



The “complex reality” (*LG*, 8) of the Church in the light of the Incarnate Word: II. Analysis and Post-conciliar Reception of the Text

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With the precedents and context established in Part I of this inquiry, the “complex reality” text can now be presented again before analyzing its logical arrangement:

Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (cf. Eph. 4:16).

Logical Arrangement

Sorting the affirmations found in the text will enable a greater understanding of their Christological and ecclesiological implications. The text explains that the Church is constituted on earth and sustained by Christ. She is holy and a community that revolves around the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. She is a visible organism, underscoring her corporeality and organic nature that communicates “truth and grace to all,” underscoring the sacramental framework, but also the basic concept of organic body. She is also described according to some paired affirmations that follow a pattern of visible-invisible:

1. society structured with hierarchical organs – Mystical body of Christ
2. visible assembly – spiritual community
3. earthly – enriched with heavenly things

These realities are typically separated conceptually and truly: a society, an assembly, something earthly, perceptible to human eyes, alongside something mystical, implying a certain spiritual and cognitive opacity, something spiritual, often associated with either invisibility or something only accepted in faith, and, finally, heavenly goods not usually found on earth. These realities are a single reality in the Church, together divine and human, a “complex reality.”

As an aid to understanding this complex ecclesial reality the text makes recourse to another complex reality that has been described with dogmatic precision after a prolonged period of reflection, suffering, and errors that spanned centuries and ecumenical councils: the mystery of the Incarnate Word. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the Church is “like” a sacrament in Christ, but here the wording is much stronger (*non mediocrem analogiam*), perhaps to emphasize that the link between the mystery of the Church (the topic of the entire first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*) and the mystery of Christ go beyond a useful metaphor or manner of speaking. LG 8 is the conclusion to the chapter: the analogy between the mystery of the Church and the mystery of Christ unpacks the lean and concise affirmation at the beginning of the chapter regarding the sacramentality of the Church in Christ.

In the analogate of the Incarnate Word the pattern of invisible-visible is aligned with that of divine-human. The Incarnation is situated in

assuming human nature permanently and using it as a “living organ of salvation.” In the analogate of the Church the pattern of invisible-visible is aligned with that of Spirit of Christ-visible social structure of the Church. The Spirit of Christ uses that social structure to give life to the Church with the goal of making the “body” grow.

This description goes beyond a static subject; it is a dynamic reality. In his earthly life Christ brought about redemption through his assumed human nature and human life (analogate of the *incarnate* Word); after his Ascension redemption continues through “the Spirit of Christ” (the Holy Spirit) that acts in the Church and through the Church to make salvation progress onward through spreading an enlivened, evangelizing Church.

In addition to this analogy between the instrumentality of assumed human nature and the visible structure of the Church, the analogy between the close connection between Christ and the instrument used is also seen: Christ will never set aside his assumed human nature, and neither will he set aside his Body, the Church. This close connection easily shows the Spirit of Christ as the soul of the Mystical Body.

Post-Conciliar Reception of the Affirmation

Post-Conciliar reception, as with the precedents, can be divided into Magisterial reception and theological reception.

Magisterial Reception

Post-Conciliar reception emphasizes the transcendent dimension of the Church, but also the importance of not confusing it with the immanent and social dimension.

The Rapport between Religious Life, Religious Structures, Charism, and Institution

The document *Mutuae Relationes*,¹ inspired by the “complex reality” text, describes the nature of the Church as sacramental:

The intimate reciprocal connection of the two elements [divine and human], therefore, confers upon the Church her special *sacramental* nature, by virtue of which she completely transcends the limits of any simply sociological perspective (n.3).

The same number of the document sees the necessity of renewing the Church’s human aspects, but always with the goal of highlighting her nature. It justifies the need to not oppose religious life and religious structures as if they could subsist apart from each other, charismatic and institutional (which would be, it should be added, a sort of ecclesiological Nestorianism). They form a single, complex reality (cf. n.34). It evokes the error pointed out by Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis* of conceiving a hidden “pneumatic” Church. It can be added that the “complex reality” text avoids this potential pitfall by speaking of the Spirit of Christ who acts in the Church.

Chéno observed that after the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* one of the most debated topics in the post-conciliar period has been the question of charisms. In his opinion, the Council doesn’t speak much of charisms, but later ecclesiology takes up the topic frequently. Conciliar texts (for example, *LG* 4,7§3; *Ad gentes* 4,23§1; *LG* 12§2; and, in more detail, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 3§4) present charisms as a personal gift of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the whole body, but also that judgment regarding their authenticity is reserved to ecclesiastical authority. The Council doesn’t explain the compatibility between the freedom of the Spirit and ecclesiastical regulation. Afterwards, despite the Council’s precautions, charismatic structure would be proposed as more fundamental than the ministerial structure of the Church and in

¹ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, document *Mutuae Relationes*, 14 May 1978. Quotation taken from <http://www.vatican.va>.

opposition to it.² More recently this topic has been taken up and clarified by the CDF document *Iuvenescit Ecclesiam*.³

Holy Spirit, Soul of the Church

Saint John Paul II in his audience of July 8, 1998 recalled the teaching of Leo XIII and Pius XII regarding the Holy Spirit as the soul of the Church. The rapport between the Spirit and the Church helps to understand the Church without falling into the errors highlighted by *Mystici Corporis* of

ecclesiological naturalism, which is limited to the visible aspect and so regards the Church as a merely human institution; or the opposite error of ecclesiological mysticism, which emphasizes the Church’s unity with Christ to the point of considering Christ and the Church as a sort of physical person. These two errors are analogous—as Leo XIII had already stressed in the Encyclical *Satis cognitum*—to two Christological heresies: Nestorianism, which separated the two natures in Christ, and Monophysitism, which confused them. The Second Vatican Council offered us a synthesis which helps us grasp the true meaning of the Church’s mystical unity by presenting her as “one complex reality which comes together from a human and divine element” (*LG*, 8).⁴

The “Spirit of Christ” mentioned in *LG*, 8 is also described here as the Holy Spirit, soul of the Church. It highlights the importance of not reducing the Church to a purely human institution, but also the pitfall of overemphasizing the unity of Christ, above all from the divine perspective, and nullifying the individuals found in the Church, an error already condemned by Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis*.

² Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe de l’Église (*Lumen gentium* 8)», *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 40/3 (2009), 341–359, 346–347.

³ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, letter *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, 16 May 2016.

⁴ Text from <http://www.vatican.va>.

Theological Pre-understanding and Multi-disciplinarity when Studying the Church

A speech by Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the students and faculty of the *Pontifical Institute of Christian Archeology* (December 20, 2008) recalled that it is impossible to not penetrate supernatural realities when doing a historical study of the Church, given her complexity:

a complete vision of the reality of a Christian community, whether ancient or recent, is not possible unless one keeps in mind the fact that the Church is composed of both a human element and a divine element. [...] In this theological pre-understanding, the basic criterion can only be to let oneself be conquered by the truth sought in its authentic sources, with a soul free from passion and prejudice, since Christian archaeology is a historical science and as such is based on the methodical study of the sources.⁵

Benedict XVI adds that, along with historical research on the Church, a theological pre-understanding is necessary. The “complex reality” requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Spataro, when speaking of Church history, makes a similar observation:

historia ecclesiastica is configured as a discipline running in two directions, history and ecclesiology. However, they are not parallel lines destined to never cross, but shores connected by a bridge that is the theology of history...⁶

This shows that a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the Church is necessary, and not just in the fields of history and theology, due to her complex reality.

⁵ Text from <http://www.vatican.va>.

⁶ “L’*historia ecclesiastica* si configura allora come una disciplina che corre lungo due direzioni, storia ed ecclesologia. Esse però non sono linee parallele mai destinate a incontrarsi, ma sponde collegate da un ponte che è la teologia della storia ...” R. SPATARO, «Scienze patristiche e “Historia ecclesiastica” per una teologia della storia», 231. Translation mine.

The Action of the Church that is not Spiritual

Since the Church is visible, as *Gaudium et Spes*⁷ observes, she too must develop a social human life, but always favoring the ends established by Christ:

Since the Church has a visible and social structure as a sign of her unity in Christ, she can and ought to be enriched by the development of human social life, not that there is any lack in the constitution given her by Christ, but that she can understand it more penetratingly, express it better, and adjust it more successfully to our times (n.44).⁸

Cardinal Reinhard Marx during meetings in the Vatican regarding the protection of minors in the Church (February 23, 2019) used the “complex reality” in his presentation to highlight the Church’s action that is not spiritual, as well as the importance of not confusing it with the spiritual dimension:

Neglecting the worldly aspects of the Church and its own laws, does not do justice to the reality of the Church. In an analogous way, the body of Christ and the human organisation of the church must be seen “without separation and without intermingling”. [...] all the basic principles for a good society and a people-serving organisation in the life of the Church cannot be ignored. And the social principles of the social doctrine of the Church are also fitting for the Church, that is subsidiarity, solidarity.⁹

He also highlights, on the basis of the “complex reality” and the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, that divine and human in the Church are not to be confused. As a social reality the Church cannot ignore social questions as if she were above them in all aspects. The

⁷ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965.

⁸ Text from <http://www.vatican.va>.

⁹ R. MARX, «Transparency as a Community of Believers», meeting “La Protezione dei Minori nella Chiesa,” Vaticano, 23 February 2019. Text from http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_card-marx-protezioneminori_20190223_en.html.

Church is holy, but she also embraces sinful children. Ignoring sin in the Church would be “divinizing” weak and human aspects of the Church.

Theological Reception

The theological reception of the “complex reality” sheds light on the influence of Saint Thomas Aquinas’ Christology and sacramental theology, the influence of *Mystici Corporis* and the notion of the Church as the body of Christ, the rapport between communion and structures in the Church, and the difference between the human and the divine in the Church. It also reiterates the pluridisciplinarity necessary for studying the Church and the “complex reality” as a possible starting point for a new stage of theological reflection.

Interpretative Keys: the Hypostatic Union and the Influence of Saint Thomas Aquinas

In his commentary on *LG 8* Gerard Philips, secretary of the commission entrusted with the drafting of the constitution, observes that by its comparison with the hypostatic union, the human nature assumed by the Son of God is indissolubly united to his Person so much so that St Thomas calls it the conjoined instrument of his divinity. The social organization of the Church is at the service of the Spirit for the building up of the Body.¹⁰

According to Philips, Nestorius hypostatized the two natures of Christ into two people. To dissociate the divine element from the human in the Church would be like an ecclesiological Nestorianism. Monophysites admit only one nature in the Incarnate Word to avoid any division in the Living Son of God. Absorbing all the human aspects of the Church in the divine majesty would empty the mystery through the destruction of her earthly reality and would be an ecclesiological monophysism.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. G. PHILIPS, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero nel Concilio Vaticano II: storia, testo e commento della costituzione Lumen Gentium*, Jaca Book, Milano 1989⁴, 109.

¹¹ Cf. G. PHILIPS, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero*, 109–110.

