

Andrzej Persidok

Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, Collegium Joanneum, Poland

jedrekpersidok@wp.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-0730-2189

“According to the Whole:” the ‘Catholicity’ of the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac

„Według całości”. Przymiot „katolickości” Kościoła
w teologii Henriego de Lubaca

ABSTRACT: This study has as its subject the meaning of the ‘catholicity’ of the Church in the works of Henri de Lubac. The French theologian, drawing his inspiration mainly from the Fathers of the Church, recovers the complete meaning of the adjective ‘Catholic,’ as containing in itself the true universality as well as the strictest unity. In his works he also tries to show that it is a multifaceted reality: the Church is Catholic in her social, historical and internal aspects. Only all three make up the full picture of her ‘catholicity.’ This study attempts to explain each of the three closely related aspects on the basis of a selection of de Lubac’s works. Although the French theologian does not belong to the most recent authors, it seems to us that his concept of the ‘three-dimensional’ character of Catholicism can help to develop the proper attitude of the Church towards today’s world – so that it will be possible to avoid both the loss of identity and the closed, sectarian mentality.

KEYWORDS: catholicism, catholicity, Henri de Lubac, Church, identity

ABSTRAKT: Tematem niniejszego studium jest znaczenie „katolickości” Kościoła w dziele Henriego de Lubaca. Francuski teolog, czerpiąc inspirację przede wszystkim od Ojców Kościoła, wydobywa na światło dzienne pełne znaczenie przymiotnika „katolicki”, zawierającego w sobie jednocześnie autentyczną powszechność oraz najściślejszą jedność. W swoich pracach stara się pokazać, że jest to rzeczywistość wieloaspektowa: Kościół jest katolicki w aspekcie społecznym, historycznym oraz wewnętrznym. Dopiero wszystkie trzy wymiary dają pełen obraz „katolickości”. Niniejsze studium jest próbą wyjaśnienia każdego z tych trzech wymiarów na podstawie wyboru prac de Lubaca. Choć francuski teolog nie należy do najnowszych autorów, wydaje się, że jego wizja „trójwymiarowej” natury katolicyzmu może pomóc w wypracowaniu

właściwej postawy Kościoła wobec współczesnego świata – tak, by uniknąć zarówno utraty tożsamości, jak i mentalności zamkniętej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: katolicyzm, katolickość, Henri de Lubac, Kościół, tożsamość

Introduction

One of the important phenomena that have characterized Western culture in recent decades is the expansion of religious indifference. Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher who deals with this issue, writes in this context about our era as “the secular age.”¹ He also explains that this term does not mean that the dominant attitude in our times is consistent atheism. Rather, it highlights the circumstances that make it difficult to practice and communicate the faith. Among these, Taylor mentions the understanding and shaping of social life in isolation from religion, the collapse of the faith, and the disappearance of religious practices among people who nonetheless declare themselves to be believers all the time. He also discusses a constant tendency of society’s development towards pluralisation: where once one Church was the place where the spiritual dimension of humanity was realized, now there is a wide and still widening spectrum of religious or pseudo-religious proposals.²

The consequence of the phenomena described by Taylor is a change in the position of the Church in societies until recently considered to be Christian. She ceases to be a determinant of their identity and becomes one of many organizations competing with each other on the market of ideas. The Church sent by Christ to “proclaim the Gospel to every creature”³ and until recently expecting “all the fullness of the Gentiles”⁴ to enter her in the near future increasingly has to accept the status of a part within a larger whole.

This situation provokes different, often extremely different answers from Catholic thinkers. Some, like the Czech philosopher of religion and the Templeton Prize winner, Rev. Tomáš Halík, see in the shrinking of the visible Church the effect of cultural changes that cannot be stopped. Christianity, closely linked to the institution and doctrine, is, in his view, a sinking ship that can no longer be salvaged.⁵ What needs to be preserved are the treasures that this ship carries: values that Christianity has brought into our world. Halík sees

¹ Cf. C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge–London 2007.

² C. Taylor, *Świecka epoka i różne ścieżki wiary*, transl. A. Pawelec, “Znak” 655 (2010), p. 21.

³ Mk 16:15 (hereinafter all quotes from the Bible after USCCB).

⁴ Rom 11:25.

⁵ T. Halík, *Co nie jest chwytne, jest nietrwale*, transl. J. Zychowicz, Krakow 2004, p. 147.

the Christianity of the future not as a boat of the Church, but rather as a polychromatic fleet of boats, whose common feature will be not so much doctrinal beliefs as Gospel-inspired ethical ideals. Among the theological interpretations of the contemporary crisis of the faith, we also find opinions that are extremely opposed. American journalist Rod Dreher, in his famous book *The Benedict Option*, holds that the crisis has been affected by the combined forces of post-Christian culture and the 'secular' mentality of some Christians that are hostile to the Church. As a response to this situation, Dreher postulates the closing of ranks: no more constant attempts at the dialogue with the modern world that is in decline, but the creation of alternative communities and institutions which, like the Ark, will become a place of refuge from the Deluge.⁶

Both authors are mentioned here as an example of two fundamentally different options for dealing with the contemporary crisis of the Church's presence in the world. It can be said that in the former, the universality of influence, even if anonymous, appears to be more important than a clearly defined identity. In the latter it is the Church's unity and strong identity that are given priority status over its influence.

