Vatican II. Karl Adam’s response to Koster draws out the tensions Doyle highlights. See Karl Adam, “Ekklesiologie im Werden? Kritische Bemerkungen zu M. D. Koster’s Kritik an den ekklesiologischen Versuchen der Gegenwart,” Theologische Quartalschrift 122 (1941), 145–166. Adam brings some of the issues to light in his response to Koster. Though, it is notable that one of Adam’s major concerns is that the quest for the definitive definition of the church’s essence taken by Koster is wrongheaded and doomed to failure.
developed the concerns of the French stream of mystical body theology. As a prelude to that work, this chapter argued that Henri de Lubac, rather than challenging the French stream of mystical body theology, supported it across his work. He picked up and developed the deeply sacramental emphasis embedded in the French stream and carried it a bit further.

As we shall see, Chauvet’s appropriation of de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* will be important for understanding how Chauvet develops the theological thrust of the French stream later in the century. The next and final chapter will examine the contours of Chauvet’s writing in light of the French stream.
CHAPTER V
VESTIGIAL BODY II:
CHAUVET AND THE (MYSTICAL) BODY

In order to ascertain the vestiges of the French-speaking mystical body revival in Chauvet’s work, the chapter will examine his theology of “corporality,” his engagement with the French philosophical milieu of the seventies and eighties, and his reading of de Lubac’s Corpus Mysticum. In so doing, it will argue that Chauvet brings the emphases of the French stream forward in a theological vision that, akin to that of the major figures in that stream, is broader than ecclesiological in scope, thematically emphasizes the body, and aims to link the liturgical and ethical components of Christian identity. Thus, Chauvet represents an interesting and relevant case study of the postconciliar provenance of the French stream of mystical body of Christ theology that is not immediately recognizable as such.

“In the Sacraments” with Chauvet

In returning to patristic insight that preceded the distinctions of the scholastics, de Lubac finds that various Eucharistic formulations—such as “truth in mystery” or “image of the sacrament,” in their construction, opened up to the whole of Christian existence. After citing St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Gregory the Great, de Lubac concludes,
As long as this world lasts, we are still living ‘in the sacraments’…. And in the providential diversity of their forms, without it ever being possible to separate their ‘spiritual’ and the [sic] ‘bodily’ aspects, are not all the means of salvation at the same time, according to whether we see them from within or from outside, and in relation to a sterile past or to a good anticipated, an image, that is to say simultaneously both figure and truth?⁴³⁸

Louis-Marie Chauvet’s project could be described precisely as working out the implications of what it means for us to be still living “in the sacraments.”

One of the marks of the French stream of mystical body theology was that it extended beyond only treatises on ecclesiology, working as more of a Christic vision of the world. This was most pronounced in Mersch, Beauduin, and Michel. Nevertheless, the liturgy was the embodied starting point from which one could encounter and learn to discern the mystical body of Christ. In fact, we can recall that Michel used “the sacramental principle,” “the Christ-life”; and “mystical body of Christ” interchangeably.⁴³⁹ Thus, Chauvet’s reinterpretation of the Christian life can be understood, at least in one sense, as a further conceptualization of these aims of the French stream.⁴⁴⁰

At the beginning of his magnum opus, *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet describes that book as a “sacramental reinterpretation [“relecture”]…of what it means to lead a

---

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 197.
⁴³⁹ See Chapter II, above. This is most apparent in Virgil Michel, “Natural and Supernatural Society I, 243–47; see also Virgil Michel, et al., *Our Life in Christ*.
⁴⁴⁰ Timothy Brunk situates Chauvet’s effort at linking sacrament and ethics, or “liturgy and life,” in the twentieth century history of such theological efforts beginning with Michel. Brunk argues that Chauvet’s use of anthropology is an advance over Michel and others because it enables him to demonstrate how sacraments and ethics are linked ritually, rather than simply asserting it. Brunk’s work on Chauvet is very helpful and, indeed, pioneering. I think that he is correct in this basic assertion. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life*, esp. 37–94.
Christian life. A foundational theology of sacramentality….” Chauvet expresses two major motivations for this work: a clamoring, in France, for the constitutive character of Christian identity and the inadequacy of scholastic sacramental thinking. With respect to the first, Chauvet addresses a pastoral desire—among not only theologians but also “catechists, campus ministers, and pastoral workers”—in 1980s France for an account of the sacramental in relation to the particularity of Christian identity.

That this theological effort not dissolve “the distinct sacraments into the blur of a ‘general sacramentality’” is a major concern of Chauvet’s. As noted above, Chauvet’s road through the ISL formed him in the long line of French-speaking participants in the liturgical movement in the early twentieth century, including the Belgian exponent of mystical body theology, Lambert Beauduin, who inspired the founding of the ISL. Indeed, Prétot argues that Chauvet can only be properly understood when placed in the line of the liturgical movement that preceded him.

441 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 1. All italics are Chauvet’s unless otherwise noted.

442 Such concerns are, of course, not limited to France and, in fact, have become more pressing over the past decade or two. See, for example, the issue of Christian Bioethics dedicated to the topic of Catholic identity in Catholic hospitals, vol. 7, no. 1 (April 2001). See also Charles E. Curran, “The Catholic Identity of Catholic Institutions” Theological Studies 58, no. 1 (March 1997): 90–108. See also such book-length studies as: Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM, Catholic Identity or Identities?: Refounding Ministries in Chaotic Times (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2013); Michele Dillon, Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power (New York: Cambridge, 1999); Daniel Donovan, Distinctly Catholic: An Exploration of Catholic Identity (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1997).

443 Patrick Prétot, “The Sacraments as ‘Celebrations of the Church’: Liturgy’s Impact on Sacramental Theology” in Bordeyne and Morrill, 25–42. He particularly looks at the work of Odo Casel, whose work on the recovery of “mystery” was influential to those who worked for liturgical reform in the early 20th century. Casel found this mystery particularly grounded in the liturgy of the Church. Others in the liturgical movement, particularly those in the United States, driven by the vision of Virgil Michel, emphasized the mysterious union that flows from and back to the liturgy—a kind of Christoform solidarity that holds potential for social regeneration.
That is because Chauvet gives a fundamental primacy to liturgy and sacraments, and specifically the rites, understood as the “symbolic order” of the church. In those rites, Christians come to be Christian, analogous to (and even coterminous with) humans becoming subjects in the symbolic order of their culture. What we learn from the sacraments is that we receive who we are from what goes before us. And, further, they are places of rich mediation. Chauvet writes, “the sacramental rites, as places in the wholly human—the too human—where grace is bestowed on the significant materiality of gestures, postures, objects, and words which make them up, while not the only representation, are still the most eminent representation of this procession of the divine God within God’s re-cession at the heart of what is most human.”

“Corporéité” is the term that Chauvet uses to describe our unavoidable location in tradition, language, and culture. If we are to experience God, there is no other way than in mediated fashion, in our corporality, at the risk of the body.

As is obvious by Chauvet’s title, the categories of language and symbol rather than of sign and cause help him to develop the implications of celebrating the sacraments. Here, we see a challenge to the classic scholastic sacramental categories. While Chauvet’s critique extends to thirteenth-century sacramental theology, his present context and comments cited above about his formation at Angers would lead us to conclude that his more immediate opponents are those teachers of the neo-scholastic persuasion.

---

444 See Prétot, “The Sacraments as ‘Celebrations of the Church’,” 26. Prétot points out that the grounding of Chauvet’s project in the liturgical action of the Church “is sometimes ignored by those who rely on the thought of Chauvet, separating it from its fundamental liturgical field at the risk of creating another form of scholasticism in which the category ‘symbol’ would play a role that in the past was assigned to hylomorphism (substance-changing).”

Thus, a few decades after de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum*, Chauvet carries on the French theological assault on neo-scholasticism that Beauduin, Mersch, and de Lubac himself had been bearing in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Armed with Heidegger, who was also formed in a neo-scholastic seminary, and French post-structuralism, Chauvet takes a step further and critiques these scholastic sacramental categories as fundamentally onto-theo-logical and, therefore, unable to take embodiment seriously.

In sacramental theology, the ontotheological problem of a lack of attention to the difference between us and God manifests itself as the reification of grace. Inattention to the depth of mediation required for the divine-human relationship ultimately reduces grace to a product, an item to be acquired or, in the words of Reginald Garrigou-

---


447 It is Martin Heidegger who proclaims the history of metaphysics as onto-theologic. For the *locus classicus* of this critique see Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics” in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 42–76. Heidegger charges Western philosophical thought with undertaking an endless search for the “ground” of reality. In so doing, Western metaphysics has, according to Heidegger, reflected upon “Being” (with a capital “B”) in order to find what is most basic or foundational to “beings,” understood as various instantiations of “Being.” It is a short step, then, to call this “ground,” “Being” with a capital “B,” “God.” This is the onto (“Being”)-theo (“God”)-logical character of classical Western metaphysics. Having made such a thoroughgoing critique of the history of metaphysics as onto-theo-logic, and thereby as inattentive to the third element always present in the schema of “Being” and “beings”—the ontological difference—the difference between “Being” and “beings” which nevertheless always connects them, Heidegger understands the philosophical task as perhaps better suited to “godless thinking” (i.e., non-metaphysical thinking). The ontological difference is more primordial than “Being” precisely because it makes any such distinction between “Being” and “beings” possible. For Heidegger, true theological thinking is something other than philosophy, perhaps something poetic, that would discourse not about the *causa sui* (the cause in itself, “Being”), in front of which one can neither sing nor dance, but about what he called the “divine God.” See also Heidegger, *The Piety of Thinking, Essays by Martin Heidegger*, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 1–60.
Lagrange, “poured into the heart.”⁴⁴⁸ In this mode, humans can only stand externally to God, as receivers of some object. Relationships among people and between people and God can only be conceived in the “technical model of cause and effect.”⁴⁴⁹

A fundamental recognition that we rest “in the sacraments” in this life is a starting point for what Chauvet describes as primarily a theological account of Christian identity. It is clear here that, for Chauvet, glaring, unmitigated presence results in nihilism of one form or another. This nihilism claims to round on mystery in all-too-quick fashion. It thus succumbs to the temptation of immediacy, refusing to assent to its loss, an assent which Chauvet calls “faith.”⁴⁵⁰ Since reality is necessarily mediated by symbols, we never encounter reality without some absence of it. “To consent to this presence of absence is to consent to never being able to leave mediation behind”—mediation of the symbolic order that always-already precedes human beings and allows them to become human because they start from a world already humanized before them and passed on to them as a universe of meaning.⁴⁵¹

A recognition of thoroughgoing mediation opens up space for talk about reality that does not bracket the ontological and simply avert to the symbolic order as complete surface play. Rather Chauvet’s emphasis on mediation affirms the reality of embodied human experience. The various phenomena that human beings experience: thoughts, dreams, cars, other people, emotions leads to the phenomenological appreciation of a particular range of what can be considered “real.” What may be real for humans—love,

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 62–63.
⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 98.
for example—is not real to trees. Symbols are contrary to the productionist/causal language that dominates ontotheology and the discourse of signs. Symbols make reality present, but do so as symbols, that is with a mark of absence. “This, for sure, does not weaken the reality of...[Eucharistic] presence, but qualifies it for what it is: human presence.”