The structural union of the Church and the Spirit is of capital importance for theological exposition. The Church is the *sign* of the presence of the Holy Spirit who in her and through her accomplishes the salvation of the elect. To be both sign and cause of grace is the very essence of the *sacrament* or *mystery*: a visible sign of the invisible divine power. We find ourselves again and again before the Church sacrament and mystery.¹²

It is worth seeing the Christological and sacramental theology of St. Thomas Aquinas in this regard. The text of *LG* 8 on the “complex reality” evokes the approach of St. Thomas Aquinas in two questions of his *Summa Theologiae*:

Whether the Human Nature was United to the Word of God Accidentally? (III, q 2, a 6)

In the *Respondeo* to this question St. Thomas explains two Christological errors on the subject: those who confused the natures (Eutyches and Dioscorus), teaching that the two natures were confused to form one nature from two natures; and those who (Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia) separated the Son of God and the Son of Man into two people united:

1. “by indwelling”: the Word of God dwelled in that man like as in a temple
2. “by unity of intention”: that man’s will was always conformed to God’s will
3. “by operation”: that man would be the instrument of the Word of God
4. “by greatness of honor”: every honor rendered to the Son of God was also communicated to the son of man due to his union with the Son of God
5. “by equivocation”: communication of names inasmuch as it is said that this man is God and Son of God

¹² “L’unione strutturale della Chiesa e dello Spirito è di capitale importanza per l’esposizione teologica. La Chiesa è il *segno* della presenza dello Spirito Santo che in essa e per suo mezzo compie la salvezza degli eletti. Essere nello stesso tempo segno e causa di grazia è l’essenza stessa del *sacramento* o del *mistero*: segno visibili della forza divina invisibile. Ci troviamo ancora e sempre davanti alla Chiesa sacramento e mistero.” G. PHILIPS, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero*, 110. Translation mine.

The underlying problem, according to St. Thomas, is the affirmation of an accidental union, and all the errors in this regard led, according to Aquinas, to Nestorius' error which divided persons and, moreover, denied the union between body and soul, another error. In his answers to the objections St. Thomas provides some insights relevant to the current inquiry:

1. *Ad Primum* notes that the assumption of human nature gives visibility to the Word and ennobles human nature without changing the Word.
2. *Ad Quartum* teaches that human nature has been used as an instrument by the hypostasis of the Word as the body or limbs are used as parts of our hypostasis. That is why the union is hypostatic, not accidental.

Whether the Sacraments of the New Law Derive their Power from Christ's Passion? (III q 62, a 5)

The second question elaborates on the instrumentality of Christ's human nature and relates it to the instrumentality of the sacraments. In the *Respondeo* he teaches that there are two kinds of instrument: separated, like a stick, and conjoined, like the hand, which can move a separated instrument:

the principal efficient cause of grace is God Himself, in comparison with Whom Christ's humanity is as a united instrument, whereas the sacrament is as a separate instrument. Consequently, the saving power must needs be derived by the sacraments from Christ's Godhead through His humanity.¹³

It is worthwhile to present *LG 8*'s statement on this subject again with some additional comments:

As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him,[not united in an accidental manner] serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation,[conjoined instrument] so, in a similar way, does the visible

¹³ T. AQUINAS, *Summa theologica*, Burns Oates & Washbourne, London, III q.62 a.5 resp.

social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body

With the image of the body and the desired effect, the visible body-Church is also an instrument conjoined and united with Christ, and not in an accidental manner. The autonomy of the Word and the Church are respected, but the Church is ennobled as the Body of Christ. This leads to two important conclusions: the unity of the Church, as Pius XII said, must be visible, so that any approach of invisible Church-separated visible communities is not sustainable; and the Church will endure forever against some more recent authors who see the Church as something that will one day disappear in favor of God’s Kingdom.¹⁴

The Relationship between Communion, Structures, and Organization

In 1984 the *International Theological Commission* in 1984 published a document on select topics of ecclesiology on the 20th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁵ In the exposition on the topic of “The New People of God as a Hierarchically Ordered Society” the document speaks of the relationship between communion, structures, and organization, drawing inspiration from the “complex reality.”¹⁶

Structure and life in the Church are intimately associated, and the communion of the New People of God is, therefore, “social communion of a hierarchically ordered sort.” The document observes that the *nota praevia explicative* of November 16, 1964, before the vote on *Lumen Gentium*, clarified that “Communion is a concept held in high honor in the ancient Church (as also today, notably in the East). By it is meant

¹⁴ Cf. F. TESTAFERRI, «La categoria “regno” nella teologia del pluralismo religioso», *Ricerche Teologiche* XVI/2 (2005), 453–463, 453.

¹⁵ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council*, 1984.

¹⁶ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology*, 6.1. All texts taken from IDEM, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1984.

not some vague sentiment but an organic reality that calls for juridical expression and yet at the same time is ensouled by love.”

The ontological sacramental function and the canonical-judicial aspect of the Church are distinct, but both are necessary for the life of the Church. The analogy presented in LG 8 avoids the pitfalls of two possible errors:¹⁷

1. “an ecclesial ‘Nestorianism’ that would recognize no subsistent relationship between the divine and the human elements in the Church’s life.” Here we see the danger of disassociating the elements and disregarding one, both in Christ and in the Church.
2. “an ecclesial ‘Monophysitism,’ for which everything in the Church is ‘divinized,’ leaving no space for the defects and faults of the Church’s organization, the sad harvest of the sins and ignorance of men.” Today it is evident that the Church is not divinely perfect in all her aspects.

Consequences of a Sacramental Perspective

From the sacramental perspective of the Church, the document shows that this understanding of the “complex reality” helps to see that even if not everything is perfect in the Church, not everything is lacking either:

ecclesiastical legislation is not and cannot be infallible. But this by no means signifies that it is without importance in the mystery of salvation. To deny the Church’s law all positive, salvific value would be, in the last analysis, to restrict the Church’s sacramentality to the sacraments alone and so to enfeeble the Church’s visibility in everyday life.¹⁸

Its exposition on the Church as the sacrament of Christ¹⁹ explains that the term “sacrament” expresses the reality both divine and human of the Church, presented indissolubly as mystery and historical subject. The Church as sacrament demonstrates:

¹⁷ Taken textually from INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology*, 6.1.

¹⁸ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology*, 6.1.

