

Toward an Intercorporeal Body of Christ: A Study in Ecclesial Body Images

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Abstract: This dissertation analyzes the various images of the body in the metaphor of the church as a body, or the body of Christ, in modern Catholic ecclesiology in order to reimagine the corporeal metaphor for postconciliar ecclesiology. The metaphor of the church as a body has a vertical dimension expressing the relationship between Christ and the church and a horizontal dimension expressing the relationships among Christians. In its vertical dimension, “body” has been understood as ‘self’ and/or as ‘spouse.’ In its horizontal dimension, the body has been understood as a living organism and/or as an ordered society. In the magisterial tradition especially, the body is described as a well-bounded and hierarchically ordered organism, in which members are united under a head and share in one common life, and which manifests the person to the world. The metaphor of the church as a body, then, has most often been used to express and justify papal authority and primacy and the exclusion of non-Catholics from the body of Christ, and to posit the Catholic Church as the ongoing manifestation of Christ’s presence and authority. This dissertation utilizes the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to challenge these notions of the body, showing instead that the body is ‘intercorporeal’—interwoven with other bodies, united by meaningful action, and having flexible boundaries. The body is the necessary foundation of existence in the world, but can also inhibit personal presence as well. In light of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, this dissertation argues for a vision of the church as an intercorporeal body—a missionary, dialogical, and decentralized body that is capable of mediating, but also inhibiting, the presence of Christ to the world.

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Abbreviations and Translations

Abbreviations of Documents from the Second Vatican Council:

- AA *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.
- AG *Ad Gentes*. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.
- CD *Christus Dominus*. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.
- GS *Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.
- LG *Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.
- NA *Nostra Aetate*. Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.

All translations of Vatican II texts are taken from Austin Flannery, OP, *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, revised and inclusive translation (New York: Costello, 1996).

All translations of biblical passages are the New Revised Standard Version.

A note on capitalization: In this manuscript, I follow the Liturgical Press Style Guide with regard to the capitalization of the word “church.” I use the capitalized “Church” when it refers to a specific denomination as a whole (ex. the Roman Catholic Church) or location (ex. St. Peter’s Church). I use the lowercase “church” when it refers to the whole body of Christians worldwide or throughout time; ecclesiastical, as opposed to secular, government; the Christian faith in general; a body of Christians constituting one congregation or parish; or the body of Christians in any particular country or region. When the word appears in a direct quotation, I retain the original author’s usage. No other theological positions are presumed or implied in my capitalization, or not, of the term.

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Chapter One: The Body and Metaphor in Catholic Ecclesiology

“The ideas about the human body, its potential and its weaknesses, which are found in particular social types, correspond uncannily well with ideas current in the same social types about the potential and weaknesses of society. ...It is essential for us to understand what bodily symbols are dominating the social life and so the minds of our thinkers and spokesmen today.”

–Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970), xii–xiv.

I. Introduction: the question and its context

In the introduction to the interdisciplinary volume *Religion and the Body*, Sarah Coakley states that “the notable explosion of thought and literature on the subject of the ‘body’ in the last decades” amounts to what she calls an “obsession” with the body in contemporary Western society.¹ Fields as diverse as sociology, philosophy, feminist theory, cultural theory, and literary theory have increasingly devoted their attention to the role of the body within their realms of research, resulting in the publication of countless studies on “the body.”² But each field approaches the body differently, and any attempt to define the body quickly reveals the difficulty

¹ Sarah Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–2. Caroline Walker Bynum’s literature review of works published on “the body” supports Coakley’s observation, showing that there is a particular intensification of interest in ‘the body’ across disciplinary fields beginning in the mid-80s (Caroline Walker Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 1–33). Coakley offers two possible explanations for the intensification of interest in the body in our present moment. First, it has been the case throughout history that “profound political upheavals” in history find their correlate “in fascinating shifts in body metaphors and symbolizations” (5). Second, the ubiquitous interest in the body is a reflection and projection, in an otherwise secularized culture, of an ultimately religious desire for transcendence and permanence. See also Sarah Coakley, “The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God,” *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1 (January 2000): 61–73; *ibid.*, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay “on the Trinity”* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

² Ola Sigurdson provides a remarkably comprehensive survey of approaches to the body in various subfields of philosophy and theology from the ancient Greeks to the present. See “Part III: Embodiment,” in *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*, trans. Carl Olsen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 295–599.

of grasping the subject while doing justice to its complexity. For example, the field of sociology views the body in light of the economic and political forces that affect it.³ In contrast, phenomenology has turned its attention to the ‘lived body’ (*Leib*) as it is experienced by the embodied subject in the world.⁴ For Michel Foucault and his followers, the body is the socially constructed site of power relations and can never be accessed or known apart from sociocultural norms.⁵ According to some feminists theorists, the devaluation of the body in contrast to the spirit and rationality has led to patriarchal domination of women and other subaltern persons, and so the body (especially women’s bodies) and ‘the feminine’ must be revalued or resignified for the sake of justice and women’s flourishing.⁶ Yet for others, any appeal to ‘the body’ is just another ‘transcendental in disguise’ that will inevitably subjugate and oppress others.⁷ Moreover, the particular associations that the body conjures up can vary widely. In some authors, the body evokes stability, limits, boundaries, and locatedness; in others, ‘the body’ signifies potentiality, desire, boundlessness, and malleability.⁸ In light of the seemingly endless inroads to understanding the body, we can agree with Mary Douglas that “just as it is true that everything symbolizes the body, so it is equally true...that the body symbolizes everything else.”⁹

³ The field of the sociology of the body began with Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 1989).

⁴ See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Kluwer, 1989 [orig. German, 1952]).

⁵ See especially Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *ibid.*, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁶ Variations of this position are seen in Simone de Beauvoir, in radical feminism (ex. Mary Daly), and in the ‘strategic essentialism’ of French feminists (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva) and many Christian feminist theologians (see note 10 below).

⁷ Sharon V. Betcher, “Becoming Flesh of My Flesh: Feminist and Disability Theologies on the Edge of Posthumanist Discourse,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 2 (2010): 107–18.

⁸ Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective.”

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 122.

This ‘turn to the body’ in the mid-late twentieth century took hold in Catholic theology as well. Feminist and womanist theologians working in theological anthropology have critiqued body-denying elements of theology and spirituality in the historical Christian tradition and have turned our attention to the goodness of the body and its central role in knowledge and praxis. They have been especially critical of ways in which androcentrism, patriarchy, racism, classism, and hierarchical dualism have infected the Catholic tradition at the expense of women’s bodies and the earth, and have reconstructed Christian symbols from the perspective of women’s history.¹⁰ Liberation theologians have highlighted the need for God’s justice and salvation to be manifested in bodily well-being and justice for the poor in this life.¹¹ In a different vein, the body took center stage in the general audiences of Pope John Paul II, amounting to his “theology of the body” which has found favor in some Catholic circles worldwide and has been a foundation of magisterial anthropology since.¹² Finally, ritual studies and sacramental theology have paid greater attention to the central mediatory role of the body and materiality in liturgy, redemption, and salvation.¹³

The body has played an important role in Catholic ecclesiology as well through the metaphor of the church as a body—the body of Christ. St. Paul describes the Christian community as like a body and teaches that believers are baptized into the one body of Christ; patristic theologians such as Augustine continued this tradition of speaking of the church as the body of Christ, especially in the context of a eucharistic liturgy. By the eleventh century, theologians began referring to the church as the ‘mystical body’ to distinguish it from the

¹⁰ For example, Anne Carr, M. Shawn Copeland, Jacquelyn Grant, Mary Catherine Hilkert, Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine LaCugna, Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Susan Ross, and Delores Williams.

¹¹ For example, Ignacio Ellacuría, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Jon Sobrino, well as Edward Schillebeeckx.

¹² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

¹³ For example, Louis-Marie Chauvet, Bruce Morrill, and Susan Ross.

Eucharist, the ‘true body.’¹⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Johann Adam Möhler’s *Unity in the Church* revitalized ecclesiology by conceiving of the church as an organic body enlivened by the Spirit.¹⁵ His later work *Symbolism* suggested that the metaphor of the church as the “body of Christ” means that church is the prolongation of the incarnation; this thesis influenced subsequent generations of theologians.¹⁶ By the early twentieth century, dozens of books and articles were published on the topic of the church as the “mystical body of Christ.”¹⁷ This movement was validated by Pope Pius XII in 1943 in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* which defined the image of the mystical body as the ‘most noble, sublime, and divine’ description of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸

In spite of this long history, the metaphor of the church as a (mystical) body began falling out of favor in the decades leading up to Vatican II. The appeal to mystical unity among people was challenged in the aftermath of World War II; the metaphor was critiqued as “pre-theological” and “pre-scientific;”¹⁹ the Möhlerian trend of incarnational ecclesiology was criticized for confusing the hypostatic union in Christ with the covenantal union between God and the church. At Vatican II, the bishops chose to not organize the constitution on the church around the metaphor of the mystical body of Christ, thereby breaking with the framework of *Mystici Corporis*. In the decades following Vatican II, the language of the church as ‘people of

¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens (London: SCM Press, 2006 [orig. French, 1944, 1949]).

¹⁵ Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church, or, the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996 [orig. German 1825]).

¹⁶ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1997 [orig. German 1838]).

¹⁷ Joseph Bluett, “The Mystical Body of Christ: 1890–1940,” *Theological Studies* 3, no. 2 (1942): 261–89. Additionally, I am grateful to John J. Burkhard, OFM for sharing with me his extensive bibliography on the church as “Body of Christ,” and the related concepts of Christ as “Head” and “Absolute Fullness,” published in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish since the 1920s.

¹⁸ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi* On the Mystical Body of Christ (June 29, 1943), www.vatican.va, 13.

¹⁹ Mannes D. Koster, O.P., *Ekklesiologie Im Werden* (Paderborn, 1940).

God’, ‘sacrament,’ and ‘*communio*’ replaced ‘mystical body’ and ‘the body of Christ’ as the dominant metaphors for the church—curiously enough, precisely when ‘the body’ was coming into vogue in so many other fields.

In recent years, however, ecclesiologists have become increasingly critical of the use of any metaphor in systematic ecclesiology. Some argue that the use of a single model or metaphor for the church can lead to imbalances in ecclesiology without bringing about a greater understanding of the concrete church in history. Moreover, different metaphors express different values, and because they are not self-adjudicating, they risk being used ideologically. Others argue that they are only appropriate to religious language and the task of preaching—not to second-order theological discourse or a systematic ecclesiology. Finally, a number of theologians have argued for and attempted a greater integration of social theory, empirical studies, and ethnography in ecclesiology, further nudging the field away from critical and constructive reflection on ecclesial metaphors.²⁰

Nevertheless, a robust theory of metaphor insists that metaphors convey unique cognitive content, cannot be reduced to literal speech or conceptual language without loss of meaning, and “compel new possibilities of vision.”²¹ Even those who reject the singular use of metaphors or models in systematic ecclesiology recognize that a metaphor or model may provide a useful exploratory function in ecclesiology and can lead to new insights. Indeed, contemporary scholars still produce dissertation- and book-length treatments of ecclesial metaphors,²² and Pope Francis

²⁰ For example, Paul Avis, Gregory Baum, Clodovis Boff, Luke Bretherton, James Gustafson, Roger Haight, Nicholas M. Healy, Joseph Komonchak, Paul Murray, Neil Ormerod, Christian Scharen, Edward Schillebeeckx.

²¹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 58.

²² Cristina Lledo Gomez, *The Church as Woman and Mother: Historical and Theological Foundations*. (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2018). Recent dissertations will be discussed below.

has used images and metaphors to speak of the church and the priesthood in ways that inspire new ecclesiological reflection and praxis.²³

Though the New Testament is replete with images for the church, the body is a uniquely interesting and enduring metaphor in ecclesiology for historical, theological, and anthropological reasons.²⁴ Historically, as we have already seen, the church has often been referred to as a body, and the body is of particular interest in our present moment. Theologically, the body is the site of the incarnation and of all human-divine encounter. Anthropologically, across cultures, the body is often seen as a symbol of the social system and vice versa. For these reasons, the metaphor of the church as a body continues to be invoked in Catholic discourse, as well as in liturgy, preaching, and calls for ecclesial reform.²⁵

But given the methodological turn away from metaphor in ecclesiology in recent decades, this metaphor hasn't been systematically evaluated, analyzed, or reinterpreted since its relative decline in the mid-twentieth century. What is most striking is that the lack of attention given to the metaphor of the church as a body in the past sixty years stands in sharp contrast to the concurrent explosion of interest in and research on the body in nearly every other field in the

²³ Francis has spoken of the church as a "field hospital" that must "heal wounds" and "warm the hearts of the faithful," and priests are to be "shepherds with the 'smell of the sheep'." See "A Big Heart Open to God: An interview with Pope Francis," Antonio Sparado, S.J., *National Catholic Reporter*, September 30, 2013, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>, and Pope Francis, "Homily for the Chrism Mass," March 28, 2013, www.vatican.va.

²⁴ Paul Minear counts over two hundred images of the church in the New Testament. Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

²⁵ As a few examples, the following columns published in *National Catholic Reporter* use the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ to argue for ecclesial reform. Of course, the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is not used exclusively in this regard; the church as "people of God" is often invoked in arguments for lay leadership as well. See Ken Briggs, "The Laity Hold the Key to Reforming the Church," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/ncr-today/laity-hold-key-reforming-church>; NCR Staff, "It's Not over: Your Thoughts on Our Open Letter to Bishops," *NCR Today* (blog), November 30, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ncr-today/its-not-over-your-thoughts-our-open-letter-bishops>; Tom Roberts, "Panel Examines How Church Culture Enables Abuse Crisis," *NCR Today* (blog), November 15, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/ncr-connections/ncr-connections-panel-examines-how-church-culture-enables-abuse>; Michael Sean Winters, "Bishops' Meeting Bombshell: Vatican Says No Voting on Abuse Crisis," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 12, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/bishops-meeting-bombshell-vatican-says-no-voting-abuse-crisis>.

humanities and social sciences, including other subfields of systematic theology and theological ethics. Catholic ecclesiology has yet to benefit from the abundance of new research on the body.

Notwithstanding this general state of the field, there have been a few recent projects and dissertations that reinterpret the church as a body or the body of Christ in light of feminist theory and disability studies. Nancy Hale envisions the ecclesial body of Christ as a disabled body, meaning that it exists in a marginalized yet critical relationship to the world.²⁶ Anne Hillman turns to womanist, feminist, queer, and disability theologies and their attention to bodily difference to reinterpret the metaphor of the body of Christ in light of religious pluralism.”²⁷ Mary Elizabeth Walsh considers how feminist and liberationist Christology reconfigure what it means to be the “body of Christ,” resulting in an ecclesiology that calls for unity, visibility, and holiness through service to women and children in particular.²⁸ These laudable approaches challenge ecclesiology to become more ‘embodied’ in the world through visible social action and give attention to ‘actual’ and ‘concrete’ bodies. However, none of them examines the history of the image of the body, and its particular ecclesiological impacts, in Catholic ecclesiology. Hale attends to the Pauline roots of the image of the church as ‘body of Christ,’ but she neglects developments of this image throughout the church’s history. Hillman examines ‘body of Christ’ as a metaphor for Christian identity in a religiously plural world, rather than as a metaphor for the church *per se*. Finally, unlike Hale and Hillman, Walsh’s project is structured by the particular work that the “body of Christ” image does in Catholic ecclesiology in the twentieth century. Yet she focuses on the Christological dimensions of “body of Christ,” and not on the

²⁶ Nancy Jill Hale, “Dis-Abling the Body of Christ: Toward a Holistic Ecclesiology of Embodiment,” (Ph.D. Diss., Boston University, 2015).

²⁷ Anne Hillman, “Being the Body of Christ: Rethinking Christian Identity in a Religiously Plural World” (Ph.D. Diss., Boston University School of Theology, 2017), v.

²⁸ Mary Elizabeth Walsh, “Ave Verum Corpus: A Feminist Ecclesiology of the Body of Christ,” (Ph.D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1998).

term “body” therein. Without a sustained connection to the historical ecclesiological tradition, the creative new images of the church as a body offered by Hale, Walsh, and Hillman fail to function as *correctives to* and explicit *developments of* the ways in which the ecclesial metaphor of the body has functioned in the past. They remain at the level of interesting options for ecclesiology, rather than a robust critique and renewal of the tradition.

A corrective and development of this kind is necessary because the image of the body can be interpreted in a variety of different ways, each of which supports a different theology of authority in the church, membership in the mystical body, and the church’s relationship to Christ and to the world. In this dissertation, I argue that the body has most often been understood by ecclesiologists as the visible manifestation of the soul or the head. Moreover, it is a hierarchical organism in which the head governs all other subordinate members, is the cause of the body’s unity, and is the very font of the body’s life. The body is well-bounded—membership in the body is unambiguous and clearly defined—and it is independent of other bodies. When the church is understood as a body in this way, the result is an over-identification of Christ and the church; a distorted, ultramontane articulation of papal authority; and antagonistic relations between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches, other religions, and the world. If the metaphor of the church as a body is to break out of this hierarchical and exclusionary history and contribute to contemporary ecclesiology and ecclesial renewal, a new understanding of the body is needed. The phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) provides the tools for just such a renewal, offering an image of the body as intercorporeal, that is, as always engaged in dialogue with self, others, and the world.

This dissertation undertakes both historical-analytical and constructive tasks. The remainder of this present chapter will establish the methodological foundations for my work.

First, I consider critiques of the use of metaphor in ecclesiology. Using the work of Janet Martin Soskice, I argue for a theory of metaphor that recognizes that metaphors convey unique cognitive content, disclose new insights, and “compel new possibilities of vision.”²⁹ I then turn to the work of cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas to provide a hermeneutic of the body for ecclesiology. The symbol of the body is particularly resonant for ecclesiology because, as Douglas demonstrates, the body is an enduring “natural symbol” for the social. I conclude this chapter with a brief history of the metaphor of the church as a body from St. Paul through the Council of Trent.

Chapters Two and Three analyze the deployment of the metaphor of the body in modern (i.e., nineteenth and twentieth century) ecclesiology up to the Second Vatican Council—a stretch of time in which “mystical body of Christ” was the predominant metaphor for, and even definition of, the church. In Chapter Two, I develop a typology of the body as living organism and as an ordered society (when referring to the church within history), and as self and as spouse (when addressing the church’s relation to Christ). I argue that Johann Adam Möhler’s early “ascending ecclesiology” in *Unity in the Church* develops a vision of an organic body as the material expression of an inner spirit. In distinction, his “descending ecclesiology” in his later work *Symbolism* reveals a notion of the body as “self,” or an objective and full manifestation of the person (in this case, Christ).³⁰ Möhler’s Christocentric turn in *Symbolism* is taken up by his readers in the Roman School, who emphasize Christ as the head of the body, his spouse.³¹ In the context of the dominant hierarchical and juridical understanding of the church, the ecclesial body

²⁹ Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 58.

³⁰ Michael J. Himes characterizes Möhler’s two stages of thought as an “ascending ecclesiology” and “descending ecclesiology” in *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1997).

³¹ The nineteenth-century Roman School (with its principal figures being Giovanni Perrone Carlo Passaglia, Clemens Schrader; Johann Baptist Franzelin, Joseph Kleutgen, and Matthias Scheeben) was characterized by a strongly incarnational and sacramental theology and a commitment to questions of ecclesiastical polity.

is seen as a visible, hierarchically ordered body that is united by its papal head and mediates the presence and authority of Christ. It is this interpretation of the ecclesial metaphor of the body that is most influential at Vatican I and in the encyclicals of Leo XIII which merge the image of the body with the notion of the church as a perfect society.

Chapter Three continues this historical analysis by examining the German, French, and Roman streams of mystical body ecclesiology in its heyday in the early twentieth century. I argue that the main distinction between major authors in this period is one of theological loci: the German and Roman streams treat the notion of “the mystical body” as an ecclesiological category or a metaphor for the Catholic Church, whereas the French stream sees it as a Christological or soteriological category, indicating our participation in the life of Christ. The 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* blends the ecclesiological and soteriological approaches and the images of the body as organism, society, and self when it defined the Roman Catholic Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. It is precisely this definition that caused theologians, and especially ecumenists, to become increasingly critical of mystical body ecclesiology in subsequent decades. Together, chapters two and three demonstrate how a particular understanding of the body as clearly bounded and governed by a single head shored up an exclusionary and papocentric ecclesiology up to the eve of Vatican II.

In Chapter Four, I examine the shift away from the metaphor of the body in favor of the notions of the church as “sacrament,” “people of God,” and “communion” during and after the Second Vatican Council. The traditional symbol of the body was reimagined at some points in the texts, yet at other points was consciously rejected by the council fathers. I argue that this is because of the changes that conciliar ecclesiology brought about in the Catholic church’s sense of its relationships *ad intra*, its sense of identity vis-à-vis other churches and the secular world *ad*

extra, and even its relation to Christ. The doctrine of collegiality offers up an image of the body as a dignified and active whole that cooperates with its head but is no longer merely subordinate to and directed by it. This organic, ecclesial body is also made up of active, living members who participate in the threefold ministry of Christ, are gifted with charisms and other gifts of the Spirit, and can grasp the sense of the faith. But in other doctrines in which the church relates to other Christians, other religions, and the world, the image of the church as a body fails to resonate. The body had for too long been seen as a centripetally-focused, rigidly bounded organism, a perfect society that only serves the world and never needs to receive anything from it.

Chapters Five and Six make up the constructive aspect of this project. In Chapter Five, I use the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty to contest and correct the networks of meaning that have long undergirded the metaphor of the church as a body. With Merleau-Ponty, I argue that the body is not self-sufficient or rigidly bounded but is “intercorporeal,” that is, it is always in constitutive relation with other bodies. It is united as a whole not through obedience to a head but through ongoing, meaningful action in the world. In fact, the body has a knowledge of the world and its own capacities for action prior to any cognitive function proceeding from the head. Finally, the body mediates the person to the world but due to illness or trauma can restrict that full presence as well. In Chapter Six, I draw out the ecclesiological implications of this vision of the body. When we envision the church as an intercorporeal body, we see the church as defined and unified by its mission in the world, as calling for greater structures of dialogue both within the ecclesial body and with other religious and secular bodies, and as more humbly recognizing that it is truly a sacrament and instrument of Christ’s presence in the world but is not the fullness of Christ himself. In light of a

phenomenological understanding of the body, then, the metaphor of the church as a body—the body of Christ—can break out of and resist its ultramontane and exclusivist history, further the ecclesiology emerging from Vatican II, and “compel new possibilities of vision” for the church in the third millennium.

II. Images, models, and metaphors in ecclesiology: recent critiques

Avery Dulles, in his 1974 landmark study *Models of the Church*, outlined five models of the church and their strengths and weaknesses for ecclesiology.³² Distinguishing a model from an image, he states that “when an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one’s theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a ‘model.’”³³ For Dulles, models have both explanatory and exploratory uses. In their explanatory function, models “serve to synthesize what we already know or at least are inclined to believe;” they account for biblical, traditional, historical, and experiential data. In their exploratory or heuristic use, through the ongoing work and experience of grace, they can “lead to new theological insights” that have not been made conscious in the past.³⁴ As a work in comparative ecclesiology, *Models of the Church* demonstrated how different ecclesial models express different, and sometimes opposed, theological commitments and ecclesiological values. To resolve this tension, Dulles maintained that one must “harmonize the models in such a way that their differences become complementary rather than mutually repugnant.”³⁵ For his part, Dulles claimed that the model of the church as

³² Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002). The five models are institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant. The second edition published in 1987 included a sixth model, community of disciples.

³³ Dulles, 15.

³⁴ Dulles, 17, 18.

³⁵ Dulles, 187.

“community of disciples” best integrates and preserves the strengths of other models and has “potentialities as a basis for a comprehensive ecclesiology.”³⁶

While Dulles’ work was an important step forward in ecclesiological method in its day, ecclesiologists in recent decades have shifted away from, and at times argued against, the use of metaphors and models as a starting point for a theology of the church. Instead, several theologians have argued for greater use of social theory, empirical studies, and ethnography in order to better understand the concrete historical church;³⁷ some such studies have been conducted.³⁸ In light of these developments in the field, any project focusing on an ecclesial metaphor must argue for its relevance in contemporary ecclesiology and answer to suspicions of ‘theological reductionism.’³⁹ In this section, I will first review three of the most common arguments against metaphor in systematic ecclesiology, found in the works of Joseph A.

Komonchak, Neil Ormerod, Nicholas M. Healy, Herwi Rikhof, and Brian Flanagan. Second, I

³⁶ Dulles, 198. His choice for “community of disciples” is unique to the 1987 edition of *Models of the Church*. In the 1974 edition, he privileged the model of church as sacrament.

³⁷ Komonchak lucidly offers an explanation as to why ecclesiology lost touch with social theory and why a rapprochement is necessary between these fields. Following the Gregorian reforms and Gratian’s *Decretum*, ecclesiology was expressed in political and juridical categories. “Law was the social theory available at the time” (Joseph A. Komonchak, “History and Social Theory in Ecclesiology,” ed. Fred Lawrence, *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, suppl. issue, Loneragan Workshop, no. 11 [1995], 9). If the church is a mystery analogous to the incarnation, comprised of both a human and a divine reality, ecclesiology was, for centuries, focused almost exclusively on the human elements. Komonchak suggests that “the indifference to social theory in recent ecclesiology is perhaps more understandable in the light of this history. Most twentieth century ecclesiologists seem to have presumed that there was little danger that the institutional elements of the Church would pass unnoticed” and so focused their attention on the theological dimensions of the Church and its relation to Christ (ibid., 11.). In other words, the twentieth century marked a swing from a ‘sociological reduction’ of the church to a ‘theological reduction,’ resulting in “a curiously abstract ecclesiology which neglects the concrete self-realizations of the Church in favor of an interpretation or simple reproduction of biblical or doctrinal statements” (Joseph A. Komonchak, “Loneragan and the Tasks of Ecclesiology,” in *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, 52–53.). Komonchak argues that at this juncture, ecclesiology must “move out of this pre-scientific stage” and, with the help of social theory, develop the tools to more adequately study the concrete and historical human community which mediates Christ’s redemption (Komonchak, “History and Social Theory,” 12).

³⁸ For example, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁹ James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

will utilize the work of Janet Martin Soskice to provide a theory of metaphor capable of grounding my analysis and constructive development of the metaphor of the church as body.

The most common critique of metaphors in ecclesiology is that they tend toward an idealized, abstract image of the church, one that is removed from history and the concrete reality of the communities of the faithful. This is the core of Healy's evaluation of "blueprint ecclesiologies." By this phrase he means ecclesiologies that use models or metaphors to envision the ideal church to which we all would like to belong, and then apply this 'blueprint' to subsequent questions or problems in ecclesiology. In Healy's judgment, a blueprint ecclesiology conceives of the church abstractly. It begins with the imagined ideal, rather than studying and evaluating the church's concrete historical reality, its practices, and its institutional structures.⁴⁰ As such, it does little to help us understand the concrete life of the church or make sense of the 'gap' between the ideal church and the concrete reality in which we live. Similarly, Healy finds that a blueprint ecclesiology lacks an appropriately eschatological sense of the church's perfection. It "does not make a sufficient distinction between the church militant and the church triumphant," between the pilgrim church concretized in history and the heavenly church in its fullness.⁴¹ Thus, a models approach or blueprint ecclesiology can fail to take seriously or account for the ongoing presence of sin and imperfection in the church in history. Ultimately, Healy argues that a better methodology is needed, for the goal of ecclesiology is not to find "the single right way to think about the church, of developing a blueprint suitable for all times and places," but rather "to aid the concrete church in performing its tasks of witness and pastoral care

⁴⁰ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). He also shows, though, that while the logic or claim of a blueprint ecclesiology is to move from a theoretical ideal to practice, what actually occurs is "a thoroughly multidirectional movement in ecclesiological argumentation." The theologian's ecclesiology, and the particular meaning given to a model of the church, is shaped from the beginning by the ecclesiological context, theological agenda, and overall judgment about the fundamentals of Christianity and the church's history. See page 43–5.

⁴¹ Healy, 37.

within...its ‘ecclesiological context.’”⁴² Komonchak and Ormerod generally agree with Healy’s critique of the idealism of metaphors, and each, drawing in various ways on their Lonerganian foundations, puts forth a methodology for ecclesiology to engage social sciences and the data of history as it seeks to understand the church in the concrete.⁴³

Second, different ecclesial metaphors suggest different ideals of the church and convey different values. As Dulles himself acknowledges, the values associated with different metaphors can conflict with and contradict one another, and the evaluation of ecclesial models is too easily reducible to one’s own values and personal taste.⁴⁴ “Pursued alone, any single model will lead to distortions.”⁴⁵ Each ecclesial model or metaphor⁴⁶ has its own strengths and weaknesses, highlighting certain problems and clarifying certain aspects of the mystery of the church, while obscuring or hiding others. Flanagan in particular warns against the tendency for metaphors to be used ideologically. He has found that ‘people of God’ and ‘bride of Christ’ have been “rallying points for various groups in the Catholic Church” in postconciliar ecclesiology, conveying values of equality, common dignity, and participation on the one hand, and hierarchical authority and obedience to Christ on the other.⁴⁷ Similarly, Healy points out that there is no consensus as to

⁴² Healy, 38.

⁴³ The methodologies vary among them. A full analysis of their methods of incorporating social sciences in ecclesiology is not central to this project. Suffice it to say that Healy and Ormerod, more so than Komonchak and Flanagan, are more critical of the social sciences and argue that theology needs to provide a teleology for social sciences. Neil Ormerod, “A Dialectic Engagement with the Social Sciences in an Ecclesiological Context,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 4 (December 2005): 815–40 provides a typology of social sciences and their theological assumptions; Brian P. Flanagan, “Communion, Diversity and Salvation: The Contribution of Jean-Marie Tillard, O.P., to Systematic Ecclesiology” (Ph.D. Diss, Boston College, 2007), 34–41 provides a helpful review of the methodologies of Komonchak, Healy, and Ormerod.

⁴⁴ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 181–84. Dulles recognizes that “there is a particular problem of verification in theology”, especially with regard to ecclesial models/metaphors, though his chapter “The Evaluation of Models” is an attempt to outline criteria for evaluation (18).

⁴⁵ Dulles, 20.

⁴⁶ In my usage, “model” and “metaphor” are closely related; a metaphor is a statement or utterance, a linguistic phenomenon (see the work of Janet Martin Soskice to follow); a model is extra-linguistic and is a systematic or heuristic application of a metaphor (or image) for explanatory or exploratory use, as Dulles notes.

⁴⁷ Brian P. Flanagan, “The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Horizons* 35, no. 1 (2008): 33.

which model or metaphor is foundational and that models lack the power of conviction; any given theologian will choose an ecclesial model or metaphor on the basis of their own prior theological commitments. And if theologians disagree on which ecclesial model or metaphor is best for thinking through a particular ecclesiological problem, they will likely disagree on the practical outcomes derived from that model as well.⁴⁸ Healy sees this ideological tendency at work in the ecclesiologies of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Jean-Marie Tillard, whose rhetoric “seems to suggest that the particular model of the church they have selected is something like the ‘right’ one.”⁴⁹ Rikhof’s work in theories of metaphor supports this concern from a theoretical perspective: because metaphors are ambiguous and do not have clear criteria of normativity and authenticity, “an exclusive narrative or metaphorical theology is not able to counter the charge that it is a form of ideology.”⁵⁰ Ultimately, Flanagan and Healy both point out that a model does not have inherent ecclesiological meaning, but is ascribed meaning and consequence based on any given theologian’s broader theological agenda. Susan Ross has shown how this is true with regard to the metaphor of the church as bride, which has been used to justify and explain the church’s opposition the ordination of women and to same-sex marriage.⁵¹

Finally, metaphors are seen to be insufficiently systematic and “pre-scientific.”⁵² Rikhof and Flanagan take the position that, because metaphors do not, in themselves, offer resources for

⁴⁸ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 36.

⁴⁹ Healy, 32.

⁵⁰ Herwi Rikhof, *The Concept of Church: A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology* (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos Press, 1981), 148.

⁵¹ Susan Ross, “The Bride of Christ and the Body Politic: Body and Gender in Pre-Vatican II Marriage Theology,” *The Journal of Religion* 71, no. 3 (1991): 345–61; *ibid.*, “The Bridegroom and the Bride: The Theological Anthropology of John Paul II and Its Relation to the Bible and Homosexuality,” in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung and Joseph Andrew Coray (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 39–59; *ibid.*, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998). See also Flanagan, “The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors,” 33–34.

⁵² Komonchak, “History and Social Theory,” 12. Mannes Koster also judged ‘mystical body’ language for the church to be ‘pre-theological’ in *Ekklesiologie Im Werden*.

adjudicating the tensions that come into play when implicated in ideological discourses, nor do they elucidate their connection to other theological and scientific fields of study or contain explanatory power, they cannot function as a starting point for systematic ecclesiology. Flanagan finds that “ecclesial metaphors provide suggestions, starting points, broad pictures of the values embodied in ecclesial relationships, but cannot on their own explain the relationships between these metaphors or relate them to other theological and social scientific theories.”⁵³ Rikhof shows how this was particularly the case in the years following Vatican II as numerous theologians debated what was the central image, metaphor, or concept for the church in *Lumen Gentium*.⁵⁴ Because of this inherent imprecision, “narrative or metaphorical theology necessarily has to be supplemented by argument” and systematic explanation, and therefore cannot stand on its own in a systematic ecclesiology.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, of the two methods of dealing with the plurality of metaphors that Flanagan identifies—juxtaposing them, or choosing a dominant metaphor—neither has proven to be an adequate methodology.⁵⁶ Because there is no consensus as to which model is/ought to be definitive or foundational, and preference for one model over another varies over time; there can be no singularly “right” model, or “supermodel.” Thus, no complete systematic ecclesiology can be deduced from any single model.⁵⁷

In addition to the problem for systematic ecclesiology that metaphors are not self-evaluating, metaphors are also seen to belong to religious language or first-order discourse,

⁵³ Flanagan, “The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors,” 48.

⁵⁴ Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, chapter one.

⁵⁵ Rikhof, 141.

⁵⁶ Flanagan, “The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors,” 43–47. Rikhof does not, in my opinion, resolve the problem of the multiplicity of metaphors in postconciliar ecclesiology either. He claims that the “concept” of the church as the “*communio* of the faithful” is a more adequate and comprehensive starting point for a systematic ecclesiology, but he makes this claim without either explaining why a concept is more adequate than a metaphor, and without resolving the debate he outlines in chapter one, which is whether “body of Christ” and “people of God” are metaphors, images, concepts, or something else.

⁵⁷ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 31–35.

rather than to second-order or theological discourse. Flanagan, Healy, and Rikhof argue this point most extensively. All three argue that metaphors can be useful and even necessary in preaching and the functional specialty of communications, and they find value for metaphors in the liturgical and spiritual life of the Christian community.⁵⁸ But the tasks of systematic ecclesiology are not the same as the tasks of preaching and prayer, for systematic ecclesiology “requires defined categories and concepts, foundational positions, and relatively stable definitions of terms and of the relations between those terms.”⁵⁹ In Ormerod’s words, a systematic ecclesiology must be empirical/historical, critical, normative, dialectical, and practical, and metaphors alone do not meet these criteria.⁶⁰ While metaphors contribute “open-endedness,...conceptual and experiential richness, and...symbolic depth” to theology, they resist the stable definitions and consistent terminology that is necessary for a systematic understanding of the church. Systematic ecclesiology must ‘go beyond’ metaphor to more precise conceptual expression of the nature and structure of the church, whether to avoid ideology, answer particular questions about ecclesial life, or adjudicate between competing values communicated by various metaphors.

To be clear, the theologians surveyed here are not arguing against *any* use of models or metaphors in ecclesiology, only the attempt at using them, especially a single model or metaphor, to construct a complete systematic ecclesiology. Healy even acknowledges that

We are likely to find that there are certain things that must be said about the church that are best said by means of a certain image or concept, so that some models may be necessary ones. But if different perspectives on the church are necessary as well as permissible, then not only are claims for a supermodel

⁵⁸ Bernard Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1979) and his classification of functional specialties are in the background for Komonchak, Flanagan, and Ormerod. Rikhof relies on Aquinas for his distinction between religious and theological, or metaphorical and argumentative, discourse; see especially chapter III.3.

⁵⁹ Flanagan, “The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors,” 49.

⁶⁰ Neil Ormerod, “The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 3–30. See also *ibid.*, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

unwarrantable, the very search for them unwarrantably contracts our ecclesiological horizons. Models should instead be used to discover and explore imaginatively the many facets of the Christian Church.⁶¹

In this regard, Healy is not far from Dulles' own position that ecclesial models can provide an exploratory function within ecclesiology. Nevertheless, the general trend among ecclesiologists today is to focus their attention on particular ecclesial contexts and concrete issues facing the living church in history, rather than to offer a theological vision of the church rooted in any particular metaphor.

I share the above-mentioned concerns regarding the risks of ideological uses of ecclesial metaphors and the need for a systematic ecclesiology to attain stable definitions and relationships between terms and concepts. Moreover, it is certainly true that “mystical body of Christ” has been used as a kind of ‘blueprint’ for ecclesiology in the early twentieth century, in *Mystici Corporis Christ*, for example. Still, the arguments summarized above undervalue the unique role that metaphor plays in theological speech — not simply in religious speech or in the context of prayer and preaching. More can and must be said in favor of the use of images and metaphors in ecclesiology, of which the image of the body is only one.

III. A positive role for metaphor in ecclesiology

The arguments reviewed above claim that metaphors serve a valuable role in religious speech, the communication of revelation, and the task of preaching, but systematic ecclesiology must ‘go beyond’ metaphor to more precise conceptual expression of the nature and structure of the church. However, these arguments reveal inadequate theories of metaphor that underestimate their cognitive power. In *Metaphor and Religious Imagination*, Janet Martin Soskice identifies

⁶¹ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 36.

two theories of metaphor that ultimately fail to provide an adequate account of how metaphors function—an ornamentalist or substitutionist theory, and an emotive theory. The substitutionist theory sees metaphor as a decorative substitution for a literal term, as “clothing tired literal expression in attractive new garb, of alleviating boredom, and, as Aquinas says, of being accessible to the uneducated.”⁶² In this view, a metaphor simply substitutes an improper word for a proper one as rhetorical flourish; it adds no new meaning and “could equally well be expressed in non-metaphorical terms.”⁶³ In fact, metaphor may muddy our thoughts rather than lead to new insights and perhaps *should* be replaced by more literal or conceptual language, according to this substitutionist account. An emotive theory of metaphor supposes that metaphor simply achieves a certain affective impact; it does so through ‘deviant word usage,’ combining terms in such a way that, because the expression is not literally meaningful, a greater emotive meaning is evoked.⁶⁴ In this theory, a metaphor does not add any new meaning that a literal statement would not—it simply has a greater affective impact on the hearer. The claim that metaphor is suited to preaching or spirituality but not to systematic theology reveals this assumption that metaphor only achieves affective impact, rather than revealing new cognitive insight. Similarly, the notion that systematic ecclesiology ought to set metaphor aside in order to achieve conceptual clarity and intellectual rigor indicates an operative substitutionist theory—as if metaphorical language could be substituted, indeed surpassed, by literal speech.

Soskice convincingly argues that substitutionist and emotive theories of metaphor fail in three ways to provide an adequate account of how metaphors function linguistically and cognitively. First, they fail to see that metaphors *add* meaning and understanding—otherwise,

⁶² Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 24.

⁶³ Soskice, 31

⁶⁴ Soskice, 26, citing Monroe Beardsley’s summary of the emotive theory, in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1958), 134–5.

authors would simply use words literally. Second, these theories fail to recognize that metaphor does not simply substitute one term for another (and indeed may not even include two terms or subjects within the metaphorical utterance) but “enables one to see similarities in what had previously been regarded as dissimilars.”⁶⁵ In a good metaphor, a particular meaning is accessible *only through* that metaphor.⁶⁶ Third, they forget that emotive meaning is reliant upon the perception of cognitive meaning. Soskice’s own “interanimation theory” of metaphor provides a more adequate basis for understanding the unique role that metaphor plays in theological speech and therefore in ecclesiology.

In Soskice’s definition, a metaphor is “that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”⁶⁷ She argues that metaphors are cognitively unique, not merely ornamentalist or emotive, and disclose new information about their subject that can’t be said in any other way. A metaphor accomplishes this by uniting its subject with the associative networks of meaning of another term, object, or concept. Three aspects of Soskice’s theory of metaphor are especially pertinent to the present study.

First, Soskice emphasizes that a metaphor is a figure of speech. It is a form of language use, a linguistic event — not a physical object or a mental event. It is an utterance. A word or phrase in itself is not a metaphor, but can be *used* metaphorically. Consequently, words do not ‘have metaphorical meanings’ in isolation. The meaning of a metaphorical use of a term can only

⁶⁵ Soskice, 26. For example, to say that the church is the body of Christ is to posit an identification between two strikingly different realities: between the sociohistorical reality of the church and the enfleshed Logos; between a finite human reality and the divine being; between a collective social organization and an individual subject. Because this is the very structure of a metaphor, we must keep this in mind when the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is critiqued as obscuring the *difference* between the church and Christ. Any theological metaphor—that is, any attempt to speak about the divine in human terms—is a speech act which suggests similarities across the ultimate dissimilars. It is precisely the presupposition of difference that makes a metaphor, an assertion of similarities, cognitively and affectively evocative.

⁶⁶ Soskice, 48.

⁶⁷ Soskice, 15. For the sake of brevity, she uses ‘metaphor’ when it should be clearly understood that she means ‘metaphorical utterances.’ I will do the same.

be discerned within the context of the complete utterance.⁶⁸ In the context of this project, therefore, “body” is not itself a metaphor for the church. Rather, the metaphor is the utterance “the church is a body” or “the church is the body of Christ.” By understanding metaphor as a form of speech, Soskice emphasizes that to identify an utterance as a metaphor is *not yet* to offer a theological or metaphysical evaluation of the metaphor. To illustrate the importance of this distinction, Soskice offers the example of Jesus’ claim that ‘this bread is my body’:

Is this metaphorical or not? The question is frequently asked as though one’s answer will settle an enormous theological controversy...as though, could we but acknowledge that phrases such as this one were metaphorical, we would be freed from the metaphysical difficulties which have troubled centuries of theological debate. But to think in this way is to fall back into the ornamentalist theories of metaphor against which we have been arguing... The point at issue is not really whether we have metaphor here, but what the metaphor is doing. Is it simply an ornamental redescription, so that Jesus has redescribed bread in an evocative way? Or is the metaphor genuinely catachretical, not a redescriving but a naming or disclosing for the first time? It is one’s metaphysics, not metaphor, which is at issue. To put it another way, the question is not simply whether we have a metaphor here or not, but what, if anything, the metaphor refers to or signifies.⁶⁹

Likewise, to say that the church is a body or that it is the body of Christ is to speak in metaphor. It is to speak about one thing — the church — in terms suggestive of another — an enfleshed, living organism. But we must still ask “what the metaphor is doing,” what it signifies. It is the theologian’s task to interpret and evaluate the ecclesiological and Christological claims being communicated by the metaphor.

Related, Soskice clarifies that there is no ‘metaphorical truth’ as opposed to ‘literal truth,’ or ‘metaphorical meaning’ as opposed to ‘literal meaning.’ There is, however, metaphorical *usage* versus literal *usage*. Literal usage is accustomed usage that requires no imaginative strain

⁶⁸ Soskice, chapter one. Her position here is distinct from that of Paul Ricoeur and Herwi Rikhof who hold that a metaphor occurs at the level of a sentence, not a single word or phrase; Soskice adds that a metaphor may extend beyond a single sentence to include several sentences or an entire idea (such as in a poem).

⁶⁹ Soskice, 90.

for the native speaker; the literal sense(s) of a word may be found in a dictionary, whereas the metaphorical sense of a word is only discernible within the context of a particular utterance. Through the process of catachresis (the application of a term to a new context where a term is lacking), a metaphorical usage of a word can become ‘lexicalized’ and take on a literal sense. In this way, metaphor has the “capacity to expand our lexicon, and in so doing, it expands the conceptual apparatus with which we work.”⁷⁰ Likewise, there are not two meanings to a metaphor, a ‘literal’ meaning which is false and a metaphorical meaning which is true. As Soskice says, a metaphor has “but one meaning; the alternative is nonsense. Either we understand [a] passage as a metaphor or we do not understand it.”⁷¹ This is not to say that a metaphor can only evoke one network of associations. In fact, what makes the metaphor “the church is a body” so interesting is that there are, as I will show, multiple networks of meaning associated with the term “body.” Soskice’s point here is simply that within the whole speech context, it is typically a misunderstanding of the speaker’s intent to construe a metaphorical utterance as a literal utterance. Metaphors must be understood within their context, and the truth or falsity of a metaphor can only be judged in connection with the reality to which the metaphor refers. Here, Soskice’s own words are luminously clear:

To say...that an utterance is a metaphor is to make a comment on its form and is not to say that it has a particular and questionable ‘metaphorical meaning’. This is most important, as is a related point about ‘metaphorical truth.’ A given truth may be expressed by a metaphor, may perhaps only be expressed by using the metaphor, but this is not to say that it exemplifies a sort of ‘metaphorical truth’ distinguishable from and inferior to ‘literal truth’. ...To say ‘He is suffering from a gnawing pain’ is to speak metaphorically, but if it were true, it would be perverse to say that it expressed a ‘metaphorical truth’. ... It is important to see...that it is particular *usages* that are literal or metaphorical, and not particular facts.⁷²

⁷⁰ Soskice, 61–62. An example of catachresis is the “stem” of a wine glass, or “leg” of a table.

⁷¹ Soskice, 85.

⁷² Soskice, 70–71.

Second, a metaphor discloses unique cognitive content. To describe how this occurs, Soskice draws from I. A. Richards' 'interactive theory' of metaphor, especially his terms "tenor" and "vehicle" which name the two 'ideas' that are united in a metaphor.⁷³ The tenor is the underlying subject of the metaphor, and the vehicle is "the mode in which it [the metaphor] is expressed."⁷⁴ For example, in the metaphor "the church is a body," the tenor is "the church," and the vehicle is "body" and its associated meanings. Another example that can illustrate Soskice's theory is the statement that the sacrament of penance is "a saving medicine" which provides for the health of the body and removes all danger of contagion.⁷⁵ The tenor is the grace of the sacrament, and the vehicle is medicine. Soskice expands Richards' theory by showing that metaphors rely on an underlying model or models that are shared by the speaker and the hearer of the metaphor. We must be clear here that she does *not* mean "model" in Dulles' sense of a systematic heuristic tool. By "model" Soskice means the "associative network" of a term, the plurality of meanings, visualizations, and descriptions that come to mind when a word is heard. She describes "the associative network of a term" as "its placement in a semantic field where the 'value' of the term is fixed not simply by the terms for which it might be exchanged...but also by the entities of which the term would customarily be predicated." She gives the example of the metaphor of a "writhing script": "one might associate with 'writhing' not only action similar to writhing such as twisting and squirming, but also entities which are known to writhe, such as snakes or persons in pain."⁷⁶ To continue with the example of penance, the "models" or "associative networks"

⁷³ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936). Soskice's use of the term 'ideas' here is significant, in that she rejects theories that hold that metaphors have two 'terms' or 'subjects.' This is first of all because a metaphor has only one true subject, and second, it may not have two 'terms' explicitly present within the linguistic utterance though it still unites two ideas.

⁷⁴ Soskice, 39.

⁷⁵ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 18.

⁷⁶ Soskice, 50.

underlying the vehicle “medicine” are the strengthening and healing functions that medicine performs within a human body.

In a metaphor, tenor and vehicle unite and ‘interanimate’ one another, disclosing new meaning and interpretive possibilities. It speaks about a single subject matter by drawing upon one or more sets of associations.⁷⁷ It is by uniting tenor and vehicle and their associative networks “that a metaphor is genuinely creative and says something that can be said adequately in no other way, not as an ornament to what we already know but as an embodiment of a new insight.”⁷⁸ By speaking of penance as a medicine, our minds are taken beyond the form or practice of the sacrament to its healing effects and its necessary administration to a sick body. Furthermore, the metaphor invites our minds beyond the words at hand to consider God (through the mediation of the priest) as a compassionate doctor who desires our fullness of life, or to consider ourselves as dependent for our healing and flourishing upon God’s wisdom and care. As Soskice says, “a good metaphor may not simply be an oblique reference to a predetermined subject but a new vision, the birth of a new understanding, a new referential access. A strong metaphor compels new possibilities of vision.”⁷⁹ In the metaphor of the church as a body, our theological vision is extended to consider the networks of meaning associated with the term ‘body’ and to ask what new insights and understandings that may disclose about the church.

Third and finally, Soskice argues that a metaphor’s cognitive uniqueness is irreducible to “words proper” or strictly literal usages. The interanimation of tenor and vehicle take us beyond the dictionary definitions of the terms within a metaphor to the world of meanings associated

⁷⁷ Soskice, 49. This is where Soskice’s theory is most distinct from other theories which argue that metaphor is a ‘comparison’ of two things in the mind, or a ‘transfer’ or ‘substitution’ of meaning from one term to another.

⁷⁸ Soskice, 48.

⁷⁹ Soskice, 57–58. In the example I give, we can see how a model leads to further metaphorical speech. The underlying model of healing leads to the metaphorical description of God as a doctor.

with those terms. This is not simply a ‘combination’ or ‘identification’ of two previously understood terms. Rather, metaphor invites us to consider a relatively unknown (ex., the grace of a sacrament) through a relatively known (ex., medicine and its functions). Thus, in contrast to theories such as Rikhof’s which holds that metaphors *redescribe* a reality, Soskice shows that good metaphors “are used not to redescribe but to disclose for the first time.”⁸⁰ Because metaphors are not simply ornamental descriptions of an already-understood reality, they cannot be ‘translated’ into literal terms without loss of meaning and cognitive (and so also affective) content.

Thus, Soskice has provided a theory that identifies how ecclesial metaphors can disclose new information about the church in a way that literal speech cannot. They are not simply ornaments to more conceptual theological discourse or practical tools for preaching but evoke new insights and new meaning that cannot be articulated in literal speech. In fact, this is precisely what has happened in the history of the ecclesial metaphor that names the church as a body. From St. Paul’s themes of ecclesial unity and the diversity of charisms, to Möhler’s early theology of tradition as organic growth, to Pius XII’s reflection on the Eucharist as the body’s nourishment, this ecclesial metaphor of the body has expanded ecclesiological reflection and led to new conceptions of the nature of the church. In this way, Soskice’s theory more adequately describes the role that metaphor has and can continue to play in systematic ecclesiology than what is admitted by Healy, Flanagan, Rikhof, Komonchak, or Ormerod. Metaphors communicate *from* and *to* the depths of the human imagination and therefore have a communicative and disclosive potential unique from that of conceptual, controlled speech. It is true that metaphors are not self-explanatory, as Flanagan notes. They do not have internal mechanisms for

⁸⁰ Soskice, 89.

adjudicating between competing values they communicate. Metaphors require interpretation.⁸¹ But it is the task of systematic ecclesiology to interpret the meanings of a metaphor, to explore what unique cognitive content they convey, and to aid in their systematic development through dialogue with the ongoing human experience from which the metaphors derive and in the context of which metaphors make meaning.

At this juncture, it is also helpful to ask what it is that metaphors do in ecclesiology specifically. A number of ecclesial metaphors have a ‘vertical’ dimension, linking the church to the divine. For example, “people of God,” “body of Christ,” and “temple of the Holy Spirit” all suggest ways in which the ecclesial community is related to the triune God, or ways in which the triune God is present to and within the ecclesial community. In this vertical dimension, the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ expresses a relationship between Christ and the church—suggesting, for example, that Christ is the divine Head of the church which is united to him as his body, or that the church is the ongoing incarnation of Christ in history. Ecclesial metaphors can have a ‘horizontal’ function as well, expressing the church’s existence within history as a human community. The horizontal dimension of the metaphor of the church as a body, or as the body of Christ, speaks to this intra-ecclesial order—the relationships and distinctions among members of the body and their functions within the church. In this sense, the metaphor of the body describes the church as a diverse yet unified whole, a living organism made up of many members joined to one another and to an earthly head. (In this sense, there is still a kind of ‘verticality’ to the horizontal, intra-ecclesial dimension through the metaphor of headship.) The horizontal dimension also addresses the church’s life *ad extra*, as a body distinct

⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). This insight from Ricoeur’s work is drawn from Andrew W. Lichtenwalner, “The Church as the Bride of Christ in Magisterial Teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II” (Ph.D. Diss., Catholic University of America, 2012), 98 and is substantiated by Soskice’s theory.

from other social groups and the broader world.⁸² [See Figure A.] When the church is spoken of as a body in general, and not specifically as the body of Christ, the image of the body is functioning in this horizontal way.


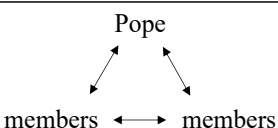
	Vertical	Horizontal
		
Image of the body (most common)	Head governs and gives life to body body manifests identity of head	Living organism vivified by one spirit Diverse parts united under one head

Figure A

Neil Ormerod appropriates Lonergan’s thought on dialectic to provide a helpful categorization of two ways in which metaphors, images, and symbols can function in ecclesial discourse in this horizontal mode. They can function either as “integrators” or “operators.” Integrators are “principles of limitation, providing integration and harmony.” Operators “transform the present situation in the direction of some normatively defined transcendence.”⁸³ For example, “communion” is an integrator, in that it focuses attention on relationships within the church and between churches. “Mission” functions as an operator, highlighting the church *ad extra* in service to the building up of the kingdom of God on earth. Ormerod finds that the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is one of the earliest integrator symbols in that it “attempt[s] to effect a greater unity within the ecclesial body.” Notably, ecclesiology is rich in

⁸² One might visualize this as a graph with an x, y, and z axis. The vertical dimension is the x-axis; the church’s ‘horizontal’ life *ad intra* is the y-axis; and church’s ‘horizontal’ life *ad extra* is the z-axis. This is not to be confused with the graph below describing Mary Douglas’ grid-group theory, which pertains only to the horizontal dimension of the symbol of the body.

⁸³ Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church*, 64.

integrators but is lacking in operators. Ormerod does not conclude that we must do away with metaphors and symbols in ecclesial discourse, but simply that their functions and limitations must be understood.⁸⁴ Some metaphors or symbols are intended to draw the ecclesial community together around a common identity. They function to unite the diverse group of Christians and express unity, harmony, and oneness in a particular symbol, such as the body. Other metaphors encourage a mission-oriented, outward-looking approach to Christian identity. They turn us towards the world and impel us forward in Christian discipleship in the world. I agree with Ormerod that “the body of Christ” has generally functioned as an integrator in ecclesiology, and this will become evident throughout this dissertation. But I also hope to bring to light the operator functions of the image of the body. Bodies are not only bounded entities, but are porous, open to the world, and depend on the world. By rethinking the image of the body in light of phenomenology, we can uncover latent potential for the metaphor of the church as a body to function as an operator and promote the church’s mission in and to the world.

Finally, we must clarify the relationship between an image and a metaphor. In this study, the metaphor is the whole statement, “the church is a body” or “the church is the body of Christ.” The metaphor contains an image—the image of the body. By ‘images’ of the body I mean the implicit or explicit understandings, and mental or visual representations, of what a human body is, is made up of, does, how it is organized, and how it functions. Dulles makes a similar distinction in his work, saying that “some models are also images—that is, those that can be readily imagined. Other models are of a more abstract nature, and are not precisely images. In the former class one might put temple, vine, and flock; in the latter institution, society, community.”⁸⁵ This dissertation is a study of the image of the body and the various “associative

⁸⁴ Ormerod, 67.

⁸⁵ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 15.

networks,” in Soskice’s language, within the metaphor “the church is a body” or “the church is the body of Christ.” Given that there are so many images and metaphors of the church in the ecclesiological tradition, and in light of the shift away from the metaphor of the church as a body or the mystical body of Christ in the past several decades, we must now consider why reflection on the image of the body is important in ecclesiology today.

IV. “Why all the fuss about the body?”: A Hermeneutic of the Body for Ecclesiology⁸⁶

As already briefly indicated, the image of the body has been part of ecclesiological reflection since the New Testament era. The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is found throughout the Pauline corpus and patristic authors, medieval popes and canon lawyers, and modern theologians and papal and conciliar texts. In addition to this scriptural and historical justification for ongoing reflection on the metaphor of the church as a body, further theological and anthropological reasons can be given.

First, the Catholic theological tradition affirms the inherent goodness of the human body and all creation. Against early gnostic and docetic heresies, Irenaeus described the flesh as “God’s handiwork” and insisted that, because Christ became fully human (a tripartite unity of flesh, soul, and spirit) and rose in his body, our flesh is capable of receiving salvation and will also be resurrected.⁸⁷ In the middle ages, Aquinas argued that the human person is a single body-soul substance, and the soul enjoys its natural perfection only when united to its body. Moreover, the soul is dependent on the body and sense-experience in order to attain knowledge.⁸⁸ In the

⁸⁶ Here I borrow Caroline Walker Bynum’s essay title by the same name. In her essay, she offers explanations for ‘all the fuss about the body’ in contemporary academia and culture. Here I am arguing why we *should* ‘fuss about the body’ in ecclesiology.

⁸⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, especially Book 5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1., trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979).

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.I, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan

twentieth century, Karl Rahner described the body as the fundamental locus of the free human person in the world. Created out of the dust of the earth, the body is radically marked with meaning by the incarnation, for “man as a bodily, concrete, historical being is just what comes into being when the Logos, issuing from himself, utters himself.”⁸⁹ It is precisely this bodily form which is the site of the ultimate love and obedience of the Son which redeems us; it is in this bodily form that the human person fulfills herself and achieves her salvation through freedom and self-gift; it is this bodily reality that will finally be resurrected and transformed. The body is, in short, the symbol of the soul, the outward self-expression in *materia prima* of the spirit.⁹⁰ Ultimately, then, in the Catholic tradition, the human body is a site of revelation. It mediates God’s presence to humanity and all creation, and mediates each human person to the entire created world and to the divine.⁹¹ For these reasons, it is fitting that theology would continue to reflect on the significance of “the body of Christ” in its historical, eucharistic, and ecclesial dimensions, and on the meaning of the church as a body in which the human and divine encounter one another. It is this theology of the body as the symbol of the soul, the incarnate self, that informs the vertical dimension of the metaphor of the church as the body *of Christ*—as the symbol, incarnation, or mediation of Christ to the world.

Second, cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued that the body often functions as a ‘natural symbol’ of social relations. Her first major work, *Purity and Danger*, argues that cultures create and symbolize social boundaries through bodily rituals and taboos. In *Natural*

(Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1952), questions 75, 76, 90, and 91.

⁸⁹ Karl Rahner, “The Body in the Order of Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17 (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 74.

⁹⁰ Karl Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. K. Smyth, vol. 4 (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 248.

⁹¹ Luke Timothy Johnson takes this as the central focus of his book *The Revelatory Body: Theology as Inductive Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015) in which he shifts the focus of revelation (that is, divine self-disclosure) from scripture and texts to living, human, embodied experience.

Symbols, Douglas analyses underlying social conditions that lead to ritualism or anti-ritualism in various tribal and modern cultures.⁹² Douglas' primary interest in both of these texts is to correlate social organization with ritual practices and cosmology (that is, worldview). But it is her "minor theme"⁹³—the body as a symbol of the social—that is most relevant to the present study and will help us to understand the various horizontal meanings of the ecclesial metaphor in particular.

In both *Purity and Danger* and *Natural Symbols*, Douglas shows that, across cultures, the body is used to symbolize the social. The body is a "natural symbol," meaning that, across cultures, there is a correspondence between bodily behavior and control, on the one hand, and social systems, organization, and control on the other.⁹⁴ This does not mean that the body is symbolized in the same way in all cultures, but the isomorphism between social structures and body symbolism is universal. In any given culture, bodily practices, bodily control and bodily concerns reflect the social environment, social control, and social concerns. In particular, social concerns around internal hierarchy and organization, and external boundaries, are frequently manifested in bodily rituals and symbols. Douglas finds that

Interest in [the body's] apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions. If there is no concern to preserve social boundaries, I would not expect to find concern with bodily boundaries. The relation of head to feet, of brain and sexual organs, of mouth and anus are commonly treated so that they express the relevant patterns of hierarchy.⁹⁵

⁹² Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970). Douglas issued a second edition of *Natural Symbols* in 1973, though her theory changed somewhat, as will be discussed below. All citations are to the 1970 edition unless otherwise indicated.

⁹³ James Spickard cogently distinguishes her "major" and "minor" themes in *Natural Symbols* (James V. Spickard, "A Guide to Mary Douglas's Three Versions of Grid/Group Theory," *Sociological Analysis* 50, no. 2 (1989): 155.

⁹⁴ This thesis is found in her first book *Purity and Danger* (1966) but is not fully elaborated until *Natural Symbols* (1970). In the former, she focuses on bodily margins as expressive of social margins.

⁹⁵ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 70.

As another example, Douglas finds that societies with more flexible or informal social structures are not troubled by trance; bodily disorganization is not a threat to social organization. In contrast, more highly structured societies view trance, which is a kind of loss of bodily control, as a danger to the individual and to the group. In short, what Douglas finds in her anthropological research is that

the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.⁹⁶

This dynamic between the individual body and the social body pertains not only to bodily experiences, behaviors, and rituals, but to *representations, images, and descriptions* of the body as well. “The human body is always treated as an image of society and...there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension.” A society’s description of the human body reflects and reinforces its understanding of the social group. Most interesting in light of our present ecclesiological research, Douglas finds that patterns in the varieties of bodily symbolism correspond to different ways in which societies are organized. To understand how bodily symbolism varies according to social structure, we must understand Douglas’ grid-group theory.

Douglas’s well-known grid-group theory, laid out first in *Natural Symbols* and further developed and revised in later texts, is an effort to explain and predict body symbolism and bodily control on the basis of social experience and social control.⁹⁷ This theory can be

⁹⁶ Douglas, 65.

⁹⁷ Spickard provides a clear analysis of the changes in Douglas’ grid-group theory over time, from the first edition of *Natural Symbols* in 1970 (repr. 1982), to the substantively revised 1973 version by the same name (London: Barrie & Jenkins, repr. 1996), to the third version in *Cultural Bias* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, 1978, repr. 1982). The theory I summarize in this section and utilize in this project is the 1970 version. The 1973 version of the theory describes ‘grid’ as “the scope and coherent articulation of a system of classification” of experience, and ‘group’ as the pressure of the individual and group upon one another. The other notable difference is

envisioned as two axes, grid and group, where ‘grid’ measures the norms and regulations of individuals’ relationships to one another within a society, and ‘group’ measures social inclusion or “the experience of a bounded social unit.”⁹⁸ This yields four quadrants, or types of societies: high group/high grid (hierarchy); high group/low grid (enclave/sectarian); low group/high grid (isolate); low group/low grid (individualist). [See Figure B.]

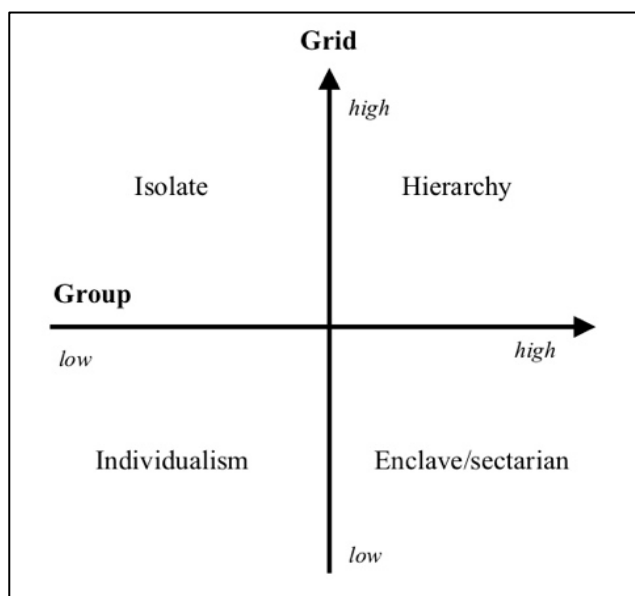


Figure B

that the 1970 version yields ‘quadrants’ as typologies of society, whereas the 1973 version functions as a ‘map’ for locating an individual’s experience of social relations. Interestingly, this version of the theory gives greater attention to the possibility that cosmology is foundational to, and therefore can influence, social relations, a notion that is supported by Soskice’s theory of metaphor as generating new insights. However, as Spickard shows, the 1973 version ultimately fails as a descriptive and explanatory theory because she maps both the social and the cosmological in the two axes and so ends up ‘deriving cosmology from cosmology’ (see Spickard 162). The third version of the grid-group theory is closer to the 1970 version in that it maps social relations and describes types of societies. The difference in this version is that she is more interested in cosmology as a mechanism of social accountability, reinforcing and sustaining social relations. In this regard, this version of the grid-group theory also explains how cosmology shores up social relations. What all three versions of grid-group theory have in common, and what is most significant for my study, is that they all attempt to describe and explain the same phenomenon—the consonance or parallel between cosmology and social relations. I utilize the 1970 version of her theory (unless indicated otherwise) because, in agreement with Spickard, it is more coherent in itself and because its description of societal types is more pertinent to ecclesiology given that body symbolism is used to describe the church as a certain kind of society.

⁹⁸ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, viii.

“By measuring to what extent a society conceived of itself as a bounded entity (group) and in what ways individuals relate to each other within that group (grid), what beliefs would be held about everything from sin to sorcery to sexual morality could be predicted.”⁹⁹ In other words, the body is described or imaged in different ways along the grid-group axis; the “associative networks” vary in accord with the social form.

Douglas argues that the more a society is arranged with fixed role structure and high levels of social organization (read: the hierarchical social type), the more the human body serves as a symbol of society. Drawing from Basil Bernstein’s work in sociolinguistics and her own ethnographic research, Douglas shows that high group/high grid societies are marked by restricted speech codes, affirmative attitudes towards materiality and externals (including the body and institutions), and a metaphysics in which spirit works in and through matter. In such societies, where speech patterns are more formal and organized and authority is fixed based on role status, the human body is seen as a ‘condensed symbol’ and “actively express[es] the solidarity of the social body.”¹⁰⁰ In particular, in ‘high group’ societies, the symbol of the human body typically expresses and reinforces social boundaries, belonging, and order. The image of the body can be conceived in two distinct ways. In a high group/high grid society (hierarchy), one possibility is that

the body will tend to be conceived as an organ of communication. The major preoccupations will be with its functioning effectively; the relation of head to subordinate members will be a model of the central control system, the favourite metaphors of statecraft will harp upon the flow of blood in the arteries, sustenance and restoration of strength.¹⁰¹

Elsewhere, she describes her expectations of a high group/high grid society this way:

⁹⁹ Paul Baumann, “Anthropology with a Difference: Mary Douglas at 80,” *Commonweal Magazine*, August 17, 2001, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/anthropology-difference-0>.

¹⁰⁰ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 158.

¹⁰¹ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (1973), 16; see also Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (1970), 160.

The religious emphasis would be expected to treat the body as the focus and symbol of life. We would expect to find positive themes of symbolic nourishment developed to the extent that the social body and the physical body are assimilated and both focus the identity of individuals in a structured, bounded system.¹⁰²

A hierarchical society, with its stronger group ties and more clearly delineated and regulated intra-group relations, will symbolize the body in a similar fashion, as a well-bounded and internally ordered unit.

The Roman Catholic Church is an example of a ‘high group/high grid’ society—a hierarchy, in Douglas’ meaning of the term. Authority is ‘positional,’ meaning that it is derived from hierarchical role and status (such as ordination) and is clearly communicated. The linguistic code is ‘restricted,’ meaning that it is tightly organized and reinforces social structure (think of liturgical rites, or the particular phrases that characterize magisterial documents). The divine or the spiritual works in and through matter (for example, in the incarnation and the sacraments). The identity of an individual is found within and in reference to the social whole (baptized into the body of Christ, the individual is made a member of that body), and the individual is subordinate to the whole (see Ephesians 4, for example). Douglas herself maintains that the Roman Catholic Church is paradigmatic of hierarchy.¹⁰³ Consequently, we can expect that, as a strongly structured society, the Catholic Church will find the body to be a meaningful symbol of

¹⁰² Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 160.

¹⁰³ It may be the case, though, that local churches, parishes, and Catholic organizations may operate as a different social type. Timothy Larsen makes it quite clear how Douglas’ own Catholic identity and commitment to hierarchy, ritual, and ‘condensed symbols’ informed, and was informed by, her anthropological research. Douglas’s defense of hierarchy (and admitted bias for “an idealized form of hierarchy”) is, at least to some extent, a defense of Catholicism. Larsen writes, “when Douglas thought of a hierarchy, she thought first and foremost of her beloved Church” (“Mary Douglas,” in *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 138). Douglas herself says ‘when I say ‘hierarchy’, I am remembering that the Roman Catholic Church calls herself a hierarchy’.” (“A Feeling for Hierarchy,” Marianist Award Lecture 2002 [University of Dayton, 2001], 7). See also Richard Fardon, “‘Memories of a Catholic Girlhood’: 1920s and 1930s,” 3–23, in *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999).

the social/ecclesial, and will likely make use of images of the body as a hierarchically organized organ of communication and a life-giving reality with clear boundaries.

Other social forms will symbolize the body differently. For example, in a high group/low grid society (enclave), Douglas predicts that

though the body will also be seen as a vehicle of life, it will be vulnerable in different ways. The dangers to it will come not so much from lack of co-ordination or of food and rest, but from failure to control the quality of what it absorbs through the orifices; fear of poisoning, protection of boundaries, aversion to bodily waste products and medical theory that enjoins frequent purging.¹⁰⁴

Societies that are low group/low grid or low group/high grid

do not produce such an elaborately consistent set of attitudes based on the symbolism of the body. For example, where grid alone is strong, the human body is inevitably less cogent as a symbol of society. For the man who feels himself unbounded, uncommitted to any social group, can make less use of the essentially bounded character of the human body to express his social concerns.¹⁰⁵

This is not to say that these societies do not use body symbolism at all, but rather that there is an ambiguity toward the body that is reflective of more flexible social organization, looser social ties, and/or weaker group identity. For example, in low-group societies where speech patterns are more fluid and expressive and family structures emphasize autonomy and self-expression, "the body may come to represent an alien husk, something from which the inmost self needs to escape, something whose exigencies should not be taken too seriously."¹⁰⁶

What Douglas' work on grid-group theory and body symbolism makes clear is that the image of the body operative within a given society is directly related to social context. There is no static, neutral, ahistorical, or acultural representation of the body. The body lived and the

¹⁰⁴ Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (1973), 16; see also Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (1970), 160. Concerns over the body's boundaries and fears of pollution are the subject of her first book, *Purity and Danger*. In that text, Douglas argues that bodily margins are invested with power and danger; taboos and rituals focused on bodily orifices cannot be understood in isolation from the vulnerability of the society to external dangers.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, ix. In chapter five, I will turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology which challenges this assumption that the human body is simply "essentially bounded."

¹⁰⁶ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 158.

body as a symbol are deeply interwoven with cultural norms, social organization, social anxieties, and patterns of authority. Bodily symbolism replicates the social order, and in this way, reinforces the patterns of power within it. She writes that the replication of body symbolism in society and religion “allows for the power of symbols generated in a particular social set-up to control it. . . . The natural symbols of society create a bias with strong philosophical and political as well as religious aspects.”¹⁰⁷ Because of this mutually reinforcing relationship between social organization and cosmology, images of the body can be analyzed for what they reveal about the social order in which they arise.¹⁰⁸

These two elements of Douglas’ theory—that bodily practices and images reflect and reinforce the social order, and that hierarchical societies are inclined to view the body as bounded and ordered—form the theoretical framework for my reading of the metaphor of the church as body in modern ecclesiology. It is certainly not new to suggest that ecclesial metaphors express particular values and reinforce patterns of power within the church; this is precisely the argument made against metaphors in systematic ecclesiology by Flanagan and Healy, outlined above.

Douglas herself agrees on this point:

the same drive that seeks harmoniously to relate the experience of physical and social, must affect ideology. Consequently, when once the correspondence

¹⁰⁷ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, xiv. This function of body symbolism is even more pronounced in the 1973 version of *Natural Symbols* in which she incorporates Bernstein’s 1971 text on educational curricula as classification systems which communicate and replicate power structures.

¹⁰⁸ Spickard criticizes theorists who apply Douglas’ theory “backwards,” reasoning from cosmology to social relations. He says that Douglas “takes pains to work from social structure to cosmology, because she thinks that similar cosmological elements can arise from quite different social locations” (Spickard, “A Guide,” 152n2). I disagree with Spickard’s dismissal of other theorists. At points in her writing, Douglas describes a cosmology and then describes for the reader what kind of social relations she would expect to find underlying such a cosmology (see for instance *Natural Symbols*, 75–77, 79 in which she moves from attitudes towards trance to social structures). Moreover, as Spickard himself summarizes, in *Cultural Bias* Douglas makes even clearer how cosmologies generate social accountability and reinforce social relations (Spickard, 165). While it does seem correct to say that Douglas developed her theory by arguing from social structure to cosmology, as Spickard indicates, it is clear they are mutually reinforcing, and in my reading, Douglas leaves room for one to begin with cosmology and then hypothesize parallels in social relations.

between bodily and social controls is traced, the basis will be laid for considering covarying attitudes in political thought and in theology.¹⁰⁹

However, there has not yet been a study of the various ways in which the image of the body has communicated social-ecclesial values and patterns of power. Such a study is needed because the image of the body has not been used univocally. At times the image of the body evokes boundaries and order, at other times, organic growth and development. Moreover, as is eminently clear in Douglas' work, body symbolism is not neutral. It replicates and reinforces a social structure. A critical self-awareness of the image of the body in ecclesial metaphor is necessary since this metaphor continues to find a place in popular and magisterial discourse. As Douglas says, we must judge the social structure that leads to a given symbol. "There may indeed be no preferring one metaphysical system to another, since their assumptions cannot be tested," she writes.

But each set of assumptions is derived from a type of society. And there may certainly be judgment as to the value of social forms as such. The psychologist or sociologist or theologian can assess social forms according to explicit concepts of the nature of man and his final ends. So the telescope can be turned around, away from the judgment of philosophy, on to the judgment of society as the environment of man.¹¹⁰

It is the task of the theologian to understand and evaluate the values and patterns of power expressed in ecclesial body symbolism. Dulles laid out seven criteria for evaluating ecclesial models: basis in scripture; basis in Christian tradition; capacity to give church members a sense of their corporate identity and mission; tendency to foster the virtues and values generally admired by Christians; correspondence with the religious experience of people today; theological fruitfulness; and fruitfulness in enabling church members to relate successfully to

¹⁰⁹ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 71.

