

PETER DE MEY

CHURCH AS SACRAMENT:  
A CONCILIAR CONCEPT AND ITS RECEPTION  
IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY\*

When one is asked to reflect about the major differences between the reflection on the Church in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and that of previous councils, one usually refers to the highly important decision to consider all believers as active subjects in the Church. Therefore, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church deals with the People of God as a whole before paying attention to its different categories. However, it is also important to draw the attention to the new way of describing the nature of the Church. The opening paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* contains a definition of the Church – understood as the assembly of all believers – which is unprecedented. The Church is believed to be sacramental in nature, because she fulfils the divine mission to take care of the unity of all people among one another and with the Triune God.

The church is in Christ as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ of the First Vatican Council, on the other hand, understood the Church as the hierarchical institute which guarantees that “all the faithful are linked by the bond of one

---

PROF. DR PETER DE MEY – Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgia); adres do korespondencji: Peter.DeMey@theo.kuleuven.ac.be

\* Tekst opublikowano zgodnie z wersją elektroniczną dostarczoną przez Autora.

faith and charity” Therefore, as from the first chapter the main emphasis is on the Petrine ministry as factor of unity in the Church.

In order, then, that the episcopal office should be one and undivided and that, by the union of the clergy, the whole multitude of believers should be held together in the unity of faith and communion, he set blessed Peter over the rest of the apostles and instituted in him the permanent principle of both unities and their visible foundation.

An excellent summary of preconciliar ecclesiology is offered in the so-called antimodernist oath (*Motu proprio sacrarum antistitum*) which had been defined by Pope Pius X (1910) and which was in function until its revision in 1967.

I firmly believe that the Church, being the guardian and teacher of the divine Word, has been instituted immediately and directly by the true and historical Christ himself, when he was living among us, and that she has been built upon Peter, head of the apostolic hierarchy, and upon his perennial successors<sup>1</sup>.

The teaching of Vatican I on the primacy of Peter has not been revoked by the Second Vatican Council. On the contrary it is repeated almost literally. This, however, happens only in LG 18.

This holy synod, following in the footsteps of the first Vatican council, teaches along with that council and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal shepherd, built holy church by sending apostles just as he himself had been sent by the Father; it was his will that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in his church right to the end of the world. So that the episcopate itself, however, should be one and undivided, he placed blessed Peter over the rest of the apostles, and in him he instituted a perpetual and visible principle and foundation for the unity of faith and communion.

It is also not denied that the Church is an institution of the historical Jesus himself. In LG 5 it is taught that “The mystery of holy church is clearly visible in its foundation (*fundatione*). For the lord Jesus inaugurated the church (*ecclesiae suae initium fecit*) when he preached the happy news of the coming of the kingdom of God that had been promised in the scripture for centuries” LG 8 opens with the solemn proclamation that “Christ, the one mediator, set up (*constituit*) his holy church here on earth as a visible structure, a community of faith, hope and love” In the first and primordial defini-

---

<sup>1</sup> DS 3540: “Firma pariter fide credo Ecclesiam, verbi revelati custodem et magistram, per ipsum verum atque historicum Christum, cum apud nos degeret, proxime ac directo institutam eandemque super Petrum, apostolicae hierarchiae principem, eiusque in aevum successores aedificatam”.

tion of the nature of the Church, however, juridical language is lacking completely. I think that it makes sense to deal in this opening lecture with the definition of the Church as sacramental which so much typical for the Second Vatican Council. We will compare the council's conviction of the sacramental nature of the Church with the insights elaborated in ecclesiological studies of contemporary German and French Catholic theologians and to question whether the issues left unclarified by the Council have received an acceptable solution in their works.

## I. VATICAN II

### 1. *A brief history of the idea of 'Church as sacrament'*<sup>2</sup>

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Church is often called a sacrament. This identification occurs in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG 1, 9, 48, 59), in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (GS 42, 45 quote LG 1), the Liturgical Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC 5, 26) and the Missionary Decree *Ad Gentes* (AG 1, 5).

The council, however, did not have to invent this identification, but could refer to an early tradition. The expression *sacramentum unitatis* for Church (SC 26, LG 9) has been borrowed from a letter of one of the Latin Church father's, Cyprian, who inspired himself of the Deuteropauline letter to the Ephesians. There, *mystèrion* or the Latin equivalent *sacramentum* stands for the salvific mission of the Saviour according to God's eternal and unfathomable dispensation. When SC 5 speaks of "the tremendous sacrament which

---

<sup>2</sup> See especially L. B o f f, *Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung. Versuch einer Legitimation und einer struktur-funktionalistischen Grundlegung der Kirche im Anschluß an das II. Vatikanische Konzil* (KKS, 28), Paderborn, Bonifatius, 1972, chs. 3-4, 6-8; L. H ö d l, "Die Kirche ist nämlich in Christus gleichsam das Sakrament Eine Konzil-saussage und ihre nachkonziliare Auslegung, in: W. G e e r l i n g s & M. S e c k l e r (eds.), *Kirche sein: Nachkonziliare Theologie im Dienst der Kirchenreform* (FS H.J. Pottmeyer), Freiburg, Herder, 1994, 163-179; L. J. K o f f e m a n, *Kerk als sacramentum. De rol van de sacramentele ecclesiologie tijdens Vaticanum II*, Kampen, van den Berg, 1986; J. M e y e r z u S c h l o c h t e r n, *Sakrament Kirche: Wirken Gottes im Handeln der Menschen*, Freiburg, Herder, 1992, 19-67; H. R i k h o f, *Kerk als sacrament: een pleidooi voor een realistische ecclesiologie*, in: H. W a r n i n k (ed.), *Ius propter homines. Kerkelijk recht op mensenmaat*, Leuven, Peeters, 1993, 19-61; A. H. C. V a n E i j k, *De kerk als sakrament en het heil van de wereld*, in: *Bijdragen* 45 (1984) 295-330. Quotations from constitutions and decrees of the Second Vatican Council are from N.P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. London-Washington, Sheed & Ward. Georgetown University Press. 1990.

is the whole Church” (*totius Ecclesiae mirabile sacramentum*), arising from the side of the crucified Christ, this is a quote from a fifth-century oration ascribed to pope Leo the Great.