¹⁹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology*, 8.

1. Her origin in and dependence on God in Christ: “if the Church is a sacrament, Christ himself is the ‘primordial’ sacrament on which the Church depends: ‘He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the Body, the Church’ (Col 1:18).”²⁰
2. The Church’s orientation toward showing the universal Love of God that leads to intimate union with God and among men. It reflects a desire in theology to “to give back to Christianity its ample communitarian and social, rather than individualistic or even institutional, character. Christianity is in its very essence a mystery of union and unity: intimate union with God, unity of men among themselves.”²¹

Heim notes that if the Church not only administers the sacramental means of grace but is also like a sacrament (cf. *LG*, 1), she is never an end in herself. The expression *veluti sacramentum* (*LG*, 1) contributes to the coordination and distinction in a differentiated way of the visible structure and spiritual nature of the Church.²² To add depth to the visible side of the Church, the side of this world, through its spiritual dimension the interweaving of temporal-social structure and transcendent reality must be taken into account. *LG* 8 explains the meaning of this complex reality through the parallel Incarnation-Church, a parallel qualified as analogical.²³ For this reason the Church cannot be considered only as a social entity; her social structure serves the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies her for the extension of his kingdom.

Pottmeyer saw the differentiation of the Church’s unity as a reason for hope for the reform of the Church’s structures before the signs of the time, because it unblocked a traditionalist opposition to reform due to a false sacralization of the Church’s structures. The description of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation expresses the complex link between the Church’s social constitution and her spiritual dimension.²⁴

²⁰ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology*, 8.3.

²¹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Themes of Ecclesiology*, 8.1.

²² A thought taken from Kasper; cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 54.

²³ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 55.

²⁴ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 56–57.

For Dulles, objections to applying the term “sacrament” to the Church included the evident concern that Scholastic theology had restricted sacrament to the seven rites instituted by Christ that confer grace *ex opere operato*, but also a concern that it would be interpreted along the lines of Modernist George Tyrell, who said the Church was founded as a general sacrament and Christ gave her the power to institute sacraments as she saw fit. However, early Christian writers and pre-Scholastic theologians had a broader use of the term and didn’t hesitate to call Christ the sacrament *par excellence*.²⁵

Dulles also notes that the Latin *sacramentum* and the Greek μυστήριον were not synonymous. Mystery emphasizes the incomprehensibility of God’s plan, whereas sacrament brings out its visible or incarnational dimension. Henri de Lubac noted:

If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but she is his very continuation, in a sense far more real than that in which it can be said that any human institution is its founder’s continuation.²⁶

In the preface of a book on his ecclesiology Ratzinger noted that “the Church’s essence is found, not in the Church herself, but rather in her orientation [*Verwiesensein*] and in her referring [*Verwiesen*] to One beyond herself.”²⁷ Ratzinger saw, based on Heim’s analysis, a Christological structure in the Council’s teaching on the Church that is necessarily “*theo-logica*”: “in Christ, man–human nature–is united with God.”²⁸ An ecclesiology centered in Christ leads to understanding the Church as sacrament:

²⁵ Cf. A. R. DULLES, «The sacramental ecclesiology of “Lumen gentium”», 551.

²⁶ H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism: Christ and the common destiny of man*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, 29. Cf. A. R. DULLES, «The sacramental ecclesiology of “Lumen gentium”», 551.

²⁷ M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 1–2.

²⁸ M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 2.

A christologically centered ecclesiology means understanding the Church in terms of sacrament. More specifically, it means a eucharistic ecclesiology. It means the inclusion [*Einordnung*] and subordination of human sociological systems in the fundamental order [*Grundordnung*] of the *communio*, as this develops from the Eucharist.²⁹

Through his Word and his bodily presence in the Eucharist he is always our contemporary. In the Eucharist is found, here and now, the core of the constitution of the Church, her interweaving of unity and multiplicity, of universality and concrete anchors, in the here and now.³⁰

The Uniqueness of the Church’s Human Affairs, Sin as the Difference between the Word and the Church

The International Theological Commission returned to the topic of the “complex reality” in 2000 with the document *Memory and Reconciliation*,³¹ where it interprets the analogy of LG 8: “The ensemble of her visible and historical aspects stands in relation to the divine gift in a way that is analogous to how, in the incarnate Word of God, the assumed humanity is sign and instrument of the action of the divine Person of the Son.”³² It bears a communion that participates in Trinitary life and unites the baptized in their diversity of times and places in history. This communion makes the Church an absolutely unique subject in human affairs.³³

The document also highlights a difference between the Incarnate Word and the Church: the Word does not sin, but the Church is holy and in need of purification, because she includes sinners: “The Church in her ‘mystery’ is thus the encounter of sanctity and of weakness, continually redeemed, and yet always in need of the power of redemption.”³⁴

²⁹ M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 2.

³⁰ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 2.

³¹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Memory and Reconciliation: the Church and the Faults of the Past*, 7 March 2000.

³² INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Memory and Reconciliation*, 3.1. All texts taken from IDEM, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1999.

³³ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Memory and Reconciliation*, 3.1.

³⁴ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Memory and Reconciliation*, 3.1.