¹¹⁰ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, xiv.

those outside their own group.¹¹¹ While not contesting Dulles' criteria, I maintain that he overlooks an important factor—that an image or metaphor must also correspond with, and be intelligible in light of, other fields of human knowledge from which the image or metaphor arises. The “associated networks” that give meaning to the metaphor arise from and are shaped by the broader linguistic, social, and cultural context of the speaker and hearer of the metaphor. The metaphor of the church as “body” will, therefore, be understood in light of concurrent beliefs about, and experiences of, what a body is and does. In this project, I will evaluate various images of the body in the metaphor “the church is a body/the body of Christ” on two grounds: for the ecclesiological consequences generated by, and values expressed in, this image, and for the adequacy of its understanding of the body in light of contemporary phenomenology. Since cosmology and society (that is, body symbolism and ecclesial structures) are mutually reinforcing, as Douglas shows, it is important to understand and evaluate both sides of the equation. Methodologically, this is one way in which studies of ecclesial metaphors can incorporate the turn in ecclesiology toward using various forms of social theory and empirical studies.

In this dissertation, I am not studying any single author's use of “body” as an image or metaphor for the church but rather the broad tradition of referring to the church as a body and the changing “associated networks of meaning” of that image. Second, I am not arguing that ‘body’ is the best or most fitting image of the church, nor that it should be the dominant metaphor in ecclesiology today. As various theologians in the twentieth century have pointed out, the image of the church as the body of Christ cannot, or has not, provided an adequate explanation for or account of sin in the church. Moreover, in its manifestations in the Roman stream of mystical

¹¹¹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 183–84.

body ecclesiology of the early twentieth century, the image of the body does not give an adequate account of how non-Catholic Christians are related to the ecclesial body.¹¹² Third, I am not arguing that images or metaphors can or should function as ‘blueprints’ in Healy’s sense, as normative scaffolds for an entire ecclesiology. I agree with the general consensus among ecclesialogists that ecclesial metaphors are insufficient for a full systematic ecclesiology; they cannot answer all ecclesiological questions, and truly they do risk ideological misuse as Flanagan points out. Still, as Soskice’s theory of metaphor argues, they serve an irreducible role in theological reflection on the church as sites of reflection on the mystery of the church and its relationship to the triune God.

Ultimately, this project urges critical self-awareness in any appeal to the church as a body and careful examination of what theological and political motivations drive the representations of the body in any given theological context. My aim is threefold. First, to develop a typology of the most common representations of the body in ecclesiological discourse in order to understand the particular function that images accomplish (as Ormerod encourages) and evaluate these representations in light of phenomenological studies of the body. The second task, relying heavily on Douglas’ grid-group theory, is to offer a new explanation of why the metaphor of the church as a body was intentionally displaced at Vatican II, in contrast to its dominance from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, particularly in conciliar teachings on ecumenism, other religions, and the church’s relationship to the world. The third and final task of this dissertation is to demonstrate the ecclesiological outcomes of alternative representations of the body drawn from phenomenology, thus engaging the ‘exploratory’ function of an ecclesial model or image. While I do not deal directly with social theory, empirical data, or ethnography,

¹¹² See Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 423.

the extra-theological tool that I will use in chapter five—the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty—is rooted in empirical study within the fields of psychology and neuroscience. In short, I do not propose a new model of the church as a body for all time and so am not engaging in a ‘blueprint ecclesiology.’ Body studies is a dynamic, rapidly expanding area of research that cuts across fields as diverse as literary theory, sociology, cultural studies, and neuroscience.¹¹³ Rather than proposing a singular or static new image or representation of the body and a systematic ecclesiology deduced from it, my primary goal is to demonstrate and critically evaluate how and why ecclesiology has sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, invoked or manipulated images of the body for particular theological and political ends, and in doing so, provide the methodological groundwork for more diverse interpretations of the metaphor in the future.

In this introduction, I have laid out the historical context and rationale for this dissertation and the linguistic, theological, and anthropological justifications for critical study and appropriation of the image of the body in contemporary ecclesiology. Chapters Two, Three and Four will explore the various deployments of the body metaphor in ecclesiology from the nineteenth century to the present. Before we begin our study and evaluation of body images in modern ecclesiology, we must take a more detailed look at how exactly the metaphor of the church as body was employed throughout Christian history. The survey of the tradition that follows is not exhaustive but rather highlights key moments in this history that continue to be influential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

¹¹³ For an overview of the field, see *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (New York: Routledge, 2012) and Margo DeMello, *Body Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

V. A Brief History of the Church as a Body

1. Pauline texts and scholarship

The image of the church as a body or as the body of Christ has its roots in the New Testament, and is only explicitly found in the letters of Paul.¹¹⁴ In 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, Paul tells the eucharistic community that they who are many are made “one body (*hen sōma*)” for they all partake of the one bread, which is a “sharing in the body of Christ (*sōmatos tou Christou*).” In 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, addressing divisions within the community, he describes an organic, and at times specifically human, body as consisting of many interdependent members, each with their own function and gift within the body, with greater honor given to the lesser members “that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (12:25).¹¹⁵ In verse 27, Paul shifts from a comparison to an identification: “Now you are the body of Christ (*sōma Christou*) and individually members of it.” He makes the same move in his letter to the Romans, writing, “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ (*hen sōma en Christō*) and individually we are members one of another” (12:4–5). Urging moral rectitude, Paul tells the Corinthians that their “bodies are members of Christ (*sōmata...melē Christou*)” (6:15). Only in the deutero-Pauline letters do we see a specification of Christ as the head (*kephalē*) of

¹¹⁴ Paul Minear’s review of the body image in the Pauline corpus includes passages in which the phrase “the body of Christ” isn’t used explicitly but the concept is present nevertheless (for example, in the related concept of ‘life in Christ’ in Rom 5–7) (Minear, chapter 6, “The Body of Christ,” in *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 173–220). He also finds that the concept of the church as the body of Christ is found elsewhere in the New Testament beyond the Pauline corpus, even though the specific phrase or wording is not used (173).

¹¹⁵ Paul does not directly state that he is drawing an analogy to a human body in particular. In my reading, verses 14–22 could equally describe other animal bodies that have hands, feet, eyes, and ears. Only verses 23–24 suggest that he is speaking about a specifically human body when he observes that we clothe certain parts of our body, namely, the genitals. See Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 94–96. The central thesis of Martin’s book is that “the theological differences reflected in 1 Corinthians all resulted from conflicts between various groups in the local church rooted in different ideological constructions of the body” (xv). Martin’s analysis of the parallel between social conflict and ideas about the body has greatly informed my analysis of modern ecclesiology.

“the church which is his body (*sōma autou*)” (Eph 1:22–23, 4:16; Col 1:18, 2:9–10) who nourishes and cares for his body (Eph 5:29) and is the source of its growth (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). “There is one body (*hen sōma*) and one Spirit,” (Eph 4:4) and this Spirit gives various gifts and charisms “for building up the body of Christ (*sōματος tou Christou*)” (Eph 4:11–12).

As with any issue of biblical interpretation, scholars disagree over the precise meaning of Paul’s language when he refers to the local Christian church as the body of Christ.¹¹⁶ Did Paul mean that the church in that place is *like* a body, whether any human body in general or Christ’s body in particular, sharing similar characteristics that allow for a fruitful analogy? Or is he claiming that the church truly *is* Christ’s body, once incarnate and crucified, now risen and glorified and still present in history through the believing community? Is “body of Christ” simply one among many images of the church in the New Testament, or is it “more than a metaphor,” set above and apart from other images?¹¹⁷ In short, is the statement “the church is the body of Christ” a functional analogy, or an ontological claim?

One way of parsing the complexity of the term “body of Christ” is a grammatical approach. Gosnell Yorke argues that the phrase “of Christ” is a possessive genitive, indicating ownership, as in, “the body that belongs to, or is governed by, Christ,” rather than an explicative genitive, indicating identification, as in “Christ’s own body.”¹¹⁸ Moreover, Yorke argues that

¹¹⁶ Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in the Pauline Corpus: A Re-Examination* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991), chapter one, and Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Introduction, both provide valuable literature reviews on the state of this question. It is important to note that diverging positions on this issue typically follow denominational lines, with Catholic scholars asserting that the church *is* the body of Christ, and Protestant scholars arguing that such an identification between Christ and the church is a distortion of Paul’s meaning.

¹¹⁷ Avery Dulles states that “body of Christ” and “people of God” “are often considered, in their ecclesiastical application, something more than mere metaphors” (Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 12). Soskice’s theory of metaphor shows the inadequacy and imprecision of the language of ‘mere metaphor’ or ‘more than a metaphor.’

¹¹⁸ Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ*. Yorke is critical of interpretations of Paul that he finds to be driven by prior ecclesiological commitments, especially what he describes as “triumphalistic, Christological” or “transubstantiationary” ecclesiologies (119, xv). Yorke uses this latter term in a pejorative sense to describe those ecclesiologies “in which the church, collectively speaking, becomes the actual body of Christ during its moments of eucharistic sharing and celebration” (xv). However, Yorke’s tone and his own ecclesiological conclusions suggest

Paul's use of "body" in an ecclesial context always refers figuratively to any human body in general, never to Christ's body, and that Paul does not identify the church with Christ's body, either mystically or metaphorically. Yung Suk Kim reads it as an attributive genitive, as in a "Christic [Christ-like] body."¹¹⁹ Going beyond a grammatical approach, many scholars determine Paul's intended meaning of the phrase "body of Christ" by reading him against the background of other Greco-Roman, especially Stoic, philosophies.¹²⁰ Michelle V. Lee compares 1 Cor 12 to Stoic philosophy and argues that Paul, like the Stoics, utilizes 'body' in two ways: as an analogy to show that the community is *like* a body (in its unity and diversity, or many-but-oneness), *and* that the community *is* Christ's body. It is both a comparison and an identification. The analogy is fertile because the believing community *is* a body, in the Stoic sense that all things that exist can be called 'body' and the human body is a microcosm of the universe.¹²¹ Still other scholars, such as Jerome Murphy O'Connor, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Andrew T. Lincoln, read Paul's *soma Christou* references in light of other passages in the Hebrew Bible that refer to "Jewish notions of representative solidarity" such that "believers are seen as having been *incorporated in Christ*," or in light of other New Testament and Pauline texts that suggest that Christ is present within the Christian community (ex. Acts 9:3–5; 1 Cor 2:16, 1 Cor 10:16–17, Phil 2:5).¹²² Finally, Paul

that his work too, is "driven by prior ecclesiological commitments."

¹¹⁹ Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 67.

¹²⁰ John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, Studies in Biblical Theology 5 (London: SCM Press, 1966); Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959); Martin, *The Corinthian Body*; Luke Timothy Johnson, "Paul's Ecclesiology," in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 199–211; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Eucharist and Community in First Corinthians," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 1–30; *ibid.*, "1 and 2 Corinthians," in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 74–90; Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*.

¹²¹ As Lee explains, the Stoics use the term 'body' in two ways: to refer to the human body, and to refer to corporeality in general. In the latter sense, the cosmos is a body, humanity at large is a body, and I am a body. These multiple bodies are related to one another both in their structures of growth and organization, and in the fact that they are all composed of the same elements. This is the foundation for the Stoic view that the human body is a microcosm of humanity.

¹²² Andrew T. Lincoln, "Ephesians," in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, 137. According to Yorke, Paul Minear and N. T. Wright fall into this category as well.

Minear reminds us that to ask whether an image is either metaphorical or literal is to pose a false question to Paul; this is a distinctly modern, post-Enlightenment approach to the question of meaning and language. We moderns afford greater significance to ‘literal,’ conceptual, propositional speech, and disvalue metaphorical or figurative language, assuming that clarity and precision is found in the former, not the latter. For Paul and his worldview and context, it was precisely the opposite.¹²³ (In any case, as Soskice has shown, to identify a statement as a metaphor is distinct from identifying the metaphysical significance of that metaphor.)

In this dissertation, I maintain the position that Paul uses the language of the church as a body as both a comparison and an identification, both a functional analogy and an ontological claim. The church is *like* a body, and it *is* Christ’s body. In 1 Cor 12 Paul utilizes the extended metaphor of the body to teach the Corinthians that the spiritual gifts they receive as individuals are to be used in service of the whole community. Additionally, that which is thought to be of lesser value is actually of greater value, just as the various parts of a human body are interdependent and serve the whole body. In these verses, Paul is not comparing the community to Christ’s body in particular, but to the human body in general. Nevertheless, for Paul, it is not merely the case that the community is (and therefore ought to behave) like a unified body. In 1 Cor 12:13 and 12:27, he makes the further claim that the community *is* the body of Christ, and each individual is a member of that body. Baptized in and partaking of one Spirit, the community is made into one body (1 Cor 12:13). As Murphy-O’Connor argues, Paul asserts that the community “is the incarnational prolongation of the mission of the saving Christ. What he did in

¹²³ Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 18–19. Minear argues that the ‘body of Christ’ metaphor has ontological significance, but that *all* New Testament images carry ontological weight due to the fact that they all refer to an ontological reality—the new creation in Christ. In distinction from Minear, I maintain that there is a distinctiveness to the claim that the church is the body of Christ because of the eucharistic dimension of this reality according to the Catholic tradition.

and for the world of his day through his physical presence, the community does in and for its world.”¹²⁴ This sense of believers being incorporated into Christ’s body or mystically identified with Christ’s body is also present in Eph 3:6, Eph 4:4, and Gal 2:20.¹²⁵ Likewise, after reviewing references to the body metaphor throughout the Pauline corpus, Luke Timothy Johnson states “it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Paul’s understanding of the church involves a deep and mystical identity between this community and the risen Jesus mediated by the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁶ Thus, I side with the those of New Testament scholars who find that the Pauline corpus contains both an analogical and an ontological dimension to the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, though in chapter six, I will argue for a more nuanced understanding of how the human body both is, and is not, the full presence of the person in the world.

2. Patristic authors: Augustine

While Augustine is certainly not the only patristic author to refer to the church as a body, given his influence on the later medieval tradition, it is sufficient to briefly explore his understanding and use of this metaphor. Augustine’s references to the church as a body are primarily found in his sermons on the church’s unity through the Spirit and on the Eucharist.¹²⁷ In sermon 268 preached for Pentecost, he unpacks the human body as an analogy for the church. Augustine’s purpose is to argue that whoever has the Holy Spirit is in the church, and whoever is outside the church does not have the Holy Spirit. To demonstrate why this is the case, he refers

¹²⁴ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Eucharist and Community in First Corinthians,” 6.

¹²⁵ Lincoln, “Ephesians,” especially 137.

¹²⁶ Johnson, “Paul’s Ecclesiology,” 207.

¹²⁷ Saint Augustine, “Sermon 268: On the Day of Pentecost,” “Sermon 272: On the Day of Pentecost to the *Infantes*, on the Sacrament,” “Sermon 267: On the Day of Pentecost,” “Sermon 227: Preached on the Holy Day of Easter to the *Infantes*, on the Sacraments,” in “Sermons, (230–272B) on the Liturgical Seasons,” Volume III/7, *The Works of Saint Augustine, (4th release)*, electronic edition, ed. John Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp, 2014).

to Paul's phrase "*one body and one spirit*" and draws out this analogy of the body. The human body is made of many parts, but is quickened by one spirit. This one spirit unites the body's parts and limbs, coordinates their functions, and commands their movements. If a part is separated from the body, it retains its shape and is recognizable as a body part, but it is no longer living since it does not have the spirit within it. By analogy, Augustine concludes that what the spirit is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the body of Christ. This theme is found again in sermon 267, once again on the occasion of Pentecost, in which Augustine states that "what the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the body of Christ, which is the Church."¹²⁸ Just as the soul quickens the body's parts and gives them different functions but one common life, so the Spirit gives different functions and gifts to each member of the church who together live one common life.

Augustine further describes the church as one eucharistic body in sermons 272 and 227 which were preached to the *infantes* on Pentecost and Easter respectively. In sermon 272, Augustine speaks of the mystery of the bread and wine as both the body and blood of Christ, and the believers themselves. First, he explores the reality of bread and wine as an analogy for individuals being made into one communal body. The multitude of believers are ground, mixed, baked together into one bread, and like multiple grapes hanging in a bunch, they form one juice poured together in one vessel. In these same sermons, Augustine also makes the ontological claim that the believers themselves are the body of Christ. Once again, he turns to the letters of Paul: "if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the apostle telling the faithful, *You, though, are the body of Christ and its members* (1 Cor 12:27). So if it's you that are the body of

¹²⁸ As Yves Congar clarifies, correcting a misreading found in modern ecclesiology (notably Pope Leo XIII in *Divinum Illud Munus*), Augustine does not say that the Holy Spirit *is* the soul of the church, an ontological claim. Instead, he makes an analogy of *function* to underscore the necessity of membership in the church in order for the believer to have the life of Christ in her. See *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 154.

Christ and its members, it's the mystery meaning you that has been placed on the Lord's table; what you receive is the mystery that means you." Again, in sermon 227, Augustine teaches that "if you receive [the body and blood] well, you are yourselves what you receive." Throughout these sermons, Augustine interprets St. Paul as teaching that the faithful are truly one body, the body of Christ, illustrated by the analogies of the spirit's role within the human body, and multiple grains of wheat being formed into one loaf. As with Paul, Augustine uses the language of believers and the church as a body not only as an effective analogy to convey what ecclesial unity is like, but also to communicate, through metaphor, an essential reality of Christian life.

3. Medieval developments in 'mystical body'

In the Pauline texts and writings of Augustine, the church is simply called "the body of Christ"—not the "mystical body" as it comes to be called in later centuries. As Henri de Lubac has shown in his now-classic *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, the term "mystical body" was originally used in reference to the Eucharist, not the church. Gradually, the Eucharist acquired the title of "true body" (*corpus verum*) and the term "mystical body" (*corpus mysticum*) was applied to the church. As debates over eucharistic realism ensued in the ninth to eleventh centuries, the Eucharist was shorn of the adjective 'mystical' and became specified instead by the terms 'true,' 'natural,' and 'physical.' Consequently, whereas in patristic and early medieval texts the church was frequently simply called "the body of Christ" or "the body of the Church" without further adjectives, it acquired the term "mystical" to distinguish it from the Eucharist, the 'true body.' This usage was common by the mid-eleventh century, and fixed by the thirteenth century.

In the centuries that followed, the term 'mystical body,' "which originally had a liturgical or sacramental meaning, took on a connotation of sociological content" and became "a

designation of the Church in its institutional and ecclesiological aspects,” while still transferring a ‘mystical’ aura to the institution.¹²⁹ *Corpus Christi mysticum* and *corpus Christi juridicum* became increasingly synonymous. Francis Oakley judges that this inversion of meaning of the term *mystical body*, and its consequent understanding of the church as akin to any secular polity, is significant because “it accelerated the process (already well advanced among the canonists [by the early fifteenth century]) whereby categories and concepts drawn from secular legal and political thinking were applied to the church.”¹³⁰ The application of *mystical body* to the church, followed by the desacramentalization of that term and its application to political bodies, led to the growth in the concept of the church as a jurisdictional polity or legal corporation. Because ecclesiology and political theory became increasingly intertwined, a history of mystical body ecclesiology must track the meaning of the phrase *corpus mysticum* in both spheres.

As ecclesiology and the term *corpus mysticum* became increasingly secularized and juridicized in the thirteenth century and onwards, the term *corpus mysticum* was picked up by jurists to shore up the autonomy and quasi-religious status of nascent territorial nations. The term *corpus mysticum* became capable of being applied to any corporate collectivity, especially one united under and in submission to a single head such as a king. It was used in both an “organological” mode to describe the relationship between head and members and a “corporational” mode to describe the supra-individual collective reality.¹³¹ In the political sphere, at times, *corpus mysticum* was understood as a ‘composite body’ with ‘composite authority’ and therefore was used to limit the absolute power of the king. Ernst Kantorowicz notes that

¹²⁹ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 195–96.

¹³⁰ Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 163.

¹³¹ These are Kantorowicz's descriptive terms and are basically parallel to my terms of “vertical” and “horizontal”. See Kantorowicz, chapter 5 (193–272).

constitutionalists in France argued that the mystical body represents the person of the king, and so the king cannot act against his mystical body.¹³² For English jurists, “the body politic, mystic, or public of England was not defined by the king or head alone, but by the king together with council and parliament”—that is, by the head together with the members.¹³³ Furthermore, the king was not himself the body, but only the head of the body. In this usage, the ‘corporational’ modality of the mystical body (a collectivity) is restricted by the ‘organological’ in that the king is the head of this body. At the same time, the corporational also prevents the organological from being strictly hierarchical and monarchial, in that the king is not himself the body, but is only a part of the body and cannot act against his body. The position that the king and polity together embody authority, “so much more important in English political thought than among the scholastic philosophers from whom it hailed, implied that head and body depended mutually on each other and that as the king was supreme in some respects, so was the polity in others.”¹³⁴

In the ecclesiastical sphere, as the papacy came into conflict with temporal powers in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, the term *corpus mysticum* was used to express the supreme authority of the church over the temporal realm. This came to a head in the reign of Boniface VIII, who conflicted with Philip the Fair of France over Philip’s taxation of the French clergy. Philip resisted Boniface’s prohibition against lay persons taxing clergy without papal consent (articulated in *Clericis Laicos* in 1296), and in response, Boniface issued in 1302 the bull *Unam Sanctam*, which asserted in no uncertain terms the pope’s supreme authority over the spiritual and the temporal realm (and argued that temporal authority is subject to spiritual authority).

¹³² Kantorowicz, 220.

¹³³ Kantorowicz, 225.

¹³⁴ Kantorowicz, 231. He is referring specifically to Fortescue’s definition of England as *dominium regale et politicum* which expressed this very idea that the “not the king alone but the king and polity together bore the responsibility for the commonweal” (226).

Notably, Boniface uses the image of a body to articulate his rationale: "Therefore there is one body of the one and only Church, and one head, not two heads, as if the Church were a monster. And this head is Christ, and his vicar, Peter, and his successor."¹³⁵ In other words, the pope alone, and no temporal figure, is the head and authority over the mystical body, the church. It even became possible for one theologian to argue that where the pope is, there is the mystical body; the mystical body was identified with, even subsumed by, the head (the pope) alone.¹³⁶ In Boniface VIII, then, the organic image of a church as a unified body with a sole authoritative head shores up papal authority over-against any other temporal power or figure. Though in reality jurisdictional and temporal power of the papacy was on the decline prior to and even more so after Boniface VIII's reign, *Unam Sanctam* "has well been termed the classic mediaeval expression of the papal claims to universal temporal sovereignty."¹³⁷ It does so through the metaphor of the body.

Of course, the century following Boniface VIII saw the Great Schism of the West (which itself saw a rise in curial jurisdictional and fiscal power) and the conciliarist movement which strove to limit the pope's sole authority. While the history of the schism does not need to be recounted here, it is worth noting how the notion of a body, with a head and members, was used in two quite different ways by canonists and conciliar theorists. From the mid-thirteenth century through the start of the Great Schism, there existed two different accounts of the nature of the church's unity.

The more conspicuous one, which has usually been regarded as the canonistic

¹³⁵ Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, in Frederic Austin Ogg, *A Source Book of Mediæval History: Documents Illustrative of European Life and Institutions from the German Invasion to the Renaissance* (New York: American Book Co., 1907), 386. The English translation of *Unam Sanctam* published therein is based upon the papal register published by P. Mury, *Revue des Questions Historiques*, vol. 46 (July 1889), 255–256. Translated in Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar H. McNeal, *Source Book for Mediaeval History: Selected Documents Illustrating the History of Europe in the Middle Age* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1905), 314–317.

¹³⁶ Alvarus Pelagius, cited in Kantorowicz, 204 and 230.

¹³⁷ Ogg, *A Source Book of Mediæval History*, 385.

doctrine *par excellence*, insisted that the unity of the Church could be secured only by a rigorous subordination of all the members to a single head. ...But side by side...there existed another theory...which stressed the corporate association of the members of a Church as the true principle of ecclesiastical unity, and which envisaged an exercise of corporate authority by the members of a church even in the absence of an effective head.¹³⁸

Here we see a parallel to the ‘corporate body and authority’ expression of the English jurists described by Kantorowicz. The relationship between the (temporal) head of a body and the members of a body is envisioned either as one of superiority and subordination, or of the collectivity of members that enables the body to function even without a head. It is this latter image of the ecclesial body that is expressed in and defended by the conciliarists. The conciliarist theory as expressed in the Councils of Constance and Basel held that “the final authority in the church...resides in the whole body of its members” and the cardinals, representing the whole body of the faithful, do not exhaust the authority of the whole body in electing a head.¹³⁹ The pope is not superior to the whole church and must exercise his power for the good of the whole church, and a council can set limits to prevent a pope from abusing his power. The vision of the body here is not one of ‘rigid subordination’ of the members to the head or of the ‘higher’ parts of the body ‘governing’ the lower.’ Rather, quite the opposite: the body orders the head and ensures that its power and rationality is used for proper ends. And the unity of the church, for these conciliarists, “resided ultimately in the association of its members with one another and with Christ, their ‘principal’ and ‘essential’ head, rather than in its domination by the pope, its subordinate and ‘accidental’ head.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1955), 240, cited in Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages*, 164.

¹³⁹ Oakley, 171.

¹⁴⁰ Oakley, 173.

4. Trent and post-Tridentine ecclesiology

At the Council of Trent, however, the image of the church as a body or ‘the body of Christ’ is notably absent. Instead, the church is seen primarily as a political entity, an organization in need of reform — a “Christian commonwealth,” in the language of the bull of convocation.¹⁴¹ In the canons and decrees themselves, the council simply uses the term “the Church.” There is no use of “the body of Christ” or “mystical body” as a controlling metaphor. The notion of the church as the body of Christ, or Christ as the head of His body, only appears five times throughout the documents, most often in the context of the church’s sacraments and with reference to 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians.¹⁴² While Trent did not produce a treatise on the church or on the authority of the papacy, the vast majority of its decrees of reform concern church governance, especially at the level of the episcopate; such reforms include, for example, appointments of bishops and prelates, limits on the collection of benefices, qualifications for ordination, and administration of vacant sees. Nevertheless, the implementation of the council resulted in increased Roman centralization. Thus, while the council strove for a “reform of head and members,” the result of the council was largely a “reform of members” (the clergy and episcopate) without a “reform of the head,” the papacy.

In the periods of the Counter-Reformation (1563–1650) and early modernity (1650–1800), “ecclesiology was primarily concerned with questions of Church polity and the relationship of the Church to civil governments” and was shaped in opposition to a Lutheran

¹⁴¹ The term “commonwealth” is used to refer to the church ten times in the bull of convocation. The term “holy Roman Church” is used three times, and only when speaking of “the cardinals of the holy Roman Church.” The image of the church as the “bark of Peter” is used once, when Paul III refers to his papacy as being called “to rule and pilot the bark of Peter.” Pope Paul III, “Bull of the convocation of the holy ecumenical council of Trent,” in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), 2.

¹⁴² Decree Concerning Justification, Chapter VII; Decree Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, Chapter II; The Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction, Chapter II; Doctrine Concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass, Chapter VI; Decree Concerning Reform, Chapter I.

emphasis on the ‘invisible church.’¹⁴³ “Not surprisingly, in the highly polemical context of post-Reformation theology, much of Catholic ecclesiology in the decades following the Council of Trent insisted that the true and only Church is a visible institution, a *societas perfecta*; that is, a society having within it all the means necessary for the attainment of its ends.”¹⁴⁴ The idea of the church as *societas perfecta* has roots in the Gregorian reforms, is found under the term *sufficiens per se* in Aquinas and the scholastics, and was systematized by the canonists in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁵ It is exemplified in Robert Bellarmine’s definition of the church as “an assembly of persons united by the profession of the same faith and communion in the same sacraments under the governance of legitimate pastors and especially of the one vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff.”¹⁴⁶ This definition of the church includes no reference to God, Christ, Spirit, or Trinity, and gives preference to the ‘externals’ of faith such as governance and creedal profession, emphasizing the institutional and organizational dimensions of the church to the extent that the church is “an assembly as visible and palpable as the assembly of the Roman people, or the kingdom of France, or the Republic of Venice.”¹⁴⁷

It is worth noting that Bellarmine speaks of membership in the church via body and soul language. He says that “the Church is a living body in which there is a soul and a body.”¹⁴⁸ Faith,

¹⁴³ Michael J. Himes, “The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 45.

¹⁴⁴ Himes, 47.

¹⁴⁵ Yves Congar, *L’Église: De Saint Augustin à l’époque Moderne*, Histoire Des Dogmes 20 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 383–84, n42. All translations from *L’Église* are my own.

¹⁴⁶ *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos* [henceforth *Controversiae*], 3 vol. (Ingolstadt, 1586–93) 4.3.2, in Himes, “The Development of Ecclesiology,” 47.

¹⁴⁷ “*Ecclesia enim est coetus hominum ita visibilis et palpabilis ut est coetus populi romani, vel regnum Galliae, aut respublica Venetorum.*” *Controversiae* 4.3.2. Translated from the French in Congar, *L’Église*, 373.

¹⁴⁸ Direct quotations of Bellarmine in this paragraph are taken from the following section of *Controversiae* 4.3.2.: “*Ecclesiam esse corpus vivum in quo est anima et corpus, et quidem anima sunt interna dona Spiritus sancti, fides, spes, charitas etc. Corpus sunt externa professio fidei, et communicatio sacramentorum. Ex quo fit, ut quidam sint de anima et de corpore Ecclesiae, et proinde uniti Christo capiti interius et exterius; et tales sunt perfectissime de Ecclesia; sunt enim quasi membra viva in corpore, quamvis etiam inter istos aliqui magis, aliqui minus vitam participant, et aliqui etiam solum initium vitae habeant, et quasi sensum, sed non motum, ut qui habent solam fidem*

hope, and charity are “inward gifts of the Holy Spirit to the soul,” and “the external profession of faith and the communication of the sacraments are the body.” Just as certain things are from the soul or the body of the church, in the same way people can be united to Christ the Head either interiorly or exteriorly, or both. The most perfect are those who are united to Christ both interiorly and exteriorly, by sharing in [*participent*] the soul of the church (i.e., having the virtues of faith, hope, and charity) and in the body (i.e. professing the faith and receiving the sacraments). They “are like living members in the body.” Bellarmine specifies further that Christians can share in the life of the body to a greater or lesser degree, and “some even only have the beginning of life—as if they had sense, but not motion—like those who have faith alone without charity.”¹⁴⁹ Moreover, “there are others that share in the life of the soul, and not in the life of the body.” These persons, such as catechumens and those who have been excommunicated, may have the virtues of faith and charity but do not publicly profess the faith or receive the sacraments. Finally, “there are others who share life in the body, and not with respect to the soul...and these are like hairs, or nails, or bad humors in the human body.” Such individuals are “those who do not have internal virtue but nevertheless have hope, or who profess faith out of fear or from some other temporal thing, and who share in the sacraments under the direction of pastors.” Heretics and infidels are members of the body of the church in its external elements, but do not belong to the soul of the church; they do not partake of its inner life of grace.¹⁵⁰

sine charitate. Rursum aliqui sint de anima, et non de corpore, ut catechumeni, vel excommunicati, si fidem et charitatem habeant, quod fieri potest. Denique, aliqui sint de corpore, et non de anima, ut qui nullam habent internam virtutem, et tamen spe, aut timore aliquo temporalis profitentur fidem, et in sacramentis communicant sub regimine pastorum, et tales sunt sicut capilli, aut unguis, aut mali humores in corpore humano.” I am grateful to Dr. Katherine Wrisley Shelby for assistance with the translation of this passage.

¹⁴⁹ This can be read as directed against Protestants in particular.

¹⁵⁰ Congar, *L'Église*, 373, drawing from Bellarmine's *Controversiae* 4.3.10.

In short, according to Bellarmine, one can be united to the ecclesial body juridically and sacramentally, but not enjoy the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit. Alternately, one can share in the theological virtues (the soul) even while not participating in the sacramental life of the church (the body). What we must notice here is the curious body-soul split in Bellarmine's thought. Whereas 'body and soul' language for the church was initially used, for example in Augustine, to say that anyone who has the Spirit belongs to the body, and in turn, anyone who is outside the body does not have the Spirit,¹⁵¹ in Bellarmine, one can belong to the body but not the soul, or to the soul but not the body. The body and the soul are not necessarily a unity. Yves Congar makes the further observation that Bellarmine does not primarily refer to the church as a whole as a body here, but only to certain elements of the church.

Bellarmine wants to translate the classic distinction between belonging to the church in number or body (*numero, corporaliter*) and in merit, intention, or spirit (*merito, mentaliter, spiritualiter*). But while this distinction was made regarding the manner in which people belong to the church which is at the same time the spiritual and visible body, the way in which Bellarmine expresses it has for a long time accredited a distinction, *within the church itself*, between a body made up of that which is visible in it, and a soul made of the interior elements of grace.¹⁵²

He thus gives the impression that there are two distinct entities, the visible church (body) and the invisible church (soul), that perfectly coincide. What is most important to Bellarmine is that membership in the ecclesial body is strictly gauged by the public profession of the faith and the reception of the sacraments, and is not inherently tied to the life of the Spirit. Quite succinctly: "in order to be part of some degree of the true Church, no inner virtue is required, in our opinion, but only the external profession of the faith and the community of the sacraments, something accessible to our senses."¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Augustine, "Sermon 268;" see above.

¹⁵² Congar, *L'Église*, 373, emphasis original.

¹⁵³ *Ut aliquis aliquo modo dici possit pars verae Ecclesiae...non putamus requiri ullam internam virtutem, sed tantum externam professionem fidei et sacramentorum communionem, quae sensu ipso percipitur.*" Translated from

When we consider this historical trajectory of the meaning of the metaphor of the church as a body in its horizontal dimension, we notice a gradual development or shift in meaning. In the Pauline letters through the patristic period, as the earliest Christian community began to understand its identity vis-à-vis the surrounding Greek, Jewish, and Roman societies, and eventually amidst persecutions, the term body evoked unity in diversity; individuals were made members of the one body by sharing in one Spirit and one eucharistic bread. In the middle ages, following the shifts in eucharistic theology and amidst increasing juridicization and papalization of the church, the term “body” signified an organized polity governed by a single head, the pope, who is the vicar of Christ the head. Following the Reformation and the Protestant emphasis on the “invisible church,” “body” signified, above all, visibility—the external or institutional features of the church; membership in the church came by way of participation in these “visible” aspects of the faith, namely, creedal profession, sacraments, and the apostolic ministry. Each subsequent ‘stage’ of meaning does not negate the prior, but builds on it and offers a new emphasis. Already we can see Douglas’ theory proving true: the changes in the meaning of the body correspond to changes in ecclesial context and ecclesio-political concerns. In its vertical dimension, St. Paul and the patristics easily acknowledged the church as the body *of* Christ—the community imbued with the Holy Spirit, made one by the Eucharist, identified with the risen Christ, and sent to continue his mission in history. As ecclesiology became identified with canon law in the middle ages and the term “mystical body” lost touch with its origins in the Eucharist, the vertical dimension of the metaphor (i.e., the church’s relation to Christ) received little attention. It is this approach of the past thousand years—one more concerned with the institutional, organizational, structural, juridical elements of the church than a systematic

the French in Congar, *L’Église*, 372–3.

theological understanding of the church's mission as it relates to God's mission in Christ—that characterizes ecclesiology until the nineteenth century, when Johann Adam Möhler, inspired by German Romanticism and rooted in patristic texts, revitalized ecclesiology with a new emphasis on the church as an organic body. To Möhler we turn next.

Chapter Two: The Nineteenth Century

“The Church is the external, visible structure of a holy, living power, of love, the body of the spirit of believers forming itself from the interior externally.”

—Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church* (1825), §49

“The Church is the body of the Lord: it is, in its universality, his visible form—his permanent, ever-renovated, humanity—his eternal revelation.”

—Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism* (1837), §38

I. Introduction: The Nineteenth Century: From Reformation to Renewal

As the previous chapter showed, from the late Middle Ages through the Reformation and the post-Tridentine era, ecclesiology was focused on questions of hierarchy and church polity—specifically, papal primacy, conciliarism, and the church’s relationship to states and civil authorities. “Thus begins the separation of the tract of ecclesiology from the other tracts of theology, to become one of apologetic and defensive tone in the face of secular and civic encroachments.”¹ Divorced from deeper theological loci, ecclesiology of this time was juridical and sociological in outlook. In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) spread a philosophical and theological spirit marked by rationalism and individualism. *Aufklärung* ecclesiology, in turn, tended to see the church as a collection of individuals who together form a society, and the church’s role as that of a moral teacher or guide.²

¹ Peter Riga, “The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler,” *Theological Studies* 22, no. 4 (1961): 566.

² See the introduction to Michael J. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1997). Ulrich Lehner provides a different take on the Catholic Enlightenment, arguing that it aimed at “making the faith more useful and practical,” and that the emphasis on parish life as the school of morality led to the creation of Catholic social ethics as a new discipline (*On the Road to Vatican II: German Catholic Enlightenment and Reform of the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 35–6.

Enlightenment philosophy proved to be an unsatisfactory foundation for Protestant and Catholic theology alike, reducing religion to reason and morality and depleting it of its mystical and symbolic dimensions. As Donald J. Dietrich writes, “rationalist concepts of the natural rights of man and secularist doctrines of state power...were tarnished by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic excesses. Turning from this traumatic era, both Catholics and Protestants were affected by the broad revival of religious faith, promoted by romanticism and German idealism, all of which had their roots in the eighteenth century.”³ As Romanticism took hold in Germany, it turned attention to the realm of mystery, spirituality, communal life, aesthetics, the oneness and harmony of the universe, and the generative dialectic of polarities. More an approach to the universe than a systematic philosophy, romanticism “cherished experience and tradition, emotion and reason, religion and science, the real and the ideal, the individual and the group, order and freedom, man and nature.”⁴ Romanticism “was a reaction to [the] lifeless and logical mode of thought” of the Enlightenment,⁵ for the “*Aufklärung* was inevitably alien to the incarnational and mystical dynamic of Roman Catholicism.”⁶ For Catholic theologians, the encounter with German romantic idealism came through Friedrich W. J. Schelling (1775–1854).

Thomas O’Meara has argued that Schelling’s romantic idealism was one of the most significant influences on nineteenth-century German theology. Schelling brought process and history, indeterminacy and will, feeling and insight, and the subjectivity of both the human and God into the thought-world of Roman Catholic theology. One of the first to incorporate Schelling’s romantic idealism into Catholic theology was the founder of the Tübingen School,

³ Donald J. Dietrich, *The Goethezeit and the Metamorphosis of Catholic Theology in the Age of Idealism*, vol. 128, European University Studies, XXIII (Berne: Peter Lang, 1979), 17.

⁴ Dietrich, *The Goethezeit and the Metamorphosis of Catholic Theology*, 24.

⁵ Riga, “The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler,” 568.

⁶ O’Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 68.

Johann Sebastian Drey. According to O'Meara, Drey drew two lasting insights from Schelling: "first, science's efforts constructing a system that unfolded from key ideas in a particular discipline; second, organic growth in all dimensions of the universe."⁷ For Schelling, the "idea" is "a reality that is abstract but capable of effecting particularity;...it is the entire intellectual atmosphere or system surrounding that reality and its apprehension. The idea is the union of the real and the ideal, the universal and the historical."⁸ This union of the real and the ideal is the very basis of knowledge for Schelling and is at the heart of his "scientific" (*wissenschaftlich*) method. Life and thought are united; all 'parts' of knowledge are related to, and are most fully understood within, the 'whole.' Science seeks the unity of the ideal and the real and "the discovery of that ideal in the phenomenal evidence *a posteriori*."⁹ In the case of ecclesiology, "the study of the church allows the scientific theologian to construct the ideal of Christian faith, to explain the history and present situation of the church by the unfolding of that idea, and so to reform the church by bringing the concrete community into accord with the ideal of its faith."¹⁰ Thus, in seeking the unfolding of the idea, the scientific theologian "must study the historical communal expression of religious ideas. A *wissenschaftlich* theology must take account of the historical forms Christianity has taken and the development of its distinctive ideas as expressed in doctrine and worship."¹¹ For Drey, the church "was not a system of ideas but essentially a living and sacred history, a participation in the eternal plan of which she is the organic

⁷ O'Meara, 96.

⁸ O'Meara, 101.

⁹ Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 38.

¹⁰ Himes, 38. This is an interesting philosophical claim to consider in ecclesiology—that the real is only intelligible in light of the ideal, and the ideal only exists as the real—in light of the critiques of "blueprint ecclesiologies" that I surveyed in chapter one. What modern theologians such as Drey and Möhler, via the thought of Schelling, suggest is that a 'blueprint ecclesiology' is *necessary* to know the church at all and bring about any needed church reform (which is a possibility because, as Drey admits, the church does not fully embody its ideal. See Himes, 39.)

¹¹ Himes, 37.

development, a transhistorical reality.”¹² This turn to seeking the concrete realization of the ideal in history will shape ideas of the Christian tradition developing organically throughout time.

The second and related insight that Drey absorbed from Schelling is the principle of organic growth. “Schelling had proclaimed nature to be organic; like consciousness, it lived out an evolutionary history. First nature, then history and art, and finally religion could all best be portrayed as an organism whose development was the matter of the spirit.”¹³ This turn to the organic as a root metaphor was “common currency” in the early nineteenth century and was a key feature of German Romanticism.¹⁴ The turn from mechanistic to organic root metaphors in philosophy and theology was brought about by developments in the natural sciences in the preceding decades, in particular, by the shift from physics and mathematics to chemistry and biology.

Previously, astronomy and mathematics had provided the scientific model of the universe and, as a result...the transcendence of the living God stood over against the inert matter and mechanistic causality of nature. When chemistry and biology suggested a new model of the universe, *livingness* became the essential principle of all reality, and, as a result, the transcendence of the living God no longer needed to be explained spatially – as outside, above, or beyond.¹⁵

The theologians at the newly-founded Tübingen school were shaped by the romantic spirit, the *wissenschaftlich* method, and the organic metaphor, and articulated their theological notions of tradition, creation and redemption, and the church through the romantic language of organic growth, development, and the oneness of the universe. The ethos of romantic idealism and the turn to the organic metaphor reshaped Catholic ecclesiology most powerfully through the work

¹² Riga, “The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler,” 572.

¹³ O’Meara, *Romantic Idealism*, 105.

¹⁴ Bradford E. Hinze, “Roman Catholic Theology: Tübingen,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 192.

¹⁵ Julia A. Lamm, “Romanticism and Pantheism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, 172–3, emphasis in original.

of Johann Adam Möhler. No longer a static society, the church was now seen as a living organism, growing and flowering through time. Though “Möhler was not the first to recognize the theological value of this organic imagery,” he “was the first among his theological contemporaries, however, to notice how the Romantic rhetoric of organicism could enhance the ancient Pauline metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ.”¹⁶

Mary Douglas’s grid-group theory has shown that the body is the symbol of the social, especially in hierarchical societies such as the Catholic Church. Body symbolism reflects, replicates, and reinforces the social order, and so images of the body can be analyzed for what they reveal about social concerns around boundaries, belonging, and order. Catholic ecclesiology in the nineteenth century fits this pattern—the ecclesiological commitments of each author shape his understanding of the body, and vice versa. In this chapter, we will see how varying images of the body—as a living organism, as an ordered society, as the self, or as a spouse—are invoked to explain the church’s unity, its hierarchical structure, and its authority. As was the case with theologians of previous eras, the metaphor of the church as a body, or as the body of Christ, functions in two main ways in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the image of the body is an inroad for understanding the unity of the church’s diverse members, its one shared common life, and its internal order or structure (the horizontal dimension). At other times, the image of the church as Christ’s body provides a way of expressing the church’s relationship to Christ (the vertical dimension). Throughout this chapter, both dimensions of the image of the body will be considered. I begin by excavating the two stages of Möhler’s ecclesiological thought for his two unique images of the body, first as living organism and then as a manifestation of the person who is its head. I then consider theologians of the late nineteenth century Roman School, who focus

¹⁶ John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

on the vertical dimension of the metaphor and emphasize Christ as the Head of his spousal body, and the texts of Vatican I and encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII which see the body as a society governed by a single head. The models of the body seen in this chapter and beyond, then, are the organic body and the ordered body (in the horizontal dimension) and the body as self and body as spouse (in the vertical dimension). I conclude with an analysis of the shortcomings—both theological and anthropological—of these models of the body and their “associated networks of meaning” (Soskice) and the ecclesiological doctrines they support.

II. Johann Adam Möhler and the Revival of Body Ecclesiology

Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) is known as the founder of modern systematic ecclesiology.¹⁷ A student of classical philology and church history at the Catholic seminary of Tübingen, he later joined its faculty and taught canon law and church history. Though his career spanned only fifteen years, his publications in ecclesiology had a remarkable impact on subsequent generations. Educated early on in the *Aufklärung* style of ecclesiology, Möhler’s initial writings in ecclesiology were drawn from canon law, were rationalistic and individualistic, and exhibited Febronian tendencies.¹⁸ Yet through close study of the patristics, the teaching and

¹⁷ A number of scholars have studied the development and coherence of Möhler’s ecclesiological thought, his place in the Tübingen school, and his influence on modern ecclesiology. Josef Geiselman is the foremost German scholar. In French, Pierre Chaillet and Yves Congar; in English, Michael Himes, Bradford Hinze, and Grant Kaplan. Yves Congar’s essay “Sur l’évolution et l’interprétation de la pensée de Moehler” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 27 (1938): 205–12 offers a comparison of schools of thought on the source and direction of Möhler’s movement between *Unity in the Church* and *Symbolism*. The book *The Legacy of the Tübingen School: The Relevance of Nineteenth-Century Theology For the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997) treats Möhler from a few different theological loci within the Tübingen school. For a summary of the influence of *Unity in the Church* in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century, see Peter Erb’s introduction in Möhler’s text, 61–66.

¹⁸ For Möhler’s earliest work in ecclesiology, see Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, chapter one. Febronianism, along with other forms of episcopalism, was an ecclesiological movement that challenged papal primacy and advocated increased authority and autonomy for bishops. It idealized the first centuries of the church, prior to the development of the papacy, as the normative model of the church. See Lehner, “Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim’s *Febronius*: A Censored Bishop and His Ecclesiology,” in *On the Road to Vatican II*, 143–170, especially 152–159.

mentorship of the Tübingen faculty (especially Johann Sebastian Drey), and dialogue with Protestant colleagues throughout Germany, Möhler's first book-length project *Unity in the Church, or, the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, is a stunning treatise on the mystical and intellectual unity of the church grounded in and flowing forth from the Spirit. Bringing German romantic idealism into dialogue with Catholic theology, the young Möhler's genius "was to apply evolution through dialectic and historical consciousness to the community, to bring together in time the historical reality and the revealed ideal of the church."¹⁹ *Unity in the Church* found a new legacy in the mid-twentieth century and at the Second Vatican Council, thanks to Yves Congar's determination to translate it into French in 1938 and his retrieval of Möhler's pneumatological basis of ecclesiology.²⁰ In his second major work, a book of comparative dogmatics entitled *Symbolism, or, Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced in their Symbolical Writings*, Möhler shifts to a more Christocentric approach, positing the incarnation as the foundation and origin of the church as well as its analogue. *Symbolism* was first published in 1832 and underwent five revisions in the following six years, influencing contemporaneous and subsequent generations of theologians at the Roman School, and through them, the First Vatican Council.²¹

¹⁹ O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism*, 151.

²⁰ Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church, or, the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, ed. and trans. by Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996). My references to the German are taken from *Die Einheit in Der Kirche: Oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte*, ed. Josef Rupert Geiselmann (Köln & Olten: Jakob Hegner, 1957). French edition: *L'Unité dans l'Église, ou le principe du Catholicisme d'après l'esprit des pères des trois premiers siècles de l'Église*, trans. Dom André de Lilienfeld, OSB, *Unam Sanctam* 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1938). In my citations of Möhler's texts, I will provide the page number corresponding to the English edition, followed by the section number which is consistent across translations.

²¹ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism, or, Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced in their Symbolical Writings*, trans. James Burton Robertson (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

In both works, Möhler's ecclesiology is rooted in his theological anthropology. He views the church as another manifestation of the God–world relation, and so his understanding of creation, primordial humanity, the consequences of the fall, and the nature of redemption in Christ lead directly to his understanding of how the individual believer encounters revelation and the nature of the church in relation to Christ and the Spirit. According to Himes, the key problematic that Möhler strives to resolve in both *Unity in the Church* and *Symbolism*—and his major contribution to ecclesiology—is to hold together, on the one hand, the individual's inner life of faith, and on the other hand, the visible, institutional, hierarchical reality of the church.²² This core question takes form in two dialectical relations: personal religious experience vis-à-vis the church, and internal ecclesial life vis-à-vis external office or form. In *Unity in the Church*, he relates these poles in two ways: first, through the organic root metaphor (all internal, invisible, spiritual realities seek outward, external expression); second, he posits the community, rather than the individual, as the locus of the Spirit's presence and work. Himes describes this as an “ascending ecclesiology.” In *Symbolism*, Möhler changes the terms of the question ever so slightly, from ‘invisible/visible’ to ‘divine/human’, and resolves it through Chalcedonian Christology, conceiving of the church as an extension of the incarnation—an unmixed, unconfused unity of divine and human. This results in what Himes calls a “descending ecclesiology,” in which the divine confronts the human through the objective authority of Christ manifested in the church.

In his brief scholarly career, Möhler moved ecclesiology out of the centuries-long pattern of juridical/sociological study and returned the field to the study of the mystery of the church and its relation with the Triune God. He did so through the metaphor of the church as a body, and for

²² Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 75.

this reason, is often credited, rather imprecisely, with recovering the theme of the church as the mystical body of Christ for modern theology.²³ Möhler's ecclesiological use of body language changes significantly between *Unity in the Church* and *Symbolism*, from an image of the body as a living organism in the former, to the body as an objective and full manifestation of the self in the latter, in a way that reflects and reinforces his changing theology of the divine-human relationship in the church, of tradition, and of hierarchy and authority. That is, his "ascending ecclesiology" is expressed through an "ascending somatology," and his "descending ecclesiology" is imaged in a "descending somatology."²⁴ (Already we can see the relevance of Mary Douglas' thesis that images of the body are reflections of the social order.) While *Unity in the Church*, insofar as it considered the church in relation to the divine mystery and drew on the church fathers, shaped the thought of the Roman School theologians, it is the Christocentric ecclesiology and descending somatology of *Symbolism* that retained the strongest influence into the mid-twentieth century.

1. *Unity in the Church*: the organic body

In *Unity in the Church*, Möhler describes the Catholic church as a visible development throughout time of the original Christian spirit that took root among the apostles with the sending

²³ By the end of this chapter and the next, I will have shown why I disagree with this attribution. Möhler's work is not a "mystical body ecclesiology" in the sense that this category encompasses works of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries up through *Mystici Corporis*. Those who credit Möhler with retrieving the theme of the church as the mystical body of Christ include Ormond Rush, "Roman Catholic Ecclesiology from the Council of Trent to Vatican II and Beyond," *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 276; Timothy R. Gabrielli, *One in Christ: Virgil Michel, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and Mystical Body Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 10; Michael J. Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 58; Peter Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," 586; Augustine Kerkvooorde, OSB, "La théologie du 'corps mystique' au dix-neuvième siècle," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 67 (1945): 418.

²⁴ I use the term "somatology" to avoid the phrase "theology of the body" which is inevitably, but unfortunately, associated with John Paul II's writings on the subject. In every instance, I mean "somatology" as a theological, not a secular, discipline, and as a subfield of theological anthropology.

of the Spirit at Pentecost. The most fundamental metaphor for the church in this ecclesiology is that of “living organism” (*lebendige Organismus*). In the spirit of nineteenth-century romanticism and its turn from the root metaphor of the machine to the organism, Möhler views the church as a living organism whose life unfolds in an ongoing process of genetic development through which all its externalities are organically connected to its originating spirit. Parallel to Paul’s use of the language of the body as both analogical and ontological, Möhler writes of the church as a living organism in the same way. The church can be described in terms of other living organisms, such as the human body, because the church is itself a living organism. His text is full of appeals to the organic. For example, he writes of “living speech,” the “living word,” and the “living gospel;” the “roots of faith,” “seeds of doctrine;” the church as “bride,” “mother,” and “womb;” Christian life and doctrine as “blooming,” “flourishing,” and “flowering;” the ecclesial body as having “one heart and soul;” the episcopacy and tradition as “organs” of the spirit; heresy as “twigs torn from a tree” or a “brook separated from its source;” the bishop as the “offspring” or “flower” of his diocese. The whole living, growing, organic world is an analogy for the life of the church—or, perhaps, vice versa. This root metaphor of the organic is, I contend, the most significant influence on Möhler’s understanding of the metaphor of the church as a body.

Because the early Möhler’s use of the body metaphor is strikingly different from how the metaphor of the “mystical body” is used in later theologians—a point often overlooked by scholars of mystical body ecclesiology—it is worth giving careful and sustained attention to what Möhler means when he speaks of the church as a body. In *Unity in the Church*, he uses the terms ‘body’ (*Körper*), ‘body of the Church,’ (*Körper der Kirche*) or ‘Church body’ (*Kirchenkörper*) in its horizontal modality to refer to the church as the external expression of

Christianity and the love of believers. The term ‘body’ conveys two meanings in this text. First, ‘body’ is the external expression of ‘spirit.’ Second, ‘body’ evokes or is synonymous with ‘the whole.’ Across all references to the church as a body, Möhler consistently maintains that the church is a living organism,²⁵ and like all living organisms, is symbolic in its structure in the sense that its outer visibility is a material expression of its inner invisible life.

A. The body as the external manifestation of the spirit

According to Möhler, all living organisms by nature seek external manifestation of the interior spirit. This is precisely what it means to be a living organism—the inner life principle expresses itself outwardly (in materiality, in language) in a continual and dynamic process. The body is precisely this outward, visible, material manifestation of the spirit. Therefore, the unity or oneness of the body is a result of the unity or oneness of the spirit. In this dynamic, the inner enjoys temporal priority over the outer, yet both poles exist in a mutually productive relationship. The spirit begets the body and is continually and essentially present to the body as its life principle; in turn, the body manifests and communicates the spirit to the world. Here, we see the influence of Schelling’s idealism: “for both Schelling and Möhler, the ideal must be concretely embodied. The ideal principle must seek real, historical, communal expression.”²⁶ This organic principle applies to the individual human body-person and all of human society as well. As Möhler writes, “the body of a person is a revelation of the spirit, manifests its presence, and develops in the person;”²⁷ likewise, on the social or communal level, the political state is the

²⁵ Möhler almost always uses the term *Körper* for “body” in the context of the church, though he does occasionally use *Leib*. My hunch is that perhaps Möhler found that *Körper* better conveys the physicality and externality that he has in mind when he speaks of the church body. The phrase “body of Christ” appears as both *Leib Christi* and *Körper Christi* (§1).

²⁶ Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 127.

²⁷ Möhler, *Unity in the Church* 210, §49. There are no commas in Erb’s English translation of this sentence, leaving it incoherent; I have added commas here based on the German original and French translation. The German reads,

outward structure of “the *koinōnion* [community] given by God.”²⁸ At every level of organic, human, and social life, the inner spirit or life expresses and forms itself outwardly in a visible and embodied way.

The organic principle also holds true for the ecclesial community: “the Christian Spirit and the Church are related as are spirit and body in the human person.”²⁹ The Holy Spirit brings about “the inner spiritual life of the Christian” which “bodies itself”³⁰ in the outer visible (ecclesial) community.³¹ When Möhler uses the term “Church body” (*Kirchenkörper*) or the visible church, he is referring to all those means by which Christianity is visibly expressed, lived, and handed down throughout the ages—in tradition, in Scripture, in doctrine, in ethics, in worship, and in ordered ecclesial offices. It is precisely this process, both spiritual and material, of the external expression of inner life that Möhler names tradition.³² In fact, Möhler uses the word “embodied” (*verkörpert*) six times to describe tradition and Scripture. Tradition is “embodied in the confessions of the Church,”³³ and Scripture “is the *expression* of [the] Holy Spirit embodied at the beginning of Christianity through specially graced apostles.”³⁴ Likewise,

“Der Körper der Menschen ist eine Offenbarung des Geistes, der in ihm sein Dasein bekundet, und sich entwickelt” (168). In the French translation, “Le corps de l’homme est la manifestation extérieure de l’esprit; celui-ci s’en sert pour affirmer sa présence” (162).

²⁸ Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 210, §49.

²⁹ Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 212, §49. The capitalization of “Christian Spirit” in the English translation by Erb may lead the reader to conclude that Möhler reduces the Holy Spirit to the Christian spirit (*Gemeingeist*). The original German does not resolve this issue: “*der christliche Geist und die Kirche zusammen wie Geist und Körper im Menschen*” (170). Since all nouns are capitalized in German, we cannot deduce from the plain text whether Möhler intended “spirit” here to refer to the communal spirit of Christian life, or the Holy Spirit present in the church. In the 1938 French translation, there is no capitalized phrase “Christian spirit.” This section reads: “La totalité des chrétiens formant une seule et véritable vie commune, on peut la comparer à l’homme composé d’une âme et d’un corps” (164). The French translation indicates that the analogy drawn here is that the totality of believers is to the communal ecclesial life as the soul is to the body. For reasons that are explained further below, I find the French rendition to be more accurate than Erb’s English translation.

³⁰ This is Congar’s phrase (“*se corporiser*”) in “Sur l’évolution et l’interprétation de la pensée de Moehler,” 210.

³¹ Möhler, 97, §8.

³² Möhler, 86, §3. For Möhler’s theology of tradition and doctrinal development, see Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*.

³³ Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 107, §12; see also 117, §16.

³⁴ Möhler, 117, §16.

doctrine is “the Christian Spirit *expressing* itself in concepts;”³⁵ Christian ethics are “the portrayal and *unfolding* of the inner, holy principle in life;”³⁶ and worship is “the *expression* of religious ideas, movements, and acts through forms *in space*, through *physical* symbols and symbolic acts, interspersed with speech or accompanied by it.”³⁷ All of these aspects of scripture, doctrine, ethics, and so on all constitute ‘the body’ of the church, for they are external manifestations and organic developments of the spirit. Ultimately, the church body is nothing more and nothing less than the visible manifestation of Christianity, the Christian spirit, the love of the faithful for Christ and one another. In Möhler’s own words, “the Church is the external, visible structure of a holy, living power, of love, the body of the spirit of believers forming itself from the interior externally.”³⁸

Because of this organic principle by which the spirit begets the body and the body communicates the spirit, there is a kind of identity between the church and the Spirit. This is precisely the source of unity, both synchronic and diachronic, in the church. The *one spirit*, the faith and love of Christians which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, is identical with, because it is the source of, the *one body* of the church (Eph 4:4–5). As Möhler says, “the Church is found where the Spirit is and the Spirit is where the Church is.”³⁹ And yet the organic and ecclesial body is ever dynamic and expanding. Because the spirit and body continually beget and communicate one another, Möhler can write that the Spirit surpasses or ‘tears down’ boundaries, seeking to bring all into the body. It is mediated by the body and is found only where the body is found, to be sure, but at the same time works to expand the body such that it is ever growing and

³⁵ Möhler, 102, §10.

³⁶ Möhler, 187, §43.

³⁷ Möhler, 198, §47, emphasis mine.

³⁸ Möhler, II.1 (preface), 209.

³⁹ Möhler, 97, §8. He echoes Irenaeus, whom he quotes: “where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and the totality of grace” (*Against the Heresies*, 3:24, 1, quoted in Möhler, 84, §2).

developing, bringing all people into the life of Christ. In fact, this is how Möhler describes the episcopacy. Dioceses are bounded entities, but those boundaries are surpassed for the sake of even greater unity when the bishops together form the episcopacy and express their unity in a metropolitan and primate.

One unique ecclesiological outcome of Möhler's application of the organic principle to the church can be seen in his account of heresy as destroying the unity of the body. Because the one spirit manifests itself in only one true body, heretics, whose doctrine arises from a non-Christian spirit (egoism), are not part of the church. Membership in the church is determined, therefore, not by juridical or sacramental criteria but by union with, and origination from, the Christian spirit. Möhler's use of body language to explain church membership and heresy is significant because stands in contrast to other uses of the image of the body to explain the same question. Compare Möhler's account with that of Bellarmine before him, for example, for whom one could belong to the 'body of the church' juridically through profession of the same faith, participation in the same sacraments, and submission to legitimate pastors, without belonging to the 'soul of the church'—an unthinkable concept for the Möhler of *Unity in the Church*.

Consider also *Mystici Corporis* after him, according to which all those who belong to Christ's Mystical Body must recognize Peter's successor as the visible head and vicar of Christ, the one chief Head.⁴⁰ Möhler does not argue that heretics are outside of the body because they are not in union with or obedient to the head. Rather, they are not part of the one body because they do not arise from the one spirit. The unity of spirit and body implied by the organic principle is the measure of membership in the ecclesial body.

⁴⁰ Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis Christi* On The Mystical Body of Christ (June 29, 1943), www.vatican.va, 40, 41.

B. The body as ‘the whole’

The second main feature of ‘the organic body’ in *Unity in the Church* is that it is synonymous with ‘the whole.’ Once again, this is true on both a universal and an ecclesial level. Möhler’s take on the relationship of parts to whole has its roots in Schelling’s romantic idealism and is the soil of his theology of orders in the church. Möhler explains that the whole is in the part, and the part is only properly a part when it exists within the whole, yet it is not itself the whole. The individual human being must know oneself as a member of the universal whole in order to know God.

This oneness with the *universal whole* is at the same time true existence in God, the source of true knowledge of God, the Creator of the *universal whole*, because the *universal whole* as such is grounded in God and is his total revelation. Thus, just as each individual in the whole is grounded in God, God can be known by the individual only in the whole.⁴¹

This dynamic applies equally in our relationship to Christ and the church. Möhler writes that “Christ, the Son of God, *the new Creator*, can be understood only in the totality of his believers..., only if the individual sees himself or herself as a member of the whole, *the new Creation*.”⁴² In order for an individual (the part) to know and embrace Christ and Christianity, one must know and embrace the church, the whole. To divorce oneself from the totality of believers, the church, is nothing less than to separate oneself from Christ. This is the foundation, the logic, the underpinning of mystical unity in the church. The ecclesial body is the whole in which we are united as individual members with one another and with Christ, who not only founded the community but reveals himself in the community.

Möhler uses the parts–whole framework to describe spiritual gifts within the church body and the relationship of ecclesial offices (bishop, metropolitan, and primate) to congregations and

⁴¹ Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 153, §31, emphases original.

⁴² Möhler, 154, §31.

to one another. First, just as the individual only exists as a part within a whole, the whole is only a *living* organism when its members maintain their individuality and life. “Through the manifold characteristics of single individuals directly, through their free development and unhindered movement, [the church] becomes a living organism, gloriously flourishing and blossoming.”⁴³ Each individual member of the church body retains the freedom to live in and from the one common spirit according to his or her own characteristics, and in so doing, brings about the growth and flourishing of the whole. Here, Möhler’s writing echoes 1 Corinthians, reminding the reader that the human body requires diverse members with unique functions, yet all determined by a single life principle, in order to exist as a living organism. Notably, this is the only point in *Unity in the Church* in which Möhler compares the church body to a human or animal body in particular, echoing Paul’s use in 1 Cor 12, insofar as the human body is made up of distinct ‘members’ such as eyes and feet.

In this organic framework, the bishop also exists as one part within the whole and as a visible expression of the invisible love of the community. Möhler describes “the idea of the episcopacy” as the natural result of the community’s desire to see itself and its love personified.⁴⁴ The bishop is a ‘part’ of the whole who represents the whole as its external manifestation (again following the organic principle that the inner seeks expression in/as the outer). He is an image *of* the community. Only when Christian unity is under attack or breaks down does the episcopacy take the form of ‘law’ confronting the community to preserve its authentic Christian spirit; in such instances, he must function as an image *to* the community of unity and love.⁴⁵ Möhler never

⁴³ Möhler, 166, §35; see also §53.

⁴⁴ Note that he says “the idea of the episcopacy” in distinction from just “the episcopacy.” This is an important qualification. Möhler insists that Christ chose the Twelve Apostles who then appointed bishops to ensure the continued proclamation of the gospel (see §50 and §51). As such, there is a distinction (or identity-in-distinction) between the idea of the bishop (the ideal) and the historical process of the foundation of the episcopacy (the real).

⁴⁵ Möhler, §55.

describes the bishop as the ‘head’ of the community, but rather as the ‘center’ of the community, the ‘offspring’ of the community and the “product of believers.” He is “the uniting of believers made visible in a specific place, the love of believers for one another made personal, the manifestation and living center point of the Christian disposition striving toward unity.”⁴⁶ This pattern also holds for the Roman pontiff, who is “the personalized center of the episcopate,” and is never described as the ‘head’ of the church or of the college of bishops or the vicar of Christ the Head.⁴⁷

Because the term “body” evokes “the whole” in Möhler’s organic framework, the term “body” does not refer to only the torso or trunk, for example (the body’s parts from the neck downward). Therefore, there is no juxtaposition in Möhler’s work of the ‘head’ as existing independently of, prior to, or over-against the ‘body.’ Moreover, there is no sense in Möhler in which the “body” of the church or of Christ names the laity in subordinate distinction to the clergy, their ‘head.’ In fact, the “Church body” does not primarily refer to people at all, but rather to the total outward, visible manifestation of Christianity. Individual believers, including all those who hold ecclesiastical office, are members of the body and derive their life from the whole of Christianity, the community of the faithful. The total effect of this broad meaning of ‘church body’ as the visible expression of the Christian spirit is the relativization of ecclesiastical structures of authority and governance, for the “whole constitution of the Church is, therefore, nothing other than embodied love...only the external expression of its essence, not the essence itself.”⁴⁸ It is not the hierarchy that generates and begets the Christian or divine spirit, but rather the divine Spirit, present in believers and the source of the Christian spirit, that gives rise to

⁴⁶ Möhler, 218, §52.

⁴⁷ Möhler, 261, §70. Pope Francis’ language of “center” and “periphery” resonates with Möhler’s more horizontal rather than vertical imagery here.

⁴⁸ Möhler, 246–7, §64.

hierarchically ordered leadership. Christianity is not essentially a concept, form, or institution, but *life*.

C. *The body of Christ?*

By this point, the reader may have noticed that Möhler's writing, or at least my presentation of it, does not speak of the church as the body *of Christ*. The body is the expression of the spirit, and the church body is the expression of the Christian spirit. Does Möhler in *Unity in the Church* have a theology of the church as the body *of Christ* in particular? And is the church in any way an 'ongoing incarnation'—either of Christ, as we see in his later work *Symbolism* and much of the ecclesiological tradition since, or of the Holy Spirit?

Reference to the church as "the body *of Christ*" is not common in *Unity in the Church*, though it is not nonexistent either.⁴⁹ When the phrase "the body of Christ" does appear in reference to the church, it is most often found within a direct quotation from or explanation of a patristic writer or Pauline letters. For the Möhler of *Unity in the Church*, Christ's relationship to the church is that of founder (both in its temporal origin and its progressive development) and object of the community's knowledge and love. Christ gathered the apostles and sent his Spirit among them to enliven them, form them into one community, and sustain that community

⁴⁹ As with note 23 above, this point is not always noticed by readers of Möhler. For example, in his essay "The Holy Spirit and The Catholic Tradition," Hinze paraphrases Möhler's work in *Unity in the Church* using the term "body of Christ" or "the organic body of Christ" twice, although this is not the language that Möhler himself uses (see pages 80, 83). Ormond Rush names Möhler as "one of the first to retrieve the theme" of "the church as the Mystical Body of Christ...particularly in his later work *Symbolik*" ("Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," 276). Himes says that Möhler's "mature incarnation-centered ecclesiology [in *Symbolism*] was an important moment in the recovery of the image of the Mystical Body of Christ for the Church" ("The Development of Ecclesiology," 58, emphasis mine). Yves Congar has a more nuanced and accurate reading. Congar does not call the church in Möhler's work the "mystical body of Christ," but a "mystical body" and an "ecclesial body" that is pneumatically constituted ("Lumen Gentium" no 7, 'L'Eglise, Corps mystique du Christ' vu au terme de huit siècles d'histoire de la théologie du Corps mystique," in *Au service de la parole de Dieu: Mélanges offerts à Monseigneur André Marie Charue* (J. Duculot Gembloux, 1969), 179–202).

throughout history. In the ecclesial community, the believer encounters the Spirit of Christ and the communal spirit of love. “Through [Christ] the community was established, by him the wall of partition that stood between human beings was destroyed, by him the love in the Holy Spirit flowed forth into our hearts.”⁵⁰ Thus, the Spirit of Christ is present in the church—even *essentially present in the church*⁵¹—but the church is not the ongoing incarnation of Christ. In no place in *Unity in the Church* does Möhler state, or insinuate, that the church is the incarnation or embodiment of Christ. He uses the metaphor of the body almost exclusively in its ‘horizontal’ modality to describe the life and unity of the church as a human community existing in history.

So, while it is easy to defend the position that Möhler does not identify the church as an ‘ongoing incarnation’ of Christ in *Unity in the Church* as he does several years later in *Symbolism*, the question of whether he sees the church as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit needs closer consideration here. In *Ongoing Incarnation*, Himes gives a remarkably lucid account of Möhler’s concern with Schleiermacher’s Sabellian trinitarian theology and its inevitable slide into pantheism. By reducing the Holy Spirit to the Christian spirit (*Gemeingeist*), Schleiermacher collapses the God–humankind relationship, denies the freedom and transcendence of the divine, and violates the integrity and freedom of the human. Because Möhler was admittedly influenced by Schleiermacher in *Unity in the Church*, he became deeply concerned with the risk of pantheism in his own work. Consequently, he spent the next several years studying Athanasius and Anselm in order to work out a more adequate divine–human relationship, one that balances divine transcendence and human freedom and will become the foundation of *Symbolism*.

Later scholars of Möhler seem to agree, with varying degrees of dodginess, that Möhler lands in pantheism. Himes finds that he at least ran this risk, saying that in *Unity in the Church*,

⁵⁰ Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 94, §7.

⁵¹ Möhler, 82, §1.

“Möhlner was hard put to maintain the distinction between the Christian *Gemeingeist* and the Holy Spirit. The 1825 work did open the possibility of simply making the church into the incarnate Spirit.”⁵² In a different essay, Himes concludes that Möhlner does indeed absorb the human into the divine in his early work, though that was obviously not his intention. Himes writes that Möhlner “clearly differentiates between the transcendent Spirit and the spirit of the community in that the latter is the effect of the former: the *Gemeingeist* is created by the Holy Spirit and is the product of the Spirit’s work. But in practice that distinction loses its importance;” the *Gemeingeist* is, ultimately, “the only Spirit *that matters*.”⁵³ Bradford Hinze’s reading is similar. He notes that “there are passages where Möhlner pushed the identification of the inner Spirit with the outer body of the Church so far as to leave apparently little room for the role of the human. ... This identification left him open to the charge of ecclesiological monophysitism, a charge that is leveled against his Word-centered ecclesiology as well.”⁵⁴ But, in distinction from Himes, Hinze himself does not fully or clearly make this charge against Möhlner.

Why does this question of pantheism, or the reduction of the Holy Spirit to the Christian *Gemeingeist*, matter? Because herein lies the distinction between a sacramental ecclesiology, and ecclesiological monophysitism; between an understanding of the church as a living body that manifests the Christian spirit, and an understanding of the ecclesial body as the Holy Spirit itself. If the heart of the pantheism concern is that Möhlner does not have an account of the work of the

⁵² Michael J. Himes, “Divinizing the Church: Strauss and Barth on Möhlner’s Ecclesiology,” in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 97.

⁵³ Himes, “‘A Great Theologian of Our Time’: Möhlner on Schleiermacher,” *The Heythrop Journal* 37 (1996), 30–31.

⁵⁴ Bradford E. Hinze, “The Holy Spirit and the Catholic Tradition: The Legacy of Johann Adam Möhlner,” in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, 91–2, n20. Interestingly, Riga makes this accusation of ecclesiological monophysitism against *Unity in the Church*, but for the reason that it leaves too little room for *Christ’s* action in the church (“The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhlner,” 576).

Spirit beyond the church, or the work of the Spirit in a prophetic way that challenges the ecclesial body, then this concern is fair. But it is not correct to conclude that Möhler's ecclesiology results in a reductive identification of the human and the divine. Since this issue of ecclesiological monophysitism arises again in his Christocentric ecclesiology in *Symbolism*, it is important to see how he avoids this in *Unity*.

First, in several places, Möhler clearly states that the divine Spirit *forms* the Christian spirit, which in turn forms the church (recall the organic principle). In this way, the believing community is the *work of*, or *result of*, the divine Spirit. Through the Spirit, the Christian faithful “are held and bound together as a whole so that the one spirit of believers *is the action of* the one divine Spirit.”⁵⁵ The church is precisely “the totality of believers that the Spirit forms.”⁵⁶ Second, the Spirit *sustains* the church, *fills* the church, and is its life principle, but again, is not itself the church. Möhler states that “the Church *exists through* a life directly and continually moved by the divine Spirit, and is *maintained* and *continued* by the loving mutual exchange of believers.”⁵⁷ This is not an ‘ongoing incarnation’ ecclesiology, but is a theology of indefectibility, that is, an account of the perpetual, covenantal gift of the Spirit promised and sent by Christ to the believing community.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the most nuanced interpretation of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the church is that they are *coextensive*, but not *identical*. The significance of this distinction is that

the *Gemeingeist* of the Church would then be aligned with the Spirit, its extent would be equivalent to that of the Spirit, it would be the full revelation of the Spirit, but would also be *dependent upon* the Spirit. *Thus the transcendence of the divine Spirit is maintained* with regard to the *Gemeingeist*, just as the

⁵⁵ Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, 83, §1, emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ Möhler, 84, §2.

⁵⁷ Möhler, *ibid.*, 93, §7, italics mine (the original is entirely in italics).

⁵⁸ Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 312–3.

transcendence of God is maintained with regard to the universe.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, while it is clear that the church is neither the incarnation of Christ nor the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, there remains a sacramental or symbolic logic to his ecclesiology—just as the invisible divine Word expressed itself in visible human flesh, so too the Christian spirit expresses itself in the visible church. To say that the church follows a sacramental logic is precisely the theological expression of Möhler’s organic framework which views the body as an external expression of an inner reality. The incarnation, the church’s sacraments, and the organic principle express one common idea—that the spirit takes flesh.’⁶⁰ The church is not the ‘ongoing incarnation’ of Christ or the Holy Spirit, but it *is* the visible, external manifestation of the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic spirit which is the work of the Holy Spirit. The church is the inherently necessary expression of living Christianity; it is the embodiment—the ‘ongoing incarnation’—of Christian faith and love. Ultimately, Möhler’s central concern in *Unity in the Church* is not to articulate how God, Christ, or the Spirit is present in or to the world, but how *Christianity*, the true faith, is present in and available to the world. His answer is that it is present and identical to itself over time through the one true visible church. Möhler’s focus is, as his title indicates, the oneness of the Christian faith, and the unity of the invisible and visible dimensions of Christianity.