His warrants are deeply scriptural. He finds in God’s gift of manna in the desert the paradigmatic example of grace, which is a non-thing. Manna’s very name is a question, Man hu? (What is this?); it is present but curiously absent; it is given utterly free of charge, eludes empirical verifiability, and is therefore outside the realm of value. He argues that, because of the manna story, any discussion of sacrament, which necessarily involves grace (the paradigmatic non-value), requires non-productionist discourse. The nature of grace—as the word for God’s ongoing relationship with humans—requires another approach, a “discourse from which the believing subject is inseparable,” a theology at the risk of the body, as the subtitle of his shorter book has it. Chauvet argues for a more symbolic, and therefore relational, understanding of grace in which we are caught up in God’s gift exchange with humanity.

453 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 44–45, 222–23. On manna, see Exodus 16 and Wisdom 16.
454 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 43.
455 Louis-Marie Chauvet, The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001). This later work distills Chauvet’s argument in Symbol and Sacrament with some explicit and practical pastoral applications. Though not directed explicitly at a particular set of social issues, it is nevertheless not insignificant that Chauvet decided to publish this work with the publishing house of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique, the Young Christian Workers’ movement, rather than the more academic Éditions du Cerf.
Corporality in Chauvet’s Reinterpretation

Across the mystical body renewal, questions had been raised concerning the relationship between the mystical body of Christ and the (Roman Catholic) Church. The Colossians hymn extols Christ as “head of the body, the church,” but in Corinthians and Romans, Paul is less explicit concerning the relationship between the church and the body of Christ.456 We saw how Sebastian Tromp was more emphatic about identifying the Roman Catholic Church and the mystical body of Christ, whereas Mersch, drawing upon Patristic sources, understood the relationship as more porous. Michel bristled at Fulton Sheen’s claim that the pope is the head of the mystical body because it belied the claim that “the Mystical Body is bigger than the Church on earth.”457 Such questions also come to the fore in Chauvet’s account of the body/corporality, particularly when he moves to discuss Christian identity.

Corporality, in the context of Chauvet’s work, works directly in opposition to the temptation to construe the ontological difference between God and creation as negative, as obstructing a supposed more direct relationship.458 Chauvet’s symbolic turn aims at rendering it more positive. This symbolic approach also includes a positive reading of absence. He emphasizes a basic phenomenological truth: Since all encounters with God,

456 Col 1:18; 1 Cor 12:12–27; Rom 12:4–5.
457 Virgil Michel, Review of Fulton Sheen, The Mystical Body of Christ, 282. See Chapter III, FN 45, above. Michel’s position is further explained by what appear to be notes he took on Bernard Roland-Gossetin’s La doctrine politique de Saint Thomas d’Aquin (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1928), in which he highlighted the latter’s discussion of the mystical body in St. Thomas, from which “only damned souls are excluded.” Michel, “Political Principles of St. Thomas” (unpublished manuscript, SJAA, Series Z, Box 33, Folder 8.6).
at least in this life, are mediated, there can be no such thing as a raw encounter with presence, so any encounter with God is also an encounter with God’s absence.

Theologically speaking, this is not bad news, but rather the good news of the Incarnation.

The Eucharist, as mediation par excellence, makes this most clear. Chauvet writes,

As a symbol, the Eucharist radicalizes the absence of the Risen One: why would I celebrate it if I were able to be in immediate possession of him? To celebrate the Eucharist is precisely—contrary to all illuminisms of the Gnostic sort—to consent to this absence; or, rather, to learn little by little to consent to this absence….

Putting to death in us the mortal dream of an immediate presence of Christ—mortal, for such a presence can only be suffocating—the eucharistic symbol opens up an emptiness, a space where God can come to be in the very heart of our corporeity, without destroying us or diminishing our autonomy and our responsibility as humans.”

To profess faith in God is simultaneously to profess a renunciation of an unmediated encounter with God. It is, therefore, to profess a more or less explicit assent to a particular body, a particular symbolic order that has born a particular confession of who God is. Chauvet thus describes faith as “‘sacramental’ in its constitution, and not simply by derivation” for it is impossible to conceive of faith outside of the body.

There is a thematic concern throughout Chauvet’s work with Gnosticism, or the eclipse of the body in exchange for purely intellectual or decontextualized knowledge. The folly of the cross, Chauvet argues, is that we always-already stand in a relationship of mediation. Jesus of Nazareth, the “body of God” in humanity, was situated in a time and place. Those who “pledge allegiance” to Him owe Him a human body in this time

---

459 Louis-Marie Chauvet, “L’Église fait L’Eucharistie; L’Eucharistie fait l’Église: Essai de lecture symbolique,” Revue Catéchèse 71 (1978): 182. My thanks to Tim Brunk for directing me to this text. See Brunk, Liturgy and Life, 73. I have followed Brunk’s translation. He chooses to translate the French term corporéité as the more direct English “corporeity,” whereas Madeleine and Beaumont choose “corporality,” and some others a combination of the two: “Corporeality.” I do not find a substantial enough difference among these English terms to find one or another more compelling.

460 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 155.
and place. Therefore, the “body of God” in humanity also has a reality in the church, Christ’s primary mediator. The sacraments are “the most distinctive representations” of the church and continually and constantly “force us to confront mediation…by way of the senses.” The link between the body and the soul runs so deep that it cannot be any other way for us in this life. “And so we find ourselves in the end sent back to the body as the point where God writes God’s self in us.”\textsuperscript{461} And there we will find God. “Faith in the crucified God dares to affirm that in spite of everything, ‘God is appearing’ in humanity, that the ‘body of Christ’ occurs there, according to Paul’s expression.”\textsuperscript{462}

Just as there is no pure, primitive Christianity to which one can appeal, because of the necessity of mediation, so too there is no “core” Christian identity. To take on Christian identity is a complex and difficult task fraught with paradox. On the one hand, to be Christian is to be part of the church and thus to enter into a defined group. The temptation is to recoil into that particularity, to become insular. On the other hand, to make a confession of Christ as Lord is also to open oneself to the universal, the entire Kingdom of God.

The temptation here is that the church so bursts open that it can no longer serve as sacrament of the Kingdom. The paradox is that the church is never more itself, never more faithful to its particular marks than when it opens to the universal, to the Kingdom which grows in the world, through the particular.\textsuperscript{463} Therefore, Christian identity betrays itself if it is not, in some sense, open-ended. Any attempt to narrow that identity to a mere sign or to a “thing” that is self-selected and easily achieved are rendered wrongheaded by

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., 82–3.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid., 491.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid., 181.
Chauvet’s account. Here, Chauvet has arrived at a phenomenological way of holding and developing the insight articulated by St. Thomas that membership of the mystical body must be considered in terms of both act and potentiality.464 That is, Christian identity too is at the mercy of the body.

Chauvet finds this corporality at the center of the Eucharist. Because one is not participating in one’s own actions or expressing one’s own religious feelings in the church’s ritual, even if one’s deepest convictions seem to be floating away and the very idea that perhaps there is no God runs through one’s body, the Eucharist remains. Indeed, “what else remains for them but their bodies taking in hand what the Church takes up—a little bread and wine—and saying what the Church says—‘my body given for you’—taking and saying these as the gestures and words of him whom the Church confesses as its Lord?”465 The bodily, and deeply symbolic, act of chewing on the Body of Christ, this rumination on the supreme folly of the cross, counteracts our temptation to make faith merely human wisdom.466

The specificity of the Eucharistic sacrifice—it is Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, on which we chew—precludes any generalized, vacuous ethic. Christians favor ethical action, not because that is the essence of all religion, but rather because in Christian

464 *Summa Theologiae* III.8.3.res. Dorothy Day was fond of this formulation and applied it especially to critique war mongering. See Chapter III, above.


466 Ibid., 225. Chauvet recalls the seemingly bizarre Scriptural accounts of Ezekiel and the visionary of Revelation literally “chewing the Book” which, after chewing, is “as sweet as honey.” Translating Scripture to Ethics in the Eucharist, Christians chew the Body of Christ. This chewing aids reception of God’s Word: “Precisely because it counteracts such a weakening of faith, the symbolic experience of the chewing, the rumination, and the ingestion of the Eucharistic bread as the body of the Lord is irreplaceable for us.”
action Christ is once again made known to His people. In the Eucharistic celebration the paschal mystery is anamnesized. We are placed in touch, if only through a dark glass, with the eschaton. God wants to be alive, to assume flesh in the world; witness the resurrection. The Eucharist impels Christians toward concrete ethical action, that is, being Christ, loving as Christ loved, for the sake of the world.

Indeed, “ethics” is one element of the tripartite structure of Christian identity for Chauvet. This “tripod” follows a model gained from Chauvet’s major anthropological ancilla, the work of Marcel Mauss (1872-1950). The nephew of Durkheim, Mauss’s anthropological work took him to “archaic societies” in which he discovered and studied the gift economies there operative. In the cultures that Mauss studies, Chauvet explains, symbolic exchange is a “total social fact” in that it is operative across social strata and in all manner of exchange from smiles to wives to goods. One cannot turn down hospitality, food, jewels, etc.; and upon reception of the gift, one is obliged to offer a return-gift, not to the giver, but to a third party. This manner of exchange, given the oxymoronic name “obligatory generosity,” is not the quid pro quo of the market because the primary “interest” in the gifting cycle is not object-driven, but relational: “to be recognized as a subject, not to lose face, not to fall from one’s social rank, and

467 Ibid., 264.
consequently to compete for prestige.” From the order of production, in which “equivalence” reigns (lend/borrow, buy/sell, give/take), the extravagant gift exchange appears silly. Impoverished people gift others with kingly extravagance because the symbolic order demands it of them in order to be recognized as subjects.