The Church as *Corpus Christi*

For Dulles, *LG* 8 still shows the inspiration of *Mystici Corporis* in drafting the Constitution. Pius XII's concern about avoiding an unhealthy mysticism in which the Church is depicted almost as a physical person, a continued Incarnation where members are biological organs, not distinct persons, led to affirming the Church not as a physical prolongation of the Incarnate Word, but, rather, a mystical one, bringing him very close to Vatican II's notion of the Church as a sacrament in Christ.³⁵

For Dulles, *Mystici Corporis* inspired the part of *LG* 8 this inquiry is considering. The Church is a complex reality consisting of a divine and human element, and "Christ himself, the great and foundational sacrament, has two natures."³⁶ The visible Church, with her hierarchical and sacramental structures, bears heavenly gifts and graces. While not hypostatically united to any divine person, her union with God is real and indefectible. Under her social and spiritual aspects the Church can be considered as the *sacramentum tantum* (her visible structure, the bare sign) and *res sacramenti* (heavenly grace, the fruit of the sacrament): "In her totality the Church is both *sacramentum* and *res*."³⁷ *LG* 8 warns against separating these two aspects:

We ought never to think that the "institutional Church" exists as a merely sociological entity, apart from the Holy Spirit, who permanently dwells within her as her animating principle. Nor should we indulge in the illusion of a merely invisible "true Church." The fruit of the sacrament, considered as grace or salvation, is inseparable from the divinely given means of salvation by which the Church is constituted as a society.³⁸

Beyond *Mystici Corporis* theologians contemplate the "complex reality" from the conception of the Church as the Body of Christ. Ratzinger contrasts two conceptions in the relationship between the

³⁵ Cf. A. R. DULLES, «The sacramental ecclesiology of "Lumen gentium"», 554.

³⁶ A. R. DULLES, «The sacramental ecclesiology of "Lumen gentium"», 555.

³⁷ A. R. DULLES, «The sacramental ecclesiology of "Lumen gentium"», 555.

³⁸ A. R. DULLES, «The sacramental ecclesiology of "Lumen gentium"», 555.

Church and Christ: a Church evaluated by functionality and pragmatic criteria established by the disciples after Easter with the aim of prolonging the work of Jesus, something purely exterior; or something that comes from the Lord, freed in its basic characteristics from self-manipulation so that, in concrete terms, it goes beyond an organization, being the “Body”-organism of Christ.³⁹

Ratzinger examines a pneumatic Christology and its rapport with a notion of the Body of Christ that goes beyond simply perceiving the Church as a historical continuation of the Incarnation that does not take the Resurrection into account. This reduction of the Body of Christ to its more visible aspects caused debates with a more pneumatological Ecclesiology. The Semitic concept of the body of Christ goes beyond corporeality to include the soul as well, which is why when Our Lord says “this is my body” in the Last Supper he is saying, in a certain way, “this is my whole self.” For Ratzinger, Paul’s Body of Christ is the pneumatic Body of the Risen Christ, something that transcends the corporeal and, therefore, the historical without eliminating them.⁴⁰ This expanded notion of the Body of Christ solves, according to Ratzinger, the ecumenical concerns of the doctrine set out in *Mystici Corporis* and allowed its inclusion in *Lumen Gentium*.

For Ratzinger “Body of Christ” and “People of God” were the two most preeminent images for the Church in *Lumen Gentium*’s ecclesiology. In the case of “Body of Christ,” it signifies a spiritual union in the body that acknowledges the interpenetration of Spirit and institution instead of placing them into opposition with one another.⁴¹ Ratzinger draws this from his ecclesiology that started with his dissertation on the People of God and the House of God in St. Augustine, in which he concluded that Augustine sees the authentic nature of the Church as a sacramental Body of Christ communion: *corpus Christi*.⁴² In his dissertation Ratzinger explains “The Church, which is this Body of Christ, ... has her sign, which, like the thing itself that is signified, is a holy sign,

³⁹ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 251–252.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 237–243.

⁴¹ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 243.

⁴² Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 244.

sacrum signum, that is, *sacramentum*. This means that the *sacramentum corpus Christi* corresponds to the *corpus Christi* by portraying it.”⁴³

Augustine describes the Church as the true Body of Christ, *verum corpus*, and the Eucharist as the *sacramentum corporis Christi*. The Church Fathers considered the Church the true Body of Christ, as really united with the Lord, and the Eucharist as the *corpus mysticum*, the concrete form in which our Christ-corporeality is effected.⁴⁴

For Ratzinger St. Paul sees the Church as “that communion which confirms and fulfills its invisible nature as the Body of Christ in a visible and ordered spiritual assembly.”⁴⁵ This sacramental understanding of the Church as *Corpus Christi* also includes the presence of the Holy Spirit, opening it up to the Trinitarian mystery. The Trinitarian mystery determines the development of the Church from the very beginning with the brief Pauline formula of “Body of Christ.”⁴⁶ So the Church is greater than her visible externals: she is not just the sum of her members like a sociological entity. She does not become corporate through recruiting members, like a club, but, rather, her unity is a gift granted by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ She is not just an external organization to attain interior salvation, but an organism of the Holy Spirit: the Church is “something alive that embraces us all from within.”⁴⁸

For Ratzinger identification with the Church is based on one essential act: sharing in Christ’s basic decision through sharing in the Church’s basic decision. Identifying with He who identified Himself with us. The Church cannot be separated from the concrete form in which she appears throughout the ages but cannot be equated with that form either; she encompasses the entire communion of saints. St. Augustine says that there are some who are empirically within the Church though spiritually outside it, and vice versa. For Ratzinger,

In the strict sense, Church is present only where the Pauline identification formula is fully effective: “All of you are one in Christ

⁴³ Quoted by M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 245.

⁴⁴ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 245–246.

⁴⁵ Quoted by M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 248.

⁴⁶ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 248–249.

⁴⁷ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 249.

⁴⁸ Quoted by M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 250.