Under the influence of medieval scholastic theology and of the critique of the Protestant distinction between the visible and the invisible Church by the Council of Trent, belief in the sacramental nature of the Church disappeared into the background in favour of a more juridical approach to the Church as *societas perfecta*.

From the 1830s on the term sacrament has been applied anew to the Church in the writings of e.g. A. Günther, J. A. Möhler and J. E. Kuhn. It is possible that the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council, by calling the Church – in reference to Isaiah 11:12 – “like a standard lifted up for the nations” (*ipsa veluti signum levatum in nationes*)<sup>3</sup>, refers to this rediscovery<sup>4</sup>.

After a small period of desinterest in ‘Church as sacrament’ – in reaction to modernism the Church was again portrayed as a hierarchic society – pre-conciliar theology rediscovered this Church image for the second time. Some important witnesses to this rediscovery are H. de Lubac’s 1952 *Méditation sur l’Eglise*, O. Semmelroth’s 1953 *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, K. Rahner’s 1960 *Kirche und Sakramente*, and E. Schillebeeckx’s 1959 *Christus, sacrament van de godsonthoening*.

## 2. Importance and limits

Why did the Council insist on this image? The old self-centred picture of the Church as a visible reality with a clear hierarchic structure had to be replaced by the de-centring notion of a sacrament, pointing both to the source and destination of what needs to be mediated: God’s salvation on behalf of the world. As a sacrament the Church needs to be *signum* and *instrumentum*: she has to signify God’s salvific action and at the same time to be an instrument in God’s hands.

But the Church is “as” a sacrament. The hesitation expressed by the word *veluti* in LG 1 pertains to the possible confusion of the believer who is used to think in terms of seven sacraments. The council fathers also wanted to make sure that the Church deserves the name ‘sacrament’ only in second instance,

<sup>3</sup> Remark the contrast between the *ipsa* of Vatican I and the *in Christo* of LG 1.

<sup>4</sup> However, the Church is not said here to signify God’s salvation, but reference is made to her apologetical function as a “great and perpetual motive of credibility”.

because she pursues in a necessarily imperfect way Christ's mission to be the sacrament of God's salvation on behalf of the world. Therefore, the first line of the constitution refers to Christ as "light to the nations", and the Church is said to be "in Christ" as a sacrament. After having observed that the "visible assembly" and the "spiritual community" of the Church form "one complex reality comprising a human and a divine element", LG 8 ventures a careful comparison between Church and Christ. "No mean analogy" exists between both. The assumed human nature of Christ can be said to be the instrument of the divine Word; the social reality of the Church stands at the service of Christ's Spirit. The classic rules of analogy imply, however, a greater amount of difference than of equality. The Chalcedonian dogma insists on the unity and indivisibility of the two natures in Christ, whereas the co-operation between the human and the divine element is in the Church far from perfect.

### 3. *Sacramental ecclesiology in Lumen Gentium*

Although the image of Church as 'People of God' is definitely far more popular than the one of 'Church as Sacrament', the latter occurs at some of the most pivotal places in *Lumen Gentium*. As is well known, the constitution proceeds several times from a reflection on the Church as a whole to a discussion of its distinctive groups. This transition can be observed between chapters 1-2 (The Mystery of the Church, The People of God) and chapters 3-4 (The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church and in particular the Episcopate, The Laity), as well as between chapter 5 (The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church) and chapter 6 (Religious). The contrast between the two types of chapters has sometimes been explained by referring to two diverging and irreconcilable ecclesiological positions, the conciliar ecclesiology of 'Church as people of God' and the pre-conciliar ecclesiology of 'Church as mystical body'<sup>5</sup> As H. Rikhof pointed out, in *Lumen Gentium* the synonymous notions of *sacramentum* and *mysterion* have been applied to the Church especially in the context of those chapters (or parts of chapters) that deal with Church as a whole: Church as 'mystery' is found in the title of chapter 1 and in the opening paragraph of chapter 5 (LG 39); Church as 'sacrament' in the opening paragraphs of chapters 1 (LG 1), 2 (LG 9) and 7 (LG 48)<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> R. M i c h i e l s, *Lumen Gentium: terugblik dertig jaar later. Twee kerkbeelden naast elkaar*, in: Id. & J. H a e r s (eds.), *Een werkzame dialoog: Oecumenische bijdragen over de kerk 30 jaar na Vaticanum II* (Nikè-reeks, 38; Publicaties van het Centrum voor Oecumenisch Onderzoek, 1), Leuven-Amersfoort, Acco, 1997, 133-185.

<sup>6</sup> H. R i k h o f, *Kerk als sacrament* (n. 3), pp. 39-40.

At the four places of *Lumen Gentium* in which the Church has been circumscribed as the sacrament of God's salvific plan for the world, trinitarian vocabulary abounds. LG 1 defines that the Church is a sacrament "in Christ" In LG 9 we hear that the Church has been called on the initiative of the Father. According to LG 48 it is the risen Christ who made the Church the all-encompassing sacrament of salvation, but "through the Spirit" who has been communicated to the disciples. In LG 59 we read that God, on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed to Mary and the apostles "the mystery of the human race's salvation", but not "before he had poured forth the Spirit that had been promised by Christ" The Church thus has its particular place in the history of salvation, as this history has been planned and accomplished by the triune God. In LG 2 the specific role and mission of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the foreshadowing, preparation, constitution, manifestation and completion of the Church are mentioned. What has changed, however, compared to classic sacramentology, is the omission of scholastic terminology to describe the relation between Church, Christ and Trinity. Ten years earlier Semmelroth still described the institutional Church as *sacramentum tantum*, the salvific work of Christ as *res et sacramentum*, and the Triune God of whom Christ himself is the sacrament, *res sacramenti*<sup>7</sup>

What the function of the Church to be an instrument of human salvation concretely implies, cannot be fully grasped from the mentioned texts in which the connection between Church and sacrament has been explicitly made. The opening paragraph, LG 1, however, clarifies the issue to a large extent. Salvation is said to consist in "the intimate union (*unio*) with God" and in "the unity (*unitas*) of all humanity" The reader is obviously reminded here of Jesus' answer to the question about the most important commandment: the equal practice of the love of God and of our neighbour (Matt. 22:34-40). The council fathers, however, decided in their final redaction of the text to mention "union with God" before "unity of humankind"<sup>8</sup> In an optimistic description of the "particular circumstances of our day" – the differences between the 'dogmatic' constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the 'pastoral' constitution *Gaudium et Spes* must indeed not be exaggerated – they apparently considered the second goal as almost realised. The whole of humankind, already interconnected by close "social, technological and cultural bonds",

---

<sup>7</sup> O. Semmelroth, *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, Frankfurt a.M., Knecht, 1953, pp. 207-208.