Mauss’s insight is not simply an historical one, but also an anthropological one: it tells us something about how human beings work, how they become subjects, and how they live within the symbolic order. The structure of symbolic exchange is ternary (gift-reception-return gift), whereas market exchange is binary (product-value). Gift-giving includes a moment of “reception” in which the gift is received as gift and not as anything else. This moment is irrelevant in market exchange because it involves merely the exchange of things. In symbolic exchange, subjects exchange each other through the object. The gift works as symbol.

“Ethics,” in Chauvet’s structure of Christian identity, sits in the place of “return-gift.” In addition to “Scripture” (gift) and “sacraments” (reception), ethics involves the necessary, obligatory generosity that flows out of liturgical participation. The “mark” of “Scripture” in Chauvet’s model “encompasses everything that concerns the understanding of the faith” from catechesis to theology because all of these comment on

---

470 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 101–2. Both Mauss and Chauvet point to the inadequacy of our language to name this gift that obligates in turn and that cannot be refused. Hence, the oxymoron.
471 Ibid., 102–3.
472 Ibid., 107. Chauvet is clear to point out, though, that “gift” as we often use it does not communicate the same reality described by Mauss. Nevertheless, “presents” work in the symbolic order, even though they can be co-opted by the logic of the market—game shows and wedding registries are two examples of gift exchange in the order of production, see Chauvet, The Sacraments, 120.
Scripture. The sacraments in their rituality “tell us that to become a believer is to learn to consent, without resentment, to the corporality of the faith.” Therefore, the move in the sacraments is from knowledge of the faith to its recognition, its being seen as faith, as gift shot through with absence. “Ethics” is the result. This final pole includes “every kind of action Christians perform in the world” as testimony to Christ—both moral and social. Chauvet is interested in theologizing the continuity-in-tension of worship and ethics, that one flows from the other ("worship divides, service unites" is unrealistically naïve), but also that the classic tension between the temple and prophets endures. Thus, in the Eucharist, the Word of Scripture passes to the corporeal of ethical praxis. In this, Chauvet again marks his place in the extended French stream and its link between liturgy and the social. “Without the return-gift of an ethical practice by which the subject ‘verifies’ what it has received in the sacrament,” he explains, “Christian identity would be stillborn.”

Further, Chauvet thematically emphasizes that the Eucharistic prayers consistently use the pronoun “we.” Christian identities are necessarily formed within the ecclesial “we.” Here, there are echoes of Michel’s strong and intimate link between

---

473 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 178.
474 Ibid., 153.
475 Ibid., 179.
476 Ibid., 281.
477 Chauvet, “L’Église fait l’eucharistie,” 172. Chauvet writes, “On notera d’abord que tout, dans l’eucharistie, se dit en « nous ». Ce « nous » désigne l’assemblée concrète qui, réunie le dimanche, « jour du Seigneur », apparaît chez Paul comme le signe fondamental de la Résurrection, parce qu’elle constitue le corps « sacramental » visible du Seigneur vivant en ce monde (1 Co 10 à 12), le temple nouveau de sa présence dans l’Esprit au milieu des hommes (2 Co 6/16-18 ; Ep 2/20-22). C’est ce « nous » commun qui, comme nouveau le peuple sacerdotal (1 Pi 2/4-10) fait (l’)eucharistie, et pas seulement le prêtre comme le laisse entendre encore le langage courant, reflet d’une pratique et d’une théologie des ministères victimes d’une véritable inflation des «pouvoirs sacerdotaux ».”
the celebration of the liturgy and the mystical body of Christ. This “we” is continually made present during the anamnesis: we do this in memory of Christ. As such the gift of salvation is brought into the present from the past, but this only happens as a “we.” Anamnesis is necessarily a corporeal act. It drives us into Christ’s saving action, placing us closer to that event than we were a few hours before. We receive the task, again and again, of rebuilding a deep sense of memory, even one that, in sacrament, brings the past to the present. Identity as “brothers-and-sisters-for-others in Christ” cannot grow in isolation, but is necessarily bound up with the body of believers, indeed, one extended through time. 478

Chauvet’s Intellectual Milieu and the Body

We have examined some of the basic contours of Chauvet’s sacramental reinterpretation of the Christian life. Before moving to Chauvet’s important reading of de Lubac’s Corpus Mysticum, we will pause to consider the intellectual context of France in the eighties in order to understand Chauvet’s engagement with major philosophical voices. This is important for at least two reasons. First, if Chauvet is indeed working out of the long stream of French-speaking mystical body theology, he is doing so in extensive dialog with philosophical work on the body. Therefore, understanding his notion of “corporality” necessitates some understanding of his dialog partners.

Second, Chauvet’s notion of “the symbolic order,” is language derived from Jacques Lacan. Chauvet sums up the implications of the symbolic order thusly, “Any word which seeks to be expressed in a kind of transparent purity is an illusion; no word escapes the necessity of a laborious inscription in a body, a history, a language, a system

of signs, a discursive network. Such is the law. The law of mediation. The law of the body.” Bodiliness, and therefore mediation, is of the essence of human subjectivity.

Bodies locate us in a particular symbolic order; therefore, Chauvet calls the body the “arch-symbol of the whole symbolic order.” Human beings are bodies; there is no primordial, Cartesian “I” that exists before the body. “Corporality,” he explains, is the concept which “seeks to express this symbolic order which holds that the human being does not have a body, but is a body.” Further this

I-body exists only as woven, inhabited, spoken, by a triple body of culture, tradition, and nature. This is what is implied by the concept of corporality: one’s own physical body certainly, but as the place where the triple body—social, ancestral, and cosmic—which makes up the subject is symbolically joined, in an original manner for each one of us according to the different forms of our desires.

Notice that Chauvet mentions the physical body when he speaks of individualization. We are individuated by the unique complex of influences upon us, but also by the make-up of our physical bodies and the diverse ways that the interact with the world: tones of voice, length of legs, structure of muscles…etc. Further, Chauvet significantly mentions,

---

479 Ibid., 151.
480 Ibid., 148–9. Chauvet explains, however, that we can rightly entertain the body as universally human and engrained in our descriptions. God is invariably discussed in terms of height or depth. Our most profound experiences run through the body; thus, the body is arch-symbol; it is primordial. We are “broken” by a loss; we “devour” books and are “consumed” by thoughts. Chauvet insists that these are not “secondary phenomena” that shape a more primordial, inner scheme or relating to reality, but are rather “constitutive of the internal structure of the human being.”
481 Ibid., 149.
482 Ibid., 150.
483 Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a significant source for Chauvet, Anthony J. Godzieba emphasizes the contingency of bodies as well as a certain distance between “I” and “body.” Godzieba writes, “the body at times outruns our intentions and, to some degree, has a life of its own. I am my body, and yet I am also not my body. Think about the sinus headache you wake up with and the recalcitrant body which you have to drag out of bed by sheer force of will.” “Bodies and Persons, Resurrected and
“forms of our desires.” This phrase clues us in to an openness, an excess that shapes the compilation of the subject. Such a phrase could merely communicate, in Lacanian fashion, the wayward resurgence of deviated sexual drive, but as we shall explore below, Chauvet’s theological project cannot be reduced to a narrow Lacanian-Freudian imaginary.484 Chauvet’s sense of desire indicates some individuation, but as a Catholic theologian it is not surprising that for Chauvet, desire tends toward or opens up a space for God. It is telling that Chauvet explicitly asks the following question about Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, “Is it possible to situate a theology in the perspective of this thinking without ‘recovering’ it and, finally, without betraying it in its most essential aspect?”485 Chauvet of course answers in the affirmative. His question applies too to his appeal to Lacan’s linguistic model.

Of course, the notion of the corporality and the symbolic order has implications for Chauvet’s theology. The sacraments are bodily events and this is no coincidence. Since “the body is the primordial and arch-symbolic form of mediation, as well as the basis for all subjective identification,” the sacraments “engage precisely the bodies of

---


485 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 63.
believers, as the exemplary symbolic representations of the corporality of the faith.”

Inscribed on the body by another body in representation of the Body universal, the sacraments are, in this way, pedagogical. They remind us that Christian faith is corporeal and militate against any gnostic-like misconception of communication as pure and direct. The rites, then, are the relevant symbolic order of the Church.

Lacan’s French reception of Freud has been heavily critiqued as hemming up the human subject within the structure of language such that the subject is veritably obliterated. The body bears no excess. While the perils of such a move for Catholic theology are numerous and obvious, in terms of the present study, eradication of the subject would succumb to some of the most dismaying hazards of mystical body theology. Chauvet is steeped in reflection on language, but he approaches language from a predominantly phenomenological tradition. Notice in the description above an openness to excess that is not typical of Lacan’s work—bodies are formed in the symbolic order, but ultimately according to our own unique desires. The critique of the Cartesian ego is typical of the phenomenological tradition as well. As Chauvet scholar Glenn Ambrose has ably demonstrated, his engagement with Lacan is not as formative as that of phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger and, therefore, the ego is not for Chauvet a mere epiphenomenon of the linguistic order. Rather, his emphasis on

---

486 Ibid., 111.
488 On one hand, we have seen Karl Pelz’s obliteration of the human subject; on the other, Karl Adam’s mystical body was grounded in Nazi collectivism.
embodiment makes room for acting subjects and, further, gestures toward an openness, a reserve from which and through which being can be disclosed.

Chauvet understands his sacramental theology as one that engages contemporary culture. In *Symbol and Sacrament*, this is not the rough ground of popular religion, material culture, or globalization, but the intellectual culture of France of his time. Chauvet stands in the long stream of French-speaking mystical body theology, but his application of those theological emphases on the body (as well as on the link between sacraments and social questions) engages the changed (postmodern) context of his own milieu. Patrick Prétot notes the particular significance, in terms of Chauvet’s later work, of courses on “Faith and Sacrament” with Marie-Dominique Chenu and on “Liturgal Symbols and Demythologization” with Antoine Vergote. Vergote is a key source for Chauvet’s re-reading of the question of the Mass as sacrifice, which I shall treat below, but he is also well known for his phenomenological work. As such, Vergote has been

---


deeply critical of Lacan’s psychoanalysis from a phenomenological perspective. It is likely not only because of Chauvet’s explicit uses of Vergote’s work, but because of Vergote’s deeply phenomenological influence upon Chauvet that Prétot cites him as particularly significant in Chauvet’s formation.