Both tendencies question the proper understanding of one of the four characteristics of the Church that appear in the Confession of Faith: her catholicity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church develops the meaning of this adjective, usually translated simply as 'universal' in Polish,⁷ but also containing the idea of fullness or completeness.⁸ 'Catholic' is, according to the Catechism, 'universal' in two meanings: first, as the one in which Christ is present with the fullness of the means of salvation, such as a correct and complete profession of faith, an integral sacramental life and the ministry of ordination in apostolic succession;⁹ second, as "sent by Christ to the whole human race," that is to say, characterized by a universal, unlimited range.¹⁰

At the root of this study lies the conviction that the Church's current position in the Western world, her status as a not always accepted minority, exposes believers to the temptation of unilaterally emphasizing only one of the two dimensions of the Church's catholicity, which are mentioned in the Catechism. Catholicity tends to be understood either as a formless universality, followed by a kind of dissolution of the Church in the world, or as self-sufficiency and

⁶ R. Dreher, *Opcja Benedykta*, transl. M. Samborska, Krakow 2018, p. 29.

⁷ Such as in the Mass Confession of Faith, cf. *Mszal Rzymski*, <http://ordo.pallotyni.pl/index.php/mszal-rzymski/czesci-stale/87-liturgia-slowa> [access: 1.05.2019].

⁸ CCC 831.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ CCC 832.

contentment within strict boundaries. Meanwhile, a proper, complete understanding of what the catholicity of the Church means is fundamental both for preserving her identity in a changing world and for developing practical strategies for action in this world. Only a Church that properly understands her catholicity can find a way out of the dialectic of either „blending into the world” or „feeling offended” – two inappropriate, instinctive reactions to the lack of acceptance from a large part of this world.

Henri de Lubac, a French Jesuit, an expert at the Second Vatican Council, later Cardinal, author of numerous theological works was one of the theologians who in the last century undertook an in-depth reflection on the concept of the ‘catholicity’ of the Church. Already in *Catholicism*, the first of his works, published in 1938 and later considered to be one of the most important theological contributions of the 20th century,¹¹ the topic of the proper understanding of ‘catholicity’ goes through almost all the chapters. In later publications, the basic lines of thought remain the same, but a different historical context allows the author to reveal new aspects of the issue.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive understanding of de Lubac’s catholicity of the Church. Given the non-systematic nature of most of the theologian’s works, this will require a synthesis of fragments scattered in various publications.¹² The guiding idea here will be the words of the author himself, who stated that the Catholic character of Christianity is evidenced by its three closely related dimensions: social, historical and internal.¹³

First, the places where de Lubac *explicitly* referred to a proper understanding of the catholicity of the Church will be examined (1). The next three paragraphs will discuss other dimensions of catholicity: social (2), historical (3) and internal (4). Together they will form a three-dimensional picture of Catholic fullness, which is perhaps the most interesting and original contribution of the French Jesuit to the reflection on the Church. The last part (5) will take up the motif of the Passover, that is, the way of the cross and the resurrection,

¹¹ Cardinal Ratzinger will recall the reading of his works as a key moment in his theological development, cf. *Introduction to the 1988 English translation* to “Catholicism. Bulletin Association Internationale Cardinal Henri de Lubac” 15 (2013), p. 49.

¹² Given the importance of the issue of ‘catholicity’ for de Lubac, the number of studies on this aspect of his thought is surprisingly small. Some of the latest ones include: V. Arborea, *La dimensione ecclesiale della fede in Henri de Lubac e Joseph Ratzinger. Un approccio teologico-fondamentale*, EDUSC 2018, 390 ff; many interesting thoughts are contained in the articles that were included in the French edition of the journal “Communio” devoted entirely to de Lubac’s *Catholicism*: “Communio” 33 (2008), p. 5.

¹³ H. de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l’occasion de mes écrits*, Paris 2006, p. 25.

whose passage is an essential stage on the road to universal union of which the Church is the sign on earth. The findings will culminate in conclusions, which will present a synthesis of the concept of catholicity of the Church¹⁴ as expounded by de Lubac.

Henri de Lubac on the meaning of the word 'Catholic'

The first approximation of the understanding of the word 'Catholic' that stems from Henri de Lubac's theology is provided by the second chapter of *Catholicism*,¹⁵ entitled *The Church*.¹⁶ For the French theologian, the Church is "Jesus Christ handed out and given to us;" at the same time, she is the result of the spiritual union of all humanity.¹⁷ It is therefore constituted by two seemingly contradictory dynamisms: the union of all people around Christ is achieved in the Church precisely by the fact that Christ is handed out and given to us. The unity and cohesion of the Church are closely linked to her focus on the whole. The centripetal dynamism can only be realized by the centrifugal dynamism.