<sup>8</sup> See G. Alberigo, F. Magistretti, *Constitutionis Dogmaticae Lumen Gentium synopsis historica*, Bologna, Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1975, p. 3.

must now, by the sacramental mediation of the Church, be led to its “full unity in Christ”

In another paragraph from the same chapter, LG 5, the sacramental mission of the Church has been described by means of the biblical category of the kingdom. The Church has to continue the work of Christ, who in his proclamation, his miracles and his very person inaugurated the kingdom of God. But her activity will never give rise to the final breakthrough of the kingdom on earth. According to LG 5, the Church “has formed the seed and the beginning of the kingdom on earth”, while looking forward to its completion. The reference in this paragraph to the presence and absence of the kingdom in the earthly life of the Church, has the same function as the comments in LG 8 about the tension between the human and divine element in the Church and about its analogous relation to the sacrament Christ. Through such relativising remarks the sacramental ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* receives its realistic outlook<sup>9</sup> The account of the Church as mystery and sacrament in *Lumen Gentium* is certainly not a triumphalistic closed story. By pointing to the incapacity of the Church of fully accomplishing her mission to be a sign and instrument of God’s salvation, the council fathers seem to have unconsciously anticipated the postmodern critique of ideological master-narratives.

#### 4. *The reception of ‘Church as sacrament’ in the Synod of 1985*

According to many commentators the extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985 deliberately intended to call a halt to the opinion of many bishops and theologians in the Church, that the conciliar ecclesiology of ‘Church as people of God’ had to be translated pastorally into a stronger consciousness of the common responsibility of all believers and into a more democratic process of decision-making in the Church. Just before and right at the outset of the Synod objections to the concept ‘people of God’ had been raised in an influential lecture of Cardinal Ratzinger<sup>10</sup> and in the *relatio* by Cardinal Danneels<sup>11</sup> In the Final Report the concept ‘people of God’ has been mentioned only once, in an enumeration of the Council's multiple images for the Church<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> I borrow this insight from: H. R i k h o f, *Kerk als sacrament*, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> J. Cardinal R a t z i n g e r, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, in: *Origins* 15 (1985-1986) 370-376, esp. pp. 375-376.

<sup>11</sup> *A summary appeared*, in: *Origins* 15 (1985-1986) 427-429.

<sup>12</sup> *Synod of Bishops: The Final Report*, in: *Origins* 15 (1985-1986) 444-450.

By preferring the concept 'communion' to 'people of God' the synod has opted for an equally biblical term, which remains also faithful to the priority attached by *Lumen Gentium* to discussions of the entire body of the Church. But the real reason for this preference seems to be that the ecclesiology of communion, according to the synod fathers, is also "the foundation for order in the Church and especially for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church"<sup>13</sup>.

A second, less explicit change with regard to *Lumen Gentium* is the terminological preference for 'mystery' over 'sacrament', although the teaching of the council has been repeated that "the Church is sacrament, that is, sign and instrument of communion with God and also of communion and reconciliation of men with one another"<sup>14</sup>. In the section of the Final Report on 'The Mystery of the Church', however, the image of 'Church as Mystery' occurs in a twofold polemic, against a purely hierarchical interpretation of Church as the 'body of Christ', and against a purely sociological interpretation of Church as 'people of God'. Commentators have wondered whether the appeal to 'Church as Mystery' in the Synod's Final Report does not function as an ideological weapon to stop "legitimate questions from the people of God"<sup>15</sup>. Because emphasis is laid on the "eschatological character" and "universal vocation to holiness" of the Church, this mystery seems to refer to an almost unrealisable ideal.

Has the realistic conception of the Church's vocation to be a sacrament of the kingdom, which dominated the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, then fully disappeared in the discussion about the mystery of the Church in the 1985 Synod's Final Report?<sup>16</sup> Perhaps, as H. J. Pottmeyer comments, is this lack of realism only apparently the case, and does it certainly need correction. "In speaking of the Church as *mysterium* we must not remain abstract, attempting to lift the Church out of the sphere of historical developments. The mystery of the Church, the mystery of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, actually indicates the Church's place within history"<sup>17</sup> "The designation of the Church as sacrament (...) demands that the visible form and orga-

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 446. Remark the substitution of 'communion' for 'union/unity'

<sup>15</sup> A. Willems, *Het mysterie als ideologie. De bisschoppensynode over het kerkbegrip*, in: TvT 26 (1986) 157-171, p. 170.

<sup>16</sup> H. Rikhof, *Kerk als sacrament* (n. 3), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> H. J. Pottmeyer, *The Church as Mysterium and as Institution*, in: *Concilium* 1985/1986, 99-109, p. 106. Pottmeyer's article forms part of a thematic volume dealing entirely with an evaluation of the Synod of 1985.



nisation of the Church correspond to its ground and life-principle, i.e., the mystery of the triune God, the mystery of Jesus Christ and the mystery of the Spirit's working"<sup>18</sup>.

## II. 'CHURCH AS SACRAMENT' IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Reflection on the sacramental character of the Church is particularly popular among German catholic ecclesiologists. We are lucky to dispose in the 1992 *Habilitationsschrift* of the Paderborn dogmatician Joseph Meyer zu Schlochtern, *Sakrament Kirche: Wirken Gottes im Handeln der Menschen* of a very detailed discussion of what he considers to be the most important theological contributions to the debate<sup>19</sup>: Hermann Josef Pottmeyer's description of the functional relation between the Church and God's kingdom<sup>20</sup>, Peter Hünemann's conception of sacraments as communicative acts<sup>21</sup>, and Medard Kehl's attention to the presence of the Spirit in the institutional acts of the Church<sup>22</sup>.