Jesus.” This is also the content of the Pauline designation of the Church as “Body of Christ.” which in Ephesians blends with the “One-flesh” formula of Genesis 2.⁴⁹

For Ratzinger it is the understanding that “mystical” is synonymous with “sacramental,” a patristic aspect neglected in the years between the two World Wars:

...unlike the twentieth-century Body of Christ theology during the period between the two world wars, which explained the attribute “mystical” largely in the sense of a mysterious interior communion with God, Ratzinger—with Augustine and in the patristic tradition—calls attention to the fact that “mystical” and “sacramental” are synonymous.⁵⁰

Heim presents several conclusions that Ratzinger draws from this synonym for an accurate interpretation of *Corpus Christi* in *Lumen Gentium*’s ecclesiology:⁵¹

1. The Church is “the reality that that is concretely constituted in the Eucharist and built up from it, a reality that is thereby simultaneously completely interior and completely public.”⁵²
2. The reality expressed by the term “Body of Christ” is the Christological foundation of ecclesiology, which also points to her sacramental structure.
3. The Church is the Body of Christ because she receives the Lord in the Lord’s Supper and lives on this core. From this Ratzinger gives a Eucharistic cast to his understanding of the Church as Body of Christ:

The two meanings of the Body of Christ, the eucharistic and the ecclesial, are not identical, yet they are thoroughly interrelated: The Church is built up from the eucharistic meal, and conversely the whole purpose of the Eucharist is to gather people into the Body of

⁴⁹ Quoted by M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 261.

⁵⁰ M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 269–270.

⁵¹ Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 270.

⁵² J. RATZINGER, Quoted by M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 270.

the Lord and thus into the Spirit of the Lord, so as to transform them into the living Body of Christ, the place of the concrete and mighty presence of Christ in the world.⁵³

The Church as *Sponsa Verbi*

The notion of *Sponsa Verbi*, inspired by chapter 5 of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, serves to highlight a deep union of love, like marriage, of becoming one flesh without annulling the spouses. Ratzinger observes in this regard:

Christ and the Church are one body in the sense in which man and woman are one flesh, that is, in such a way that in their indissoluble spiritual-bodily union, they nonetheless remain unconfused and unmingled. The Church does not simply become Christ, she is ever the handmaid whom he lovingly raises to be his Bride and who seeks his face throughout these latter days.⁵⁴

Together with the doctrine of the Mystical Body this conception is also comparable with the "complex reality." It respects the union of divine and human without confusing them, a union of love. The concept of *Sponsa Verbi* could perhaps provide a starting point for further unexplored reflection on the "complex reality."

The Pluridisciplinarity of Ecclesiology

Legrand observes that since, as *LG 8* affirms, the Church consists of a divine and a human element her study requires pluridisciplinarity. Since the Church is presented to all visibly as an organization and society, an understanding of her requires sociology in addition to the dogmatic categories furnished by theology.⁵⁵

Since she is a single complex reality she requires, epistemologically speaking, a pluridisciplinary approach. He notes that in ecumenical

⁵³ Quoted by M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 271.

⁵⁴ J. RATZINGER, *Called to communion: understanding the church today*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco [Calif.] 1996, 39. Cf. M. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church...*, 255.

⁵⁵ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l'ecclesiologie une requête de *Lumen gentium* 8: "l'Église, réalité complexe, faite d'un double élément humain et divin"», *Science et Esprit* 59/2-3 (2007), 333-349, 333-334.

dialogue the Catholic position presents a distancing from Luther and Reformed Christian tradition that says the Church is essentially hidden or invisible. Vatican II, in Legrand’s estimation, did not take the polar opposite position of Robert Bellarmine in response to the Reformers. Bellarmine said the visibility of the Church was as palpable and visible a gathering of men as that of a nation such as France or the Republic of Venice. Vatican II makes recourse to the Chalcedonian Christology of the double human and divine element. LG 8 frees ecclesiology from monophysism and challenges theology to conceive the Church as a continued incarnation.⁵⁶

Alongside doctrinal and dogmatic considerations of the Church, Legrand sees the importance of sociology for a complete understanding of the Church and a tool for ecumenical dialogue:

Usually, Orthodox and Catholic dogmatists agree on the causes of our separation in the doctrinal differences about the Papacy and the Filioque. But if they are only dogmatists, they will have difficulty explaining why, for centuries, not a single Latin has chosen to become oriental (“orthodox”) and not a single Byzantine has wanted to become Latin (“Catholic”), thus respecting the boundary drawn by Constance between the Eastern and Western empires in 395. Their contribution will be minimal in deciphering real history and overcoming today’s divisions.⁵⁷

Legrand also notes that ecclesiology is pluridisciplinary because of how it is situated in theological knowledge as a whole. For Legrand, theology began as a commentary on Sacred Scripture throughout the patristic period, then in the XIII century, with the *sic et non* of Abelard,

⁵⁶ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l’ecclésiologie», 335–336.

⁵⁷ «Habituellement, dogmaticiens orthodoxes et catholiques s’accordent pour situer les causes de notre séparation dans les divergences doctrinales au sujet de la papauté et du Filioque. Mais s’ils ne sont que dogmaticiens ils expliqueront difficilement pourquoi, pendant des siècles, pas un seul latin n’a choisi de devenir oriental (“orthodoxe”) et pas un seul byzantin n’a voulu devenir latin (“catholique”), respectant ainsi la frontière tracée par Constance entre les Empires d’Orient et d’Occident en 395. Leur apport sera mince dans le décryptage de l’histoire réelle et le dépassement des divisions d’aujourd’hui». H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l’ecclésiologie», 336–337. Translation by DeepL translator (<https://www.deepl.com/translator>).

it also became a speculative reflection on the realities of faith. In that same century canon law was emancipated from theology as a science of decrees, focusing on the *Decreta* and drawing from Roman law as a conceptual resources just as speculative theology drew from Greek philosophy. The disciples of exegesis, speculative theology, and canon law are required points of passage to ecclesiology. In a posterior moment liturgy should also be added to the list, since it shows, according to Legrand, the precedence of the Church over ecclesiology.⁵⁸ A scholar of ecclesiology is not required to master all four of these disciplines, but he would miss something if he didn't at least take these four dimensions into consideration in his research. This is a theological consequence, for Legrand, of the intra-theological status of ecclesiology:

1. Ecclesiology must remain faithful to *Sacred Scripture*, the soul of theology as Vatican II describes it (cf. OT 16), to help understand the relationship between Church and Kingdom, the Church's foundation by Christ, the foundations for ministry, and to connect dogma to Sacred Scripture.⁵⁹
2. It must integrate aspects of *speculative theology*, allied sometimes with Platonism, other times with Aristotelianism. This has led to divergent opinions in ecclesiology, such as the debate between Cardinal Kasper (Aristotelian-Thomistic approach) and then-Cardinal Ratzinger, who was seen to have adopted a Platonic outlook. Speculative theology is needed to understand the mystery of the Church, the relationship between the Church and God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, making the Church the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This would aid in addressing questions such as the relationship between Christology and Pneumatology, avoiding Christomonism, and the instrumental role of the Church in mediating salvation, as well as her subsistence and the relationship between the universal Church and particular Churches.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l'ecclésiologie», 341–342.

⁵⁹ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l'ecclésiologie», 342.

⁶⁰ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l'ecclésiologie», 342–343.

3. Ecclesiology must include reflection on the Church as institution, especially *canon law*. The Church is very juridical, requiring canon law to understand, for example, the collegiality of bishops presented in Vatican II, and the translation of that collegiality in the post-Conciliar period into canonical-disciplinary provisions (unsuccessfully, in Legrand’s opinion, due to a deficient collaboration between ecclesiology and canonists).⁶¹
4. Ecclesiology should be familiar with *liturgy* as a *locus theologicus*, because the principle of *lex orandi-lex credendi* reminds us that what the Church does is just as important as what she says. As an example, Legrand notes a recent dissertation by J.F. Puglisi that shows that ordinations in all the Christian Churches are celebrated according to an identical ecclesiological structure. In discussing ministry this may point to the importance in theology of not just focusing on what is said, but also taking what is done into account.⁶²

Ecclesiology always benefits from the history of the issues it addresses, so the history of an issue, in Legrand’s mind, is always important. The history of an issue gives you a basic understanding of it through its main parameters. Current issues are often complex and a historical study of them helps discern between statements of faith and the cultural forms adopted by the Church. For Legrand this would help elucidate questions in a calm and informed way, including thorny ones such as the status of women in the Christianity and the fact that they are not ordained, and Christian attitudes that persisted up to the XIX century on issues such as Judaism, slavery, and sexuality.⁶³

The importance of Christology is also worth adding, as this inquiry has demonstrated, for a solid understanding of the Church as the subject of intra-theological research.

⁶¹ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l’ecclésiologie», 345–346.

⁶² Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l’ecclésiologie», 346–347.

⁶³ Cf. H. LEGRAND, «Le statut pluridisciplinaire de l’ecclésiologie», 347–348.

The “Complex Reality” as a Point of Departure for a New Stage of Ecclesiology

Chéno sees the complex reality of the Church as the starting point for a new stage of ecclesiological reflection. He quotes a quip made by Jürgen Werbick: “Isn’t it significant that as churches empty, the treatises on ecclesiology are getting thicker and more numerous?”⁶⁴ It’s more than a joke; it is an ecclesiological challenge. If this were to be said of Trinitarian treatises in the light of secularization in the West it could be said that the trinitarian mystery remains a mystery, always open to new questions in answer to contemporary thought and development, but ecclesiology has to deal with the unity of a complex reality, its object being on the one hand, the empirical Church whose historical achievements are also studied by sociology, institutional law, and history; and, on the other, her mystery that questions the believer. Ecclesiology must account for the unity between both these aspects. When the sociological reality, in Chéno’s mind, of the Church seems to be collapsing in West it should shake up ecclesiology and new treatises should address that.⁶⁵

For Chéno, Vatican II has not ignored the issue, but has just affirmed the unity of the Church through an unconvincing analogy with the mystery of Christ. The complexity of this unique reality is what ecclesiology should address today.⁶⁶ Recent ecclesiological work presents elements that are fruitful pathways to overcome exhausted debates and return with a new approach. It is necessary to work on the tensions⁶⁷ that embrace the mystery of the Church and not to take a position too quickly to eliminate them as sources of uncertainty:⁶⁸

1. The tension between continuity and discontinuity, whether Vatican II presents a break with Vatican I or should be interpreted in continuity with it. One author (Medard Kehl) who advocates a transition from a classic ecclesiology of substance to an ecclesiology of relationality expects that the gestures made by Popes will determine whether the magisterial interpretation

⁶⁴ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 341.

⁶⁵ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 341.

⁶⁶ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 342.

⁶⁷ A term he takes from Jürgen Werbick as a translation of the German term “spannungen.”

⁶⁸ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 352–353.

of pontifical infallibility has evolved since the constitution *Pastor Aeternus*. A similar question would question whether magisterial teaching evolved between *Mystici Corporis* and *Lumen Gentium*, and Benedict XVI’s discourse on a hermeneutic of discontinuity and a hermeneutic of continuity.⁶⁹

2. The tension between the divine dimension and the human dimension of the Church. The unity between the visible, hierarchical and institutional dimensions of the Church or its legal constitution on the one hand, and her invisible, mysterious dimension. This is a crucial tension that shows the Church as a concrete place where the work of the Spirit would really be taken into account.⁷⁰ The Church is a sacrament of communion with God, a communion of believers united in communion by the Holy Spirit, conformed to Jesus Christ, and called by the Father to the Kingdom along with all of creation. The Church is a multifaceted sign in which the gift of Jesus to the world finds its effective presence. Other authors explore the Church as a sacrament of the Spirit, as a sign of freedom, and a sign of unity. Contemporary ecclesiology seeks to reconcile a pneumatological approach with the Church’s institutional reality, seeing the Holy Spirit as a structuring subject and charisms as a structuring element.⁷¹
3. The tension in the relationship between the Kingdom and the institution of the Church. Christian Duquoc saw the precariousness of the institution of the Church as a remedy against falling into a triumphalist attitude due to the certainty of the glory to come and the sentiment of the Kingdom already being joyfully present in her to a certain extent. He saw the Church in the darkness between the opacity of history and the clarity of the Kingdom.⁷²

⁶⁹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia offering his Christmas greetings*, 22 December 2005.