It is the Church as the beginning of the unification of all humanity scattered after original sin that bears the name of *Katholika*. This designation has been given her since the second century and, as de Lubac notes, until the 8th century it even appears as the Church's proper name.¹⁸ Its sources are, however, pre-Christian. Before the word *katholikos* found its way to theology, it had its place in philosophy and classical Greek, where it meant a general concept, a universal.

¹⁴ De Lubac himself preferred to speak of 'Catholicism' rather than 'catholicity' because the former better reflects the fact that it is not a trait that could be attributed to many different realities, but a unique attribute that belongs to the Church and almost identifies itself with her. In this study, however, we will in most cases write about 'catholicity,' bearing in mind that this is a concrete and not an abstract meaning of the term; cf. É. de Beaufort, *L'actualité paradoxale de Catholicisme*, "Communio" 33 (2008) 5, p. 97.

¹⁵ H. de Lubac, *Katolicyzm. Społeczne aspekty dogmatu*, transl. M. Stokowska, Poznań 2011 (hereinafter: C); in the first part of this study we analyze de Lubac's selected works by the time of their creation. In the following parts, however, we abandon the chronological perspective, treating its individual texts, regardless of the time of their creation, as elements of some coherent synthesis. As for this approach to the work of de Lubac, cf. É. Guibert, *Le Mystère du Christ d'après Henri de Lubac*, Paris 2003, pp. 16–18; cf. É. de Moulins-Beaufort, *L'actualité paradoxale de Catholicisme*, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁶ C 43–66.

¹⁷ C 43.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

The Greek adverb *kath'olou*, from which it is derived, means 'together,' 'as one.'¹⁹ What is emphasised in it is organic unity: it does not mean a sum or a set of loosely related elements, but a coherent whole.²⁰ Thus, when this concept was adapted to theology and referred to the Church, it was intended to emphasize, on the one hand, the fact that the Church, even when she was a "small flock," little different from other ephemeral religious groups of late antiquity, was, in its essence, directed towards uniting all creation within her.²¹ On the other hand, a special kind of this union was pointed out: not as the sum of purely externally related particles, but as parts of a living organism which, although complex, is something single.²² It was not until later that the word 'Catholic' began to be used in a restrictive sense, to distinguish the Church from "schismatic communities."²³ However, as the French theologian claimed, although this is the most widespread sense today, it is by no means the primary sense or the most important one.²⁴ The "Catholic spirit" is not the spirit of closure and limitation, but "the spirit of the widest universalism with the closest unity."²⁵

The theme of the proper sense of the 'catholicity' of the Church returned more than a decade later in *The Splendour of the Church*.²⁶ De Lubac noted in it that the term 'Catholic' originally meant 'universal assembly,' that is, a perfect community embracing in time and space all people united to Christ and through him to God.²⁷ It is important to stress not only the spatial but also the temporal dimension of the universality of the Church. Through the same faith in Christ, handed down from generation to generation, even the most distant particles of the Church are united in one Body.²⁸ Thus, the French theologian, following the thought of St Thomas Aquinas, indicates a wide, essentially unlimited spatial range of this universality: The Church "is open to all," "embraces all mankind," "has no time or space limitations;" it also encompasses angels and "extends further into the whole cosmos."²⁹ Even the visible world is not a barrier to it, which traditional teaching expresses by distinguishing between

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ C 44.

²¹ C 45.

²² C 44.

²³ C 47, note 13; C 230–231.

²⁴ Cf. C 231.

²⁵ C 65.

²⁶ H. de Lubac, *Medytacje o Kościele*, transl. I. Białkowska-Cichoń, Krakow 2012 (hereinafter: SC).

²⁷ SC 47.

²⁸ SC 49.

²⁹ SC 48.

the Church Militant (on Earth), the Church Penitent (in Purgatory) and the Church Triumphant (in Heaven).³⁰

This closest unity of unlimited range, stretching over time and space, makes the Catholic Church a unique creation. In her womb, the people who are basically divided by everything – the era, the climate, the culture, the problems, the worries, the tastes – merge into one, in spite of the constantly recurring gravitation towards mutual strangeness and isolation.³¹ De Lubac illustrated this unusual feature of the Church, referring to the experience of people studying ancient Christian authors. He notes that people reading e.g. the writings of the Church Fathers today feel a sense of strangeness and indifference to their problems. It turns out, however, that this strangeness is not the last word. Someone who studies these authors, sharing the same faith with them, quickly realizes that they are actually his contemporaries, because “Christians of every age and country, race and culture indeed form one people, united by love for Christ.”³²

Henri de Lubac once again returns to the meaning of the adjective ‘Catholic’ in the text of *Particular Churches in the Universal Church*.³³ This time the context of the deliberations is polemical: the clarification of the proper meaning of ‘catholicity’ serves the French theologian to discuss with those who in order to simplify and modernise the religious language have called for it to be replaced by a simple adjective ‘universal.’³⁴ At the outset, as in the previous work in question, he points out that the mark of catholicity of the Church was originally indeed synonymous with its universality.³⁵ Over time, however, the concept of catholicity has gained a special meaning, as unique as the Church is among other realities developing in the world.