### 1. J. Meyer zu Schlochtern

According to Meyer zu Schlochtern, the Church is only worthy of the qualification 'sacrament', if some or all of her activities reflect this sacramental nature. However, since it is the most typical characteristic of a sacramental act that there are two actors involved, a divine and a human one, one

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>19</sup> With an article on the substitution of the study of the multiple metaphors of Church for the quest of a basic concept of Church – *Kirchenbegriffe, Kirchenverständnisse, Kirchenmetaphern: Zur Diskussion um den sprachlogischen Status ekklesiologischer Prädikationen* – Meyer zu Schlochtern equally contributed to a volume edited by Klaus Müller, *Fundamentaltheologie: Fluchtlinien und gegenwärtige Herausforderungen*, Regensburg, Pustet, 1998, 411-426.

<sup>20</sup> H. J. P o t t m e y e r, *Die Frage nach der wahren Kirche; Zeichen und Kriterien der Glaubwürdigkeit des Christentums*, in: *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 3 (1986) 212-241 and 4 (1988) 373-413.

<sup>21</sup> P. H ü n e r m a n n, *Sakrament – Figur des Lebens*, in: I d. & R. S c h ä f f l e r (eds.), *Ankunft Gottes und Handeln des Menschen: Thesen über Kult und Sakrament* (QD, 77), Freiburg, Herder, 1977, 51-87.

<sup>22</sup> M. K e h l, *Kirche als Institution*, in: *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 3 (1986) 176-197. See also I d., *Die Kirche: eine katholische Ekklesiologie*, Würzburg, Echter, 1992, 1993<sup>3</sup>.

must be able to carefully distinguish the divine and the human actor. Perhaps the most important contribution of his study are the carefully constructed questions to be solved by any future sacramental ecclesiology. In the introduction we read questions such as: "How is the claim of the Church to be a sacrament of divine salvation to be reconciled with her being created as a human construct?" "How is it to be conceived that in a human action the presence of God assumes a sacramental form? How does God's transcendence, undisposable to human agency, become real presence in the same human acting?"<sup>23</sup> In his conclusion Meyer zu Schlochtern asks: "How can the Church be an instance in which God's graceful compassion becomes present, when she is constructing herself as a social structure made up by human acts and decisions? How can the Church be conceived as the sacramental unity of the supernatural reality of grace and of human agency?"<sup>24</sup> The Church can only legitimately be called a sacrament when the relation between the real presence of the divine salvation and grace and the agency of the Church is clarified.

## 2. H. J. Pottmeyer, P. Hünemann, M. Kehl

In three other theologians' reflections Meyer zu Schlochtern perceives important impulses to link together the presence of God and the activity of the Church. He especially appreciates the fact that they restrict the sacramental reality of the Church to particular ecclesial activities.

– For Hermann Josef Pottmeyer the Church is in a twofold way the sign of God's kingdom: she is sign of the presence of the kingdom in that the Spirit of Christ is already active in her, and she is sign of the kingdom's future in that she in her activities tries to remain faithful to Christ's proclamation of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is therefore for Pottmeyer at the same time the foundation of the Church's existence (*Seinsgrund*) and of her future orientation (*Sinngrund*). Particularly in those acts in which the

---

<sup>23</sup> J. Meyer zu Schlochtern, *Sakrament Kirche* (n. 3), p. 16: "Diese Selbstauffassung in ihren Inhalten aufzuhellen ist das Hauptziel unserer Untersuchung: Wie ist der Anspruch der Kirche, Sakrament göttlichen Heils zu sein, mit ihrer Beschaffenheit als einem menschlichen Gebilde zu vereinbaren? Wie ist denkbar, daß *im menschlichen Handeln* die *Gegenwart Gottes* sakramentale Gestalt annimmt?"; p. 18: "Wie gelangt die dem menschlichen Handeln *unverfügbare* Transzendenz Gottes in ihm gleichwohl zu *realer Gegenwart*?"

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389: "Wie kann die Kirche die *Gestalt der Gegenwart des gnadenhaften Erbarmens Gottes* sein, wenn sie sich als ein *soziales Gebilde aus menschlichen Handlungen und Entscheidungen* aufbaut? Wie können *das übernatürliche Sein der Gnade* und das *Handeln des Menschen* im Begriff der Kirche als deren sakramentale Einheit gedacht werden?"

Church renders an explicit 'testimony' (*Zeugnis*) to the kingdom of God – the extreme realisation of such a testimony is the martyrdom (*Blutzeugnis*) – is the unity of divine and human activity realised, in Pottmeyer's opinion<sup>25</sup>

– According to Peter Hünemann the sacramentality of the Church is restricted to those sacramental acts that are constitutive for the Church. It are free, communicative acts which establish the communion between God and humankind in Jesus Christ anew. These sacramental acts reveal themselves at the same time as an ecclesial act and as an act of Christ's Spirit on behalf of the Church. Since it belongs to the definition of a sacramental act that it gives rise to a new birth (*Lebensvollzug*) of the Church<sup>26</sup>, it is clear that not all ecclesial acts must be considered as sacramental acts. Hünemann wants to restrict the notion of explicit sacramental acts to the Church's preaching in the name of Jesus and to the sacraments, above all the sacrament of the eucharist.

– In order to be able to call the Church a sacramental reality her relation to Christ as the sacrament of God's love by excellence needs to be further specified. The exalted Christ is present in the Church in the power of his Spirit. According to Medard Kehl, the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church can be recognised when the Church is as an institution promoting the identification with Christ, the integration of the community and the liberation of all believers. When these conditions are fulfilled, the Church really deserves to be called 'sacrament of the Spirit'

Meyer zu Schlochtern has learnt from these theologians that it is important to limit the sacramentality of the Church to her "constitutive acts" (*ihre konstitutive Handlungen*). He believes, however – without being able to propose a better alternative – that they were not able to clarify sufficiently how human action and the activity of Christ's Spirit are exactly mediated<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> See especially H. J. P o t t m e y e r, *Die Frage nach der wahren Kirche* (n. 22), p. 240; *Zeichen und Kriterien* (n. 22), p. 387.