In sum, in *Unity in the Church* Möhler provides a pneumatocentric, sacramental, and organic ecclesiology in which the church is a living organism, a living body. The church can be understood fruitfully through the analogy of other living organic bodies (including the human

⁵⁹ Himes, “‘A Great Theologian of Our Time,’” 30–31, emphasis mine. As noted in the footnote above, Himes simply concludes that the distinction between the *Gemeingeist* and the Holy Spirit doesn’t result in any practical distinction between Church and Spirit. In my view, the distinction is still crucial because it leaves room to account for ecclesial sin and the occasional failure of the church to manifest the divine Spirit. In this regard, the ‘practical distinction’ between the Church and the Spirit is painfully obvious.

⁶⁰ Möhler names both the incarnation and the organic principle as the ‘original image of the church’ (*Unity in the Church* 157).

body) but *is not* the incarnate presence of Christ in a “transubstantiationary”⁶¹ sense.

Nevertheless, the church is the embodied, incarnate, visible, real manifestation of Christian love and faith in and knowledge of Christ. The Christian spirit, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit internalized in the lives of believers, is progressively expressed in tradition, Scripture, doctrine, worship, the episcopacy, and the pontiff. This external expression of Christianity—the visible church—fulfills the inner spirit’s desire to be externalized, allows the life and love of Christ to be communicated to others, and preserves the Christian spirit as an objective measure of authenticity. He roots this in Scripture in Eph 4:4 and 1 Cor 12, and in the writings of church fathers such as Clement, Origen, Cyprian, and Irenaeus. He is aided above all by the romantic and idealist philosophy of his time, articulated by Schelling and passed on to Catholic theologians through Drey. The pneumatocentric and sacramental ecclesiology of *Unity in the Church* is subsequently developed in a distinctly Christocentric vein in *Symbolism*.

2. Symbolism: Body as self

Almost immediately after the publication of *Unity in the Church*, Möhler’s ecclesiology underwent significant development due to his critical engagement with his Protestant contemporaries Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ferdinand Baur and his study of Athanasius’ Christology and Anselm’s anthropology and soteriology.⁶² In an effort to avoid the pantheism

⁶¹ Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in the Pauline Corpus: A Re-Examination* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), xv. See my chapter one, n117.

⁶² Riga finds that Johann Michael Sailer and Drey had the greatest impact on Möhler’s ecclesiology, far more than that of his Protestant contemporaries such as August Neander and Schleiermacher (to which Himes gives as much attention) (“The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler,” 570–573). Himes states that Möhler’s contemporaries saw Schleiermacher’s influence “not in any particular treatment of doctrine so much as in the foundation of Möhler’s whole view of Christianity” (“A Great Theologian of Our Time,” 25). Himes argues that what Möhler’s contemporaries saw as Schleiermacherian, for example in §31 of *Unity in the Church*, is better understood as the influence of the Romantic idealism of the day which shaped Schleiermacher’s thought as well. O’Meara finds more evidence of Hegel, especially in *Symbolism*, than do Himes or Riga.

which he judged inevitable in Schleiermacher's work, to which he was admittedly indebted in *Unity in the Church*, Möhler shifted his view of the God–world relation away from a focus on human interiority as it grasps revelation and toward an emphasis on the exteriority of God's revelation as it 'confronts' the believer with divine truth. Möhler's intellectual change between *Unity in the Church* and *Symbolism* occurs in the realm of theological anthropology and moves to articulating the divine–human relationship as expressed in the church on analogy to the incarnation: two natures, united, undivided, inseparable, yet unconfused. This Christocentric turn in Möhler's thought provides a new framework for addressing his enduring question: what is the relationship between the inner, personal life of faith and the outer institutional reality of the church? Between the invisible and the visible dimensions of Christian life? In *Unity in the Church* he resolved this question through the organic principle: all inner life seeks exterior expression; likewise, the Christian spirit in the hearts of believers seeks visible manifestation as the church. In *Symbolism*, he addresses this through the incarnational principle: just as the divine Word took on visible human form in Jesus Christ, so must the continuation of divine work in history take on visible human form in the church. This is not an "inner→outer" dynamic or "ascending ecclesiology," but an "outer→inner" dynamic, or even an "above→below" dynamic (what Himes calls a "descending ecclesiology"). As a result, his ecclesial body language changes as well.

Because he has shifted his attention away from the organic development of the life of the church, Möhler does not use body language nearly as widely or as often in *Symbolism*. His image of the body—what it is, whence it originates, how it functions—is more implicit than explicit. In *Symbolism*, the church isn't modeled on a general organic body as much as it is envisioned as the authoritative, objective presence of Christ. It is important to remember here that *Symbolism* is a

work of comparative dogmatics, and so Möhler is particularly concerned to refute the errors of foundational Protestant thinkers like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, especially on the notion of an “invisible church.” Through a careful reading of Möhler’s understanding of the church as “the body of Christ” and the way in which Christ’s authority is present in the church, we garner the image of the body as an objective manifestation and mediator of personal presence that is formed and governed by the head—“body” is synonymous with “self.” Applied to ecclesiology, the church, as the body of Christ, is the objective and authoritative interpreter and mediator of Christian teaching; it is the “perpetual incarnation” of Christ and his continued presence in history. The members of the church are formed as one communal body through the head, the bishop, just as the body of bishops is formed and united by their head, the pope.

A. “Even as the faithful are sometimes called ‘the body of Christ’”

In this comparative work of Protestant versus Catholic doctrines, Möhler begins his account of Catholic ecclesiology by defining the church as a “visible community of believers, founded by Christ,” which, through the apostles and their successors and with the guidance of Christ’s spirit, continues his redemptive and sanctifying works throughout history.⁶³ Möhler then immediately moves to expound the visibility of the church as essential to its nature: “the ultimate reason of the visibility of the Church is to be found in the *incarnation* of the Divine Word.”⁶⁴ Had the Word come invisibly in hearts of believers, then the church would be an invisible church. “But since the Word became *flesh*, it expressed itself in an outward, perceptible, and human manner” and continues to communicate itself through “a *visible, human* medium”—the

⁶³ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 258, §36.

⁶⁴ Möhler, 258, §36, emphasis original.

visible society of the church.⁶⁵ Thus far, Möhler is only positing an analogy between the incarnation and the church: because the Word of God became visible in human form, so must the church be visible and human, that is, it must follow the logic of the incarnation. But Möhler moves beyond the analogy to establish an essential connection between the church and the incarnation. Once Christ gathered a community together,

a living, well-connected, visible association of the faithful sprang up, whereof it might be said—there they are, there is his Church, his institution wherein he continueth to live, his spirit continueth to work, and the word uttered by him eternally resounds. Thus, the visible Church, from the point of view here taken, *is the Son of God himself*, everlastingly manifesting himself among men in a human form, perpetually renovated, and eternally young—the *permanent incarnation* of the same, as in Holy Writ, *even the faithful are called ‘the body of Christ.’*⁶⁶

In this well-known passage, Möhler interprets the scriptural description of the faithful as “the body of Christ” to mean that the faithful, gathered together as the visible church, are nothing less than the “permanent incarnation” of Christ. Not only does the church follow the logic or pattern of the incarnation, of the divine manifesting in visible human form, but the church *is* the word and spirit of Christ having “put on flesh and blood.” The body is understood here as the material, fleshly reality that makes present the reality of the person whose body it is. It is the incarnation—the visible, sensible reality—of the person. So it is with the church understood as a body: “The Church is the body of the Lord: it is, in its universality, his visible form—his permanent, ever-renovated, humanity—his eternal revelation. He dwells in the community; all his promises, all his gifts are bequeathed to the community—but to no individual, as such, since the time of the apostles.”⁶⁷ The church, being the body of Christ, makes present in every age Christ’s divinity and humanity, his life, his spirit, his saving work. “He it is who, concealed

⁶⁵ Möhler, 258, §36, emphasis original.

⁶⁶ Möhler, 258–9, §36, emphasis mine.

⁶⁷ Möhler, 278, §38.

under earthly and human forms, works in the Church.”⁶⁸ Framing the church as the perpetual incarnation of Christ allows Möhler to establish the divine and human, the invisible and the visible, elements of the church in an undivided yet unconfused union in which the visible, human dimension is necessary for divine revelation. In fact, Christ’s work *could not* continue without the church. “The divine without the human has no existence for us” and the human is “the organ and...the manifestation of the divine.”⁶⁹ The quote from Irenaeus to which Möhler appeals in *Unity in the Church*—“where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and the totality of grace”—takes on a new, Christocentric form in Möhler’s words in *Symbolism*: “Christ is in the Church, and the Church in him.”⁷⁰

Already we can see that Möhler continues to posit a correspondence or identity between the outer and the inner as we saw in *Unity in the Church*. But in *Symbolism*, the order of temporal priority and importance is reversed. Whereas in *Unity in the Church* the inner spirit and faith of the community gives rise to and is encountered in the church, here the outer, visible reality of the church precedes and births the inner, invisible or spiritual reality, which is Christ’s own self. Objectivity gives rise to subjectivity; the body generates the spirit. In contrast to Luther’s emphasis on the invisible church, “the Catholics teach: the visible Church is first, then comes the invisible; the former gives birth to the latter.”⁷¹ The new order of priority here does not deny the necessity of individual appropriation of the faith, for “we are not *living* members of the external Church, until we belong to the interior one.”⁷² But this subjective grasp of faith and

⁶⁸ Möhler, 259, §36.

⁶⁹ Möhler, 259, §36.

⁷⁰ Möhler, 261, §37.

⁷¹ Möhler, 330, §48.

⁷² Möhler, 335, §49.

Christian love, “this kingdom of God begins, grows, and ripens within us, after it has first externally encountered us.”⁷³

Möhlher applies his new ordering of outer and inner when interpreting the church’s historical origins at Pentecost as well. He stresses that the Spirit was only sent when the apostles and disciples were already gathered together in one place in a visible community.

At last the Holy Spirit, that had been promised, *appeared*: he took an outward shape—the form of fiery tongues—...He wished not to come inwardly as if he designed to uphold an invisible community; but in the same way as the Word was become *flesh*, so he came in a manner obvious to the senses, and amid violent sensible commotions, like to ‘a rushing mighty wind.’⁷⁴

Patterned on the incarnation, the Spirit comes in visible, sensible, audible form to fill individuals “with power from above” and bring about in them a loving union with one another and with Christ. Möhlher claims this to be “the ordinance of the Lord for all times”: “the union of the interior man with Christ could take effect only under outward conditions, and in communion with his disciples.”⁷⁵ This is the foundation for the church’s sacraments, which are visible signs, enacted by the community, that denote and convey invisible gifts. The external (bodily, sensible, the social, the human) and the internal (inner, grace, the divine) are “inseparable,” but the former is necessarily prior for the mediation of the latter.

The two elements of Möhlher’s ecclesiology in *Symbolism* described thus far—the church as the ongoing incarnation, and the priority of the outer over the inner—dramatically shape his account of the church’s authority. Since the church is the ongoing incarnation of Christ, the church, “though composed of men, is yet not purely human. Nay, as in Christ the divinity and the humanity are to be clearly distinguished, though both are bound in unity; so is he in undivided

⁷³ Möhlher, 335, §49.

⁷⁴ Möhlher, 260, §37. emphasis original.

⁷⁵ Möhlher, 260, §37.

entireness perpetuated in the Church.”⁷⁶ Thus, Christ’s divine authority is transferred to the church through this ecclesiological *communicatio idomatum*. The divine and human elements of the church “change their predicates. If the divine—the living Christ and his spirit—constitute undoubtedly that which is infallible, and eternally inerrable in the church; so also the human is infallible and inerrable in the same way.”⁷⁷ In and through the church, especially through tradition and its interpretation of scripture, divine truth and authority are made objectively present. Revealing the incarnational logic to his ecclesiology once again, Möhler writes: “the divine truth, in one word, must be embodied in Christ Jesus, and thereby be bodied forth in an outward and living phenomenon, and accordingly become *a deciding authority, in order to seize deeply on the whole man*, and to put an end to pagan skepticism.”⁷⁸ No longer is the episcopal structure the outcome and reflective image of the community’s *a priori* life and love. The authority of the church is the authority of Christ, and dogmatic statements of faith and morals are “to be revered as the sentences of Christ himself.”⁷⁹ In this logic, the magisterium speaks “not only *from* the believing community, but *to* it.”⁸⁰ The church, the ongoing incarnation, is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture, the embodiment and bearer of Tradition, “the Christian religion in its objective form—its living exposition.”⁸¹ The visibility and authority of the church matches and fulfills the anthropological need for an authoritative body to protect against human egotism and ignorance.⁸² It is precisely the error of Luther, in Möhler’s judgment, and a tragic misapprehension of the meaning of the incarnation, to presume that one’s subjective

⁷⁶ Möhler, 259, §36, emphasis mine.

⁷⁷ Möhler, 259, §36.

⁷⁸ Möhler, 265, §37, emphasis original.

⁷⁹ Möhler, 281, §38.

⁸⁰ Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 201.

⁸¹ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 259, §36.

⁸² The anthropological desires that are matched by the Church are described in §37. This section was added only in the second edition of the book, and in Himes’ opinion, is Möhler’s attempt to integrate *Unity in the Church*’s ‘ascending ecclesiology’ into the present work to balance the ‘descending ecclesiology’ of §36.

interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture can be understood with certainty through the power of one's own mind, apart from the authority and objectivity of the visible church.

But who or what composes this ecclesial 'body of Christ?' I argued that in *Unity in the Church* the ecclesial body is comprised of all exterior manifestations of the Christian spirit, including tradition, Scripture, doctrine, worship, ethics, as well as the entire believing community, laity and clergy alike, gathered together. In *Symbolism*, this question can only be answered by considering the image and function of "the head."

B. Headship of the body

Möhlér's shift from inner→outer in *Unity in the Church* to outer →inner or above→below in *Symbolism* results in a very different theology of the hierarchy, one that draws out an image of the head as distinct from the body. In his discussion of the hierarchy in §43, "the body" no longer evokes "the whole," but rather indicates "the laity," or all those subordinate to the episcopacy.⁸³ The 'head' stands above and is superior to 'the body' in an image of verticality and top-down generation. The function of the head is to form the body and hold it together in a visible unity.

Though the order in which Möhlér addresses the ranks of the hierarchy in *Symbolism* is 'ascending,' proceeding from priest to bishop to pope (reminiscent of *Unity in the Church*), the logic he unveils is the reverse: priestly ordination requires a bishop, and an episcopacy requires a pope as its center and head. Thus, the order of importance is 'descending': the pope is the head from which other sacramental and non-sacramental orders, and indeed the entire body of the church, proceed. In other words, the head is not the *expression* of the body or the communal love

⁸³ Möhlér doesn't directly refer to priests as "heads" of their parishes, but insofar as they are "manifestations of the bishop," they can be understood to be part of the 'head' rather than the 'body'.

of believers, or even its pinnacle, but is the *source* of the body as a unification of its individual parts. Möhler writes: “if the episcopate is to form a corporation, outwardly as well as inwardly bound together, in order to unite all believers into one harmonious life,” it needs a head and a center.⁸⁴ The pope is this “centre of unity, and the head of the episcopate.”⁸⁵ This head, which is instituted by Christ, binds the parts (ex. individual Christians, bishops) together and causes or enables them to work toward the good of the whole. Indeed, the head is virtually *the source of the body qua body*, that is, as a functional whole. Möhler writes these stunning words:

What a helpless, shapeless mass, incapable of all combined action, would the Catholic Church not have been, spread as she is over all the kingdoms of the earth, over all the parts of the world, had she been possessed of no head, no supreme bishop, revered by all.⁸⁶

Without a head, there would be no body, only a dispersed population of amoeba-like creatures, trapped in their own individualism and unable to develop into a more complex, multicellular whole. And if all the members were to act and develop of their own accord, there would be a “dissolution of the whole body.”⁸⁷ The head brings about the existence of the body *as a body*, as a whole that is capable of acting as a whole and existing as “a visible society representing the place of Christ.”⁸⁸ The latter is dependent on the former for its very existence. To put this in more directly ecclesiastical and theological terms, the pope, as head of the church, is the source of the church’s unity and existence as a whole and living entity that embodies and continues to make available salvation in Christ. Likewise, each bishop is the head of his diocese, uniting his sheep into a common flock. This ecclesiological perspective is an extreme

⁸⁴ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 306, §43.

⁸⁵ Möhler, 306, §43.

⁸⁶ Möhler, 307, §43.

⁸⁷ Möhler, 307, §43.

⁸⁸ Möhler, 307, §43. Note that the language here of “representing the place of Christ” suggests a bit more distance between Christ and the church than does his earlier phrase “ongoing incarnation.”

manifestation, even a distortion, of the parts–whole dynamic of romantic idealism as described at the outset of this chapter.

Two observations are to be drawn from this, one methodological and one theological. First, note what is missing from these statements on headship. Möhler’s argument is not that, as Christ is the divine Head of his Body, so his vicar the pope is head of Christ’s body on earth. He does not cite or refer to Col 1:18, Eph 4:15–16, or Eph 5:23 which name Christ as the head of his body, the church. Rather, Möhler once again has in mind an organic understanding of a body (a human or any other animal body) and the presumed role of the head therein—or possibly even a social body such as a kingdom with the king as its head⁸⁹—an interesting departure from his otherwise deeply Christological ecclesiology.

My second observation is that what the Spirit/spirit does in relation to the body in *Unity in the Church*, Christ or even the pope does in relation to the body in *Symbolism*. In *Unity in the Church*, Möhler attributed the unity of the church to the oneness of the Christian spirit, a product of the one Divine Spirit, which organically produces one body (Eph 4). In *Symbolism* however, Christ or the head of the church on earth accomplishes this task. According to the divine element of the church, the church is one because Christ is one, his work is one, and his truth is one.⁹⁰ According to the human element in the church, the church is one because the pope, the head, forms the individual members into one whole body. In either case, Christ or the pope constitutes the whole, unites the various parts, and enables the continuation of Christian faith and mission in the world.

⁸⁹ See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), as referenced in Chapter One.

⁹⁰ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 264, §37.

In spite of the theology of headship described above, Möhler lays out a curiously ambiguous understanding of infallibility in *Symbolism*, situating infallibility not within the pope but within the whole church. We have already noted that, by the *communicatio idiomatum* implied in the claim that the church is the ongoing incarnation, the infallibility of Christ can also be posited of the whole church. Even though the Church has a divinely instituted teaching function in the episcopacy, Möhler writes that “all the developments of its dogmas and its morality, *which can be considered as resulting from formal acts of the whole body*, are to be revered as the sentences of Christ himself, and in these his spirit ever recurs.”⁹¹ In this passage, the phrase “the whole body” could be interpreted to refer to either the episcopate, or the entire church, laity included. On the one hand, Möhler locates teaching authority within the episcopacy when he writes that “dogmatic decrees of the episcopate (united with the general head and centre) are infallible; for it represents the universal Church.”⁹² On the other hand, on the previous page, he names “the community of believers” as “his permanent organ,” suggesting that the entire church participates in Christ’s prophetic work.⁹³ That dogma could be considered as “resulting from the whole body” suggests that the whole body of the faithful—laity and clergy together—when united in a visible, spiritual, and intellectual union, is the bearer of divine truth, and to that extent or in that sense, is the incarnation of Christ and his saving work. Still, these dogmatic proclamations have objective authority over the individual believer. The episcopacy, as successor of the divinely instituted apostleship, functions as both guardian and mediator of the true faith and true doctrine.⁹⁴ Insofar as true faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, the episcopacy always remains above the lay faithful as the head ensuring truth and mediating

⁹¹ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 281, §38, emphasis mine.

⁹² Möhler, 308, §43.

⁹³ Möhler, 279, §38.

⁹⁴ Möhler, 308, §43.

salvation to the body. Nevertheless, Möhler's concept of the whole community of faithful as the "organ" of Christ and source of doctrine can be affirmed and developed through a phenomenological account of the body and its ways of knowing.

C. Concluding Möhler's Ecclesiologies

Thus far, we have delineated two models of the body within Möhler's systematic ecclesiology: the organic body of *Unity in the Church*, and the body as self of *Symbolism*. But there is an important common thread between *Unity in the Church* and *Symbolism*, and that is the symbolic relationship between spirit and body. In both texts, the body mediates, or is the symbol of, the spirit. I have shown how the temporal and ontological priority within this relationship shifts between Möhler's two major works. The more significant difference, though, is in *what* the ecclesial body mediates. In *Unity in the Church*, the ecclesial body is the visible and material expression of the Christian, human spirit. In *Symbolism*, however, the ecclesial body is the visible and material expression of the *divine* spirit, "the Son of God himself." Thus, while both texts conceive of a symbolic relationship between spirit and body, in *Unity in the Church*, the spirit-body relationship is further specified as *organic*, in the sense that the church is the dynamic outgrowth of Christian faith. In *Symbolism*, this symbolic relationship is further specified as *incarnational*, in the sense that the church, as the body of Christ, is a continuation of the incarnation of Christ, who is himself the incarnation of the Logos. The different images of "body as living organism" versus "body as self" have unique strengths and weaknesses for ecclesiology.

In *Unity in the Church*, the image of the organic body expressed the continuous existence of the original and authentic Christian spirit within the ecclesial community and offered a

compelling account of the diachronic and synchronic unity of the church. Möhler also maintained a distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Christian *Gemeingeist* and so preserved the transcendence of the divine in relation to the church. Still, the organic ecclesiology of *Unity in the Church* warrants two points of critique. First, Möhler's theology of tradition is overly irenic and linear, for he argues that authentic development must be in genetic continuity with Christian origins. "Möhler's approach to development strongly privileges the value of constancy over the value of renewal; unity over plurality" and "the fixed in tradition over the mobile."⁹⁵ Such a model of development-in-continuity does not account for or admit moments of what John Thiel calls 'dramatic development' in doctrine and tradition.⁹⁶ Second, the organic principle as applied to ecclesiology falls short on two counts. First, it leaves no room for prophetic critique within the church. In Möhler's view, any expression of Christianity (its teachings or its communal life) that does not express a unity-identity with 'the whole' (both synchronic and diachronic) is judged to be egoism and a wrongful division within the one body. As Thiel writes, "Möhler tended to be suspicious of any individuality that stands out in relief from tradition's organic unity. ...Möhler, it seems, regarded ecclesial particularity as authentic only to the degree that it exudes, expresses, and promotes an already established unity of the Church that is finally the unity of God."⁹⁷ Second, because of the identity between spirit and body, he cannot conceive of any possibility of the Spirit working beyond the bounds of the institutional church. This will present a problem for a more ecumenical account of membership in the body of Christ. A kind of 'perfect society' notion is also present in his model of the body as the manifestation of the spirit,

⁹⁵ Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 66.

⁹⁶ Dramatic development is a model of tradition that is attuned to breaks and loss of constancy in the history of the church's teaching and practice. The church's teachings on usury and slavery are examples of dramatic development. See Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, chapter 3.

⁹⁷ Thiel, 66, 67.

for it allows him to claim that “the Catholic Church...allows nothing to work upon her from outside so as to first find truth,” but contains the whole truth within itself and rejects all foreign elements.⁹⁸ There is no sense in which the secular world has wisdom of its own that can deepen our understanding of revealed truth, nor is it possible, as Vatican II teaches, that the ‘seeds of the word’ and ‘rays of truth’ might be present in other religions.⁹⁹ These shortcomings of the body–soul analogy as it is applied to the church will continue to plague Catholic ecclesiology well into the twentieth century, but can be addressed through a more dynamic, phenomenological account of the body’s boundaries.

Symbolism made the significant contribution of reconsidering the relationship between Christ and the church beyond Christ as merely the historical founder of the church. But the ecclesiological application of the image of the body as “self,” seen the statement that the church is the “ongoing incarnation of Christ,” wrongly divinizes the church. The most insightful critique of Möhler’s “continued incarnation” ecclesiology comes from Yves Congar, who argued that it is based on an imprecise analogy between Christology and the church: it “fails to take sufficient account of the difference that exists between a hypostatic and a covenant union.”¹⁰⁰ It produces a skewed ecclesiology tending towards ecclesiological monophysitism, and it confuses incarnation with divinization.¹⁰¹ In Congar’s apt judgment, this “excessively physical treatment of the theme of the body” is found not only in *Symbolism* but in later Roman School theologians such as Perrone, Passaglia, and Schrader as well.¹⁰² Moreover, by describing the church as “the Son of

⁹⁸ Möhler, *Unity in the Church* 184 § 41.

⁹⁹ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes* 11, Declaration on the Church’s Relations with Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* 2.

¹⁰⁰ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 312.

¹⁰¹ Yves Congar, “Dogme Christologique et ecclesiologie: vérité et limites d’un parallèle,” in *Sainte Église: Études et approches ecclesiologiques* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1963), 69–104. First published in 1954 in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, Würzburg, 239–68.

¹⁰² Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 312, note 1. See also Hinze, “The Holy Spirit and the Catholic Tradition,” 78–9. In my judgment, this excessive physicalism is even more pronounced in the Roman School than in *Symbolism*.

God himself,” Möhler makes it impossible to give an account of a sinful church. In an apparent breakdown of his parts–whole framework drawn from romantic idealism, the sin of the ‘parts,’ the members of the church, has no effect on ‘the whole,’ the church itself. Finally, Möhler’s statement that all dogmatic claims are to be taken as ‘the sentences of Christ himself’ is an insufficient account of doctrine, dogma, and tradition as a finite human expression of, and handing-on of, divine revelation.¹⁰³ As with the impossibility of the sinful church, Möhler does not leave much room to consider the possibility of finitude and failure in the actual functioning of the hierarchy and its governance of the church. Once again, phenomenology can correct these errors by providing a more nuanced account of the relationship of between the biological body and one’s full, personal existence.

III. After Möhler: Body as Spouse, Body as Ordered Society

Möhler’s contributions to Catholic ecclesiology in *Unity in the Church* and *Symbolism* influenced his contemporaries throughout Europe: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox alike. The theologians working at the Roman College in the mid- to late-nineteenth century were influenced in particular by his Christocentric turn in *Symbolism*, whether directly through reading his texts or indirectly through their teachers. Like Möhler and the Tübingen school, the Roman School¹⁰⁴ sought to renew theology through a return to scriptural and patristic sources.¹⁰⁵ Though the most notable of the Roman School theologians—Giovanni Perrone; Carlo Passaglia; Passaglia’s student Clemens Schrader; Johann Baptist Franzelin; and the latter two’s students Joseph

¹⁰³ For example, as expressed in the Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Chapter 2

¹⁰⁴ For the extent to which it can be called a “school,” see Hinze, “Roman Catholic Theology.” For the doctrines of tradition in Perrone, Passaglia, and Schrader, see Walter Kasper, *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962).

¹⁰⁵ Congar notes that the theologians at the Roman College were particularly influenced by Greek patristic sources through Möhler’s work; in fact, when Perrone, for one, cites Greek sources, he cites the same texts that Möhler does.

Kleutgen and Matthias Scheeben—varied in their theological positions, “their common characteristic is the integration of the Church into a strongly incarnational and (especially with Scheeben) sacramental theological vision.”¹⁰⁶ But they were not breathing the air of German Romanticism and the organic principle, as Möhler was. As Himes notes, the Roman School figures sought to “provide deep doctrinal grounds for the Church’s institutional polity, which was a much greater concern for the Roman school than for the Tübingen theologians.”¹⁰⁷ And so they met the Christocentric turn and revival of the body metaphor from within their lineage of a more juridically-oriented ecclesiology of the church as a perfect society and in light of their particular concerns pertaining to papal authority, for example.

As a result, the (mystical) body ecclesiology of the Roman School is notably different from Möhler. For the Roman School theologians, the image of the body in its horizontal dimension evokes an ordered society governed by a single head. Vatican I and the encyclicals of Leo XIII continue to use this image of the body, especially in defense of papal primacy and infallibility. In its vertical dimension, the corporeal metaphor reveals Christ’s headship over the church. Here, the spousal metaphor frequently shapes the interpretation of the corporeal metaphor: Christ lovingly unites himself to his church *as if* it were his own body, as a bridegroom with his bride, but the two remain distinct and unequal; the bridegroom-head governs, directs, and gives life to the bride-body. This hierarchy of Christ over the church will serve, for some authors, as a pattern for intra-ecclesial relations as well. In both the horizontal and vertical dimensions, then, “body” does not indicate “the whole,” as it did for the early Möhler, or the “self” as it did for the later Möhler. Rather, the body is the “trunk,” so to speak, which is distinct from, united to, and governed by its head.

¹⁰⁶ Himes, “The Development of Ecclesiology,” 59.

¹⁰⁷ Himes, 59.

The different meanings of the image of the body between Möhler and later nineteenth-century thinkers becomes even more clear we compare the meaning of the term “organic” within these authors and texts. Möhler’s use of the term “organic” conveys his focus on growth, development, and continuity within the church. It is synonymous with “natural,” “biological,” or “living,” and his organic approach is shaped by German romantic idealism. In contrast, where the Roman School theologians describe the church as “organic,” or the ordained hierarchy as “organs” of Christ or the Spirit, “organ/ic” should be read as synonymous with “instrument,” “tool,” or “mechanism.” For example, the bishop is an ‘organ’ of Christ in the sense that he is an instrument of Christ’s authority to govern and teach. These various “organs” are ordered or *organ-ized* by the head of the body for the good of the whole. Though Möhler occasionally uses the term “organ” in this sense of instrument or tool, the Roman School theologians do not also use “organic” in the sense of genetic development. In Passaglia, Scheeben, and the Vatican I texts, attention to ‘the organic’ aspects of the church has to do not with the historical development of the church or its diachronic unity, but with the juridical and sacramental aspects of the church and its organ-ization.

As Valfredo Maria Rossi says, “although the Roman School presents an apologetic and, at times, conservative theology, it nevertheless plays a crucial role in a theological renewal that would influence the understanding of the church and the Tradition for a long time.”¹⁰⁸ Theologians such as Schrader, Franzelin, and Kleutgen had a hand in drafting the texts of the First Vatican Council. Even those schema that were never approved on the council floor had an influence on the later tradition, being cited in the final documents of the Second Vatican

¹⁰⁸ Valfredo Maria Rossi, “Carlo Passaglia’s *De Ecclesia Christi*: A Trinitarian Ecclesiology at the Heart of the 19th Century,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 333.

Council.¹⁰⁹ Between the first generation of the Roman School through Vatican I to the end of Pope Leo XIII's pontificate in 1903, we find an ongoing tension and criss-crossing of Möhler's revival of an organic body ecclesiology with the still-dominant concern to defend the church as a visible and authoritative institution founded by Christ over-against Protestant ecclesiologies. As a result, the metaphor of the body is used in a range of different, sometimes conflicting, ways.

1. The Roman School: Passaglia and Scheeben

The theologians of the Roman School, committed to theological renewal and to providing a doctrinal basis for ecclesiastical polity, focus on explaining the union between Christ and the Catholic church (the vertical dimension of ecclesiology). They do so primarily by appealing to the incarnation and to the metaphors of the church as body and bride. Carlo Passaglia, Clemens Schrader, and Matthias Scheeben serve as key examples.¹¹⁰ Passaglia's *De Ecclesia Christi* (1853–4), coauthored with Schrader, continues Möhler's perspective on the church as the ongoing incarnation of Christ.¹¹¹ He not only draws an analogy between the church and the incarnation but also very nearly posits a hypostatic union between the two. He offers an analogy when he writes that “just as we believe in only one Christ, visible and invisible, temporal and

¹⁰⁹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* chapter 6, note 6, cites the Vatican I schema *De Ecclesia Christi* chapter 15 and note 48.

¹¹⁰ Josef Franzelin's *Theses de Ecclesia Christi* (Rome, 1887) fits this pattern just as well, but is not as accessible in English translation. Sections of Franzelin's text are translated into French in Kerkvooorde, “La théologie du ‘corps mystique’.” For an English-language summary of Franzelin's thought and influence, see Bernhard Knorn, SJ, “Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816–86): A Jesuit Cardinal Shaping the Official Teaching of the Church at the Time of the First Vatican Council,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 7, no. 4 (July 3, 2020): 592–615.

¹¹¹ Carlo Passaglia, *De Ecclesia Christi: Commentariorum Libri Quinque*, vol. 1 (Manz, 1853). Schrader collaborated with Passaglia on the two completed volumes, but secondary sources usually refer to the author as just Passaglia for brevity's sake and I follow that convention here. The text is not available in English translation. Large sections are translated from Latin to French in Kerkvooorde, “La théologie du ‘corps mystique’.” When I provide direct quotations from Passaglia's work, they are translations from Kerkvooorde's French, though I have consulted the Latin when necessary. For my analysis of Passaglia and Schrader, I have also relied on the work of C. G. Arévalo, “Some Aspects of the Theology of the Mystical Body of Christ in the Ecclesiology of Giovanni Perrone, Carlo Passaglia and Clemens Schrader: Theologians of the Roman College in the Mid-Nineteenth Century” (Rome: Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, 1959).

eternal, God and man, true Man-God, we believe in only one Church, visible and invisible, human and divine, or even human-divine [*humano-divinam*].”¹¹² But Passaglia presses beyond analogy when he suggests a *communicatio idiomatum* between God and the church. Just as divine properties are attributed to Christ in the union of his human and divine natures, “one can equally say, because of the intimate link which unites the interior element with the exterior element in the Church and makes it one, that the supreme and particular properties of God are its own.”¹¹³ Passaglia even states that “if one wants to make a complete biography of Christ, it is not enough to content oneself with that which is written in the gospels; it is still necessary to take [into account] the ecclesiastical annals, because Christ continued to manifest himself in the Church after being manifested in his humanity; his mystical body continues the work of his natural body.”¹¹⁴

Even though the ecclesial body continues Christ’s work in history, Passaglia does not see the church as Christ himself. Rather, Christ remains Head over his body. Passaglia’s analysis of the meaning of Christ’s headship stands out for three reasons: first, compared to Möhler’s *Symbolism*, it is a much more detailed analysis of headship grounded in a reading of the physical body; second, again compared to *Symbolism*, it specifically posits Christ as the supreme head; third, it foreshadows the method of understanding Christ’s Headship in *Mystici Corporis Christi*.¹¹⁵ Methodologically, Passaglia moves from an exposition of headship in general to the headship of Christ in particular. In the context of a general living organism, head and body are “in a most intimate union,” “conjoined” to one another “as to make up with them but one thing,

¹¹² Passaglia, *De Ecclesia Christi* chapter III.34, page 31, in Kerkvoorde, “La théologie du ‘corps mystique’,” 421.

¹¹³ Passaglia, *De Ecclesia Christi* chapter III.34, page 31, in Kerkvoorde, 421.

¹¹⁴ Passaglia, *De Ecclesia Christi* chapter III.39, pages 37–38, in Kerkvoorde, 423.

¹¹⁵ See *Mystici Corporis* 36–60. Arévalo states that “*Mystici Corporis* gives six diverse relationships between Christ and the church as Head and body, a complete inventory of Tradition on this point” (“Some Aspects,” 25 n44).

one subject.” The head, as preeminent, is also “set over” the body and guides and directs it and all its members. Finally, the head is the “life-giving influence” of the body, “the source in which life most fully dwells, and from which life flows” to the whole body.¹¹⁶ Applying the metaphor of headship to an ecclesial context, Christ, the Head, and the church, his body, make up one subject, “a divino-human body.” This body is called “Christ’s body” because by a “wonderful transfer, the name of the Head is communicated to the body.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, by his preeminence, Christ as Head guides and directs the church. “He fulfills perfectly and lovingly every duty that headship of the Church implies,” including assuring her holiness, impassibility, and infallibility.¹¹⁸ In this function of external governance, Peter shares in Christ’s headship.¹¹⁹ Finally, Christ as Head vivifies the body, giving it life and enabling its growth “as the vine shares its life with its branches.”¹²⁰ Clearly, for Passaglia, the term “body” does not mean “the whole” as it did for the early Möhler; it means “trunk,” that which is distinct from yet united to the head.

Passaglia also resists any conflation of Christ and the church by reading the corporeal metaphor through the spousal metaphor. To say that the church is the body of Christ does not mean that the church is Christ’s own self. Rather, “body” is understood as “spouse,” the one who is covenantally united to the bridegroom. The church is the body of Christ the head; she is the bride of the divine Bridegroom. Evoking Genesis 2, Passaglia writes that the church is drawn from Christ’s side, is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone; together, they generate all the

¹¹⁶ Arévalo, “Some Aspects,” 25. These are Arévalo’s words. This symbolic reading of the function of a head in relation to a body, within an individual organism, is contestable. Surely the heart, or the entire cardiovascular system, could be called the life-giving ‘part’ of the body rather than the head.

¹¹⁷ Arévalo, 26.

¹¹⁸ Arévalo, 27.

¹¹⁹ Passaglia, *De Praerogativis B. Petri*; see Arévalo, 29.

¹²⁰ Arévalo, 28. This function of vivification and growth is what Möhler attributed to the Spirit in *Unity in the Church*.

faithful. As spouses, Christ and the church are so intimately united in a covenantal bond of love, fidelity, and obedience that they are called ‘one body.’ In this spousal union, “she is his body because, in her and through her, he continues visibly his preaching and his work of universal redemption and will continue this work, which he began when he took flesh and lived among us, until the end of time.”¹²¹ In the marriage covenant, the spouses remain distinct subjects but love one another *as if* one’s partner was one’s very own body; it is a union of the will and of the flesh, but not a union of hypostases. Ultimately, by allowing the spousal metaphor to inform the body metaphor, Passaglia unites the two subjects, Christ the Head and the church his body, without conflating them or positing the church as Christ’s own self.

In spite of these distinctions between Christ and the church, Passaglia posits a biological and substantial incorporation—not simply a covenantal union—of Christians into Christ’s body through the category of *Christus cibus*, Christ as Food of the church. The Eucharist, the sacrament of Christ’s own body and blood, nourishes and sustains the church and is the “seal and attestation” of their union. Through the Eucharist, Christ is the church’s food, its source of life; consequently, the life of the church is the divine life. Most significantly, through the Eucharist, the church is made “*concorporeal* and *consanguineous* with Christ. The Church, truly receiving Christ within herself, becomes *Christ-bearing*.”¹²² In other words, in Passaglia’s mind, the church is one body, *concorporeal*, with Christ in an organic or fleshly sense not as an extension of his humanity (as Möhler’s *Symbolism* maintains) or the externalization of the Holy Spirit but through the Eucharist. By physically taking Christ’s sacramental body into our bodies, we become his one body. The church is *incarnational* to the extent that it is *eucharistic*.

¹²¹ Passaglia, in Kerkvooorde, “La théologie du ‘corps mystique’,” 420; Kerkvooorde does not provide a chapter, paragraph, or page number for the original text.

¹²² Arévalo, “Some Aspects,” 33, emphasis original. Arévalo notes that Passaglia draws this from Cyril of Jerusalem.

Matthias Scheeben, writing a decade after Passaglia, echoes the eucharistic approach of Passaglia's ecclesiology and develops the spousal metaphor with an emphasis on the maternity of the priesthood. In Part Five of *The Mysteries of Christianity* (1865, 1883), Scheeben focuses on the interrelated mysteries of the Eucharist, the incarnation, and the Trinity. "The Incarnation is the presupposition and explanation of the Eucharist, just as the eternal generation from the bosom of the Father is the presupposition and explanation of the Incarnation, regarded as the stepping forth of God's Son into the world."¹²³ Because the Eucharist, which reproduces the true body of Christ, is related to the incarnation in this way, Scheeben proclaims that "we may say with profound truth that the Eucharist is a real and universal prolongation and extension of the mystery of the Incarnation"¹²⁴—a claim that is parallel to, yet quite distinct from, Möhler's claim in *Symbolism*. The church is subsequently the body of Christ because by partaking of the Eucharist, the real presence of Christ, we are taken into Christ, substantially united with him, and made his mystical body with He as our head. We are united to the divine-human head, Christ, not 'indirectly' "like the head in the physical body," but substantially, "like the soul which informs the physical body," "thoroughly pervade[s]" each member of the body, and "fill[s] them with His divine energy and splendor."¹²⁵ We, His mystical body, are really incorporated into His physical body; we live in Christ and partake of his life, becoming one body with him, so that we might share in his divine nature and glory.¹²⁶ Because the Eucharist is an extension of the incarnation in Scheeben's framework, he can ask,

if the Word is made flesh by assuming flesh, is He not to some extent incarnated anew when He makes those who partake of Him in the Eucharist His members, and as such takes them to Himself? ... So completely do we become one with

¹²³ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, SJ (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co, 1946) [Orig. 1865, 2nd ed. 1888], 478.

¹²⁴ Scheeben, 485.

¹²⁵ Scheeben, 482.

¹²⁶ Scheeben, 497.

Christ that we can say with deep truth that we belong to the person of Christ, and in a sense are Christ Himself. ‘Christ is the Church,’ says St. Hilary, ‘bearing it wholly within Himself by the sacrament of His body.’¹²⁷

Thus, the church, intimately united to Christ through the reception of his true body in the Eucharist, becomes a kind of ongoing incarnation in the sense that Christians, through the church, become one with Christ.

Like Passaglia, Scheeben turns to the spousal metaphor to recall a distinction of subjects and emphasize the superiority of Christ in the Christ–church relationship. To say in a single breath, as Scheeben does, that the church is ‘the mystical body of Christ, His true bride’ is to assert *both* the intimate unity and near-identity of the bride with her bridegroom, *and* the subordination of the bride to her head.¹²⁸ Our union with Christ through the church “is exemplified in the union which takes place in marriage, where the wife, whose function it is to receive, is joined and subjected to the husband, whose function it is to impart, as her head.”¹²⁹ Through this spousal union we are made “an organic part of him” and share in his divine life as a bride becomes one with her husband, taking on his name and his life. As He once acted upon Mary, the Holy Spirit overshadows the church-bride and “pervade[s] her with His own divine life . . . so radically and powerfully that it may be said of her that she does not herself live, but God lives in her. He must make her so like her divine head and bridegroom that she seems to be Christ Himself.”¹³⁰

This spousal relationship, truly the model of an ‘unequal society’, becomes the means by which Scheeben explains the authority of the church and the priesthood. The church is the wife—

¹²⁷ Scheeben, 486.

¹²⁸ Scheeben, 541, for example.

¹²⁹ Scheeben, 483.

¹³⁰ Scheeben, 544.

mother who mediates between the Father and his children, communicating not her own truth but her spouse, “nourishing these children with the substance and light of her bridegroom.”¹³¹ And while all Christians are brides of Christ, the priesthood is *uniquely* the mother of all Christ’s children. He writes, “The motherhood of the Church in the strict sense pertains not to the whole community, but to those persons endowed with the fruitfulness and the pastoral power by which the children of the Church are begotten, reared, and aided. In a word, it belongs to the fathers of the Church.”¹³² The Holy Spirit overshadows and fills priests so that, as Mary brought about Christ’s true body, priests can bring about Christ’s sacramental-eucharistic body which substantially unites us to Christ and makes us into His mystical body. Additionally, like any earthly mother, the priest-mother has the unique power and authority to guide, rule, teach, instruct, and regulate the activities of her children on behalf of the Father so that they might be united with their divine head.¹³³ In this way, the priest-mother-hood is the foundation of the church as the body-bride of Christ and as an “organically constructed society.”

For it is this motherhood by which the ecclesiastical fellowship is made a soundly constituted society, wherein the children are linked to the Father through the mother. By it the body of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, is developed and extended by a process of growth from within; by it the real presence and the real union of the head with His members is sustained and perfected. Finally, this maternity is the basis of all the other social relations and activities which regulate and shape the Church in the unfolding of its life. It imparts to these a supernatural, mysterious stamp which they would lack apart from union with the Church.¹³⁴

If the Eucharist is the ‘ongoing incarnation,’ and the maternal priest is the begetter of the Eucharist, then the priest is the one who continues the incarnation in the world.

¹³¹ Scheeben, 541.

¹³² Scheeben, 555–6.

¹³³ Scheeben, 550.

¹³⁴ Scheeben, 548.

Passaglia and Scheeben provide a welcome Christocentric and eucharistic foundation to the church, especially when considered against the pressing juridical and ecclesiastical concerns that commanded so much attention in their day, such as church-state relations, ultramontanism, and debates over papal primacy. Moreover, their emphasis on the transcendence and authority of Christ over the church through the spousal metaphor is an ecclesologically appropriate expression of the covenantal union between God and the church. The image of “body as spouse” provides a more expansive notion of what “my body” is or entails. My body is not *only* what is biologically integrated or physiologically united with my flesh, but is *also* that which I love so deeply that I consider it an aspect of my subjectivity, transfer my identity to it, so to speak. “Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone,” as Adam spoke to Eve. This resonates with a more phenomenological account of bodily identity, as we will see in Chapters Five and Six.

However, the model of the spousal body as it is developed in Scheeben is flagrantly patriarchal and leads to concerning expressions of ideal marital and intra-ecclesial relationships. Scheeben does not simply identify marriage as a fitting analogy for the church but argues that Christ’s “love and union with the Church and her members” is “the ideal and model” of human marriage.”¹³⁵ On these grounds, his model of the spousal body is in serious need of feminist critique, for the spousal relationship that Scheeben describes is patriarchal, sexist, and obliterates both the female-symbolized partner and the concrete reality of women who participate in the church. The ecclesial body that is imaged in Scheeben’s work is the heteropatriarchal ideal of woman. She is ever young, ‘incomprehensibly fruitful’ and enjoys a ‘marvelous fertility.’¹³⁶ She is the immaculate womb ceaselessly birthing children. These children may sin and bring stain upon her, but it is they who err, not she herself. Neither she nor her children ever mature into

¹³⁵ Scheeben, 544.

¹³⁶ Scheeben, 548.

their own adult subjectivity, for her children remain ever obedient and submissive to the father, just as she herself is perpetually submissive and obedient to her husband.¹³⁷ Any authority that the female spouse does exercise is that of the Father; she is always only the mediator. She is a pure vessel, bestowing no character of her own, but is a pure channel and mediator of the Father-Husband and his truth.¹³⁸ She has no subjectivity, for “she does not herself live,” but is made so alike her husband that she seems to be he himself. Finally, in spite of the fact that this idealized female represents the essence of the church, this does not translate into a role for embodied historical women. It is only the ordained male who can symbolically fulfill this maternal role; the fathers are the true mothers. It is they alone who birth Christians, create new life in them, and nourish the church with the supernatural food that they alone have the power to create. This patriarchal expression of a maternal priesthood reinforces clerical privilege and promotes an infantilization of the laity. A phenomenological account of bodily identity will allow for a flexible and expansive account of what constitutes “my body” without relying on the sexist and patriarchal nuptial metaphor.

2. The Magisterial Tradition: Vatican I and Leo XIII

¹³⁷ This understanding of the spousal metaphor as conveying the dependence of the church on Christ is common in twentieth-century ecclesiology, but this is not the only possible interpretation of the metaphor. For example, in *Tradition and Traditions*, Congar describes the ‘mystical body’ as ‘Bride of Christ’ precisely to emphasize the autonomy of the church—bride vis-à-vis her spouse. The Bride “keeps its own subjectivity before Christ its Lord; the human subject is left to its own freedom and responsibility within a framework of weaknesses and graces, efforts and ups-and-downs in fidelity; only the ultimate decisions about the reality of the covenant are guaranteed” (312–13). Granted, Congar’s approach still envisions a heterosexual union in which only the feminized partner is capable of error and sin. But this still admits of autonomy and freedom, and Congar does not propose this theological-ecclesiological relationship as a model for human sexual relations, as Scheeben does.

¹³⁸ We see this in Scheeben’s statement that priests’ “individual personalities do not enter into consideration. Whether such personality is good or evil, Christ acts through them as through His organs. This activity is ever fruitful, or infallible according to the nature of the case; no account is taken of the personal condition of the organs” (557).

Although Passaglia eventually left the Jesuit order and was excommunicated due to his advocacy of liberalism in Catholic theology, his student and coauthor of *De Ecclesia Christi*, Clemens Schrader, developed increasingly ultramontanist tendencies and eventually served on the theological-dogmatic commission at Vatican I. The various schemas of Vatican I and its final text *Pastor Aeternus* utilize a similar image of a body governed by a head as we saw in Passaglia and Scheeben, but with a much stronger emphasis on the church as society. Joseph Kleutgen's schema *Tametsi Deus* expresses this quite clearly: he calls the church a perfect society and defines it as “a society, distinct from every other assembly of men, which moves towards its proper end and by its own ways and reasons, which is absolute, complete, and sufficient in itself to attain those things which pertain to it and which is neither subject to, joined as a part, or mixed and confused with any society.”¹³⁹ The conciliar texts emphasize the church as a perfect society because the pressing questions driving the council were ecclesiastical and political problems rather than strictly theological or Christological ones—the loss of the Papal States, papal authority vis-à-vis secular authorities, and the still-unresolved issue of conciliarism and papal primacy. When the image of the body appears in the schema and texts of Vatican I, it is used mainly in its horizontal modality to address these ecclesio-political concerns and describe the church as a visible society. Nevertheless, the term “mystical body” also appears, referring to the interior, spiritual dimension of the church which is identical with the visible church.

Because the council was interrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, *Pastor Aeternus* does not offer a complete ecclesiology and so there is no data for analyzing its

¹³⁹ Quoted in Patrick Granfield, “The Rise and Fall of *Societas Perfecta*,” *Concilium* 157 (1982): 6. The full text of *Tametsi Deus* can be found in J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 53 vols. (Paris and Leipzig, 1901–27), 53:308–22.

dominant image of the church *per se*.¹⁴⁰ For a view of the broader ecclesiology and images of the church among the council fathers, we turn to *Supremi Pastoris*, the first draft of a constitution *De Ecclesia* by the theological commission which included Perrone, Schrader, and Franzelin in its number.¹⁴¹ Though this draft was not debated as a whole on the council floor, there were over a hundred written responses to it by bishops, and the document exercised an influence in later ecclesiology and was even cited in the texts of the Second Vatican Council. The central ecclesial image in the text is the church as a society, even a *societas perfecta*—a self-sufficient and autonomous visible institution that “is complete and independent in itself and possesses all the means necessary to attain its proposed end.”¹⁴²

In his essay on the concept of the church as society in *Supremi Pastoris* and *Tametsi Deus*, Granfield observes that although *Supremi Pastoris* opens with a chapter on the church as the Mystical Body of Christ, “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.”¹⁴³ Rather, the term ‘*societas*’

played a much more significant methodological and theological role in the schema than the Body of Christ. It was used fifty-four times . . . and was found in

¹⁴⁰ For this history, see John W. O’Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2018). For the theological debates, see Margaret O’Gara, *Triumph in Defeat: Infallibility, Vatican I, and the French Minority Bishops* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988). The text of *Pastor Aeternus* is available in Latin and English in *Heinrich Denzinger Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünermann et al, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 609–616. A side-by-side comparison of the draft and the final text of *Pastor Aeternus* can be found in O’Gara, “Appendix,” 257–269.

¹⁴¹ The full Latin text of *Supremi Pastoris*, as well as adnotations and responses to it, can be found in Mansi, vol 51. My references are to the English translation by John F. Clarkson et al in *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co, 1955), 87–94.

¹⁴² Granfield, “The Rise and Fall of ‘*Societas Perfecta*’,” *Concilium* 157 (1982): 3.

3. The term *societas perfecta* is found in the schemata of Vatican I but not in the final text of *Pastor Aeternus*. Granfield provides an excellent and concise summary of the development of *societas perfecta* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, following the middle ages in which church and State were not considered as independent but as “two parts of a unified social reality—the *respublica christiana*” (3–4). The concept of the church as society has a much longer history, extending as far back as Augustine (see F.X. Lawlor and D.M. Doyle, “Society (Church As),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 13 no. 2, 285–87).

¹⁴³ Patrick Granfield, “The Church as *Societas Perfecta* in the Schemata of Vatican I,” *Church History* 48, no. 4 (December 1979): 434.

all but four chapters. Aside from this numerical frequency, the idea of society functioned as a controlling idea throughout the schema. It was a constant point of departure and was used as a theological fulcrum for a description of the 'nature, properties, and power of the Church.'¹⁴⁴

Curiously enough, earlier scholars Emile Mersch and José Madoz have quite the opposite interpretation of the schema. Mersch notes that less than thirty council fathers, out of some six hundred who received the schema, wrote responses objecting to the doctrine of the Mystical Body contained therein. Mersch thus writes that the council fathers "were unanimous in making the truth of the Mystical Body the first principle of the doctrine concerning the Church. . . . The greater part of the ordinary *magisterium* did not object to centering the treatise on the Church round the doctrine of the Mystical Body."¹⁴⁵ Madoz is in full agreement with Mersch, on whom his scholarship relies heavily. Madoz finds that the concept of the Mystical Body "forms the base of the whole ecclesiological construction" of the schema.¹⁴⁶ The schema affirms "from its first lines the conception of the Church as Mystical Body of Christ and derives from it, like an axis, its whole being and all manifestations of its economy."¹⁴⁷

Granfield and Mersch/Madoz are both correct to some extent. The concept of the church as a society is indeed the central theme of the text, as Granfield maintains, but as Mersch shows us, the image of the body, and the "mystical body" metaphor, is frequently used to express this fundamental concept of a visible society.¹⁴⁸ (Yves Congar made this same observation in

¹⁴⁴ Granfield, "The Church as *Societas Perfecta*," 435.

¹⁴⁵ Émile Mersch, *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition*, trans. John R. Kelly, S.J. (London: Denis Dobson, 1962), 563–4. See also José Madoz, "La iglesia cuerpo místico de Cristo según el primer esquema 'De Ecclesia' en el concilio Vaticano," *Revista española de teología* 31 (1943): 159–81. Madoz's analysis and evaluation of *Supremi Pastoris* is almost identical to that in Mersch, whom he admittedly relies on.

¹⁴⁶ Madoz, 159.

¹⁴⁷ Madoz, 161.

¹⁴⁸ Where Mersch goes off-base is in reading "mystical body" in *Supremi Pastoris* through his own French-stream interpretation, for Mersch himself takes the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ to mean "the doctrine of our incorporation in Christ," expressing our interior spiritual union with Christ.

1961.¹⁴⁹) In some places within the schema, body language is used to indicate the external visibility of the church as a human society or assembly; yet in a few instances, it also indicates the divine life that is the essence of the church, or the unity between these visible and invisible realities. For example, in Chapter I, entitled “That the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ,” it uses the phrase “mystical body” as a social-sacramental assembly with Christ as its Head.

The only-begotten son of God, . . . being made like unto man in a *visible* way, appeared *visibly* in the assumed form of our body so that the carnal men of this earth might put on the new man, who has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth, and form a mystical body whose head would be Christ himself. Indeed, to bring about this union of a mystical body, Christ the Lord instituted the holy washing of regeneration and renovation so that the sons of men...might be members of one another; and, being joined to their divine Head by faith, by hope, and by love, they all might be given life in his one spirit, and receive copiously the gifts of heavenly graces and charisms.¹⁵⁰

The ecclesial, mystical body is a social assembly, constituted by the sacraments, with Christ as its divine head. Baptism first and foremost effects a union of Christians with one another, making them members together in this one body. The second effect of baptism and union in the mystical body is life in the Spirit. This opening chapter of *Supremi Pastoris* ends by quoting Ephesians 4:16 which names Christ as Head, through whom the whole body grows and builds itself up. Later chapters argue that, as his mystical body, the church shares in Christ’s divine privileges and prerogatives and is the sole and necessary means for obtaining the salvation offered in Christ. The chapter does not name the church as Christ’s own body, either as his ongoing incarnation or as a body intimately united to him as a spouse.

¹⁴⁹ Yves Congar, “L’écclésiologie, de la Révolution Française au concile du Vatican, sous le signe de l’affirmation de l’autorité,” in *L’écclésiologie au XIXe siècle*, ed. M. Nédoncelle (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 109. “Non seulement ces craintes étaient injustifiées, mais l’écclésiologie sacramentelle et reliée à la christologie, que proposaient Passaglia, Schrader et le Scheeben des *Mysterien* (1865), fournissait le cadre et la base de tout le système juridique qu’on voulait dogmatiser. *A condition, bien sûr, d’interpréter la notion de corps (du Christ) dans le sens corporatif et social.* ...C’est dans cette théologie du corps - société que le chap. 11e, “Pastor Aeternus”, du *Schema*, pose la primauté du Pontife romain” (emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁰ *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 1.

Subsequent chapters, though, lose this emphasis on the spiritual and sacramental dimension of the church and focus instead on the ecclesial, mystical body as a visible, juridical reality. As Granfield shows so well, *Supremi Pastoris* described the church “as a true society, a perfect society, a visible society, and a salvifically necessary society,” one that is spiritual, supernatural, indefectible, and let us not forget, unequal, because “only some are given a divinely authorized power to sanctify, teach, and rule.”¹⁵¹ The language of the body is subtly present here in describing the church as a perfect society, that is, as separate from the world and all other religious or political bodies. The text states that “the Church is not a *member* or a part of any other society whatsoever, and it does not and cannot coalesce with any other. But it is so perfect in itself that, although it is distinct from all other human societies, it is nevertheless far superior to them.”¹⁵² The ecclesial body is a fully independent body and continues the work of Christ primarily as a juridical entity with the power of orders, teaching, and governance.

The schema also insists that the church, as a social and mystical body, is visible. Through the church’s teaching authority, priestly office, and governing body—those “visible and external bonds which make the Church, which is a spiritual and supernatural society, ‘conspicuously evident’ as a visible society”—“the whole body of the Church is visible. Not only the just or the predestined belong to it, but also sinners who are joined to it by profession of faith and by communion.”¹⁵³ The importance is placed on the juridical visibility of the church, to which one belongs not only through interior union with Christ but also through the profession of faith and reception of the church’s sacraments. The hierarchical authority of the church is responsible for the visibility of the “whole body” of the church, which includes both those who are spiritually

¹⁵¹ Granfield, “The Church as *Societas Perfecta*,” 435, 438. Some bishops, however, objected to the term “*societas inaequalis*” as belonging to jurists, and preferred “*societas hierarchia*” instead (438).

¹⁵² *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 3, emphasis mine.

¹⁵³ *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 4.

united to Christ (the just or predestined) as well as those who are juridically united to the church (by profession of faith and by communion). Here, the written remarks of the council fathers reveal confusion and disagreement regarding the use of the body–soul analogy to express membership in the church. For some, the term “mystical body of Christ” referred to the “soul” of the church, in Bellarmine’s sense, and so is a broader category than the external, visible church.¹⁵⁴ The dominant sense in *Supremi Pastoris*, on the other hand, is that “mystical body of Christ” refers to the unity of the church’s “soul” and “body”, i.e., the spiritual-sacramental reality and the social-juridical reality, which are, the document claims, identical to one another.

Finally, the image of the body in *Supremi Pastoris* expresses the unity, as in singularity or oneness, of the church. The church is *one* body, *one* society.

Any societies whatsoever that are separated from the unity of faith or from communion with this body cannot in any way be said to be a part or a member of it. And it cannot be said to be diffused and distributed among the various Christian denominations; but it is an integrated unit, entirely coherent; and, in its conspicuous unity, it shows itself an undivided and indivisible body, which is the true mystical body of Christ. The Apostle says of it: “One body, one spirit... (Eph. 4:4–6).¹⁵⁵

All local or particular Christian churches must be united in faith and communion to the true (Roman) Church of Christ in order to be members of the mystical body of Christ, and any non-Catholic church is not a part of the one mystical body. It is this analogy to the body, envisioned as a visible physiological organism that is held together through bonds of authority and manifests the invisible soul, that supports the claim that the true church of Christ is the Roman Church and that membership in the one visible Catholic church is necessary for salvation.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ See Granfield, “The Church as *Societas Perfecta*,” 440.

¹⁵⁵ *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 5.

¹⁵⁶ *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 10.

In sum, the term “body” carries two slightly distinct meanings in *Supremi Pastoris*. It refers first and foremost to the social, juridical dimension of the church; the church is a body, that is, a visible reality that is an integrated and indivisible whole, made up of many members but itself not a member of any other body. “Body” is frequently synonymous with “society.” The phrase “mystical body,” in distinction, refers to an invisible, spiritual reality or the “soul” of the church, but which is only encountered in, and is identical to, the visible body of the church-society.

These distinctions are important because they help us understand the reception of *Supremi Pastoris* among the bishops at Vatican I and because these varying usages of “body” and “mystical body” reappear in the early twentieth century, especially in *Mystici Corporis*. On the one hand, *Supremi Pastoris* is a strongly juridical text, and it uses the language of the body to that end. The image of the body justifies the church’s institutional structures and serves exclusionary purposes, separating the church from the world and drawing clear boundaries for membership in the church. Here, it is important to recall from our previous chapter that the term “mystical body” was used from the high middle ages and up through the early modern period in a strictly juridical mode to refer to any social entity or nation-state; this use is still present in *Supremi Pastoris*. On the other hand, Granfield, Mersch, and Hahnenberg tell us that several bishops at the council found the use of the metaphor “mystical body” in *Supremi Pastoris* to be “vague, ill understood, too mystical,”¹⁵⁷ “too complicated, obscure,”¹⁵⁸ “too abstract and mystical,” to pertain to mystical theology and not dogmatic theology, and as too metaphorical to serve as the foundation of a schema on the church.¹⁵⁹ And they are right, for the term “mystical

¹⁵⁷ Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 563.

¹⁵⁸ Mersch, 564.

¹⁵⁹ Granfield, “The Church as *Societas Perfecta*,” 434; Edward P. Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 9. Hahnenberg, however,

body” is *also* used in the text to refer to the spiritual-sacramental dimension or the “soul” of the visible church. In this sense, “mystical body” is indeed “too abstract” or vague if it is a synonym for “interior spiritual union with Christ” yet is forced to explain, or provide criteria for, membership in the church as a juridical society. Ultimately, *Supremi Pastoris* blends two distinct trajectories and images of the body: 1) a regnant ecclesiology of the church as a perfect society in which the term “mystical body” was a sociopolitical category and 2) a revival of a more organic understanding of the body brought about by Möhler. It merges the latter into the former.

Of course, we cannot end our consideration of Vatican I with its drafts. Its final text, *Pastor Aeternus*, was crafted out of Chapter XI of *Supremi Pastoris* “and the later *caput addendum* on papal infallibility,” both of which were debated on the council floor.¹⁶⁰ *Pastor Aeternus* does not give us a vision of the church as a total reality, instead focusing only on the defense of papal primacy and infallibility. In spite of this relative lack of data for parsing out the dominant image of the church in the mind of the council fathers at this point, we still see body language expressing the concept of the church as a juridical and unequal society. While the term “body” is not used in the document to describe the church, the metaphor of the body is present through the language of Peter, and his successors, as chief and head (as well as supreme shepherd, father, teacher, and foundation). The image of the hierarchically ordered body governed by the head is not given as the theological foundation for the assertion of papal primacy—Scripture and tradition play this role¹⁶¹—but rather is used to illustrate and express this ecclesiological position. This is perhaps most evident when comparing Chapter 4 within the

cites only Chapter I of *Supremi Pastoris* and then states that Kleutgen’s draft “subordinated the theme of the mystical body to the language of the Church as the ‘true society,’ of the faithful,” (mis)leading the reader to believe that “mystical body” was the dominant theme of *Supremi Pastoris*. Granfield convincingly shows otherwise.

¹⁶⁰ Granfield, “The Church as *Societas Perfecta*,” 433, note 12.

¹⁶¹ The text cites, for example, John 1:42; Matt 16:16–19; John 21:15–17; Council of Ephesus; Irenaeus; Leo the Great; and Ambrose.

schema and the final text. The end of this chapter on “The Infallibility of the Roman Pontiff” in the schema reads: “Because infallibility is the same whether in the Roman pontiff *as head of the Church* or in *the whole Church teaching in union with its head*, we define in addition that this infallibility also extends to one and the same object.”¹⁶²

This passage from the schema puts forth an ecclesial body image in which the body, even if only composed of bishops here, has the ability to teach the faith authoritatively. This position is ultimately rejected in conciliar debate, and the final text of *Pastor Aeternus* declares that the Roman pontiff, “when in discharge of the office of shepherd, and teacher of all Christians” on certain matters “is possessed of that infallibility” granted by Christ and that such definitions “are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.” Though the language of headship is not directly invoked here, when read in light of earlier passages that declare Peter the “true vicar of Christ,” the “supreme head,” and “head of the whole Church and father and teacher of all Christians,” we are given the image of a single head endowed with absolute teaching [read: cognitive] authority who ‘feeds’ doctrinal truth to a passive, obedient body—a body which need not even provide its affirmative consent for a teaching to be declared as irreformable.¹⁶³ Once again, we have a “descending somatology” expressing a “descending ecclesiology.”

Vatican I’s definition of papal primacy and infallibility did not settle the magisterium’s need to assert the Catholic Church, under the headship of the Roman Pontiff, as the one true church. Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Satis Cognitum* “On The Unity of the Church” (1896) continues this tradition, emphasizing the necessarily visible, social, and institutional reality of the

¹⁶² *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 11, emphasis mine

¹⁶³ In several places, the text identifies Peter’s power, granted by the Lord, as the “full power of feeding, ruling, and governing the universal Church.” The flock of Christ is saved from “the poisonous food of error” and is “nourished by the food of heavenly doctrine” (chapter 4). This is the only instance in which the ecclesial body is imaged as a living organism in *Pastor Aeternus*.

church as the means willed by Christ for the authoritative continuation of his preaching and governance.¹⁶⁴ He uses the metaphor of the church as a body precisely to explain the visibility and sensibility of the church. Jesus commanded the apostles to teach and to rule the nations so that his mission might be perpetuated throughout the ages; this teaching and governing must be visible and audible, perceptible to the senses.

For this reason the Church is so often called in Holy Writ a *body*, and even the body of Christ—‘Now you are the body of Christ’ (1 Cor 12:27)—and precisely because it is a body is the Church visible: and because it is the body of Christ is it living and energizing, because by the infusion of His power Christ guards and sustains it, just as the vine gives nourishment and renders fruitful the branches united to it. And as in animals the vital principle is unseen and invisible, and is evidenced and manifested by the movements and action of the members, so the principle of supernatural life in the Church is clearly shown in that which is done by it. (3, emphasis original)

Here we have the body as a living organism through which the life of Christ is shared with the members of his body. This invisible divine life is made visible in the church, and the church is necessarily visible because such is the nature of a living body. Leo asserts the visibility of the church (against the “grievous and pernicious error” of Protestant teaching) by appealing to the incarnation and the body–soul analogy as well. It is just as impossible that the church could be *either* human or divine

as that man should be a body alone or a soul alone. The connection and union of both elements is as absolutely necessary to the true Church as the intimate union of the soul and body is to human nature. The Church is not something dead; it is the body of Christ endowed with supernatural life. As Christ, the Head and Exemplar, is not wholly in His visible human nature, which Photinians and Nestorians assert, nor wholly in the invisible divine nature, as the Monophysites hold, but is one, from and in both natures, visible and invisible; *so the mystical body of Christ is the true Church*, only because its visible parts draw life and power from the supernatural gifts and other things whence spring their very nature and essence. (3, emphasis mine).

¹⁶⁴ Pope Leo XII, Encyclical Letter *Satis Cognitum* On the Unity of the Church (June 29, 1896), www.vatican.va.

Similar to what we saw in *Supremi Pastoris*, there are multiple meanings of “(mystical) body of Christ” across these two selections from the encyclical. In the first, the phrase “the body of Christ” indicates the church as a visible, i.e. social-institutional, reality. In the second selection, the phrase “the mystical body of Christ” indicates the visible and the invisible together. The mystical body of Christ is the true Church because, like Christ, it is the union of the visible and invisible, the human and divine; the “visible parts” of the mystical body of Christ are animated by supernatural life.

The physiological body, and especially the function of the head therein, and the body–soul analogy also explain the criteria for membership in the mystical body of Christ. The church, “His mystical body,” is united to Christ the Head “after the manner of the human body which He assumed, to which the natural head is physiologically united.” The head of a physiological body is the source of its life and unity. In other words, one must be united to the visible, social ecclesial body in order to be united to the divine Head. “Scattered and separated members cannot possibly cohere with the head so as to make one body” (5). Leo appeals patristic authors who likewise use the image of an organic body on the topic of membership in the true church. Cyprian, he says “makes use of the illustration of a living body, the members of which cannot possibly live unless united to the head and drawing from it their vital force. Separated from the head they must of necessity die” (5). And as Augustine argues, just as a person’s soul does not abide in an amputated limb, “so the Christian is a Catholic as long as he lives in the body: cut off from it he becomes a heretic—the life of the spirit follows not the amputated member.”¹⁶⁵

In order to be united to Christ the divine Head and be a member of His mystical body, one must be united to Christ’s visible head on earth—the pope. Leo cites the Council of Florence

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, “Sermon 267,” in *Satis Cognitum* 5.

(1431–49) which defined the Roman Pontiff as “the true Vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church, and the father and teacher of all Christians” to whom Christ gave the full power “to feed, to rule, and to govern the universal Church” (13). Unity in the church requires unity of government which, as Aquinas states, is manifested “in the mutual connection or communication of its members, and likewise in the relation of all the members of the Church to one head,” the pope (10).¹⁶⁶ As Peter was made the head of the Apostles, so the pope is the visible head of the church empowered and appointed by Christ to inherit the authority given to Peter and to serve as the foundation and principle of unity of the whole church (11–12).

Finally, Leo argues, Christ did not will that he be worshipped ‘in spirit and in truth’ by individuals alone, but that individuals be united to one another in a single, organized society with He as their head. The metaphor of the body is just such an expression of the church as such a perfect society. He states that Scripture includes many names for the church that indicate it is a perfect society, such as “house of God,” “the fold presided over by one Shepherd,” and “the kingdom of God.” “Finally, it is the *body of Christ*—that is, His *mystical* body, but a body living and duly organized and composed of many members; members indeed which have not all the same functions, but which, united one to the other, are kept bound together by the guidance and authority of the head” (10). The ecclesial body is a perfect society, a diverse yet unified multitude governed by Christ the one Head through his vicar, Peter, and his successors.

Edward Hahnenberg writes that “the encyclicals of Leo XIII suggest a growing appreciation of the church as the mystical body of Christ – an image that nevertheless remains alongside the pope’s view of the church as a ‘perfect society.’”¹⁶⁷ But as we have seen above, the image of the body doesn’t simply remain alongside the view of the church as a perfect society;

¹⁶⁶ Leo XIII quotes *Summa Theologica* II.II, q39, a1.

¹⁶⁷ Hahnenberg, “Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiologies,” page 9n21.

rather, the latter is expressed *through* the former, just as we saw in the texts of Vatican I. Pope Leo XIII, as with the fathers of the First Vatican Council and Roman School theologians before him, sees the human body as, above all, visible and as governed by an authoritative head. It has many members that fulfill different functions, and those members are governed by and ordered under a head. A body is vivified by one life and one spirit, but that life flows from the head, and the invisible spirit is only available in the visible, physiologically united body.

The image of the body as a society, in its various particularizations in the texts of Vatican I and Leo XIII, exhibits a reasonable intuition about the relationship between the body and the social order. The blending of the concepts of “body” and “society” in these authors is a micro expression of Douglas’s macro-observation that the body is a symbol of the social. However, the texts considered above exaggerate the role of the head in relation to the rest of the body. From a theological perspective, the almost singular emphasis on headship reduces the laity to purely passive recipients of doctrine and offers no acknowledgment of the *sensus fidei* as belonging to the whole church. *Supremi Pastoris* in particular “fostered a juridical ecclesiology. The intense preoccupation with external and hierarchical elements obscured the understanding of the Church as mystery. Ecclesiology became, in Congar’s phrase, ‘hierarchology’.”¹⁶⁸ Second, as Vatican II will acknowledge, the effort to define membership in the body of Christ on the basis of submission to the visible head, the Roman Pontiff, fails to honor the validity of baptism in other Christian churches as incorporating an individual into Christ’s body. From an anthropological perspective, the “descending somatology” of *Symbolism* and the Roman School falls into a kind of Cartesian dualism that overvalues the cognitive function of the ‘head’ and its foundational importance for the existence of the body or ‘the whole,’ and devalues other embodied ways of

¹⁶⁸ Granfield, “The Rise and Fall of *Societas Perfecta*,” 6.

knowing. A phenomenological consideration of the body, taken up in Chapters Five and Six, can correct and renew our understanding of the church as a body, the body of Christ, on both of these counts.

IV. Conclusion

The nineteenth century marked a turning point in Catholic ecclesiology. Coming out of a tradition of ecclesiology done primarily as canon law and against a background of Enlightenment philosophy that valued the individual over the community, Johann Adam Möhler brought systematic theology back into the heart of ecclesiology, first through pneumatology and later through Christology. Breathing the air of German Romanticism and retrieving patristic sources, he brought forth an image of the church as a living, organic body that is the visible manifestation of the one Christian spirit. A “body” is an external manifestation of an interior, invisible spirit and is a whole in which all parts find their true identity. “Visible” is not synonymous with “juridical,” for all aspects of the church’s communal and liturgical life constitute its visibility. To say that the church is a body is to say that it is united across time and space by one single spirit, even as it lives and grows throughout history. In *Symbolism*, Möhler made it clear that this ecclesial body is the “permanent incarnation” of Christ and “the Son of God himself” which precedes, rather than proceeds from, the faithful. Here, in its vertical dimension, a “body” is the full manifestation of the person. To say that the church is the body of Christ is to say that it carries all of the authority of Christ himself.

Theologians in the Roman School continued the later Möhler’s Christocentric ecclesiology with an added emphasis on the role of Christ as Head. To say that the church is the body of Christ is to say that Christ is its head, governing and giving life to it; the body is the

subordinate, obedient, and fruitful spouse. We are made members of this mystical body through the Eucharist, which is itself an extension of the incarnation and is made present by the maternal priesthood. Vatican I and Leo XIII utilized this metaphor of headship to describe the authority and primacy of the pope and the requirements for membership in the body of Christ. To say that the church is a body is to say that it is a visible society whose many members are united by visible bonds under a single head. This visible body makes manifest the invisible and divine reality interior to the church; together, the visible and the invisible dimensions constitute the “mystical body of Christ.” This emphasis on visibility is perhaps the most consistent meaning given to the term “body” throughout this century, in continual defense against the Protestant notion of an “invisible church.”