In his discussion of corporality and the body in *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet has recourse to several philosophers. In addition to Lacan, and Heidegger, who drives Chauvet’s critique of scholasticism, he also engages Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas. Ambrose helpfully refers to the French context in which Chauvet was writing. For better or worse, Ambrose argues, Lacan’s work was the academic lingua franca in the eighties in France. He writes,

Freudian psychoanalytic practice or ‘therapy’ that sought a ‘cure’ in the form of a healthy ego that was adapted to society, was viewed with great suspicion in France… the French resistance to Freud’s thought up until the fifties is in part explained by the apparent reluctance of psychoanalysts to be involved in social critique. This lack of social critique led French Marxists and other intellectuals on the left to conclude that psychoanalysis was simply a bourgeois tool for maintaining the status quo.493

It was Lacan’s interpretation of Freud that turned French intellectuals on to Freud. And they engaged the Lacanian Freud with much gusto. According to Eugene Webb, as a result of the 1960s, the French looked to Lacan’s psychoanalysis to solve problems that philosophy, politics, and political science no longer seemed capable of solving.494

---

Ultimately, Chauvet uses Lacan to make a much more phenomenological point. For example, Ambrose points out Chauvet’s commentary on the Lacanian point that the subject emerges only in the “enunciation that denounces itself”: that Heidegger would agree, but for different reasons.\footnote{Glenn Ambrose, Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet: Overcoming Onto-theology with the Sacramental Tradition (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).} According to Heidegger, “it is Being itself that withdraws; that is what he wishes to indicate in crossing out the word Being.”\footnote{Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 49.} Chauvet also comments that Levinas makes this same point, but in a different context.\footnote{Ibid.} This is a clue not that Chauvet would like the phenomenological tradition to be read as eradicating the subject, but rather that his appeal to Lacan is less about Lacan and more about his audience. In his elaboration of the symbolic order, Chauvet picks up Lacan’s famous example of the “stage of the mirror” whereby a child is fascinated with her image reflected in a mirror. The image is an illusory ideal, a “specular I,” which is not the real subject because it posits a unified whole, where the infant is a fragmented mass. As Ambrose puts it,

> It can only be viewed negatively and exclusively by Lacan as a narcissistic fantasy and source of alienation because it is a denial of the real state of affairs. All subsequent ego formation in the development of the child follows this initial pattern according to Lacan. Later the “social I” founded on the desire of the other is as bound to the imaginary order and as alienating as the “specular I.” The only way to break from this imaginary order of the “specular I” or ego is to acquiesce to the “Law” or the symbolic order.\footnote{Ambrose, The Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, 76.}

By contrast, Chauvet takes Lacan’s insight as a fundamental posture of humility, but not as eradicating the subject or submitting it completely to the symbolic order. Chauvet recognizes the linguistic reading of reality as only one point of view, not as
Lacan would have it, an all-encompassing structure, “linguisterie.” Ambrose concludes, “That the ‘I’ exists only in the event of speaking does not mean it is purely linguistic reality. Besides being embodied in the subtle body of language and culture, the insight that structuralism is especially adapted to shed light on, the ‘I’ is always embodied in an individuated living body.”\(^{499}\) That is, it is subject to the exigencies of living bodies

Ambrose emphasizes the triple-body of Chauvet’s discourse as, in itself, circumventing the temptation presented by Lacan’s reading of the symbolic order. To drive the point home that Chauvet is more indebted to phenomenological categories than psychoanalytic ones, Ambrose argues for the relevance of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work for understanding Chauvet’s notion of the body. He explains that we can understand Chauvet’s linguistic account very much in the context of a body-based phenomenology “if we understand the linguistic ‘It’ and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological notion of the ‘Flesh’ to refer to the multiple dimensions of human existence.”\(^{500}\) By “flesh,” Merleau intends something like the common fabric between “I” and “You,” what it is that we share.

These dimensions are among other things the blood and bones of our living bodies and the real values and dreams of our cultures. In other words, Merleau-Ponty’s ‘Flesh’ refers to the whole world of human beings and not just a purely physical substrate. Likewise, the symbolic order and “It” of Chauvet’s linguistic viewpoint refers both to a cosmic and symbolic world, and not just some purely linguistic reality.\(^{501}\)

For Chauvet, then, there is excess bound up in the subject. To hem in the subject to the symbolic order or reduce the subject to simply an epiphenomenon of language is to do violence to it.

\(^{499}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{500}\) Ambrose, “Eucharist as a Means for ‘Overcoming’ Onto-Theology?” 159.

\(^{501}\) Ibid.
Contrary to a strictly structuralist view that would hypostatize a purely linguistic reality, the threefold structure as situated in Chauvet’s thought serves as an argument against a sharp dichotomy between consciousness and body as well as between the individual and the social. Human existence is construed as being fundamentally rooted in a particular kind of body-consciousness and intersubjectivity. Furthermore, by placing Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology side by side with this insight of linguistic structuralism, we can perhaps entertain the idea that the I-You-It linguistic structure, rather than imposing a split between human being and nature, may in fact reflect the reality of a real differentiation in the created order. In other words, I-You-It has an ontological dimension.\(^{502}\)

In Chauvet’s work, the psychoanalytic insight concerning the symbolic order and its pervasiveness is tempered by a phenomenological account of the body which takes greater account of contingency, fragility, and agency. Chauvet’s “triple-body” of culture, tradition, and nature allows for a subject that does not always respond to the a linguistic default. Whereas Lacan was deeply suspicious of any attempt to grasp the whole, to see perceive the whole truth, Chauvet is able to see that human tendency as not utterly negative—indeed it is, at bottom, a desire to see God’s face. As Ambrose explains, “Chauvet sees revealed in psychoanalytic discourse not so much a lack, but rather an open space that calls for philosophical and theological questioning. The very openness of this space, which can never be filled, calls for an attitude of humility and proper responsiveness to God’s word.”\(^{503}\) Nevertheless for Chauvet, the consent to the loss, or the acceptance of mediation is a necessary condition of our human reality.

It is essential here to remember that Chauvet is a Catholic theologian and, therefore, approaches philosophical discourse as an ancilla to his larger theological point. This is no small point. In contrast to Lyotard’s famous definition of postmodernity as the “suspicion of all metanarratives,” Chauvet is comfortable working out of the

---

\(^{502}\) Ibid., 60.
\(^{503}\) Ibid., 148.
metanarrative of the Christian tradition. In contrast to the deep suspicions of the post-structuralists, Chauvet clearly understands the project in *Symbol and Sacrament* as working out a “structure of Christian identity,” a symbolic metanarrative of his own. Central points he elaborates or seeks to understand with the help of philosophical discourse are often fundamentally Scriptural points. We discussed above the centrality of God’s gift of manna to the Israelites in the desert. The Lukan resurrection narratives are likewise key texts for understanding how the subject comes to faith in the symbolic order of the church. As far as Chauvet goes with Heidegger, he sharply critiques the gulf that Heidegger posits between faith and reason as “two irreducible worlds” and further notes the difference, though similar attitude, in the kenotic posture born of Christian exaltation of the crucified Christ with Heidegger’s openness to being. “The crucified God is not-crossed out Being.” “That the face of God show itself only by erasing itself, that we think of God less in the metaphysical order of the Unknowable than in the symbolic and historical order of the unrecognizable—quite clearly this is the “folly,” which theologians attempt to express through their discourse.” It is, at bottom, the uniqueness of the Incarnation, culminating in the paschal mystery, that, pace Heidegger, makes theological discourse possible.

**Chauvet and *Corpus Mysticum***

We have introduced some key aspects of Chauvet’s project and clarified the role of body in his sacramental reinterpretation, especially as it relates to his intellectual context. Now we turn to the brief passages in his major work where Chauvet considers

---

504 Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 161–78.  
505 Ibid., 58–65.  
506 Ibid., 74.
mystical body theology explicitly. Chauvet engages de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* and receives it as a defense of patristic theology, which generally said that Christ is present truly in the Eucharist *because* he’s present in sacrament (in mystery, in figure, in symbol), whereas following Berengar, scholastic theology emphasized that Christ is truly present, *although* that presence is sacramental. Chauvet’s critique of the shift that de Lubac describes is primarily about the metaphysical scholastic categories that support the “deadly break.” The problem is what Chauvet calls the temptation to immediacy, a lack of recognition that our encounter with the real is only through mediation; the real cannot be “presupposed as something ‘behind’ the sacramental.” Chauvet carefully rejects a particular kind of mystical body theology, one that is “without any relation to the Eucharistic mystery,” and puts a fine point on de Lubac’s historical study: “the reality of Christ comes to us in no other way than through its expressive mediation and… we can talk about it only *because and insofar as* it is sacramental (“in sacrament, “in symbol,” “in memorial”).

As Chauvet traces the scholastic reaction to Berengar, following de Lubac but also Yves Congar, he moves from the rationalism of Berengar to the rationalism of the scholastics. Later in *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet would quote Berengar: “It is the mark of a great heart to use dialectics in all things. For to use dialectics is to use reason so that those who do not do so, although made in the image of God according to God’s reason, show contempt for their own dignity and are not able to be renewed from day to

---

507 Ibid., 294.
508 Ibid., 294–5.
509 Ibid., 296–7.
day according to the image of God.” Only after foregrounding this issue of rationalism does Chauvet move to discuss the import of the caesura dividing the threefold body of Christ, “the deadly dichotomy” between on the one side, Christ’s historical/glorified body and His sacramental (Eucharistic) body, and on the other Christ’s ecclesial body.

In the second half of the twelfth century, after Berengar, the Church takes the name “‘corps mystique’ en un sens absolu,” that absolute sense is a result of a disconnect from the Eucharist. The prepositional phrase is key. Chauvet emphasizes de Lubac’s point that the over-application of rational dialectic led to the notion of “mystical body” applied to the Church in a merely sociological sense. The problem here is first rationalism, and next the disconnection of “mystical body” from the Eucharist and ultimately from Christ.

Chauvet sees a faulty understanding of the sacrificial character of the Mass in the wake of Berengar: “La messe devient ainsi, par l’allégorie, un mime de la Passion.” After Berengar, the center of gravity in terms of the question of sacrifice was on the truth of the sacrificial event in the Eucharist despite its sacramental character, rather than the patristic emphasis on the truth of the sacrificial event in the Eucharist because of its sacramental character.