<sup>26</sup> See P. H ü n e r m a n n, *Lebensvollzüge der Kirche: Reflexionen zu einer Theologie des Wortes und der Sakramente*, in: I d. & R. S c h ä f f l e r (eds.), *Theorie der Sprachhandlungen und heutige Ekklesiologie: ein philosophisch-theologisches Gespräch* (QD, 109), Freiburg, Herder, 1987, 27-53.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. with regard to Pottmeyer: "Dieser Einheit kommt freilich noch kein sakramentaler Status zu, solange nicht beides, Wirken Gottes und Handeln des Menschen, *innerlich* vermittelt ist" (*Sakrament Kirche*, p. 306); with regard to Hünemann: "Wie sind das Handeln der Menschen und das Wirken Gottes, das bislang als 'Ineins' oder als 'kommunikative Einheit' des menschlichen Handelns und der Wirksamkeit des Geistes Christi beschrieben wurden, exakt miteinander vermittelt?" (*ibid.*, p. 337), and, with regard to Kehl: "Wer ist nun das wahre Subjekt der kirchlichen Vollzüge: die individuellen Subjekte, die Gemeinschaft der Kirche oder der Geist?" (*ibid.*, p. 357).

### III. 'CHURCH AS SACRAMENT' IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

#### 1. *L.-M. Chauvet*

In chapter five of *Symbole et sacrement*<sup>28</sup>, Louis-Marie Chauvet reflects about the Church as symbolic mediation of Christ<sup>29</sup>. In the first part of his book he has applied Heidegger's critique of classical metaphysics to scholastic sacramental theology. The presupposition of an immediate presence of ourselves, of things or persons outside us, or of the divine has become an impossibility for post-Heideggerian philosophy and theology. Notwithstanding the fact that the sacramental life of the Church constitutes the only access to Christ, are her symbolic mediations the presence of an absence. Chauvet reckons with a threefold symbolic mediation of Christ, "rereading the Scriptures with him in mind, repeating his gestures in memory of him, living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name"<sup>30</sup>

By means of an exegesis of the story of the two disciples returning to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) and other Lukan texts, Chauvet explains how the faithful must overcome their fixation on the event of the crucifixion in order to be able to encounter Christ anew in the symbolic mediation of the Church. The interest of the disciples in what happened to Jesus' corpse reveals their intention to capture the object of their desire, and to hold on to their ideological knowledge about God instead of listening to God's revelation in the Scriptures<sup>31</sup>. The first mode of sacramental presence of the absent One is, therefore, to be found in the Church's proclamation, "according to the Scriptures", of Jesus' death and resurrection. When doing so, the Church acts as "spokesperson" and "lieu-tenant" of Christ, in the same way as He can be recognised when Church ministers celebrate the Eucharist (Lk 24:30), baptise new believers (Acts 8:36) and lay their hands on them in order to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:17). This is the second level of sacramental mediation of the Church. Finally, Christ is present in the Church when she "returns to

---

<sup>28</sup> L.-M. C h a u v e t, *Symbole et sacrement. Une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne*, Paris, Cerf, 1987, 167-194: 'Position de la structure de l'identité chrétienne'. References are made to the English translation, *Symbol and Sacrament. A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, Colledgeville (Mi), Liturgical Press, 1995, 159-189.

<sup>29</sup> Chauvet does not deny that salvation can be experienced in other religions, but in the Church salvation is recognised as salvation of God in Christ.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163 (169).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168 (173).

Jerusalem" (Lk 24:52) to assume her mission, to be witnesses of the Messiah in word and deed (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35). His real body is gone, but His symbolised body is present in the Church's "interpretation of Scripture, its liturgical celebrations, and its ethical engagement"<sup>32</sup>. Conscious of her not being identical with Christ, the Church sacramentally mediates in the three mentioned ways "the presence of the absence of God"<sup>33</sup>

Chauvet warns for the temptation to absolutise one of these three constitutive elements of the Christian faith<sup>34</sup>, comparable to the three main characteristics of human existence: cognition, recognition and praxis<sup>35</sup>. If the Church would hold on to a closed system of divinity, she would pay no justice to "the otherness of God, the absence of the Risen One, the unmanageability of the Spirit"<sup>36</sup>. In the same way does an exclusivistic attention to the second and third component of faith on the one hand result in a magical interpretation of the sacraments and on the other hand in a moralistic Church, in which the Church's orthopraxis becomes the norm of her orthodoxy. The first temptation is typical for those protestant Churches who are opposed to any hermeneutical reading of the Scriptures. One meets the second temptation in (certain forms of) catholic theology, in which the efficacy of the sacraments is considered to be automatical. The third temptaton is, according to Chauvet, a typically contemporary danger, not linked to a specific Christian denomination.

At the end of this chapter Chauvet pays attention to some pastoral implications of his outline of a sacramental ecclesiology<sup>37</sup>. I resume them in three points. 1° The Church can only be called a sacrament insofar as she is not occupied with herself, but with the mediation of God's kingdom to the world. But Chauvet realises that the identity of the Church hereby becomes

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 171 (177).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 178 (183). In this paragraph the author alternates 'Christ' and 'God' without, if my interpretation is correct, having in mind a different divine person. On p. 177 we read: "Now, as risen, Christ has departed; we must agree to this loss if we want to be able to find him" Further on Chauvet explains: "This is why to consent to the sacramental mediation of the Church is to consent to what we called above, echoing Heidegger, the presence of the absence of God" But then he prefers again the name 'Christ': "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"

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 173-177 (179-182).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 179 (185).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 174 (179).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 180-189 (186-194).

a paradoxical one: her symbolic mediations of the kingdom cannot but be coloured by her concrete, institutional reality. 2° Although there must be room, according to Chauvet, for a partial identification with the Church, the three characteristics of the Christian life require nevertheless a certain institutionality. This institutionality is to be considered as a gift of God's grace, which, however, does not mean that the concrete organisation of the Church is not susceptible for amelioration<sup>38</sup> 3° The sacramentality of the Church receives its primordial manifestation in the liturgical assembly (*ecclesia*) as the symbolic body of Christ. It is here that the individual believer recognises Jesus as Christ and Lord. Individual prayer and meditation presuppose the community experience of the presence of God's absence.