In sum, in the late nineteenth century we see a merge of 1) the juridical and sociopolitical concept of the church as a “mystical body” that took hold in the high middle ages with 2) the image of a living, organic body that Möhler brought into ecclesiology in *Unity in the Church*. While Möhler’s turn to the church as a mystical unity and as a pneumatological and Christocentric reality greatly influenced theologians after him, it is important to remember that he himself never used the term “mystical body” in *Unity in the Church* or in *Symbolism*. Möhler’s image of the church as an organic body is significantly different from, and was developed to explicitly counter, the notion of the church as a mystical, as in ordered and sociojuridical, body. The confusion, conflict, and tensions in various streams of “mystical body ecclesiology” in the early twentieth century, which we explore in more detail in the following chapter but are already present in the texts of *Supremi Pastoris* and *Satis Cognitum*, are a result of the conflation of these two trends or images of the (mystical) body—one juridical, expressing

visibility and ordered unity under a single headship, and the other organic-biological, evoking common life in Christ and unity in one spirit.

Chapter Three: The Early Twentieth Century

“As the Church is a separate genre of society, in which the *physical* union to the *invisible* head is the end itself of the moral union to the visible head, and the analogy of the body is the symbol revealed by God as the most expressive of this mystical reality, the study of the Church as society should always be open to the analogical transpositions inspired and imposed by its special nature; the best that one should expect from a systematic study of the Church as supernatural society will be a new appreciation of the value of the analogy of the body.”

–Yves Congar, *Thèse du Lectorat* (1931), 6–7¹

I. Introduction

The previous chapter traced the use of the metaphor of the body in key figures in European and magisterial theology from 1825 through the turn of the twentieth century. As we’ve seen, the encyclicals of Leo XIII (1878–1903) utilized the metaphor of the body, and especially that of headship, to support his theology of the papacy. With the rise of anti-modernist sentiment in the papacies of Pius X (1903–1914) and Benedict XV (1914–1922), mainstream Catholic theology remained neoscholastic. Official ecclesiology in the first decades of the twentieth century (or rather, the end of the “long nineteenth-century”) was “still bound to Bellarmine’s model emphasizing visibility, perfect society, and juridical structures of organization and authority.”² Because of the stifling ecclesiastical atmosphere, the renewal of ecclesiology begun by Möhler was slowed. It wasn’t until the 1920s that the patristic, liturgical,

¹ Congar, *Thèse du Lectorat* (unpublished draft of a treatise on the church), 6–7, quoted in Rose Beal, *Mystery of the Church, People of God: Yves Congar’s Total Ecclesiology as a Path to Vatican II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 89, emphasis original.

² Ormond Rush, “Roman Catholic Ecclesiology from the Council of Trent to Vatican II and Beyond,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Avis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 273.

biblical, and ecumenical movements gained momentum and began to bear fruit in ecclesiology on the European continent.

The literature on the church as the mystical body, and on mystical body theology more broadly, exploded in the early twentieth century between 1920 and 1945. As Joseph Bluett notes in his literature review on the subject,

in the first half of the 1920's the amount of literature equaled that of the twenty previous years. And in the second half of the decade the output was doubled. The first half of the 1930's saw a volume of literature five times that of the corresponding years of the preceding decade. The crest of the acceleration seems to have come in 1937. Thereafter growth continued, but at a more moderate rate.³

Theologians approached the mystical body from a wide range of theological perspectives—doctrinal, biblical, liturgical, historical—and found it to be a rich resource for spirituality and social action as well.⁴ Among ecclesiologists, “the mystical body” or “the body of Christ” was frequently expounded in response to the growing ecumenical movement (even if only implicitly) but supported quite different theological positions. But beginning in the mid-1940s, theologians became increasingly critical of the metaphor of the mystical body as the sole definition for the church or the starting point for ecclesiology. The *ressourcement* of patristic sources and renewal of biblical and liturgical theology that led to the rise of mystical body theology/ecclesiology in the first place eventually led to the retrieval of “people of God” as a central ecclesiological notion. By the time of the Second Vatican Council, the metaphor of the mystical body was sidelined (relative to its prior prestige) and gave way to “people of God,” “sacrament,” and “communion” as freshly significant ecclesial metaphors.

³ Joseph Bluett, “The Mystical Body of Christ: 1890–1940,” *Theological Studies* 3, no. 2 (1942): 262. He surveys literature in Latin, French, and English. For a survey of the French-language literature up to 1950, see J. Eileen Scully, “The Theology of the Mystical Body of Christ in French Language Theology 1930–1950: A Review and Assessment,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (1992): 58–74.

⁴ Timothy Gabrielli shows how mystical body theology was expressed in the Catholic Worker movement in Dorothy Day’s writings in *One in Christ: Virgil Michel, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and Mystical Body Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017).

A number of contemporary theologians have noted the rise and decline of mystical body ecclesiology in the early twentieth century and sought to thematize and explain the diversity of theologies in this period. Timothy Gabrielli provides the latest analysis of the mystical body movement and very helpfully divides scholars in the early twentieth century into three ‘streams’: a German Romantic stream, a French-speaking socio-liturgical stream, and a Roman stream. Gabrielli finds that these streams differ based on “‘where they tend to ground, locate, or anchor, the slippery mystical body theology.’”⁵

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.⁶

He uses similar language in describing the 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, saying “Pius’ 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, its papacy.”⁷ Elsewhere, he describes the differences in the three streams by saying that “some versions [of mystical body theology] emphasized firm borders: either one is in the body or out of it. And some versions emphasized the more amorphous character of the mystical body of Christ.”⁸

⁵ Gabrielli, 7.

⁶ Gabrielli, 7. The goal of Gabrielli’s book is to argue that the French socio-liturgical stream continued in Beauduin and Chauvet.

⁷ Gabrielli, 14. In his 1939 manuscript *Der Christ als Christus*, Karl Pelz compared the unity between Christ and the mystical body to the hypostatic union. “The lack of attention to the visible and juridical aspects of the Church and his close identification of Christ and the Christian led to fears of a false mysticism that would obscure the distinction between Creator and creation.” Pelz’s text was placed on the Index in 1940. (Edward P. Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 11).

⁸ Gabrielli, *One in Christ*, xix.

Similarly, Edward Hahnenberg also provides a helpful historical overview of the rise and decline of mystical body ecclesiology. He states that the relationship between the mystical body of Christ and “the visible Church on earth was variously understood.” He then describes the approaches of Sebastian Tromp, Karl Pelz, and Émile Mersch as revealing “a range of views.” Tromp represents “a traditional attempt to harmonize the ancient image of the mystical body with the institutional and juridical approach of the neo-Scholastic period.” Then, “at the other end of the spectrum” is Karl Pelz, who neglected the institutional elements of the mystical body and too-closely identified Christ and the Christian, leading to a false mysticism. “Finally,” writes Hahnenberg, “the important contribution of Mersch represented a middle position,” distinguishing “between the visible society of the baptized under the direction of its legitimate shepherds and the mystical body which is the communion of those who live in the life of Christ.”⁹

Both Gabrielli and Hahnenberg are right to point out that there are important distinctions between authors. Gabrielli in particular astutely notes similarities within language groups and suggests that “the distinctions between these streams of mystical body theology help to explain...the ambiguities of *Mystici Corporis*” and “to sort...the various reasons why mystical body theology recedes just after mid-century.”¹⁰ But neither Gabrielli nor Hahnberg perfectly identify what those distinctions are. Gabrielli’s language of “grounding” and “planting” mystical body theology is rather imprecise. A theological dogma or ecclesial metaphor cannot be “grounded” in an institution. Moreover, mystical body theology is not, in itself, “slippery.” Likewise, Hahnenberg rightly describes the differences between these figures, but inexactly frames this as a “spectrum” of positions on the relationship between the mystical body and the

⁹ Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology,” 10–11.

¹⁰ Gabrielli, *One in Christ*, 7.

visible church. All of the authors maintain, in one way or another, that the mystical body of Christ is, or is found in, the Roman Catholic Church. The difference between them is not one of positions on a spectrum or of “grounding” the mystical body; rather, it is a difference of theological locus—of “the mystical body of Christ” as primarily either an ecclesiological expression or a Christological-soteriological doctrine. This, in turn, determines how the relationship between “the mystical body of Christ” and the Roman Catholic Church is expressed.

As I will show in this chapter, the differences between authors and streams arise because they begin their treatment of the corporeal metaphor from either an ecclesiological perspective or a Christological perspective. In other words, “the mystical body of Christ”—or in some authors, simply “the body of Christ”¹¹—is seen by some theologians (e.g. in the German and Roman streams) first and foremost as a metaphor for, or even a definition of, the church, making it an ecclesiological concept. For these theologians, the metaphor of the church as the (mystical) body of Christ expresses the intimate unity between Christ and the church as well as the unity among the baptized faithful and often with the pope. Others (e.g. the French stream), however, see “the mystical body” first and foremost as the mystery of our saving union with Christ. For these theologians, “mystical body” refers to the mutual indwelling of Christ and the individual believer, as expressed in St. Paul’s frequent claim that Christ is in us and we are ‘in Christ.’ The Head together with his mystical body make up “the whole Christ.” Thus, “mystical body” belongs simultaneously to the locus of Christology (because the mystical body is *His* body and makes up “the whole Christ”) and to soteriology (because we receive and participate in divine

¹¹ Because of this variation in terminology, it would be most accurate to use the phrase “the (mystical) body” or “the (mystical) body of Christ,” with parentheses, throughout this chapter when referring to this metaphor or theme in general. For ease of reading, I will not use the parentheses. It will become clear throughout the text why certain authors use the phrase “mystical body,” “mystical body of Christ,” or simply “body of Christ,” and the meaning of each.

life as members of His body). Of course, the Christological-soteriological perspective has consequences for ecclesiology, for one must ask how Christ's life is mediated to human persons in history, or how we become members of his body. As we will see, those who begin from a Christological-soteriological perspective will maintain that the Roman Catholic Church is the necessary visible and social mediation of the life and sanctifying grace of Christ; nevertheless, these authors do not *begin* their treatment of the mystical body from an ecclesiological standpoint. Distinguishing between the ecclesiological and soteriological approaches to "mystical body" will help us see more clearly why different theologians in this time period have such varying accounts of the mystical body and membership therein. In short, mystical body theology appears "slippery," in Gabrielli's words, only when this distinction of theological locus is overlooked.¹²

It is also important to remember that, within both loci, the phrase "mystical body of Christ" contains both a *vertical* dimension and a *horizontal* dimension which contributes to the differences between mystical body theologies/ecclesiologies and especially to the different understandings of the body therein [see Figure C]. We have already seen some of these differences in the nineteenth century. In the ecclesiological approach, the vertical dimension expresses the relationship between Christ and the church. The metaphor of the body is understood as indicating the relationship between the head (here, Christ the divine Head) and the

¹² Yves Congar intuited this distinction of theological locus later in his career as well, and clearly reveals his preference for the soteriological approach. Noting that the term "mystical body of Christ" did not mean for the medievals what it meant in *Mystici Corporis*, he points out that "according to the Fathers (St. Augustine, St. Gregory) and the scholastics, *Corpus Christi mysticum* is not in the first place an ecclesiological notion: it is a christological and soteriological notion." This is true in the Pauline texts as well: "When St. Paul says 'this body which is the Church,' he is not proposing *first* an ecclesiological affirmation, but a christological and soteriological one: the Church is something *of Christ*, a presence, an action, a manifestation. ...the essential reference is always christological." Yves Congar, "Peut-on définir l'Église? Destin et valeur de quatre notions qui s'offrent à le faire," in *Sainte Église: Études et approches ecclésiologiques*, Unam Sanctam 41 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 27. Translation mine.

body which is united to the head. The horizontal dimension speaks to intra-ecclesial order—the relationships and distinctions among members of the body and their functions within the church—as well as to the relationship between the church and the world. The metaphor of the body describes the church as a diverse yet unified whole, made up of many members joined to an earthly head. This ecclesial body is separate from or independent of the world; it is a perfect society. In the soteriological approach to mystical body theology, the vertical dimension typically expresses the relationship between Christ and the individual Christian who lives in Christ—between the Head and the member. The horizontal dimension is less developed in the soteriological approach, but is prominent in this time period in the work of Karl Adam who turns to the communion of saints to show that grace is mediated by Christians to one another across time and space.¹³ The metaphor of the body describes the church as a living organism in which life or grace flows from the Head to members and throughout the whole body; a member must be organically united to this body in order to receive and participate in its life. In its horizontal dimension, within both the ecclesiological and Christological-soteriological approaches, the metaphor of the body does not necessarily refer to Christ's body in particular but to any human body.

	Vertical	Horizontal	Symbol of "body"
Ecclesiological	Christ / Head ↓ Church / body (qua institution)	Pope / head ↙ ↘ members ↔ members	Visible unity of diverse parts organized under a head; body manifests identity of head or soul
Christological-soteriological	Christ / Head ↓ Christians / members (qua baptized individuals)	members ↔ members (grace, charity, prayer, etc.) (communion of saints)	Living organism with many members sharing in one life/spirit; life flows from head to members

Figure C

¹³ Mersch's historical survey of the doctrine of the mystical body indicates that the Scholastics also saw the communion of saints as mediating spiritual goods and satisfaction among human persons. Émile Mersch, *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition*, trans. John R. Kelly, SJ (London: Denis Dobson, 1962), 526–528.

The fundamental theological question at the nexus of the ecclesiological and soteriological, and the vertical and horizontal, is “how is salvation in Christ mediated to us concretely in history?” For an ecclesiologist, this is a question of the role of the church in salvation. The subsequent question, and the one that has consequences for ecumenism, is “what constitutes membership in this church”? (Otherwise put, “what is the relationship between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church?”) Because “mystical body of Christ” illuminates both soteriological and ecclesiological doctrines, and the image of the body evokes both vertical and horizontal relationships with Christ and with one another, it can be used to address both of these questions. But it is precisely the broad use of the term “mystical body” and the richness of the symbol of the body that leads to unresolved tensions in *Mystici Corporis* and contributes to the decline of the metaphor itself.

In this chapter, I review key figures within Gabrielli’s three streams in the early twentieth century—Romano Guardini and Karl Adam in the German stream, Émile Mersch and Yves Congar in the French stream, and Sebastian Tromp in the Roman stream. Finally, I turn to Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943) as the high point of the mystical body movement that blends the three streams. In my analysis of these authors and their texts, I will demonstrate first how they perceive “the mystical body” as, first and foremost, an aspect of either ecclesiology or of soteriology. Second, I will show how their understanding of embodiment shapes the way they describe 1) the relationship between Christ and the church (the vertical dimension) and 2) the internal hierarchy or ordering of the church (the horizontal dimension). The ecclesiological approaches tend to understand “body” as an organized unity of parts that is the visible manifestation of the person, the head, or the soul within the world; the soteriological approaches tend to describe “body” as organism that is made living by virtue of its

unity with its head, the source of life. I contend that this framework helps parse out, more helpfully and cogently than other authors, 1) the variations in mystical body theology/ecclesiology in the early twentieth century up to *Mystici Corporis* and 2) offers a more nuanced explanatory account of why the metaphor of the (mystical) body was critiqued in the decades following the encyclical and replaced by other ecclesial metaphors. This is the necessary foundation for any critical retrieval of the metaphor of the body in ecclesiology today.

II. The German Stream: The body as living community

As Kevin McNamara describes, the ecclesiological movement in Germany in the early twentieth century was shaped by the reaction against nineteenth-century individualism and a growing consciousness of “the community ideal.”¹⁴ Theologically, the “new consciousness of the Church as community” that was presented to meet this context arose out of the liturgical renewal movement in Germany, which brought to the fore the unity of all the faithful together in Christ in the celebration of the Mass, inspired a return to scriptural and patristic sources for ecclesiology, and fostered a vibrant lay apostolate movement.¹⁵ The ecclesiological renewal that Möhler, and those influenced by him in the Roman School, especially Scheeben, had begun decades earlier was continued at Tübingen by Karl Adam (1876–1966) and Romano Guardini (1885–1968), inaugurating a new wave of mystical body ecclesiology. McNamara writes,

With the publication of Karl Adam’s famous work, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, in 1924 the main lines of the new theology of the Church may be said to have made their appearance. It became known as the Mystical Body theology and was part of a wider Mystical Body ‘movement’, which sought to exploit the full value of the new theology for the liturgical, moral and spiritual life. ...The whole movement made a powerful appeal to the Catholics of Germany, especially to the younger

¹⁴ Kevin McNamara, “The Ecclesiological Movement in Germany in the Twentieth Century,” *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 102 (1964): 349.

¹⁵ McNamara, 346.

generation, and gave rise to a wholly new experience of Christian life.¹⁶

The twentieth century ecclesiological renewal begun by Guardini and Adam in Germany gradually spread throughout Europe and came to fruition at the Second Vatican Council.

Both Guardini and Adam inherited and developed the legacy of their predecessor at Tübingen, Johann Adam Möhler, and German Romantic thought more broadly. As we've seen, the nineteenth-century Roman School was influenced primarily by the Christocentrism of *Symbolism*. The later Möhler echoes throughout Guardini and Adam as well, most notably in their insistence that the church, as Christ's body, is the continuation of Christ himself. Yet Guardini and Adam also carry forth Möhler's early ecclesiological vision in *Unity in the Church*. This is especially evident in their developmental understanding of the church and its continuity of identity over time and their emphasis on the 'living word' alive in the 'living community.' In this way, both twentieth century theologians continue the organic paradigm of German Romantic thought—a significant influence on Möhler himself—which values life, dynamism, and multiplicity while also pursuing coherence, interconnection, and systematicity.¹⁷

In both Adam and Guardini, the church is seen as a living community—an approach which “stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing view of the church as an institution whose members are bound together by a set of divine and human rules.”¹⁸ Although the dominant scriptural metaphor for the church in Guardini's thought is an 'edifice' or 'structure' built on a

¹⁶ McNamara, 350.

¹⁷ Joris Geldhof, “German Romanticism and Liturgical Theology: Exploring the Potential of Organic Thinking,” *Horizons* 43 (2016): 288–91. According to Robert Krieg, Adam also utilized the *Lebensphilosophie* of Max Scheler, which accounts for a difference in form, though not in content, between him and Möhler (Robert A. Krieg, *Karl Adam: Catholicism in German Culture* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992], 42–43.). See John E. Thiel, “Karl Adam and the Council,” *The Month* 17 (November 1984): 380–381 for a brief summary of the influence of Möhler's *Unity in the Church* on Adam.

¹⁸ Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 29. Krieg notes that, in the aftermath of neo-Kantianism and World War I, the growth of phenomenology and the general interest among German academics in apprehending life's essence “led to widespread recognition of the importance of community” (31).

rock, expressing the church's supernatural capacity to withstand the ebb and flow of history, he sees the Pauline "mystical body of Christ" as expressing the nature of the church as a living organism, a community of living members within a whole. In Adam's ecclesiology, the image of the body plays a more explicit role, describing the organic unity of individuals and the church as the living manifestation of Christ's authority. For these two thinkers influenced by Romanticism, the image of the "organic body" evokes the interrelationship of the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts. Read together, Guardini and Adam exemplify the German stream of [mystical] body ecclesiology that views the ecclesial body as an organic living community in which the individual is united with the whole, and the whole is united with Christ.

1. Romano Guardini: living organism, living structure

In his 1922 *The Church and the Catholic*, Guardini argues that, following World War I and the limitations of neo-Kantian individualism and subjectivism, 'the church is awakening in souls,' meaning that humanity is coming to a new consciousness of the value of community, of 'the people.'¹⁹ The church is the Kingdom of God and is a supra-personal unity of all humanity that never annihilates the individual but unites her with God and with the whole, thus perfecting the individual's true existence. This is precisely what it means for the church to be an "organic life"—we achieve individuality by our existence in and embrace of the church community as interrelated parts within a whole, as cells within a living organism.²⁰ As a living organism, or a living structure, the church is a human and historical reality as well as a mystery. It was founded by Christ and born at Pentecost and has weathered the thrashings of history and heresy—an

¹⁹ Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 11.

²⁰ On the correspondence between German Romanticism and the organic paradigm with Guardini's work and the early twentieth-century liturgical movement, see Geldhof, "German Romanticism and Liturgical Theology."

impossibility for any other human institution, but made possible for the church by the power of the Spirit. Even as the church changes and develops with history, it transcends history, belonging to no particular age, fad, or passing opinion, but always communicating the truth of Christ.

In Guardini's judgment, this new consciousness of community accounts for the embrace of the image of the mystical body; it is the reason why "the conception of the Church as the *Corpus Christi mysticum*, which is developed in the Epistles of St. Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians, is acquiring a wholly new power."²¹ For Guardini, the *corpus Christi mysticum* is St. Paul's way of expressing the dialectical relationship between the individual believer and the whole church (the horizontal-ecclesiological element) as well as the fact that Christ lives in the church and is the 'content' of the church (the vertical-Christological element).²² The term *corpus* in Paul's usage indicates the unity of members with one another—"the objective, organic unity, in which the individuals are the members, a unity that does not depend upon the will or the experience of the individual but subsists objectively in itself."²³ Guardini finds it significant that Paul, who on the basis of his Damascus experience would have "been most tempted and most able to fashion Christian existence into an immediate and individual relation to Christ," does precisely the opposite by describing the church as a *corpus*, in which the individual believer finds life as a member of the whole.²⁴

From the concept of *corpus* in its ancient sociological usage, Paul then develops "the idea of the *soma Christou*, the Church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12ff). She is that great unity in which every individual is a member, and Christ is the head."²⁵ The church is Christ's body, and

²¹ Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic*, 23.

²² Romano Guardini, *The Church of the Lord: On The Nature and Mission of the Church*, trans. Stella Lange (Chicago: HRegnery Co, 1967), 73.

²³ Guardini, *The Church of the Lord*, 89.

²⁴ Guardini, 38.

²⁵ Guardini, 89.

“is herself Christ, mystically living on, herself the concrete life of truth and the fulness of salvation wrought by the God-man.”²⁶ The horizontal and the vertical come together in the church community: each individual believer “is a ‘cell’ in this great living organism, carried, arranged and united by the molding force which proceeds from the sacred Head.”²⁷ The individual is not crushed by the whole but is supported by it and finds life within it. In the liturgy especially, the individual believer knows herself as a member not only of the gathered assembly but of whole body of the faithful that transcends space and time.²⁸ Moreover, the whole church and every individual in it is permeated by Christ and manifests Christ to the world as his living body. “Christ lives in the Church and she proclaims Him to the world. Through her word, her sacraments and regulations, her whole life and being...she reveals the Lord.”²⁹

In his later work on the church published in 1965, reflecting back on the development of ecclesiology, Guardini notes that the concept of the mystical body seized theological consciousness in earlier decades because

the individual felt that he lived by the Church, that the Church lived in him, that between her and him there existed a relationship like that between a living part of the organism and the whole. Every believer stood in this relationship and so lived in a communion which was more intimate and rich than that which had been expressed by the ecclesiastical concept of membership in the ‘perfect society.’³⁰

Even after forty years, he continued to describe the church as both a solid building and a living organism, a living community. As Robert Krieg observes, Guardini’s ecclesiology in *The Church and the Catholic* “was a visionary statement, a ‘programmatic formulation’ for theology in the 1920s. It described what was taking place in German society and the church, and located this

²⁶ Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic*, 52; see also 54.

²⁷ Guardini, *The Church of the Lord*, 5. See also *The Church and the Catholic*, 43 and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 142 for the Christian as a ‘cell within an organism.’

²⁸ Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

²⁹ Guardini, *The Church of the Lord*, 49–50.

³⁰ Guardini, 5. This text was published in 1965 but often summarizes his thought in 1922.

yearning for community in relation to a Christian sense of human life in union with Christ.”³¹

Guardini’s colleague Karl Adam developed his own ecclesiology in a similar vein, with even greater and more detailed use of the metaphor of the body to express the fundamental reality of community.

2. Karl Adam: the body as community

As a professor at Tübingen, Karl Adam explicitly situated himself as a continuator of the nineteenth-century Tübingen school’s theological synthesis of speculative theology and historical research.³² In his view, generation after generation of Tübingen theologians crafted a *Lebenstheologie* that views Christianity as “a loose, streaming life, the mystical Christ who is realized in his church” which is “not a sum of individuals but an overarching community which creates faithful individuals.”³³ Adam continued this “theology of life” and view of the church as a community that precedes the individual in *The Spirit of Catholicism*.

Like Guardini, Adam’s primary way of viewing the Catholic Church is as a community or a fellowship of the faithful, and he too is responding to the subjectivism and individualism resulting from the Enlightenment and the collapse of nations after World War I. Against this background, he proposes the Roman Catholic Church as an ancient and stable fellowship of all humanity. For Adam, the church “is nothing else than the unity of fallen humanity accomplished by the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, the Kosmos of men, mankind as a whole, the many as one.”³⁴ The incarnation accomplishes the work of redeeming all of humanity and constituting all people

³¹ Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 36.

³² Krieg, 24–25.

³³ Adam, “Die katholische Tübinger Schule,” in Fritz Hoffman, ed. *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Dogmengeschichte* (Augsburg: Haas & Cie, 1936), 389–412, quoted in Krieg, 25–26.

³⁴ Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 32.

as a new humanity in Christ. For this reason the church is described as an organic, rather than a mechanical or contractual, unity of persons with each other and with Christ: “The ‘many,’ the sum total of all who need redemption, are in their inner relationship to one another, in their interrelation and correlation, in their organic communion, objectively and finally the Body of Christ, never more separable from Him for all eternity.”³⁵ The organic nature of the church also accounts for its continuity and stability over time—it is a living reality that embraces all of humanity without losing its essential identity. Thus Christ continues to live in the church as its very essence, the source of its authority, and the reason for its exclusivity as the source of salvation. It is the community as a whole, rather than any individual within it or any written texts, that is the “organ” of the Spirit of Christ and the mediator of the living word throughout history.

The main scriptural metaphors that punctuate Adam’s ecclesiology are Kingdom of God and Body of Christ, and he identifies distinct attributes of the church that are highlighted by each metaphor.³⁶ “Because she is the Kingdom of God, she is no haphazard collection of individuals, but an *ordered system of regularly subordinated parts*. And because the Church is the Body of Christ, she is essentially *an organism, with its members purposively interrelated*, and a *visible organism*.”³⁷ Thus, the metaphor of the Kingdom evokes the sense of a hierarchically ordered society, whereas the image of the body evokes a visible unity of members; both operate as horizontal metaphors. The essence of the Catholic Church is this unity—“the actual inner unity of redeemed humanity united with Christ.”³⁸ This is an organic unity, meaning “a unity with

³⁵ Adam, 35. Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 6–9 describes the influence on Adam of neoromanticism’s “‘organic’ view of reality in which all parts were seen within a whole” (9) and its *Lebensphilosophie*, “whose center point was a vague, inclusive notion of life” (7).

³⁶ Adam does not call them metaphors but definitions of the church.

³⁷ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, 31, emphasis mine.

³⁸ Adam, 36.

inner differentiation.” As St. Paul expresses, “the Body of Christ, if it be a true body, must have members and organs with their special tasks and functions, which each in its measure serves the development of the essential form of the body and which therefore serve one another.”³⁹ The ecclesial body, then, is a plurality of members with differentiated functions, bound together by the Spirit of Christ, each member serving the whole.

The unity of the ecclesial body is a hierarchically ordered structural unity as well as a unity of love among all members across time and space. For Adam, the pope is the visible embodiment, expression, and protector of ecclesial unity, and the pope and the bishops alike are the “true structural organs” of the Body of Christ that provide external stability.⁴⁰ However, “the organic activity of the Body is not confined to this administrative activity.”⁴¹ The various other members of the body (though they are described as “weaker” members⁴²) provide the inner dynamism of love, without which the Body of Christ “would be a rigid corpse.”⁴³ In a unique move not seen in other authors on the mystical body, Adam turns to the doctrine of the communion of saints to describe how the various members of the Body of Christ, extended across time in the church militant, suffering, and triumphant, are bound to one another in a fellowship of love, prayer, solidarity, and mutual aid. The love among the communion of saints on earth is “the life-blood of the Body of Christ, which, welling forth out of the heart of the God-man, flows through the whole Body and gives it form and strength and beauty.”⁴⁴ As Krieg

³⁹ Adam, 36–37.

⁴⁰ Adam, 38. He draws explicitly from Möhler’s *Unity in the Church* in his description of the papacy and episcopacy as the expression of the community’s love and unity.

⁴¹ Adam, 97.

⁴² Adam, 98.

⁴³ Adam, 138.

⁴⁴ Adam, 138.

notes, the doctrine of the communion of saints indicates that “the church’s communal nature is disclosed in a unity that is not constrained by the limits of time and space.”⁴⁵

The definition of the church as the Body of Christ (as well as the Kingdom of God) also has a vertical-ecclesiological dimension. It means, for Adam, that the church is the living continuation of Christ’s presence in history—“the realisation in history of His divine and human Being,” most especially in its dogma, worship, and morals.⁴⁶ Christ lives and is incarnate in the church and is “the real self of the Church;” the church is “permeated by Christ” and organically united to him. “Christ and the Church can no more be regarded separately than can a head and its body.”⁴⁷ Likewise, the church is not simply the seed or foreshadowing of the Kingdom, but “is the realisation on earth of the Kingdom of God;” “this ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ is...implanted in her own being and there manifested.”⁴⁸ Adam clearly follows in the line of Möhler’s *Symbolism* in interpreting “body of Christ” as “ongoing incarnation.” In its preaching, teaching, and sacramental action, the church manifests Christ to the world.

Adam’s vertical-ecclesiological interpretation of “body of Christ” as Christ’s own self has two consequences. First, it leads to a high theology of the papacy, episcopacy and priesthood, just as it does for Möhler in *Symbolism*. The organic unity between Christ and the church is the foundation of ecclesiastical authority, for all power and authority in the church is the power and authority of Christ. From Christ, power flows to the apostles, and from them to their successors, the bishops. This applies not only to the sanctifying power, but to the teaching power as well, and

⁴⁵ Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 38.

⁴⁶ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, 20. Krieg notes that when the Holy Office studied Adam’s book in the early 1930s, one of the criticisms of it was that it too closely identified Christ with the Church. See Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 48–49. I agree with this critique, though Krieg refers to Adam’s work as showing the church as ‘organically united’ to Christ, as ‘manifesting’ Christ, and as the place where people ‘meet Christ’ (40, 42), suggesting that Krieg sees more of a gap.

⁴⁷ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, 15. Adam says this doctrine is found in early church fathers, through Aquinas, “and thence on to our own unforgettable Möhler.”

⁴⁸ Adam, 14.

not only to the bishop as the successor of the apostles, but to all ordained priests. For example, “a sermon by the pope in the Sistine Chapel has no more weight than the words of a simple parish priest in a remote village church.” This equality comes about not, however, by relativizing the importance of the pope in relation to the entire priesthood, but precisely by elevating the entire priesthood to the level of Christ. “For it is not Peter, or Paul, or Pius that preaches, but Christ.”⁴⁹ In this regard, Adam follows in the trajectory of Möhler’s account of church authority in *Symbolism*, in which Möhler claims that dogmatic statements of faith and morals are “to be revered as the sentences of Christ himself.”⁵⁰ But whereas Möhler identifies Christ’s authority with the church’s magisterium, Adam extends this teaching authority to all priests. In both authors, this theology of ecclesial authority is rooted in the interpretation of the church as the “Body of Christ” to mean that the church is the continuation of Christ himself.

Second, Adam employs his vertical-ecclesiological interpretation of “body of Christ” to explain the church as the locus of salvation, though in a much less developed way than we will see in the French and Roman streams. For Adam, we encounter Christ in the church. Just as Christ is the source of our salvation, the church, precisely insofar as she is the Body of Christ, is “the exclusive institution wherein all men shall attain salvation....In her own eyes the Catholic Church is nothing at all if she be not *the Church, the Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God.*”⁵¹ “The one Christ and the one Body of Christ belong indissolubly together.”⁵² The purpose of the formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is “to formulate positively the truth that there is but one Body of Christ and therefore but one Church which possesses and imparts the grace of Christ in

⁴⁹ Adam, 23.

⁵⁰ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1997), 281.

⁵¹ Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, 159, 160.

⁵² Adam, 163.

its fullness.”⁵³ Just as there is no second Christ, there can be no second church that claims to be his Body. Nevertheless, Adam attenuates this exclusivist position by noting that some non-Catholic communions retain elements of the Catholic church and its means of grace, and that the Catholic tradition affirms that the sacraments can be both objectively valid and subjectively efficacious outside of the church: “God’s grace work[s] even outside the Catholic body” in extraordinary ways, uniting individuals to the soul of the church.⁵⁴ In this regard, for Adam the reality of the “Body of Christ” extends *beyond* the Roman Catholic Church, at least in its visible dimension.

Because and in so far as the Body of Christ comprehends all those who are saved by Christ, those also who are visited by His grace in this immediate way belong to His Church. It is true that they do not belong to its outward and visible body, but they certainly belong to its invisible, supernatural soul, to its supernatural substance. For the grace of Christ never works in the individual in an isolated fashion, but always in and through the unity of His Body. And thus it holds good, even for those brethren who are thus separated from the visible organism of the Church, that they too are saved through the Church, and not without her or in opposition to her.⁵⁵

While Adam does not give further detail about how it is that one could belong to the soul of the church without belonging to its ‘visible organism’ (nor does he say what the ‘soul’ of the church is), his interpretation of the metaphor of the body, in the context of the question of membership, admits some possibility of belonging to the body of Christ without belonging to the visible body of the church. We will see this position developed in greater detail in Yves Congar, and ambiguously both rejected and affirmed in *Mystici Corporis*.

Krieg and other scholars argue that Adam and Guardini were significant actors in the mystical body ecclesiology movement of the 1920s and 30s. *The Spirit of Catholicism* “set the

⁵³ Adam, 164.

⁵⁴ Adam, 166.

⁵⁵ Adam, 170.

stage for *Mystici Corporis* by promoting the idea that Christ meets us not solely as individuals but as members of the Christian community” and revitalized the notion of the church as a living, organic body of Christ, begun in Möhler but stifled by the societal concept of the body in Vatican I and Leo XIII.⁵⁶ As Ormond Rush puts it, Adam’s book became “a ‘major reference point in Catholic ecclesiology for the next forty years.’”⁵⁷ Adam’s influence is seen in later decades in the work of Yves Congar, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, and *Lumen Gentium*.⁵⁸ Adam brought the notion of the church as community into the fore, moving ecclesiology out of the dominant institutional and apologetic approach and toward a more biblical, dogmatic, and historically conscious ecclesiology. He did so by understanding the church’s embodiment as unity—vertical unity between Christ and the church, and horizontal unity within the community of faithful across time and space. “It was precisely this dynamic view of the Church and its tradition which appealed to his contemporaries, established the popular reception of his work, and paved at least one road leading to Vatican II.”⁵⁹ The German stream of (mystical) body ecclesiology had shortcomings, it is true—it risked downplaying the visible structures of the church and the salvific role of Jesus’ death and resurrection, overemphasizing the invisible bonds of grace and charity and the salvific role of the incarnation, and too closely identifying the church and Christ.⁶⁰ And of course, as Krieg, Gabrielli, and Hahnenberg note, Adam’s emphasis on community and his conceptually unclear theology of grace building on nature found too close an affinity with the rhetoric of the National Socialist party in 1930s Germany.⁶¹ Nevertheless,

⁵⁶ Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 52.

⁵⁷ Ormond Rush, “Roman Catholic Ecclesiology,” 274.

⁵⁸ Thiel, “Karl Adam and the Council.”

⁵⁹ Thiel, 379.

⁶⁰ McNamara, “The Ecclesiological Movement in Germany,” 350; Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 55.

⁶¹ Krieg reviews Adam’s writings and public lectures between 1933 and 1939, showing how he attempted to not-entirely-uncritically bridge National Socialist ideology with Catholicism’s emphasis on community and its ability to perfect human culture, concluding that “Adam favored German nationalism, but he was not a National Socialist” (Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 135); see also 107–136 and 170–176; Gabrielli, *One in Christ*, 23–28.

Vatican II's ecclesiology “would not have been possible without such preparations and struggles [as Adam's].”⁶²

The German stream's emphasis on the church as the living community of believers united in Christ stands out as even more communitarian when compared with the French stream's emphasis on the “mystical body” as the unity of the individual with Christ, as we will see next.

III. The French Stream: The body as life-giving organism

The French stream of mystical body theology/ecclesiology is represented here by the Belgian Jesuit Émile Mersch and the early work (1932–1941) of the French Dominican Yves Congar. Mersch is often noted as *the* proponent of mystical body theology in the early twentieth century. His text *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition* (1933) provides an extensive historical retrieval of mystical body theology—the doctrine of our incorporation in Christ—in scripture and the Greek and Latin traditions; *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (1944) builds on this history by developing a comprehensive systematic account of the doctrine of the mystical body.⁶³ In his early lectures, essays, and drafts of a treatise *De Ecclesia*, Congar turns to the mystical body to wrest ecclesiology out of the realm of apologetics and scholastic categories of causation⁶⁴ and unveil a

⁶² Heinrich Fries, a student of Adam, in Krieg, *Karl Adam*, 54fn99.

⁶³ Mersch wrote the first draft of this book between 1929 and 1935. He rewrote the entire work in a second edition, completed in 1939. By May 1940, he had completed a third edition nearly ready for print. When Mersch was killed in a bombing raid in France shortly thereafter, only eleven chapters of the third edition were recovered. It was published posthumously in French in 1944 (the English translation in 1952) and is comprised of those eleven chapters plus the ten remaining chapters of the second edition. The chapters “Nature and Notes of the Church” and “Functions of the Church” to which I refer here are from the second edition. The chapter on the sacraments is from the third edition. See the introduction to the English edition by Cyril Vollert, SJ, ix–xi.

⁶⁴ This scholastic approach to the causes of the church was present in the work of Carlo Passaglia; see Valfredo Maria Rossi, “Carlo Passaglia's *De Ecclesia Christi*: A Trinitarian Ecclesiology at the Heart of the 19th Century,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 329–46. Charles Journet continues this in the twentieth century (*L'Eglise du Verbe incarné*, 3 vols [Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1941, 1951, 1969]).

truly theological account of ‘the mystery of the church in all its dimensions.’⁶⁵ For Congar, any treatment of the church as a society will be inadequate and incomplete without attention to the “mystical body” as the inner mystery of the church. Though in his later career he preferred “people of God” and “temple of the Holy Spirit” as central paradigms for ecclesiology, he continued to use “body of Christ” to evoke the newness of the covenant in Christ. As we will see, Mersch’s influence is palpable in Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*; Congar’s impact is felt later in the documents of Vatican II.

In order to understand the contribution of the French stream to (mystical) body ecclesiology in the early twentieth century and the various images of the body therein, it is important to keep in mind the distinction I drew earlier between “mystical body” as a Christological-soteriological doctrine and as an ecclesial metaphor or definition. For both Mersch and Congar, the term “mystical body” refers to our union with and incorporation in Christ, evoking the vertical dimension of unity between Christ and the Christian. It is first and foremost a Christological doctrine, describing the continuation of Christ’s life in all humankind and our recapitulation or divinization in Christ.⁶⁶ As Gregory Malanowski puts it, Mersch’s work on the theology of the mystical body is not “a treatise on the Church” but “a synthesis of theology that reflects a broad Christocentric vision.”⁶⁷ This Christological-soteriological approach will have consequences for ecclesiology insofar as the church mediates Christ to humanity and incorporates us in Christ, but for neither author is “mystical body” primarily an ecclesiological category.

⁶⁵ For an excellent treatment of Congar’s efforts to develop a “total ecclesiology” in his early unpublished and published works up to *Lay People in the Church*, see Beal, *Mystery of the Church*.

⁶⁶ Different readers of the French stream describe this differently. For example, Scully labels this a Christological/incarnational emphasis; Bouyer calls it a “spirituality stream” (Scully, “The Theology of the Mystical Body of Christ,” 158–160).

⁶⁷ Gregory Malanowski, “The Christocentrism of Émile Mersch and Its Implications for a Theology of Church” (Ph.D. Diss., The Catholic University of America, 1988), 2.

Nevertheless, both authors also use the metaphor of the human body in their ecclesiologies to describe the social, institutional reality of the church (the horizontal ecclesiological dimension) and Christ's relationship to the church as a whole (the vertical ecclesiological dimension). It is here that we see the phrases "the body of the Church" or "His social body." To be clear, these terms are *not* synonymous with "mystical body" in the French stream as they will be for the Roman Stream, though as we will see, these two realities are intrinsically united—the social body is the visible manifestation of the mystical body. It is important to note the distinctions of terminology and reference here because the metaphor of the body is used in multiple contexts—the Christological-soteriological "mystical body" and the ecclesiological "body of the Church"—but the symbolic meaning of "the body" varies significantly depending on its theological locus. Mersch and Congar envision the body as a living organism *when speaking about the 'mystical body,'* but envision the body as both a living organism and as a juridical society/organization when speaking about *the body of the church*. For both theologians, the metaphor of the church as a body ultimately expresses the necessity of the visible, institutional church for participation in Christ's life, his mystical body. As I will argue later in this chapter, *Mystici Corporis Christi* attempts to integrate the Christological-soteriological starting point and organic metaphors of the French stream with the much more juridical ecclesiology and organizational metaphors of Sebastian Tromp.

1. Émile Mersch: mystical body, central mystery

For Mersch, the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ is the doctrine of our incorporation in Christ and the continuation of Christ's life in us. "Dissatisfied with the Western scholastic tendency to depict the relationship of Christ to the Church in terms of principal and

instrumental causality”⁶⁸ and seeking to counter the modern ills of naturalism, individualism, nationalism, modernism, and false mysticism, Mersch turned to the patristic notion of the mystical body to describe our individual and collective union with Christ. The mystical body is the supernatural union between Christ and humankind—between Head and members—that brings about our divinization and the fullness of Christ himself.⁶⁹ Because our union with Christ is both the effect and the prolongation of the incarnation—the union of the divine with human nature—the mystical body encompasses, at least potentially, the entire human race and, in a sense, the whole cosmos. It is “the supernatural unity of all creation, and more particularly, since men are in question, the unity of mankind in the God-man,” including all those “who live or ought to live in Christ.”⁷⁰ The unity of the members with their Head, and the sharing of one divine life between them, constitutes one person—“the whole Christ” or “the mystical Christ.” “The faithful are not merely in Christ, nor are they simply one in Christ; they are Christ Himself, the one Christ, the Mystical Christ.”⁷¹ In this way, the mystical body is a theandric reality and the prolongation of Christ’s human and historical life throughout history. Moreover, Mersch insists that the mystical body is no mere metaphor, figure of speech, or simply a moral union with Christ. Rather, it is “a ‘physical’ union, we should say, if the very term itself did not appear to place this bond in the category of mere natural unions. At all events it is a real, ontological union, or, since the traditional names are still the best, it is a mystical, transcendent, supernatural union” between Christ and the Christian.⁷² Two scriptural references echo throughout Mersch’s

⁶⁸ Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 421–422.

⁶⁹ Mersch almost always speaks of the shared life and unity of “Head and members” rather than “Head and body,” suggesting that his interest is not so much on the unity between Christ and the church *qua* institution or community, but on the unity between Christ and the individual believer.

⁷⁰ Émile Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co, 1952), 51.

⁷¹ Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 139.

⁷² Mersch, 584.

work as a summary of the doctrine of the mystical body: Paul's expression "in Christ" (for example, in the prologue to Ephesians) and Christ's own words, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).⁷³

For Mersch, then, mystical body theology is an aspect of Christology because the mystical body is an aspect of Christ Himself—it is the continuation of his divinized humanity in the lives of the faithful; it is the fullness of Christ, his *pleroma*. It is not a metaphor for the church but is a Christological reality. Indeed, it is the central dogma and mystery of Christianity and is prefigured in the Old Testament; is present, even if 'hidden,' throughout the New Testament; and in the Greek and Latin traditions "is somehow present in every dogma, giving each truth a new meaning for the interior life."⁷⁴ This is evident in the very structure and content of Mersch's major works. For example, *The Theology of the Mystical Body* presents a detailed, 400-plus page systematic treatment of supernatural truth and the unity of theology; the preparation for Christ in creation, original sin, and Mary; the incarnation, the mystical body, and our redemption; and the Trinitarian relations. Only then does Mersch attend much more briefly to the nature, notes, functions, and sacraments of the church, and he does so "not to construct a treatise *On the Church* for its own sake" but "to see, at least in bold outline, how an ecclesiology that is nothing but a continuation of Christology would take shape."⁷⁵ It is also telling that in *The Whole Christ*, when surveying medieval developments in the doctrine of the mystical body, Mersch does not make a single mention of the secularization and juridicization of the term

⁷³ Interestingly, for Mersch, the Pauline use of the term "body of Christ" is not the key expression of the central mystery of our unity in Christ. "For all its energy, it does not designate so intimate a union as do the brief sentences in which Paul declares that, in Christ, we are *unus*, one mystical person, one Mystical Christ" (149). The metaphor of the body is only one of several scriptural images (such as the vine and the branches or the spousal metaphor) that points to the central mystery. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the body in the Pauline letters convey two key points: the unity of all in Christ, and the presence of Christ the Head within the body, the church.

⁷⁴ Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 580.

⁷⁵ Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 481.

“mystical body” or its use by Boniface VIII and the conciliarist movement. Rather, he briefly mentions developments in early medieval sacramental theology before focusing extensively on the Scholastics’ development of the grace of headship and the influx of Christ’s grace to members of his body by virtue of his humanity. In other words, in both his historical analysis and systematic presentation of the doctrine, the mystical body is first and foremost a comprehensive Christology and soteriology rather than an ecclesial metaphor or definition of the church.

This is not to say, however, that the mystical body has no ecclesiological implications or ecclesial resonances for Mersch. The ‘vertical’ union between Christ and the Christian that is the heart of Christian dogma is the foundation and cause of the ‘horizontal’ unity among Christians themselves. In this sense, the term “mystical body” also refers to the unity of all the faithful—the members of the body—with one another. For this reason, Mersch often uses the terms “Church” and “mystical body” interchangeably, suggesting that the church is most fundamentally a mystical communion rather than a juridical institution. When treating ecclesiology directly, however, Mersch holds a clear terminological distinction between the mystical body and the juridical reality that is the Roman Catholic Church. He writes:

Although we may nearly always regard the terms, Church and mystical body, as interchangeable, it does not follow that the two expressions have exactly the same shade of meaning in every case and from every point of view. . . . In the ordinary language of the Church, ‘mystical body’ connotes the entire multitude of those who live the life of Christ, with a life that admits of degrees, whereas the word ‘Church’ represents the society of the baptized faithful as organized under their lawful pastors.⁷⁶

In this usage, then, “mystical body” is a much broader Christological reality, whereas “the Church” is, following Bellarmine, a narrower social and juridical reality.

⁷⁶Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 479–480. On ‘degrees of life,’ he cites Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIIa, q. 8, a. 3.

As we seek to understand the diverse meanings of the image of the body in these authors, it is important to note that Mersch uses the image of the body in reference to both of these realities—the mystical body and the church—but with quite different connotations. Mersch sees the mystical body as a living organism, one that is defined by and made living by its Head, and he describes the unity of this body in organic, biological language. We participate in Christ's life by being united to the Head of the living body, for "the life of the body is but the continuation of the life of the Head" and the Head is incomplete without a body.⁷⁷ United to the Head and bound together by him, "the members interchange their blood, their energies, their assistance. And, by the life-giving virtue of the Head, the whole body has within itself its own principle of development and of growth. Hence, the body lives; it lives truly, and it effects its own development."⁷⁸ In contrast, when speaking of "the soul and the body of the Church," Mersch defines the body in organizational, sociological terms: the body of the church is "the external aspect, the empirical society which is the Church of Rome."⁷⁹ It is "an empirical, concrete, visible, tangible thing...it has its clearly defined members and its definite seat...as a society it is perfect in its kind, with a firm and well-delineated structure."⁸⁰ In other words, "body" in "mystical body" indicates *unity and life*, whereas "body" in "the body of the Church" indicates *a visible ordered society*. The symbol of the body is used throughout in Mersch's work, but with very different meanings depending on its theological referent.

Still, the organic and the organizational resonances of the body interweave, for the mystical presence of Christ in the church "makes His supernatural society an organism of

⁷⁷ Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 579.

⁷⁸ Mersch, 119.

⁷⁹ Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 484.

⁸⁰ Mersch, 482–83.

salvation.”⁸¹ The “empirical society” that is the church is also a living, organic body, an “organism of grace.”⁸² In notable contrast to the German and Roman authors considered here, Mersch uses the image of an organic ecclesial body to argue against an overemphasis on centralization in the church. As in every human society, some centralization is necessary in the church. But excessive centralization, “by forcing life too much to the center...runs the risk of lopping off members and of killing the organism.”⁸³ The life of Christ, as the life and soul of the body, is given equally to all members. Moreover, leaders within the ecclesiastical structure of the church never cease to be members of the organic body, like all the rest.⁸⁴ For Mersch, the body of the church is not in essence a hierarchically ordered organism, as it will be for Sebastian Tromp, but, closer to Möhler’s organic body of *Unity in the Church*, is the whole of members, united to Christ and so to one another, sharing a common life.

Though Mersch clearly distinguishes between the mystical body and the Roman Catholic Church, he also holds that the two are intimately united; the latter is the external and visible manifestation of the former. The mystical body, as we have seen, is our incorporation in Christ that brings about our divinization and the unity of all those who live Christ’s life. It is “the mysterious and interior element of the Church.”⁸⁵ As a visible society, the Church “is but the expression and the body of its invisible life, which is grace and divinization in Christ.”⁸⁶ The juridical unity of the Church is “the visible expression and the social body of an interior unity that is its soul and life, the visible side of a great invisible deification.”⁸⁷ To further describe and

⁸¹ Mersch, *The Whole Christ*, 561.

⁸² Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 552.

⁸³ Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 449.

⁸⁴ Contrast this with *Mystici Corporis* in which Pius XII writes that bishops are the superior members of the body.

⁸⁵ Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 484.

⁸⁶ Mersch, 552.

⁸⁷ Mersch, 494.

express this unity between the mystical body or life of grace and the body of the church, Mersch draws analogies to Christology and to the unity of the body and soul in a human person.

First of all, for Mersch, because Christians are the continuation of Christ, ecclesiology “is nothing but a continuation of Christology.”⁸⁸ But rather than suggesting that the church is analogous to Christ’s divine and human natures, as others do, Mersch sees the church as the continuation of *Christ’s humanity in particular*. In Mersch’s Christology, there are two aspects to Christ’s humanity: it was “both an empirical thing and a mysterious reality”—a “humanity like all others” on the one hand, and on the other, an “empirical humanity...mysteriously divinized with a superabundant fullness, so as to possess, in the manner of a universal source, the supernatural life and divinization of all mankind.”⁸⁹ Since the church is a continuation of Christ’s humanity, the church likewise has two aspects: a visible empirical reality, and an invisible reality, a life of grace and divinization. These two aspects are for Mersch the body and the soul of the church. The body is the external, empirical, juridical reality or society, the Church of Rome. The soul is the principle of unified life, and is variously identified as divinizing grace, as Christ himself as the head of all graces, or as “the humanity of Christ regarded as a universal principle of divinization.”⁹⁰ These two aspects of the church—body and soul, visible and invisible—make up a single entity. Just as Christ’s “humanity and the transcendent divinization of it” are united without confusion or division, are distinct but inseparable, so too “the two aspects that perpetuate the two aspects of Christ’s sacred humanity, the aspect of the empirical society and the aspect of

⁸⁸ Mersch, 481.

⁸⁹ Mersch, 482. To be clear, the latter of these two aspects is not divinity itself, but *divinization*, brought about by hypostatic union with divinity. I make a point to draw this out because Mersch is attempting to avoid applying the hypostatic union to the church (a mistake which the later Congar finds in the tradition). He’s not claiming that the church is both human and divine, but both human and *divinized*. He still calls the church a “theandric reality,” not because divinity is one of its own aspects or elements, but because “it is the perpetuation of the theandric humanity, the humanity fully divinized and subsisting in the Word, the humanity of the God-man” (483). However, I find the distinction between an “empirical humanity” and “divinized humanity” to be arbitrary and untenable.

⁹⁰ Mersch, 495.

fellowship in grace and divinization, are indissolubly united in the Church, without on that account being identified.”⁹¹

Here, we see Mersch beginning to develop a theology of the church as sacrament. Just as “the sacred humanity is the great sacrament, the sacrament par excellence,” so too “the visible Church, as the continuation of Christ’s humanity, perpetuates the sacramental character of the sacred humanity as the sacrament par excellence. Like Him and in Him, it is a sacrament essentially and in its very structure; it is the appearance of the divine in the human...The Church is a sacrament in all its acts.”⁹² Moreover, it is precisely in the sacraments that “the Church, the body of Christ, fully actuates itself as the body of Christ, the body of holiness, the body of grace.”⁹³ Mersch does not develop this notion of the church as sacrament, or the body as a sacrament, in any greater detail, but his efforts to unite the mystical body with the body of the church (the invisible with the visible) lead him to the category of sacrament, just as it will for Congar.⁹⁴

Mersch’s theandric ecclesiology and hylomorphic body-soul analogy are central to his explanation of membership in the Roman Catholic Church as necessary for salvation. The soul, as the form of the body, “imparts existence to the body and is its act, its ultimate interior principle; and the body is the realization and expression of the soul on the level open to experience.” The body is limited in time and space, while the soul, as spirit, is limitless.⁹⁵ And so with the church. The church, as an institution, a social body, is “likewise the body of something

⁹¹ Mersch, 485. Mersch applies the hypostatic union analogously to these ‘two aspects’ of Christ’s humanity—there is the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures, and an analogous hypostatic union of the empirical humanity and the divinized humanity. The church is a continuation of the second, analogous hypostatic union.

⁹² Mersch, 548, 549.

⁹³ Mersch, 550. This is one of the few times where Mersch refers to the church as “the body of Christ” rather than the “body of the Church” which is the visible expression of the “mystical body.” The church is Christ’s own body, since the sacraments are actions of Christ himself, yet are also actions of the church.

⁹⁴ Malanowski, “The Christocentrism of Émile Mersch,” 261–62, 168.

⁹⁵ Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 505.

unlimited, the body of a soul that is the universal gift of the Infinite to men in Christ”—it is the expression in time and space of Christ, its soul. Thus, on the question of salvation, Mersch deduces:

If the Church is thus the ‘body’ whose soul is Christ, and if it is union with God and the vehicle of the universal salvific will, *it must be necessary with the necessity of Christ*, of God, and of God’s universal will to save. Therefore we must insist that salvation is not to be found outside the Church, and that submission to the Roman Pontiff is necessary for the salvation of every human creature. This does not mean that adherence to the Church is just one more condition to fulfill in order to achieve salvation, but that the Church *is salvation* such as it is offered today... Christ is mediator, not as a third person placed between two conflicting parties, but as God who lives with man in the unity of His unique divine person. In like manner the Church is not a mechanism placed between Christ and the faithful, *but is Christ Himself* who has come to live in mystical union with the faithful.⁹⁶

Note that in contrast to Leo XIII, this exclusivist soteriology is not, in Mersch’s case, deduced from the metaphor of the head (in which salvation-life is only in the body by being united to the head), but rather comes through a body-soul anthropology applied quite literally to the church.

In spite of this very clear statement from Mersch, Malanowski argues that Mersch “would admit a broader membership in the Mystical Body than in the Roman Catholic Church.”⁹⁷ Recall that Mersch insists that “church” and “mystical body” describe two different realities which are not absolutely identical. The former is the juridical society of the baptized faithful; the latter is a broader Christological reality that includes all those who live the life of Christ. Accordingly, Mersch claims that “a person can be a member of the visible society of the Church without actually living the life of Christ as a perfect member of the mystical body... Likewise, one can truly live the life of Christ without being actually attached to the visible society that is His Church.”⁹⁸ Unfortunately, there remains an irreconcilable tension between his broader definition

⁹⁶ Mersch, 507, emphases mine.

⁹⁷ Malanowski, “The Christocentrism of Émile Mersch,” 254.

⁹⁸ Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, 480.

of “mystical body” and membership therein, on the one hand, and his use of a hylomorphic body-soul analogy on the other hand. For Mersch does not articulate how one could be a member of the ‘soul’ of the church without being a member of the ‘body’ which is the very manifestation in time and space of the soul, nor does he explain how one could be a member of the mystical body, sharing in Christ’s divine life, but if not ordered under the Roman Pontiff, would not be saved. Ultimately, though Mersch views the mystical body as a Christological doctrine of our salvific incorporation in and union with Christ, rather than as an ecclesiological doctrine or metaphor for the church, the reality of this organic, mystical body is only found within the social body, the Roman Catholic Church. The Christological-soteriological and the ecclesiological overlap perfectly, even if he says they are not synonymous.

2. Yves Congar: mystical body, interiority of the church

As was the case with Mersch, it is also true for Congar that the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ is not primarily or exclusively ecclesiological. Like Mersch, Congar describes the mystical body as the reality of our union with Christ. To be a member of the mystical body “means to lead our life on Christ’s account and to live on this earth his own life;” it is to live *in* Christ.⁹⁹ The mystical body is built up by faith and charity, as well as by the sacraments and the apostolic hierarchy which are the visible, sensible mediations of Christ’s grace to Christians. Because the mystical body is “Christ continuing his life in humanity,”¹⁰⁰ Congar also finds the mystical body to be a theandric reality or a continuation of Christ. The mystical body is “his

⁹⁹ Yves Congar, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” in *The Mystery of the Church*, 1st ed. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960), 123.

¹⁰⁰ Congar, 129, emphasis mine.

Incarnation continued” because it is the ongoing manifestation in humanity of Christ’s supernatural life.¹⁰¹

In his early courses in ecclesiology and in his published and unpublished works, Congar turned to the mystical body in order to retrieve the inner mystery of the church against the dominant ‘hierarchology’ of his day. The doctrine of the mystical body, for Congar, improves upon attempts at articulating Christ’s relationship to the church through scholastic categories of causation. “Mystical body” conveys “the duality of Christ acting both intrinsically and extrinsically with regard to the church as his body, as well as the duality between the visible, earthly church and the invisible, heavenly church.”¹⁰² In other words, “mystical body” brings a Christological and soteriological dynamism back into ecclesiology. So while Congar’s mystical body theology is not *primarily* an ecclesiology in itself (and the mystical body is not identical or synonymous with the social-ecclesial body), he values it for the sake of a more adequate ecclesiology and for its ecumenical potential (as uniting the invisible and visible dimensions of the church).

Congar uses the terms “mystical body” and the “social body” to name the two dimensions, distinct but never separate, of the one church. The mystical body is the inner invisible reality of the church, whereas the social body is its visible external reality. Once again, the term “body” describes each reality but its symbolic meaning varies according to its referent. Seen ‘from within,’ the church is the mystical body. It is an organic body, “a body in the vital sense of the word—a visible reality animated by an interior principle of life. The Holy Spirit and the grace of Christ are this soul, and the mystical Body is mysteriously one with a simple living

¹⁰¹ Congar, 136.

¹⁰² Beal, *Mystery of the Church*, 130–31. Here we see that “mystical body” and “social body” come together in the single metaphor of the church as the “body of Christ.”

oneness which resembles the substantial unity of a living body.”¹⁰³ Like Mersch, Congar uses organic-biological language to describe the mystical body, our union with Christ. To live the life of Christ means “we must accept that another feeds on our own substance and grows in us, or rather desire that we should grow in him and feed our life on his.”¹⁰⁴ Through charity, we “let Christ take to himself all the living cells, the active fibres of our being.”¹⁰⁵ In baptism we are incorporated in Christ the Head, which means “nothing else than becoming living beings animated by his life, associated to his life, placed in symbiosis with him.”¹⁰⁶ When we partake of the Eucharist, receiving Christ as our food, we do not assimilate the food into ourselves but “the power of assimilation belongs to Christ and it is he who, in feeding us, unites us and incorporates us with his life.”¹⁰⁷

Seen ‘from without,’ the church is also essentially social; it “is a body in the institutional and legal sense of the word, i.e. a multitude organized in one by corporate activities and diverse functions.”¹⁰⁸ It is an organization with laws, dogma, a hierarchy, subjects, and “a visible head, a central organ and regulator of her social life.”¹⁰⁹ Congar does not primarily see the term ‘social body’ as meaning ‘hierarchically internally ordered,’ as Tromp will, though he doesn’t ignore this. His emphasis is rather on the visibility and corporate nature of the body as a society, a community. At the same time, the social institution is also an organic living reality, for it has its

¹⁰³ Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. M. A. Bousfield (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1939), 79.

¹⁰⁴ Congar, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” 120.

¹⁰⁵ Congar, 127.

¹⁰⁶ Congar, 132.

¹⁰⁷ Congar, 133.

¹⁰⁸ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 79. Congar’s terminology for these two aspects of the church vary throughout his texts. In his early courses in the 1930s, he calls it “a duality of realities and logics,” or “two zones” that correspond to two societies—a spiritual society and a visible society (Beal, *Mystery of the Church*, 90, 120). In *The Mystery of the Church* he describes the dualities as visible/invisible, or exterior/interior. In *Divided Christendom*, it’s a “twofold plane” or the church as seen “under two aspects”—as “already the family of God and the community of those sharing the divine life” and “as she is in this world, humanly conditioned and militant” (75–76).

¹⁰⁹ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 78.

own interior law, incorporates all of human reality into itself, and grows in self-knowledge over time.¹¹⁰ For both Mersch and Congar, then, the term “body” in “the body of the Church” or “social body” indicates visibility, whereas term “body” in “mystical body” indicates unity.

For Congar, the spiritual reality of the church and the social-ecclesial reality necessarily go hand in hand.

The Christian life is a life in Christ which is nourished, maintained and expressed in a spiritual life of a social and strictly ecclesiastical nature; union with Christ, which is the interior life of the individual soul, is lived and acquired socially, in the Church. Thus, within the Church, the spiritual realities of the *vita in Christo* possess a social and strictly ecclesiastical form wherein they are expressed, embodied, and nourished.¹¹¹

The church is therefore simultaneously a living organic body and a social organizational body, a *corpus mysticum* and a *corpus politicum*.¹¹² The social body of the church is the mystical body of Christ, in the sense that it brings about and is the visible expression of the inner spiritual reality that is the mystical body. And the mystical life of Christians is necessarily an organized, apostolic, and ecclesiastical group life, for apostolic preaching and ministry are necessary for the faith and charity that are the very substance of the mystical body.¹¹³ Thus, the two bodies coincide while not being synonymous: “The mystical Body of Christ and the Church in its social being are identified as a single reality. The mystical Body is not some spiritual entity unrelated to the world of human realities and activities but it is the visible Church itself.”¹¹⁴ “For that which is thus organized is precisely the human fellowship of the friends of God, and the mystical Body

¹¹⁰ Yves Congar, “The Life of the Church and Awareness of Its Catholicity,” in *The Mystery of the Church*, 143–146.

¹¹¹ Yves Congar, “The Church and Its Unity,” in *The Mystery of the Church*, 87.

¹¹² Congar, “The Church and Its Unity,” 90.

¹¹³ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 72–73.

¹¹⁴ Congar, “The Church and Its Unity,” 85.

is the ecclesiastical *societas* itself.”¹¹⁵ The Christological-soteriological and the social-ecclesiological dimensions of the church are two aspects of a single reality.

Again, like Mersch, Congar invokes a Christological analogy to describe the unity between the mystical body of Christ and the social body of the church. The church, he says, follows the “law of the incarnation”—the divine is always given to us in human mode.¹¹⁶ Just as the invisible Father works through the visible Son, the interior, spiritual reality of the church must be incarnate, mediating divine life in human, social form. And so the inverse is also true: “It follows inevitably that we must belong to the Church in order to belong to the mystical Body and that the two coincide.”¹¹⁷ The institutional church and the mystical body are not two distinct realities, but rather is a single twofold reality, a divine reality made manifest in a human reality, analogous to the union of two natures in Christ. As in Christ, the divine and the human realities must always be held in union, so with the church. “To exclude his human nature is monophysitism; to exclude His divine Nature is Nestorianism. The Church is analogous to the Christology of Ephesus as well as that of Chalcedon.”¹¹⁸

The analogy of the body and soul is likewise “instructive” of the unity of the mystical and social bodies and the ongoing presence of Christ in the church. The divine and human aspects of the church, the mystical body and the ecclesiastical institution, are analogous to the soul and the body in the human person. As the body localizes the soul, “so the Church *manifests* the presence of the Kingdom of God in space and time.”¹¹⁹ As the body is the instrument and manifestation of

¹¹⁵ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 80.

¹¹⁶ Congar, 66.

¹¹⁷ Congar, 75.

¹¹⁸ Congar, 80.

¹¹⁹ Congar, 82, emphasis original. Earlier in this chapter, he explained what it means to say, as the tradition does, the Holy Spirit is the soul of the church. Following Journet, he distinguishes between the church’s created and uncreated soul; the Holy Spirit is the uncreated soul, whereas faith, charity, and sacramental grace are the created soul. It is the latter that is the interior, immanent form of the church. Congar is clear that “God is not the interior form of the Church” but rather, as the uncreated soul, is first cause and active principle of the church, the cause of “the

the soul, so the exterior church is the manifestation, symbol, and instrument of the life of Christ. As the soul animates a living body, so the Spirit of Christ animates the church. And just as the soul is only perceptible by means of the body, so the life of Christ is only perceptible in and through the church. “Christ, it has been said, needs the Church as a *pneuma* needs a *soma*.”¹²⁰ To call the church the “body of Christ,” then, is to affirm the church as a Christophany, the manifestation of Christ himself:

Christians altogether, animated by the same spirit and acting in the name and under the impulse of the same Lord, form a single whole, the Body of Christ. For, as the body is animated by the soul, which it makes visible and expresses in all kinds of actions, so the Church is animated by Christ, makes him visible and expresses him in its various activities. In one sense, it adds nothing to Christ; it is simply his visibility in extended and tangible form, *it is a Christophany*, the visible body of his Spirit, of his *pneuma*. In another, it adds something to him; it is his fulness and, in realizing itself, realizes Christ.¹²¹

What Congar is developing in this “law of incarnation” and body-soul analogy, even more explicitly than Mersch, is a theology of the church as a sacrament of Christ. The church is sacramental in two senses. First, the two ‘planes’ of the divine and the human realities meet in the sacraments of the church. Second, the institutional church is itself the mediation and instrument of divine life. Its externalities—organization, functions, dogma, in short, “all the institutional machinery of the Church”—are for the sake of, are the means and instrument of, its interior realities—organism, life, faith.¹²² “All the sacraments, *together with the Church’s whole life, itself an extension of the sacramental principle*, work together to bring into being the Mystical Body.”¹²³ The body of the church, the social body, is the sacrament—mediator and

existence, the growth, and all the activity of the Church” (Congar, 52–56). I call this a “modified hylomorphism.”

¹²⁰ Congar, 71.

¹²¹ Congar, “The Church and Its Unity,” 70. The italicized phrase is added in the second edition and is not present in the first (*The Mystery of the Church*, 2nd ed. translated by A. V. Littledale, [Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965], 27). See also a nearly identical paragraph in Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 61.

¹²² Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 85.

¹²³ Congar, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” 134, emphasis mine.

visible expression—of the mystical body, the organic body, and the supernatural life of the mystical body is only acquired through social ecclesial life.¹²⁴ This is precisely what he finds in his study of Aquinas' idea of the church:

The whole Church is a great sacrament...this sacrament considered outwardly is, as it were, a *Sacramentum tantum*: the Institution with its rites, organization, hierarchy, law....[the] *Res et Sacramentum* in turn is the sign and principle of attainment of a pure, inward reality of grace, the *Res tantum*. In the likeness of the Eucharist and by the power of its grace the Church-as-Institution, considered as a great sacrament, attains this *Unitas corporis mystici*.¹²⁵

The sacramental logic that was implicit in Möhler's organic principle in *Unity in the Church* is now becoming explicit in Congar.

Because of this incarnational, hylomorphic, and sacramental relationship by which the one church manifests the one life of Christ communicated to humanity, Congar concludes that salvation is only found in the Catholic Church. "Since the Church is the actual sharing of the life of the Blessed Trinity in Christ, there can be no salvation except in her."¹²⁶ Again, because the Church is the human expression of divine life, "it is the *place* where salvation must be sought, for it is the dwelling-place of the Spirit of God."¹²⁷ Later, however, considering the relation of "separated brethren" to the Catholic Church, Congar nuances this claim by acknowledging that there are persons who are united to Christ and members of the mystical body but who are not members of the visible Catholic Church. But he wisely goes beyond Mersch and others by pointing out that the explanation used by Bellarmine (that there are some who belong to the 'soul' of the church but not to the 'body' of the church)

is certainly not inaccurate, but, in this form, neither very aptly expressed nor of any antiquity....The facile distinction between the body and the soul of the Church does not seem theologically a very happy one, though imaginatively and

¹²⁴ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 83–87.

¹²⁵ Yves Congar, "The Idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *The Mystery of the Church*, 116.

¹²⁶ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 59.

¹²⁷ Congar, 82, emphasis original.

verbally attractive. It leads one to suppose that there is in the Church a sort of solid nucleus, and around it, like a halo, a somewhat shadowy soul. But how could one in any sense be in the soul of the Church without being, by that very fact, in the body which it animates? Is not the body of the Church to be found where its soul is, and for that very reason? And must not the body of the Church be co-extensive with its soul?¹²⁸

Congar then suggests that the proper way of proceeding is not to dissociate body and soul, but to consider more deeply the various ways in which one can belong to the body (i.e. “effective, plenary and visible” belonging versus “imperfect, invisible, and moral” belonging by desire).¹²⁹ Anyone who belongs to the soul must *somehow* belong to the body, and that manner of belonging to the body is what needs to be explained. Because he has argued that the visible church is the social embodiment and visible manifestation of the Mystical Body, but also affirms that one can belong to Christ without belonging visibly to the Catholic Church, Congar must craft a new way of articulating *invisible* and *incomplete*, but still real, membership in the visible church.¹³⁰ Ultimately, Congar is the first to point out that the body-soul analogy, as it has been understood through Aristotelian philosophy and invoked by theologians since Bellarmine, simply cannot meet the demands of a nuanced understanding of membership in the church of Christ, and instead he seeks an explanatory account of the relationship of non-Catholics—who are indeed members of the mystical body of Christ—to the visible church.

3. Mersch and Congar: Toward *Mystici Corporis* and *Lumen Gentium*

Mersch and Congar agree that the term “mystical body” does not refer to the church itself, but rather to the mystical reality of our unity with Christ that is made possible only through

¹²⁸ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 224–25.

¹²⁹ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 225.

¹³⁰ Rahner takes a different approach here, arguing that membership *in voto* is still somehow *visible* membership. Karl Rahner, “Membership of the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII’s Encyclical ‘*Mystici Corporis Christi*,’” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2 (London, 1963; orig. 1947), 1–88.

the church. It is a Christological-soteriological reality. In the phrase “mystical body,” the symbol of the body evokes unity, the unity of a living organism—members united with one another (horizontal unity) and with Christ their Head (vertical unity). But when the church as a social institutional is referred to as a body—the body of the church, or the social body—the symbol of the body evokes visibility, the material, external aspect of a living organism. It is a juridical, organizational, and social reality. The church body makes visible the mystical body, especially in the sacraments, a living faith animated by charity, and the apostolic hierarchy. It is the visible sacrament of the invisible life of Christ. Though both Mersch and Congar consider the mystical body or the church to be a continued incarnation of Christ, it is a kind of virtue-based “ongoing incarnation.” By living a life of faith animated by charity, Christians live in Christ and Christ lives in them, continuing Christ’s presence in the world. This contrasts with Möhler’s *Symbolism*, Karl Adam, and Sebastian Tromp, for whom Christ’s threefold ministry of teaching, governing, and sanctifying is continued in the church’s ordained ministry—a powers-based “ongoing incarnation.” Similarly, neither Mersch nor Congar invoke the metaphor of ‘head and body’ to justify papal primacy or episcopal authority (as we saw in *Symbolism* and Vatican I, for example) or refer to the pope as the head of the mystical body (as we will see in Tromp and *Mystici Corporis*). In fact, Congar explicitly rejected accounts of ecclesial unity based in submission to a common visible head,¹³¹ and he valued the image of the mystical body because it “obviously serves to give the lay members their organic place within the Church.”¹³²

The most significant distinction between the two French-speaking authors is that for Mersch, the doctrine of the mystical body is expounded almost entirely as a Christology, and

¹³¹ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, 192. He cites Bellarmine and de Maistre as guilty of an incomplete account of unity in this regard; I would add parts of Möhler’s *Symbolism* and Leo XIII’s encyclicals as well.

¹³² Congar, “Bulletin de théologie” (1934), 685, in Beal, *Mystery of the Church*, 37.

only subsequently entails ecclesiological questions. Congar, by comparison, exposit the doctrine of the mystical body precisely in order to revitalize ecclesiology, and because of this purpose, he gives more attention to the historical, sacramental, hierarchical aspects of the church. Mersch's work will have a notable influence on *Mystici Corporis* in 1943, whereas Congar's thought, even as it continued to develop and shift in the following decades, shaped the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.

IV. The Roman Stream: The body as ordered society

The third and final stream surveyed in this chapter is the Roman stream, exemplified by Sebastian Tromp, the Dutch Jesuit who is generally acknowledged to be the ghostwriter of *Mystici Corporis*. His book *Corpus Christi Quod Est Ecclesia* surveys key questions in mystical body ecclesiology according to Scripture (primarily Paul), the Greek and Latin Fathers, and the papal tradition (from Boniface VIII through Pius XII).¹³³ As a professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Tromp “had inherited some of the cutting-edge emphases of his forebearers in the Roman college but applied them in a different ecclesial and theological context,” namely the neo-Thomist revival following *Aeterni Patris* (1879) and the condemnation of modernism in *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907).¹³⁴ As a result, *Corpus Christi Quod Est Ecclesia*, written as a textbook for university students, seeks the conceptual clarity of neoscholasticism while still engaging a wide range of patristic and contemporary texts on the mystical body.

¹³³ Sebastian Tromp, *Corpus Christi, Quod Est Ecclesia*, trans. Ann Condit (New York: Vantage Press, 1960). I am using the second edition of Tromp's book. The first was published in 1937, before *Mystici Corporis*; the second edition was published in 1947, and at several points quotes or refers to the encyclical.

¹³⁴ Gabrielli, *One in Christ*, 18.