⁷⁰ A hope expressed by J. Werbick; cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 353.

⁷¹ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 354–355.

⁷² Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 355.

Chéno concludes that for Catholic ecclesiology the tension between the visible and the invisible, between the event and the institution, is the fundamental question on which the mysterious unity of the Church presented in *LG 8* finds its foundation. Recourse to the category of the Church as sacrament would be difficult to accept by Protestants. A pneumatological ecclesiology should be elaborated, which is not found in the texts of Vatican II but should not renounce the Catholic tradition of linking ecclesiology with the juridical and institutional dimension of the Church.

The challenge for Chéno is to maintain an eschatological tension that spans ecclesiology without falling into a triumphalism shown to be misplaced by churches that are emptying and the Church's credibility severely put to the test. An approach to the ecclesial reality that is both pneumatological and eschatological can initiate a new stage of ecclesiology and is urgently needed, in Chéno's estimation.⁷³

Conclusion

In summary, what does the mystery of the Incarnate Word teach about the mystery of the Church? How the two natures united in Christ, the divine and the human, are united in the Church. Like the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, the divine and the human are deeply and permanently united in the Church. Just as Christ uses the human nature he assumed to redeem, he uses the Church to redeem: a conjoined instrument of Christ, like a sacrament in Christ.

The concepts for a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Church in Christ are the Church as the Mystical Body, the Church as *Sponsa Verbi*, and the Holy Spirit (Spirit of Christ) as the soul of the body of the Church. The possible errors denounced by Chalcedon on the hypostatic union also serve to avoid comparable pitfalls in ecclesiological understanding: "in two natures, without mingling, without change, indivisibly, undividedly, the distinction of the natures nowhere

⁷³ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l'unité de la réalité complexe», 358–359.

removed on account of the union.”⁷⁴ Beyond a concept, the irrefutable horizon on which any further theological reflection must be placed would also be the Church as a sacrament in Christ.

What can the mystery of the Church teach about the mystery of Christ? The main purpose of this inquiry has been to illuminate the Church in the light of the mystery of the Incarnate Word, but if the Christological thesis presented as background at the beginning of this inquiry is taken into consideration—a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith—the “complex reality” demonstrates the unsustainability of that thesis, both as a formal distinction and as a real distinction. An epistemological approach to both leads to the recognition of the importance of taking Jesus Christ into account, a topic of empirical historical investigation and also the topic, in faith, of theological investigation.

A split in the mystery of the Incarnate Word would necessarily affect the mystery of the Church, leading once again to the old contrast between the visible and the invisible, which disregards one or the other and, in the light of the doctrine of Chalcedon, causes confusion, mutation, division, or separation of the constitutive elements of the “complex reality” of the Church. Without this, as Jacobs observed, it would be a “story” without an ending.⁷⁵

As Chéno rightly observes, the tension between visible and invisible in the Church must not lead to precipitated (or conflictual) positions that seek to eliminate one pole of the tension as a source of uncertainty.⁷⁶ The “complex reality” of the Church demands a pluridisciplinary and, as Legrand rightly observes, intra-theological approach that elucidates not only the mystery of the Church, but also the mystery of the Incarnate Word.

Summary: Since Reimarus certain Christologies have made formal and methodological distinctions between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, premises that became points of

⁷⁴ COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON, “Definition of the Two Natures of Christ” in H. DENZINGER – K. RAHNER (edd.), *The sources of Catholic dogma*, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, MO 1954, 61. DS 302.

⁷⁵ Cf. M. M. JACOBS, «The relation between Jesus, Christ and Christian faith...», 103.

⁷⁶ Cf. R. CHÉNO, «Penser l’unité de la réalité complexe», 352–353.

departure for the "Jesus Quest" and theologies of religious pluralism that required Magisterial interventions such as *Dominus Iesus*. Number 8 of the Vatican II dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, presents an analogy between the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the Incarnate Word, describing the Church as, like Christ, a "complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element." Christological approaches that divide the Incarnate Word into the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith will necessarily lead to repercussions in ecclesiology. The goal of this inquiry is to see how the mystery of the Incarnate Word sheds light on the mystery of the Church, in the light of *Lumen Gentium* 8.

Key Words: Jesus, Christ, Quest, Ecclesiology, Christology, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II, Complex Reality, Church, Unity.

Sommario: Da Reimarus in poi, alcune cristologie hanno fatto delle distinzioni formali e metodologiche tra il Gesù storico e il Cristo della fede, premesse che sono diventate punti di partenza per la "Jesus Quest" e le teologie del pluralismo religioso, che hanno necessitato degli interventi magisteriali come la *Dominus Iesus*. Il numero 8 della costituzione dogmatica sulla Chiesa del Vaticano II, *Lumen Gentium*, presenta un'analogia tra il mistero della Chiesa e il mistero del Verbo incarnato, descrivendo la Chiesa, a somiglianza di Cristo, "una sola complessa realtà risultante di un duplice elemento, umano e divino". Gli approcci cristologici che dividono il Verbo incarnato nel Gesù storico e nel Cristo della fede porteranno necessariamente a ripercussioni nell'ecclesiologia. L'obiettivo di questa indagine è di vedere come il mistero del Verbo Incarnato illumina il mistero della Chiesa, alla luce della *Lumen Gentium* 8.

Parole chiave: Gesù, Cristo, ricerca, Ecclesiologia, Cristologia, *Lumen Gentium*, Vaticano II, realtà complessa, Chiesa, unità.