## 2. C. Duquoc

Christian Duquoc published in 1999 a new monograph on the Church because he was no longer satisfied with his earlier approach in his 1985 *Des églises provisoires*<sup>39</sup> In the analytical first part of "*Je crois en l'Église*" *Précarité institutionnelle et Règne de Dieu*<sup>40</sup> the author no longer restricts himself to a description of the historical schisms in the history of the Christian churches, but pays attention to contemporary signs of disfunctioning as well. The second part of his book deals with the ideal Church as portrayed in bible and tradition. The qualifications 'one', 'holy', 'catholic' and 'apostolic', enumerated in the Apostolic Creed, as well as the biblical images of 'people of God', 'temple of the Holy Spirit', and 'body of Christ', used in *Lumen Gentium*, are indeed only fully applicable to the eschatological form of the Church as identical with the kingdom. The visible Church is an institutionalised one and, therefore, necessarily ambiguous.

---

<sup>38</sup> According to V. J. Miller (*An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation: Louis-Marie Chauvet's Fundamental Theology of Sacramentality*, in: *Horizons* 24 (1997) 230-247) Chauvet has overlooked the fact that the institutionalised sacramental mediation of the Church underwent important changes throughout history and received a plurality of cultural expressions. Moreover, Chauvet does not seem to reckon with the possibility that a symbol may petrify and eventually be replaced by new symbolic expressions. "Chauvet's notion of symbolic mediation would favor the continuation of a distorted practice because that is what has been handed on in the tradition and has formed the identity of generations of Christians" (*ibid.*, p. 239).

<sup>39</sup> C. D u q u o c, *Des Églises provisoires: essai d'ecclésiologie oecuménique*, Paris, Cerf, 1985.

<sup>40</sup> I d., "*Je crois en l'Église*" *Précarité institutionnelle et Règne de Dieu*, Paris, Cerf, 1999.

How does the Church have to realise its unity?<sup>41</sup> By always looking back at the idealistic portrayal of the unity of the community of Jerusalem in the first chapters of the book of Acts? Recent exegesis, however, has discovered that there existed no normative Church model in the formation period of the New Testament. A second option would be to hold that the unity has been realised at a specific moment of Church history, namely, when the Church became an institution. In this approach all internal tensions are considered as deviations, compared to this earlier (idealised) period of unity.

Personally, Duquoc prefers to describe the Church's unity by means of the metaphor of Church as sacrament, but not without some important restrictions. A sacramental model of unity accepts in fact that the visible and invisible are articulated in "provisional churches" But, according to Duquoc, it would be unjustified to apply the same notion of sacramentality, which is valid for the liturgical sacraments, to the whole life of the Church. Whereas in the sacraments, ministers refrain from their own personality in order to make place for the action of Christ through his Spirit, their other activities are not completely permeated by God's grace. On the contrary, to invest all the ministers' actions and decisions with sacramental authority, would mean to deny free initiative to the believers.

Only when distinction is made between the different levels of engagement of the Spirit in the activities of the Church, can the notion of sacrament be applied to the institutional Church as a whole<sup>42</sup>. It is then no longer an overstatement to call the Church a symbol of God's reign<sup>43</sup> Through the celebration of the sacraments, those ecclesial activities in which the articulation of the visible with the invisible is most clear, the institutional Church is oriented towards God's kingdom as her transcendental goal, and is thereby

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 125-134.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 129-30: "Est-il justifié de penser l'Église comme sacrement, la panoplie des sacrements liturgiques n'étant que les formes variées de l'unique sacrement, l'institution visible de l'Église? Je ne suis pas assuré que ce transfert de l'acte liturgique signifiant le don de la grâce à l'Église prise en sa totalité visible ne relève pas davantage de l'hyperbole que de la métaphore: il tend en effet à qualifier toute réalité ecclésiale d'une vocation médiatrice de la grâce christique. Cette attribution ne paraît acceptable que si elle tient suffisamment compte des différents niveaux structurant l'institution"

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 162: "J'ai cependant fait remarquer plus haut qu'il y avait dans cette application à l'institution du concept de 'sacrement' un risque d'hyperbole. Le transfert de son usage restreint et rigoureux à un usage plus large n'est justifié que s'il prend le sens plus fluide de symbole"

relativised<sup>44</sup>. The same articulation “is verified analogically for the whole of the ecclesial institution”<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In his analysis of the use of the metaphor ‘Church as sacrament’ in *Lumen Gentium*, H. Rikhof pointed out that the council fathers considered the task of the Church to be a sign and instrument of God’s kingdom as a realistic ideal. They were aware that the visible reality of the Church was compounded of human and divine elements, that the sacramental nature of the Church and of Christ are only analogous, and that the full realisation of the kingdom is not comprised in the sacramental vocation of the Church. The preference of the synod of 1985 for the image of ‘Church as mystery’ may, but, according to H. J. Pottmeyer, must not be interpreted as a withdrawal of this realism.

The same realism motivated recent German and French theological commentators on the notion of ‘Church as sacrament’ to insist on the necessity of a clear distinction between the human and the divine actor in the sacramental life of the Church (J. Meyer zu Schlochtern); to emphasise that it is the concrete, institutional Church which is the bearer of this sacramental mission (Kehl, Chauvet, Duquoc); and to argue that the sacramental nature of the Church appears especially in her most constitutive acts: her testimony and proclamation (Pottmeyer, Hünemann, Chauvet), her ethical engagement (Chauvet), and, her liturgical celebration of the sacraments, above all of the sacrament of the eucharist (Hünemann, Chauvet, Duquoc).

Both the elaboration of the conciliar concept of ‘Church as sacrament’ in *Lumen Gentium* and its reception in contemporary theology (Duquoc) contain important, realistic warnings with regard to the analogical status of this meta-

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.: “Le sacrement se célèbre, en effet, dans l’institution, mais il ne travaille pas pour l’institution: il oriente vers ce qui la transcende, le Règne de Dieu ou l’Invisible. Celui-ci est l’instituant et déplace l’institution vers sa marge. (...) Ainsi, le sacrement ne sacralise pas l’institution, mais il l’ouvre en sa forme ambiguë à ce qui, au sein d’elle-même, la dépasse et la relativise. Le sacrement forme donc l’un des noeuds de l’articulation avec l’invisible”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 179: “Le sacrement noue l’articulation qui, selon la diversité des actions exigeant des modes variés d’implication des sujets, se vérifie analogiquement pour la totalité de l’institution ecclésiale. Plus on s’éloigne du sacrement célébré en lequel le ministre agit *in persona Christi*, plus l’articulation est fluide, car elle laisse alors au pôle visible sa spécificité humaine en son autonomie”.



phor. That there has been a significant reception of this conciliar notion, reassures me, however, that theologians have not yet transformed their realism in hyper-realism, in that they would no longer narrate their experiences of the presence of God's absence (Chauvet), but only deplore the absence of God's presence.