As a broad reader of the patristic tradition, Tromp acknowledges the diversity of questions and perspectives on the mystical body according to the Fathers—whether it exists only in heaven or here on earth; whether it encompasses sinners as well as saints; how it is related to the church. In spite of this theological diversity, Tromp insists that “there must be a primary and central concept” to our understanding of the mystical body as revealed in scripture and tradition, and it must be “that concept which has the property that in it the metaphor of a *human body* is most perfectly verified.” This concept, he contends, is “that the Mystical Body of Christ also exists here on earth, and that that Body, understood in the strict sense, is none other than the Holy Catholic Roman Church.”¹³⁵ This is evident, he argues, in St. Paul, in the writings of the Fathers, and in the writings of the popes from Boniface onward, and it is this thesis that Tromp sets out to explain in his text. In other words, “mystical body” belongs to the locus of ecclesiology; the term “body” has significance for both the vertical relationship between Christ and the Roman Catholic Church as well as the horizontal (yet very hierarchical) relationship between members of the church. At the same time, ecclesiology and soteriology are merged, for no one outside the Roman Catholic Church is a member of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Unlike with our French-speaking theologians who explain the unity of the mystical and social dimensions of the church through the Christological analogy and the body–soul analogy, Tromp identifies the two because of his understanding of the historical founding of the church by Christ its founder, head, and savior. For Tromp, Christ is the material and juridical foundation of the church as well as its spiritual foundation. He is the material foundation of the mystical body because the incarnation unites divine nature and human nature. Christ also juridically founded the church in his preaching and in the twofold mission, that is, his sending of the apostles (the

¹³⁵ Tromp, *Corpus Christi*, 194, emphasis original.

visible mission) and his sending of the Spirit (the invisible mission). On the cross, in giving up his Spirit, he sent this Spirit upon the juridical church, making it a pneumatic, mystical entity. Finally, at Pentecost, “Christ gives a fuller outpouring of the Spirit, with more abundant gifts and charisms” for the building up of the church.¹³⁶ Thus, the church as established by Christ is at once “a juridical organization and a pneumatic organism.”¹³⁷ This distinction is not a material one but a formal one; the mystical reality does not exist apart from the Roman Church. Tromp writes: “The Church is the juridical and ethical continuation of the mission of Christ, in the manner of a true and perfect society, hierarchically constituted, universal and perpetual, equipped with various organs both for providing for its mission and for attaining the end proper to itself,” that end being continuing Christ’s mission, sanctifying humankind, and the beatific vision.¹³⁸

As a result, for Tromp, the church is not simply the continuation of the *incarnation* of Christ, that is, the ongoing union of divine and human nature. Rather, it is better understood as the continuation of Christ’s *work of redemption*. It is the divinely-willed and divinely-established continuation of Christ’s Messianic offices of Priest, Prophet, and King for the purpose of continuing his redemptive work.¹³⁹ While he often speaks of the church as the “visible continuation of Christ visibly incarnate,” he aims to balance out what he sees as an overemphasis on the incarnation traceable to Möhler’s *Symbolism*.¹⁴⁰ “It is very often said that the Body of Christ is a kind of prolongation of the Incarnation: but no one will fully understand the Body of Christ unless he also sees that most sacred Body as it is the prolongation of the redemption on

¹³⁶ Tromp, 19.

¹³⁷ Tromp, 29.

¹³⁸ Tromp, 24.

¹³⁹ Tromp, 38.

¹⁴⁰ Tromp, 23.

the cross.”¹⁴¹ The church is materially begun in the incarnation, but is fully juridically and pneumatically constituted only in Christ’s preaching and sacrifice on the cross.

This emphasis on the cross and his understanding of the juridical and pneumatic foundation of the church shape Tromp’s understanding of membership in the mystical body. Tromp sees the mystical body not as all of humanity united to Christ through his sharing in our human nature (as Mersch does, for example), but as only those who are baptized into Christ’s death, becoming members of the body of the Crucified one, and so receive Christ’s Spirit and subjectively appropriate the redemption won for us on the cross. Likewise, “because the visible Church and the Mystical Body are not distinct materially, but are distinguished only according to the two formal aspects [the juridical and the pneumatic], it follows that no one who in no way belongs to the visible Church can be a member of the Mystical Body; and no one who is in no way subject to the infusion made by the Holy Spirit can be a member of the visible Church” (though he indicates a distinction between ‘membership in’ and being ‘ordered to’ the visible church).¹⁴²

Moreover, Tromp’s historical–scriptural interpretation of the foundation of the church explains his assertion that submission to the Roman Pontiff is necessary for membership in the mystical body. The church, because it is the juridical and ethical continuation of Christ’s work, can rightly be called “the Body of Christ” or just simply “Christ.” (In other words, “body” is equated with the head, and so means “self” or “person,” not the “trunk” that is united to its head.) But it is specifically the Catholic Church that is the body of Christ, for all of Paul’s metaphors for the church (temple, bride, vine and branches) show that hierarchy and visible unity are essential to the church. This is especially true of the metaphor of the body. “The Pauline

¹⁴¹ Tromp, 214.

¹⁴² Tromp, 29.

metaphor of a body—body, head, members, organs, one mystical person” is only “fully verified...in the hierarchical Catholic Church at once teaching and learning,” and the Fathers affirmed this as true.¹⁴³ Therefore,

If the Body of Christ here on earth par excellence is the Catholic Church, it follows necessarily that the Body of Christ is the Roman Church. For whoever does not adhere to the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not of the Catholic Church. And if these things are true and are to be believed by divine faith, then it is also true and is to be believed by faith that the Head of the Body of Christ here on earth is indeed Christ, quickening and unifying His Body in an invisible way, it is true, through His Spirit; but, in respect to the visible direction of the Body, no less truly manifesting Himself visibly in the Roman Pontiff.¹⁴⁴

Thus, the Roman Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, and the head of the Roman Church is the visible head of the mystical body.

Tromp explains in great detail the significance of the metaphors of “body” and “head” for the church, and derives his image of the body from his reading of St. Paul’s use of *soma*. For Paul, a *soma* has several characteristics “not to be slighted by ecclesiologists”: it is “something real, concrete,” as opposed to a shadow; it is “material and visible and needs to be quickened;” it is “one and whole,” yet also internally diverse; and the term “body” can also mean “person.”¹⁴⁵ “Therefore, the Church is something real, visible, one, whole, and organized, having a kind of personality of its own.”¹⁴⁶ As Tromp continues to explain the image of the human body as it relates to ecclesiology, he emphasizes three key features: it is visible, has diverse organs, and since it is the body *of Christ*, Christ is its head.

First and foremost, a body is visible. When considering why the Roman Catholic Church is called the Mystical Body of Christ, Tromp answers thus:

It is called the *Body* of Christ because it is a visible organism, instituted by Christ

¹⁴³ Tromp, 197.

¹⁴⁴ Tromp, 198.

¹⁴⁵ Tromp, 90–91.

¹⁴⁶ Tromp, 91.

and visibly directed by Christ in His visible Vicar. It is called the *Mystical* Body of Christ because, by means of an invisible principle instilled in it by Christ, that is, by the Spirit of Christ Himself, that organization, in itself, in its organs, and in its members, is unified and quickened and united to Christ and brought to perfect likeness to Him.¹⁴⁷

The image of the body expresses (indeed, requires) the visibility of the church, manifested as an institution headed by the pope. The term *mystical* qualifies this visible institution as “unified, quickened, and united to Christ” by the invisible Spirit, which is the soul of the Mystical Body.

Secondly, Tromp uses the term “body” to express the reality of the church as an internally diversified and regulated organization. He says, “The Body of Christ is an organism, and therefore it has various hierarchical and non-hierarchical organs for the building up and increase of the entire body.”¹⁴⁸ This “organism” is also “heterogeneous,” meaning its organs or functions are diverse, yet “harmoniously compounded and knit together through various joining of coordination and subordination,” and so the church body is opposed to “an inorganic homogeneous mass,” like an undiversified lump.¹⁴⁹ To be clear, for Tromp, the term “organism” means something quite different than what it meant in our earlier authors: for Möhler, ‘organism’ meant the material expression of the spirit; for Mersch and Congar, ‘organism’ was understood biologically and meant ‘livingness’ and, with the German theologians, it pointed to the intrinsic, as opposed to mechanical or contractual, unity of members. For Tromp, as with the nineteenth-century Roman School, “organic” means “having organs” which fulfill particular functions within the body. In other words, an “organism” is essentially hierarchical. (Here, I briefly remind us of Mary Douglas’ thesis that in a more hierarchical society, the body often symbolizes a society’s internal ordering; this is very clear in Tromp’s work.)

¹⁴⁷ Tromp, 196, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁸ Tromp, 28–29.

¹⁴⁹ Tromp, 91.

In explicit contrast to other modern ecclesiologies, Tromp does not reduce the “organs” of the church to merely the hierarchical or jurisdictional organs of teaching, governing, and sanctifying.¹⁵⁰ The burgeoning Catholic Action movement clearly influences his ecclesiology in this matter, for he also considers as “organs” of the church those non-hierarchical gifts and charisms bestowed by the Spirit, such as religious life or marriage, monks, widows, the lay apostolate, and all those endowed with extraordinary charisms. All of these organs must be *ordered by and under* the hierarchy (because this is precisely what an ‘organism’ is—‘ordered organs’), but they retain their own dignity as means by which the Spirit builds up the body of Christ. In this regard, in spite of his juridical and deeply hierarchical approach to ecclesiology, Tromp’s treatment of the mystical body’s “organs” plants the seeds for a more robust theology of the laity and charisms in the church.

Finally, the church as the mystical body of Christ is defined as having one Head, Christ, who is visibly manifest in his vicar, the Roman Pontiff, the earthly head. Tromp gives remarkable detail about the role of the head in a body, and thereby the role of Christ in the church.¹⁵¹ Christ is Head of his Body because of supereminence (in him alone dwells the fullness of divinity); because of royal primacy (he enjoys supreme lordship over the whole church which is subject to him as a bride to a bridegroom); and because of life-giving infusion. This last is where a more organic, as in biological, understanding of the head-body relation comes into play. The head in a human body, as the seat or origin of the nervous system, is the source of sense-perception and self-movement (though this will be thoroughly refuted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception in chapter five).

¹⁵⁰ Tromp, 158.

¹⁵¹ I am grateful to my colleague John Kern for pointing out that this is a distinctly Aristotelian account of the function of the head in a body, and underlies accounts of capital grace—the grace of the head, *capitis*—in medieval treatises on the mystical body.

Just as a man's head makes infusion into the whole of his body by means of the nerves in the head—in such a way that from the infusion made by the head, the body possesses the powers of sense-perception and of moving itself; and all the members and organs are bound together vitally; and the whole organism is sustained in life: so Christ the head is the principle of the entire supernatural life of the Church.¹⁵²

Although Tromp does not explicitly apply these functions to the pope, he has no qualms about calling the pope the head of the Mystical Body of Christ. For when the term “body” means ‘head and members together’ (the *whole Christ, Christus-totus*), the head is clearly Christ himself. But when ‘body’ means ‘something different from the head,’ *alter Christus* (the “spousal body” or bride of Christ), then “the head can be none other than he who governs the Church in the name of Christ with supreme authority”—the Roman Pontiff.¹⁵³ Christ the Head always rules his church both invisibly, through his Spirit, and visibly through his vicar the pope. As such, the powers and functions of Christ can be applied to, and in fact are visibly manifest in, the pope in “a certain *communicatio idiomatum*” between Christ and the church.¹⁵⁴ “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.”¹⁵⁵

In short, a “body” in Tromp’s mind is a clearly hierarchical structure that is visible to the world through its one head, the source of its unity and visible manifestation of the authority of Christ. Other members of the body participate in and contribute to its life as ‘organs’ but must always be directed by the visible head. Tromp’s historical account of the foundations of the church clearly identifies the mystical body with the Roman Catholic Church in such a way that

¹⁵² Tromp, *Corpus Christi*, 94.

¹⁵³ Tromp, 98.

¹⁵⁴ Tromp, 29.

¹⁵⁵ Tromp, 198, emphasis mine.

leads to a much narrower definition of membership in the mystical body than we saw in the German and French streams. While he freely acknowledges that sinners may be members of the Mystical Body (both as a spiritual reality and as a juridical reality), it is clear that non-Catholics are not. In both his identification of the Roman church with the mystical body of Christ and his high theology of the papacy through the metaphor of headship, Tromp continues the trajectory begun in Möhler's *Symbolism* and expanded through Vatican I and the encyclicals of Leo XIII. As we will see, Tromp's mystical body theology shapes both *Mystici Corporis* and the draft *De Ecclesia* at Vatican II, but is ultimately superseded.

V. *Mystici Corporis Christi*

The mystical body movement of the early twentieth century culminated in Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (On The Mystical Body of Christ)—“the most comprehensive papal statement on the Church prior to Vatican II.”¹⁵⁶ Drawing heavily from scriptural and patristic sources, the draft and final documents of Vatican I, and the encyclicals of Leo XIII, Pius XII affirmed the expression “the Mystical Body of Christ” as the most ‘noble, sublime, and divine’ definition and description of the Roman Catholic Church (13).¹⁵⁷ In the encyclical, the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ is a doctrine of the church, its union with Christ the Head, and its role in continuing the work of the Redeemer. In other words, “mystical body” in Pius’s pen is first and foremost an ecclesiology, and secondly a Christology; the pope details the soteriological-Christological dimensions of the doctrine of the mystical body in order to “throw an added ray of glory on the supreme beauty of the Church” (11). In this way, the encyclical fits primarily within the Roman stream of mystical body ecclesiology (unsurprising

¹⁵⁶ Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology,” 11.

¹⁵⁷ Parenthetical citations to *Mystici Corporis* refer to the section number within the encyclical.

given Tromp as its ghostwriter), but incorporates the broader soteriological context of the French stream through its attention to the mystical body as the locus of divine life. Moreover, two central themes from the German stream—“the presence of Christ in the Church and the corporate union of the faithful in Christ and the Holy Spirit”—“were fully endorsed” as well.¹⁵⁸

A number of theological, ecclesial, and social factors influenced the promulgation and particular teachings of *Mystici Corporis*. Several scholars note that “it was in direct response to the controversy in Germany [between Koster and Adam, Guardini, and others], which was causing great turmoil and uncertainty, that Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*” in order to clarify authoritatively the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, the encyclical is explicitly framed as a response to certain heresies (naturalism, rationalism, and false mysticism) and implicitly responds to the growing ecumenical movement in its identification of the mystical body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church and its definition of membership in the mystical body. The document is well-known for its teaching that only those “who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and 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” are members of the church—a position for which it received much criticism and which was eventually attenuated at Vatican II.¹⁶⁰ Finally, written in the context of World War II, the encyclical exhorts all Christians to unity with Christ, to fervent prayer for the church and for the salvation of all souls, and to charity.

¹⁵⁸ McNamara, “The Ecclesiological Movement in Germany,” 352.

¹⁵⁹ McNamara, 351. See also Rush, “Roman Catholic Ecclesiology,” 276–77, Malanowski, “The Christocentrism of Émile Mersch,” 72.

¹⁶⁰ For an extended analysis of the teaching on church membership in the encyclical in relation to the tradition on this topic, see Rahner, “Membership of the Church.”

In explaining the significance of the definition “mystical body of Christ,” the document moves in three parts.¹⁶¹ First, it explains why the church is called a *body*; second, why it is called the body of *Christ* in particular; and third, why it is called *mystical*. The image of the body in *Mystici Corporis* is a hybrid of the two models I have been describing up to this point—the organic body and the ordered, social body. The term “body” explains, firstly, the visibility of the church, for “like several popes before him, Pius XII insisted that the Church could not be a body unless it were visible.”¹⁶² Secondly, the metaphor of the body describes the hierarchical communion among all Christians (the horizontal dimension), and thirdly, the church’s relationship to Christ its Head (the vertical dimension). Ultimately, the encyclical sees the ecclesial body as a social body—a human and juridical institution made up of many members, united under a visible Head—that is infused with, and mediates, divine life.

In *Mystici Corporis*, we find a clear delineation of what precisely it means to be a “body.” A body 1) is an unbroken unity, 2) is definite, visible, and perceptible to the senses, 3) has a multiplicity of members linked together, 4) has organs with diverse functions that are structurally united and ordered, 5) provides for its own life, health, and growth, 6) has definite members, some healthier or weaker than others, and 7) these members work toward a common end. Correspondingly, since the church is a body, it is an unbroken visible unity, united through one faith and one government; it is made up of many members who work together for the building up of the whole; its organs are both hierarchical and charismatic; it lives, grows, and sanctifies its members through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; is made up of both holy and sinful individuals, who are made definite members of the church through baptism; and it has one end, the sanctification of members for the glory of God (14–24, 68). In other words, the body is a

¹⁶¹ Tromp, *Corpus Christi*, 206–07 provides a very helpful synoptic outline of the encyclical.

¹⁶² Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 422.

living, visible unity of diverse and ordered members. What we see in this explanation of the term “body” is the presence of *both* the Roman emphasis on the body as a hierarchical organization and perfect society with clear boundaries (nos. 2, 4, 5, 6) *and* the German and French emphasis on the organic body whose many members share one common life which is nourished by the sacraments (nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 7).

While *Mystici Corporis* clearly incorporates the soteriological and biological-organic elements of “mystical body” from the French and German streams, it primarily views the church as an organized society analogous to a human body. Throughout the text, the church is referred to as “Christ’s social body” six times and as a society seventeen times (twice a “perfect society”). In *Mystici Corporis*, the adjective “social” distinguishes the ecclesial body from Christ’s historical body and his eucharistic body, quite like the adjective ‘mystical’ did beginning in the eleventh century, as Henri de Lubac has described.¹⁶³ The phrase “His social body” also continues the long-dominant tradition of the church as a visible society united by one common faith, government, rite, Eucharist, law, and authority. *Mystici Corporis* also evinces a lingering sense of the church as an “unequal society.” In this social body of the church, there is not only a hierarchy of power but also a hierarchy of value. The encyclical describes bishops as “the more illustrious members” and ‘principal parts’ of the body (42), and “those who exercise sacred power in this Body are its chief members;” further down this hierarchy are the laity who collaborate with clergy, who “occupy an honorable, if often a lowly, place in the Christian community” (17). Finally, the metaphor of the living human body also expresses, oddly enough, the notion of the church as a “perfect society.” Just as “the human body is given proper means to provide for its own life, health and growth, and for that of all its members,” so too the mystical

¹⁶³ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (London: SCM Press, 2006).

body has the sacraments, which sustain members from birth to death and provide for individuals' needs as well as the church's social needs (18).

This vision of a body that is at once a social-juridical organization and an organic source of life is particularly evident in, and deployed for the sake of, the encyclical's statement that only Roman Catholics are members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Only they are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess 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. . . . It follows that those who are divided in faith or government cannot be living in the unity of such a Body, nor can they be living the life of its one Divine Spirit. (22)

Bluett is correct in observing that *Mystici Corporis*'s definition of 'body' "echoes all that ecclesiology has always taught about the Church as a visible and perfect society. The Church is a Body because it is the organized, visible part of a living whole."¹⁶⁴

Next, *Mystici Corporis* explains that the church is the mystical body *of Christ* because Christ is its Founder, Head, Sustainer, and Savior. On this count, *Mystici Corporis* closely follows Tromp's argument that Christ founded the church in his incarnation, his preaching, his sacrifice on the cross, and his sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. Then, just as the encyclical gave specific delineations of why the church is a body, it also enumerates in what sense Christ is the Head of the body, the church. A natural head of a natural body is 1) in the highest place, 2) rules and governs the members, 3) still needs the help of the body and its members, 4) is of the same nature as the body, 5) is the seat of all the senses, whereas the body only has the sense of touch, and 6) is the seat of the nervous system which extends throughout the body and gives it the power to feel and move. Likewise with Christ: Christ is pre-eminent, the first-born among all

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Bluett, "The Theological Significance of the Encyclical '*Mystici Corporis*,'" *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 1 (1946): 49.

creation; he alone rules and governs the church; the church and its members assist in the work of redemption; he was one with our human nature, and the church resembles him in its work of teaching, governing, and sanctifying; in him is the fullness of all power, gifts, and graces which he bestows on the church through his Spirit; and he communicates power, light, and holiness to the church. As Head, Christ rules the church both directly and invisibly through his Spirit, and indirectly yet visibly through his Vicar, the Pope, as well as the bishops, for Christ “could not leave the body of the Church He had founded as a human society without a visible head” (40).

The metaphor of headship is joined with the societal-organic model of the body to affirm once again that only Roman Catholics are members of the mystical body. For in order to be a member of the body of Christ, one must be governed by Christ the Head, and one is only governed by Christ the Head by being ruled and governed by the Roman Pontiff.

They, therefore, walk in the path of dangerous error who believe that they can accept Christ as the Head of the Church, while not adhering loyally to His Vicar on earth. They have taken away the visible head, broken the visible bonds of unity and left the Mystical Body of the Redeemer so obscured and maimed, that those who are seeking the haven of eternal salvation can neither see it nor find it (41).

Without a visible head, a body (organic-human, mystical-ecclesial) is dismembered, lacks identity, and is incapable of visible existence in the world. Membership in the Mystical Body of Christ—in other words, union with Christ in his living social body—is dependent upon juridical union with the Roman Pontiff through baptism into the Roman Catholic Church. As Bluett states (with enthusiastic approval), “such exact identification of Christ’s members as all Catholics and only Catholics pervades the entire encyclical.... Thus the encyclical makes it clear that there is no distinction and no difference between the Church of Christ and the Body of Christ.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Bluett, 51.

Finally, the document then clarifies that, while the church is rightly called a body for the reasons given above, it is neither a physical body nor merely a moral body. United through the one Spirit of Christ indwelling the church and each of its members, this is a *mystical* body. The term “mystical” disambiguates the church-body from Christ’s physical body, ‘now hidden under the eucharistic veil,’ on the one hand (so, parallel to the phrase “His social body”), and from any other physical or moral body, on the other hand. It is called mystical “because it is replete with indwelling Divinity at every moment of its existence, because it is formed and vitalized from within by that Divinity.”¹⁶⁶ Whereas other moral bodies are united simply through a common end, the unity of the church is due to its supernatural internal principle, the Spirit of Christ, which is present in the whole church and in each member (akin to the soul in a human body.) The term “mystical” sets the church apart from, and superior to, other institutions. “The Church in its entirety is not found within this natural order, “any more than the whole man is encompassed within the organism of our mortal body” (63). The document then strongly condemns anyone who denies the necessity of the church’s visible and juridical elements or wrongly opposes them to the mission and presence of the Spirit in the church.

Note that because the encyclical does not describe two distinct realities—a mystical body and a social body—but rather a social-ecclesiastical institution that is nevertheless a supernatural reality, there is no need for Pius XII to describe in great detail the relationship between these two bodies in the way that Congar, for example, does. Rather, the visibility of the mystical body of Christ is argued first and foremost from the very definition of “body.” Citing *Satis Cognitum*, Pius XII states that a body is necessarily “something definite and perceptible to the senses.” Therefore, it is a grave error to assume that the mystical body of Christ can be invisible or

¹⁶⁶ Bluett, 52.

hidden. The institutional church is precisely this ‘visibility’ of the mystical body. To be clear, the metaphor of the body at the service of the church’s visibility is not the hylomorphic body-soul analogy from the French stream. This analogy is not used in *Mystici Corporis* to justify or explain the unity between the mystical and the institutional aspects of the church, although it is invoked in other ways to describe the superiority of the church’s spiritual reality. “As our composite mortal body...falls far short of the eminent dignity of our soul, so the social structure of the Christian community...still remains something inferior when compared to the spiritual gifts which give it beauty and life, and to the divine source whence they flow” (63). It also expresses the unity between the two missions, one juridical and one invisible, that constitute the church, which “mutually complement and perfect each other - as do the body and soul in man - and proceed from our one Redeemer” who established both missions (65).

Mystici Corporis does, however, explain the visibility of the mystical body by invoking the analogy to the hypostatic union, which Pius expresses by quoting *Satis Cognitum*: “As Christ, Head and Exemplar of the Church ‘is not complete, if only His visible human nature is considered...or if only His divine, invisible nature,...but He is one through the union of both and one in both...so it is with His Mystical Body’” (64). But *Mystici Corporis* is careful to not suggest a hypostatic union between Christ and the church. Since one of the goals of the encyclical is to refute and correct errors pertaining to the doctrine of the mystical body, Pius reminds us “that the Apostle Paul has used metaphorical language in speaking of this doctrine” and so we must distinguish between the physical, the social, and the mystical body so as to avoid “a distorted idea of unity” between Christ and the church. To call the church the body of Christ “must not be so understood as if that ineffable bond by which the son of God assumed a definite human nature belongs to the universal church.” Rather Christ “shares

prerogatives peculiarly His own with the Church” so that she might be “a most faithful image of Christ” (54). For this reason, the metaphor of the body understood as “head and members” reasserts the distinction between the body and its divine Head. Still, Christ together with the church, His Body, form “one mystical person,” “the whole Christ” (66, 67). The church lives Christ’s own supernatural life (55), and “we must accustom ourselves to see Christ Himself in the Church. For it is Christ who lives in His Church, and through her, teaches, governs, and sanctifies,” continuing his work of redemption (93). Through the communication of the graces of the head, “the Church becomes, as it were, the filling out and the complement of the Redeemer” (77).

In sum, the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ is an ecclesiological doctrine in which the metaphor of the body expresses both the horizontal-ecclesial relationship between head and members, but also the vertical-ecclesiological and vertical-soteriological relationships between Christ and the church. The body envisioned within the encyclical is an ordered body, a visible and hierarchical society. It is no mere moral unity or even mystical unity, but is a unity that is visible and expressed in one government (the bishops and the pope), one faith, one liturgy, and one law. In this sense, the mystical body ecclesiology of *Mystici Corporis* is in keeping with Bellarmine’s classic definition of the church. And yet, as subsequent interpreters note, it goes beyond a simply juridical understanding of the church. The juridical mission of the church is complemented by the spiritual, redemptive mission of the Spirit working in the church, just as the body is complemented by the soul. And while the connections to Tromp’s own work are clearly visible, so too is the emphasis on the union of all the faithful with Christ, in the vein of Émile Mersch. Its identification of the Roman Catholic Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, expressed through the metaphor of the role of the head in a human body and the body as the font

of life, leads, at least initially, to the exclusion of other baptized Christians from the Body of Christ. Nevertheless, the encyclical also notes that there are some who “by an unconscious desire and longing...have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer.” Similarly, because the mystical body is begun, in a certain sense, in the incarnation (as the German and French streams emphasize), Pius can speak of non-Catholics as “our brothers in Christ according to the flesh, called, together with us, to the same eternal salvation” (96). But the organic model of the body rears its head again to exclusive, boundary-defining effect: the Holy Spirit, as the soul of the church, “refuses to dwell through sanctifying grace in those members that are wholly severed from the Body” (§57), and so even those ordered to the church by desire “still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church” (§103). Therefore, the pope urges all those outside the church to “to seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation” and to “enter into Catholic unity and [join] with Us in the one, organic Body of Jesus Christ” (103).

It is this assertion of the identity of the visible and invisible dimensions of the church in *Mystici Corporis* that could lead Bluett to observe in 1946 that *Mystici Corporis* marked the victorious end of one era of ecclesiology and laid out the doctrinal ‘armor’ necessary for the next. “The era dominated by the struggle for the visibility of the Church is over. An era of struggle for the supernaturalness of God’s Church has begun.”¹⁶⁷ As we will see in the following chapter, this “struggle for the supernaturalness of the church” comes to be expressed not through the term “mystical body,” but through the models of the church as sacrament and people of God.

¹⁶⁷ Bluett, “The Theological Significance of the Encyclical ‘*Mystici Corporis*,’” 47.

VI. Conclusion: The decline of a metaphor

As a papal encyclical, *Mystici Corporis* marked official approval and expression of the mystical body movement, but it also invited wide engagement with and critical study of its teaching. Pius XII's identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the Mystical Body of Christ provoked resistance from Catholic theologians and contributed to the shift in ecclesiology away from "mystical body" as the preeminent definition of or metaphor for the church.¹⁶⁸ In the years following the promulgation of *Mystici Corporis*, theologians critiqued the encyclical on two major points: first, its identification of the mystical body of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church, and the consequent proclamation that only baptized Catholics are members of the mystical body of Christ, conflicted with a theology of baptism as incorporation in Christ and even with canon law. Second, as later commentators noted, the encyclical attempts to move beyond a simply juridical ecclesiology, but only partially succeeds in doing so. What my analysis also shows is that *Mystici Corporis* attempted to merge or harmonize disparate understandings of what "mystical body" refers to and what the metaphor of the body reveals for ecclesiology. To conclude this chapter, I will review some of the common evaluations of *Mystici Corporis*, showing how they overlook the important distinctions in ecclesiological or soteriological approaches and fail to notice the various ways in which the metaphor of the body functioned in this time period. The latter point is especially important as we consider the reasons for, and significance of, the transition away from the (mystical) body metaphor up to and following Vatican II.

The identification of the juridical body of the church with the spiritual, mystical body of Christ led to the encyclical's teaching that only baptized Catholics are members of the mystical

¹⁶⁸ Hahnenberg, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology," 12.

body and was the major sticking point in the reception of the encyclical. Dulles writes that “without overtly dissenting, many theologians were evidently dissatisfied” with Pius XII’s teaching that the Mystical Body *is* the Roman Catholic Church, and that only members of the Roman Catholic Church are members of the Mystical Body.¹⁶⁹ Congar himself found that “the identity of the (mystical) body of Christ with the ecclesial organism of the Roman Catholic Church...is not totally tenable: there are members united to Christ who are not of the Roman Catholic Church and vice versa.”¹⁷⁰ In 1947, Karl Rahner wrote a lengthy essay in order to interpret *Mystici Corporis* more broadly on this point. Invoking a sacramental theology that distinguishes ‘sign’ from ‘sign and sacrament,’ Rahner argues that *Mystici Corporis* is simply addressing membership in the church as ‘sign’, the visible juridical institution; it does not negate the longstanding tradition of membership in the church *in voto*.¹⁷¹

Related to the question of membership in the mystical body is the tension within the encyclical between the visibility of the church, on the one hand, and the inner mystery of the church on the other hand. *Mystici Corporis*’s emphasis on visibility “stood in some tension with the ideas of Mersch and, as several scholars would soon point out, those of Thomas Aquinas. Exegetes soon became involved in a discussion as to whether Paul had understood the body in a way that necessarily involved visibility,” and wider study of Pauline texts on the body of Christ followed the publication of the encyclical.¹⁷² As early as 1948, Congar was critical of any treatment of the church simply as the mystical body of Christ because it leads to an “arbitrary duality of the interior being and the spirit of the Church, and its exterior being”—an arbitrariness

¹⁶⁹ Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 423. Of course, many theologians were quite happy with this—Tromp, obviously, as well as Bluett in “The Theological Significance of the Encyclical ‘*Mystici Corporis*.’”

¹⁷⁰ Congar, *L’Église, Peuple de Dieu et Corps du Christ* (1948), Archives of the Dominican Province of France, 8, in Beal, *Mystery of the Church*, 96.

¹⁷¹ Rahner, “Membership of the Church.”

¹⁷² Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 422–423; Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959).

of which *Mystici Corporis* is guilty, in his judgment.¹⁷³ Hahnenberg also notes, in discussing the reception of *Mystici Corporis* and mystical body movement overall, that “while conservative commentators, appealing to the neo-Scholastic clarity of the *societas perfecta* model, accused these mystical body theologies of presenting an image of the Church vague, diffuse, and hard to pin down,” other figures offered a “more nuanced critique. This model alone seemed unable to clarify the relationship between the visible and the invisible in the Church; its emphasis on the mystery dimension seemed ill equipped to specify the Church as an historic subject.”¹⁷⁴ Ultimately, “*Mystici Corporis* confirmed the suspicion that ‘mystical body’ could be invoked in support of whatever structural reality needed support.”¹⁷⁵

More recent commentators have noted similar tensions within the document. According to Avery Dulles, in lifting up the spiritual dimension of the church, “the encyclical was by no means a repudiation of official teaching, but in many ways it was a welcome advance beyond the more juridical ecclesiologies of the manuals.”¹⁷⁶ Other scholars, though, find that the juridical aspect lingers more strongly than Dulles indicates. Ormond Rush offers a similar observation to Dulles, but concludes that the encyclical unfortunately presented “a juridical slant to the biblical doctrine” of the mystical body. “The encyclical blurred the distinction between Christ and his church, and identified the mystical body of Christ exclusively with the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, while the encyclical did go somewhat beyond the Bellarminian focus on visible and institutional elements of the church, strong echoes of Bellarmine remained,” for example, in

¹⁷³ Congar, *L'Église, Peuple de Dieu et Corps du Christ*, 8, in Beal, *Mystery of the Church*, 95.

¹⁷⁴ Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology,” 12.

¹⁷⁵ Hahnenberg, 13.

¹⁷⁶ Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” 422.

the encyclical's definition of what constituted membership in the church.¹⁷⁷ Hahnenberg agrees with Rush, and finds the juridical emphasis to be concerning:

the encyclical contained a strong reaffirmation of the visible and juridical nature of the Church; and given Pius XII's ecclesiological presuppositions, visible and juridical meant a Church hierarchically, and even monarchically, constituted. For Pius XII the invisible and visible dimensions of Church are one and the same; the spiritual community of Christ's body *is* the institutional, hierarchically-ordered society. The result is that, in *Mystici corporis*, the pliable image of the mystical body serves to justify prevailing patterns of authority and power.¹⁷⁸

While I agree with these judgments of the encyclical and its reception and demonstrated above that *Mystici Corporis* retains the post-Tridentine notion of the church as society, a more precise analysis is possible. The merge of the two dominant interpretations of “mystical body”—the Roman ecclesiological stream and the French Christological stream—underlies the encyclical's identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the mystical body of Christ and the definition of membership in the mystical body. I contend that the tension between the juridical and the spiritual in *Mystici Corporis* is because the single phrase “mystical body” was expositied under two different theological loci by those who influenced the encyclical— as first and foremost an aspect of Christology, for the French stream, but as an ecclesiology, for Tromp. Moreover, the term “body” is understood differently in these streams, either as an organic unity and font of life, or as a visible ordered society; each of these models of the body has different ecclesiological consequences. Pius attempts to unite both trajectories and incorporate the soteriological-organic into an overarching ecclesiological-organizational approach, yet he uses the phrase “mystical body” strictly and solely in the Trompian mode as referring to the visible, social reality of the church; he does *not* use “mystical body” to refer to the inner mystery of the church as Mersch and Congar do, though he still tries to bring forth their insights. Thus, there is

¹⁷⁷ Rush, “Roman Catholic Ecclesiology,” 277.

¹⁷⁸ Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology,” 11.

a fundamental confusion of meaning or categories within the encyclical when considered in light of the various streams of scholarship that influenced it. If Mersch were to read *Mystici Corporis*, for example, having in mind “mystical body” as referring to our organic union in Christ, he would almost certainly see *Mystici Corporis* as having a shockingly juridical and narrow understanding of the doctrine of the mystical body. In contrast, if one were to read and subscribe to *Mystici Corporis*’s doctrine of the mystical body of Christ, one would then likely see the mystical body in Mersch’s texts as “vague, diffuse, and hard to pin down.”¹⁷⁹ One is an ecclesial metaphor or definition; the other is a Christological doctrine. Yet the same phrase is used for both.

My second point is that the image of the body is deeply implicated in the ecclesiological and ecumenical problems within *Mystici Corporis* —a fact that has been only partially understood by theologians in the decades since. I am not claiming that the metaphor is *the* driving factor in the texts I have reviewed, for there are important and properly theological questions about the effects of baptism, the possibility of sanctifying grace outside the church and its sacraments, and the significance of the incarnation versus the cross in uniting humanity in Christ. Nevertheless, the image of the body is understood in a particular—and not unquestionable—way in defense of the encyclical’s ecclesiological positions. In regards to the ecclesiological-vertical dimension of the metaphor of the body (that is, the relationship between Christ and the church), one must note that there is a plurality of meaning inherent in the term “body,” as Tromp rightly points out. He notes that “body” can mean either 1) “something different from the head,” 2) “the combination of head and all the members at once,” or 3) it “may be used to mean a person’ so long as it always includes the head.”¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the church may

¹⁷⁹ Hahnenberg, 12.

¹⁸⁰ Tromp, *Corpus Christi*, 98.

be called the bride of Christ, *alter Christus*; the whole Christ, *totus Christus*; and the fullness of Christ, his *pleroma*. Consequently, to say that the church is the “body of Christ” can mean the church is the fullness of Christ, his living body, his own person, *or* that the church is ‘something different from’ Christ the head. When *Mystici Corporis* asserts an identity between the mystical body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church, it pursues the first of these two options, interpreting “body” to mean “self”—the very identity of, living incarnation of, the person. The church, as the body of Christ, is the ongoing reality of Christ in the world. In this way, *Mystici Corporis* continues the trajectory begun in Möhler’s *Symbolism* and continued in Leo XIII, Adam, Mersch, Congar, and Tromp. (By way of contrast, for example, recall Passaglia’s and Scheeben’s model of the spousal body, interpreting “body of Christ” as equivalent to “bride of Christ.”) It is this interpretation of “body” as “self” that blurs the distinction between Christ and his church. The hylomorphic body-soul analogy is also implicated in this problem when it is held, as in *Mystici Corporis*, that the soul of the church is the Holy Spirit—for the soul does not exist in space or time apart from, outside of, the visible body. The ecumenical issue arises when, in stating that “the church is the body of Christ,” the “church” in question here is solely the Roman Catholic Church, as Tromp argued.¹⁸¹

To correct this excessive identification of the church with Christ, beginning in the 1940s theologians such as Otto Semmelroth, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx turned to the model of the church as sacrament.¹⁸² A sacrament is an effective sign of something beyond itself;

¹⁸¹ This is where Vatican II’s statement that the church of Christ subsists in the Roman Church attenuates the problematic use of the mystical body metaphor in *Mystici Corporis*.

¹⁸² For example, Otto Semmelroth, *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* (Frankfurt: J. Knecht, 1953) and *ibid.*, *Church and Sacrament*, trans. Emily Schossberger (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1965 [orig. German 1960]); Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O’Hara (Freiburg: Herder, 1963) and *ibid.*, “Membership of the Church;” Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of The Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barred (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963 [orig. Dutch 1960]). See also Dennis Doyle, “Otto Semmelroth and the Advance of the Church as Sacrament at Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2015): 65–86 and *ibid.*, “Otto Semmelroth, SJ

it reveals and conceals; it makes an invisible reality present, but is not the totality or origin of that reality. Of course, this is precisely the meaning that Möhler gave to “body” in *Unity in the Church*—the visible manifests the invisible; the outer manifests the inner; the body of the church expresses the spirit of the church. It wasn’t until *Symbolism* that Möhler’s use of “body” for the church means “self” when he states that the visible church “is the Son of God himself...the permanent incarnation of the same, as in Holy Writ, even the faithful are called ‘the body of Christ.’”¹⁸³ Nevertheless, in the aftermath of *Mystici Corporis*, rather than pursuing a sacramental understanding of the body in the metaphor “the church is the body of Christ,” theologians and the council fathers at Vatican II opted for the expression “the church is a sacrament” of Christ, or of salvation, or of unity. Though these alternate ecclesial metaphors are certainly valid and useful, we must also interrogate the assumption that the body is the fullness of the self. Here, phenomenology can offer a more nuanced account of the body as truly mediating, yet also potentially impeding, personal presence in the world and of the soul or personal existence as reaching beyond the biological body.

The second way in which the body is implicated in the ecclesiological and ecumenical difficulties of *Mystici Corporis* is in the horizontal dimension of the metaphor when “body” is taken to mean something different from the head,” in Tromp’s phrase—the hunk of mass connected to and subservient to a head, from which it receives direction, life, and its own unity. When “body” is understood in this way, to be a member of the body of Christ one must be ‘visibly connected’ to the head. We saw this understanding of “body” in Mersch and Congar who understand “mystical body” as the unity between the Christian and Christ, the member with the

and the Ecclesiology of the ‘Church as Sacrament’ at Vatican II,” in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, eds. Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini, SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 203–25.

¹⁸³ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 258–59, emphasis mine.

head, which brings about the unity of all members. Tromp goes well beyond this by detailing the function of the head as the source of all life, unity, and governance, and then applying the powers and prerogatives of the invisible Head to the visible head. Again, the ecumenical problem arises when the Roman Pontiff is defined as the necessary visible vicar of the invisible Head, Christ. This interpretation of the function of the head in living body also reasserts the binary of *ecclesia docens* / *ecclesia discens*. We saw this explicitly in Tromp as well when he states that the Pauline metaphor of a human body is only verified in the hierarchical Catholic Church, at once teaching and learning. The head directs; the body obeys. In the next chapter, we will see how the Second Vatican Council attempted to articulate degrees of belonging to the church apart from the metaphor of the body. But once again, we must ask whether the notion that a body is clearly defined and bounded by its head is an adequate understanding of embodiment. Phenomenology provides the tools to reconsider the source of bodily unity and to reimagine the relationship between a body and its head in a less hierarchical and more mutual and dialogical way.

In sum, Hahnenberg is exactly right when he says that “*Mystici Corporis* confirmed the suspicion that ‘mystical body’ could be invoked in support of whatever structural reality needed support.”¹⁸⁴ This is, as it happens, precisely the point that Mary Douglas makes—the body symbolizes the social, but differently so depending on the degree of internal ordering of that society and its concern for its borders. Hahnenberg misses the underlying anthropological reality of why this is the case, though, and ecclesiology since *Mystici Corporis*, even as it has offered many compelling explanations for the decline of the mystical body movement, has failed to note the ways in which particular understandings of embodiment have contributed to this. By having a clear sense of the ecclesiological and soteriological dimensions of the “mystical body of Christ”

¹⁸⁴ Hahnenberg, “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology,” 13.

metaphor, and the various ways in which “body” can be, and has been, interpreted and used “to justify prevailing patterns of authority and power,” we can trace more precisely the shifts in metaphors leading up and following Vatican II, especially *why* the anthropological image of the body falls out of favor and how “sacrament,” “pilgrim people of God,” and “communion” each take up ecclesiological values or positions that “body” had once expressed. Only then can we reimagine the meaning of the body for postconciliar ecclesiology.

Chapter Four: The Body at the Council

“Thus the Church is the mystical body of Christ: that is to say, quite simply, that it is the body of Christ signified by means of the sacrament. *Mystical* is a contraction of *mystically signified*, *mystically designated*. ...Is this not a true definition of *mystical*?”

—Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum* (1949), 250.

I. Introduction

The previous chapter surveyed the dominance of mystical body theology/ecclesiology from the 1920s through the early 1940s in German, French, and Roman theology, culminating in *Mystici Corporis*. Around the time of Pius XII’s encyclical, though, the metaphor of the mystical body had begun to give way to other biblical images of the church. The same impulses that led to the embrace of the mystical body in the early twentieth century—the return to patristic sources, the biblical renewal movement, and the liturgical movement—led to a new appreciation for the concepts of the church as the people of God, as a communion, and as a sacrament. At the same time, the two main teachings of *Mystici Corporis* (the identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the mystical body of Christ, and the limitation of membership in the mystical body to membership in the Roman Catholic Church) led to criticism of mystical body ecclesiology in general; the metaphor of the church as a (mystical) body could not account for how other baptized Christians were members of this body. I argued that the image of the body is deeply implicated in the ecclesiological and ecumenical problems with *Mystici Corporis*, both in its vertical dimension and its horizontal dimension. Vertically, “body” was understood as “self” or “person,” such that the church as the “body of Christ” is the ongoing incarnation of the historical and glorified Christ, obscuring the difference between Christ and the church. The body–soul

analogy falls prey to the same issue when the ‘soul’ of the ecclesial body is the Holy Spirit.

Horizontally, “body” was understood as “trunk,” something different from the head, with the consequence that in order to be a member of the ecclesial body, one had to be organically united to the visible ecclesial head, the pope.

In this chapter, we will explore how the metaphor of the body was employed—or not—at the Second Vatican Council. It is well known that, in contrast to *Mystici Corporis*, the council’s dogmatic constitution on the church incorporates a wider range of biblical images in its first chapter and that the conciliar documents as a whole describe the church using a variety of terms such as “people of God,” “sacrament,” and “communion” rather than invoking “mystical body of Christ” as the definition of the church or a fulcrum for its entire ecclesiology. Scholars have offered several explanations for this. The weaknesses of *Mystici Corporis* and the disillusionment with the appeal to mystical unity in light of World War II are generally regarded as two contributing factors. Moreover, theologians in the 1940s and 1950s offered a series of methodological, scriptural, historical, and Christological critiques of the metaphor of the church as a (mystical) body. Offering a different perspective, Timothy Gabrielli suggests the decentering of mystical body theology at Vatican II should not be seen as a rejection of that theology, “but rather...a sublation of it in which its goals were achieved. The Christological center and emphasis on mystery in the first chapter [of *Lumen Gentium*] illustrate the point. ...Thanks to the hard work of pastors and theologians, the heavy lifting of the mystical body recovery has been accomplished...all the work had been done already.”¹

¹ Timothy R. Gabrielli, *One in Christ: Virgil Michel, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and Mystical Body Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 102, 104. He cites Gregory Baum who also says that mystical body theology was ‘unanimously accepted’ by the hierarchy going into the council (“The Laity and the Council,” *New Blackfriars* 43, no. 500 [1962], 61). I disagree with Gabrielli and find that the waves of criticism mentioned earlier and in the next section were more influential in the council’s choice not to define the church as the mystical body of Christ.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that the traditional symbol of the body was, by and large, incapable of expressing the ecclesiology of Vatican II, and was sometimes consciously rejected in the process of drafting conciliar texts, because of the changes that conciliar ecclesiology brought about in the church's sense of its internal relationships (*ad intra*) and its sense of boundedness and identity over-against the world (*ad extra*). In other words, I will add an anthropological and historical explanation to the nevertheless-valid, but somewhat incomplete, theological explanations for the shift in metaphors at the council. In its vertical dimension, the “body of Christ” metaphor takes on a much more specific and limited meaning in comparison to its previous usage. In its horizontal dimension, the corporeal metaphor is expanded and reconceived in light of some ecclesiological doctrines, yet more or less abandoned in regards to others. If we only notice that *Lumen Gentium* situated “body of Christ” within a variety of other biblical metaphors, we miss seeing the ways in which the metaphor of the body—especially in its horizontal dimension—was utilized in significant new ways at the council, and perhaps more importantly, why it failed to resonate with other aspects of conciliar ecclesiology.

Before taking a closer look at the conciliar texts, we must recall in greater detail Mary Douglas' grid-group theory and its relation to the symbol of the body.² Douglas has shown that body symbolism both reflects and reinforces social structures. This is especially true in hierarchical societies, which are characterized by highly regulated relationships or a fixed role structure within the society and a strong sense of being a bounded group. In such high grid–high group societies, the body is a particularly resonant symbol for the social and frequently

² Douglas' grid–group theory is an effort to explain and predict body symbolism and bodily control on the basis of social experience and social control. This theory can be envisioned as two axes, grid and group, where ‘grid’ measures the norms and regulations of individuals' relationships to one another within a society, and ‘group’ measures social inclusion or the boundedness of the social unit. This yields four quadrants, or types of societies: high group/high grid (hierarchy); high group/low grid (enclave/sectarian); low group/high grid (isolate); low group/low grid (individualist). See my Chapter 1, pages 31–35.

symbolizes boundaries, belonging, order, and life. In societies that are somewhat lower on the group or grid axes, the “the body may come to represent an alien husk” or other experiences of alienation, or may be seen as an uncontrollable entity to be feared.³ At the lowest end of the grid–group axes, all symbols become more diffuse, and the body “is inevitably less cogent as a symbol of society.”⁴ As I have shown in my second and third chapters, Douglas’ theory regarding hierarchical societies and body symbolism proves true in the history of modern magisterial ecclesiology and its use of the (mystical) body as an ecclesial metaphor. For centuries, stretching back to Boniface VIII’s *Unam Sanctam* (1302), in the context of pyramidal, Tridentine, and ultramontane ecclesiologies, the body was seen as a hierarchically ordered organism, visible to the eye and governed by a single head, from which all life and activity flowed and which dictated the boundaries of the body via organic unity with this head.⁵ This emphasis on the authority of the life-giving head over the obedient and well-ordered body continued in Vatican I, Leo XIII, and Pius XII, amidst the loss of the papal states, the quest to define papal infallibility and primacy, and the fight against modernity.

The Second Vatican Council, however, was tasked with “throwing open the windows” of the church, with *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, in order to bring the church out of its past ‘hierarchology’ and anti-modernist disposition and into greater dialogue with the world, its

³ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 158.

⁴ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, ix.

⁵ For the church as pyramid, see Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 311 and Ormond Rush, “Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church,” *Theological Studies* 78, no. 2 (2017): 229–325. Rush notes that “the image of the pyramid had become common for describing preconciliar ecclesiology” (301n8). For a summary of Trent and ‘Tridentine’ ecclesiology, see Ormond Rush, “Roman Catholic Ecclesiology from the Council of Trent to Vatican II and Beyond,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Avis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 264–268 and Michael J. Himes, “The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 45–50.

people, and its religions. In ways that I will explore in greater detail below, the council aimed not only at internal reform and the completion of the ecclesiology of Vatican I, but also at putting on a more merciful and humble face as it looked out at the world. In terms of Douglas' theory, I suggest that conciliar ecclesiology is located somewhat lower on both the grid and the group axes in comparison to the dominant ecclesiology of seven or more centuries that preceded it—not all the way into the 'individualism' quadrant, but slightly down and to the left (see figure D).

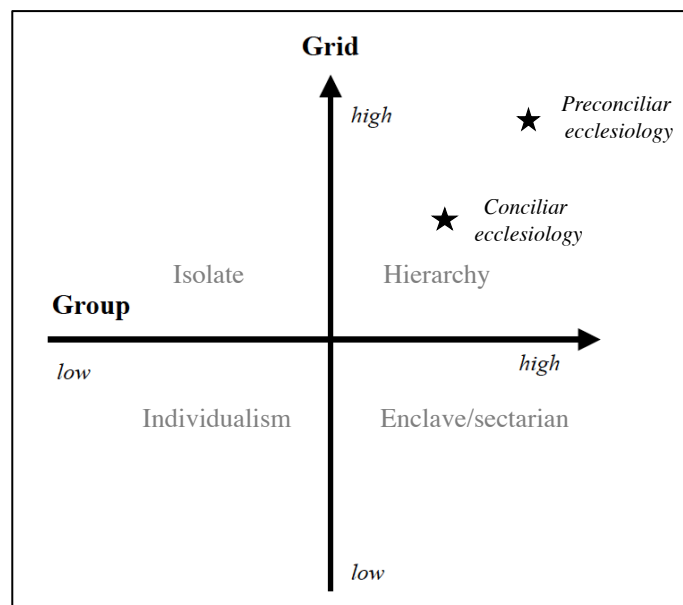


Figure D

The changes in the church's self-understanding brought about by the council resulted in (and per Douglas, *had to result in*) a shift in the symbol of the body. As Douglas argues, ruptures in social life will bring about changes in the symbol of the body:

Something can always go wrong with any social system. There could either be a general catastrophe such as drought or economic depression, or individuals in it may find they can never succeed in working the rules except to their own loss. Then the grid type of society changes. Again we find the dominant symbolic forms draw on bodily experience....In these types of social experience, a person feels that his personal relations, so inexplicably unprofitable, are in the sinister grip of a social system. It follows that the body tends to serve as a symbol of evil,

as a structured system contrasted with pure spirit which by its nature is free and undifferentiated.⁶

While I certainly would not call the changes wrought by the Vatican II “catastrophic,” the council marked the end of an ecclesiology (and especially a theology of hierarchy and the papacy) that had been developing since the Gregorian Reforms. On the ‘grid’ axis, the council still articulates clear internal roles within the church, but these roles have multiplied, become more interdependent, and because they do not always follow clear sacred/secular or clergy/laity lines, they are somewhat less fixed. Furthermore, conciliar ecclesiology is much less focused on hierarchical differences among members of the church, and instead lifts up the whole people of God and the equal dignity of all the baptized. On the ‘group’ axis, the council still sees the Catholic Church as a distinct society with its own identity and markers of inclusion and belonging, but one that is in intimate and mutual relation with other churches, and is open to both giving to and receiving from the world. As a result of these ecclesiological changes *ad intra* (grid) and *ad extra* (group), and in a shift predictable via Douglas’ theory, the body becomes a *less resonant symbol* for the social in the conciliar texts and the perhaps unconscious minds of the fathers; when it *is* used to reflect or describe the social structure of the church, it is a much less hierarchically-inflected body that appears.

Before moving right into an analysis of the council documents, we must have a better sense of the critiques of the metaphor of the (mystical) body of Christ leading up to the council, especially in its vertical dimension, by theologians who had a hand in drafting the documents and shaping the debate on the council floor.

⁶ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, xii.

II. The Vertical Dimension: The Trinity and the Church

1. Between *Mystici Corporis* and Vatican II

As we have seen, *Mystici Corporis* upheld “the mystical body of Christ” as the preeminent definition of the church, yet the encyclical was roundly critiqued for identifying the mystical body with *only* the Catholic Church and for using this expression to exclude non-Catholic Christians from membership in the church or in the mystical body. Theologians soon went beyond criticism of the encyclical specifically, re-evaluating mystical body ecclesiology more broadly on methodological, scriptural, historical, and theological grounds.

The searing critique of the mystical body metaphor by Mannes Domenikus Koster, a German Dominican, was the first major reproof against the movement that captured so much attention in the previous two decades. In his 1940 *Ekklesiologie im Werden*, he criticized “mystical body” as pre-theological and simply metaphorical, an insufficient starting point for ecclesiology.⁷ This metaphor neglects the role of the sacraments in the essential constitution of the church, he argued; it fails to see the historical character of the church and its place in salvation history, it overlooks the charismatic elements in the church, and it fails to link the juridical structures of the church with grace and the individual with Christ. As a corrective, Koster advocated that ecclesiology ought to be centered around the concept of the people of God. “People of God” is solidly grounded in scripture, tradition, and liturgy; it is a global or universal notion and is truly theological, rather than a partial description of the church or a mere metaphor; and it is the key to interpreting all other biblical images. Even though Koster’s contemporaries

⁷ Mannes D. Koster, *Ekklesiologie Im Werden* (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1940). I rely here on the analysis of Koster’s work by Angel Antón in *El misterio de la Iglesia: Evolución histórica de las ideas eclesiológicas*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Editorial Católica, 1986), 704–709. Antón presents a clear summary of Koster’s argument and the reception of it by his contemporaries, and argues that Koster’s weakness lies in his total rejection of “body of Christ” and attempt to replace one hegemonic metaphor with another.

did not always agree with his argument, his work played a significant role in reevaluating the use of “the mystical body of Christ” in ecclesiology and in encouraging greater exploration of the concept “people of God.”

The biblical renewal movement, given official approbation by Pius XII in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, also contributed to a more tempered use of the term “mystical body” as applied to the church. In 1942, Lucien Cerfaux published the first edition of his work of biblical exegesis, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*.⁸ Cerfaux maintains that the fundamental idea of the church in the Pauline texts is not “the body of Christ,” but the people of God, a messianic assembly that includes Jews and gentiles alike. Moreover, Cerfaux challenged the dominant interpretation of the Pauline formula “the body of Christ,” especially as seen in other theologians and exegetes such as Émile Mersch, arguing that the concept of a “mystical Christ” or “the whole Christ” simply does not exist in the mind or writing of St. Paul.⁹ Cerfaux “insists that the Pauline image ‘body of Christ’ involves spiritual union with Christ, but not becoming part of Christ.”¹⁰ Moreover, the apostle only uses the word *sōma* to refer to a physical, individual human body, never to a social body or a collectivity of individuals; it “means a unity, a whole, but never a collectivity.”¹¹ Cerfaux writes:

⁸ Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959).

⁹ Joseph T. Culliton situates Cerfaux’s contribution to “body of Christ” theology as a counterposition to those of Allo, Plat, and Mersch. The first two of these figures are mentioned repeatedly throughout Cerfaux’s book. Cerfaux never refers to Mersch directly and the latter never appears in the index, though it is hard to believe that Cerfaux wasn’t familiar with his compatriot’s *The Whole Christ* published a decade earlier. See Joseph T. Culliton, “Lucien Cerfaux’s Contribution Concerning ‘The Body of Christ,’” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (January 1967): 41–59.

¹⁰ Culliton, 58.

¹¹ The quotation here comes from F. De Visscher, *Les Édits d’Auguste découverts à Cyrène* (Louvain, 1940), 91; Cerfaux quotes him in support of his own views. According to Cerfaux, in the major epistles, Paul uses the Hellenistic simile of the body in its physiological sense to express the unity of the local assembly of Christians; the local assembly is ‘like a body’ because of its unity with the one real body of Christ in the Eucharist. In the captivity letters (which Cerfaux accepts as authentically Pauline), Paul develops his understanding of the universal, heavenly church which is identified with the risen body of Christ. In these texts, *sōma* has a juridical or political connotation, akin to the Greek sense of the body-city; Christ as *kephalē* (head) also has a political valence and translates as

The idea of ‘body’ is never connected with the Church as a social body. The word refers to the Church only by means of an always perceptible reference to the real body of Christ. And so the expression is always metaphorical: it is rooted in the real body of Christ, his risen body, which pours out its life on Christians, who are ‘the body’ because the name of the mystically present cause (the risen body) is attributed to the effect (the Christians are the *pleroma* of Christ).¹²

The *sōma* into which Christians are incorporated is always the ‘real body of Christ’—the historical, crucified and risen Christ now present in the Eucharist—not a collective social reality or moral person. The church is united into one whole, a spiritual organism, *like* a body, through our identification with the physical person of Christ present in the Eucharist, and is mystically identified with Christ and manifests his spiritual and sanctifying activity and therefore can be called his body. But the Pauline texts “are explained without having to give *sōma* the collective meaning of a ‘moral body’ constituted by the entirety of Christians (*σῶμα τῶν Χριστιανῶν* [body of Christians]), who would be the ‘mystical’ body of Christ. In the metonymy ‘body’ there is always a reference to the real (risen) body of Christ.”¹³

In short, Cerfaux rejected two interpretations of Paul that he saw as common in mystical body ecclesiology in his day: first, the idea that baptism or Eucharist incorporate us into to a society or political body; second, that a ‘mystical body’ made up of Christians could be distinct from the ‘real body’ that is the person of Christ. In contrast to these positions, Cerfaux argues that, for Paul, the sacraments unite us to the one, real body of Christ, who is the principle of unity of the ecclesial community, the church of God. In any case, the notion of the church as the “body of Christ” is second in Paul’s thought to the notion of the church as the messianic assembly, the people of God. According to one scholar, Cerfaux’s exegesis had a significant impact on *Lumen Gentium* insofar as the constitution “stresses that the image ‘body of Christ’

‘master’ or ‘leader.’

¹² Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, 344.

¹³ Cerfaux, 337.

describes communion of life in Christ [and] does not refer to the social body of the Church as the body of Christ.”¹⁴

A critique of the ecclesial use of “mystical body” from a historical, as well as theological, perspective was leveled by Henri de Lubac in his 1943 publication *Corpus Mysticum*.¹⁵ De Lubac traces the history of the term “mystical body” and shows that in its origins in the early church, it referred to the Eucharist, not the church. This transposition only came about gradually between the ninth and twelfth centuries, as scholastics refined a theology of real presence and began calling the host the “true body;” only then was “mystical body” applied to the church to disambiguate it from the Eucharist. Consequently, over the course of the following centuries, the Eucharist and the historical and glorified Christ became more and more closely linked, while ecclesiology became increasingly detached from the Eucharist. In his own theology, the church as the body of Christ is a spiritual and social unity, “the body mystically signified by Christ and the Eucharist” which “is only co-extensive with the Mystical Body of Christ at the end of time.”¹⁶ He scoffs at the phrase “the body of the Church,” a merely social or juridical use of the term “body,” and other analogies to the natural human body that reveal the sociological reduction away from the eucharistic origins of the church.¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger credits de Lubac with significantly developing and correcting the enthusiasm over mystical body ecclesiology by “put[ing] the idea of the body of Christ in concrete terms as eucharistic ecclesiology and thus open[ing] it up to the actual questions of the Church’s legal order and the relationship between the local and the universal church.”¹⁸ By showing that “mystical body” originally referred to the

¹⁴ Culliton, “Lucien Cerfaux’s Contribution Concerning ‘The Body of Christ,’” 59.

¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (London: SCM Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 77, 82.

¹⁷ De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 112–14.

¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics* (New

Eucharist, de Lubac retrieves “body of Christ” as a threefold, sacramental reality—historical, ecclesial, and eucharistic—and restores to theological consciousness the eucharistic dimension of the church as the body of Christ, an element which was often ignored or downplayed by previous theologians.¹⁹

It was Congar who offered perhaps the most substantive critique of the organic metaphor and other Christological analogies in ecclesiology on both theological and methodological grounds. Ever since Möhler wrote that “the visible Church, from the point of view here taken, is the Son of God himself...the permanent incarnation of the same, as in Holy Writ, even the faithful are called ‘the body of Christ,’” theologians have developed the notion of the church as an ongoing incarnation or continuation of Christ.²⁰ Congar himself used this phraseology in his early work. But by 1950, Congar had come to see the limits and possible errors of Christological analogies in ecclesiology, and especially the common claim that the church is the continuation, or ongoing incarnation, of Christ. In a 1954 essay, he critiqued the mystical body theology/ecclesiology of the preceding decades, even his own.²¹ The parallelism between Christology and ecclesiology has, in recent theologians, “lacked rigor. ... It is not itself an explanatory principle...it is that itself rather which needs to be explained.”²² Congar sets out to

York: Crossroad, 1988), 14.

¹⁹ For example, Congar typically only mentions the Eucharist in passing insofar as faith and the sacraments build up the mystical and social body; Mersch treats the sacraments at the end of his *Theology of the Mystical Body* under the heading of the sanctifying office of the church; Tromp’s *Corpus Christi Quod Est Ecclesia* mentions the Eucharist only occasionally, as assisting in bringing about the unity begun in baptism; Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis* treats the Eucharist primarily as nourishing—not as constituting—the mystical body, and secondarily as a figure of ecclesial unity. On the other hand, however, de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* does not address the role that baptism plays in incorporating us in/as the body of Christ, a point which was much more prominent in the aforementioned authors.

²⁰ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 258–59.

²¹ Yves Congar, “Dogme christologique et écclesiologie: Vérité et Limites d’un Parallèle,” in *Sainte Église: Études et approches écclesiologiques* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1963), 69–104. He began writing this essay in 1950. It was first published in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon - Geschichte und Gegenwart*, hrsg v. A. Grillmeier et H. Bacht, vol III - Chalkedon heute, 1954, 239–268. It was later reprinted in *Sainte Église*, 1964; all citations of this work come from the latter, and all translations are my own.

²² Congar, 102.

provide this explanation. Christ has a truly divine nature, hypostatically united to his human nature; the church, however, does not have a divine *nature*, but rather a divine principle of action and a human principle of action which is not negated by its divine operations any more than the Logos takes the place of the human soul in Christ. Moreover, the church *participates* in the divine nature and its operations. It is not hypostatically united to Christ or the divine nature in a union of substances; rather, the union of the church to God is a *covenantal union*, or a spousal union.

The Church and Christ, or in some aspects, the Church and the Holy Spirit, form, because of this covenant, one sole subject of action, life, and law. This is not an ontological fusion. The physical substrata [*suppôts*] remain various, namely, humanity on one side, and the Persons of the Holy Trinity on the other. This is why, if there can be no infidelity in the substantial content of the covenant, there can't be a failure of the covenant, though there can be and there even are inevitably flaws in the exercise that humans make of the goods of the covenant – the gifts of grace and the ecclesial means of grace.²³

Once the parallel between Christology and ecclesiology is clarified in its limits, Congar then critiques “‘organicist’ or ‘biologico-organic’ or still ‘romantic’” expressions of the mystery of the church which were favored in the early nineteenth-century Tübingen school and again between 1919 and 1939.²⁴ The risk of proposing a kind of mystical or biological identity between Christ and the church (under the metaphor ‘body of Christ’) is that it can treat the hierarchy “as being an organ of Jesus Christ and having, as such, infallibility, the right to respect and

²³ This same emphasis on the union between the church and God, or the Holy Spirit, as a covenantal union, not a substantial union, is central in Congar’s 1952 essay “The Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Body, Continuator of the Work of Christ,” in *The Mystery of the Church*, first ed. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960), 147–86. In his 1963 *Tradition and Traditions*, in contrast to his earlier work, “mystical body” is not Christ’s own personal body or his life dispersed and lived out among the Christian community, but is a spousal body, a subject distinct from Christ and retaining its own freedom and responsibility, yet united to him. The qualifier “mystical” serves to *markedly differentiate* the church from Christ himself. Thomas O’Meara indicates that Herman Schell posited a covenantal relationship between the church and God, and the church’s organization as “a sacrament and service,” in *Jahwe und Christus* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoningh, 1905), but Congar does not make any reference to Schell in this essay. O’Meara, *Church and Culture*, 124.

²⁴ Congar, “Dogme christologique et ecclesiologie,” 98.

obedience, the authority of Jesus Christ.” In *Tradition & Traditions*, he specifies that “such an excessively physical treatment of the theme of the body” is found in Möhler’s *Symbolism* §36 and in Perrone, Passaglia, and Schrader. This interpretation of a kind of biological, organic continuity between Christ and the church wrongly posits all actions of the church as divine actions, annihilating the genuine subjectivity of human actors in the church. Congar makes clear that he is not denying that the hierarchy has certain powers of Christ; he is arguing that “these powers are limited, conditioned; [and] the best way to pose them in their truth is not that of a biological-organic consideration of the church as Body of Christ; it’s more so that of a consideration of the institution, of its relationship to Christ as its cause, and the community of faithful as its fruit.”²⁵

Similarly, the idea of the church as a “continuing incarnation” risks positing an identity between Christ and Christians, or making the church a divine and impeccable reality.²⁶ Most significantly, it confuses *incarnation* with *incorporation*—“the movement of God’s descent in the flesh with the opposite movement of the assimilation of man to God.” Congar puts forth the following, proper understanding of the phrase:

Under the word of “continuing Incarnation” one has never understood anything other than *life in Christ*, which is also that of *Christ in us*, conducted in concrete existence, on the basis of faith and the sacraments of faith. ...When we speak of the “continuing Incarnation,” we really don’t mean anything else than the incorporation, bringing back of all in Jesus Christ, our head according to the *Pneuma*, to mystically bring about Jesus Christ in all that we are, in order to pass the first creation to the existence according to the *Pneuma* in Jesus-Christ resurrected.²⁷

²⁵ Congar, 98.

²⁶ Congar, 99.

²⁷ Congar, 100–1.

Nevertheless, there remains a truth in the idea of an ongoing incarnation and a parallelism between Christology and ecclesiology—the truth that what was accomplished in Jesus Christ (*gift*) is still to be performed in us and by us (*task*). Moreover, “there is not exactly, in the Church, a divine nature and a human nature, but there is a human element and a divine element, a visible element and an invisible element, a ‘flesh’ serving, in the conditions of space and time of humanity, the divinizing operations of grace. And basically, when one invokes a parallelism and a certain continuity between the Church and Christ, it is this that one wants to say.”²⁸ Finally, the church belongs to the economy of salvation and is a great sacrament of that salvation, and for these reasons can validly be called the “Body of Christ”.

Congar’s own work moving forward reflects his new insight into the limits of the parallel between Christology and ecclesiology. In his later publications (1950 onwards), he does not center his ecclesiology around the notion of the mystical body of Christ, as he did in his early works and courses. Rather, he along with other biblical scholars (such as Cerfaux, discussed earlier) and ecclesiologists (such as Ratzinger) rediscover other biblical images for the church, first and foremost the notion of the people of God, a term which links God’s covenants with Israel with the new covenant in Christ.²⁹ To understand the church as the people of God is to foreground a more historic and dynamic notion of the church, embedded in history and part of salvation history; a people who are one not on the basis of race, blood, or nation but on the basis of grace; a people covenantally, not hypostatically, united to God by God’s own initiative; a people and institution in need of ongoing development and reform. And yet, he consistently

²⁸ Congar, 103–4.

²⁹ His doctoral dissertation was on the people of God in Augustine. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, (München: KZink, 1954). In Ratzinger’s analysis, ‘people of God’ in the New Testament “is not a description of the Church...it can only denote the new Israel in the Christological reinterpretation of the Old Testament.” St. Paul “summed up this necessary Christological process of transformation in the concept of the body of Christ” (“The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” 18).

maintains that “people of God” is, in itself, insufficient to define or describe the total reality of the church, for it does not evoke the Christological dimension of the new dispensation. For this reason, “people of God” must always be completed by “body of Christ,” for the latter brings into focus the reality of the church as instituted by Christ and as an ‘already here’ spiritual reality through which we participate in divine life.³⁰ Ratzinger offers a similar position, arguing that Christology and the sacraments must always remain at the heart of any talk of the people of God: “We are the people of God in no other way than on the basis of the crucified and risen body of Christ.”³¹

The methodological, scriptural, historical, and theological critiques summarized above are aimed at the vertical dimension of the corporeal metaphor, the way in which it risks identifying Christ and the church. In such a reading of “the body of Christ,” the term “body” was understood as the objective presence of the self, the very manifestation of the person, soul, or identity in physical form. The bishops and theologians gathered at the Second Vatican Council had to wrestle with how to utilize the biblical image of the body of Christ while avoiding the pitfalls so clearly delineated by theologians in the decades leading up to the council.

2. The draft *De Ecclesia*

The meaning and use of the metaphor of the church as the (mystical) body of Christ, in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions, was most directly hashed out in the drafting of and

³⁰ Yves Congar, “The Church: The People of God,” in *The Church and Mankind*, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx, vol. 1, Concilium (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1965), 11–37. See also “The People of God,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 197–207. Ratzinger offers a very similar list of the reasons why people of God was embraced by the council (“The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” 17).

³¹ Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” 19. See also Gérard Philips, “History of the Constitution,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Kevin Smyth, vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 109.

debates over the constitution on the church. Sebastian Tromp, as a member of the Theological Commission, assisted in drafting the schema *De Ecclesia* for discussion by the bishops at the end of the first session. Unsurprisingly given Tromp's own work and his role as ghostwriter of *Mystici Corporis*, "the schema was a blend of the neo-scholastic ecclesiology currently being taught in seminaries and the teaching of Pope Pius XII in his encyclicals, *Mystici Corporis* and *Humani Generis*."³² The first chapter 'On the Nature of the Church Militant' begins by describing the church through several biblical images—"a new Israel," "the people of God," and "the Church of God." Articles 4–6, however, affirm the position of *Mystici Corporis* that "of all the figures, because it more clearly expresses the social element along with the mystical, the principal one is the figure of the body," and that "there is only a single true Church of Jesus Christ...the Church which, after his resurrection, he handed over to be governed to St. Peter and his successors, the Roman Pontiffs. Therefore, only the Catholic Roman is rightly called the Church."³³ The next chapter reiterates *Mystici Corporis*' teaching on membership in the church "in the true and proper sense." All others, including other baptized Christians, are not members of the church though they may be "linked on many counts" with the church and share in "some union in the Holy Spirit," who acts both within the Mystical Body and outside of it in order to unite all Christians into the one body of Christ.

The longest article in all of Chapter One is dedicated to "the explanation of the figure of the body." The body is visible, structured, unequal, enlivened by the Spirit, and includes sick members. The text explains that

³² Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 9.

³³ Translations of the preparatory schema *De Ecclesia* by Joseph A. Komonchak, <https://jakomonchak.wordpress.com/2013/07/27/draft-of-a-dogmatic-constitution-on-the-church/>, 2013. Full Latin text at *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, Vol. I, Pars IV (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971), 12–122, available online at <https://archive.org/details/ASI.4/page/n111/mode/2up>.

by the very fact that she is a body, the Church is seen by the eyes. ...It is, moreover, a structure of many members, not, of course, all equal, since some members are subordinate to others and since there are in the Church clergy and laity, superiors and subjects, teachers and pupils, and different states too, over all of which Christ the Head is superior in position, perfection and power.³⁴

Yet there is also a “conformity of nature and of life” among members, as with a vine and its branches. The draft goes on to say that the Holy Spirit is the Soul of the body, is the source of its unity as one mystical person, and “distributes grace and gifts and confers charisms.”

The draft then asserts the unity of the institutional and mystical dimensions of the church, rooted in both a pneumatological and Christological reality, in language that remains nearly the same in the final text. The one Spirit gifts the church with various social offices and ministries for the sake of building up the body.

For that reason, the Church society and the Mystical Body of Christ are not two realities, but only one, which presents both a human and a divine aspect, and which, therefore, by no slight analogy, is compared to the mystery of the Incarnate Word. For as in the Incarnate Word the human nature served as a living instrument of his divine nature...so the Church society is equipped with the charisms of preacher, priest and king so that she might serve the Spirit of Christ in the building up of Christ's Body.

The majority of the bishops roundly rejected the schema.³⁵ Richard Gaillardetz notes that perhaps the most significant speech came from Bishop Emile de Smedt, who summed up the concerns of many in attendance when he outlined three fundamental shortcomings: (1) the tone of the document was inappropriately *triumphalist*; (2) the schema reflected a *clericalism* in its pyramidal view of the church, placing the pope at the apex and the laity at the base; (3) the document's vision of the church was excessively *juridical*, lacking an appreciation for the

³⁴ *De Ecclesia*, article 5.

³⁵ For an in-depth presentation of the debate on this schema and especially on Chapter One, see Giuseppe Ruggieri, “Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics: The Debate on the Church,” in *History of Vatican II, Vol. II: The Formation of the Council's Identity. First Period and Intersession, October 1962–September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 281–357, and Joseph A. Komonchak, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion,” in *History of Vatican II, Vol IV: Church as Communion. Third Period and Intersession. September 1964–September 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 1–93.

church as mystery.³⁶

Others complained that the draft gave too central a place to the mystical body to the exclusion of other biblical images, or rejected the strict identification of the mystical body with the Roman Catholic Church. In widely-circulated written remarks, Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner highlighted several inadequacies with the preparatory schema.³⁷ Schillebeeckx regretted that the church was considered in the abstract, and that “the church as ‘body of Christ’ is not understood biblically, that is, in relation to the glorious body of Christ with which it is sacramentally identified, but in the derivative sense of a living organism comprising many members. Consistent with this deficiency is the lack of a sacramental view of the Church, so that the visible bonds of the Church and the bonds of grace and truth are dealt with separately.”³⁸ For Rahner, “the schema claimed to derive [the nature of the Church] by a logical deduction from the image of the body, as though this were a logical concept and not a simple image that, as such, did not allow the application of deduction.”³⁹ In short, all the major theological, methodological, and exegetical critiques of mystical body ecclesiology in prior decade were voiced on the council floor in response to this schema.⁴⁰

Following the debate at the first session, a subcommission worked on revising the draft and included Rahner and Congar among the *periti*. “The decision was made to follow a text that

³⁶ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 13.