Chauvet’s interpretation of de Lubac and his rereading of the nature of the Mass as sacrifice would see fuller explication by the time that Chauvet wrote Symbol and Sacrament. In the latter, he repeats much of what he had written about sacrifice in the

---

510 Ibid., 293. For the Berengar quotation, Chauvet relies upon P. Vignaux, Philosophie au moyen age (Paris: A. Colin, 1958), 23.
earlier article, but directs his reinterpretation of the sacrificial character of the Christian life in terms of the threefold character of that identity: Scripture, sacrament, and ethics.  

“Mystical body,” then, is linked to an understanding of the Mass as sacrifice, a soteriology and sacramental theology which has received much criticism heightened, Chauvet notes, in French circles because of the controversies surrounding the work of René Girard.  

Chauvet’s reading of de Lubac and discussion of the mystical body is closely linked to his reinterpretation of “sacrifice,” one of the most “treacherous” but nevertheless “theologically precious” terms. Chauvet thinks that a sense of “sacrifice” cannot be discarded with respect to the Mass and pursues a reading of Christ’s life as sacrificial, “exercised existentially, and not ritually.” That is, Christ’s life, and his eventual death, is sacrificial precisely because it is kenotic. Christ fully embraces his human condition and rejects the temptation (notably when tempted in the desert and when teased upon the cross to rescue himself) to “unburden himself of the full human responsibility he had to assume.” Thus Chauvet follows Antoine Vergote and, in some respects René Girard, in rendering the sacramental notion of sacrifice (which Chauvet sees as “anti-sacrifice,” an overcoming of servile-sacrificial tendencies that does not

513 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 316.
514 René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). While Girard offers a reconceptualization of the sacrificial in society in some ways amenable to the Christian vision, Chauvet cites critiques of Girard that sense a certain “Gnostic smell” in his Christology, in which Christ becomes simply the moral exemplar, the key to an anthropology. Chauvet nevertheless finds Girard’s approach a useful launching pad for developing his own, more kenotic, reading of the sacrifice of Christ.
515 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 315–16.
516 Ibid., 299.
517 Ibid., 301.
uphold the inverse), an ethical imperative flowing from the Eucharist, “where we eat
drink the body and blood of Christ” in order to likewise live kenotically.\textsuperscript{518}

Since a narrowing of the extension of Christ’s priestly \textit{munus} to only ordained
ministry is related to the notion of Mass as sacrifice, and connected to a certain
festishization of the Eucharistic elements apart from the ecclesial body, Chauvet
emphasizes the priesthood of all believers by virtue of their baptism. He is critical of the
tendency to speak in cultic terms about only ordained ministers, conceived as the only
priests, which according to Chauvet’s narrative developed when priests appeared to new
post-Constantinian converts as performing the same role as pagan priests had.\textsuperscript{519} The
further development of the penitential system whereby Mass funds supported expiation
for sin resulted in the multiplication of a group of ordained ministers whose sole
occupation was to say Masses for the forgiveness of sin. Thus, one hundred years after
Berengar, St. Thomas—in contradistinction to Peter Lombard—heavily emphasizes the
celebrant’s role \textit{in persona Christi} especially at the moment of consecration, Chauvet
argues, to the near exclusion of the \textit{in persona Ecclesiae}, thus pushing “to its ultimate
consequences the effects of this ‘deadly break’ between Christ and the Church born a
century before him.”\textsuperscript{520} As noted, the fundamental problem for Chauvet is the scholastic
recourse to the language of causality. Chauvet draws out another implication of mystical
body theology shorn of its Eucharistic character. Rather than over-identifying the church
with Christ, such that the church’s actions are simply speaking Christ’s action, Chauvet
points to an extensive narrowing, rather than elimination of, the mediative role of the

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 302.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid., 308.
\textsuperscript{520} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} III.82.7, ad 3; Peter Lombard, \textit{Sentences} IV.13; Chauvet, \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, 472–73.

207
church. Thus, the ordained minister is set apart from the church in order to be more closely identified with Christ.

By the time Chauvet reaches the end of his treatment of sacrifice in *Symbol and Sacrament*, he has returned to Augustine and Irenaeus to embrace a full theology of the body of Christ or, as he writes “‘the whole Christ’ (*Christus totus*), Head and Body,” a phraseology of which Émile Mersch was particularly fond. Chauvet further explains:

It is impossible to say here ‘Christ’ without at the same time saying “the Church”: the Eucharist is the *sacramental sym-bolization of both*. The Christian sacrifice manifested in the *sacramentum* is not Christ taken in isolation, but the ecclesial *unum corpus* that must live “in him.” In this way does his sacrifice become our sacrifice, and his Pasch our own pasch…. One thereby rejects any conception of Christ’s sacrifice which, under the pretense of “realism,” would be carried out at the expense of the truth of the participants’ sacrifice in their mutual relations as members of the same body of Christ. The *sacramentum* cannot effect in truth a relation with Christ without simultaneously effecting, in truth also, a relation with others, a relation which seeks to become enfleshed here and now in the practice of reconciliation between human beings.\(^{521}\)

We have seen how Chauvet’s theological project, especially in *Symbol and Sacrament*, takes up the theme of the body, aims at articulating a sacramental reinterpretation of the Christian life, and aims to unite the “poles” of Christian identity, including Scripture, sacraments, and ethics. All of these themes were present in the French stream of mystical body of Christ theology in the early twentieth century. We saw further how Chauvet has been critical of mystical body theology insofar as it follows the scholastic assumptions characteristic of the twentieth-century Roman stream. In his principal emphases, Chauvet lands closer to de Lubac in his critique of rationalism, individualism, and the “deadly break” among the threefold body of Christ.

\(^{521}\) *Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament*, 313.
Conclusions: At the Risk of the (Mystical) Body

If Chauvet’s fundamental theology of the sacramental structure of Christian faith strikes the reader as paradoxical, then that can only attest to its success in articulating something of the tragic beauty of the paschal mystery: God’s revelation of salvation as the meeting of divine and human desire (the Spirit) in the human (bodily and historical, assured yet struggling, defeated but triumphant) person of Jesus. Any imaginary shortcut to the immediate presence of divine fulfillment is a sliding away from the faith, a misplacing of the hope, a malnourishment of the love that comes to us in the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ.522

In Chauvet’s appropriation, the body—both the physical, fleshy reality and the corporate, womblike structure—deserves a place of preeminence in a non-metaphysical model of thinking about God. It is precisely the located-ness and shaping-ness of bodies that onto-theo-logic ignores. Therefore Chauvet’s emphasis on corporality aims to take seriously the coming-to-be of human subjects. Subjects come to be subjects through symbolic exchange—not market exchange—which is always constituted by bodies such that any articulation of religious belief, of faith in God will necessarily occur at the risk (risque: hazard, danger, peril) of the body.523

Critics of mystical body of Christ theology have asserted that it was “Christomonist” in its heavy emphasis on the hypostatic union and its lack of pneumatology.524 De Lubac formulates the same problem as the refusal to acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the soul of the body. Across the board, continuity with the Incarnation had certainly been an important aspect of mystical body theology. Even before Möhler,

523 “La parole de Dieu au risque du corps” is the subtitle of Chauvet’s The Sacraments in the original French. The English translation “The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body” seems inadequate to express the scandalous character of the Incarnation and, in turn, of both the sacraments and the act of faith.
524 See Wood, Spiritual Exegesis, 149.
for the French school of spirituality the mystical body of Christ “becomes a sort of system of spirituality” where the Christian life is understood as the prolongation of the Incarnation.\(^5\)

Chauvet “rereads” the Christian life in a thoroughly sacramental/mediative framework, but emphasizes that the Christological centrality of that insight (the prepositional phrase “of Christ” in terms of mystical body theology) must take a more thorough account of the paschal mystery as theologically, especially sacramentally, relevant. This stands in contrast to the scholastic method in which the hypostatic union was so prominent that theirs became a theology in which “everything is already over…in the hypostatic union.”\(^5\) That is, the union of divine and human natures in Christ was the primary, and perhaps only, relevant matter for sacramental discourse. This Christological insight and critique coincides with Chauvet’s wider project. After all, a focus on Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection involves attention to how it went with the body He is.

Among other effects (a narrow view of the resurrection, a shortening of the kenotic relevance of Christ, etc.), Chauvet argues that the sacramental starting point of the hypostatic union leads likewise to an eclipse of the Holy Spirit, “the ‘holy humanity’ of Christ takes the place of the Holy Spirit as the agent and efficient cause of Church unity.”\(^5\) Chauvet proposes instead a starting point in the paschal mystery, which has at least three implications for Chauvet’s project and for considering the mystical body of Christ in its light.

---

\(^5\) Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 455.
\(^5\) Ibid., 467.
First, it specifies the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth, specifically Christ crucified—that “the face of God shows itself only by erasing itself” “in the crushed humanity of the crucified one.”\textsuperscript{528} The “folly of the cross” is that we always-already stand in a relationship of mediation. Jesus of Nazareth, the “body of God” in humanity, was situated in a time and place. This emphasizes, in symbolic discourse, the failure of separating the mystical from the real. In other words, every real is necessarily mystical.

Second, Chauvet asserts, those who “pledge allegiance” to Him owe Him a human body in this time and place. He writes:

It is impossible to separate the divine kenosis from the one that must be carried out in ourselves: our corporality is charged with becoming the place for this kenosis. In our corporality, the most distant is also the closest, the most divine is also the most human… Thus we are obliged to give to this God the body of humanity that God asks of us. Corporality is God’s place. God whose being is to ‘not be’ (see 1 Cor 1:18; Phil 2:5-8), reduced to nothing as God has been by humankind, finds God’s ‘sacrament’ in those who have themselves been reduced to ‘not-others’.\textsuperscript{529}

This kenotic connection between ecclesial body, sacramental body, and historical/glorified body is cemented by the Spirit. “It is significant,” Chauvet writes, “that the Spirit is the operating agent of the threefold body of Christ: his historical body, born of Mary, overshadowed by the Spirit (Luke 1), and spiritualized into a glorious body; his sacramental body (first epiclesis); and his ecclesial body (second epiclesis).”\textsuperscript{530} He explains further, “The Spirit, neutral, faceless, nameless except for the names drawn from cosmic symbolism, is the agent of the divine in God’s concealment in Jesus’ personal body, in the body of history the Church gives him, and joining these two bodies, in the symbolic body of the Eucharist in which the body of Jesus is given only to be veri-

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{529} Ibid., 509.
\textsuperscript{530} Ibid., 526.
fied [lit. “made truth”] in the Church’s body, as our analysis of the Eucharistic Prayer has shown.” Thus Chauvet finds in an enriched pneumatology the operator for linking what de Lubac has called the threefold body of Christ. Notably, it is from the rite that he derives the Spirit’s preeminent place.