The changes in the meaning of the word ‘Catholic’ are already visible in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville: he initially defined ‘Catholic’ according to pre-Christian etymology as ‘universal, general.’ However, he immediately

³⁰ SC 50.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² SC 51 (own translation).

³³ H. de Lubac, *Kościół partykularne w Kościele powszechnym*, transl. M. Spyra, Krakow 2004 (hereinafter: MC).

³⁴ In note 27 to this work, the author mentions the initiative of the French bishops who made such a demand, and the strong reaction of the French theologians who are part of the International Theological Commission, who sent a letter to the Episcopate of France on this matter, cf. PKPK 30; the French theologian himself wrote a note on this subject, the content of which he repeats in this work. This note was included as an addition to the last French edition of *Catholicism* within as a part of the collected works, cf. H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme. Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Paris 2010, pp. 455–456.

³⁵ MC 26.

provided a second definition: Catholic is “as if *apo tou kath’olon*, that is: according to the whole.”³⁶ The further evolution of the meaning of the word ‘Catholic,’ associated with an ever-growing understanding of the nature of the catholicity of the Church, moves away from being simply synonymous with universality.³⁷ De Lubac noted that from a certain moment these words, both of which refer to the Church, begin to point out two opposite directions of thought. While ‘universal’ remains a term for a reality disseminated everywhere, as can be seen in such expressions as ‘universal use’ or ‘universal publicity,’ the meaning of ‘Catholic’ becomes broader and refers to something else: it “suggests the idea of an organic whole, of coherence, of a compact synthesis, of a reality that is not dispersed but, on the contrary, regardless of its internal differentiation and where it is spread, is turned towards a centre that ensures its unity.”³⁸ The word ‘Catholic’ indicates ‘dynamics and intensity’ while the word ‘universal’ indicates ‘passivity, stability and extensivity.’³⁹ Catholicity is, according to de Lubac, “in principle and in its becoming a force of unity in its entirety; a force that is not totalitarian, but integrating.”⁴⁰ ‘Catholic’ is both ‘universal’ and ‘one,’ and therefore also ‘unique.’⁴¹ This is why the same word was used in very early Christian scriptures to describe both the universality of the Church and the integrity of her faith.⁴²

‘Catholicity’ therefore does not point to some purely ideal and invisible unity which, in human terms, may seem the only kind of unity to be reconciled with authentic universality in time and space. The Catholic Church is not an abstractly universal Church, a scattered and unstructured one, but she is the only concrete Church, founded by Christ on the foundation of the Apostles, and continuing in history, with potentially unlimited reach. According to de Lubac, to confuse these two visions of universality would logically lead to a kind of ‘religious universalism,’ based on the assumption “that all believers would invisibly, even unaware of it, create a vast community, while the issues of organization, worship, discipline or belief would be of little importance in her.”⁴³ The author of *Catholicism* warns that such a vision of universalism,

³⁶ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VII, 14,4; VIII, 1,1, EN 82, pp. 293–294, cited after: MC 26.

³⁷ MC 26.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² MC 28.

⁴³ MC 30.

shared in our times by many theologians, would in fact lead to the removal of the Christian faith.⁴⁴

From what de Lubac writes about the importance of the adjective ‘Catholic’ in the works analysed above, it can be assumed that catholicity is for him a universality, but of a special kind: one that is not a scattered omnipresence, but a coherent whole organised around the centre, which in the case of the Church is Christ.⁴⁵ This particular kind of universality is realized both in the spatial dimension as a community reaching to the farthest ends of the world, and in the temporal dimension as a communication between people of different eras. To these two dimensions of catholicity de Lubac adds another: its internal dimension. In his intellectual autobiography published at the end of his life, referring to the idea behind *Catholicism* published in 1938, he writes that he tried to show the social, historical and *internal* character of Christianity in this work. He goes on to add that it is only the unity of these three characteristics that gives Christianity that characteristic of universality and totality which is best expressed by the word ‘Catholicism.’⁴⁶

This idea of the ‘three-dimensional’ nature of catholicity is at the basis of the analyses presented in the following sections. They will largely be based on *Catholicism*.⁴⁷ This does not mean that it will be the only point of reference. References to other works of the French theologian will allow us to see that the threefold – social, historical and internal – character of Catholicism is not an idea present in just one book, but rather something that characterizes his entire thinking about the Church.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Cf. É. de Moulins-Beaufort, *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri de Lubac. «L'esprit de l'homme» ou la présence de Dieu en l'homme*, Paris 2003, p. 827.