³⁷ See Ruggieri, “Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics,” 305–316 for a detailed presentation of their arguments. He notes that “several thousand copies were made” of Schillebeeckx’s notes (305n38) and 1,300 copies of Rahner’s text were distributed (311n44).

³⁸ Ruggieri, 305.

³⁹ Ruggieri, 312.

⁴⁰ For criticism of the schema, see Ruggieri, 332–339. König and Döpfner in particular were influenced by the Schillebeeckx and Rahner texts. Not all bishops opposed Tromp’s schema, however; supporters included Ottaviani, Ruffini, Bueno y Monreal, Spellman, Siri, and others, though some offered emendations to the schema (Ruggieri, 329–32). As Ruggieri observes, “the reason why the supporters of the schema opposed any radical revision of it was clearly expressed by Siri: ‘The schema gives an excellent exposition of the truth about the visible church that has been juridically established by the Lord himself, and this in light of the truth about the Mystical Body of Christ’” (331).

had been composed early in the council by the Belgian *peritus* Gérard Philips.”⁴¹ The result was a four-chapter schema that foregrounded the church as mystery, proposed a doctrine of collegiality, and drafted a chapter on “the people of God and the laity in particular.” Its first chapter “no longer speaks of ‘the nature of the Church militant’ ...but of love, the inward supernatural reality of the Church” through the use of the terms *mysterium* and *sacramentum* and the biblical image of the body as well as those of “flock, vine, temple, family, and bride.”⁴² The chapter on the mystery of the church was well received, though the schema as a whole “still bore the mark of the original schema in its uncertainties, ambiguities, compromises, and juxtapositions,” especially on the topic of membership in the church and in its “strong assertion of the unity of the visible Church and the mystical reality of the Church,” even in its pilgrim state.⁴³ These juxtapositions will endure in the images of the body in the final text. Nevertheless, the choice to “abandon the dominance of the image of the mystical body” in favor of a broader framework of the church in light of the Trinitarian mystery of salvation was an option to “accept the germinal character of the Church...and renounce hierarchic triumphalism.”⁴⁴

3. The Final Text of *Lumen Gentium*

The final texts ultimately express the vertical relationship between Christ and the church in language other than that of the mystical body. The choice to refer to the church as itself an aspect of the mystery of salvation is the primary way in which the council relates the church to the divine—not only to Christ but to the “inner life of the blessed Trinity” and the history of

⁴¹ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 13–14.

⁴² Philips, “History of the Constitution,” 111, 112.

⁴³ Alberto Melloni, “The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church,” in *History of Vatican II, Vol III: The Mature Council. Second Period and Intersession. September 1963–September 1964*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 46, 49.

⁴⁴ Melloni, 50–51. This quotation clearly shows that the dominant interpretation of the “mystical body” was as a hierarchical, self-enclosed body.

salvation as well.⁴⁵ Kloppenburg notes that the council never defined the term ‘mystery’ as it relates to the church, though in the mind of the council it means that “the Church is a divine, transcendent, and salvific reality which is visibly present among men.”⁴⁶ In other words, at the very outset, the constitution unites the visible and invisible aspects of the church through the concept of mystery, without the struggle of relating a ‘mystical body’ to a ‘social body’ or the like.

The notions of the church as “sacrament” and “people of God” are further ways in which *Lumen Gentium* does the ‘vertical’ work of relating the church to the divine while avoiding the pitfalls of the metaphor of the body. The constitution opens by saying that “the church, in Christ, is a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (LG 1). This description of the church as a sacrament is repeated again throughout the conciliar documents, both in *Lumen Gentium* and in later texts that at times quote the constitution.⁴⁷ The concept of sacrament not only relates the church to Christ, but to the whole economy of salvation and the divine life and work of unity and communion. Perhaps more importantly, because one of the main weaknesses of “body of Christ” in its vertical dimension is the risk of too closely identifying Christ with the church,

the concept of church as sacrament functions as a corrective to this since the concept of sacrament is able to express the unity between the sign and the referent of that sign at the same time that it maintains their distinction. A sacrament is a symbol of a sacred reality, a visible form of invisible grace. In the case of the church, the visible sign includes the institutional and social aspect of the church, that is, all that is manifest in history and located in space and time. The referent of the sign is the resurrected Christ.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Kevin McNamara, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church. A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 75–76.

⁴⁶ Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 14.

⁴⁷ *Lumen Gentium* 9 and 48, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 5 and 26, *Ad Gentes* 1 and 5, and *Gaudium et Spes* 45

⁴⁸ Susan K. Wood, “Body of Christ: Our Unity With Him,” *Word & World* 22, no. 2 (2002): 188.

In other words, “sacrament” succeeds where “body” seems (rightly or wrongly) to fail—in maintaining the difference or distinction between sign and referent, while at the same time uniting them. And yet both “sacrament” and “body” struggle to express the historical dimension of the church and its capacity for weakness, error, and sin—for how can a body or a sacrament fail to express the transcendent reality that it continues or signifies?

The biblical notion of the “people of God,” the focus of chapter two, makes up for this shortcoming. Once again, the concept of the people of God situates the church in human history and salvation history beginning with the people of Israel. As Congar pointed out, “people of God” raises up the notion of a covenantal relationship between God and the church, rather than a mistaken assumption of a hypostatic relationship suggested by “body,” in a way that accounts for the possibility of humanity breaking the covenant. “People of God” also speaks to the vertical dimension of the church by evoking the concept of divine election—God freely chooses and calls his people to be united to himself. Clearly, then, this biblical notion does not run the risk of over-identifying the church with the divine; “people of *God*” cannot be interpreted in the way that “body of *Christ*” can, to mean God’s own self or a continuation of God in history.

Still, the dogmatic constitution on the church does not by any means forego the biblical image of the body. Though it is true that article 6 presents various biblical images of the church and that the constitution as a whole does not hinge on the metaphor of the mystical body as Tromp’s draft did, neither does it treat “body of Christ” as simply one among many images of the church in the New Testament. Article 7 treats the ecclesial body of Christ as a mystical reality, constituted by Christ’s sending of his Spirit on the cross and at Pentecost; we are incorporated in his body through baptism and are united to Christ and one another in the sharing of the

eucharistic bread and of the one Spirit.⁴⁹ “In this body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ and his passion and glorification” (7). Grillmeier finds that “the image of the ‘Church as body’ contains the notion of Christ as ‘head of the body’ and of the Spirit as ‘soul of the body’ and thus definitively leaves behind the metaphor of the body politic and the like which was popular in ancient philosophy.”⁵⁰ As Philips says of articles 6 and 7, “the Pauline doctrine of the body of Christ had been given a more complete and better-balanced presentation. This brought out on the one hand the solidarity of the members, as taught in the great epistles of St. Paul, and on the other hand, the function of head exercised by Christ, the source of life, in this living body, as taught in the epistles of the captivity.”⁵¹ The constitution’s use of “body of Christ” in a more exegetically sound way is evident in the fact that it “does not refer to the social body of the Church as the body of Christ, nor does it use scriptural texts to support theological hypotheses of the Fathers or later theologians. In fact, no reference to the theological concepts ‘mystical person’ and ‘total Christ’ is to be found in this document.”⁵²

What is important in the council’s use of the phrase “body of Christ” is that it is consistently used to describe the whole church as belonging to Christ and dependent on him.

Article 7 establishes the relationship between Christ and the church as a union of love and life

⁴⁹ Note that the council fathers learned from Cerfaux and do not use the term “mystical body [of Christ]” in Article 7 when summarizing the Pauline use of the metaphor. It does appear, however, in Article 8 in the sense that it was used in the early twentieth century, as the invisible, interior reality of the church, the counterpart to the “social body.” “Mystical body (of Christ)” is also used elsewhere in *Lumen Gentium* and in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Ad Gentes*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and other decrees in reference to the whole church, especially when gathered in prayer, worship, or sacramental action. In this way, *Lumen Gentium* Chapter I does not fully break out of the habit of referring to the church as a mystical body, in spite of the work of Cerfaux and de Lubac. Interestingly, “mystical body” is never used in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Nostra Aetate*, or *Dignitatis Humanae*, for reasons that I will describe below.

⁵⁰ Aloys Grillmeier, “Chapter I: The Mystery of the Church,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 145.

⁵¹ Philips, “History of the Constitution,” 127.

⁵² Culliton, “Lucien Cerfaux’s Contribution Concerning ‘The Body of Christ,’” 59.

yet one in which Christ is unequivocally superior to this body as its head and its source of life, unity, existence, gifts, and charisms. There is no sense in article 7 that the church is Christ's ongoing incarnation, or Christ himself. Christ is the head of this body, forms its members like him, and is the source of its life and growth; he shares with it His Spirit "who, being one and the same in head and members, gives life to, unifies and moves the whole body." The difference between Christ and the church is further underscored through the nuptial metaphor at the end of *Lumen Gentium* 7; in fact, the church is called the spouse or bride of Christ a total of fourteen times in the constitution.⁵³ In the council's use of the corporeal metaphor in this vertical sense, a body is an organism of life that receives its identity from the head on which it is utterly dependent; the head is not another member of the body but is the very source and cause of the body.

Lumen Gentium also corrects the prior tradition by utilizing the analogy to the incarnation in a careful way that frames the church as sacrament and instrument, rather than as "the Son of God himself" or "the permanent incarnation of the same"⁵⁴:

the society equipped with hierarchical structures and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society [*coetus*] and the spiritual community, the earthly church and the church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality comprising a human and a divine element. For this reason the church is compared, in no mean analogy, to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a *living instrument* of salvation, so, in somewhat similar fashion, does the social structure of the church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (see Eph 4:16). (LG 8)

Just as Christ is the sacrament of God—his humanity is an 'instrument' of salvation—the social structure of the church is a sacrament of the Spirit of Christ, serving as its instrument, making it

⁵³ *Lumen Gentium* 4, 6, 7, 9, 39, 41, 44, 46, 64, 65; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7, 47, 84, 85, 102; *Gaudium et Spes* 43, 48; *Dei Verbum* 8, 23.

⁵⁴ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 258–59.

present and effective in the world. It is quite clear that the text is not stating that the church is hypostatically united to Christ, or is a continuation of the incarnation, but rather follows on the pattern of the incarnation (much like what we saw in Congar's 'law of incarnation').⁵⁵ The constitution does not use the Christological analogy to describe the relationship between Christ and the church, but to express the unity between the spiritual community and the institutional realities that structure the church as a human social organization (akin to the organic principle in the early Möhler). Grillmeier frames the significant improvement from *Mystici Corporis* in the fact that in *Lumen Gentium* "the visible element of the Church is not referred to the invisible 'Logos' but to the supernatural graces bestowed upon the Church, that is, to the Holy Spirit."⁵⁶ Moreover, there is no hypostatic union like there is between the Logos and the individual human nature of Christ, but rather there is an 'indwelling' of the Spirit in the social structure of the church. "Thus the sacramental structure of the Church comes to the fore again and ultimately its incarnational quality also, though now in a clearer way."⁵⁷

In order to fully grasp the significance of how the metaphor of the body in its vertical dimension develops and changes at the council, it is important to notice two ways in which the body is *not* invoked in the constitution on the church. First, as just seen in article 8, the unity between the visible and invisible dimensions of the church is *not* defended by appeal to an organic human body. This is in stark contrast to the draft *De Ecclesia* in which the church's social structure is defended via the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ: "by the very fact that she is a body, the Church is seen by the eyes."⁵⁸ In appealing to the body to defend the

⁵⁵ The final chapter of *Lumen Gentium* approaches this concept after referring to the incarnation of Christ through Mary. "This divine mystery of salvation is revealed to us and continues in the church, which the Lord established as his body [*corpus*]" (52). This is not exactly a claim that the church is a prolongation of the incarnation in the sense of continuing Christ's authoritative presence on earth, but that it continues the mystery and work of salvation.

⁵⁶ Grillmeier, "Chapter I: The Mystery of the Church," 147.

⁵⁷ Grillmeier, 148.

⁵⁸ *De Ecclesia* 5.

church's visibility, the draft was continuing a magisterial tradition extending back through *Mystici Corporis* to *Satis Cognitum* to *Supremi Pastoris*. The constitution, however, separates these themes into two articles—article 7 on the body of Christ, and article 8 on the relationship between the spiritual and the institutional dimensions of the church.⁵⁹ *Lumen Gentium* teaches that, since the church is part of the whole mystery of salvation, it follows the pattern of our salvation in the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Christ and for this reason is a 'visible,' historical, human social institution. The visibility of the church (that is, its existence as a human social institution with structure and law) is explained solely on the basis of the pattern of salvation, not by appeal to a metaphor or image.

Second, the body-soul analogy for the church is also not utilized in *Lumen Gentium*. This analogy is no longer used to express the visibility and invisibility of the church, or the relationship of the 'mystical body'/spiritual reality of the church to the 'social body'/institutional structure, as it did in Bellarmine, Adam, Mersch, Congar, and others. Rather, both of these pairs of relationships are explained through the notion of sacrament (and the related concept 'mystery'), which is itself analogous to or patterned on the incarnation. It is true that article 7 refers to the Holy Spirit as the 'soul' of the church, but in a much more careful and circumscribed way than previously. The Spirit's work "could be *compared* by the Fathers of the church [such as Augustine] to the *function* that the principle of life, the soul, fulfills in the human body"—the text does not say the Holy Spirit *is* the soul of the body which is the church.⁶⁰ What we see here is a shift brought about at Vatican II from a hylomorphic understanding of the body, to an (albeit implicit) sacramental understanding of the body.

⁵⁹ Komonchak, "Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion," 42.

⁶⁰ Emphasis mine.

In sum, when the ecclesial metaphor “body of Christ” or “mystical body of Christ” is used in the conciliar texts, it refers to the whole church (including the Roman Pontiff and not to the exclusion of him as its visible head) as *united to, yet always distinct from*, Christ its Head. The ecclesial body of Christ is in no way Christ himself. “Body” does not indicate the self, the full presence of a person/subject, or the external, material manifestation of an invisible, spiritual reality. Rather, the council intends the sense of the ‘spousal body,’ as was used by Passaglia, Scheeben, and the later Congar. It is a body that Christ unites to himself, purifies, enlivens, and gifts with charisms through the Spirit. It is not the *totus Christus* or even *alter Christus*, but *sponsa Christus*. In this sense, the metaphor in *Lumen Gentium* is normed by Ephesians and Colossians rather than Corinthians and Romans. When read in conjunction with the concepts of the church as mystery, sacrament, and people of God, it is even more clear that the ecclesial “body of Christ” is the “sacrament of Christ,” not the “ongoing incarnation” of Christ. The council suggests, if only implicitly, that in its vertical dimension the body is a sacrament, a mediation, an instrument of a transcendent reality—not the very material expression of an inner spiritual or personal reality.

III: The Horizontal Dimension: Grid and Group

As we have seen in chapters two and three, the metaphor of the church as a body or as the mystical body of Christ not only communicates the vertical relationship between Christ and the church, but in its horizontal dimension it has also functioned as a primary model of 1) hierarchy, authority, and order in the church, 2) membership in the church, and 3) the Catholic Church’s relation to other churches and to the world outside itself. The final texts of the Second Vatican Council still use the metaphor of the body to illustrate intra-ecclesial relationships and the

church's hierarchical and ordered character—the “grid” or *ad intra* dimension—but do *not* use it to explain membership in the church or the Catholic Church's relationship to other churches and the broader world—the “group” or *ad extra* dimension. Other metaphors, images, concepts such as people of God and sacrament address these issues. It is here that I take up the thesis outlined in the introduction to this chapter. First, conciliar texts understand the horizontal dimension of the body in a new and positive way in its teaching on collegiality. Second, because conciliar ecclesiology moved the church's self-understanding to a lower position on Douglas' grid-group axes, the body was less resonant as a symbol of the social order and, given its historical interpretation as a dualistic and hierarchical organism, was seen as less able to convey the more open and dynamic ecclesiology of the council.

1. Grid (*ad intra*)

A. Hierarchy, authority, and order

For centuries prior to the Second Vatican Council, the metaphor of the (mystical) body was often used to defend the role of the Roman Pontiff, the visible head of the church, as the supreme authority over the ecclesial body and the source of the body's identity. We saw this as far back as Boniface's *Unam Sanctam*, for whom the one mystical body (i.e., the whole earthly reality, temporal and spiritual realms together) was ruled by one Head, Christ, united with his visible Vicar. Vatican I illustrated its doctrine of papal primacy and infallibility through the language of Peter and his successors as the ‘supreme head’ who governs “an undivided and indivisible body.”⁶¹ For Leo XIII, any members who are “scattered and separated” from the one head, the source of the body's life and unity, “must of necessity die.”⁶² In the twentieth century,

⁶¹ *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 5.

⁶² Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum* 5.

according to *Mystici Corporis*, one only belongs to the mystical body of Christ if one is subordinate to the earthly visible head, the pope; membership in the body is defined by one's relationship with the head.

In seeking to balance the papo-centric ecclesiology of Vatican I with a doctrine of collegiality and the sacramental nature of the episcopacy, Vatican II offers a new interpretation of the body and its relationship with the head. The texts of *Lumen Gentium*, the *Nota Explicativa Praevia*, and *Christus Dominus* employ the metaphor of the body in their statements on the episcopacy and the papacy. The episcopal body is most often spoken of as an organic body (*corpus*) or college (*collegium*), though as we will see, the juxtapositions within the documents retain an organizational-juridical sense of the body (*coetus*).⁶³ Nevertheless, the council's effort to articulate a doctrine of collegiality results in a metaphor in which the body has greater dignity, importance, and capacity for action than we saw in the body metaphors of the late nineteenth century.

The conciliar doctrine on collegiality was hard-won, even if *Lumen Gentium* retains 'compromise statements' meant to ensure the support of the minority bishops. The minority was anxiously concerned to preserve the teaching of papal primacy from Vatican I, while the majority was concerned to resituate this teaching within a doctrine of collegiality, not "to correct the doctrine of Vatican I, but to eschew the exaggerations that had misinterpreted Vatican I."⁶⁴ The core of the doctrine of collegiality is that the apostles were formed by the Lord "as a college or permanent assembly [*ad modum collegii seu coetus stabilis*]" (LG 19) and that the bishops, also

⁶³ *Corpus* in articles 22, 23, 25, 28; *coetus* in 19 and the *Nota Explicativa Praevia* (and in 23, *coetus* refers to local churches, 'organically united groups' as well as episcopal conferences, *coetus episcopales*); *collegium* in 21, 22, and the *nota*. *Christus Dominus* uses *corpus* for the body of bishops, and *coetus* for an episcopal conference as well as a group or association of the faithful. *Christus Dominus* 18, 37, 38 uses *Episcoporum Conferentiae* for conferences of bishops also.

⁶⁴ George Tavad, *The Pilgrim Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 95, cited in Ormond Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), 312.

as a college or body, “have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the church” (LG 20). They teach, govern, and sanctify the whole church in union with their head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, who is the “visible source and foundation of the unity” of the bishops and the whole church (LG 21–23).⁶⁵

Ormond Rush points out that the order in which collegiality and primacy are addressed and prioritized in *Lumen Gentium* is significant and parallels the intentional choice to place the chapter on the people of God before that on the hierarchy. The college of apostles is founded first by Christ, with Peter as its head; collegiality precedes primacy (LG 18). Episcopal collegiality is prior to papal primacy because, as the council determined, both the power of orders *and* the power of jurisdiction are given at episcopal consecration which is itself the fullness of the sacrament of orders; jurisdiction is not simply delegated by the pope. Because of this, the council stresses that the pope-head is first and foremost a member of the body of bishops. As Rush puts it, “the pope is not ‘above’ the church or ‘above’ the episcopate but to be situated *within the church* and *within the college of bishops*.”⁶⁶ Moreover, according to the council fathers, the body of bishops is not dependent on the pope for its authority—it is “the subject of full and supreme power in the Church,” though the Roman Pontiff must “consent,” “approve,” or “freely admit” this power or corporate action (LG 22, CD 4). Similarly, each individual bishop is not a vicar or delegate of the pope but enjoys “proper, ordinary, and immediate” power to teach, govern, and sanctify his local church (LG 27). Finally, the church is structured by the body of bishops and a local community receives its identity *as church* from the bishop, rather than from its subordination to the head, the Roman Pontiff. Union with the church is union not only with the head but with the whole body of bishops. As Jean-Marie Tillard puts it,

⁶⁵ For a summary of the debates and conciliar teaching on collegiality, see Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 309–35.

⁶⁶ Rush, 314, emphasis original.

Where Vatican I sees the Church in its earthly form starting from its ‘head,’ the bishop of Rome, Vatican II sees it starting from the bishops as ‘successors of the apostles,’ and who taken together as a whole, comprise the foundation of the universal Church. . . . Vatican II is thus entirely clear: the fullness of that ministry which builds, guides and leads the whole Church belongs to the body of bishops as such.” The function of the pope as head is set “firmly within this shared mission.”⁶⁷

Nevertheless, as many scholars note, the conciliar texts remain marked by juxtapositions and competing ecclesiologies, often due to the efforts of the minority bishops to resist the changing vision of the church and retain without question the teaching of Vatican I.⁶⁸ As a result, *Lumen Gentium* retains several passages that reassert the authority of the head *over* the body, even as it situates the head *within* the body as a member of it. While the college of bishops is not dependent upon the pope for its very existence, the papacy is “the perpetual and visible source and foundation *of the unity* both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful” (LG 23, emphasis mine). Article 22 introduces the notion of “hierarchical communion,” meaning that the body of bishops is “the subject of supreme and full authority over the universal church” *only* “in union with the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, as its head” and when acting with his consent. As Gaillardetz notes, “hierarchical communion” “is a problematic expression” that risks “returning to the hierocratic, pyramidal view of the church that developed in the thirteenth century.”⁶⁹ In keeping with the teaching of Vatican I, the council affirms that the Roman Pontiff “has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole church, a power which he can always exercise freely” as head of the church and head of the body of bishops, without requiring their participation or consent (LG 22, CD 4). George Tavard observes: “The conciliar text redundantly

⁶⁷ Jean-Marie Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 36, quoted in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 314–15.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Antonio Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie: ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella “Lumen Gentium”* (Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 1975).

⁶⁹ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 73.

affirms the Pope's independent right of action, so that the Pope appears to be both part of the episcopal college and above it."⁷⁰ The result of this "'supra-collegial' position of the pope as vicar of Christ" is the appearance of "a twofold authority: on the one hand the college of bishops in union with its head, but on the other hand the head by itself. This tension between a twofold ultimate authority remains unresolved in the final text."⁷¹

This tension was worsened by the *Nota Explicativa Praevia* which "insisted that the doctrine of collegiality was not meant to erode in any way the jurisdictional primacy of the Roman pontiff."⁷² Interestingly, whereas the text of *Lumen Gentium* and *Christus Dominus* primarily use the term *corpus* or *collegium* for the "body" or "college" of bishops, the *Nota* uses *coetus*, a more sociological or juridical term indicating an organizational, rather than an organic, body. The purpose of this is to stress the inequality of the members of the body and the primacy of the pope over the episcopal college:

the word *College* is not taken in the *strictly juridical* sense, that is as a group (*coetus*) of equals who transfer their powers to their chairperson, but as a permanent body [*coetus stabili*] whose form and authority is to be ascertained from revelation. For this reason, it is explicitly said about the twelve apostles...that Our Lord constituted them 'as a college or *permanent group*' [*coetus stabilis*]. In the same way the words *Order* or *body* [*corpus*] are used at other times for the college of bishops.⁷³

The *Nota* reasserts an unequal and hierarchical sense of *corpus*—in contrast to the way it is used in the main text of *Lumen Gentium*—by interpreting the organic term *corpus* through and in light of the juridical term *coetus*.

⁷⁰ Tavard, *The Pilgrim Church*, 96–7, cited in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 321.

⁷¹ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 321. The tension between the pope acting as head and acting as member was experienced in Paul VI's interventions in the council, especially during the so-called 'black week' and the insertion of the *Nota Explicativa Praevia* as an addendum to *Lumen Gentium*. See Rush, 322–24.; Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, ed. Denis Minns, trans. Mary John Ronayne and Mary Cecily Boulding (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 658–9.

⁷² Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 324.

⁷³ *Nota Explicativa Praevia*, 1, emphases original.

In terms of our corporeal metaphor, the council's doctrine of collegiality (the *Nota* notwithstanding) paints an image of the body as an organic entity, a unified whole in which the individual parts find their identity. Significantly, the existence and identity of the body is not derived from its head—the episcopal college is not “the body of the pope” in the way that the church is “the body of Christ”—and the episcopal body is not an extension of the pope's presence or power in the way that the ecclesial body is sometimes seen as a continuation of Christ. It is a body in its own right, its identity is grounded in the parts (bishops) that make up the whole, and the head is only the head insofar as it is firstly a member of this body. The body as a whole, and each of its members, is not simply a passive agent carrying out the life, identity, or commands of the head, but has its own proper authority and agency, even if it must always remain united to its head. Moreover, the role of the head within the body is not the Aristotelian-Scholastic head that we saw in earlier theological and magisterial statements. It does not direct, govern, or command all actions of the body, but “consents” to the body's collective action in union with it. The head is not the font or source of the body's life; rather, the head and the body are mutually dependent on one another for their existence. As Gérard Philips puts it, the teaching on collegiality “was not a matter of contrasting two rival powers, but of describing the *organic union*, unique in its kind, which links the supreme head of the Church hierarchy with the bishops as a group.”⁷⁴ The council's “non-competitive ecclesiology” becomes imaged as non-competitive body.⁷⁵ And yet, the “compromise statements,” insisted upon by the minority bishops, and the *Nota* retain a lingering hierarchical and organizational sense of the body. The head does not exist apart from the body, but the body does not exist and cannot act *as body* without the head either.

⁷⁴ Philips, “History of the Constitution,” 113, emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), chapter 5.

The concept of hierarchical communion—“an attempt to hold together a *sacramental* and *juridical* understanding of the episcopate”⁷⁶—attenuates the organic metaphor that emphasizes the dignity and importance of the *whole body* with an Aristotelian, juridically-inflected body that sees the head as the source of the body’s agency and the unity of its (subordinate) members. It is the latter aspect of the council’s use of the metaphor—an image in which the head hovers above the body and can act apart from or without it—that chaffs against any phenomenological understanding of embodiment.

While the council uses the image of an organic body in its teaching on collegiality to new and positive effect, as we will see, it is precisely this understanding of the body that the council struggles with and virtually abandons in its consideration of membership in the church and the Catholic Church’s relationship with other churches and the broader world.

B. The whole people of God

Beyond the conciliar teaching on collegiality, we also see a new expression of the church’s nature and order *ad intra* in the council’s attention to the church as the whole people of God and to the individual believer before God. As is well known, in the process of drafting and debating the schema on the church, Cardinal Suenens proposed splitting what was originally chapter three of the Philips schema on “the people of God and especially the laity” into two separate chapters, and placing the chapter on the people of God before that on the hierarchy. This amounted to what the *peritus* Charles Moeller called a “Copernican revolution” in ecclesiology.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 317, emphasis original.

⁷⁷ Charles Moeller, “History of *Lumen Gentium*’s Structure and Ideas,” in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, 127–28. Antón attributes this expression to Congar but offers no citation (Angel Antón, “Postconciliar Ecclesiology: Expectations, Results, and Prospects for the Future,” in *Vatican II: Assessments and Perspectives. Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, ed. René Latourelle, trans. Louis-Bertrand Raymond and Edward Hughes, vol. 1, 1988, 413.)

With this intentional rearrangement of chapters, the council foregrounds what is common to all members of the church before considering distinctions of ministry and office. In Congar's words, "the highest value was given to the quality of the disciple, the dignity attached to Christian existence as such or the reality of an ontology of grace, and then, to the interior of this reality, a hierarchical structure of social organization."⁷⁸ Rooted in a robust recovery of the centrality of baptism in the Christian life, the council teaches that the threefold offices of priest, prophet, and king pertain first and foremost to the whole people of God; each individual believer, by virtue of their baptism and regardless of any later sacrament of holy orders, participates in the threefold ministry of Christ. As a result, not only the successors of the apostles but "all the baptized are implicated in the apostolic nature of the church; they share in Christ's mission to build the kingdom of God so all may participate in Christ's salvation and live in just relationship with God (AA 2)."⁷⁹ Other consequences of the centrality of baptism in the people of God are the universal call to holiness (LG chapter 5), the common participation by "the whole priestly community" in eucharistic worship (LG 11), and the shared sense of the faith. As *Lumen Gentium* 12 states, "the whole body of the faithful (*universitas fidelium*)...cannot be mistaken in belief" and enjoys a "supernatural sense of the faith, when...it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals."

The council further empowers the whole people of God in its theology of the laity and the lay apostolate. As Amanda Osheim notes, the council does not perceive the laity as simply the non-ordained or as passive members of the church, but as 'the Christian faithful' (*Christifideles*).⁸⁰ In *Apostolicam Actuositatem* especially, the laity are active and living members

⁷⁸ Congar, "The Church: The People of God," 13. See also Congar, "The People of God."

⁷⁹ Amanda Osheim, "The Christian Faithful," in *Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard Gaillardetz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 222–23.

⁸⁰ Osheim, "The Christian Faithful." Others find a less consistent theology of the laity in the council documents; see,

of the ecclesial body (2) whose “right and duty to be apostles derives from their union with Christ their head,” not from any delegation by the hierarchy (3). They are gifted with charisms and gifts by the Holy Spirit “for the building up of the whole body in charity” (3) and are obliged to exercise these gifts for the good of the church and the world, in collaboration with the hierarchy (23–25). Lay Christians are entrusted to carry out their apostolate in the ‘temporal world,’ infusing all things and especially family life with the Christian spirit (7–8, 13), as well as in the church, for they have “a highly important part to play” in the proclamation of the gospel and building up of the church (6) and are essential in the functioning of their church communities (10). As Rush puts it, on the question of spheres of ministry, “there is to be no clear-cut division between those concerned with the church *ad intra* and those concerned with the church *ad extra*.”⁸¹ All the faithful are to serve the whole church and the whole world.

Finally, the conciliar documents as a whole accord a new dignity to the individual believer. “The vision of Vatican II brings into the foreground of its ecclesial self-understanding the individual baptized believer and his or her singular importance in the mission of the church, without downplaying the communal and social nature of Christian faith.”⁸² This is especially so in the council’s teaching on conscience and religious freedom, the *sensus fidei*, and charisms.⁸³ *Dignitatis Humanae* declares that every individual has the right to religious freedom, should be free from all coercion in matters of faith, and is morally obligated to seek the truth. The document also gives high regard to individual conscience, declaring that “all are bound to follow

for example, Giovanni Magnani’s framework of what Gaillardetz calls a “contrastive view” and a novel and more positive “intensive view” of the laity within the conciliar texts, in Giovanni Magnani, “Does the So-Called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?,” in *Vatican II: Assessments and Perspectives*, especially 590–602, as taken up by Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 53–55. For an extended analysis of the ambiguities surrounding a theology of the laity in the conciliar texts and their postconciliar development, see Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church* (New York: Continuum, 2002), especially chapters 3 and 4.

⁸¹ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 272.

⁸² Rush, 274.

⁸³ Rush, 274–282.

their conscience faithfully in every sphere of activity so that they may come to God, who is their last end. Therefore, the individual must not be forced to act against conscience nor be prevented from acting according to conscience, especially in religious matters” (3). The church has no right to force anyone into conversion, but is only to follow the pattern of the Lord in service and authentic proclamation of the Gospel (10–11). The dignity of the individual’s conscience and quest for religious truth also resounds in *Lumen Gentium*’s appraisal of the *sensus fidei fidelis* as the capacity of the individual to discern the faith. The individual believer grasps the faith of the church, “penetrates it more deeply through right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life” (12). This same article also articulates a theology of charism, according to which the Holy Spirit allots “his gifts ‘at will to each individual’ and “distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank.” These graced individuals utilize their gifts “to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church,” and those with hierarchical offices in the church are to cultivate and order the proper use of these Spirit-given charisms.

Although this new emphasis on the foundational nature of the whole people of God for the church and on the dignity and importance of the individual believer before God in no way contradicts the church as an ordered institution, it does alter the “grid” dimension of the church’s self-understanding. The change brought about by Vatican II in this regard is especially poignant when conciliar teaching is contrasted with Pius X’s understanding of the structure and order of the church in *Vehementer Nos* (1906):

the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that *with the pastoral body* only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing *all its members* towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Pius X, Encyclical Letter *Vehementor Nos* On the French Law of Separation (February 11, 1906) 8, first emphasis

With Vatican II, no longer is the church an unequal society comprised of two distinct categories of persons; no longer is it a pyramid, with a single head embodying the threefold ministry of Christ and mediating Christ in a one-way, downward direction. No longer is the church easily divided into a ‘teaching church’ and a ‘learning church.’ The clergy and the laity are to collaborate, even on matters of doctrine; the latter are not simply the passive recipients of the teaching and governing of the former. Instead, knowledge of the faith and the mission to proclaim the gospel to the world run in many directions. What in Douglas’ terminology had long been an unambiguously hierarchical society with fixed role structures is now envisioned in the conciliar texts as a more collaborative, diversified, and dynamic organization whose members are “mutually dependent and responsible.”⁸⁵ It is no wonder, then, in light of Douglas’ theory summarized earlier, that the dominant metaphor for the church’s life *ad intra* is “people of God” rather than “body.”

2. Group (*ad extra*)

*A. Membership in the church*⁸⁶

The organic image of the body meets a complicated fate on the topic of membership in the church. When speaking of those who are unquestionably members of the church, the council has no problem using the symbol of the body to express the multiplicity and diversity of the church, particularly in its theology of the laity. Drawing from Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians, *Lumen Gentium*’s fourth chapter describes the laity as “living members”

original, second and third are added.

⁸⁵ Osheim, “The Christian Faithful,” 215.

⁸⁶ I am considering questions of membership and ecumenism here as ‘group/*ad extra*’ topics because of the way they change the *Catholic* church’s understanding of ‘others.’ But from the perspective of the ‘one church of Christ,’ these are *ad intra* issues.

who are “gathered together in the people of God and established in the one body [*corpus*] of Christ under one head [*capite*]” (33). Though this body is made up of diverse members and ministries, all contribute to “the building up of the body of Christ” (32) by exercising the gifts bestowed upon them by the Spirit. Here, it is Christians themselves who are like the soul of the church: quoting the Letter to Diognetus, *Lumen Gentium* 38 states that “what the soul is in the body, let Christians be in the world”—a vivifying and sanctifying force of life. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* continues this organic language, praising the “unity and solidarity” among members of the living ecclesial body and lifting up the lay apostolate, saying that “in the organism of a living body no member is purely passive: sharing in the life of the body each member shares in its activity” (AA 2).

And yet, on the painful topic of the relation of non-Catholic Christians to the church, the council fathers made the intentional decision to relinquish the metaphor of the body for the sake of clearer and more nuanced teaching. Recall that *Mystici Corporis* taught that only those who are united in faith, government, and sacraments under the one visible head of the church, the Roman Pontiff, are members of the mystical body of Christ and share in His life. This aspect of the encyclical was roundly critiqued for treating non-Catholic Christians as having the same relation to the mystical body (i.e., are not members) as non-baptized Christians, violating the basic belief that baptism incorporates one into the body of Christ. At the council, the preparatory draft *De Ecclesia* reiterated the teaching of the earlier encyclical: “the text stubbornly insisted that non-Catholic are not ‘really’ members of the Church, and seemed thereby to relegate them to the status of members ‘by desire.’ This was the iron cage created by reprise to the category of ‘member’ in defining what it means to belong to the Church.”⁸⁷ As a result, the very language of

⁸⁷ Ruggieri, “Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics,” 287.

‘membership’ in a presumed-organic body was called into question. Joseph Ratzinger reflects on the mind of the council fathers on this point:

It was asked whether the image of the mystical body was not too narrow a starting-point to be able to define the multitude of different forms of Church membership that now existed thanks to the confusion of human history. For membership *the image of the body can only offer the idea of member in the sense of limb: one is either a limb or not, and there are no intermediary stages*. But in that case, the question was asked, is not this image’s starting-point too narrow, since quite clearly there are intermediary stages? In this way people latched on to the term ‘people of God,’ since in this context it was more capacious and flexible.⁸⁸

Ratzinger’s statement suggests that he and other council fathers were operating with an organic, physiological sense of the body. Bonaventure Kloppenberg agrees with Ratzinger’s evaluation of the metaphor. According to draft’s terminology of *membrum reapse et simpliciter loquendo*, “a person either is or is not a member of the Church, either belongs to the Church or does not, either is or is not within the unity of the Church. There are no gradations of more or less, of perfect or imperfect.”⁸⁹

But before *De Ecclesia* even reached debate on the council floor, at the request of Cardinal Suenens, Philips worked on revisions to Tromp’s schema. In his emendations, “the noun *members* disappeared and was replaced by a form of words unconnected with the analogy of the members of a body...The text made clear, even to non-experts, the strategic importance of abandoning the category ‘members of the Church.’”⁹⁰ In its final form, *Lumen Gentium* 14 specifically avoided the language of membership in an organic body and opted for this framework of ‘degrees of incorporation’ in “the *society* of the church”—full incorporation,

⁸⁸ Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” 15, emphasis mine. A phenomenological approach to embodiment will complicate Ratzinger’s assumption that ‘one is either a limb or not, and there are no intermediary stages.’

⁸⁹ Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 128.

⁹⁰ Ruggieri, “Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics,” 303, 304.

incorporation yet without persevering in charity, unity through baptism in the Holy Spirit, and being ‘related to the people of God in various ways’ (14–16).⁹¹ In other words, when addressing the question of belonging in the church, the analogy of an organic body was seen as too exclusive and inflexible, not allowing enough complexity or nuance appropriate to a properly theological, and even canonical, understanding of the church and the effect of baptism. Ultimately, Chapter II modifies prior teaching on the relation of non-Catholic Christians to the Catholic Church by recognizing the validity of their baptism, other shared sacraments, and communion in prayer, discipleship, and the Spirit, and it does so precisely by avoiding the metaphor of a body having members (or, as Ratzinger puts it, limbs).

However, it seems to me that the issue is not fully resolved and the council does not successfully break out of the organic metaphor here, for the texts still use the metaphor of the body through the term “incorporation” (*incorporatio*; note the root *corpus*). On the one hand, the language of “incorporation” may intend a sociological or legal incorporation, rather than organic incorporation, in the way that a town or a company is incorporated; *Lumen Gentium* 14 does specify that it is speaking of ‘full incorporation in the *society* of the church.’ However, it is not obvious that the council intends a strictly sociological approach.⁹² Moreover, if the council fathers wanted to speak of the church in a juridical rather than organic way in order to allow more nuance or canonical precision, it is perplexing that they failed to consider that membership in societies or institutions quite often *does* admit of degrees—associate member, full member, lapsed member, member in good standing, etc. A juridical or sociological sense is also not given unequivocally to the term “incorporation,” since the conciliar texts frequently state that through

⁹¹ Emphasis mine.

⁹² See Aloys Grillmeier, “Chapter II: The People of God,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 168–77 for the choice of terminology in Article 14.

baptism one is ‘incorporated into the *body of Christ*’ or into the church which is an ‘*organic structure*’ (see LG 11, for example), and some scholars read article 14 as proposing “degrees of incorporation in the *body of Christ*.”⁹³ In the end, although the notion of ‘degrees’ is an improvement, it does not resolve the issue that Ratzinger pointed out above, for neither the conciliar text itself nor any of the major commentaries on it explain how an individual could be ‘incorporated’ to greater or lesser ‘degrees’ in an organic structure or body.

Conciliar teaching on membership in the church avoids the organic metaphor of the body in two other significant ways. First, membership in the ecclesial body is not defined by or contingent upon unity with and submission to its head, a position which appeared prominently in *Mystici Corporis* and *Satis Cognitum*. Instead, membership is constituted by faith, sacraments, and life in the Spirit. As Komonchak notes, “the inclusion in no. 14 of the requirement of *being in the Spirit* for full incorporation represented a decisive shift away from the external criteria that had dominated the discussion from Robert Bellarmine to *Mystici Corporis*.”⁹⁴ As we saw in the teaching on collegiality above, the body is no longer primarily defined by its head. “Full incorporation” in the church does entail acceptance of the “entire structure and all the means of salvation established within it” and unity with Christ who rules the church “through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops” and other bonds of ecclesiastical government (LG 14), but the metaphor of the body and its utter dependence on a visible head is not invoked.

Second, *Lumen Gentium* 14 avoids using the metaphor of the body and soul to articulate membership in the church by sinners or by non-Catholics. Regarding the first of these, building on Bellarmine and to some extent Augustine, theologians often spoke of sinners as belonging to the ‘body’ of the church even if they did not belong to its ‘soul.’ The constitution on the church

⁹³ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 71, emphases mine.

⁹⁴ Komonchak, “Toward an Ecclesiology of Communion,” 44, emphasis mine.

abandons this metaphor, and instead holds that one who does not “persevere in charity” “is not saved, even though incorporated into the church. Such people remain indeed in the bosom of the church but only ‘bodily’”—that is, in *their* bodies, not the ecclesial body—“not ‘in *their* hearts’.”⁹⁵ Second, recall that the representatives of the French stream, Mersch and Congar, both held that membership in the body of the church was necessary for membership in its soul and therefore for salvation. In Mersch’s words, “If the [Catholic] Church is thus the ‘body’ whose soul is Christ, and if it is union with God and the vehicle of the universal salvific will, *it must be necessary with the necessity of Christ*, of God, and of God’s universal will to save.”⁹⁶ In Congar’s mind, as the soul animates a living body, so the Spirit of Christ animates the church. And just as the soul is only perceptible by means of the body, so the life of Christ is only perceptible in and through the church—though to be fair, Congar does acknowledge that the use of the body-soul analogy in this way is somewhat inapt. Perhaps the council fathers took heed of Congar here, for the body-soul analogy is never used to express either the relationship of the mystical body or the church of Christ to the Catholic Church, or membership in the church for sinners or non-Catholics.

B. The Catholic Church’s relation to other churches, religions, and the world

The issue of membership in the church is closely related to the question of how the body of Christ or church of Christ is related to the Catholic Church, a question which lies at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the metaphor of the body. *Mystici Corporis* infamously stated that the Roman Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ—a

⁹⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ Émile Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co, 1952), 507.

teaching which was not well received by many theologians (Catholic and otherwise) and ecumenists. Yet the preparatory schema *De Ecclesia* proposed the same: “*Ecclesia Catholica Romana est Mysticum Christi Corporis.*” The final text of *Lumen Gentium* 8 opts instead for the following formulation: this “unique church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic..., constituted and organized as a society in the present world, *subsists in* the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.”⁹⁷ Grillmeier argues that the significance of the final formulation is twofold: it avoids specifying that the church of Christ subsists in the *Roman* Church, allowing for a greater expression of catholicity among the Roman and Eastern Catholic Churches, and second, it avoids stating that the Church of Christ *is* the Catholic Church, recognizing that “many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside [the] visible confines” of the Catholic Church (LG 8).⁹⁸ To say that the church of Christ “subsists in” the Catholic Church is to say that the church founded by Christ and entrusted to the apostles *continues to exist* in the Catholic Church, and that it does so through its faith, the Holy Spirit, the sacraments and threefold ministry, and charity, without claiming that the church of Christ *only* exists in the Catholic Church.⁹⁹ In Sullivan’s interpretation, it is the church as *sacramentum*, having certain institutional means of salvation, that continues to exist as Christ founded and endowed it, not as *res sacramenti*. “There is no question of denying that a non-Catholic community, perhaps lacking much in the order of sacrament, can achieve the *res*, the communion of the life of Christ in faith, hope, and love, more perfectly than many a Catholic community.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸ Grillmeier, “Chapter I: The Mystery of the Church,” 150.

⁹⁹ Francis A. Sullivan, “The Significance of the Vatican II Declaration That the Church of Christ ‘Subsists in’ the Roman Catholic Church,” in *Vatican II: Assessments and Perspectives*, 276–78. Sullivan argues that “*subsistit*” is not meant in any technical philosophical sense.

¹⁰⁰ Sullivan, 278–79.

This position is developed and expanded upon in *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Article 3 recognizes that non-Catholic Christians are “incorporated into Christ” through baptism and “are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.” This article also acknowledges that “some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written Word of God; the interior life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the holy Spirit, as well as visible elements.” These other Christian churches and communities are truly “means of salvation,” and while the council maintain that the “fullness of the means of salvation” are present in the Catholic Church alone, article 4 also notes that “anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brothers and sisters can contribute to our own edification.” In short, the decree on ecumenism states that the invisible life of Christ in souls and the visible Catholic Church are not identical or co-extensive; the former extends beyond the latter. It also maintains that the visibility of the one Church of Christ includes elements of visibility of the other churches. In this way, the decree transcends the visible/invisible, Catholic/Protestant polemic—as well as the effort to explain the unity of the visible and invisible through body metaphors and Christological analogies—that have plagued Catholic ecclesiology since Bellarmine. A new relationship between the visible Catholic Church and the invisible life of grace is articulated.

The council breaks new ground in its similar openness to other world religions and their members in *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*. *Nostra Aetate*’s statement that holiness and “rays of truth” are found in other religions acknowledges the presence of the divine beyond the Christian community and Christian doctrine (2). *Lumen Gentium* 16 carries forth the previously-discussed attempt at a more flexible and nuanced account of membership when it says that

“those who have not yet accepted the Gospel are *related to the people of God* in various ways” and are included in the divine plan of salvation, and those who have not yet heard the Gospel but “nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart” may attain salvation.¹⁰¹ Whatever goodness or truth is found in the hearts of individuals, in peoples and their cultures and customs, and in the morals and doctrines of other religions, is accepted, respected, and encouraged by the church and is seen as capable of being perfected by God. Once again, it is significant that the body–soul analogy is absent on this topic. Earlier strands of the tradition used the hylomorphic body–soul analogy to illustrate or explain the axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, not only excluding non-Catholic Christians from the ‘soul’ of the church, but all non-Christians as well. Thus it is a notable advance, both for ecclesiology and theological anthropology, that the council set aside any attempt to explain the activity of the Spirit or the presence of grace in other religions through the metaphor of the ‘soul’ of the ecclesial body. According to the council, the divine can and does exist outside Catholic and ecclesial boundaries.

The council’s embrace of ecumenism and its openness to the goodness and truth in other religions finds a parallel in the council’s opening of the church to the secular world. Just as *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* move beyond *Mystici Corporis* by teaching that other churches and baptized non-Catholics are part of the one church or body of Christ, so too *Gaudium et Spes* moves past the dominant post-Tridentine *societas perfecta* ecclesiology and the anti-modernist tendency of the preceding century. No longer a fortress under siege, the church—all the faithful as well as the ecclesial social structure—is now ‘leaven in the world’ (40), a sacrament of unity among all humanity, a sign of salvation (43), and a servant of the world and its people, offering meaning, human dignity and freedom, and genuine community (41–2). The

¹⁰¹ Emphasis mine.

world itself is no longer seen as merely a sinful realm in need of redemption from Christ through the church. Rather, the world is the “theater of human history,” the whole of humanity and human activity that “has been created and is sustained by the love of its maker” and will be brought to its final fulfillment in Christ (GS 2).¹⁰² As McNamara says of the church’s mission in *Lumen Gentium*, “The Church exists not for itself but for the whole world. This sense of responsibility for, and solidarity with, the world...is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Second Vatican Council.”¹⁰³ Joseph Ratzinger even suggested that *Gaudium et Spes*, together with *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Nostra Aetate*, are “a revision of the *Syllabus* of Pius IX, a kind of countersyllabus” to the nineteenth-century document’s antagonistic rejection of any engagement between the church and modernity.¹⁰⁴

As John O’Malley has pointed out, one of the most significant changes evidenced in *Gaudium et Spes* is one of style. The council no longer spoke the language of condemnation and correction, but of proclamation and invitation.¹⁰⁵ The church’s disposition toward the world is characterized by the council’s frequent use of the term “dialogue,” which is described by council *peritus* Marie-Dominique Chenu as “recognition of the other as other, loving others as they are and not as people to be won over, accepting that they are different from me, without trying to encroach on their consciences and on their searching, without asserting my reservations before I give my trust.”¹⁰⁶ Paul VI’s opening speech at the second session expressed his desire for the

¹⁰² Antón notes that the “Churches of the Third World” offered the important criticism that “the world with which the Church is carrying on a dialogue in *Gaudium et Spes* seems to be identified with the scientifically and technically developed world, at a high western economic and cultural level,” leaving the churches of the third world in silence (Antón, “Postconciliar Ecclesiology,” 415).

¹⁰³ McNamara, *Vatican II*, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, “Church and World: An Inquiry into the Reception of Vatican Council II,” in *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 381–82, in Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 483.

¹⁰⁵ John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008), 307–8.

¹⁰⁶ Marie-Dominique Chenu, quoted in Giuseppe Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” in *History of Vatican II, Vol.*

pastoral constitution to focus on dialogue, and his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* which took dialogue as its theme influenced on the conciliar text.¹⁰⁷ “By emphasizing dialogue, the council implicitly cautions against viewing ‘the world’ as an object of Christian ministry, and instead advances a more interdependent understanding of the relationship between the faithful and the larger world (GS 3).”¹⁰⁸ This dialogical approach set the church in a much more mutual, reciprocal relationship with the world—the church not only serves the world, but is thoroughly embedded *in* the world and *receives* from the world a range of social, cultural, and intellectual goods and genuine human development, all of which may be a preparation for the gospel (44). The church begins to see itself as a dialogical church, and even moves in the direction of becoming a “humble church.”¹⁰⁹

3. The absent body?

As I have shown, the Second Vatican Council marks a new stage in the history of body ecclesiology because of the ways in which it develops, modifies, and rejects the metaphor of the body. In regards to the vertical dimension of the metaphor, the council corrects excesses of the prior tradition by carefully using “(mystical) body of Christ” to refer to the whole body of the faithful, especially when gathered in worship and made one by the Eucharist; this body is united to its divine Head on which it is always dependent and from which it is always distinct. In this way, the council returns the phrase to its Pauline context and offers a more methodologically, historically, and theologically sound application of the metaphor. In its horizontal dimension, the

5: *The Council and the Transition. The Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965–December 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 589n37.

¹⁰⁷ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 204, 267.

¹⁰⁸ Osheim, “The Christian Faithful,” 227.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Lakeland, *A Council That Will Never End: Lumen Gentium and the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), especially “Part 3: In Search of a Humbler Church,” 101–154; see also Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, 73–90.

corporeal metaphor is retained in more or less traditional ways when the council praises the laity as ‘living members’ who are active in building up the body of the church. It is interpreted in a new and positive way through the council’s teaching on collegiality such that the body is no longer in competition with the head. But it is seen as uniquely problematic when addressing the issue of who belongs, and to what extent, to the church of Christ. The council makes an effort to step away from the metaphor of the organic or physiological body for the sake of a more accurate and precise teaching on membership, but it falls back into it through the language of incorporation.

In other ways, however, the council effectively, and perhaps intentionally, avoids the metaphor of the body. I have already indicated that the council wisely avoids applying the body–soul analogy to the relationship between the church of Christ/mystical body and the Catholic Church and to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. The reader may have noticed that my analysis of the ‘group’ issues regarding other churches, religions, and the world did not include any mention of body language, for there is none. I now want to argue that the council avoids using the metaphor of the body, especially, in its exposition of *ad extra* (‘group’) issues, for yet-unnoticed anthropological reasons. Again, here we are going beyond a mere observation that *Lumen Gentium* decenters “body of Christ” in favor of a range of biblical metaphors, or that “people of God” or “communion” are the central concepts in conciliar ecclesiology. What can we learn from the notable absence of the body in certain conciliar texts?

In many of the *ad extra* (‘group’) teachings in *Lumen Gentium*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Nostra Aetate*, and *Ad Gentes*, the conciliar texts seem to intentionally choose to not give any particular weight to the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, and instead favor the concepts of “people of God,” “sacrament,” and less directly, “communion.” When “body of

Christ” is used, it is often interwoven with and therefore balanced by other metaphors for the church. For example, *Ad Gentes* speaks of God’s desire that “the whole human race might become one people of God, form one body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the holy Spirit” through missionary activity (7).¹¹⁰ Likewise, *Gaudium et Spes* almost never refers to the church as a body or the body of Christ when speaking of the church in relation with the modern world.¹¹¹ Congar himself asked if the term “body of Christ,” was “deliberately avoided” in *Gaudium et Spes*, though he offers no hypothesis or explanation as to why this was the case. He notes that even “the expression ‘People of God’ is not used very often, although it accurately expresses the content of the word ‘Church’ in the Pastoral Constitution. It was feared that if it were used too often it might give the impression that the Church is a people or nation side by side with other peoples, a sort of *tertium genus* in the sociological and not in the purely religious sense.”¹¹² Instead, the dominant metaphor for both the church and the world throughout the pastoral constitution is “family.” The church is frequently spoken of as the “family of God” situated within the “whole human family,” terms that appear over two dozen times in the text.¹¹³

Though Congar offered no explanation nor surmised any hypotheses for why “body of Christ” was avoided in the pastoral constitution, it is possible for us to offer an explanation of the absence of this corporeal metaphor in all these *ad extra*-oriented doctrines (i.e., membership in

¹¹⁰ See also *Ad Gentes* 9, 19, 36, 38, 39 for language of the “mystical Body” being “enlarged,” “increased,” or “spread” through missionary activity until it reaches its fullness.

¹¹¹ The pastoral constitution only refers to the church as a body in passing twice, in articles 32 and 78, in relation to Christ’s passion and resurrection in forming a “brotherly community” through his body.

¹¹² Yves Congar, “Part I, Chapter IV: The Role of the Church in the Modern World,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 222. The term most often used is *Ecclesia* which Congar says “generally means the original community founded by Christ which watches over the deposit of faith of the gospel and has the task of communicating it to the world”—it doesn’t mean the hierarchy or office-holders in particular.

¹¹³ The church as the family of God appears in *Gaudium et Spes* 24, 32, 39, 40, 42, 43, 50, 56, 91, as well as *Lumen Gentium* 6, 27, 28, 32, 51 and *Ad Gentes* 1. The broader category of the “whole human family” appears in *Gaudium et Spes* 2, 3, 24, 26, 29, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, 45, 46, 53, 56, 57, 63, 74, 75, 77, 86, 91, sometimes appearing multiple times in a single article.

the church, relations with other religions, etc.) by recalling the history of the ecclesial metaphor itself and Douglas' grid-group theory. First, the metaphor of the body was frequently used to express the church' supremacy over the temporal world and its character of being a perfect society by highlighting the external visibility of the church as a human society or assembly under a single head. Boniface's *Unam Sanctam* asserted that the pope, as the one head of the one mystical body (understood as the entire temporal sphere) has supreme power over the spiritual *and* the temporal realm. The Vatican I draft *Supremi Pastoris*, stated that "the Church is not a member or a part of any other society whatsoever, and it does not and cannot coalesce with any other."¹¹⁴ *Mystici Corporis* continued this trend of using the metaphor of a living human body to expression the notion of the church as a perfect society—just as "the human body is given proper means to provide for its own life, health and growth, and for that of all its members," the mystical body sustains its members from birth to death and builds up the church's social structure through the sacraments (18–21). As a perfect society, the ecclesial body transcends the world and needs no other 'bodies' in order to fulfill its nature. In so much of this literature, the sole purpose of the church seems to be to bring members *into* the body where they can meet Christ; there is no concept of the ecclesial body extending *outward* to the world to encounter 'rays of truth' beyond its own organism.

At the council, the church underwent a thorough *rapprochement* in all of its *ad extra* relationships, not only with the world but with other Christian churches, other religions, modernity, and culture, with the aim of becoming a much more dialogical church.¹¹⁵ From being

¹¹⁴ *Supremi Pastoris*, chapter 3. emphasis mine.

¹¹⁵ Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 252–58. Rush draws heavily from Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), on this point. For a review of the church/world principle at the council and the major themes and creative tensions within *Gaudium et Spes*, see Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 480–532.

the only true church of Christ and *the* Mystical Body of Christ, it is now the church in which the one church of Christ subsists or continues to exist, though not to the exclusion of other churches. From being the only mediator of salvation in Christ, it now enjoys the ‘fullness of the means of salvation’ yet recognizes other means, goodness, truth, and even sanctifying grace outside its institutional bounds. From being a perfect society set apart from the world, it is now thoroughly *in* the modern world, which is already graced and which contributes social and cultural material and a wide range of human knowledge, all of which may be a preparation for the gospel. Even the council’s theology of the laity seems to break down the boundaries that once separating the church from the world. The constitution on the church states that the laity build up the body of Christ by “living in the world,” sanctifying it from within (31) in order “to make the church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that it can become the salt of the earth” (33). Thus, the laity are imagined as living, gifted members of a body who stretch the boundaries of the ecclesial body, expanding it by simultaneously living in the world and reaching out to this world, infusing it with the life of Christ.

Unfortunately, the Catholic magisterial tradition, and European theology more broadly, has no history of understanding the symbol of the human body as this kind of centrifugal, missionary, dialogical reality. The body has only ever been understood as a self-enclosed, centripetal reality in which alone a divine or personal identity dwells. Neil Ormerod intuits this point when he observes that “body of Christ” is one of the many “integrator” metaphors of the church—symbols that emphasize integration, harmony, and unity—and that we lack robust “operator” metaphors “which transform the present situation in the direction of some normatively defined transcendence.”¹¹⁶ There is practically no theological, anthropological, or

¹¹⁶ Neil Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 64–67, quote at 64.

symbolic foundation for the bishops and theologians at Vatican II to conceive of the “body of Christ” as an outward-oriented, intercorporeal reality that is dependent on others.

Second, Mary Douglas’ grid-group theory offers a compelling explanation for why the symbol of the body has never functioned in this kind of centrifugal, intercorporeal way in the history of Catholic ecclesiology. As Douglas herself maintains, and I agree, the Catholic Church and its ecclesiological self-understanding has been high on the “grid-group” axis, firmly rooted high in the ‘hierarchy’ quadrant. It has articulated a clear group identity and formal, clear boundaries—even when it was seen as absorbing or superseding the temporal order altogether, as in *Unam Sanctam* and the *Syllabus of Errors*. In high grid–high group societies like the Catholic Church, the body frequently and easily symbolizes a well-bounded unit. This ecclesial body is self-sustaining, with its own law and provisions for growth—it has needed nothing from the world, and its members are set apart from, made distinct from, the world. This is precisely the theology of the church–world relationship that the council rejected. As the council moved toward an openness of the church to the world, a relationship of reciprocity and dialogue, the body became a less resonant symbol, precisely as Douglas would predict. The fathers had to search for new metaphors—people, sacrament, communion, family—to convey its ecclesiology.

If Douglas’ theory is right, as I argue it is, did the Second Vatican Council usher in the end of the metaphor of the body in Catholic ecclesiology? And how might the metaphor of the body be reinterpreted as a centrifugal, missionary, and dialogical body, and so be revitalized for postconciliar ecclesiology?

IV. The Body After the Council

In the first decade or so after the council, a people of God ecclesiology continued to flourish alongside, and not in competition with, other ecclesial metaphors. In their analysis of the conciliar texts, theologians often saw “people of God,” “body of Christ,” and “sacrament” as complementary terms for the church.¹¹⁷ The turn to “people of God,” the newfound appreciation for the laity, and the renewed emphasis on baptism were reflected in liturgical and sacramental reforms, the revision of the code of canon law, and new movements and organizations calling for greater participation by the laity in the decision-making and governing structures of the church.¹¹⁸ As José Comblin has noted, the concept of the people of God was particularly celebrated in Latin America due to how well it evoked the “church of the poor.”¹¹⁹

By the 1980s, however, new emphasis was given by the magisterium to the notion of the church as a *communio* implicit in the council documents. In Comblin’s analysis, then-Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, feared that “people of God” involved a Marxist distortion and sociological reduction of the church, one that must be combatted by reasserting sacramental incorporation into the body of Christ through baptism and Eucharist.¹²⁰ This position seems to have gained some ground, for, as Gaillardetz notes, some bishops at the 1985 Extraordinary Synod were concerned that “people of God” was being used ideologically “to create an opposition between the hierarchy and a ‘people’s church.’”¹²¹ The synod’s final text cautioned against replacing “a false unilateral vision of the Church as purely hierarchical with a new sociological conception”—a democratic one, perhaps—“which is also

¹¹⁷ Congar, “The Church: The People of God;” Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” 19.

¹¹⁸ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 89–91.

¹¹⁹ Jose Comblin, *People of God*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), especially chapter three.

¹²⁰ Comblin, 52–53.

¹²¹ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, 92.

unilateral.”¹²² The church as mystery is feared lost in such a presumed-sociological and historical notion of “people” and must be reasserted. The text then asserted that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s documents.”¹²³ Such an ecclesiology “cannot be reduced to purely organizational questions or to problems which simply relate to powers,” but nevertheless is “the foundation for order in the Church,” for a “correct relationship between unity and pluriformity,” for the doctrine of collegiality and the “collegial spirit,” for “participation and co-responsibility” among clergy and laity, and for ecumenism—all of the ‘horizontal’ dimensions of conciliar ecclesiology considered above.¹²⁴ In short, the 1985 synod enshrined ‘communion’ as the fundamental concept of Vatican II and *the* path forward for postconciliar ecclesiology; the concept of people of God was so absent from the final text’s analysis of the council that “some observers even speak of the Synod’s having ‘entombed’ the expression ‘People of God.’”¹²⁵ The assertion of communion as the fundamental concept of the council works to relativize all other biblical images as well. As Walter Kasper holds, “it can be demonstrated that the *communio*-ecclesiology lies behind all of the aforementioned biblical images for the description of the nature of the Church,” including “images such as people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, etc.”¹²⁶

In light of this, what came of the metaphor of the body, or the biblical notion of the church as the body of Christ, after the council? This question arises, for example, in light of Gaillardetz’s summary of the postconciliar reception and implementation of *Lumen Gentium*, *Christus Dominus*, and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.¹²⁷ His analysis of the major points from these

¹²² “The Final Report: Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 15 (1985): 441–450.

¹²³ “The Final Report,” C.I.

¹²⁴ “The Final Report,” II.C.I

¹²⁵ Joseph A Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” in *Synod 1985: An Evaluation*, 1986, 55.

¹²⁶ Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality and Mission* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 21.

¹²⁷ Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making*, Parts II and III.

conciliar texts includes subsections on church as sacrament, body of Christ, the church as communion, the people of God, temple of the Holy Spirit, the laity, the pilgrim church, and Mary and the church. All of these major points from the conciliar texts are seen as having been received, developed, and implemented in the postconciliar period—except “Body of Christ.” This metaphor is absent in his summary of the postconciliar period.

In many ways, the corporeal metaphor is indeed set aside. We see this in the way that *communio* is claimed as the foundation of all horizontal elements of ecclesiology in the 1985 synod. All of the ecclesiological work that ‘mystical body’ and ‘body of Christ’ did in the half-century preceding the council was now expressed through the image of the church as a communion—it situates the part within the whole; it evokes many members or local churches joined together for the good of the whole; it suggests order and regulation, with communion being held together by unity under a single head, the bishop of the church in Rome; it is brought to its fullness in the reception of the eucharistic body. This impulse was underway even before the council. Jerome Hamer’s *The Church is a Communion* argues that communion is the form of the church’s unity and sociability, it directs us both toward God and to other Christians, it is visibly manifest in the worshipping assembly and church structures, and it is organized hierarchically—all points which used to be explained through the image of a human or organic body. Moreover, when he selects a single biblical image of communion, he chooses the image of the body, and defines the mystical body of Christ as “*a communion* which is at once inward and external, an inner *communio* of spiritual life (of faith, hope and charity) signified and engendered by an external *communio* in profession of the faith, discipline and the sacramental

life.”¹²⁸ Whereas the body was once a living organism, or a hierarchically ordered society, it is now a communion.

This transfer of nearly all theological value from ‘body’ onto ‘communion’ is also evident in a number of works which offer a broader analysis of the postconciliar developments in ecclesiology. Avery Dulles’ *Models of the Church* merges ‘body of Christ,’ ‘people of God,’ and ‘communion’ into one single model of “mystical communion.”¹²⁹ In 1987, Antón suggested that ‘communion’ is the proper notion under which the connection between ecclesiology and Christology are linked, and that it is the church-as-communion (not as the body of Christ) which links the church to the historical Christ and makes it the universal sacrament of salvation and of union among humanity and with God. In fact, he does not mention the church as the body of Christ at all in his analysis of postconciliar ecclesiology.¹³⁰ In these ways, the metaphor of the body, and the church as the (mystical) body of Christ, did indeed fall by the wayside in the decades after the council, especially in comparison to its prominence in the early twentieth century but also in comparison to the place it held in the conciliar documents. Perhaps better put, the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is not set aside or ignored but subsumed under a lingering pyramidal ecclesiology; (mystical) body ecclesiology has morphed into *communio* ecclesiology.¹³¹ The central theological questions about the nature and structure of the church remain the same—its relation to Christ and the Trinity, its visible and invisible elements, the relations between members, the pattern of authority—only the metaphor has changed.

¹²⁸ Jérôme Hamer, *The Church Is a Communion* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964), 93, emphasis mine.

¹²⁹ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

¹³⁰ Antón, “Postconciliar Ecclesiology,” 418–19.

¹³¹ Edward Hahnenberg traces the rise and fall of mystical body ecclesiology between the 1920s and 50s and describes a parallel history for communion ecclesiology, rising in the decade after the council and perhaps equally destined to give way to new models and metaphors. He does not argue as I do, however, that the model of *communio* takes up the work of the metaphor of the body. See “The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 3–30.

V. Conclusion: redeeming the body for postconciliar ecclesiology

This chapter has traced the challenges leveled against (mystical) body ecclesiology in the wake of *Mystici Corporis* and the impact those concerns had on the drafts and debates at Vatican II. The final texts of the Second Vatican Council are responsive to these critiques. The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ is used in its vertical dimension in *Lumen Gentium* Chapter I, but this is a distinctly spousal body—“body of Christ” is primarily interpreted through the nuptial metaphor in order to preserve the difference between the church and Christ the Head. The church is never styled the ‘ongoing incarnation’ or continuation of Christ, but is only analogous to the incarnation of the Word in human form insofar as the church is made up of both divine and human elements. In its horizontal dimension, the metaphor of the body undergoes an even more significant transformation and contraction. The council’s teaching on collegiality offers up an image of the body as a dignified and active whole that cooperates with its head but is no longer merely subordinate to and directed by it. This organic, ecclesial body is also made up of active, living members who participate in the threefold ministry of Christ, are gifted with charisms and other gifts of the Spirit, and can grasp the true sense of the faith and pursue religious truth in accord with their consciences. But this is more or less the extent of the image of the body in the conciliar texts. In all other matters in which the church relates to other Christians, other religions, and the world, the image of the church as a body fails to resonate. The body has for too long been seen as a centripetally-focused, rigidly bounded organism, a perfect society that only serves the world and never needs to receive anything from it. Is this the end of the metaphor

of the body in Catholic ecclesiology? Or can the symbol be made to sing again,¹³² in service of postconciliar ecclesiology?

¹³² A phrase used by Elizabeth Johnson for her critical and constructive retrieval of Christian symbols, ex. in “Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again,” *Theology Today*, 54 no. 3 (1997): 299–311.

Chapter Five: Merleau-Ponty and the Intercorporeal Body

“Yes or no: do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought,
but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch?”

—Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), 137

I. Introduction

The preceding chapters of this dissertation traced the use of the metaphor of the body in key texts in modern Catholic ecclesiology, parsing out the various “associative networks of meaning” that clung to the image of the body and the ecclesiological positions they supported. From Johann Adam Möhler’s *Symbolism* through the mid-twentieth century, in the vertical dimension of the metaphor, the church as the body of Christ was frequently understood as the ongoing incarnation of Christ; “body” meant “self.” The horizontal dimension admitted of somewhat greater variety. For some authors, “body” evoked a common life, unity, and collaboration among its many members (ex. the early Möhler, Guardini, Congar, Mersch). Others focused on the role of the head as governing and giving life to the rest of the body, the ‘trunk’ (ex. the later Möhler, Passaglia, Tromp, Pius XII). In the latter stream especially, the metaphor of the body was frequently used to anti-ecumenical effect. The Second Vatican Council intervened in this history in two notable ways—by specifying that the spiritual and institutional realities of the church are analogous to the divine and human natures joined in the incarnation, not an extension of that hypostatic union, and by redescribing head–body relations. But the image of the body was abandoned on issues of ecclesial mission and the church’s involvement in and with the world—because, I argued, the body had for so long been understood

as a rigidly bounded organism defined by its head and as a self-sustaining “perfect society.” The symbol of the body remained a centripetal force. I concluded the previous chapter by asking if, in light of this history, the metaphor of the church as a body has a future in postconciliar Catholic ecclesiology in the third millennium.

In this chapter, I turn to the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) to contest and correct these “associative networks of meaning” that have long undergirded the metaphor of the church as a body. According to Edmund Husserl, phenomenology sets out to study “the things themselves,” bracketing off prior assumptions, categories, and knowledge in order to describe phenomena strictly as they present themselves to us.¹³³ It is descriptive rather than explanatory, and precedes scientific or theoretical explanations of experience, seeking not to reject sciences but to ascertain “their actual basis, the horizon, background, or relief against which the person’s perceiving, thinking, and acting play out.”¹³⁴ Merleau-Ponty’s major works study phenomena such as behavior, perception, language, politics, and art. Two of his most well-known works, *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and The Invisible*, take up questions of subject–object and body–world relations. Although Merleau-Ponty does not set out to study the body as the direct subject of his analysis, his studies of behavior, perception, and language all reveal the absolute centrality of the body in human experience and undermine any dualistic understanding of the body as separate from the world—

¹³³ A key difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is the latter’s insistence that a complete reduction is impossible (see *Phenomenology of Perception* Preface). In his later work, Husserl emphasizes the “life-world” in which we live and in which all experience takes place, not as something to be bracketed off but as a pre-given. What are to be bracketed off for the sake of pure description are scientific and theoretical explanations of experience. For an overview of Husserl’s early and later phenomenology, see Eric Matthews, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, Continental European Philosophy (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 23–30. For Merleau-Ponty’s indebtedness to yet difference from Husserl, see Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 2nd ed., Routledge Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 2020), 27–28.

¹³⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), viii; Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, The Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 315.

an insight which contemporary readers declare “his most profound and original contribution to philosophy”¹³⁵ and has earned him the title “patron saint of the body” among Western philosophers.¹³⁶

My use of Merleau-Ponty focuses on his description of embodied life as “intercorporeal,” that is, as constituted by its engagement with other bodies and the world. The term itself (sometimes called ‘intercorporeity’) does not appear in *Phenomenology of Perception*; Merleau-Ponty first uses it in his 1960 essay on Husserl, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” and twice again in *The Visible and the Invisible* in his chapter on the chiasmic intertwining of flesh. The first use appears in Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the phenomenon of the handshake. In self-touch, “my two hands ‘coexist’ or are ‘compresent’ because they are one single body’s hand.” In the handshake, “the other person appears through an extension of that compresence; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality [*une seule intercorporéité*].”¹³⁷ In its second use, it is the experience of oneself as visible within a field of visibility, able to be seen by another and to touch another whose own hands open up for her a tangible world which includes oneself, that establishes a recognition of the other who is also a seer—it establishes “intercorporeity [*intercorporéité*].”¹³⁸ “What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the visible and the tangible is—if not yet the incorporeal—at least an intercorporeal being [*un être intercorporel*], a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present.”¹³⁹ In spite of the fact that the term itself appears relatively few times

¹³⁵ Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

¹³⁶ Richard Shusterman, “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, 151.

¹³⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 168. For the French, see *Signes* (NRF Éditions Gallimard, 1960), 213.

¹³⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 141.

¹³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 142–43. For the French, see *Le visible et l’invisible* (NRF Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 185, 188.

throughout his work, it captures the core of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body—one's body is always, in its conscious and nonconscious interactions, interwoven with other bodies and the flesh of the world. Intercorporeal being is the landscape of visibility and tangibility in which I exist and perceive others as seeing and touching subjects. As Gail Weiss puts it, "to describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies."¹⁴⁰

Scott Marratto, in his book-length analysis of Merleau-Ponty's account of subjectivity, points out that the concept of intercorporeity is not identical to the concept of intersubjectivity, "which would concern a relation between (conscious) *subjects*." What distinguishes Merleau-Ponty's concept of intercorporeity is the recognition that "my body is already bound up with the other's body before there can be any relation between conscious subjects. But this mutual involvement of bodies does not overcome the *difference* between *conscious* subjects."¹⁴¹

Marratto offers a description of intercorporeity that is worth quoting at length:

There is, according to Merleau-Ponty, beneath my explicit self-consciousness, a fecund layer of anonymous life; it is this dimension of anonymity characterizing my bodily experience that Merleau-Ponty designates with the term 'intercorporeity.' The presence of sensible reality in our conscious experience is a kind of mysterious contact, *a communion with otherness*, but this communion also always involves a certain threat of dispossession. The sense of anonymity persists throughout our experience insofar as our bodies are sentient bodies, bodies open to and pervaded by a reality that does not wait for us to set the terms of its appearance and thus whose appearance always holds for us a sense of our own vulnerability and exposure. The appearance of the foreign in my experience, the undeniable presence of sensible being, is subtended by this anonymity of my own sentient flesh; in this mass that is my sentient body it is never immediately clear where the 'other' ends and the 'I' begins. Thus, the sense of anonymity is also the mark of a certain primitive kinship between my body and the bodies of other selves. 'Intercorporeity' names at once this mysterious familiarity of my body

¹⁴⁰ Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 5.

¹⁴¹ Scott L. Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 144.

with things and with the bodies of others and, at the same time, a no-less-mysterious sense of the strangeness of ‘my own’ body. ... We are intercorporeal selves insofar as our involvement with otherness constitutes for us a kind of archaeological pre-history subtending our present experience: older than any consciousness, but present at every moment, ‘in the flesh.’ As conscious selves we inherit, so to speak, the memory of an originary contact with otherness. We are, as Merleau-Ponty sometimes says, *haunted* by others.¹⁴²

As Merleau-Ponty sought to express in *The Visible and the Invisible*, intercorporeity points to the fundamental structure of relations between nonconscious as well as conscious beings.