Here, we see that the necessary mediation of God must occur in human corporality, but even further there is an ethical component—the mystical body of Christ makes God present as its members lay down their lives in imitation of Christ. Chauvet aims at mitigating the “deadly dichotomy” by emphasizing that the Holy Spirit brings forth the body of Christ in humanity when, as part of the sacramental gift exchange, human beings “give flesh” to their confession of Christ’s body in the Eucharist by living the way of the cross. “Where human beings give flesh to their confession of the Risen One by following him on the way of the cross for the liberation of their brothers and sisters (and thus for their own as well), there the body of Christ comes forth. Of this body, the Church is the eschatological promise in and for the world.”

Third, and clearly not least, is the enriched pneumatology. It is the Spirit that breathes life into the anamnesis of the Paschal Mystery: “Spirit,” Chauvet writes, “is the personal name traditionally given to what, of God, gives present and future vigor to such a memorial of the past.” Chauvet’s close reading of Eucharistic Prayer II makes clear that a theology of the mystical body of Christ cannot proceed without the Spirit, especially if it strives to maintain the link between liturgy and ecclesiology. “In the epicleses, the Spirit is always the agent of the incorporation of the risen Christ into the

---

531 Ibid., 529.
532 Ibid., 510.
Church and into the elements of the sacraments.”\textsuperscript{533} Chauvet illustrates from the rites that the same Spirit is called upon in the Eucharistic Prayer to transform the elements and to transform the Church into Christ’s body.

This, too, has necessary ethical component: “Where human beings give flesh to their confession of the Risen One by following him on the way of the cross for the liberation of their brothers and sisters (and thus for their own as well), there the body of Christ comes forth. Of this body, the Church is the eschatological promise in and for the world.”\textsuperscript{534} Taking seriously the language of the Church and the actions of the Church in ritual, Chauvet is able to articulate a pneumatology that supports, rather than replaces or undercuts, a mystical body theology. What results for Chauvet is what we can perhaps call the aesthetics of sanctity. He writes,

The Spirit is precisely the agent that makes possible the expression of the crucified Word by removing it to another space than that of concept: the space of the conversion of attitudes, the space of the body. Hence, the primary mediation of God’s revelation in Christianity is no longer only that of the cosmos and seeing or even that of the word of the Law and hearing, but, recapitulating these two…that of the body and living.”\textsuperscript{535}

The body for Chauvet is not a concrete ground of refuge, but rather an indication that God is to be found in Christians becoming, with reference to St. Paul, a “living ‘letter of Christ’.”\textsuperscript{536} By thematizing corporality as the place of God, Chauvet sets the groundwork for a relentless emphasis on mediation, the mediation that was variously lost in some versions of mystical body theology. Most famously that of Karl Pelz. On the other side, we have seen earlier in this chapter the Eucharistic physicalism—as in

\textsuperscript{533} Ibid., 525. 
\textsuperscript{534} Ibid., 529. 
\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 528. 
\textsuperscript{536} Ibid., 530.
gnawing on flesh and crunching on bones—following the Berengarian controversy reduced the celebration Eucharist to a mere recipe, on the other side of which there was an unmediated Christ. That physicalism and the individualistic piety that flowed from it resulted in an empty sociological “mystical body” no longer thought to mediate Christ. Thus, we see such a figure as Luigi Sturzo dismiss the “imaginary mysticisms” of Communism, Bolshevism…etc. and instead espouse a full mystical body theology.537

By maintaining, as the French stream consistently had, the liturgy as the primary mediation of Christ, Chauvet’s reinterpretation guards against the horribly mistaken Romantic application of mystical body theology to the German Volk decades before.

The various elements of Chauvet’s “turn to the symbolic” work against these dangers of mystical body of Christ theology. Chauvet’s connection to the ISL, thematic emphasis on the body, the liturgy, and the sacraments of the Church, and his aim of developing a “fundamental theology of sacramentality” in Symbol and Sacrament demonstrate his project as a surprising locus of the concerns and categories of the French stream of mystical body theology after its recession earlier in the century. Understanding his work thusly, we are able to see it as not merely a rejection of a theological tradition (i.e. neo-scholasticism), but a development of those who had gone before him in and around the ISL. It is of no small consequence that Chauvet was eventually trained by and worked closely with some key figures who were connected with Beauduin and his liturgical-social mystical body theology. In this view, Chauvet’s fundamental theology of the sacramental is not “a thoroughly postmodern obfuscation of the Christian

537 Luigi Sturzo, Spiritual Problems of Our Times (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1945), 166. See also Chapter VI of that work, on “The Mystical Body and Human Society.”
mysteries,” but rather a renewed investigation of the French stream’s theological concerns in a different philosophical milieu. This is done in the vein of Chauvet’s fundamental claim about the theological task, “In its role as hermeneutics, theology has the job, not of retrieving an original meaning but, on the contrary, of producing, starting especially from the text of the Scriptures, new texts, that is, new practices which foster the emergence of a new world.”

Demonstrating, as I have done here, some of the vestiges that are recognizable in Chauvet’s work helps us to see that mystical body theology, especially in its French-speaking stream, was not merely an ecclesiological stepping stone as it has been received in many theological quarters. Further, it establishes a ground and precedent for discerning the impact of that stream of mystical body theology in our contemporary milieu.

---


539 Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 69.
CONCLUSION

This study set out to demonstrate that figures as chronologically and geographically diverse as Virgil Michel and Louis-Marie Chauvet not only share a common theological emphasis on the link between liturgy and social questions, but that they both inhabit the long French-speaking stream of mystical body of Christ theology. In this light, their common emphasis on the theological import of the body should not be seen as two different iterations of Catholic thinking, but rather as two different moments in the same stream of thought.

Along the way, we have come to see the theology of the mystical body of Christ as variegated into three major streams, each sharing a commonality that largely inheres across a common language and geographical area of work. These distinctions help us not only to understand Michel and Chauvet a bit more clearly, but also help to explain the diversity of responses to mystical body theology—from politically vacuous to juridically heavy—in the postconciliar period. That is, these at times contrasting criticisms apply only to selected streams, not to all. Further, they help us to understand the general reception of mystical body theology as an ecclesiology per se, including the assumptions and assertions of Pope Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis*, side-by-side with several efforts to broaden the categorization of the term, especially among those doing history or mystical theology/spirituality.
Body, Absence, and Theology in the French Stream

Chauvet recently retired from teaching and is still active as a parish priest. However, the major direction of his research and especially the aspects of it that we have emphasized here were formed in the late seventies and early eighties. The last chapter emphasized how his engagement with Lacan was particularly geared toward France’s intellectual milieu in the eighties. In the words of Lieven Boeve, “It is the awareness of a theological urgency that drives Chauvet to his reconsideration of the sacramental structure of Christian existence. The gap between classical sacramental theology and contemporary culture puts the very plausibility and relevance of the sacraments, and of Christian existence as a whole, under pressure.”540 That plausibility has a pastoral dimension as well. At the beginning of Symbol and Sacrament, Chauvet mentions that the motivation for undertaking that project included a certain clamoring for the “marks” (or principal pillars) of Christian identity in France. He identifies Scripture, sacrament, and ethics as the three marks proper to Christian identity and explores the relationship among them throughout the rest of the book. If Michel inhabited the monastery/college campus and found a home with the “new social Catholics” pushing boundaries in the thirties, Chauvet inhabited parish rectories and dealt with the pastoral questions of the Paris suburbs and the ISL in the latter decades of the twentieth century (and still). The questions concerning social reconstruction of the Depression era gave way to questions about identity in the eighties.

Nevertheless, placing his work in the long French stream of mystical body theology demonstrates that Chauvet’s interest in corporality has deep theological roots

that are not driven solely by his engagement with the philosophical interests of his day. Adopting the categories of the latter is a demonstration of “philosopha ancilla theologiae,” that is, appropriating philosophical categories in service to a deeply theological point. In Chauvet’s hands, the widespread emphasis on corporality becomes theologically speaking, primarily an emphasis on the liturgy, with social implications. In other words, Chauvet’s reflections on corporality are second-order reflections derived from Scripture and the liturgy. He engages philosophical work on embodiment to support and develop these fundamental theological sources.

Developing the concerns of his forebears in the French stream, the liturgy grounds his appeal to the body and its social implications. In fact, Patrick Prétot points out that the liturgical grounding of Chauvet’s project “is sometimes ignored by those who rely on the thought of Chauvet, separating it from its fundamental liturgical field at the risk of creating another form of scholasticism in which the category ‘symbol’ would play a role that in the past was assigned to hylomorphism (substance-changing).”541 Thus, the emphasis on the body does not float off into the utter identity with: God, juridical structure, or national identity as we have seen in versions of mystical body theology earlier in the century. Chauvet’s is not purely a sacramentalism in genere, but rather a Christologically-rooted and Pneumatologically-thick fundamental theology. In this there are echoes of Michel’s insistence on the “sacramental principle” that flows out of the liturgy, infusing the Christian life.

Chauvet’s theological accomplishment in this regard is related to his relentless emphasis on mediation, sounding a note of absence with respect to the Christian life. Our

knowledge of others, our world, ourselves, and our God is necessarily run through our corporality, or mediated. For example, the “temptation to immediacy” includes our attempts to control God, including our attempts to define Christian identity too narrowly. However, this is not simply the “surface play” of signs. In a novel published two years before Symbole et Sacrement, Don DeLillo offers a well-known reflection on our postmodern reveling in the proliferation of images. White Noise portrays “the most photographed barn in America,” which can no longer actually be observed by onlookers because they are overwhelmed by the camera flashes and pictures of pictures. “No one sees the barn.” “Once you see the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.” The multiplication of renditions obstructs the reality. Left asking “is the barn even there?,” we are reminded by Chauvet that on the other side of that mediation is Christ.

If on the one hand, Chauvet’s work guards against the glaring presence of the scholastic account of the sacraments, on the other it fends off the possibility that they might just be a charade.