*Appendix on the Reception  
of this Notion with the Other Christian Churches*

How has the awareness of the Roman Catholic Church of the huge distance between her mission to be a sign and instrument of the unity of all human beings among each other and with God and her concrete reality, been received in the other Christian churches?

Already in 1983 Reformed theologian Günther Gaßmann contributed to a symposium on *Die Sakramentalität der Kirche in der ökumenischen Diskussion* with a paper on the reception of this notion in the ecumenical discussion<sup>46</sup>. He remembered his audience that already the first world conference of Faith and Order held in Lausanne in 1927 described the church as "the divinely chosen instrument by means of which Christ in the Holy Spirit reconciles humankind with God through faith" Partly receiving the definition of the church in LG1, the World Council of Churches's General Assembly in Uppsala (1968) "dares to speak" about the church "as sign of the future unity of humankind" In his article Gaßmann makes mention of several signs of a positive reception of the idea of Church as sacrament, sign and instrument in both the multilateral and bilateral ecumenical dialogue. According to him this "remarkably broad" reception indicates that these concepts "apparently are a help to determine and describe the place and the vocation of the church and its unity in God's salvific plan" He emphasises, however, that this definition should not lead to a triumphalistic understanding of the church. The Church is only able to function as a sign, "because the living Christ is present and active in her", through the Holy Spirit.

Notwithstanding his great sympathy for the understanding of the nature of the church as sacrament of salvation of the Second Vatican Council, Pannenberg formulates similar warnings in the section dealing with 'Die Kirche als

---

<sup>46</sup> G. G a ß m a n n, *Kirche als Sakrament, Zeichen und Werkzeug. Die Rezeption dieser ekklesiologischen Perspektive in der ökumenischen Diskussion*, in: *Die Sakramentalität der Kirche in der ökumenischen Diskussion. Referate und Diskussion eines Symposions anlässlich des 25jährigen Bestehens des Johann-Adam-Möhler-Instituts* (Konfessionskundliche Schriften des Johann-Adam-Möhler-Instituts, 15), Paderborn, Bonifatius, 1983, 171-201.

Heilsmysterium in Christus' in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*<sup>47</sup> The Church is only sign of the future reconciliation of humankind in God's Kingdom "in Christo", as the body of Christ. As a Lutheran theologian he is only willing to affirm that the Church constitutes the mystery of divine salvation when it is at the same time allowed to emphasize that the historical form of the Church constitutes only a broken appearance of this mystery. The identification of the Church as sign and instrument of the coming Kingdom makes it also clear, according to Pannenberg, that the Church is not the goal of its proper existence. One should not forget that the realisation of God's Kingdom remains God's work.

In 1997 two monographs have been published in which, on the one hand, the theology of the sacraments of the Reformed theologians Thielicke, Ebeling, Wenz and Kuhn, and on the other hand, the understanding of Church as sacrament in Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Asmussen have been investigated. These studies have been written by two Roman Catholic scholars Burkhard Neumann and Josef Aussermair<sup>48</sup>. The theologians investigated by Neumann agree that the sacraments are a mixture of divine and human action. Primacy has to be ascribed to the divine work of grace, but the human activity cannot be neglected if one does not want to destroy the sacrament itself. The author is aware that Roman Catholic theologians argue in a similar way about the sacramentality of the Church. Among the theologians investigated by Aussermair, Hans Asmussen has been most receptive towards the idea of the sacramentality of the Church. He has even exhorted the Protestant churches to receive this notion. According to Aussermair, however, Protestant theologians continue to have difficulties with Roman Catholic attempts to objectify divine grace and to claim an equal role for the human activity in the history of salvation. The Protestant claim of the "Solus Deus" for its part has to be understood as pointing to the primacy of the divine action, and not as a denial of the presence of any human and ecclesial action in the sacramental rite.

---

<sup>47</sup> W. P a n n e n b e r g, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. 3, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, 51-62. Pannenberg is definitely more sympathetic to the Catholic rediscovery of 'Church as sacrament' than Eberhard Jüngel in his famous 1983 article on *Die Kirche als Sakrament?* (ZThK 80 (1983) 432-457).

<sup>48</sup> J. A u s s e r m a i r, *Konkretion und Gestalt: "Leiblichkeit" als wesentliches Element eines sakramentalen Kirchenverständnisses am Beispiel der ekklesiologischen Ansätze Paul Tillichs, Dietrich Bonhoeffers und Hans Asmussens unter ökumenischem Gesichtspunkt* (KKS, 47), Paderborn, Bonifatius, 1997; B. N e u m a n n, *Sakrament und Ökumene: Studien zur deutschsprachigen evangelischen Sakramententheologie der Gegenwart* (KKS, 64), Paderborn, Bonifatius, 1997.

On 4 September 2000 an ecumenical commission of theologians, commissioned by the German episcopal conference and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, published a common document, entitled *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as Communion of Saints*<sup>49</sup> Section 3 of chapter IV contains a reflection on 'The Church as Sign and Instrument of Salvation' Lutherans and Catholics are able to confess together that Jesus Christ is God's sacrament par excellence (*Ur-Sakrament*). They also agree that God needs the Church to invite all human beings to enter into communion with Him (86). Lutherans are aware that the Second Vatican Council has taken care to make it clear that the Church fulfils her role in the mediation of salvation only in and through Christ and in and through the Holy Spirit. By calling the Church the foundational sacrament (*Grundsakrament*) of God's salvation it is equally made clear that, even while being Christ's body, the Church is not identical with Him (87). Lutherans understand the Church to be "the community in which the means of salvation of Word and Sacrament which God has instituted become visible for human beings" Therefore they consider the Church to be – in a derived sense – an instrument of divine salvation. In her mediation of Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit sanctifies the people of God. A strong distinction is made between the mediating function of the Church and Christ as the unique giver of salvation. Therefore Lutherans apply the notion of sacrament only to Baptism, the Lord's Supper and to Christ himself. They are also afraid that, when the notion of sacrament is applied to the Church, it is easily forgotten that the Church is at the same time holy and sinful (88).