By demonstrating that the body is intercorporeal—that is to say, the subject is always embodied in a particular world-situation; thought, language, and perception always begin in the body and its interaction with the world; body and world interweave each other through shared flesh—Merleau-Ponty shows the impossibility of a clear separation between subject and object, interior and exterior, mind and body, yet without fusing the two. As Elizabeth Grosz says,

Rather than valorize one or the other side of a dichotomous pair of terms, rather than either affirm their fundamental unity or oneness in some kind of holism (which necessarily implies a reduction of one term to the other) or accept the bifurcation and mutually exclusive and exhaustive status of binarized terms, Merleau-Ponty...refuses the very terrain and founding presuppositions of dualisms. His work is a resumption or reclamation of the space *in between* binary pairs, that apparently impossible no-man’s land of the excluded middle, the gulf separating the one term from its opposite or other.¹⁴³

In this way, Merleau-Ponty’s work is a nail in the coffin of Cartesian dualism that would separate out the *res cogitans* from the *res extensa*, mind from body, and only subsequently try to offer a theory that unites the two. There is no *cogito* apart from a body in a world-situation.

As I have shown in prior chapters, the metaphor of the church as a body has often resisted this intertwining of self and otherness, the mysteriousness of one’s own body and its dependence

¹⁴² Marratto, 8–9; first italics is my own emphasis, second is Marratto’s.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Grosz, “Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh,” in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, ed. Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 146–47.

on the world; instead, the body was understood to be independent from others, rigidly bounded, and defined by its head. Merleau-Ponty's description of the body as intercorporeal counters those "associated networks of meaning" that have shaped the ecclesiological use and consequences of the metaphor for centuries. In what follows in this chapter, I engage two of Merleau-Ponty's major works on perception and flesh—*Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*—culling from them his insights into the structure and function of embodiment and the body's relation to the world in order to re-interpret the corporeal metaphor for contemporary Catholic ecclesiology. Three key elements of the body that I highlight are: the body as being-*in* and *of*-the-world, motor intentionality as the source of the body's unity, and the body as "raw material" of presence in the world. Each of these themes is a further specification of what it means to say that the body is "intercorporeal." To be clear, I am not myself engaging in the phenomenological task or offering a phenomenology of the ecclesial body of Christ, nor will I take up issues of Merleau-Ponty's reception by later philosophers such as Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Emmanuel Falque. Instead, I seek to engage Merleau-Ponty's work directly, with my reading of his work guided by contemporary commentators. I will consider critiques of Merleau-Ponty's work to the extent that they bear upon this specific application of Merleau-Ponty's work to the ecclesial metaphor. In the next and final chapter, I will bring Merleau-Ponty's work to bear on ecclesiology, interpreting the church as the "intercorporeal body of Christ" in a way that reflects and furthers the ecclesiology of Vatican II, especially as it is continued in Pope Francis.

II. Merleau-Ponty's Intercorporeal Body

1. *Phenomenology of Perception*

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty contests empiricist and intellectualist accounts of perception. The empiricist account, common in modern natural sciences, presumes that perception is simply brute sensation which corresponds with an object in the world. The intellectualist account, found in Kant and Descartes, holds that perception, experience, and understanding are mental phenomena, representations of objects in our incorporeal minds. Both of these approaches, Merleau-Ponty finds, place theories of perception prior to the actual phenomenon of perception as we experience it. We are not simply acted on by objects in the world (empiricist account) nor do we stand apart from the world as disengaged observers (intellectualist account). Rather, perception is a fundamentally *embodied* phenomenon, structured by our “being-in-the-world,” a phrase that Merleau-Ponty borrows from Heidegger. Consequently, there is an “intentionality”—a concept that Husserl develops from Franz Brentano—or a directedness not only to our conscious life of thought (all thought is thought *about* something, after all) but to our bodily movements as well. This motor intentionality is, Merleau-Ponty argues, the source of our bodily unity. Finally, because the body is the vehicle of our being-in-the-world, injury or trauma to the body can bring about a kind of partial ‘withdrawal’ from the world as well. The body is, as Merleau-Ponty says, our “barest raw material” for personal existence—it is the necessary substratum for our existence, but may also be the site at which life ‘hides away.’

A. Being-in-the-world

To arrive at his account of perception, Merleau-Ponty draws heavily from neurophysiology and psychology, specifically Gestalt psychology which “rejected the atomistic and mechanistic assumptions that had dominated philosophy and psychology for centuries,

arguing instead that sense experience has a holistic and dynamic character in virtue of its intelligible form or shape (*Gestalt*).”¹⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty extended this structuralist insight beyond the realm of psychology, suggesting that this is the very structure of human experience in general—we perceive *situations*, not discrete stimuli that are pieced together by a thinking machine. He also draws from the neurological studies by Kurt Goldstein, who was likewise influenced by Gestalt psychology in emphasizing the unity of organisms (human and otherwise) as they encounter and act in the world. Goldstein’s research on patients with brain injuries and various motor disturbances feature prominently in *Phenomenology of Perception*, as Merleau-Ponty studies ‘pathological’ conditions of perception in order to gain insight into the ‘normal’ functioning of perception.

One such condition that Merleau-Ponty studies is phantom limb syndrome, in which a patient feels a limb which is no longer physically there, whether due to surgical amputation or a war injury or the like.¹⁴⁵ The inverse of this is the condition of anosognosia, the phenomenon of not perceiving limbs that are physiologically united to the rest of the body, or of lacking perception of an illness or physical disability. These kinds of mind-body disturbances reveal that perception is neither strictly judgment (the intellectualist account) nor sensation (the empiricist account), neither simply subjective nor objective, but is *between* the two—it is an embodied phenomenon structured by our being-in-the-world. As Taylor Carman puts it, “Perception is not a mental representation, according to Merleau-Ponty, but skillful bodily orientation and negotiation in given circumstances. To perceive is not to have inner mental states, but to know

¹⁴⁴ Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Weiss finds that for Merleau-Ponty “the phantom limb is only a more extreme form of a phenomenon that all of us experience on a daily basis, namely, the attempt to maintain a certain bodily equilibrium in the face of continual changes in both our body and our situation” (*Body Images*, 35).

and find your way around in an environment.”¹⁴⁶ We can perceive the world because our bodies are always *in* the world and *toward* the world. “Sensation,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “is literally a form of communion.”¹⁴⁷ In fact, Merleau-Ponty argues that my body—its needs, capacities, and functions—*gives me* a world, and the world *gives me* my body. We perceive objects according to our bodily backgrounds and goals; we live and know our bodies differently depending on the world we inhabit. For example, if I enter my kitchen to work on my laptop, I see the kitchen chair as ‘an object for sitting on’; if I enter the kitchen to retrieve a pan from atop the cabinets, I perceive the chair as ‘an object for standing on.’ My bodily capabilities and tasks shape how I perceive and interact with the world. In turn, I experience my body in a particular way—as ‘short’ in this moment—because of the height of the cabinets. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “I am conscious of my body *via* the world. ...It is true for the same reason that...I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body.”¹⁴⁸ For this reason, Merleau-Ponty calls the body the “pivot of the world.”¹⁴⁹

Because perception is an embodied phenomenon, because we are always bodies *in* the world, all perception is perspectival. To see an object is always to see it from *somewhere*. Because objects always exist within a horizon or world, we can also imaginatively project ourselves into the world and ‘see’ objects from the perspective of other objects. For example, “when I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those which the chimney, the walls, the table can ‘see.’”¹⁵⁰ I can also move my body around an object to see it from other sides, or pick up an object and manipulate it in my hands so

¹⁴⁶ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 25.

¹⁴⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 212.

¹⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 82, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 82.

¹⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 68.

as to see other facets. But this does not negate the perspectival nature of perception. “My human gaze never *posits* more than one facet of the object, even though by means of horizons it is directed towards all the others. It can never come up against previous appearances or those presented to other people otherwise than through the intermediary of time and language.”¹⁵¹ The embodied, perspectival nature of perception also means that my body can never be simply an object of perception *for me*, for it is the ground of possibility of my perceiving anything at all. I cannot rotate around my own body to see my backside; I can never catch my own ‘living glance,’ even in a mirror. “This peculiar unobservability of one’s own body is not just a material or geometrical problem, an artifact of, say, the position of our eyes in our heads. Instead, it has to do with the impossibility of shedding our own perceptual agency and simply observing ourselves.”¹⁵² I always observe myself as observer, as both subject and object simultaneously. I can never see or know myself and my body as pure object.

Our perception of the world results in, and is mediated by, a “body schema,” a lived awareness of one’s phenomenal body-as-subject which is the result of habitual action in a meaningful world. We know and live our bodies preconsciously as a result of our embeddedness in the world over time. The body schema “is not a representation of the body, then, but our ability to anticipate and (literally) incorporate the world prior to applying concepts to objects.” It “thus constitutes our *precognitive* familiarity with ourselves and the world we inhabit.”¹⁵³ This being-in-the-world is, as Merleau-Ponty says, “preobjective;” it is a fact of bodily existence prior

¹⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, 69.

¹⁵² Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 97.

¹⁵³ Carman, 101, emphasis mine. The body schema is not to be confused with “body image.” “A *body image* consists of a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one’s own body. In contrast, a *body schema* is a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness or the necessity of perceptual monitoring. ... The body schema... involves certain motor capacities, abilities, and habits that both enable and constrain movement and the maintenance of posture” (Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005], 24, in Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self*, 148).

to any symbolizing function or deliberate action of the mind. The body schema is what allows us to know where our body and limbs are at all times, without having to ‘find’ them; it enables us to perform abstract movements, to imagine one’s bodily capacities and project one’s body into a world. It is not simply the sum of proprioception or a “global awareness of the existing parts of the body” but is shaped by the body’s goal-directed action, incorporating limbs, movement, and sensations “only in proportion to their value to the organism’s projects.”¹⁵⁴ In this way, the notion of the body schema brings together the physical and psychological dimensions of perception, rejecting the strictly empiricist or intellectualist accounts. In the case of the phantom limb, the missing limb endures in the patient’s body schema—even if she cognitively acknowledges the loss of the limb, it remains part of her embodied self-understanding that has developed over time.

Significantly, the body schema may or may not be continuous with our bodily morphology; the ‘habitual body’ may differ from the ‘actual body,’ to use Merleau-Ponty’s words. In the case of anosognosia, a limb may be physiologically intact but the patient may unconsciously refuse to use it; it has lost meaning for him as part of his bodily schema and capacity for action and movement in the world. At the same time, non-organic objects can be incorporated into the bodily schema. Merleau-Ponty’s example of the plasticity of the body image is a person with a visual impairment who uses a white cane. The cane is not an *object* for the blind person. It is not perceived for itself, but is “an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight. ...The blind man is...aware of [the cane] through the position of objects, [rather than] the position of objects through [the cane].”¹⁵⁵ “The stick is no longer an object perceived by the blind man, but an instrument *with* which he

¹⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 100.

¹⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 143.

perceives. It is a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis.”¹⁵⁶ Through its habitual use, the cane is *incorporated* into the bulk of the body, is an extension of the body. Habit, therefore, proves “our power of dilating our being in the world.”¹⁵⁷ The “I” as a living embodied subject does not end at my fingertips.

Moreover, the body schema changes over time. As Weiss observes, the body schema is both flexible and stable. It must be relatively stable, for it “is precisely what provides us with a reliable sense of where and how our body is spatially positioned as well as a tacit understanding of what our corporeal possibilities are at any given point in time.” But this stability depends precisely on its plasticity:

the body [schema] must be flexible enough to incorporate changes occurring both within and outside of the body while continuing to seek a certain ‘equilibrium’ which will provide the stability needed not only for effective bodily movement, but also for a relatively unified perceptual experience. ...It is precisely when the body [schema] becomes too inflexible, that it moves towards its own dissolution. Since the situation is continually changing, socially, emotionally, libidinally, and physiologically, the body [schema] *must* make corresponding changes to maintain its equilibrium.¹⁵⁸

It is precisely the body schema’s openness to difference and otherness—its flexibility and plasticity—that allows for the acquisition of habit, the adjustment to new environments and

¹⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 152.

¹⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 143.

¹⁵⁸ Weiss, *Body Images*, 17–19. Weiss uses the term “body image” where Merleau-Ponty’s original French text, and most secondary sources, use “body schema.” Though I noted the differences between a ‘body image’ and ‘body schema’ above, Weiss is, in my understanding, referring to the body schema. Later in her book, Weiss draws from Iris Marion Young’s work to point out that the body *itself* (not simply the body image) is, for most people, constantly changing. “Health is associated with stability, equilibrium, a steady state. Only a minority of persons, however, namely adult men who are not yet old, experience their health as a state in which there is no regular or noticeable change in body condition. For them a noticeable change in their bodily state usually does signal a disruption or dysfunction. Regular, noticeable, sometimes extreme change in bodily condition, on the other hand, is an aspect of the normal bodily functioning of adult women. Change is also a central aspect of the bodily existence of healthy children and healthy old people, as well as some of the so-called disabled. Yet medical conceptualization implicitly uses this unchanging adult male body as the standard of all health” (Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], 169).

instruments, and even the gradual ‘contraction’ or ‘shrinking’ of the phantom limb and its eventual disappearance.

B. Motor intentionality and the unity of the body

Merleau-Ponty further analyzes embodied perception by studying the phenomenon of psychic blindness, particularly in one patient named Schneider who suffered an injury to his occipital lobe. Following his injury, Schneider lost the ability to make abstract movements, such as tracing a circle in the air with his finger, on command. Such an abstract use of his body is literally meaningless to him. To trace a circle, “he first ‘finds’ his arm, then lifts it in front of him as a normal subject would do to find a wall in the dark, and finally he makes a few rough movements in a straight line or describing various curves, and if one of these happens to be circular he promptly completes the circle.”¹⁵⁹ To be clear, Schneider does not have a physical impairment—if a mosquito lands on his arm, he can, without hesitation or thought, swat the mosquito away. And yet, if a doctor points to that spot on his arm where the mosquito landed and asks Schneider to touch it, he cannot. This command has no affective or biological significance to it. He can ‘swat,’ but he cannot simply ‘touch.’

Another example of Schneider’s psychic blindness is the inability to perceive objects as meaningful to his body. If he is asked to identify a small, cylindric object lying on a table, he observes its shape and size and notices that it is opaque, with certain colors; when the side of the pen with the clip on it is turned toward him, he touches his shirt pocket, and concludes “it must be a pencil or a pen...it is put there [in the shirt pocket], to make notes with.”¹⁶⁰ Without a meaningful task, “the patient finds in his body only an amorphous mass into which actual

¹⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 110.

¹⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 131.

movement alone introduces divisions and links. In looking to his body to perform the movement for him, he is like a speaker who cannot utter a word without following a text written beforehand.”¹⁶¹ Without *bodily significance* to these movements, without a goal to them—swatting away a mosquito, taking notes—he cannot perform them. These commands carry intellectual significance, but not motor significance. The world, and his own limbs, are meaningless to Schneider outside the context of intentional action.

Similarly, Schneider has lost the ability to perceive a ‘sexual situation’ or to experience sexual desire. He “no longer seeks sexual intercourse of his own accord. Obscene pictures, conversations on sexual topics, the sight of a body do not arouse desire in him. The patient hardly ever kisses, and the kiss for him has no value as sexual stimulation.”¹⁶² As with other of his bodily movements, physiological function is not impeded; what is lost is the *meaning* of sexual activity, a “sexual schema.”¹⁶³ Tactile stimuli “have lost their sexual significance...they have so to speak ceased to speak to his body.”¹⁶⁴ Just as he can no longer project himself before a world in order to perform abstract movements, he also lacks “his power of projecting before himself a sexual world, of putting himself in an erotic situation.” Merleau-Ponty concludes that the sexual life is subtended by the “intentional arc” of perception, motility, and representation; it is one more way of being-in-the-world. Schneider’s case in this regard indicates that behavior and movement, whether my own or another’s, is saturated with vital meaning not for the mind or *cogito* but *for the body* insofar as it is embedded in a world.

Through his analysis of the case of Schneider, Merleau-Ponty arrives at the concept of *motor intentionality*. Schneider suffers no loss of physical capacity for movement, intellectual

¹⁶¹ Merleau-Ponty, 110.

¹⁶² Merleau-Ponty, 155.

¹⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, 156.

¹⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 156.

function, or comprehension. What he has lost is motor intentionality—the ability to perceive a world, a situation. Motor intentionality is “the projection of a world *given* in intuition, as opposed to constructed in thought. ...It is...the normal unity and integration of our bodily movement and our intuitive awareness of a given, stable environment.”¹⁶⁵ It is a ‘praktognosia,’ an inherent knowledge of movement and bodily capability that results from our habitual enmeshment in a spatial world. Significantly, Merleau-Ponty argues that this motor intentionality or praktognosia is not a rapid intellectual synthesis of sensory input. Rather, the body inhabits the world, acts in the world, and interacts with objects in the world without passing through an explicit cognitive function or needing guidance or direction from the ‘head.’ As Merleau-Ponty writes, “Our bodily experience of movement...provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a ‘praktognosia,’ which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying’ action” because it is ordered to action, to being in the world and toward the world. This is precisely what Schneider lacks—in order to perform abstract movements, he needs to ‘find’ his limbs first; in order to identify a pen lying on a table, he needs to articulate through language its features, gesture towards his shirt pocket, and only then conclude that it is an instrument for writing. In contrast, the ‘normal subject’ can perform abstract functions and carry out verbal commands with her body because she constantly experiences her body as in-the-world and is aware, through her body schema, of the location and potentiality of her limbs. Perception is incarnate significance, gathered and received through our embeddedness in and with the world. It is not cognitive judgment but embodied knowing. It is not the *cogito* that translates a verbal command into action, but the habitual experience of one’s own body in the world. By

¹⁶⁵ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 109.

emphasizing the preobjective, precognitive dimension of the body schema and motor intentionality, Merleau-Ponty argues that we most effectively live our bodies and perform intentional actions when we are focused not on our body but on the object of our action or perception; I must let my body as *object* fall to the background, and become ‘absent’ from me in order to *inhabit* my body as subject and perceive the world through it.

Merleau-Ponty’s work also shows that motor intentionality is the very source of the unity of the body and its senses. For the ‘normal’ subject, the visual, tactile, and motor aspects of sensory data are not linked through a mental or intellectual process, as they must be for Schneider. Rather, the body exists for the subject as a unity (of limbs, parts, sensations) when and because it is engaged in meaningful, task-oriented action in the world.

The connecting link between the parts of our body and that between our visual and tactile experience are not forged gradually and cumulatively. I do not translate the ‘data of touch’ into the language of seeing or vice versa—I do not bring together one by one the parts of me body; this translation and this unification are performed once and for all within me; they are my body itself. ... We are ourselves the unifier of these arms and legs.¹⁶⁶

As Marratto puts it, “the body is unified because, in moving, it ‘interprets itself’, because, in moving, it is ‘an expressive unity.’”¹⁶⁷ In fact, Marratto says that “speaking of the ‘parts’ of the body is an unavoidable concession to the demands of language; it reflects the demands of a grammar that tends to reify ‘subjects’ and ‘objects.’”¹⁶⁸ Marratto suggests that we ought to understand the ‘unity’ of bodily ‘parts’ as ‘expressive movement that makes sense.’ It is a contingent and dynamic unity that occurs in gesture and movement. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of sitting at a desk and reaching for a telephone. “The movement of my hand towards [the phone], the straightening of the upper part of the body, the tautening of the leg muscles are

¹⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 149–50.

¹⁶⁷ Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self*, 68, internal citations to Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

¹⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 71.

superimposed on each other. I desire a certain result and the relevant tasks are spontaneously distributed amongst the appropriate segments.”¹⁶⁹ When engaged in a meaningful task, the body is not, for me, an object or a set of tools that ‘I’ control, but rather is the very power of movement and expressive space. “Consciousness,” he writes, “is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that,’ but of ‘I can.’”¹⁷⁰

What is true for the body is also true for speech, according to Merleau-Ponty. Language is neither pure motility (of the biological structures for speech) or pure intellect, but is part of the structure of being-in-the-world. Thought and speech are not separate from one another, as if we had here another subject-object, interior-exterior dichotomy. Thought is completed or fulfilled in speech, and speech *is* thought: word and speech are not “a way of designating things and thoughts [but are] the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world, and, moreover, not its clothing but its token *or its body*.”¹⁷¹ Language and speech are marked by the same intentional structure that marks the body and its motility—we do not need to engage an objectifying function in order to ‘reach’ the words needed to express meaning. “I do not need to visualize external space and my own body in order to move one within the other. It is enough that they exist for me, and that they form a certain field of action spread around me. In the same way I do not need to visualize the word in order to know and pronounce it. It is enough that I possess its

¹⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 149.

¹⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 138. Young observes that this is less obviously true of female bodily existence. In her classic essay “Throwing Like A Girl,” she notes that feminine bodily comportment is often arbitrarily self-restricted and limited. “Women frequently tend to posit a task which would be accomplished relatively easy once attempted as beyond their capacities before they begin it. Typically, the feminine body underuses its real capacity... feminine bodily existence is an *inhibited intentionality*, which simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an ‘I can’ and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed ‘I cannot’” (“Throwing Like A Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality,” in *Throwing Like a Girl*, 146).

¹⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 182, emphasis mine.

articulatory and acoustic style as one of the modulations, one of the possible uses of my body.”¹⁷²

Once again, Merleau-Ponty is arguing against dichotomizing theories. Language is not some simple external expression of an internal thought, as if they were only extrinsically related. “It presents or rather it *is* the subject’s taking up of a position in the world of his meanings. The term ‘world’ here is not a manner of speaking—it means that the ‘mental’ or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that *the thinking subject must have its basis in the subject incarnate*.”¹⁷³ For this reason, Merleau-Ponty says that language “inhere[s] in the body.”¹⁷⁴ Language, meaningful speech, relies on the grasping of the structure of the word, its “articulatory physiognomy,” and its relevance to the world of the speaker.¹⁷⁵ Patients who suffer pathologies of language or speech, such as alexia or aphasia, have lost the more fundamental capacity to project themselves into the world or perceive the figure-background structure in which the word stands out as meaningful. Once again, Schneider demonstrates this—he has lost neither thought nor motility, but the “‘life’ of language.”¹⁷⁶

He speaks practically only when he is questioned, or, if he himself takes the initiative in asking a question, it is never other than of a stereotyped kind, such as he asks daily of his children when they come home from school. He never uses language to convey a merely possible situation, and false statements (e.g., the sky is black) are meaningless to him. . . . Schneider never feels the need to speak; his experience never tends towards speech, it never suggests a question to him, it never ceases to have that kind of self-evidence and self-sufficiency of reality which stifles any interrogation, any reference to the possible, any wonder, any improvisation. We can perceive, in contrast with this, the essence of normal language: *the intention to speak can reside only in an open experience*.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Merleau-Ponty, 180. This seems to be true, in my view, only for one’s native language and for words already known.

¹⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, 193; final emphasis is mine.

¹⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 194.

¹⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 195.

¹⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 196.

¹⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 196, emphasis mine.

As the neurologist Goldstein concludes following his study of Schneider: “As soon as man uses language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men.*”¹⁷⁸ In other words, language is also intercorporeal and participates in ‘flesh’ as the foundational ‘element’ of the world.

C. The body as “raw material” of presence in the world

The fact of our being-in-the-world and the concept of motor intentionality show that the body manifests personal existence and opens up to the world in self-transcendence. The phenomena of movement and perception are possible because the body “inaugurates our primary ‘consonance with the world’”¹⁷⁹ and “constitutes an opening onto the world.”¹⁸⁰ As Merleau-Ponty writes, when we perceive a cube, there is “an openness upon the cube itself by means of a view of the cube which is a distancing, a transcendence—to say that I have a view of it is to say that, in perceiving it, I go from myself onto it, I go out of myself into it.”¹⁸¹ Perception is the body transcending itself, going out into the world. The same is true for movement, according to Mark Hansen. “It is in the very act of moving itself, that is moving along with itself, remaining a ‘zero of movement,’ that the body moves out of itself, into the world—that, in short, it perceives the world.”¹⁸² The capacity for movement and perception, as capacities for self-transcendence,

¹⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 196, emphasis original, quoting Goldstein, *L'analyse de l'aphasie et l'essence du langage*, 496.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Kearney, “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics,” in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 41.

¹⁸⁰ Mark B. N. Hansen, “The Embryology of the (In)visible,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, 249.

¹⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 202.

¹⁸² Hansen, “The Embryology of the (In)Visible,” 250.

indicates that “there is an excess of the body’s potential in relation to its actuality.”¹⁸³ We exist only in, through, and as our bodies, which lunge toward the world.

At the same time, precisely because the body manifests our existence and is the site of our opening upon the world, the body can also be site of our withdrawal from the world to some degree. Merleau-Ponty describes the case of a girl who, after being forbidden by her mother to see her lover, cannot sleep, loses her appetite, and loses the use of speech (aphonia). Her body withdraws from the world and refuses to express personal existence or co-existence with the world. Merleau-Ponty states that “the emotion elects to find its expression in loss of speech...because of all bodily functions speech is the most intimately linked with communal existence...Loss of speech, then, stands for the refusal of co-existence... The patient breaks with relational life within the family circle. More generally, she tends to break with life itself.”¹⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty is clear that this is not the result of any physiological impediment, nor is it simply a ‘translation’ of anger or a deliberate silence. “The sick girl does not mime with her body a drama played out ‘in her consciousness.’ By losing her voice she does not present a public version of an ‘inner state.’”¹⁸⁵ Rather, the body *is* its significance—it is a symbol, a sacrament of its own meaning. “The body does not constantly express the modalities of existence in the way that stripes indicate rank, or a house-number a house: the sign here does not only convey its significance, it is filled with it; it is, in a way, what it signifies.”¹⁸⁶ The body “expresses total existence, not because it is an external accompaniment to that existence, but because existence

¹⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 254. Hansen draws from *The Visible and the Invisible* as well as Merleau-Ponty’s final lectures entitled *Nature*; Harman lifts up Merleau-Ponty’s turn to embryology and other biological sciences to show the philosophy of emergence that he was developing at the end of his life.

¹⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 160.

¹⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 161.

¹⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 161.

comes into its own in the body...the body is solidified or generalized existence, and existence a perpetual incarnation.”¹⁸⁷

But the case of the girl with aphonia reveals the body’s potential to shut itself off from the world as well. For her, even while her body expresses incarnate significance, “the body has become ‘the place where life hides away.’”¹⁸⁸ “Bodily existence which runs through me, yet does so independently of me, is only the barest raw material of a genuine presence in the world.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, the body “expresses total existence,” but can also obscure, hide, contract that existence. In the case of Schneider, injury to the material body (in this case, the occipital lobe) results in inhibited personal and social existence. The body is the foundation of perception and of human relations with others, but it is not the sole or maximum criterion. Contemporary philosophers have developed this aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s work in ways that show how social and cultural factors can constrict our bodily existence in the world as well. For example, Iris Marion Young has pointed out that feminine embodiment is shaped by a patriarchal and sexist society, with the result that female bodily comportment is characterised by ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuous unity within itself and its surroundings. “Feminine bodily existence is frequently not a pure presence to the world.”¹⁹⁰ Similarly, Franz Fanon and Mayra Rivera have highlighted how racist and sexist social worlds can, and often violently do, restrict one’s bodily freedom and capacity to manifest one’s corporeal existence, resulting in what Rivera calls “ambiguous incarnations.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 166.

¹⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 164.

¹⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 165.

¹⁹⁰ Young, “Throwing like a Girl,” 150.

¹⁹¹ Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Duke University Press, 2015), 12.

This ebb and flow of the body toward or away from the world, similar to the phantom limb syndrome and anosognosia, reveals that personal existence is not identical to or reducible to biological existence. Merleau-Ponty describes this as a continual, back-and-forth capacity or dynamic potential. “Precisely because my body can shut itself off from the world, it is also what opens me out upon the world and places me in a situation there. The momentum of existence towards others, towards the future, towards the world can be restored as a river unfreezes.”¹⁹² The girl suffering aphasia will only be restored to speech “when the body once more opens itself to others or to the past, when it opens the way to co-existence and once more (in the active sense) acquires significance beyond itself.”¹⁹³ The body must be *in the world, toward the world, open to the world*—and, I would add, lovingly received by the world—in order to manifest personal presence.

Merleau-Ponty makes this point once again in his consideration of speech. He notes that different cultures have different behaviors and bodily gestures to express the ‘same’ emotion—“the angry Japanese smiles, the westerner goes red and stamps his foot or else goes pale and hisses his words”—in spite of the fact that the biological substratum such as organs and the nervous system are the same across cultures.

It is not enough for two conscious subjects to have the same organs and nervous system for the same emotions to produce in both the same signs. What is important is how they use their bodies, the simultaneous patterning of body and world in emotion. The psycho-physiological equipment leaves a great variety of possibilities open, and there is no more here than in the realm of instinct a human nature finally and immutably given. *The use a man is to make of his body is transcendent in relation to that body as a mere biological entity.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 165.

¹⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, 165.

¹⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 189.

There is no ‘natural’ bodily expression of an emotion apart from culture and a shared world of meaning. Meaning can *only* be expressed in bodily gesture and language, yet it transcends its biological foundation as well. “I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as if it were a ‘natural’ subject, a provisional sketch of my total being.”¹⁹⁵ The body is not simply a transparent or straightforward manifestation of the self. It is the essential foundation and raw material of our existence in the world, but that existence is always shaped by social forces.

Merleau-Ponty’s work in *Phenomenology of Perception* will enable the metaphor of the church as a body to bring forth a more missionary, dialogical, and humble ecclesiology. His notion of the body as being-in-the-world united by motor intentionality will yield a vision of the church as thoroughly *in* the world, “missionary in its very nature” (AG 2), and united as a body not through a single head of the church but through its social and spiritual mission. The metaphor also urges more synodal forms of governance and more comprehensive structures of dialogue within the church and with other peoples, since as a body, the church’s perspective on itself and the world is limited and because knowledge of the faith begins in the body. As the body “of Christ,” the church makes Christ present in the world but, due to illness or injury, can also obscure that presence at times as well.

2. *The Visible and The Invisible* and being-of-the-world

In his final, incomplete, and posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty brings the results of his study in *Phenomenology of Perception* to “ontological explication.”¹⁹⁶ In doing so, he makes a notable departure from his approach in his earlier work.

¹⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 198.

¹⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, working notes of February 1959, 183.

As Merleau-Ponty himself observes in the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, *Phenomenology of Perception* fails to fully overcome dualism because he had relied on a “philosophy of ‘consciousness’” and started from a consciousness-object distinction.¹⁹⁷ As one scholar puts it, “The very strength of Merleau-Ponty’s intervention [in *Phenomenology of Perception*]*—*his revision of intentionality into a corporeal intentionality or ‘I can’*—*proves to be its own downfall, for the structure of transcendence toward the world ultimately leaves intact the consciousness–world dualism. In becoming the ‘mediator of the world,’ the body continues to be defined by its correlation with consciousness.”¹⁹⁸ In *The Visible and the Invisible* then, Merleau-Ponty shifts his focus from perspectival embodied consciousness to a more fundamental account of the body–world relation—from being-*in*-the-world to being-*of*-the-world, one might say—demonstrating that our “unconscious immersion in the world” is more fundamental than conscious experience and is common to all living organisms.¹⁹⁹ In this last work, he focuses not on the phenomenon of perception, but on the condition of the possibility of perception—the fact that I, a body, am perceivable, a “sensible sentient.”²⁰⁰

The intellectual context for *The Visible and The Invisible* is the failure of other philosophies to adequately describe or explain the subject–world relation (similar to how *Phenomenology of Perception* responds to the failure of other philosophies and sciences to adequately describe the phenomenon of perception). Merleau-Ponty seeks to uncover and explain

¹⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, working notes of February 1959 and July 1959, 183, 200.

¹⁹⁸ Hansen, “The Embryology of the (In)Visible,” 245.

¹⁹⁹ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 115.

²⁰⁰ Readers of Merleau-Ponty debate the extent to which *The Visible and the Invisible* is a break with or even rejection of his work in *Phenomenology of Perception*, but as Carman rightly observes, “although Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh does mark an abandonment of the primacy of *consciousness* in his account of being in the world, the images of chiasm and interlacing are elaborations on an idea he already had been expounding in his early work, decades before” (80). Marratto takes a similar position regarding a basic congeniality between the two books, finding that Merleau-Ponty was attentive to ontological concerns in his early work, not only in his later work (6). Thus, *The Visible and the Invisible* can be read as extending the intercorporeality of the subject in *Phenomenology of Perception* to all organisms/objects, conscious or unconscious, rather than as renouncing his earlier work.

the paradox of “perceptual faith”—“our shared pre-reflective conviction that perception presents us with the world as it actually is, even though this perception is mediated, for each of us, by our bodily senses.”²⁰¹ The natural sciences rely on perceptual faith without actually explaining this phenomenon. The philosophers of reflection (Descartes, Kant) fail as well, reducing the world into an idea, the subject into thought, and ‘rendering unthinkable’ an account of intersubjectivity in a common world.²⁰² Sartre’s philosophy of negation, by “defining the mind as the pure negative which lives only from its contact with the exterior being,...renders impossible that *openness upon being* which is the perceptual faith.”²⁰³ Philosophers of intuition such as Husserl and Bergson conflate subject and object, failing to note the divergence between the two.²⁰⁴ In his chapter “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” Merleau-Ponty improves upon these prior philosophies by providing an ontology of flesh as the element or fabric of being that mediates between subjects, objects, and world but also retains the divergence (*écart*) or distance between them.

For Merleau-Ponty, the term flesh does not mean ‘matter,’ or a substance composed of body and soul, or the ‘stuff’ or ‘corpuscles of being’ that all add up to make an organism. Rather, it names the foundational possibility of relation and communication between all things in the world. Flesh is “this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself.”²⁰⁵ It belongs to neither myself nor the world, but is the medium of the existence of both. It is a “formative medium,” an “element” in the ancient sense, an “incarnate principle.” It is “a ‘chiasm’ between me and the world—a reversible crossing which precedes all analytic and

²⁰¹ Ted Toadvine, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/merleau-ponty/>.

²⁰² Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 43.

²⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, emphasis original.

²⁰⁴ Toadvine, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty.”

²⁰⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139. On 142 he describes “an anonymous visibility” that inhabits all seers and objects in the world.

transcendental divisions between subject and object, consciousness and thing.”²⁰⁶ It is the very structure of being and is the foundation of the body–world relation.

He arrives at his notion of flesh in part by developing Husserl’s work on the topic, particularly his analysis of the ‘double-sensation’ of touching one’s own hand and of feeling oneself feeling an object.²⁰⁷ In a marked shift from the bulk of the Western tradition that privileged sight both as a sense and a metaphor for knowledge or intuition, Husserl “restored the primacy of the ‘flesh’ (*Leib*) as a living body constitutive of psychic reality” and demonstrated that touch, not vision, is the foundational sense and the basis of consciousness.²⁰⁸ As Richard Kearney puts it, by reflecting on the double-sensation of touching one’s own hand, Husserl demonstrated that “one is no longer an isolated subject experiencing the body as mere object: one is flesh experiencing flesh, both active and passive, constitutive and receptive, spirit and matter...we are not, in the first instance, cerebral sovereign egos but sensing incarnate Bodies.”²⁰⁹ Merleau-Ponty expands upon Husserl’s insight by arguing that this phenomenon of double-sensation, this reversibility, applies not only to touch but to vision and language as well. For Merleau-Ponty, one’s own act of seeing constitutes oneself as a visible object within a visible field. “He who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at.”²¹⁰ In other words, my act of seeing another person makes me aware that I, too, can be seen by that person; I feel myself as fully visible, and can subsequently take on the perspective of another.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Kearney, “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics,” 37. A chiasmus in grammar is “an inversion of parallel phrases, such as *when the going gets tough, the tough get going*.” In the material world, a chiasm is a crisscross or interwoven structure (Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 117).

²⁰⁷ Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989) [orig. 1952], especially 152–54.

²⁰⁸ Kearney, “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics” 27.

²⁰⁹ Kearney, 27, 28.

²¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 134–5, emphasis original.

²¹¹ Mayra Rivera uses the work of Franz Fanon to connect the doubleness of flesh with Merleau-Ponty’s account of the body schema in *Phenomenology of Perception*, to ethically significant effect. Fanon’s literary works and his own

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty argues that visibility and tangibility themselves are reversible or fold over into one another. “Every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility.”²¹² All that we see with our eyes exists within tactile space, and all that we touch has visual existence. “In sum, Merleau-Ponty tempers the privilege accorded touch by Husserl and exposes a deeper intersensory reversibility beneath it.”²¹³

This reversibility of flesh and sensation opens up an extensive world of “intercorporeal being.”²¹⁴ When I recognize myself as a “sentient sensible,” as a visible set within a field of visibility, I become aware that “there are other landscapes besides my own.”²¹⁵ The crisscrossing of the sensible and sentient that constitutes my own body also constitutes other bodies; the folding-over of touch and tangibility when my left hand touches my right hand touching is a power also present in the hand of another. In the handshake, for example, both subjects feel themselves as both touched and touching.²¹⁶ Just as I am a “sentient sensible,” so are other bodies. The reversibility of flesh is well expressed in Merleau-Ponty’s example of two mirrors facing one another, yielding “two indefinite series of images set in one another...which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them.”²¹⁷ Flesh names this intertwining and coiling over of the touchable upon itself, the ‘doubleness’ of the body as both sensing and

engagement with Merleau-Ponty demonstrate how the dynamic of perception, when perception is racialized, can inhibit and destroy one’s being-in-the-world. The very dynamic of being embodied in a world of flesh and constituted by perceiving-and-being-perceived means that the social hierarchies of the world also get inscribed on flesh. This occurs not only through racialized perceptions, but through all processes in which our interaction with our environment constitutes our flesh. (Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann [New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967].)

²¹² Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 134.

²¹³ Hansen, “The Embryology of the (In)Visible,” 247.

²¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 143.

²¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, 141.

²¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 142.

²¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 139.

sensed, and the interweaving of body and world, self and other. It is the constitutive foundation of our capacity to be both subject and object, the toucher and the touched, the seer and the seen.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the reversibility discerned between the sentient and the sensible and across visibility and tangibility applies not only to conscious beings but is the structure of the whole sensible world. My body and all objects in the world are particular constellations of flesh; I am not different from the world, but a moment, a self-moving configuration, of world. “Our body, the sensible sentient,” is “a very remarkable variant” of the coiling over of the visible and tangible, but a variant “whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible.”²¹⁸ There is a “kinship” [*parenté*] between my body and the world, a duality (in the sense of reversibility and multiplicity) that is not a dualism.²¹⁹ One does not exist ‘within’ the other, for they are mutually interwoven. Merleau-Ponty writes:

“Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only ‘shadows stuffed with organs,’ that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not ‘in’ my body, and my body is not ‘in’ the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively. ... There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other.”²²⁰

In other words, the seer does not stand outside of or apart from the world she perceives. In fact, this is the very foundation of perception—vision and touch are only possible because the body itself is visible and tangible. “He who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it*.”²²¹ According to Young, pregnancy is a paradigmatic example of this intertwining of body and world: pregnancy “render[s] fluid the boundary between what is within,

²¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 136.

²¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 133; 176 in the French edition.

²²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 138.

²²¹ Merleau-Ponty, 134–5.

myself, and what is outside, separate... the boundaries of my body are themselves in flux. In pregnancy I literally do not have a firm sense of where my body ends and the world begins.”²²²

And yet, my body is not *coincident* with other bodies or the objects I perceive. The chiasmic structure of flesh names the intertwining and crossing-over of bodies and world as well as the distance and separation between them. If we envision a two-dimensional double-helix, we see that each thread repeatedly crosses over the other, creating an ebb and flow of proximity and distance. Even in the reversibility of touch (my left hand touching my right hand touching), the two phenomena never exactly coincide: “either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it*—my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering.”²²³ We are capable of perceiving objects in our environment because we ourselves are of the same flesh as other objects, yet “at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body.” As Kearney puts it, “Because flesh is this two-way transmission between inner and outer, it is the place where I enjoy my most primordial experience of the other.”²²⁴ Flesh is marked by and is the foundation of difference. But Merleau-Ponty insists that “this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.” There is a unity in difference and difference in unity characteristic of flesh that is constitutive of perception and intercorporeality. But all distance, all invisible depth, is subtended by our common “cohesion” in flesh which “prevails

²²² Young, “Pregnant Embodiment,” in *Throwing Like a Girl*, 163.

²²³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 148.

²²⁴ Kearney, “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics,” 27.

over every momentary discordance.”²²⁵ Like two threads in a common fabric, body and world, self and other, are not the same entity yet they share a common materiality, are interlaced, and make up “a single woven texture.”²²⁶

Through the notion of flesh, *The Visible and the Invisible* more deeply intertwines the embodied subject and the world than *Phenomenology of Perception* did. As Carman puts it, “Merleau-Ponty had always insisted that to stand *before* the world, one must be *in* the world; he now goes further by insisting that to be *in* the world, one must be *of* the world. One must, so to speak, be of the same flesh as the world one inhabits and perceives.”²²⁷ The ontology of flesh demonstrates, as *Phenomenology of Perception* did, the non-dichotomy and folding-over between interior and exterior, visible and invisible, subject and object, self and world; it applies this dynamic of reversibility not only to conscious subjects but to non-conscious beings as well. But Merleau-Ponty does not conflate body and world. Flesh is chiasmic, and so it both mediates and separates; it grounds an object’s visibility as well as its separateness from myself; it is the foundation of common existence, but it is the distance and “dehiscence” between my body and the world; it mediates, but does not reduce the other to the same.

Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible* offers ecclesiology a vision of the church that is thoroughly *in* and *of* the world (meaning that it is constituted and shaped by temporal realities such as history, culture, and social and political forces) while not being conflated with the world. This allows us to celebrate the goods that church and world offer to one another while also grappling honestly with the fact that the church is distorted by sin, just as the world is.

²²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.

²²⁶ Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, 116.

²²⁷ Carman, 117.

III. Critique, development, and application of Merleau-Ponty's work

Following his untimely death, Merleau-Ponty fell into disregard, seen as a structuralist at the dawn of poststructuralism, as doing a 'philosophy of the subject' at the moment when antisubjectivism was on the rise, and as uncritically advancing Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.²²⁸ Jacques Derrida in particular has accused Merleau-Ponty of occluding "the alterity of the other" and the fact that language—and therefore *différance*—subtends all consciousness.²²⁹ But there has been something of a renaissance of Merleau-Ponty studies in recent decades, with French philosopher-phenomenologists such as Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, and Emmanuel Falque drawing from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to develop what Kearney calls a "theological hermeneutics of incarnation."²³⁰ Additionally, his work is still being used in theories of cognition (though in light of more recent developments in neuroscience) and theories of (inter)subjectivity.²³¹ Feminist philosophers have turned to Merleau-Ponty's work as a resource for reconsidering the nature and status of the body and flesh.²³² As Dorothea Olkowski summarizes, "in feminist theory, Merleau-Ponty's conception of 'flesh' as the reversibility of interior and exterior in a structure that encompasses both is of great importance

²²⁸ Carman and Hansen, "Introduction," 17–23, for Merleau-Ponty in relation to Sartre, Deleuze, and Foucault. The authors argue that Merleau-Ponty moves away from his earlier subjectivism in *The Visible and the Invisible* and is significant for bringing phenomenology into dialogue with human sciences.

²²⁹ Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self*, 8.

²³⁰ Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics," 56.

²³¹ Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self*; Shogo Tanaka, "Intercorporeality as a Theory of Social Cognition," *Theory & Psychology* 25, no. 4 (August 2015): 455–72; Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Merleau-Ponty and Recent Cognitive Science," *Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, 129–150.

²³² Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss, *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

for undermining binaries and producing a new conception of the continuity of relations between mind-body and interior-exterior.”²³³

Merleau-Ponty’s relation to feminist theory is not unproblematic, however. Many feminist philosophers have called attention to the fact that Merleau-Ponty ignores or is unaware of the sexed, gendered, and racialized aspects of the body; he presumes to describe a ‘neutral,’ desexed body (which, as feminists point out, does not exist) when in fact his description of the body is a male-normative one. Luce Irigaray has famously critiqued his privileging of visibility over touch as a displacement of the maternal—the intrauterine tactile experience which is prior to vision.²³⁴ Similarly, Weiss calls attention to Merleau-Ponty’s description of a body which “not only flows over into a world whose schema it bears in itself but possesses this world at a distance rather than being possessed by it.” Weiss argues that the presumed sexual neutrality of Merleau-Ponty’s work “is completely undermined by this masculinist project of possessing without being possessed in turn.” She also wryly points out “the way in which the world suddenly takes on the ‘feminine’ characteristics of the seductress, from whose ‘clutches’ the body successfully manages to preserve its distance. The body becomes a male protagonist engaged in a perpetual ‘flirtation’ with a female, ‘worldly’ antagonist, and not surprisingly, it is the male who wins the

²³³ Dorothea Olkowski, “Introduction,” in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, 14–15.

²³⁴ Luce Irigaray, “The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ‘The Intertwining—the Chiasm,’” in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 151–84; *ibid.*, “The Politics of Difference,” trans. Sean Hand, in *French Feminist Thought*, ed. Toril Moi (London: Blackwell, 1987). See also Elizabeth Grosz, “Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh” and *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 103–107; “Part II: Feminist Possibilities: Reading Irigaray, Reading Merleau-Ponty,” in *Intertwinings: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Gail Weiss (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 63–96; Tina Chanter, “Wild Meaning: Luce Irigaray’s Reading of Merleau-Ponty,” in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 219–236.

round.”²³⁵ Nevertheless, feminist philosophers such as Young and Grosz have constructively developed Merleau-Ponty’s thought on the body as the site of subjectivity, giving special attention to the particularities of race and gender. Weiss, Judith Butler, and Mayra Rivera have extended Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of how social, cultural, and historical forces shape and constrict embodied subjectivity,²³⁶ and Sara Ahmed uses Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the ‘intentionality’ and ‘oriented-ness’ of the body to develop queer phenomenology.²³⁷ These thinkers offer important critiques of Merleau-Ponty’s work while also building upon his fundamental insights into the centrality of the body for human experience and perception.

The critical development of Merleau-Ponty’s work that is most significant for my application of his thought to ecclesiology comes from Richard Shusterman, founder of the discipline known as “somaesthetics.” He calls into question Merleau-Ponty’s commitment to the body as the “tacit” and “silent” cogito, his privileging of the body as unconscious or preconscious in the phenomenon of perception.²³⁸ Schusterman argues that the French philosopher typically neglects any attention to the body’s “conscious somatic sensations, such as explicit kinesthetic or proprioceptive feelings...and they tend to be sharply criticized when they are discussed.”²³⁹ For example, in his 1960 work *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty writes that our body “guides us among things only on condition that we stop analyzing it and make use of it,” and

²³⁵ Weiss, *Body Images*, 172n5. Weiss’ project is precisely to show how sex, gender, race, and class shape the phenomena of embodiment and one’s body images. Grosz also rebukes the presumed neutrality of Merleau-Ponty’s work; see *Volatile Bodies* especially 103–111.

²³⁶ Judith Butler, “Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*,” in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 85–100; Weiss, *Body Images* et al; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* et al. Like Rivera above, Weiss draws from Franz Fanon’s work on the ‘historico-racial’ or ‘racial epidermal’ schema created by the white subject that dehumanizes the black man and assails his body image.

²³⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

²³⁸ Shusterman, “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy,” in *Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*; *ibid.*, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, 2008.

²³⁹ Shusterman, “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy,” 151–52.

again, “On the condition that I do not reflect expressly upon it, my consciousness of my body immediately signifies a certain landscape about me.”²⁴⁰ As noted earlier in our consideration of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that we most effectively live our bodies and perform intentional actions when we are focused not on our body but on the object of our action or perception; I must let my body as *object* fall to the background in order to *inhabit* my body as subject. Shusterman posits that Merleau-Ponty intentionally avoids thematizing conscious somatic awareness “because he presumed that such recognition could actually challenge his philosophical project of defending the body’s tacit, unreflective mode of perception and because he thought that greater attention to explicit somatic feelings could hamper not only the understanding of our perception, speech, thought, and action, but even the efficacy of their performance.”²⁴¹

As a corrective and development of Merleau-Ponty’s work, Shusterman argues that the body is not only, and not always, the unconscious foundation of perception, for we can be consciously aware of our bodies as well, and indeed we can make our bodies, its limbs, its movement, its sensations the object of our conscious reflection. Shusterman agrees with and values Merleau-Ponty’s attention to the somatic base of habit and his insight into the process of learning “through unreflective motor conditioning or somatic sedimentation.”²⁴² But in Shusterman’s view, Merleau-Ponty oversells the body’s unreflective capacity to seamlessly move about through the world. Merleau-Ponty’s method of drawing from unique or extreme cases like Schneider to contrast ‘pathological’ perception to ‘normal’ perception

obscures the fact that most of us so-called normal, fully functional people suffer from various incapacities and malfunctions that are mild in nature but that still impair performance. Such deficiencies relate not only to perceptions or actions we

²⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 78, 89; see Shusterman, “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy,” 153.

²⁴¹ Shusterman, “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy,” 153.

²⁴² Shusterman, 164.

cannot perform (though we are anatomically equipped to do so) but also to what we do succeed in performing but could perform more successfully or with greater ease and grace. Merleau-Ponty implies that if we are not pathologically impaired like Schneider and other neurologically diseased individuals, then our unreflective body sense is fully accurate and miraculously functional.²⁴³

Though Merleau-Ponty doesn't directly make a claim to this extent, it is true that he doesn't give due attention to 'gaps' in or malfunctions of perception that occur apart from serious injury or trauma. Combined with his central emphasis on the unreflective or pre-reflective motor intentionality at the heart of perception, and his frequent examples like the organist who seamlessly plays a new organ or a woman who always knows how to walk through a doorway without breaking off the feather in her hat, Shusterman is right to highlight this absence in Merleau-Ponty's thought.

Schusterman also points out that we can acquire *bad* habits, and our bodily instincts can sometimes be wrong. He gives the example of looking over your shoulder to see behind your back. In performing this action,

most people will spontaneously lower their shoulder while turning their head. This seems logical but is skeletally wrong; dropping the shoulder constrains the rib and chest area and thus greatly limits the spine's range of rotation, which is what really enables us to see behind ourselves. By withdrawing our attention momentarily from the world behind us and by instead focusing attention on the alignment of our body parts in rotating the head and spine, we can learn how to turn better and see more, creating a new habit that eventually will be unreflectively performed.²⁴⁴

Finally, our 'minds' can misperceive or misunderstand our bodily positions and habits. For example, a golfer may think she is keeping her head down when swinging her driver, but upon watching a video recording of her tee-off, learns that in fact she is not.

²⁴⁴ Shusterman, 172.

Young similarly calls into question Merleau-Ponty's valuing of preconscious or unconscious use of the body. She observes that (male) existentialist phenomenologists of the body, including but not limited to Merleau-Ponty, assume that "awareness of my body as weighted material, as physical, occurs only or primarily when my instrumental relation to the world breaks down, in fatigue or illness." She quotes one male phenomenologist as writing that "the transformation into the bodily as physical always means discomfort and malaise. The character of husk, which our live bodiness here increasingly assumes, shows itself in its onerousness, bringing heaviness, burden, weight."²⁴⁵ These thinkers assume that bodily self-awareness "entails estrangement and objectification. ... They also tend to assume that such awareness of my body must cut me off from the enactment of my projects; I cannot be attending to the physicality of my body and using it as the means to the accomplishment of my aims."²⁴⁶ As Merleau-Ponty wrote in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Movement is not thought about movement, and bodily space is not space thought of or represented. ... In order that we may be able to move our body towards an object, the object must first exist for it, our body must not belong to the realm of the 'in-itself.'"²⁴⁷ As seen in the selections from *Signs* above as well, the ideal, for Merleau-Ponty and these other philosophers, is for the body to remain in the realm of the prereflective, lest it interfere with the performance of a task. (One can see here again the masculinist bias of Merleau-Ponty's work—his ideal is an active, masculine subject for whom the feminized body remains a silent supporter.)²⁴⁸ Young points out in contrast that pregnancy is

²⁴⁵ Hans Plugge, "Man and His Body," in Spicker, ed., *The Philosophy of the Body* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 298, cited in Young, "Pregnant Embodiment," 164. Young also cites Plugge, Erwin Straus, and Merleau-Ponty as guilty of her charges here.

²⁴⁶ Young, "Pregnant Embodiment," 164.

²⁴⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 137, 139.

²⁴⁸ There is a parallel here with an Augustinian ideal of the body: the perfect, glorified body is one in which the members are obedient to the head, to reason. There is no passion, no lust, no unruly members, only reason governing the members for the good of the whole body. See *City of God*, Book 19.25, 22.17, 14.9, 14.16, 14.23 and especially

a paradigmatic example of “being thrown into awareness of one’s body,” a situation in which “the awareness of my body in its bulk and weight does not impede the accomplishing of my aims” and is an awareness of another body inside my own.²⁴⁹ Like Shusterman, Young argues that bodily self-awareness is not a threat to bodily action but in fact can reveal the dynamism and intercorporeality at the heart of human embodiment.

In response to this simple fact that the body, conscious awareness, and world can be misaligned, Shusterman lifts up “disciplines of somatic education” which “deploy exercises of representational awareness to treat such problems of misperception and misuse of our bodies in the spontaneous and habitual behavior that Merleau-Ponty identifies as primal and celebrates as miraculously flawless in normal performance.”²⁵⁰ Somatic education highlights the potentiality for reflective self-consciousness to actually improve the body’s engagement in and with the world to better achieve the body’s ends or goals, for “disciplines of explicit somatic awareness are aimed not simply at *knowing* our bodily condition and habits but at *changing* them.”²⁵¹ The theory or practice of somaesthetics can temporarily draw one’s attention back towards or into her body in order to become more accurately aware of its location, capacities, structure, and functions. This kind of conscious attention to our bodies, while involving “a temporary retreat from the world of action,...can greatly advance our self-knowledge and self-use so that we will return to the world as more skillful observers and agents.”²⁵² In other words, just as the body schema is dynamic and flexible in response to the body’s world-situation, bodily habits can be cultivated, corrected, and re-formed through explicit, conscious attention to one’s body. This

14.24, in which Augustine holds that in paradise prior to the fall, “the man would have sown the seed, and the woman received it, as need required, the generative organs being moved by the will, not excited by lust.”

²⁴⁹ Young, “Pregnant Embodiment,” 165.

²⁵⁰ Shusterman, “The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy,” 166.

²⁵¹ Shusterman, 167, emphasis original.

²⁵² Shusterman, 172.

does not negate other or prior levels of unconscious, spontaneous bodily perception that Merleau-Ponty foregrounds, but it does add a necessary dimension to them that Merleau-Ponty ignores and brings to light additional levels of consciousness in relation to bodily movement. “We can affirm the unity and unreflective quality of primary perceptual experience while endorsing self-reflective body consciousness that deploys representational thought for both the reconstruction of better primary experience and the intrinsic rewards of reflective somatic consciousness.”²⁵³

Shusterman offers an important balance to Merleau-Ponty’s description of the preconscious body. The body has its own praktognosia and ability to navigate the world and achieve the body’s ends prior to conscious awareness, but it is also true that the body sometimes misjudges the world and its own movement, and the head/‘mind’ can misjudge the body’s positioning and capacities. Anyone who has ever bumped their hip into their own kitchen table, caught their shoulder on a doorframe, or tripped up a step knows this to be true. Our bodies do not always glide seamlessly through the world. The body can err, misjudge, misstep, come up short in its own self-awareness, and fail to achieve its mission perfectly. Yet the embodied subject can reflect, do a “body scan,” check in with its limbs and senses, learn from those sensations, better guide those limbs, and “return to the world as more skillful observers and agents.” In short, in the human organism, ‘head’ and ‘body’ are not inherently in competition with one another anymore than ‘body’ and ‘world’ are in a conflictual or dichotomous relation; neither is it the case that, at all times, the head governs, directs, and gives life to the body. And attention to the body’s contours, position in the world, and changing capabilities is a strength and indicator of bodily integrity, not a distraction from cognitive or practical tasks. As we will see in

²⁵³ Shusterman, 167.

the next chapter, Merleau-Ponty, when developed through Shusterman, provides a richer vision of intra-ecclesial relations of teaching and governance—especially in the form of synodality and more extensive practices of dialogue within the church— than prior interpretations of the metaphor of the church as a body allowed.

IV. Conclusion

To conclude, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and ontology of flesh show that the body lives, moves, and perceives within a world to which it is common and with which it shares in one flesh. As Grosz puts it,

“What Merleau-Ponty gestured toward, throughout his writings, was a way of understanding our relation to the world, not as one of merger or oneness, or of control and mastery, but a relation of belonging to and of not quite fitting, a never-easy kinship, a given tension that makes our relations to the world hungry, avid, desiring, needing, which makes us need a world as well as desire to make one, which makes us riven through with the very nature, materiality, worldliness that our conception of ourselves as pure consciousness, a for-itself, an agent, daily belies.”²⁵⁴

This continual and purposeful engagement with the world is what provides the conditions for bodily unity and the integration of various sensory data. Even speech depends upon co-existence with the world and other subjects. We are only subjects in the world through our bodies, and this body expresses my existence at every moment, but the body can also partially withdraw from the world or be restricted by that world, inhibiting interpersonal, social existence. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides us with the resources to reinterpret the most neuralgic aspects of the metaphor of the church as a body or as the body of Christ—the role of the head in the body, the source of the body's unity, and the body's relationship with the world. When we envision the

²⁵⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, “Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Question of Ontology,” in *Intertwinings: Interdisciplinary Encounters with Merleau-Ponty*, 25.

church as an intercorporeal body, we see the church as defined and unified by its mission in the world, as calling for greater structures of dialogue both within the ecclesial body and with other religious and secular bodies, and as more humbly recognizing that it is truly a sacrament of Christ's presence in the world but may impede that presence as well.

Chapter Six: The Intercorporeal Body of Christ

“Please do not withdraw into yourselves! ...When the Church becomes closed, she becomes an ailing Church, she falls ill! That is a danger. Nevertheless we lock ourselves up in our parish, among our friends, in our movement, with people who think as we do...but do you know what happens? When the Church is closed, she falls sick, she falls sick.”

—Pope Francis, Address at the Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements (May 18, 2013)¹

I. Introduction

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and ontology of flesh show that the human body is intercorporeal—it is *in* the world and *of* the world, always in relation to other bodies in a web of flesh that both unites and separates. Through the body, we perceive the world as meaningful to us and our tasks, and we know our bodily selves as unified wholes precisely through our ongoing engagement with the surrounding world. This precognitive, embodied knowledge of self and world is the basis of any subsequent explicit, conscious, or cognitive knowledge. The subject’s conscious awareness can work together with these bodily perceptions to more effectively and efficiently perform bodily tasks. The body mediates personal existence to the world, though that full and authentic existence can be constrained due to various traumas to the body. In this concluding chapter, I show how this phenomenological understanding of the body can correct the past hierarchical and exclusionary uses of the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ and can press forward some of the reforms begun at the Second Vatican Council. If we understand embodiment as Merleau-Ponty does, then the metaphor of the church as a body

¹ Pope Francis, Address at the Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements, May 18, 2013, www.vatican.va, cited in Massimo Faggioli, *Catholicism and Citizenship: Political Cultures of the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 34.

opens up a more missionary, dialogical, and decentralized ecclesiology. It functions, for the first time, as an “operator,” in Neil Ormerod’s term—that is, a metaphor that evokes mission and transformation—rather than as an “integrator,” evoking unity, integration, and harmony.²

Two shifts in the metaphor of the body in its horizontal dimension at Vatican II are ripe for further development through Merleau-Ponty’s thought. First, phenomenology supports the emphasis on mission and the vision of the church as existing *in* the modern world, seen in *Gaudium et Spes* and developed especially by Pope Francis. A living body is always embedded in its world, and the body and the world are constituted by one flesh. Moreover, this phenomenological perspective presses beyond the council’s articulation of mission and dialogue. Because all perception is inherently perspectival, each person has a necessarily limited perspective both on the world *and* on one’s own body; other subjects can see things about myself that I cannot. In light of this, dialogue between the church, other religions, and ‘the world’ is not simply a strategic approach to evangelization or even a more comprehensive way of knowing the divine, as the conciliar and postconciliar tradition tends to hold; rather, dialogue is essential for the Catholic Church *to know itself* more fully. Second, the council’s teaching on collegiality described the body as an authoritative, dignified, and agential body. The body is capable of action, and the head and body together share in one ordinary, proper, and full authority. This organic, ecclesial body is also made up of active, living members who participate in the threefold ministry of Christ. In both of these teachings, the ecclesial head is not the sole source of action and governance, nor does the body simply obey the head. This image of the body finds support in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. At the same time, phenomenology challenges the *Nota Explicativa Praevia*’s position that the head can act without the knowledge, consent, or

² Neil Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 64–67.

collaboration of the body. A phenomenological approach to embodiment will call into question this lingering mind-body dualism in conciliar ecclesiology and advance a vision of a more thoroughly dialogical and synodal church.

Regarding the vertical dimension of the metaphor, at the council the church is never styled the ‘ongoing incarnation’ or continuation of Christ but is only analogous to the incarnation of the Word in human form insofar as the church is made up of both divine and human elements (LG 8). The council texts often use instead the concepts of “sacrament” and “people of God” to express the church’s relation to the divine. Merleau-Ponty restores the capacity of the corporeal metaphor to adequately express the relation between the church and the risen Christ by distinguishing between, while still uniting, biological existence and personal existence. On the one hand, the body is the constitutive possibility of our being-in-the-world; on the other hand, due to illness or injury, the body can, to some degree, withdraw from the world and refuse personal and social co-existence. As Merleau-Ponty put it, “bodily existence...is only the barest raw material of a genuine presence in the world.”³ This phenomenological understanding of the capacity of the body both to mediate and inhibit personal presence offers an important new way of understanding how the church can imperfectly manifest Christ in the world while still rightly being called the “body of Christ.”

Before exploring in more detail the ecclesiology that proceeds from theological reflection on Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body, we must recall the function, as well as the limits, of metaphor in ecclesiology. In chapter one, I noted the main arguments against beginning a systematic ecclesiology with a metaphor or using a metaphor as a ‘blueprint’ for ecclesiology: they are too idealized and obscure the historical reality of the church; they do not lead to

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 165.

concrete reflection on the life of the church or its institutional structures; they are laden with ideological tendencies without any mechanisms for adjudicating between conflicting metaphors; and they are ‘pre-scientific’ and insufficiently systematic, and so belong only to religious or spiritual language rather than second-order theological discourse. Using the work of Janet Martin Soskice, I argued instead that these ornamentalist or emotive theories of metaphor fail to acknowledge that metaphors *add* meaning and understanding and unleash new cognitive possibilities that cannot be encompassed by literal speech. They do this by uniting the ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’ of a metaphor—the underlying subject of the metaphor and the mode in which the metaphor is expressed. In a metaphor, tenor and vehicle unite and ‘interanimate’ one another, disclosing new meaning and interpretive possibilities by drawing upon one or more sets of “associative networks” that adhere to the ‘vehicle’ and considering the ‘tenor’ in light of those.

In the metaphor “the church is a body,” the tenor is “the church,” and the vehicle is “body.” As I have shown throughout the preceding chapters, the “associative networks of meaning” pertaining to the term “body” typically involved the unity of organs, limbs, or parts under a single head. In this way, “body” indicates a bounded entity, with a straightforward notion of membership in this body. While this may have been the dominant meaning of the body in the past two centuries, especially among Roman theologians and the magisterium, we have seen other ‘associative networks’ pertaining to the body as well. Möhler, for example, saw the body as the external material expression of the spirit that grows and develops through time. The French stream in the early twentieth century emphasized the one common life that permeated the body. At times, the body was framed as a female-maternal-spousal body; at other times, the emphasis on headship, hierarchy, and order suggests a more masculinist conception of the body. In general, these networks of meaning, when ‘interanimating’ the tenor ‘church,’ lent themselves to

a papal-centric, exclusionary, and centripetal ecclesiology. There is clearly no singular meaning to the term ‘body’ that persists across history and exists outside of cultural and ecclesiological-theological concerns.

In applying the ‘associative networks of meaning’ from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, I am consciously invoking one particular understanding of embodiment to advance postconciliar Catholic ecclesiology. In so doing, we must acknowledge not only the limits of ecclesial metaphors but the differences between an individual, bio-physiological body animated by an individual psyche or soul and the ecclesial body, a social group. Merleau-Ponty’s conclusions are drawn from studies of neurology, neurophysiology, child psychology, and the effects of traumatic brain injury and other ‘pathological’ conditions. Some of his later readers mentioned in chapter five, such as Elizabeth Grosz, Gail Weiss, Mayra Rivera, and Iris Marion Young, develop Merleau-Ponty’s work through consideration of psychoanalytic theory, particularly the development of the body image in early childhood, and the impact of a racist, sexist, patriarchal society on the body image and bodily capacities/movements of women and men of color. These studies obviously focus on the individual personal organic body, even as they demonstrate the intercorporeal nature of the body, its dependence on other bodies and interwovenness with the social and culture world.

The ecclesial body is a body in the corporate sense—not a literal organism with a nervous system, individual consciousness, organs, and flesh. But this does not preclude the application of Merleau-Ponty’s work, and other aspects of body studies, to the ecclesial body, for two reasons. First, as my prior chapters have shown, it has never presented this limit before, for theologians throughout history—beginning with none other than St. Paul—have been drawing analogies between the church and the individual human body. In this regard, my work in this chapter

continues a methodology employed throughout the tradition. Second, as Soskice has argued, metaphors allow two *different* realities to ‘interanimate’ one another. It is by uniting tenor and vehicle and their associative networks “that a metaphor is genuinely creative and says something that can be said adequately in no other way, not as an ornament to what we already know but as an embodiment of a new insight.”⁴ The interanimation of tenor and vehicle take us beyond the dictionary definitions of the terms within a metaphor to the world of meanings associated with those terms, inviting us to consider a relatively unknown (the church) through a relatively known (the body). As we move into considering the ecclesial body from a phenomenological lens, we must remember also that, per Soskice, because metaphors are not simply ornamental descriptions of an already-understood reality, they cannot be ‘translated’ into literal terms without loss of meaning and cognitive (and so also affective) content. A metaphor’s cognitive uniqueness is irreducible to “words proper” or strictly literal usages. Therefore, the metaphor of the church as an *intercorporeal body* is worthy of quiet meditation prior to the task of ‘translation’ or explanation of the metaphor. Nevertheless, the task of ecclesiology requires such an exposition.

Finally, it is important to clarify some terminology used in this chapter. In what follows I attend to the relationship between the church and the world and to the church’s mission in and to the world. In Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, the term ‘world’ means something like ‘situation’ or ‘context’ and is value-neutral. In the texts of Vatican II, according to Massimo Faggioli, the meaning of the term ‘world’ “is not to be understood only geographically (the new awareness of the globally and interconnectedness of humankind) or metaphysically (the world as the earthly dimension), but also, and in a new way, in the sense of the level of human institutions that govern the economic and political dimensions of our lives in a way that is autonomous and

⁴ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 48.

independent from the church but not completely separated from it.”⁵ The pastoral constitution

Gaudium et Spes gives a very specific and clear definition to the term, saying that “world” means

the world of women and men, the entire human family seen in its total environment. It is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and failures. It is the world which Christians believe has been created and is sustained by the love of its maker, has fallen into the slavery of sin but has been freed by Christ...so that it might be fashioned anew according to God’s design and brought to its fulfillment (2).

In other words, the world is the total social and created reality in which we live and in which the mystery of salvation takes place. The term does not carry universally negative associations of sinfulness, though at times it is contrasted with the coming reign of God (as with other dyadic terms such as ‘secular/religious’ and ‘spiritual/temporal’) and is in need of sanctification.⁶

The second term in need of specification is “mission.” The church’s mission, rooted in God’s own mission in Christ and the Spirit, is fundamentally the proclamation of the gospel. In *Ad Gentes*, the church’s mission is to announce “the faith and salvation which comes from Christ” in order to open for all people “a sure path to full participation in the mystery of Christ” and to incorporate all people into Christ “and into the church which is his body” (AG 5, 7). In *Gaudium et Spes* chapter four, we see that this proclamation of the gospel has both spiritual-religious and social-material dimensions. The church offers existential meaning and the truth of the human person, promotes dignity and human rights, stands up for religious and other human freedoms, fosters solidarity and union among communities, and orders all things to the common good. Postconciliar statements by the magisterium have continued to value the church’s social mission, but at times have strongly reasserted the Christocentric and ecclesiocentric elements of mission as well. For instance, Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) expanded the notion of

⁵ Faggioli, *Catholicism and Citizenship*, 47.

⁶ For other philosophical and theological meanings of “world,” see Gerd Haefner, “World,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, 1832–1838 (New York: Seabury, 1975).

mission “to include a variety of activities other than direct proclamation of the gospel, conversion, and planting the church,” such as witnessing to the gospel through one’s own life of faith, hope, and love, and working for spiritual and material liberation from injustice and oppression.⁷ John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio* includes interreligious dialogue as part of the church’s social and peacemaking mission, yet the encyclical emphasizes the Christological focus of missionary work, that is, its task to invite all people to explicit faith in/conversion to Christ and baptism in the church.⁸ In sum, missionary activity is multifaceted, seeking to bring all people to Christ through the church and to be the seed of the kingdom of God by offering true liberation and integral human development.

II. The Intercorporeal Body of Christ

1. Being-in-the-world, mission, and the church’s relationship with ‘the other’

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated that the image of the body has predominantly been understood within Catholic ecclesiology as a self-enclosed, centripetal reality, a perfect society sufficient unto itself, in which alone a divine or personal identity dwells. What Merleau-Ponty’s work offers in response is an understanding of the body as intercorporeal and centrifugal, inherently embedded in and preconsciously engaged with the world. Merleau-Ponty has shown that existence is embodied being-in-the-world. The body projects a meaningful world around it and the body’s habitual embeddedness in a world enables the formation of a body schema and the capacity for meaningful action. In other words, there is no *body* without

⁷ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 145. See Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), www.vatican.va, 21–47, especially 29–39 for the document’s articulation of liberation as not reducible to a temporal project.

⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate (December 7, 1990), www.vatican.va, see especially 46.

world, and vice versa. I know myself as a subject through my interactions with other objects and situations. In fact, it is only through dialogue with another seer-subject that I can gain a fuller perspective on my own body. All perception is therefore perspectival, and I can only ever see my body from *within*, from a fixed and limited perspective. I cannot move around my body to see it from another angle as I can perceive other objects or bodies. This is not simply the result of the position of our eyes in our head, but because of the very structure of our being as enfleshed in a world. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as being-in-the-world advances the Second Vatican Council's renewed vision of church-world relations and the importance of dialogue held up by the conciliar texts and the event of the council itself.

The notion of the body as being-in-the-world captures well the insight expressed in the English title of *Gaudium et Spes*—that the church is *in* the modern world, “living and acting with it,” not separate from or adjacent to it (40). As already indicated, the world is the total social and created reality in which we live and in which the mystery of salvation takes place. The church cannot but exist within this total social and created reality and as contributing to it. In this sense, the church is always *of* the world, meaning that as a community and institution it is constituted by the whole human, historical, cultural and social world (for better or for worse). In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's work also shows us the impossibility of considering a body as a perfect society, for the body and the world are inherently interdependent. Contra *Mystici Corporis*, the church in history is not *really* self-sustaining—no body is. The church and the world are interwoven in chiasmic relation and are constituted by one ‘flesh’—the joys and hopes, griefs and sorrows of the world are the joys and hopes, griefs and sorrows of Christians and the church (GS 1), and the “members of the earthly city are called to form the family of the children of God” (GS 40). Like all bodies, the church *only exists* in this intercorporeal mode, as constituted by other bodies and

the world (though not to the exclusion of also being constituted by God's grace). As the council puts it, the church "travels the same journey as all of humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world," and "the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other" (GS 40). In fact, the council rejects the notion that a Christian may withdraw from the world (understood here as the temporal realm of secular activities) or "evade their earthly responsibilities," and urges instead that Christians integrate their "human, domestic, professional, scientific, and technical enterprises with religious values" (GS 43). Church and world *must* interweave one another, in order for the human needs of the world to stir the Christian and for the gospel to penetrate the world.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as being-in-the-world means that the world shapes our bodies and our bodies give us a world. In my earlier example, I perceive a kitchen chair according to my bodily task at hand (sitting at a table or reaching atop a cabinet); likewise, I experience my body as either short or tall, capable or limited, in relation to my built environment. As James K. A. Smith makes clear from Merleau-Ponty's work, the body does not perceive disconnected sensory data but a "practical field," a situation, a meaningful world with objects that are purposeful for my body and its task at hand.⁹ The body's mission in the world shapes its perception of that world and vice versa. For ecclesiology, this suggests that our theological perception of the world will shape our ideas of what the church's mission is. For example, if we perceive the world as infected by heresy and in need of doctrinal truth, we may understand the mission of the church body as bringing all persons into the one true church. In contrast, if we perceive the world as the raw material of the kingdom of God, we might see the liberation of the poor as central to the church's mission. In turn, how we perceive the world and

⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 51.

how we move toward it in mission will impact how we understand the nature of the church as a body, the significance of the body's various 'members,' and the relative importance of the teaching, governing, and pastoral authorities in the church. If the church's mission is to proclaim doctrinal truth to a world blinded by heresy, those with teaching authority will be seen as the most valuable or central members of the ecclesial body. If the mission of the church is to cultivate the seeds of the reign of God in a world torn by poverty and racial violence, we may more readily value those members of the ecclesial body who are engaged in the daily work of staffing food pantries and housing the homeless, advocating for policy reforms, and galvanizing others for social justice.¹⁰

In short, the church's work *ad extra* cannot but transform its structures *ad intra*, and structural reform *ad intra* must be driven by church's mission *ad extra*. This is precisely the vision of Pope Francis when he said in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the church's customs and structures ought to be renewed "for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (27).¹¹ For Francis, structural reform isn't an end in itself but rather is at the service of mission and is inspired by mission. A "change of structures' (from obsolete ones to new ones) will not be the result of reviewing an organizational flow chart, which would lead to a

¹⁰ It is well known that the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes* was marked by conflicts between competing theologies of the world, one more optimistic and Thomist represented by French theologians such as Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu on the one hand, the other more dialectical and Augustinian, represented by Joseph Ratzinger and Henri de Lubac. See Joseph Komonchak, "Augustine, Aquinas, or the Gospel *sine glossa*? Divisions over *Gaudium et Spes*," in Austen Ivereigh, ed., *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years After Vatican II* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 102–118, and Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), chapter 4. Karl Rahner's position within these debates "is particularly intriguing, for while he joined and even led the Germanophone Augustinian critics of Schema XIII, he operated within and remained committed to a Thomistic framework shared by the document's strongest proponents" (Brandon Peterson, "Critical Voices: The Reactions of Rahner and Ratzinger to 'Schema XIII' [*Gaudium et Spes*]," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 1 [January 2015]: 1–26).