Chapter I noted that the word mystical can be applied in a more or less mediated fashion. We recall the obliteration of mediation in Karl Pelz’s version of mystical body theology, the other side of the coin from DeLillo’s barn. In other versions of mystical body theology, “mystical” comes to have pure horizontal purchase, mediating only a collection of people spread across extended space. That is the body is mystical only because it is spread out. From this conception, there is a short slide to the formulation “mystical body of the church,” a literal replacement of “Christ” with “Church.”

We can understand Chauvet’s dialectic of presence and absence more clearly by looking at his foundational appeal to Luke 24. This Scriptural text is perhaps the most important in *Symbol and Sacrament*, rivaled only by Exodus 16—the gift of manna, which we discussed in the last chapter. For Chauvet, the Emmaus narrative and the surrounding pericopes suggest a paradigm for what it means to become a Christian—“to pass from non-faith to faith.” These narratives represent a Lucan reflection, in the post-Ascension time of the Church, on the temptation to seek out Jesus is his dead (physical) body which is no longer with us. Attempts to verify Jesus with touch prove unsatisfactory, “‘Touch me and see; no ghost has flesh and bones as you can see that I have.’ They were still incredulous, still astounded.” The disciples who had traveled to Emmaus with him, however, recognized him in the breaking of the bread, obvious ritual language of the Church. Chauvet concludes,

> In this time of the Church, the Lord is no longer visible. Luke insists on this point: resurrected, Jesus is the “Living One” (see Luke 24:5)—a divine title—he lives in God, as the account of the ascension clearly emphasizes. However, the Absent One is present in his ‘sacrament’ which is the Church: the Church rereading the Scriptures with him in mind, the Church repeating his gestures in memory of him, the Church living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name. It is in these forms of witness by the Church that Jesus takes on a body and allows himself to be encountered. Such an interpretation is one of the keys for unlocking these three texts: the Church is never mentioned as such, but it is everywhere present in veiled fashion; if it seems omitted from the text, it is because it alone constitutes its authentic “pre-text.”

---

543 Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 161–78. Chauvet pairs this chapter with two other Lucan texts in explicating how it is that Christians come to be Christians: the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) and Saul/Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1–20). Of course, the last is an important text, more or less formative, for mystical body theologies across the century.
544 Ibid., 161.
545 Lk 24: 39, 41 (NRSV)
546 See Lk 24: 30–31
These reflections offer a clear indication of how Chauvet injects a healthy dose of absence into the French stream. There is no danger, then, of identifying Christ too closely with the individual Christian or with the Church. His thoroughgoing recourse to corporality and the “presence of absence” chasten some of the potential excesses of the theology, tendencies obvious in Adam’s theology and Tromp’s theology, and incipient in Mersch’s theology (the least expressly liturgical of those in the French stream studied here). We no longer see Jesus walking about; in order to find the body of Christ, we are instructed to seek the Church. We feel the absence profoundly and are tempted to seek the living among the dead, to reformulate the angel’s question to the women at the tomb.\footnote{Cf. Lk 24: 5} And Peter, running to the tomb, also found not his body, but “the wrappings and nothing more.”\footnote{Lk 24: 12 (NRSV)} It is difficult to shake that temptation to immediacy.

This was an absence that from the angle of social engagement, Michel’s constructive social engagement presumed: the Church has no ability to decree institutionally an end to societal problems. Michel saw that movements such as the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Catholic Worker, and Friendship House, must drive this work in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, indebted to his scholastic imagination, there is still a heavy sense of presence that accompanies his mystical body theology. This made sense. Despite a lack of political power, the Church in the United States of the 1920s and 1930s had a coherence resulting from its ongoing identification as “other” to American society and cohesive subcultural strategies to combat that

\footnote{Cf. Lk 24: 5}
\footnote{Lk 24: 12 (NRSV)}
identification. His formation in the liturgy taught him to avoid simply identifying mediation with the real, yet the Church had a vision of pursuing social repair that was neither of the state, nor dependent upon it. This delicate mix of cohesiveness and displacement has some echoes in our contemporary cultural context of interconnectedness and fragmentation. It is this fragmentation-yet-connection to which Chauvet refers when he opens *Symbol and Sacrament* with the proliferation of questions about Christian identity arising in the pastoral sphere in 1980s France. And he works to develop a pervasive fundamental theological norm that is not dependent upon the claims to glaring presence of neo-scholasticism.

**Directions and Implications**

The interplay of fragmentation and connection intensifies after Chauvet produces his main body of work in the cultural context of ongoing globalization. Thus we now turn to some possible directions in which the research of this dissertation could be developed, first in view of the arguments it makes about the historical flow of mystical body theology, and then with respect to our contemporary context.

**Historically Speaking**

The foregoing analysis holds several implications for continued historical theological investigation of what has oftentimes been seen as a monolith: mystical body theology in the twentieth century. If the argument here is correct—that Michel and

---


Chauvet inhabit the same broad stream of French socio-liturgical thinking about the mystical body of Christ, then there is potential for much more investigation of this and other streams of mystical body theology.

If we understand “mystical body of Christ” only as an ecclesiological model or image, then its variations—which we have begun to show here are many—are not so important as its contradistinctions to other models or images. But if we scratch the surface of its historical incarnations, we may find a better way of understanding its implications throughout twentieth century theology and perhaps more theological resources for contemporary theology.

Delineating, with a rather broad sweep, three streams of mystical body theology as I have done here only begins that process. There are nuances that I have only been able to nod to along the way. For example, we noted the German-liturgical theology of Romano Guardini as well as the differences between the mystical body theology of Mersch and Beauduin—less and more liturgically inflected, respectively, though both grounded in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church. These examples demonstrate that more needs to be done to see mystical body theologies even more clearly.

“Direct Access”

In Charles Taylor’s imposing A Secular Age, the Canadian thinker brings a variety tools to his diagnosis of the contemporary. As he promises,Taylor tacks back and forth between a more analytical philosophical view and an historical one, often dealing with cultural contexts as well as philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, what emerges

---

from his study are a variety of aspects that compose a diagnosis of our contemporary and how it is that this particular contemporary came to pass. Two aspects of Taylor’s analysis are of particular interest here: 1) his description of a “direct-access society” and 2) his treatment of “excarnation.”

One of the characteristics of what Taylor calls “the modern social imaginary” is the establishment of a “direct-access society.” This is a component of what it means to live in a secular age, wherein the conditions for belief have shifted from an unquestioned belief in God, to such belief as one option among many.552 A growing flat sense of time—every moment is both simultaneous and relentlessly chronological—accompanies a corresponding flat society, a “radical horizontality.”553 The celebration of the high feast, which both pauses the workaday slog and, importantly, casts us forward and backward because “it is close to eternity, or the time of origins, or the events it prefigures”554 is dismantled.

A secularized (i.e. flat) eschatological and anamnetic sense of time pairs with a secularized (i.e. unmediated) sense of the corporate. “The modern social imaginary no longer sees the greater trans-local entities as grounded in something other, something higher, than common action in secular time.”555 “In the earlier form, hierarchy and… mediacy of access went together.”556 From this perspective, we can see that the Roman stream of mystical body theology tried to recover this altogether—a strong sense of mediation via a strong grounding in hierarchical structure. In most cases, the structure

552 Taylor, 3.
553 Ibid., 209.
554 Ibid., 209.
555 Ibid., 207.
556 Ibid., 210.
was the lead. With Taylor’s lens we can see that the French stream represents an attempt to recover mediation and, of course, some sense of the hierarchical, with liturgy and sacraments in the lead.

The shift, Taylor tells us, is from relational identities to categorical identities. The ground still proves difficult and there are a variety of other factors at play that lead us to think only in terms of direct access between myself and society, which eviscerates an imagination of the common good. There are, of course, plenty of positive elements to this shift, not the least of which being that serfs are no longer beholden to their lords to gain any kind of subjectivity within the broader power structures of society. Though what results is not nationalism, the virulent kind to which some in the German stream of mystical body theology succumbed in the thirties and forties, but a more atomized individual sense of access. On the religious plane, this becomes a “me and God” kind of direct access that eliminates mediation across the board. Thus, the complex structure of identity described by Chauvet and the complicated sense of indebtedness across simple ideological lines that characterized mediated society are challenged.

Perhaps the beginnings of cultivating an alternative imagination reside in the French stream. As Taylor demonstrates, the idea of “direct access” is partly an imaginary. It is supported by certain social practices (e.g. fewer formal “patrons”; calling a customer service line), but others clearly reinforce a different idea (“it is not what you know, but who”; celebrity vs. non celebrity access). Thus, while mystical body

---

557 Ibid., 211.
558 Ibid., 146. Taylor describes the term “social imaginary” as “the way we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life in the contemporary Western world.” Thus, there are social constructs and practices that are part of it, but there is also an over-riding sense of “this is the way things are” that does not line up with every aspect of social life.
theology does not serve as a social practice, it has potential to work on the imaginary side of the equation; that is, the way we see the world. We have noted almost ad nauseum how for the French stream, mystical body theology was a fundamental Christological vision of the world that embraces mediation in a non-stifling way.

For example, Michel’s mystical body theology included a fundamental emphasis on the little mystical body of the family, which situated human existence in the context of mediating relations early on, tapping us into this reality. Chauvet emphasizes that we always come to be and continue to be in a network of relations. The primordiality of the symbolic, which forms us in its womb and appears as gift preceding us, opens us up to reflection upon a God who precedes and goes before us. This is both a protological and eschatological point. We are constituted by God and move forward toward God in ultimate consummation. This is an insight that grows out of our very corporality. We are constituted by corporality and depend upon it for growth and learning. Our very physical bodies open up beyond themselves. They are not discrete entities. Chauvet uses the example of the navel—a trace that we have been sewn up in our own unique sack of skin; our bodies bear the marks of a primordial openness that is not autonomous, but they also admit of other openings (eyes, ears, mouth, the open palm) which make any coming-to-subjectivity of the human being possible.

---

560 Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 446.
561 Ibid., 147.
Mystical body theology in the French stream seems to have been successful at helping us to imagine a broad horizontal society that has a vertical thrust. We have learned not to move in the direction of the Roman stream, wherein the structure was the primary means of securing the vertical, moving from priests to bishops and, ultimately, the pope. But a workable approach cannot jettison these elements either, as Taylor demonstrates.