⁴⁶ „En gros, l'on peut dire que l'ouvrage veut montrer le caractère à la fois social, historique et intérieur du christianisme, cette triple note lui conférant ce caractère d'universalité et de totalité exprimé au mieux par le mot «catholicisme»,” H. de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, op. cit. p. 25; de Lubac similarly presents these three dimensions of ‘Catholicism’ in the introduction to the first edition of *Catholicism*, which for unknown reasons was not included in the Polish translation, cf. H. de Lubac, *Introduction*, [in:] *Catholicism. Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Paris 2010, pp. XII–XIII; cf. L. Villemain, *Fécondité ecclésiologique des “aspects sociaux du dogme,”* “Communio” 33 (2008), no. 5, pp. 104 ff.

⁴⁷ As Hans Urs von Balthasar argues, *Catholicism* already contains as if in embryo all the later works of the French theologian; H.U. von Balthasar, *Henri de Lubac: la obra orgánica de una vida*, transl. A.G. Rosón, Madrid 1989, p. 33.

Social dimension of 'catholicity'

The first of the three dimensions of catholicity, the social one, is reflected in the subtitle to *Catholicism*. A perfect illustration of what this dimension is all about is, according to de Lubac, St Augustine's polemic against the Donatists. The bishop of Hippo did not accuse the Christians of Africa who persisted in their schism of being a minority within the Christian world, but of being content to be a minority. Blinded by local particularism, the Donatists limited their ambitions to being a church closed in tight, narrowly defined boundaries,⁴⁸ while the trait of the true Church is that, regardless of her actual reach and the number of believers, she always considers herself as a coherent whole potentially open to all people.⁴⁹ Although at a given moment in history she is only a 'part,' she must always see herself 'as a whole.'

Viewing Catholicism as one of many religions (...) – even with this complementary remark that it is the only true religion (...) – is a fundamental mistake regarding its essence (...). Catholicism is *the* Religion. It is the shape that humanity should take to finally be itself. It is the only reality which, in order to exist, does not have to oppose something and is therefore the opposite of a 'closed community.'⁵⁰

Catholicism, not as one of the many Christian denominations nor even as one of the many religions, but as *the* Religion in the proper sense of the word: on what basis does the French theologian form such an opinion?⁵¹ This is not, of course, about phenomenological observation, but about capturing the theological essence of what the Catholic Church is. De Lubac saw it in the broad perspective of the history of salvation as a work of reunifying the creation torn apart by sin. At the beginning of this story there is one mankind, at the end – a perfectly united humanity. The Church is not only one of the contingent forms of searching for lost unity, but she is the only one of its forms that has been inscribed from the beginning in the plan of Providence. People created "in one image of the one God" have both a common source and a common destination in Him.⁵² The path of the return of prodigal children to the Father

⁴⁸ C 46.

⁴⁹ C 45.

⁵⁰ C 213–214.

⁵¹ Although de Lubac does not refer at this point to the traditional etymology of the word 'religion' (allegedly derived from the Latin *religare* – to re-bind sth), he implicitly makes an allusion to it here.

⁵² C 30.

is at the same time a path of universal union in one body, of which the Saviour is the head.⁵³ It will be a true “triumphant catholicity;”⁵⁴ not a mere “sum of the chosen,” but a “real and suprapersonal” unity. According to his understanding of catholicity, the theologian adds that it is a community “united as one family” and stretched to borders like an “endless city.”⁵⁵ In a narrower sense, this community will include all spiritual creatures, people and angels. In a broader sense, however, it is about a truly universal union in which, according to the hierarchy of beings, there is room for every creature.⁵⁶ The Church in her perfect form identifies herself with a world fully reconciled with itself and with God.⁵⁷ That explains why the French theologian presents the final completion of the salvific economy in the following way:

The whole universe embraced by man as being bound to his fate and destiny; man in turn, with the immeasurable richness of his entire history, embraced by the Church; the universe spiritualised by man and man sanctified by the Church; and finally the Church, the spiritual and sanctified world, like a great ship carrying all the fruits of the earth, will together enter eternity.⁵⁸

⁵³ C 42.

⁵⁴ In the Polish translation, the original *Catholicité triomphante* was translated as “triumphant universality,” cf. H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme...*, op. cit., p. 87; C 90. However, given the emphasis the theologian himself placed on the distinction between ‘universality’ and ‘catholicity’ (cf. MC 26–27), at this point it seems appropriate to modify the translation.

⁵⁵ C 90; on the same page in the Polish translation there occurs again an inaccuracy: de Lubac writes, among other things, that the Church is a *catholica societas*; in the Polish translation the term ‘universal community’ is used here, while the translation contained in the original edition of *Catholicism is la société catholique*, cf. H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme*, op. cit., p. 476.