¹¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (November 24, 2013), www.vatican.va. Francis even quotes John Paul II on this point as saying "all renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion" (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* [November 22, 2001], 19).

static reorganization; rather it will result from the very dynamics of mission. What makes obsolete structures pass away, what leads to a change of heart in Christians, is precisely missionary spirit.”¹² “Even good structures,” he says, “are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s ‘fidelity to her own calling,’ any new structure will soon prove ineffective” (EG 26).¹³ Structural reform must be part of the total “missionary transformation” of the church that sends the church into the streets and to the peripheries to joyfully proclaim the mercy of God.

To say with Merleau-Ponty that the ecclesial body of Christ is thoroughly *in* and *of* the world, though, is not to claim that there is no difference between church and world. Merleau-Ponty does not conflate body and world. Flesh is medium and communication, but is also distance and separation. There is a unity in difference and difference in unity characteristic of flesh. Difference is constitutive of perception, sensation, vision, and touch, of communication and union. The visibility of my own flesh instantiates me in a world of visible objects, yet “at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body.”¹⁴ The visible is precisely the visible of the *invisible*; every body is the subject of an infinite depth. And while I can experience my own body as both subject and object (the double-sensation of Husserl), I can *only* experience my own body—never another body or another object—as subject. As Kearney puts it, “there is always an element of the invisible and the untouchable in the other’s life. The reversibility of touching-touched is imminent but never fully realized. There

¹² Pope Francis, “Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting,” Rio de Janeiro (July 28, 2013), www.vatican.va; henceforth “2013 address.”

¹³ Emphasis mine.

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 135.

remains a gap. And the gap makes all the difference, preventing fusion and keeping open the task of transit and translation between self and other.”¹⁵ Still, all distance, all difference, all invisible depth is subtended by our common “cohesion” in flesh which “prevails over every momentary discordance.”¹⁶

This non-identity of body and world allows the church, as a body, to continue to affirm its own rightful autonomy as well as that of the world and other religious bodies, as the council does (GS 36, 59; NA 2). It is this autonomy from the world (e.g., nation-states) and separation of spiritual and temporal powers that a *societas perfecta* theology sought to protect in the first place.¹⁷ It also allows room to distinguish the values of the Christian ecclesial body from ‘worldly’ values—not in the sense in which ‘world’ has been defined above, but in the contrastive sense of ‘fallen’ or ‘that which is opposed to the reign of God.’ The church, as a sacrament of salvation and seed of the reign of God, has quite different values and visions of the good that distinguish it from the human, social, temporal world of capitalism and consumerism, for example. And yet—it is also true that the church as a human and social reality *is* ‘of the world’ in this sense of being complicit in and beholden to sin. As Franz Fanon, Mayra Rivera, and Gail Weiss have shown, the intercorporeality of the body and body schema is the ground of our communion with others and the world as well as the ground of the violence we inflict on one another. Other bodies in the world can misperceive another’s body, objectifying and dehumanizing the body by imposing a racialized and sexualized body schema on it to the extent that an individual’s bodily and psychic being-in-the-world is violently restricted.¹⁸ Similarly, the

¹⁵ Richard Kearney, “The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics,” in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 39.

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.

¹⁷ See Patrick Granfield, “The Rise and Fall of *Societas Perfecta*,” *Concilium* 157 (1982): 3–8.

¹⁸ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Duke University Press, 2015), and Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013).

mutual involvement of church and world can malform both subjects and misshape the church's efforts to embody Christ; the structures of white supremacy, sexism, and colonialism that shape our present world are no stranger to the church.¹⁹ In short, the church is distinct from the world in that it enjoys autonomy from other religious and political bodies and aims at values 'not of this world' (Jn 18:36), but the church always is *of* the world both in the sense of existing within the "theater of human history" (GS 2) and in the sense of being distorted by sin, just as the world is. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the intercorporeal body, constituted by the same flesh as the world, allows the metaphor of the church as a body to honestly accept rather than reject our embeddedness in the world—and so to attend to ways in which the world and the church (both in its structures and in its members) contribute to one another's good, but are also mutually caught up in patterns and structures of sin.

One way in which the Second Vatican Council embraced the idea of the church as *in* the world is in its frequent use of the term "dialogue." *Gaudium et Spes*, like Pope Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*, affirms multiple spheres of dialogue: *ad intra* among members of the church, and *ad extra* between the Catholic church and other Christian churches, with members of other religions, and with the world or all humanity. As Ormond Rush states, the council realized that the proclamation of the gospel would be "ineffective without dialogic openness to the perspectives and contexts of the intended receivers of the proclamation, whether they be believers or nonbelievers."²⁰ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder have offered the term "prophetic dialogue" as a synthesis of the strains of mission theology that have developed since

¹⁹ We might consider, as one example, the USCCB's near-total alliance with the Republican Party at the expense of defending the rights and dignity of the poor and various marginalized communities such as migrants and LGBT persons. See Sam Sawyer, SJ, "Cardinal Dolan's Praise for President Trump Was A Pastoral Failure," *America* (May 4, 2020), <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/05/04/cardinal-dolans-praise-president-trump-was-pastoral-failure>.

²⁰ Ormond Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), 14, 255.

Vatican II. In fact, they argue that we ought to see mission *as* dialogue. Mission must begin with openness to and respect for the other and an attentiveness to the ways in which God is already at work within other peoples, cultures, and traditions. Then, the proclamation of Jesus Christ as universal savior must be done in humility and vulnerability so that the gospel might become fully inculturated in and as a local church.²¹

The conciliar and postconciliar tradition tends to embrace dialogue *ad extra* for the sake of two particular ends: for the effective proclamation of Christ as savior, and to learn about the ‘other’ and how the Spirit of Christ is at work in other peoples and traditions. To this first point, *Ad Gentes* 11 urges full appreciation for and authentic relationships with a local culture “in order to bear fruitful witness to Christ.” This dialogue with culture, if not actually dialogue with other religions, is valued in Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi* for the same reason: “Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addresse[d], if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life” (63). In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II states that the immersion of the missionary in a local culture is necessary because “only if they have this kind of awareness will they be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mystery in a credible and fruitful way” (53). In other words, dialogue is seen as the *context* for and *means of* proclamation of Christian truth. The document “Dialogue and Proclamation” affirms dialogue as a “legitimate and necessary” element of the church’s mission, but indicates that dialogue is ultimately at the service of proclamation: “true interreligious dialogue on the part of the Christian supposes the desire to make Jesus Christ better known, recognized and loved; proclaiming Jesus Christ is to be carried out in the Gospel

²¹ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*.

spirit of dialogue” (77).²² Dialogue has a particularly ecclesiocentric aim for John Paul II: “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (RM 55, emphasis original). Dialogue is about effectively sharing with others the truth that we, the Catholic Church, already enjoy in its fullness.

Second, dialogue provides an opportunity to notice how God, in the Spirit of Christ, is present in other religions and cultures and to bring the gospel message to those elements of a religion or culture which are not in accord with God’s desire for humanity. *Lumen Gentium* recognizes this, saying that “whatever good is found sown in people’s hearts and minds, or in the rites and customs of peoples...is purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God” through the proclamation of the Gospel to all people (17). *Nostra Aetate* states that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy” in other religions which “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women” (2). *Ad Gentes* encourages dialogue with other cultures and religious traditions so “that through sincere and patient dialogue [Christians] might learn of the riches a generous God has distributed among the nations” (11). Missionary activity should seek “those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God,” even if it is also to “purge [those elements of truth and grace] of evil associations” due to their original cultural or religious context (AG 9). Because the council acknowledges the presence of truth and grace in other religions, Christian must have an attitude of genuine openness “to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions” (DP 49). Through interreligious dialogue, Christians can “discover the active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ beyond the visible boundaries of the Church and the

²² Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (May 19, 1991), www.vatican.va.

Christian fold” (DP 50) and can grow in understanding of others, resulting in the “elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings” between religions (RM 56). Such dialogue can also spur the church “to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all” (RM 56). These conciliar and postconciliar texts offer a positive appreciation of other religious traditions, insofar as they may contain ‘rays of truth’ (NA 2) and ‘seeds of the Word’ (AG 11) that enable their adherents to encounter the salvation offered in Christ alone.

I do not contest the importance of dialogue and inculturation amidst missionary work, nor do I contest the basic theological claim that universal salvation is offered in Christ and that the church exists to continue the mission of Christ. Yet what we see from the texts quoted above is that dialogue is often treated as a means of effectively proclaiming *my* truth to others and of identifying *my* truth in fragment or in seed in other people, traditions, and cultures. Dialogue is rarely treated as an opportunity for genuine learning, for receiving from others truths or insights that I (read: the Catholic Church) do not already possess.²³ In this regard, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology can press the conciliar and postconciliar embrace of dialogue even further, beyond a one-way proclamation of truth or identification of Christian truth in other religions.²⁴

²³ “Dialogue and Proclamation” does embrace the possibility of true learning, correction, and growth through interreligious dialogue, but at the level of the individual Christian, and not for the church as a whole. See article 49: “The fullness of truth received in Jesus Christ does not give *individual Christians* the guarantee that they have grasped that truth fully.... *Christians* must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions. Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified” (emphasis mine). We see this individualist approach in article 32 as well, mentioned below. Even if individual Christians stand to learn from other religious persons and traditions, the document still maintains that the Christian church has received the fullness of revelation. It does not suggest that the church as a whole might not have grasped the truth fully and so would need to learn from others outside the church.

²⁴ The unidirectionality of the church’s understanding of dialogue is evidenced in its otherwise positive move of offering a truly theological ground for dialogue. See “Dialogue and Proclamation” 38: “The foundation of the Church’s commitment to dialogue is not merely anthropological but primarily theological. God, in an age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all men and women.” God’s offer of salvation to humankind is a one-directional offer. Humanity has nothing to offer God in return except loving acceptance of the gift of grace

Because all perception is inherently perspectival, I have a necessarily limited perspective both on the world *and on my own body*. Consequently, other subjects have a unique perspective on my body, and they can see things about myself that I cannot and never will be able to see. In light of this, dialogue between the church and other religions and the world must not be simply a strategic or more effective approach to evangelization or even a more comprehensive way of knowing the divine. Dialogue is essential for the Catholic Church *to know itself* more fully and more accurately. Dialogue must not simply be about proclamation but about learning. Others who are not, or no longer, part of the church can perceive things about the church that the body itself, or members of the church, may never be able to see or name. For example, persons and cultures who have been subject to colonial conquest and religious and cultural destruction in the name of the gospel are able to point out the violence committed by Christians and Christianity itself; likewise, persons of any or no religious commitment have called the church to account for its culture of clerical sexual abuse. Less dramatically, any individual can offer feedback to a Catholic or Christian regarding how well they seem to witness to love, justice, and mercy in their lives, as in the quote attributed to Gandhi, “Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”

The perspectival nature of perception urges the church to expand its practices of consultation (still limited even within the church!) to include non-Catholics, and perhaps especially former Catholics, in order to gain critical insight into its own bodily reality or institutional existence. The seeds of this are already found in at the council, both in its texts which state that the church in its mission is helped by the world (especially *Gaudium et Spes* Part

and the worship due to God. This asymmetry is appropriate in the context of divine-human relations, but is insufficient as a model of dialogue within the church, or between the church and other religions. This unfortunate analogy to God’s dialogue with humanity helps explain why the magisterium’s attempts at “dialogue” (ex. the Congregation for Catholic Education’s statement “‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education” [February 2, 2019]) is so painfully disappointing. Intra-ecclesial dialogue modeled on the economy of salvation/God’s dialogue will always be imbalanced. There is no genuine openness to learning on the side of the magisterium.

One: Chapter 4) and in its very practice of inviting ecumenical observers who were able to contribute to conciliar debates through conversations with *periti* and bishops *ex aula*.²⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* notes that the church throughout its history has benefited from the sciences, diverse cultures, “the evolution of social life,” and even “from the opposition of its enemies and persecutors” (44).²⁶ “Dialogue and Proclamation” points towards this as well, briefly indicating that interreligious dialogue can result in a renewed understanding of Christianity itself. In interreligious dialogue, “Christians too must allow themselves to be questioned. Notwithstanding the fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, the way Christians sometimes understand their religion and practise it may be in need of purification” (32). The church may enjoy the fullness of the means of salvation, but as *Gaudium et Spes* and now Pope Francis emphasize, the church stands to learn a lot from the world—from the natural sciences, from psychology and trauma studies, even from business management.²⁷ The metaphor of the church as an intercorporeal body, limited in its own perception of itself, invites us to dwell on and develop these insights. A church that is truly *in* and *of* the modern world must humbly consider the possibility that its own perspective on itself, on the world, and on revelation is limited, and that other religious bodies might offer a unique contribution to the common quest for truth.

2. Motor intentionality, the unity of the church, and the role of the head

²⁵ See Peter De Mey, “The Role of Non-Voting Participants in the Preparation and Conduct of the Council,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 87–88.

²⁶ On the last point, the constitution cites texts from Justin and Tertullian in which they note that the persecution of Christians ultimately leads to more people believing in Christ. In our day, I suggest that the “enemies and persecutors” from whom we might learn are those who point out the church’s failure to embody its gospel message (for example, regarding the culture of clericalism and sexual abuse).

²⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* 44 and Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (November 24, 2013).

Through its embeddedness in a world, the embodied subject enjoys a ‘motor intentionality,’ a preconscious apprehension of the world around it. Unlike the patient Schneider, whose brain injury causes a loss of motor intentionality, the ‘normal subject’ seamlessly unites visual, tactile, and other sensory data without needing to engage a symbolizing or objectifying function. Merleau-Ponty rejects the intellectualist account of perception that would explain Schneider’s condition as merely a slowing-down of the process of mentally integrating a flurry of sensory data. Instead, Merleau-Ponty gives us something radically different: the body’s unity is *not* a result of ‘the head,’ a conscious cognitive process of governance or integration, but is the result of habitual inherence and intentional action in a world. This offers Catholic ecclesiology a way of reconsidering ecclesial unity and the relationship between the papal head and the body of bishops and other members of the body of Christ.

First, an ecclesiological appropriation of Merleau-Ponty’s account of motor intentionality suggests that the mission of the whole people of God, rather than governance from the head, is the foundation of the church’s unity, both within the Catholic Church and across Christian churches. The church is a united body when and because it exists in-the-world and toward-the-world. As we saw from Merleau-Ponty, “the body is not first a unified group of organs that *then* confront the things around them; rather, the body is an integral part of the subject-object dialogue, that is, an openness onto things that allows them to come into fuller presence at the same time that they call upon the body to become more completely the ‘hold’ it already has on them.”²⁸ This resonates with Vatican II’s vision of the church not just as a *communio* but as a

²⁸ Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, “Introduction: The Value of Flesh: Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy and the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate,” in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 4, emphasis original.

“communion-in-mission,” as Steven Bevens has argued.²⁹ It is through movement and meaningful action in the midst of a world-situation that the body integrates its limbs and sensations. Without mission—without the motor intentionality and ‘intentional arc of consciousness’ borne from continual existence in a world-situation, without *being-toward-the-world*—the church would be like Schneider, incapable of uniting its members into a coherent, whole organism. The unity of the church as a body comes about through the common participation by all members in living the life of Christ, proclaiming the kingdom, feeding the hungry, clothing the poor. The church is, after all, missionary “by its very nature” (AG 2).

This understanding of bodily unity stands in contrast to one of the most enduring, and anti-Protestant, interpretations of the metaphor of the church as a body in modern ecclesiology—that unity in the body requires unity with the (papal) head, specifically on matters of teaching and governance. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology suggests, rather, that the unity of the church-body is a unity of mission-driven action. Texts on mission commonly acknowledge the need for greater ecumenical unity in order to present a more compelling common Christian witness to the world.³⁰ As Paul VI wrote, “Before all men can be brought together and restored to the grace of God our Father, communion must be reestablished between those who by faith have acknowledged and accepted Jesus Christ.” Merleau-Ponty invites us to consider the inverse: the work of evangelization—especially in the sense of the church’s task to promote human dignity and work for human development and liberation from all forms of injustice—might be a *means* of, rather than a result of, ecumenical unity. This “mission first” approach is common in

²⁹ Stephen Bevens, “The Church in Mission,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 136–54 and Bevens, “Beyond the New Evangelization: Toward a Missionary Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century,” in *A Church With Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hahnenberg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 3–22.

³⁰ *Ad Gentes* 6, 15; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 77; *Redemptoris Missio* 50.

interreligious dialogue and is known as a “dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people;” it exists alongside, and not in contrast or competition with, other forms of dialogue such as dialogue of theological exchange, of religious experience, and of life (DP 42).³¹ Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body suggests that we apply this “dialogue of action” or “mission first” approach to ecumenical dialogue as well. The Christian church broadly understood, and the Catholic Church in particular, might effect greater unity among its members by placing collaboration in social mission before a dialogue of theological exchange. As even John Paul II admits, “only by becoming missionary will the Christian community be able to overcome its internal divisions and tensions, and rediscover its unity and its strength of faith” (RM 49).

Moreover, because the body’s continual inherence in a world results in a ‘habitual body’ or ‘body schema’ that may or may not be contiguous with the physiological body (ex. the phantom limb), the unity of the ecclesial body need not be envisioned as a strictly ‘organic’ unity. Recall that Joseph Ratzinger, in explaining the council’s choice to abandon the organic metaphor of the body on the issue of membership in the church, said that “the image of the body can only offer the idea of member in the sense of limb: one is either a limb or not, and there are no intermediary stages.”³² On the contrary: Merleau-Ponty has shown us that the body schema is dynamic and flexible and incorporates within it whatever enables it to accomplish its task. The blind person’s cane is part of his body—not an object that he perceives, but an extension of his body *through which* he perceives. This is not an organic unity as we typically think of the

³¹ The InterFaith Youth Corps has shown this “dialogue of action” to be quite successful in building relationships between young people of various religious traditions on local and national levels. See Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

³² Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,” in *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 15.

body—the hand and the cane are made of different substances or matter—but it is nevertheless a unity of existence, of being-toward-the-world. “My body” does not end at my fingertips but extends into and incorporates the flesh of the world.

This, I argue, is how we might understand *Lumen Gentium*’s statement that there are “degrees of incorporation” in the body of Christ—a phrase that, as I argued in chapter four, is not adequately explained by the council. Baptism and Eucharist admit a kind of substantial unity with Christ, incorporating us into his body in a particular way. But we might also think of other ‘people of goodwill,’ members of other religions, and all those in whom ‘rays of truth’ are found as ‘incorporated’ into the body of Christ analogous to how the body is constituted by the flesh of the world and extends itself through habit, as in the blind person and her cane.³³ One concrete instance of this more expansive, intercorporeal body might be the case of a Muslim, or agnostic, who works in human development for Catholic Relief Services. While not a ‘member’ of the body through baptism or Eucharist, they participate in the mission of the body and so can be said to be ‘incorporated’ into the body of Christ to some degree, aiding the body to *be* in the world. This example can be expanded to include all those who participate in the church’s social mission by working for or contributing to Catholic institutions such as schools, hospitals, and social service providers, regardless of their individual religious affiliation or non-affiliation. Bevans and Schroeder offer a similar perspective, though without using the language of membership. When we consider the fact that “mission precedes the church,” we see that

the church is not about the church. It is about what Jesus called the Reign of God. ... What we realize too is that people in the church don’t have a monopoly on working for the Reign of God. Maybe people don’t call it that, and maybe some people are even repulsed by the church. Nevertheless, they are our partners, our allies, and need to be our friends. St. Augustine said it wonderfully, “Many whom God has, the Church does not

³³ See *Lumen Gentium* 15: the church is ‘linked’ (*coniunctum esse*) with other baptized Christians; and *Lumen Gentium* 16, those who are “related (*ordinantur*) in various ways to the people of God.”

have; and many whom the Church has, God does not have.³⁴

The church, understood as the intercorporeal body of Christ, does indeed ‘have’ these partners and allies as members when mission is understood as the foundation and connective tissue of the ecclesial body.

Here I suggest we retrieve Möhler’s sense of the term “body” in *Unity in the Church*, in which “body” signified not a human or conscious organic body in particular, but the material expression of spirit. The ‘body of the Church’ was not limited, for Möhler, to ecclesiastical offices, baptized persons, or juridical structure. It included the whole range of the church’s doctrine, liturgy, and tradition—all those visible, material expressions of faith. In this sense, the ecclesial embodiment of Christ is not limited to juridical or sacramental union of persons with the institutional church but includes a broader range of incarnate material manifestations of faith in God in Christ. This more expansive understanding of incorporation in Christ, on the basis of participation in Christ’s mission, coheres with the long history of considering the “mystical body of Christ” as the *ecclesia ab Abel*, inclusive of all the just throughout history. Even Sebastian Tromp recognized that from the perspective of the incarnation, the mystical body of Christ includes all of humanity; it is only from the perspective of the cross and the paschal mystery that the mystical body of Christ is demarcated by baptism and Eucharist.³⁵ The flesh of the world and the flesh of the church interweave one another. Merleau-Ponty’s challenge to dichotomies of subject–object, interior–exterior, self–other provide the grounds for rejecting exclusivist

³⁴ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 16, citing Augustine, *De Baptismo* 5.38.

³⁵ Sebastian Tromp, *Corpus Christi, Quod Est Ecclesia*, trans. Ann Condit (New York: Vantage Press, 1960), 17–18, 38, 131 for example. Émile Mersch’s *The Whole Christ The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition*, trans. John R. Kelly, S.J. (London: Denis Dobson, 1962) also highlights patristic authors who hold this position.

interpretations of the ecclesial metaphor of the body that presume that a body has clear and static boundaries.

Merleau-Ponty's account of motor intentionality as the source of bodily unity also clearly relativizes the role of the head in the body. We have seen throughout the history of (mystical) body ecclesiology the influence of an Aristotelian notion of headship—the head gives life to the body, is its principle of unity and life, and is supereminent over other parts. Möhler's words in *Symbolism* painted a dramatic image of the constitutive role of the head of the church: "What a helpless, shapeless mass, incapable of all combined action, would the Catholic Church not have been, spread as she is over all the kingdoms of the earth, over all the parts of the world, had she been possessed of no head, no supreme bishop, revered by all."³⁶ Modern ecclesiology has also been marked by a dichotomy of the teaching church (*ecclesia docens*) and the learning church (*ecclesia discens*). MP's phenomenology of perception challenges this hierarchy of the head over the rest of the body. The body has a knowledge of the world, a praktognosia, that is preconscious and precognitive. All perception of the world begins in the body—not in some 'mind' abstracted from the body, and not as cognitive conceptual awareness, but as a meaningful grasp of a situation. In Merleau-Ponty's example, a woman who habitually wears a hat with a large feather does not need to take the measurements of a doorway to know if she and her hat will fit through it. Even if our perceptions eventually 'rise' to the level of conceptual knowledge, this is not the origin of perception, for even conceptual knowledge begins with and replies upon bodily perception. Still, as Shusterman has shown, reflective self-consciousness can improve the body's capacities to function in the world and accomplish its aims. Motor intentionality, then, provides a rich metaphor for rearticulating the dynamics of teaching and governance in the church—

³⁶ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings* (New York: Crossroad Pub, 1997), 307.

specifically, the importance of, and relations between, the *sensus fidelium*, collegiality, and synodality.

First, Merleau-Ponty's insight into the embodied nature of perception underscores the significance given by Vatican II to the *sensus fidei*—the apprehension of the faith by the whole body of the church (*sensus fidei fidelium*) and each of its members (*sensus fidei fidelis*). Following Yves Congar's *Lay People in the Church*, the council recognized that the whole people of God—the magisterium, theologians, and the faithful alike—participate in Christ's three offices of priest, prophet, and king.³⁷ This includes the teaching office as pertaining to the whole body of Christ, from the Bishop of Rome to the last lay believer. By situating the *sensus fidelium* within Christ's prophetic office, the council affirmed the capacity of the whole people of God, not just the hierarchical magisterium, to authentically teach the faith. In other words, knowledge of God and the truths of the faith do not reside first and foremost in the magisterium or the 'head' (*ecclesia docens*) who then teaches the faith to a passive body (*ecclesia discens*), but is given to the whole body of believers. Theologians such as Richard Gaillardetz and Ormond Rush have continued to develop a theology of the *sensus fidelium* as not only receiving the teaching authority of the magisterium but also as producing new insight and contributing in a unique way to the church's teaching office.³⁸ Within this theology of the whole body of Christ as the primary recipient of revelation, the role of the head can be understood as articulating and confirming the faith known and held by the whole body. For example, Peter Hünemann's conception of papal teaching authority "in which the pope functions as a kind of 'notary public,'

³⁷ Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster: Newmann Press, 1957).

³⁸ Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), *ibid.*, "Sensus Fidei: Faith 'Making Sense' of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 62 (June, 2001): 231–61; Richard Gaillardetz, "The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, edited by Bernard Hoose (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 95–114, especially 108–111.

formally affirming/witnessing the faith...not imposing a new teaching, but rather setting his ‘seal’ on that which has emerged in the consciousness of the Church” fits well with this phenomenological perspective on the body as the foundation of perception.³⁹

But as Merleau-Ponty made clear, it is not necessary for the body to ‘translate’ its know-how into cognitive expression for the ‘head. We do not need to engage a symbolizing function in order to move throughout the world. The *sensus fidei* can be understood likewise. As Gaillardetz has argued, the *sensus fidei*—the faith-knowledge of the body of Christ—is not some kind of ‘proto-doctrine’ that is only valid once it is affirmed by hierarchical authorities in doctrinal expression. It is already an authentic manifestation of the faith which, in being lived and witnessed to, is part of the church’s tradition and teaching office even prior to any ‘official’ recognition by the magisterium. Gaillardetz reminds us that

the church generally promulgates doctrine only in response to serious and enduring controversy regarding the substance of Christian faith. It does not follow, however, that doctrine is the most profound expression of the faith. ...Is it vital that the bishops consult the faithful prior to the formulation of church doctrine? Yes. Is it necessary that the comprehensive insight of all God’s people find its final and definitive form in church doctrine? No.⁴⁰

Pope Francis has acknowledged this non-cognitive dimension to the *sensus fidei* as well. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the people of God “does not err in faith, *even though it may not find words to*

³⁹ Peter Hünemann, “Die Herausbildung der Lehre von den definitive zu haltenden Wahrheiten seit dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil. Ein historischer Bericht und eine systematische Reflexion,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 21 (2000) 71–101, cited in Richard R. Gaillardetz, “The Ordinary Universal Magisterium: Unresolved Questions,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 468.

⁴⁰ Richard R. Gaillardetz, “Power and Authority in the Church: Emerging Issues,” in *A Church With Open Doors*, 95. The risk in this position is that it may allow insights from the *sensus fidelium* and results of dialogue to be swept under the rug. This is especially the case in our present context in which magisterial or curial documents are issued frequently and are widely available online; in this context, the written tradition (or tradition-in-process) is much more dominant and commands the news cycle well beyond any ordinary, precognitive manifestations of the *sensus fidelium*. This is painfully evident in the March 2021 *responsum ad dubium* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith against blessing same-sex unions, which functioned as an official *rejection* of a large swath of the *sensus fidei*. In order for Gaillardetz’s perspective to be compelling in practice, the papacy, episcopacy, and curia would need to operate in a more minimalist mode when it comes to the publication of documents, which seems unlikely to happen. Otherwise, the faithful will continue to expect, demand, or hope for papal approval or a ‘notary affirmation’ of the *sensus fidelium*.

explain that faith. ...The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression."⁴¹ Knowledge has its foundation in the body and is valid as such, whether or not this knowledge ever finds conceptual expression via the head.

Second, and similarly, Merleau-Ponty's work offers a further challenge to (post)conciliar ecclesiology on the subject of collegiality. As seen in chapter four, the council's hard-won doctrine on collegiality taught that the pope is first and foremost a member of the body of bishops, and that the body of bishops is not dependent on the pope for its authority. Yet *Lumen Gentium*, *Christus Dominus*, and especially the *Nota Explicativa Praevia* retain several passages that reassert the authority and primacy of the head over the body, even as it situates the head within the body as a member of it. This image of a head that hovers above the body and can act apart from or without it is untenable in light of a phenomenological approach to the body. While Merleau-Ponty's research does admit of the importance of the physiological head—Schneider's troubles are the result of a brain injury, after all—there is no mental activity that does not involve the body, no knowledge that does not begin in bodily perception, no language or speech that does not arise from the body. As Gaillardetz puts it, "Because the pope is the local bishop of Rome who, as such, functions as head of the college of bishops, he and the college can never be conceived as two distinct entities and two distinct (or as some [neo-Scholastic] manuals would say, 'inadequately distinct') subjects."⁴² Phenomenology urges Catholic ecclesiology to fulfill the council majority's vision of collegiality that was attenuated by 'compromise statements' in the final texts. The body—not to the exclusion of the head, but as members preobjectively

⁴¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* 119, emphasis mine.

⁴² Gaillardetz, "The Ordinary Universal Magisterium," 470.

engaged in the world—is the primary recipient of revelation, agent of speech and action, and perceiver of grace at work in the world.

Both of the positions I have described above—the *sensus fidelium* as a unique and foundational contribution to the church’s teaching office, and a vision of collegiality in which the head is never separate from the body—call for greater structures of dialogue at all levels within the church and a reconsideration of papal ministry and primacy vis-à-vis the college of bishops and the whole people of God. In order for the whole church to discern the *sensus fidelium* and, when called for, for the ecclesial head to affirm and express the knowledge that arises from the body’s engagement with the world, there must be structures that enable such communication and corporate self-reflection. Neither the body nor the head has flawless judgment; they must continually work together in a mutually informing and self-correcting process. More regular and robust structures of dialogue *within* the church, among all members and offices, are necessary for the church’s own self-knowledge, for perceiving the work of the Spirit, and for expressing and handing on the faith. There must be institutional channels by which the faith of the local church can be made known to its bishop, and by which the bishops individually and as a collegial body can share this *sensus fidelium* with one another and with the head of the church; in turn, any formal expression of the church’s faith or morals articulated by the head must originate from and reflect the body’s knowledge. As Brad Hinze has argued, “Dialogue provides the most important means for promoting communion in the church: *communion in relations* by advancing bonds of mutual trust and goodwill; *communion in convictions* by the effort to reach a consensus in judgments and decisions, even if a differentiated consensus, so as to foster a mutual commitment

and witness to the truth; *communion in mission*, promoting collaboration in action fostering the common good.”⁴³

Hinze has shown that there have been a number of such attempts at creating practices of dialogue since the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁴ Such structures include things like parish and diocesan pastoral councils and diocesan synods, the widely consultative and collaborative efforts by the U.S. bishops in crafting pastoral letters, the national Call To Action assembly organized by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Detroit in 1976, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, and the dialogical discernment process known as chapters employed by women’s religious communities. Hinze’s review of many of these practices of dialogue, however, shows that while the Roman Catholic Church has embraced ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue since the 1960s (both in terms of papal and curial statements in favor of dialogue, as seen above, and in actual participation in bilateral and multilateral dialogues), it has typically resisted the aforementioned efforts to increase dialogue *within* the church among the various “ranks” of the baptized. For example, some U.S. bishops rejected both the process and the final recommendations of the Call to Action conference, and such an extensive process of dialogue has not been repeated; the CDF disapproved of the U.S. bishops’ consultative method of generating episcopal teaching and it was abandoned during the drafting of a pastoral letter on women in the church in 1992; and the curia strongly resisted the Adrian Dominican sisters’ articulation of collegial authority within their congregation. Moreover, parish and diocesan pastoral councils and diocesan synod are not required by Vatican II and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, though they are encouraged. Even the synod of bishops—a structure created to increase

⁴³ Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 259, emphases original.

⁴⁴ Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*.

collaboration and communication between the pope and bishops—has often failed to be truly and effectively dialogical (that is, marked by sincere speaking and listening) in practice, due to both design flaws (i.e., numerous 8-minute pre-written speeches) and curial interference in small-group conversations.

Nevertheless, Pope Francis seems to be urging the church toward more widespread dialogical practices through his reforms of the synod of bishops and his desire for a truly synodal church. Synodality, for Francis, is fundamentally about listening.

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing.’ It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17) in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).⁴⁵

In accord with *Lumen Gentium*, Francis emphasizes that the whole people of God is infallible *in credendo*, thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit gifting the baptized with an instinct for the faith (*sensus fidei*). Lay faithful, bishops, theologians—all need to listen humbly to one another to collectively discern the voice of God and sense of the faith among them. “Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked.”⁴⁶ It is for this very reason that enacted more consultative procedures for the 2014 synod on the family, the 2018 synod on young people, and the 2019 synod on the Amazon.⁴⁷ In fact, in his 2018 apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, Francis mandated a three-phase

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (October 17, 2015), www.vatican.va, henceforth “50th Anniversary Address.”

⁴⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 236.

⁴⁷ Several commentators have noted the clumsy process of consultation preceding the 2018 synod, though it is surely a start. Amanda Osheim, for one, argues that we need more expansive and institutionalized procedures of consultation, including those that make use of sociological data, limited though that may be in itself. See Amanda C. Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (June 2019): 370–92, and the work of Julie Clague therein. Faggioli argues that structures of synodality also need to go beyond a diocesan or parish model to include new lay ecclesial movements Massimo Faggioli, “From Collegiality to Synodality: Promise and Limits of Francis’s ‘Listening Primacy,’” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (November 1, 2020): 360.

consultative process for the Synod of Bishops. In the preparatory phase, the bishops must consult the people of God by submitting questions to the faithful in their diocese; at the synodal gathering they discern the *consensus ecclesiae*; and the implementation of the synod's conclusion must finally be inculturated within local churches. This bottom-up or even circular dynamic shows that “the synodal process not only has its point of departure but also its point of arrival in the People of God.”⁴⁸ It is only through this ongoing and mutual process of *parrhesia* and listening that the Synod of Bishops can become “a privileged instrument for listening to the People of God.”⁴⁹

These efforts toward a fully synodal church are part of the “conversion of the papacy” that Francis first envisioned in *Evangelii Gaudium*.⁵⁰ Inspired by John Paul II's interest in seeking “a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation,”⁵¹ Francis is developing a “listening primacy,” in which the role of the head is not primarily to direct or govern the body but to listen to its members.⁵² As Francis says,

synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. ... the Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but *within it* as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time—as Successor of Peter—to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.⁵³

The exercise of the papacy must be situated within a truly synodal church; the head is grounded in the whole body. Francis is working towards this “listening papacy” not only by more frequently making use of a reformed Synod of Bishops, but also by creating the College of

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution On the Synod of Bishops *Episcopalis Communio* (September 15, 2018), www.vatican.va, 7.

⁴⁹ *Episcopalis Communio* 6.

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, “50th Anniversary Address” and *Evangelii Gaudium* 32.

⁵¹ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 95.

⁵² Massimo Faggioli, “Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words,” *The Way* 59, no. 4 (October 2020): 89–100.

⁵³ Pope Francis, “50th Anniversary Address,” second emphasis mine.

Cardinals and by drawing heavily from the documents of episcopal conferences in his own papal documents. By exercising his papacy in a more synodal way, and by making synods more deeply consultative (and potentially even deliberative⁵⁴), Francis is restoring the primacy of the whole body of the faithful in knowing and teaching the faith. As Rush notes, in something of a contrast to Vatican II's "downward" vision of synodality as a balancing of primacy with collegiality, Francis' vision of synodality is "a promotion of an 'upward' direction in the teaching, sanctifying, and governing aspects of the Catholic Church."⁵⁵ This is precisely the kind of dialogical body that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception unveils.

Of course, these various forms of dialogue, collaboration, and consultation must not simply turn ecclesial energy or focus inward onto the structural mechanisms of the church. Reform is never reform for its own sake; decentralization is always for the sake of evangelization. Any increase in synodality and dialogue must be for the sake of the church's mission in the world. But a renewed emphasis on the church's missionary nature does not obviate the need for critical self-reflection on *ad intra*, structural issues. As with Shusterman's 'somatic education,' regular conscious attention to the body—its knowledge, its positionality, the health and habits of its members—can enhance the body's movement and mission in the world. We might think of various intentional dialogical gatherings—from parish council meetings to diocesan synods to ecumenical councils—as so many ecclesial analogues to Shusterman's "disciplines of somatic education," the "temporary retreat from action" that allows for greater bodily self-awareness and the possibility of correcting bad or ineffective habits in order to improve the body's performance or effective action in the world. This is the complement to my

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, *Episcopalis Communio* 3 and article 18, §1.

⁵⁵ Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium* in a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 78, no. 2 (2017): 303.

argument that the church's life *ad extra* shapes and informs its structure *ad intra*. The inverse also holds—more effective ecclesial structures and greater self-awareness through ongoing dialogue at all levels of the church can improve the church's mission *ad extra*. As Francis has noted, the move toward a more synodal church “has significant ecumenical implications” for the Catholic Church's relations with the Orthodox churches. He and others have also suggested that synodality has missionary import insofar as it can model participation, solidarity, authority as service, and the absolute value of human dignity for secular governments.⁵⁶ It is also reflective of the new church-world relationship affirmed at Vatican II. As Amanda Osheim puts it, “Rather than creating a church turned inward upon itself, through synodal practices and structures, the church discerns how to live faithfully in the midst of particular contexts.”⁵⁷ A truly synodal church recognizes the inculturated nature of doctrine and worship and celebrates the diverse expressions of the Catholic faith. In this way, it reflects a fundamentally positive view of the world and its peoples and fosters the church's mission of proclaiming the gospel to all people.

3. The ecclesial body as the “raw material” of Christ's presence in the world

The vertical dimension of the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ not only raises ecclesiological and exegetical questions regarding the relationship between Christ and the church, but touches on an enduring question in philosophy and theological anthropology as well—the relationship between one's body and one's self, identity, or person. As we saw in Chapter Two, ever since Johann Adam Möhler's statement in *Symbolism* that “the visible Church...is the Son of God himself...the permanent incarnation of the same, as in Holy Writ,

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, 50th Anniversary Address. See also Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II*, 325 and Faggioli, “Synod and Synodality in Pope Francis's Words,” 93.

⁵⁷ Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church,” 392.

even the faithful are called ‘the body of Christ,’” theologians have continued to describe the church as an ‘ongoing incarnation’ of Christ.⁵⁸ In Chapter Three, we saw how Yves Congar and Émile Mersch described the relationship between the visible church and the mystical body of Christ as analogous to the unity of body and soul, and used this analogy to justify and explain that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church. As the body localizes and manifests the soul, so the church manifests the Kingdom of God and is the instrument of the life of Christ. As the soul animates a living body and is only perceptible by means of the body, so the Spirit of Christ animates the church and is only encountered in the church. To call the church the “body of Christ,” then, is to affirm the church as “a Christophany, the visible body of his Spirit, of his *pneuma*.”⁵⁹ This near-identity between Christ and the church was thoroughly critiqued in the decades leading up to the council, and the Second Vatican Council makes no use of the body-soul analogy in its ecclesiology.⁶⁰ Instead, the conciliar fathers develop the notion of the church as a sacrament, “since the concept of sacrament is able to express the unity between the sign and the referent of that sign at the same time that it maintains their distinction.”⁶¹ In this way, “sacrament” expresses what the council fathers felt that “body” could not—the mediation of a reality that is not the fullness of that reality itself.

Merleau-Ponty’s work offers three ways of rethinking the relationship between body and self that allow for a more nuanced reading of the ecclesial “body of Christ” as mediating, but not

⁵⁸ Möhler, *Symbolism*, 258–59

⁵⁹ Yves Congar, “The Church and Its Unity,” in *The Mystery of the Church*, first ed. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960), 70.

⁶⁰ Theologians in our own day remind us that the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, by identifying the former with or as the latter, leaves no room to account for sin in the church. For example, Brian Flanagan cautions against any ecclesial metaphor that would reify the church as a person (such as mother, bride, or chaste whore) because such metaphors, “combined with a robust theology of ecclesial personhood ... further distance the church as a semi-independent entity from its members” and therefore inhibit an account of the church as sinful (and not only as ‘clasping sinners to itself’) (Brian P. Flanagan, *Stumbling in Holiness: Sin and Sanctity in the Church* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2018], 163).

⁶¹ Susan K. Wood, “Body of Christ: Our Unity With Him,” *Word & World* 22, no. 2 (2002): 188.

being identical with—and sometimes even impeding—the presence of the Savior. First, his attention to neurological pathologies shows an important distinction between biological existence and personal existence—the body is the “raw material” of presence in the world, but it is capable of both mediating *and inhibiting* that presence. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty describes the body as the constitutive possibility of our being-in-the-world: “the body expresses total existence,” “existence comes into its own in the body,” and “existence [is] a perpetual incarnation.” James K. A. Smith notes that Merleau-Ponty uses, perhaps intentionally, the classic language of sacrament as “not just symbols of some other reality but as the very presence and effectual power of that which they signify.”⁶² In Merleau-Ponty’s own words,

just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but is also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread,...in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion.⁶³

The body is the sacrament of—symbolizing and making present—our being-in-the-world. The girl suffering from aphonia does not *choose* to remain silent, and she is “not simply trying to convey or express something she knows or thinks; her silence is not a sign that merely points to some interior meaning. Her silence *means* something in itself, and that meaning is not intended by her intellect but rather is meant by her whole person.”⁶⁴ The body does not point to something ‘more real’ but is itself the very presence of meaning; existence is realized in the body.

⁶² Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 66.

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 212.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 63.

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's study of conditions such as apraxia, aphasia, anosognosia, and aphonia⁶⁵ show the body's capacity to withdraw from the world and inhibit personal existence and co-existence in the world. For, as Merleau-Ponty says, when the body is afflicted by illness or injury, it "is *only the barest* raw material of a genuine presence in the world" rather than a mediation of that full presence.⁶⁶ The body becomes "the place where life hides away."⁶⁷ Aphonia, though it is a true expression of the girl's existence in that moment or situation, is also a contraction of personal existence, a preconscious refusal of being-in-the-world. The same holds true for Schneider—due to a brain injury, his body is no longer capable of fully manifesting his personal presence in the world or intending a world of meaning. He can no longer perform abstract movements because he lacks the capacity for imagination; he is unable to understand a story other than as a series of facts; he never goes out for a walk if not on an errand; he is incapable of sexual desire. His personal existence in the world is inhibited by the particularities of his bodily existence. Precisely because the body is the sacrament of being-in-the-world, injury or trauma to the body can impede meaningful co-existence in a social world.⁶⁸ "Even when normal and even when involved in situations with other people, the subject, in so far as he has a body, retains every moment the power to withdraw from it," to turn inward on oneself and "shut myself up in this anonymous life which subtends my personal one." ⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Apraxia: the incapacity to execute purposeful movements; aphasia: the "absence of the ability to recognize the form and nature of persons and things;" anosognosia: "failure or refusal on the patient's part to recognize the existence of a disease or disability;" aphonia: loss of speech. See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 126, translator's note.

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 165, emphasis mine

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 164, citing Binswanger, *Über Psychotherapie*, 182.

⁶⁸ I intentionally say 'can' here and not 'will,' making full room for perspectives from disability studies or trauma theory that might argue that 1) injury, illness, or trauma is central to one's unique personal identity and being-in-the-world; 2) physical or psychological phenomena that are experienced at one time as an impediment to being-in-the-world may be healed or worked-through such that this is not always or no longer the case; and 3) that the responsibility for impeded being-in-the-world lies in the social, political, and/or cultural world rather than in the individual's physical or cognitive makeup.

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 164-5

The church as the body of Christ is likewise capable of mediating but also inhibiting the presence of Christ. It is the necessary biological substratum, so to speak, but at times may be “only the barest raw material” of Christ’s presence in the world. In the language of sacramental theology, “a genuine and decisive Christian reality can exist on the visible, and sacramentally and juridically verifiable plane, without always being, in fact, an immediately effective expression and manifestation of an actual event of grace.”⁷⁰ The ecclesial body can and often does realize the existence of the divine continually present in the world; this is the truth at the core of the tradition of mystical body ecclesiology and a theology of the church as sacrament. And yet, whether from injury, trauma, or simply its own refusal to love, the ecclesial body can also withdraw from its missional engagement with the world and obscure the presence of Christ within it. As Pope Francis has said, “When the Church becomes closed, she becomes an ailing Church, she falls ill! That is a danger. Nevertheless we lock ourselves up in our parish, among our friends, in our movement, with people who think as we do...but do you know what happens? When the Church is closed, she falls sick, she falls sick.”⁷¹ Throughout the church’s history, we have seen far too many examples of the church obscuring rather than manifesting the presence of Christ. Throughout the ‘long nineteenth century,’ the church chronically withdrew from the world (as the good, created realm of human society and culture that is the stage of salvation history) into a kind of fortress mentality or siege mentality, feeling itself under threat from modernity. The ongoing clerical sexual abuse crisis is another obvious example of this kind of trauma afflicting the ecclesial body (by its own members, no less, and particularly its leaders). In the United States in particular, the church’s complicity in institutional racism is yet another

⁷⁰ Karl Rahner, “Membership of the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII’s Encyclical ‘*Mystici Corporis Christi*,’” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2 (London, 1963), 1–88.

⁷¹ Pope Francis, Address at the Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements, May 18, 2013, www.vatican.va.

wound on the body of Christ.⁷² The cultures of sexual abuse and white supremacy are those kinds of ‘worldly values’ mentioned earlier that infect the church, like all other human and social realms, because the church is always *in* and *of* the world. These moments of intra-ecclesial violence, trauma, and withdrawal from the church’s liberative spiritual and social mission are moments in which the church—still *the body of Christ*—inhibits the presence of Christ in the world. This withdrawal from the church’s mission is in some cases especially the failure of the collective ‘head’ of the church—the pope, bishops conferences, and individual bishops, who have closed their eyes to the injury done to the ecclesial body and so have inhibited the presence of God’s justice and mercy in the world. As with the case of aphonia, the living church-body must remain open to the world, to co-existence, to vulnerable communication with others—to intercorporeality—in order to express its identity as the sacrament of Christ and manifest an event of grace. Bodily wounds must be healed on the way to more authentic being-in-the-world.

Second, Louis-Marie Chauvet uses Merleau-Ponty’s work on language and the body as being-in-the-world to inform his articulation of the body as presence as well as absence. Chauvet draws from Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to argue that language and the body are not instruments but mediations.⁷³ They are not the ‘exterior expression of inner reality,’ as if the ‘inner reality’ originates somewhere else than in-the-world. The inside is already outside, and vice versa. There is no ‘pure thought’ or ‘pure presence;’ we are always within a symbolic order, within mediation. This lack of immediacy is inherent to the human condition. Language brings the subject into being through a ‘breach,’ through the enunciation of an ‘I’ which “is not

⁷² Annie Selak, “Toward an Ecclesial Vision in the Shadow of Wounds” (Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, 2020) for racism as a ‘wound’ on the body of Christ. See also Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010).

⁷³ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan, S.J. and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 87.

conceivable without a YOU, the reversible partner of the I” who is “*the most different*; but it is also *the most similar* to the I since it designates the interlocutor” who can also take up the position of the speaking ‘I’.⁷⁴ This splitting of the subject is also seen in the child’s identification of herself in the mirror as both ‘I’ and ‘not I,’ seeing herself from the perspective of another and as named by another (Lacan). Thus, says Chauvet, “it is only through a *breach* that a subject comes to birth, and it is in this breach that it maintains itself. Its truth can be produced only by consenting to this absence which constitutes it.”⁷⁵ All of reality and subjectivity is constituted by a certain breach or absence, and “to consent to this presence of the absence is to consent to *never being able to leave mediation behind*.”⁷⁶

This is true especially in the Christian life. Faith, as Chauvet puts it, is “the consent to loss”—the loss of Jesus’ presence, the loss of his dead body not found in the tomb, and even the loss of his glorified body at the Ascension; we must give up the desire to see-touch-find, and accept instead the proclamation of a word.⁷⁷ But the loss of presence involves an acceptance of mediation. “To agree to this loss...is equivalent to consenting to its symbol: the Church,” and a symbol always involves presence as well as absence or distance. As Chauvet says, a symbol “*is* what it represents. Obviously, it is not ‘really’ but ‘symbolically’ what it represents, precisely because the function of the symbol is to *represent* the real, therefore, *to place it at a distance* in order to present it, to make it present under a new mode.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the existence of the

⁷⁴ Chauvet, 93, 94. The ‘I’ and ‘YOU’ both exist under the influence of the ‘IT’, “the social and universal Other under which both the I and the YOU abide and which permits them, spoken as they are by the same culture, to ‘understand one another’” (94).

⁷⁵ Chauvet, 98.

⁷⁶ Chauvet, 98.

⁷⁷ Chauvet, 170, 161.

⁷⁸ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 72, first emphases original, final is mine.

church ought to be a reminder of Christ's *absence*, as well as a mediator of his presence. Chauvet reminds us that

the Church is not Christ, and...if, in faith, it is recognized as the privileged place of his presence, it is also, in this same faith, *the most radical mediation of his absence*. ...The Church radicalizes the vacancy of the place of God. To accept its mediation is to agree that this vacancy will never be filled. ...But it is precisely in the act of respecting his radical absence or otherness that the Risen One can be recognized symbolically. For this is the faith; this is Christian identity according to the faith. *Those who kill this sense of the absence of Christ make Christ a corpse again.*⁷⁹

In other words, the church precisely *as a body* is the reminder of an absence. The liturgical assembly in particular “constitutes the fundamental ‘sacramental’ representation of the presence of the absence of God.”⁸⁰ The body as a symbol *is existence*, as Merleau-Ponty says, but existence as the mediation of something which, in its fullness, lies beyond or transcends the historical-material realm. It is the *only* means of encounter with the person, and is the “primordial expression” of the person/subject⁸¹—“there is no longer the slightest interstice between the body and the ‘I’”⁸²—and yet, in some way, the person is not fully captured by the body. The visible is, as Merleau-Ponty says, the “surface of a depth.”⁸³ Every visible is the visible of the *invisible*; the visible is a sacrament that both reveals and veils. As Chauvet describes, according to Luke the evangelist, the church, precisely as the “body of Christ,” is *not* the visibility, tangibility, physicality of Jesus himself.

Luke in effect asks his audience, ‘So you wish to know if Jesus is really living, he who is no longer visible before your eyes? Then give up the desire to see him, to touch him, to find his physical body, for now he allows himself to be encountered only through the *body of his word*, in the constant reappropriation that the *Church* makes of his message, his deeds, and his own way of living.’⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 177–78, first emphasis mine.

⁸⁰ Chauvet, 188–89.

⁸¹ Chauvet, 140.

⁸² Chauvet, 149, citing Y. Ledure, *Si Dieu s’efface: La corporéité comme lieu d’une affirmation de Dieu* (Paris: Desclée, 1975), 44–45.

⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, passim.

⁸⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 166, emphasis original.

What Chauvet finds in Luke is an insistence that the church is *not* Jesus himself—he is “no longer visible before your eyes”—but is the mediation or sacrament of Christ, the ongoing embodiment of ‘his message, his deeds, his own way of living.’ The church, the ‘body of his word,’ is *contrasted* with his physical body. “Only differences can be symbolized,” that is, “fitting together, joining, splicing two...elements which at the same time belong to one entity...yet are distinct.” Sacraments, then, are symbols “only inasmuch as Christ and the church are rigorously *differentiated*.”⁸⁵ Chauvet reminds us, then, that to call the church the “body of Christ” is to say it is the absence of Christ just as much as it is to say it is the presence of Christ.

Finally, Anthony Godzieba uses Merleau-Ponty’s work on the body’s intentionality to express the symbolic relation yet non-identity between the biological body and the body–subject or ‘soul.’⁸⁶ In letting go of traditional ‘body-soul’ language out of fear of falling into dualism, Godzieba finds that theology has lost what ‘soul’ stood for: “the mysterious depth of individual identity which has come to be valued and beloved within a particular family and a particular community, as well as the unique cluster of relationships and bodily performances which have served to constitute and expand that identity.”⁸⁷ Godzieba seeks new language to express this “duality”—not dualism—of embodied life. To do so, he turns to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body as “incarnate intentional subjectivity”—as intentional, as temporal, as intending the world in its perception and movement, and as conscious of the world prior to a logical consciousness.⁸⁸ Reading Merleau-Ponty along with Judith Butler, Godzieba notes that the body is open to the

⁸⁵ Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 84, 85.

⁸⁶ Anthony Godzieba, “Bodies and Persons, Resurrected and Postmodern: Towards a Relational Eschatology,” in *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and Peter de Mey (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 211–225; “Knowing Differently: Incarnation, Imagination, and the Body,” *Louvain Studies* 32 (2007): 361–382.

⁸⁷ Godzieba, “Bodies and Persons,” 213.

⁸⁸ Godzieba, “Knowing Differently,” 361.

world, is shaped by its intentional desires toward the world, and is constituted over time as the performance of our relationships with the world. As we saw above in our summary of Merleau-Ponty, the body is *toward-the-world*. For Godzieba, the body's intentionality toward the world, an intentionality that both constitutes us and stretches beyond us, is grounded in "its material-empirical substratum" but "thrusts us beyond" this as well.⁸⁹ Godzieba finds in Merleau-Ponty's account of the body an 'ineffability' of the body-subject that evokes what the traditional term 'soul' conveyed. This conception of the body allows Godzieba to express the duality of the human self who transcends biological reality yet whose body will continue to bear her self-identity in resurrected eternal life.⁹⁰ Jesus' resurrected body is a sign of this duality: his resurrected body still bore his self-identity and his relationships, yet went beyond the materiality with which we are familiar, revealing the possibility of our body-selves to go beyond biological boundaries. At the same time, though, our "corporeal openness" is matched by "corporeal resistance." "The body at times outruns our intentions and, to some degree, has a life of its own. 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."⁹¹ The embodied self reaches beyond its biological boundaries but can be inhibited by its materiality as well.

For Godzieba, then, the body, as a biological-material substratum, bears and incarnates the 'self' which ultimately exceeds the body. But it can also resist our conscious or intentional life, and in death, the 'soul' or personal identity is torn from the living body. The biological substratum remains (for a time, at least), yet is no longer *Leib* but *Körper*. Extending Godzieba's

⁸⁹ Godzieba, "Knowing Differently," 373.

⁹⁰ On this point, Godzieba also uses the work of Judith Butler combined with Gadamer and Manfred Frank's models of the self as composed of both exteriority and interiority constituted over time through relationships. He also uses Frank to articulate how 'structure' as general conventions that order experience homogenously are always 'applied' by the individual, emphasizing the irreducibility of human freedom against those who argue that the self is totally socially or linguistically determined ("Knowing Differently").

⁹¹ Godzieba, "Bodies and Persons," 219.

account to ecclesiology, we can say that the glorified Christ ‘outruns’ his ecclesial body; the church body, as a biological-material substratum, mediates Christ to the world but Christ is not limited to and stretches beyond these ‘biological’ or social-institutional boundaries. The body, especially when suffering trauma, injury, or illness, can inhibit the self’s engagement in the world and with other subject-selves, as I have argued above. Yet even when the body is ‘healthy,’ the self still cannot be ‘pinned down’ to the body’s biological substratum, as Godzieba shows. Christ always exceeds his ecclesial body, even at its best. In this way, Godzieba offers one possible way of thinking, in anthropological terms, about the presence of sanctifying grace and ‘rays of truth’ beyond the ecclesial body.

The above uses of Merleau-Ponty to provide a non-dualistic account of the relationship—yet non-identity—between body and self also provides a necessary corrective to the body–soul analogy as applied to the church especially but not exclusively in the past two centuries of (mystical) body ecclesiology. Body and soul are not perfectly coexistent realities; Godzieba, Chauvet, and Merleau-Ponty have all shown how the ‘self’ extends beyond or transcends the biological body. This provides one analogue for resisting the claim that the mystical body of Christ is, or is only found in, the Roman Catholic Church as the soul is in the body. Yet there remains a symbolic relation between the two—the body is the very manifestation of existence, and existence is perpetual incarnation. On this score, Merleau-Ponty’s work resists the notion of the body–soul relation found in Bellarmine, for example, for whom one could belong to the ‘body’ of the church without belonging to its ‘soul,’ and vice versa. In light of the above—and in agreement with Karl Rahner—any participation in the ‘soul’ suggests some participation in the ‘body,’ and there is no membership or participation in the ‘body’ that is not also a participation

in the ‘soul.’⁹² As Merleau-Ponty himself writes, “the union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence.”⁹³

III. Conclusion

Janet Martin Soskice has argued that metaphors are not merely ornamental substitutions for literal speech or more affectively compelling formulations of straightforward concepts. Rather, metaphors unite two subjects, a “tenor” and “vehicle,” and through the interweaving of the “associated networks of meaning” of each, open up new insights and possibilities. They convey meaning that can be said in no other way. In this dissertation, I have engaged the “explanatory” and “exploratory” functions of the metaphor of the church as a body, to use the language of Avery Dulles.⁹⁴ I have parsed the networks of meaning associated with the image of the body in order to identify what ecclesiological doctrines this metaphor has been used to *explain*, and why. In my final two chapters, I brought forth new networks of meaning from the field of phenomenology in order to *explore* the corporeal metaphor’s “capacity to lead to new theological insights” into the meaning of the church as a body, or the body of Christ.⁹⁵

In my analysis of the history of the corporeal metaphor in modern ecclesiology, I have demonstrated that the image of the body has varied in Catholic ecclesiology in direct relation to the theological and ecclesio-political concerns of a given author or time period. As Sarah

⁹² In his essay on membership in the church according to *Mystici Corporis*, Rahner argues that “even a mere *votum ecclesiae*, as long as it is really present, has a *quasi-sacramental visible aspect* in the concrete, which can and must also be included in the visible nature of the Church” (46, emphasis original). This visibility can be simply be free acceptance of one’s human nature and so one’s membership in the people of God formed by the incarnation (48–50).

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 88–89.

⁹⁴ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 16–18.

⁹⁵ Dulles, 17.

Coakley has pointed out, political upheavals are often reflected in shifts in body metaphors and symbolizations.⁹⁶ The body is a symbol of the social, as Douglas has so compellingly argued. As our social context and concerns shift, so does our image and experience of the body. There is no static, neutral, or ahistorical representation of the body. It is a symbol that is consistently interwoven with cultural norms, social anxieties, and patterns of authority. My work has also indicated that shifts in philosophical context are reflected in the symbol of the body as well.

This parallelism between the symbol of the body and the social, ecclesial, and philosophical context has held true throughout the history of the Catholic church and Catholic ecclesiology. As I discussed in Chapter One, St. Paul uses the metaphor of the church as a body, and as the body of Christ, in his letters to the Corinthians and Romans to appeal to unity within these communities. In this context of internal conflict and division, the image of the body served as a model of unity and interdependence amidst diversity and of coordination of gifts for the good of the whole. In short, for Paul, the term “body” indicated unity, as many-in-one. St. Paul’s use of body language was likely informed by Stoic philosophy, especially the concept of the human body as a microcosm of the universe.⁹⁷

The Middle Ages saw significant changes to the church’s ecclesiastical structure. The Gregorian Reforms brought about continuous growth of the power and privileges of the papacy from the eleventh through nineteenth centuries. These were also the centuries in which, as the church grew in its temporal power and influence, popes and theologians had to address issues of the church’s relation to other nation-states and secular powers. In this context, Pope Boniface

⁹⁶ Sarah Coakley, “Introduction: Religion and the Body,” in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5. She makes reference to the work of Carolyn Walker Bynum who studied the ‘invention of the individual’ in the twelfth century, and Thomas Laqueur’s work on the shift from a one-sex model to a two-sex model in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁹⁷ For the scholarly debate on influences on Paul, see my chapter one.

VIII defined the church as the one mystical body, governed by one head, the pope, which enjoyed supreme authority over the temporal realm. In this period, the term “body” indicated the existence of a supremely important “head,” which governed a self-enclosed, bounded, unified body. Medieval theologians understood the mystical body in the language of Aristotelian notions of the head as the source of life, sense perception, and movement.

The Protestant Reformation brought about intense preoccupation among Catholic theologians with defending the Catholic Church as the one true church instituted by Christ as necessary for the salvation of all people. The Protestant notion of the true church as an “invisible” church was met with relentless insistence on the Catholic Church as necessarily “visible” institution. As the human body is visible to the eyes, so the church, as the mystical body of Christ, must be a visible social institution, united and governed by a visible head. In the post-Reformation context, “body” indicated visibility. In this dualism of the invisible and the visible, we can hear echoes of René Descartes’ dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Each of these key moments of ecclesial upheaval and development integrated the prior meaning of the body, such that post-Tridentine ecclesiology described the ecclesial body as a visible unity in which many members are ordered and governed by a single head.

In Chapters Two and Three, I showed how this interaction between social-ecclesiastical concerns, philosophy, and the image of the body continued in modern ecclesiology. In his effort to retrieve theological foundations for ecclesiology, the new philosophical context of German Romanticism and the broad turn to the root metaphor of the organic led Johann Adam Möhler to speak of the church as a living, organic body that is the visible manifestation of its spirit. In the texts of Vatican I and Leo XIII, the ultramontane movement and the definition of papal primacy and infallibility were supported by the metaphor of a body as held together, governed, and

defined by its head. Against lingering Enlightenment individualism and in sync with a growing sense of nationalism, Karl Adam described a body as a unity and community of many members. In the midst of a growing ecumenical movement, theologians such as Yves Congar and Émile Mersch sought to explain how a body, and so the church, is both visible and invisible, social and spiritual. Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis* affirmed these trajectories but reasserted, to the dismay of ecumenists, that a body is an unbroken unity whose members and organs are necessarily structurally united and ordered under a visible head.

How true it is, Douglas' theory that high grid–high group societies will see the body as a symbol of boundaries, order, hierarchical communication, and the source of nourishment and life. The description of a body perfectly tracks with the description of the church: the “pyramidal ecclesiology” or “hierarchology” of the second millennium described the human body as a monarchy or pyramid as well—defined by its head, which teaches and governs its lower, subservient members. Likewise, the “fortress mentality” the past few centuries, in which the church had to guard itself against the encroachment of the secular/temporal world and the errors of Protestantism, liberalism, and modernism, described the body as a fortress—a clearly bounded entity in which one was decidedly either in or out; an independent organism or perfect society that enjoyed its own means for nourishment and growth. Above all, in modern ecclesiology the metaphor of the church as a body, and as the body of Christ in particular, has served anti-Protestant polemic and strongly papocentric, ultramontanist accounts of ecclesial order and authority. It has long been an “integrator,” in Neil Ormerod's term—a symbol that seeks to effect integration and internal unity.

It is unsurprising, then, as I showed in Chapter Four, that the Second Vatican Council, being a key moment of ecclesial and ecclesiological upheaval and reform, symbolized the body

differently—or not at all. As the council sought a more balanced account of the relationship of pope to bishops and of clergy to laity (*ad intra*), the human body had to be described differently—no longer as a head reigning over its lower members, but a head as a member among members, part of the greater whole. As the ‘group’ (*ad extra*) dimension of ecclesial self-understanding shifted to a more dialogical disposition toward other churches, religions, and the world, the image of the body was hardly used at all. The body had no history of interpretation as an open, dialogical reality.

The method that I have employed in the final two chapters this dissertation—using current philosophical resources in order to interpret the metaphor of the church as a body in light of present ecclesiological concerns—aligns with the method used by theologians all along. My work has been an intentional effort at re-engaging the metaphor of the body in light of the broader philosophical shift away from Aristotelian, even Cartesian understandings of the body (and especially the function of the head therein) toward a phenomenological approach inaugurated by Husserl and developed by Merleau-Ponty and other contemporary philosophers. I do not pretend that my own work exists outside of the dynamic that Douglas names—that the symbol of the body is always shaped by social concerns. Rather, I have sought to make explicit the “networks of meaning” given to the term “body” in the past, and the ecclesial structures they support, in order to challenge those meanings and structures and self-consciously pursue new ways of understanding the body that can help us address, and symbolize, our own particular ecclesial concerns—to imagine the body not as an “integrator” but as an “operator,” a symbol that expresses a teleology and seeks to effect transformation.

And what are the deep ecclesial concerns of our day and our context? In my judgment, two things are at the top of this list. First, the need for more thoroughly participatory structures

that invite every member of the body of Christ, regardless of sex, gender identity, or sexuality, to put their gifts and charisms at the service of the church and the world. Second, structures of accountability, transparency, and oversight that ensure that ecclesial leaders are not abusing their power and authority but instead are truly serving and listening to the people of God. As Pope Francis insists, though, ecclesial reform cannot and must not be undertaken for its own sake. The church's life *ad intra* must be reformed for the sake of its mission *ad extra*; the church's customs and structures ought to be renewed "for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation."⁹⁸ Decentralization is always for the sake of evangelization. To truly become a just and participatory church, and a church of the poor and for the poor, we must orient our ecclesiology toward the margins, where Christ is encountered in our midst.

The metaphor of the church as a body or the body of Christ can support and reflect such an ecclesial vision, but only if we understand embodiment differently than we have in the past. I have argued that we ought to understand the body as intercorporeal, always living, perceiving, and acting within a world to which it is common and with which it shares in one flesh. It is this ongoing and purposeful engagement with the world that enables the experience of bodily unity, not some kind of structural unity with an authoritative head. Moreover, one's knowledge of the world begins in the body, though the body's *praktognosia* is always in dialogue with its more explicit, cognitive, symbolizing function. This vision of the body rejects the papocentric and exclusionary history of the metaphor of the church as a body, and instead supports a decentralized, missionary, dialogical, and humble ecclesiology.

The postmodern shift away from hegemonic grand narratives and toward more diverse and proliferous perspectives has opened up vast new terrain in body studies, as indicated at the

⁹⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 27.

very outset of this project. By showing the centrality of the symbol of the body in ecclesiological thought, and making clear the particular theological and ecclesio-political ends this symbol has served in the past, this dissertation offers a methodological clearing and foundation for bringing new perspectives on the body into ecclesiology. This is all the more important in light of Douglas' claim that, not only does the *symbol* of the body reflect social concerns, but in fact *the physical experience* of the body sustains a particular view of society. As Nancy Hale asks, "What kind of 'body' is the church called to become and proclaim as part of its mission?...Whose bodies are definitive for drawing out the connections between the church and embodiment, the church and the world?"⁹⁹ In the case of the Catholic tradition, (mystical) body ecclesiology has almost always been written by celibate white European males whose bodies, through the vow of celibacy, have been strictly bounded and fortified over-against other bodies, especially women's bodies. The ecclesial body, as we have seen, has been described quite similarly. The historical and symbolic parallelism between the physical experience of the body and the description of the church as a body points toward three avenues for future development of the ecclesial metaphor from a more diverse range of experiences of embodiment.

Though I did not primarily engage in a gender analysis of the corporeal metaphor in this project, I have offered at least one point of explicitly feminist critique. In chapter two, I argued that the spousal metaphor for the church, which was seen most clearly in Scheeben but is certainly not limited to him and in fact has been used quite frequently by John Paul II, has deeply sexist, patriarchal, and heteronormative roots. When the "body of Christ" is understood as the "bride of Christ," it is in order to reinforce the difference and asymmetry between the feminized church and the masculinized Christ. The bride is subordinate to the bridegroom and depends on

⁹⁹ Nancy Jill Hale, "Dis-Abling the Body of Christ: Toward a Holistic Ecclesiology of Embodiment" (Ph.D. Diss., Boston University, 2015), 3, 6.

him for her life and salvation. As has so often been the case in Christian history, hierarchical dualisms such as mind/body or head/body are applied to the binary male/female, to the detriment of the female pole. In my final two chapters, I have argued for an understanding of the body that allows some healthy distance between “biological substratum” and “personal existence” such that the ecclesial term “body of Christ” need not be read as “Christ himself” while also not relying on a sexist appeal to the spousal metaphor.

A further gender analysis of the metaphor of the church as a body is warranted, for the ecclesial body is gendered in interestingly diverse ways. As the bride of Christ, it is gendered female. She is a font of life and nourishment, an eternally pure and endlessly fertile mother who births and protects her (infantilized) children. But as the body of Christ himself, the church is gendered male. The ecclesial body is masculinized when it is described hierarchically ordered entity in which all members ought to obey the head. À la Augustine in *City of God*, the perfect body, the glorified body, is one in which there is no passion, no lust, only reason governing the members for the good of the whole. But there still other threads in the tradition in which the ecclesial body is not necessarily a human, gendered body at all—the Möhler of *Unity in the Church* almost never described the church body as having any human characteristics such as a head, members, or limbs. A body, in his mind, is simply any material manifestation of an interior life principle. In other words, the corporeal metaphor is gendered in ways that certainly warrant critique, but there is also an aspect of gender fluidity to the ecclesial body—or a body beyond or apart from gender—that may be richly explored by queer theology.

Second, what did not receive focused attention in this project, but calls for critical interrogation, is the tendency toward ableism in patristic authors especially. Sebastian Tromp’s *Corpus Christi Quod Est Ecclesia* cites a number of Greek and Latin authors who describe the

sinfulness of the church in the language of disease or disabled limbs. Augustine, for example, describes the church as “a person who limps, who sets one foot firmly in place but drags the other.” For Chrysostom, the body is “full of sores.” Tromp writes that “some of the Fathers, not without elegance, call sinners the feet of Christ, since they are stained with dust and need washing” (and he himself, when describing the church as including sinners, writes that “the body of Christ on earth limps.”¹⁰⁰) Sinners are members who are “sickly and weak,” “injured and ailing,” “decaying,” “tainted,” “diseased,” “deformed and shameful,” and “must be cut out.” Sin or error is decaying flesh; scandal is contagious infection. As a remedy for the diseased and disabled body, healing grace comes from the Head, “for the Head improves all the members;” it “receives, scourges, cleanses, consoles, creates, calls, calls back, corrects, restores.”¹⁰¹ Tromp’s evaluation of this tradition reveals a kind of disgust at the vulnerability of our fleshly lives. These patristic authors, he says, “approach a naturalism which is assuredly not of our time...there are definite limits beyond which correctness cannot exist.”¹⁰² As we saw of his own work in my third chapter, though, he takes the analogy of the head just as far, though it is much more abstract and philosophical account of the body, rather than a fleshly one. This broader emphasis in ecclesiology on a transcendent, rational head governing a subservient, passive body reveals a somatophobia latent within the tradition—a fear of the flesh as unruly, guided by the passions rather than reason, vulnerable, tactile, prone to decay, ever-changing. Once again, we can sense hierarchical dualisms of male/female, reason/passion, mind/body, at work, to the

¹⁰⁰ Tromp, *Corpus Christi, Quod Est Ecclesia*, 162.

¹⁰¹ All quotations here are Tromp’s words citing a range of patristic authors in *Corpus Christi* 148–49.

¹⁰² Tromp, 104, 105.

detriment of all embodied human persons but especially those who historically have been aligned with the body (women, people of color, persons with disabilities).¹⁰³

Finally, Latinx and Black liberation theologians demand that the body of Christ become concretized in history in solidarity with the crucified people of the world. “The renewed appreciation of church as *corpus verum*, that is *real* body of Christ,” Roberto Goizueta writes, “demands a retrieval of the intrinsic connection between the body of the historical Christ, as crucified and rise, and the church.”¹⁰⁴ This echoes the argument of William Cavanaugh writing from a Chilean context in *Torture and Eucharist*—through the Eucharist the church becomes, or must become, “the true body of Christ capable of enacting a counter-practice to that of the state.”¹⁰⁵ M. Shawn Copeland reunites the historical, eucharistic, and ecclesial meanings of “the body of Christ” as well in her description of a church body marked by eucharistic solidarity. The Eucharist does indeed make us Christ’s body, but we cannot forget that the Eucharist comes with social consequences.

As *his body*, we embrace with love and hope those who, in their bodies, are despised and marginalized, even as we embrace with love and forgiveness those whose sins spawn the conditions for the suffering and oppression of others. ...Eucharistic solidarity is a virtue, a practice of cognitive and bodily commitments oriented to meet the social consequences of the Eucharist. We women and men strive to become what we have received and to do what we are being made.¹⁰⁶

Andrew Prevot seeks the decolonial potential of “the mystical body of Christ,” arguing for an anthropological and cruciform interpretation beyond (though not to the exclusion of) its typical

¹⁰³ As mentioned in my introduction, Nancy Hale’s dissertation “Dis-Abling the Body of Christ” offers a constructive reimagining of the church as the disabled body of Christ, meaning it exists in a marginalized, critical, prophetic relationship with the world. Her dissertation does not make any mention (or therefore critique) of this history of the church as a disabled body, in a negative sense, in the patristic era.

¹⁰⁴ Roberto S. Goizueta, “Corpus Verum: Toward a Borderland Ecclesiology,” in *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology*, ed. Orlando Espín (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 152.

¹⁰⁵ William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

¹⁰⁶ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 127.

ecclesiological usage. For Prevot, “the mystical body of Christ” means that *all* human bodies—not simply Christian bodies—are, by virtue of the incarnation, ‘mystical bodies of Christ.’ This is especially true for crucified bodies and crucified peoples of history. “A decolonial shift can happen within Christian theology only if Christian theologians reinterpret the mystical body of Christ anthropologically and *without reserve*—that is, as a doctrine that raises up and celebrates human flesh as such, regardless of communal belonging or sacramental status.”¹⁰⁷

Goizueta, Copeland, and Prevot bring together the Christocentric ecclesiology of the past two centuries with the kind of mission-driven ‘church of the poor’ that we see in Pope Francis. The ecclesial body of Christ must look and act like the historical body of Christ crucified, and our participation in the eucharistic body of Christ must lead to active solidarity with the crucified bodies in our midst. This ethical dimension of the church as an “ongoing incarnation” is almost entirely overlooked by the modern theologians I considered in this dissertation but is perhaps the most fertile and significant site for future development of the corporeal metaphor. If the church truly is, and is to be, Christ’s body on earth and the continuation of his mission and incarnation, then the church must feed the poor, heal the sick, liberate the oppressed, and stand on the side of all those who are marginalized by the powers that are not of the kingdom of God.

My application of Mary Douglas’ thought to ecclesiology has made explicit the methodological and theoretical terrain from which these future projects might arise. The ever-expanding fields of body studies, gender and sexuality studies, queer theory, and critical race theory offer ever more sites from which to reflect on the revelatory meaning of the body and so on the metaphor of the church as a body, the body of Christ, so valued and deeply rooted in the

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Prevot, “Mystical Bodies of Christ: Human, Crucified, and Beloved,” in *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*, ed. Joseph Drexler-Dreis and Kristien Justaert (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 141. Prevot’s approach resonates with the Christological-soteriological strain of mystical body theology insofar as he does not see “the mystical body of Christ” as simply or even primarily an ecclesial metaphor.

Christian and Catholic tradition. The metaphor of the church as an intercorporeal body of Christ is one—but certainly not the only—way in which emerging insights in theological anthropology might prod the church to become more dialogical, decentralized, and missionary, and so to more fully embody Christ's own mission in the world.

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