A consensus could be found, however, as it is stated explicitly, on the content of the content of the teaching on the sacramental nature of the Church, but not on the Roman Catholic tradition to apply the notion of 'sacrament' in an analogous sense to the Church. It is said in common that the Church is at the same time creature and servant of the Word (*creatura et ministra verbi*), that she is a sign of God's intention to save the whole of humankind, and that she is an instrument of grace, by mediating Word and Sacrament. It is also emphasized that this sacramental mission affects the essence of the Church. But, finally, salvation remains God's gift. The Church relates to Christ in a mixture of unity and difference (89).

In the last decades different Protestant Churches have allowed intercommunion and sometimes also the exchange of ministers among one another

---

<sup>49</sup> Deutsche Bischöfkonferenz – Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands, *Communio Sanctorum: die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*, Paderborn, Bonifatius, 2000.

after a solemn declaration of their agreement on the essential aspects of the Christian faith. In other points there is still room for legitimate difference. Both the *Declaration of Meissen* between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Church of England (1988) and the *Porvoo Declaration* (1992) between the Anglican Churches on the British isles and most Lutheran Churches in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries reflect a sacramental understanding of the Church without using the term. Chapter one of the Meissen statements discusses the Church as ‘Sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God’ The summary of beliefs and practices that both churches have in common contains the following definition of the nature of the Church.

We believe that the Church is constituted and sustained by the Triune God through God’s saving action in word and sacraments, and is not the creation of individual believers. We believe that the Church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. But we also recognise that the Church stands in constant need of reform and renewal.

This text has been taken over in the Porvoo statement with the exception that there, a more direct affirmation is used, that the Church “is a sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God”

In 1998 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches launched the first draft of a common statement on ‘The Nature and Purpose of the Church’ None of the participating churches denies that “the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is the sign and instrument of God’s design for the whole world” No consensus, however, exists on applying the notion of Church as sacrament to the Church.

Those churches who use the formula “Church as sacrament” do so because they see the Church primarily as a pointer to what God wants for the world, namely the communion of all together and with him, the happiness for which he created the world.

Other churches do not apply the concept of sacrament to the Church, giving the following two main reasons: (a) there should be a clear distinction between Church and sacraments. The latter are means of salvation through which Christ sustains the Church, not actions by which the Church realizes or actualizes itself; and (b) using the term “sacrament” for the Church might obscure the fact that, for them, the Church is sign and instrument of God’s design as the communion of Christians who, though begin redeemed believers, are still liable to sin.

## KOŚCIÓŁ JAKO SAKRAMENT. KONCEPCJA SOBOROWA I JEJ RECEPCJA WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ TEOLOGII

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Profesor Uniwersytetu w Leuven ukazuje w pełnym świetle eklezjologię posoborową, a w szczególności jej ważny aspekt, jakim jest sakramentalność Kościoła. Omawia podstawowe określenia Kościoła, zawarte w orzeczeniach Soboru Watykańskiego I, a także w motu proprio *Sacrarum antistitum* Piusa X, które w swej części przysięgi antymodernistycznej było w użyciu aż do 1967 r. Głównymi kwestiami eklezjologicznymi tych dokumentów, pozostających pod wpływem myśli takich ówczesnych teologów, jak A. Günther, J. A. Möhler i J. E. Kuhn, było Chrystusowe ustanowienie Kościoła oraz zagadnienie prymatu papieskiego. Podejmując te kwestie Autor stosuje metodę historyczno-porównawczą dzięki której możemy wraz z nim prześledzić ewolucję tekstu Konstytucji dogmatycznej o Kościele, zwłaszcza gdy chodzi o cytowania wspomnianych dokumentów. Pozwala to przyjąć tezę o ewolucyjnym charakterze orzeczeń Magisterium, dla których w przypadku Vaticanum II element nowości pojawia się pod wpływem racji duszpasterskich oraz szerokiej inkulturacji, rzutującej na współczesne rozumienie tradycyjnych ujęć.

Pośród nich kwestia sakramentalności Kościoła została ukazana przez omówienie podstawowych ujęć współczesnych teologów: H. de Lubac'a w *Méditation sur l'Eglise*, O. Semmelrotha w *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, K. Rahnera w *Kirche und Sakramente* oraz E. Schillebeeckxa w *Christus, sacrament van de godsonthoening*. Syntetycznie i komunikatywnie wyjaśnia Autor strukturę *Lumen Gentium* budując rodzaj sakramentalnej eklezjologii, w której mieści się zarówno hierarchiczna struktura, jak i próba opisu samej tajemnicy Kościoła.

Cenną częścią pracy De Mey'a jest ukazanie recepcji tej eklezjologii w orzeczeniu Synodu Biskupów z 1985 r., zwłaszcza gdy chodzi o pluralizm form eklezjalnych nie ujmujących nic jego jedności i powszechności. O posoborowej recepcji sakramentalnej eklezjologii przekonuje nas także omawiając dzieła niemieckich teologów: J. Meyera zu Schlochtern w *Sakrament Kirche: Wirken Gottes im Handeln der Menschen*, H. J. Pottmeyera opisującego Kościół jako ukonkretnienie Królestwa Bożego oraz P. Hünermanna z jego koncepcją wspólnotowych działań i M. Kehla akcentującego elementy pneumatologiczne w tajemnicy i instytucji Kościoła.

Nieco innymi drogami przebiegała recepcja sakramentalnej eklezjologii na gruncie francuskojęzycznym. De Mey omawia ją na przykładzie L.-M. Chauveta oraz C. Duquoca z jego *Des églises provisoires* i późniejszymi pismami.

Wspomniana recepcja w głównych grupach językowych stanowi cenną pomoc w dialogu ekumenicznym, dla którego Kościół jako sakrament pierwotny, fundamentalny staje się okazją dla nowych poszukiwań w zakresie jego ustanowienia i tak ważnej ekumenicznej kwestii prymatu.

Dla środowiska polskiego artykuł posiada wartości poznawcze, ukazujące istotne kwestie współczesnej eklezjologii w teologii zachodniej. Może być inspirujący dla ukierunkowania badań w dialogu naszej teologii ze środowiskami teologii środkowo-wschodniej Europy.

*Streścił Karol Klauza*

**Słowa kluczowe:** eklezjologia, Kościół, sakramentalność.

**Key words:** ecclesiology, Church, sacramentality.