⁵⁶ Cf. C 199; de Lubac refers here to one of the interpretations of the word *pleroma* which appears in Col 1:19, understood not so much as “all the fullness” of deity in Christ, but as the union of the whole of creation in Him. Unfortunately, the Polish translation lacks an extensive footnote, in which de Lubac, referring to Greek and Latin patristics, explains how he understands the term *pleroma*, cf. H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme*, op. cit., p. 239, note 1.

⁵⁷ Cf. H. de Lubac, *Paradoja y misterio de la Iglesia*, transl. A. Ortiz García, Salamanca 2002, p. 59; SC 155.

⁵⁸ C 196; the theologian, of course, does not mean that the Church in her present form will exist forever. He makes a clear distinction between the “essential content” of the Church, which will last forever, and her temporal, incidental character, which will pass away, “for the world in its present form is passing away” (after USCCB). These two aspects of the Church, although different, are not separate. The relation between them is that of a “mystical analogy” which is a “reflection of the deepest identity.” Cf. SC 53–59.

In summary, the social dimension of catholicity means that the Church, the Body of Christ, is not a reality secondary to the individual path of salvation of each of her members, but the form that this salvation must take.⁵⁹ Salvation, on the other hand, cannot be understood merely as the union of the individual soul with God, but also, inextricably, as the restoration of the original unity of the humankind, through Christ and in Christ.⁶⁰ Just as the primordial, natural unity embraced all people, so is the final unification unlimited. According to God's plan, the Church is really meant to embrace everyone and everything, so even if she seems to be a "little flock" at a given moment in history, she can never consider herself as one of the many religious communities. She must always see herself "as a whole," and in those who are beyond her borders, she must see not so much a foreign and hostile world as her ununited members.

Historical dimension of 'catholicity'

The second dimension of the Christian mystery, which, according to de Lubac, makes it truly 'Catholic' as a unique combination of unity and universality, is the historical dimension. As was the case with the social dimension, de Lubac adheres to a theological view as well. From this perspective, the relationship between Christianity and history reverses from what a religious historian could say: it is not so much Christianity that is a historical phenomenon as history is a Christian reality.⁶¹ God is at its beginning and at its end, and is its hidden depth. Although de Lubac, unlike some 20th-century theologians, does not succumb to the temptation to identify the very course of history with the history of salvation,⁶² he nevertheless strongly emphasizes that history is the place of God's action and Revelation.⁶³ God not only directs the history of the world, but He Himself is involved in it; He enters history, thus giving it a „religious consecration.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Cf. "Just as God's will is an act and is called the world, so it is God's intention to save people and it is called the Church," St Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogue* I, 6, quoted [in:] SC 58.

⁶⁰ In the introduction to the original edition of *Catholicism*, de Lubac writes about the social character of the Church as something that is part of "the very essence of its dogmatics," cf. H. de Lubac, *Introduction*, [in:] *Catholicism...*, op. cit., p. IX.

⁶¹ H. de Lubac, *Paradoksy i Nowe paradoksy*, transl. M. Rostworowska-Książek, Krakow 1995, p. 78 (hereinafter: P).

⁶² H. de Lubac, *Słowo Boże w historii człowieka*, transl. B. Czarnomska, Krakow-Kiev 1997, pp. 39-41; cf. F. Bertoldi, *De Lubac. Cristianesimo e modernità*, Bologna 1994, pp. 81-83.

⁶³ C 127.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

God’s involvement in history has had significant consequences for the Christian ethos. Since God is present not only above history, but also – through his Word – in it, a believer cannot ignore it, seeking some direct, timeless contact with God. Though Christ has come to lead mankind to eternal life, He leads it not beside time, but through time.⁶⁵ History “becomes a necessary mediator and translator between God and each of us.”⁶⁶ Therefore, in order to enter eternity, a Christian must “necessarily lean on time and trudge within it.”⁶⁷

As for the role that history plays in the Christian mystery, a duality can be seen in de Lubac’s writings. On the pages of *Catholicism*, he stressed that this mystery develops over time. History is, in fact, “the story of Christ’s infiltration into mankind”⁶⁸ while “spiritual reality is revealed gradually and must be understood historically.”⁶⁹ Although strictly speaking this is true of the times preceding the coming of Christ, it does not seem to be limited to them. He reconsidered it in his later works. History appears less as a place where God’s plan is gradually becoming more and more real but rather as a collection of successive epochs, each of which, in conjunction with the previous and the next one, must find its own path to God.⁷⁰ The theologian no longer focuses on history as a whole, but on the religious potential of individual epochs.

It is this second approach that Francesco Bertoldi, the author of an insightful study analysing the main structural lines of de Lubac’s theology, referred to when he claimed that for the French theologian history was not a cumulative process in which the understanding of the mystery would grow linearly, but rather has a character of successive phases, each of which gives the opportunity to hear anew, under new conditions, what God says to man.⁷¹ According to Bertoldi, in de Lubac’s view, each individual epoch is not so much a mediator between man and the Event of Christ, as it is the embodiment of that Event

⁶⁵ C 113.