**Bodies in Our Contemporary Context**

Another aspect of the modern social imaginary that Taylor develops is what he calls “excarnation” in which, “Embodied feeling is no longer a medium in which we relate to what we recognize as rightly bearing an aura of the higher; either we do recognize something like this, and we see reason as our unique access to it; or we tend to reject this kind of higher altogether, reducing it through naturalistic explanation.”\(^{562}\)

Thus, Taylor describes an over-rationalization of our age (and Christianity rooted in the Reform more specifically) to the epistemological detriment of embodied ways of knowing. It is against this backdrop that the burgeoning interest in bodies since Nietzsche must be understood.\(^{563}\) But the swing back is inherent to Christianity itself, explains Taylor, “there is something in Christian civilization which resists excarnation.”\(^{564}\)

Chauvet developed and appropriated the French stream in the philosophical context of France in the seventies and eighties. Chauvet’s theological engagement with the body in the context of postmodern thought has been followed with a host of studies of

---

\(^{562}\) Taylor, 288.  
\(^{563}\) Ibid., 613.  
\(^{564}\) Ibid., 615.
all different stripes. We have demonstrated that his concerns are largely in line with the French socio-liturgical stream and that his thinking on the body grows more complex in dialogue with Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Levinas.

Questions surrounding our understanding of embodiment are rife in our globalized context. Forces drive us in both excarnating and re-incarnating directions. Ours is a context deeply conflicted about the body. It is, on one hand, the limiting sack of skin that holds us in one particular place while we are virtually transported around the globe, the fleshy mass that sits idle as capital whizzes from Los Angeles to Dubai to Beijing and back again. On the other hand, bodies themselves are commodified in various ways, enlisted in those structures and put to very specific ends in various new forms of slavery that move miles with relative ease. Insidious corporate networks are easier to create and sustain with technological support. Simultaneously, we have technological avenues for entering into the experiences of persons around the globe—and therefore potential for a deep sense of corporality—and yet the temptation arises that those mediated entrées remain merely voyeuristic and disembodied. Yet, many thinkers have

---

struggled to find some other way to ground important universals such as human rights. Some have turned to the body.\textsuperscript{566}

Vincent Miller warns of resting too easily with embodiment as a panacea in our contemporary, globalized consumer context, “Constructing ourselves by choosing among and acting upon passive objects, we are particularly ill suited to understand ourselves as gift” because “the formation of our imaginations on this side of the veil of the commodity makes us appear autonomous, unrelated to anything.”\textsuperscript{567} Nevertheless, Miller argues, “our response to the challenge of global consumption must focus on cultivating awareness of [our] interconnections.”\textsuperscript{568} These dynamics that lead to fragmented persons, identities, and cultures cries out for a substantive account of the corporate nature of human life.

While different in analysis and emphasis, Taylor and Miller agree that we have a sense of bodiliness, but that it does not take us to God. A connection has been severed. Taylor describes a widespread privileging of the rational, so that what is bodily is not taken as a conduit for reality. Miller emphasizes our obsession with bodies, in several respects, which nevertheless fails in itself to move us toward a sense of the sacramental.

Miller’s analysis, in particular, derives from the effects of consumer practices among global commodities and warns us to avoid too much sanguinity concerning invocations of embodiment. In light of the work here, further exploration of the possibilities of mystical body theology in the French stream for serving as a theological framework for bringing our interconnections to the surface is necessary. Theologically

\textsuperscript{566} Bryan S. Turner, \textit{Vulnerability and Human Rights} (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006).


\textsuperscript{568} Ibid., 119.
speaking, bodies are always more complex than their fleshiness. The glorified body of Christ is fleshy and yet mistaken as a ghost, as mentioned above.\textsuperscript{569} The tradition has long wrestled with how to articulate that there is body and more than body (i.e. soul), without dualism.\textsuperscript{570} “Mystical body of Christ” fits into this same complex conversation. There are fleshy and bodily elements as Timothy Kelly points out, “Since body firstly means body, there is always a certain physical dimension when the word is used.”\textsuperscript{571} Yet, the mystical body of Christ has been traditionally distinguished from the historical body of Christ and, despite some of the Eucharistic physicalism cited by de Lubac, led to reflections upon the interconnectedness among human bodies in time predicated on the liturgy.

While fleshiness seductively promises to be an entrée into that resistance to excarnation characteristic of Christianity, Miller demonstrates that it is not so simple. He points to John Tomlinson’s definition of globalization as “complex connectivity,” whereby the key characteristic of global culture is that we are related to one another and other things in multi-layered ways, ways which we are often unaware.\textsuperscript{572} In a different, but still significant way, this was precisely the point that Michel and others on this side of

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
the Atlantic, such as Dorothy Day, made about the mystical body—it was complex connectivity. Day describes an early sense of the mystical body of Christ hitting her upon the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, before her conversion.\textsuperscript{573} Michel, in a passage cited above, reflects on “the organic fellowship in which all men are actually, or by destiny, true members with Christ of His Mystical Body.”\textsuperscript{574} This is an element—this “supernatural solidarity”—that is more strongly emphasized by Michel and underemphasized by Chauvet. The supernatural solidarity of mystical body theology drives us to consider what is now fully a situation in which we are inserted into a web of relationships without our explicit choice and challenges us to think about the narrowness of the network of relationships that we do choose. We have demonstrated that the French stream was able to hold these two elements—corporality and sacramentality—together in a way that other streams of mystical body theology were not. This is promising. We should not lose sight of the fact that a theological account can only go so far in this context, but there is potential, nevertheless, for examining virtual (and other non-physical connections) in the theological light of the mystical body of Christ.\textsuperscript{575}

\textsuperscript{573} Day, \textit{The Long Loneliness}, 147.
\textsuperscript{574} Michel, “The Liturgy and Catholic Life,” 119.
\textsuperscript{575} There have been several theological attempts to engage questions of embodiment, taking account of mystical body theology. Among them are, Rebecca Clouse, “A Postmodern Look at the Mystical Body,” \textit{Mystics Quarterly} 20, no. 1 (March 1994), 3–9; Cooke, “Body and Mystical Body: The Church as \textit{Communio}”; Kelly, “Christ and the Church: \textit{Duo in Carne Una}”; Joseph Rivera, “\textit{Corpus Mysticum} and Religious Experience: Henry, Lacoste, and Marion,” \textit{International Journal of Systematic Theology} 14, no. 3 (July 2012): 327–49. Rivera’s work is particularly fascinating because it studies Marion, Lacoste, and Henry on “the ‘mystical body of Christ’” which “has become a theological grammar for understanding both the limits and possibilities of religious experience in recent continental philosophy of religion” (327). His work demonstrates the more-than-ecclesiological heritage of mystical body theology in French circles. However, he does not engage the question of embodiment directly. Though it bears mentioning that Rivera is patently wrong that de Lubac wrote \textit{Corpus Mysticum} “in
In 1998, Pope John Paul II acknowledged the growth of globalization, remarking on its potential to bring people together accompanied, however, with the threat of increasing marginalization. John Paul described our challenge, especially that of the United Nations, as ensuring “globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization. This is a clear duty in justice, with serious moral implications in the organization of the economic, social, cultural and political life of nations.”

More recently, Pope Francis has called the world’s attention to Lampedusa, a small island off the coast of Italy, where a boat filled with African émigrés had wrecked, killing many. He demonstrated his solidarity with the dead by celebrating Mass with a chalice fashioned from the wood of the broken ship. Then, in his homily, he connected this seemingly accidental event with “The globalization of indifference [which] makes us all ‘unnamed’, responsible, yet nameless and faceless.” And then he called upon the world to pay greater attention to our complex connections,

How many of us, myself included, have lost our bearings; we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don’t care; we don’t protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another! And when humanity as a whole loses its bearings, it results in tragedies like the one we have witnessed.

“When is your brother?” His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and part, as a response to the 1943 papal encyclical entitled Mystici Corporis Christi.” As mentioned above, that work was written in the late thirties, though a second edition did appear in 1949. However, these studies largely do one of two things, they either define “mystical body of Christ” as simply an ecclesiology or they move more in the direction of mystical experience. There is room, then, for a study of how the French stream provides resources for engaging questions concerning bodies.

their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity.577

Of course, mystical body theology is not a cultural practice that in itself would lead to furthering efforts at genuine solidarity. However, it does provide a theological account of solidarity rooted in Christ that could be even further developed. If the German-Romantic stream of mystical body theology taught us the dangers of not taking the Christological moment to be transformative enough, these are lessons well-learned in our contemporary context. On the other side, trajectories in Catholic sensibility which aim to narrow the boundaries of the Church, effectively blunting its capacity to serve as a gateway to that same solidarity may be challenged by the Roman stream’s failure to grip the hearts of people and to further just causes of the day.

---

577 Pope Francis, “Homily,” Lampedusa, Italy (8 July 2013).
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Sources

Virgil Michel Papers, St. John’s Abbey Archives, St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, MN (SJAA).

Patrick Cummins Papers, Conception Abbey Archives, Conception Abbey, Conception, MO (CAA).

Books, Articles, Manuscripts, and Magisterial Documents

*Unless otherwise noted, all magisterial documents were accessed via http://www.vatican.va.


______. *Notre piété pendant l’avent*. Louvain, Belgium: Mont César, 1919.


Bonaventure, OFM. *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*. In *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Episcopi Cardinalis Opera Omnia*, vol. 5. Quaracchi: 1891. Available from:


________. “Où en est le mouvement liturgique?” *La Maison Dieu* 25 (1951): 34‒46.


______. “Avery Dulles, St. Benedict’s Center, and No Salvation Outside the Church, 1940–1953,” *Catholic Historical Review* 93 (July 2007): 553–75.


Francis, Pope. “Homily,” Lampedusa, Italy. 8 July 2013.


Lamberts, Jozef. “The Abbey of Mont-César in Louvain: One Hundred Years Young.” Worship 73, no. 5 (September 1999): 425–42.


Satis Cognitum: On the Unity of the Church. 29 June 1896.


_______. “The Liturgy and Catholic Life.” Unpublished manuscript. Virgil Michel Papers. SJAA. Series Z, Box 33, Folder 3A.


Miller, Vincent J.


_____. *Mystici Corporis Christi: On the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.* 29 June 1943.


_______. *Decree on the Apostolate of Laity* Apostolicam Actuositatem. 18 November 1965.

_______. *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church* Ad Gentes. 7 December 1965.

_______. *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops* Christus Dominus. 28 October 1965.

_______. *Decree on Renewal of Religious Life* Perfectae Caritatis 28 October 1965.

_______. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* Lumen Gentium. 21 November 1964.