⁶⁶ C 128.

⁶⁷ C 113.

⁶⁸ C 111; cf. G. Chantraine, *Catholicisme. De quelques idées*, “Communio” 33 (2008), 5, p. 16.

⁶⁹ C 127.

⁷⁰ A question may be asked to what extent this shift in emphasis was due to the different context in which subsequent works were created: in the case of *Catholicism*, it was the enthusiasm for the Catholic revival of the interwar years, and in the case of the works from the post-conciliar period cited below, the disappointment with the triumph of naive progressivism among many theologians; cf. H. de Lubac, *Najnowsze Paradoksy*, transl. K. Dybel, A. Ziernicki, Krakow 2012, pp. 35–52; S. Madrigal, *Tiempo de concilio. El Vaticano II en los Diarios de Yves Congar y Henri de Lubac*, Santander 2009, pp. 238–241.

⁷¹ F. Bertoldi, *De Lubac...*, op. cit., p. 88.

under specific historical and cultural conditions.⁷² Thus, every epoch has “direct contact with God” and therefore both the complaints about the “godless” times and nostalgia for any “golden era” of Christianity do not make any sense.⁷³ Although there are times that are more or less conducive to reflection on faith and its assimilation by man, the path towards God remains open at every stage of the development of human spirit.

The concept of history, to which Bertoldi referred, is clearly present where de Lubac criticises the idea of linear progress in theology, arguing with representatives of neo-scholastics.⁷⁴ The latter claimed that the thought of St Thomas Aquinas and his great commentators as a perfect synthesis of faith and reason is the final point in the development of theology. Returning to pre-scholastic theology – patristic or early-medieval – was for them the abandonment of what was perfect in favour of what was only an intermediate stage on the road to fullness. De Lubac holds, however, that behind this type of thinking there is the erroneous assumption that the progress in theology is linear, leading from less to more perfect solutions.⁷⁵ However, such an assumption is as naive as dreams of returning to some ideal era in the past.⁷⁶ The history of theology does not resemble an ascending or descending line but rather successive instances of ebbs and flows.⁷⁷ The price for progress in one aspect is often regression in another, as de Lubac shows with the example of the transition from a symbolic model to a scholastic model in the Middle Ages.⁷⁸ The movement of thought in theology therefore does *not* consist in the linear growth of knowledge, but rather in the constant rediscovery and re-expression of the truths of faith in the context of the present, with reference to the past and openness to the future.⁷⁹

⁷² Ibidem, p. 89.

⁷³ Charles Taylor analyses history in a similar way in the context of a reflection on modern times as a “secular age,” cf. C. Taylor, *Nawrócenia. Chryścijaństwo w poszukiwaniu nowych szlaków*, transl. T. Kunz, “Znak” 654 (2009), pp. 41–42 (the text is a chapter from *A Secular Age* translated into Polish).

⁷⁴ Cf. H. de Lubac, *Le mystère du surnaturel*, Paris 2000, pp. 19–40 (hereinafter: MS).

⁷⁵ MS 35.

⁷⁶ C 236; P 54.

⁷⁷ MS 35–37.

⁷⁸ Cf. H. de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum. L'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1949, pp. 254, 265; P 55; cf. H. Boersma, *Analogy of Truth: The Sacramental Epistemology of Nouvelle Théologie*, [in:] *Ressourcement. A movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, G. Flynn, P.D. Murray (eds.), Oxford 2012, p. 160.

⁷⁹ C 114; 236; “The progress of the spirit is not about continuity, but about renewal,” P 55. In his view of the relationship between the old tradition and the new challenges in theology, de Lubac goes in a similar direction as the 20th-century philosophical hermeneutics,

In opposition to most religions, where time is regarded as a meaningless becoming, while salvation is construed as an individualistic escape from history, Christians have from the beginning seen in history the place where God's saving plan is being realized.⁸⁰

For Christians, therefore, history is not indifferent to the plan of salvation, but is *entirely* the place where this plan is realized: at first as a vague announcement in the Old Covenant and then as the fullness in the Incarnation; finally, as the penetration of the Incarnate Word into humanity through the Church.⁸¹ On the other hand, within this whole, *every* epoch in the history has a direct reference to God. Even the epochs seemingly completely immanent are rooted in Eternity, and the Christians living in them can, by exploring the Revelation, extract from it treasures that have escaped the eyes of those who lived before them or will live after them. So God's agency in history is universal because it applies to every era.

History is one whole because as a place of God's agency it has one beginning and one goal.⁸² The universality and unity of God's agency in time make up together the catholicity in its historical dimension.

Internal dimension of 'catholicity'

The last of the three dimensions of the Christian mystery, which constitute the mark of its 'catholicity,' is much more difficult to grasp than the others. If, following the three-part structure of *Catholicism*, one of the three dimensions were to be assigned to each part of the work, then the internal dimension would correspond to the third part.⁸³ The content of this part makes one think of the inner dimension of catholicity as a necessary complement to its social, collective dimension. One-sided emphasis on the latter would, according to de Lubac, lead to a totalitarian vision in which each individuality is sacrificed on the altar of the whole. The unity to which the Church leads mankind is the real and most complete unity and at the same time the place where each

cf. P. Feliga, *Czas i ortodoksja. Hermeneutyka teologii w świetle Prawdy i metody Hansa-Georga Gadamera*, Toruń 2014, pp. 326–327.

⁸⁰ C 110; on the theological, Christian origin of the idea of history, cf. H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, I, 2, Paris 1959, p. 470; K. Löwith, *Universal History and the History of Salvation*, transl. J. Marzęcki, Kęty 2002, pp. 5–9.

⁸¹ Cf. C 155.

⁸² Cf. C 112.

⁸³ C 221–277.

of her members can thrive.⁸⁴ In the Church, the individual person is not only not absorbed by mankind, but is even forever confirmed in his own identity and in the uniqueness of his interior.⁸⁵

However, in addition to the explanations given above, de Lubac posits yet another specific understanding of ‘interiority’ which seems to be more closely linked to the catholicity of the Church. In the second chapter of *Catholicism*, the French theologian writes that the Church not only addresses every human being, but also “addresses the *entire* human being in each one, embracing him fully in his nature.”⁸⁶ The Church, like Christ, “knows what is in man” and reaches out to the most secret depths of the human spirit.⁸⁷ In this sense, therefore, ‘interiority’ indicates that Christianity is not something artificially fastened to human nature, some kind of distortion or alienation from its natural, spontaneous aspirations and desires, but that it corresponds to who man really is.

The issue of correspondence between the Christian message and human nature, which has already been drawn up in *Catholicism*, was the subject of the famous dispute over the relationship between nature and grace that de Lubac had with his contemporary Neo-Thomists.⁸⁸ He attempted to prove that there is an inner bond between nature and grace because man is already created as directed towards God. When the gift of grace reaches man, his nature is not questioned or distorted, but is finally completed, crowned by what his deepest and most basic desire was directed to.⁸⁹ In the 20th-century dispute over the supernatural the main issue was whether Christianity could present itself as a desirable complement rather than a superfluous addition in contrast to the modern world which is seeking for the natural and has become allergic to all forms of alienation.⁹⁰ At the same time, however, de Lubac’s position was to show that grace is not just a kind of spiritual “gilding,” but a profound transformation of human nature, such that embraces all spheres of man, right down to the deepest and most secret movements of his spirit.⁹¹

⁸⁴ C 244.

⁸⁵ C 246.

⁸⁶ C 44.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Cf. J.-P. Wagner, *Henri de Lubac*, Paris 2007, pp. 21–24, 77–89; as far as (surprisingly few) publications in Polish discussing the dispute are concerned, an excellent introduction is a short commentary and a selection of texts in “Christianitas” 44 (2010), pp. 167–212. Cf. also B.J. Shanley, *Tradycja tomistyczna*, transl. R. Mordarski, Krakow–Poznań–Warsaw 2017, pp. 388–397.

⁸⁹ H. de Lubac, *La foi chrétienne*, Paris 2008, p. 340.

⁹⁰ Cf. P. Milcarek, *Nadprzyrodzoność w centrum debaty teologicznej XX wieku*, “Christianitas” 44 (2010), p. 168.

⁹¹ Cf. C 204.

If the Church, as truly Catholic, addresses man as a whole, then "nothing truly human, wherever it may come from, can be foreign to her."⁹² The role of the Church and of the Gospel is therefore not to replace the natural content of the human spirit with a completely different, purely Christian one, but to "gather everything to save everything and sanctify everything."⁹³ This also applies to elements of truth and goodness present in the various religious and cultural traditions of humanity. After being purified, they are to become the building blocks of the Body of Christ so that its beauty can shine forth with a wealth of diversity.⁹⁴ Faith in the assimilating power of Christianity originates in de Lubac from his full reflection on the mystery of the Incarnation. Following the example of Christ, true God and true man, Christianity is completely divine and at the same time "in a sense completely human."⁹⁵ Although it is entirely from God, it is entirely expressed in a human way. It is not some "pure supernaturalism" imposed on man, suppressing his nature, but it is the supernatural elevation of that very nature, in all its spheres.⁹⁶ There is no such place in man that could not be reached by grace because there is "a profound correspondence between the dogma which the Church guards and human nature, also full of mysteries."⁹⁷

In this correspondence between Christianity and the human interior, catholicity is revealed in its internal dimension. In a sense, this dimension forms the basis for the other two: the Church can embrace mankind of all times and all geographical latitudes because by virtue of the correspondence between human nature and the Christian mystery there is no such man or sphere of the human spirit for which it is alien. This does not, of course, mean naive optimism about what is human. In the conclusion to *Catholicism*, de Lubac reminds us that even the most noble in man must first die so that, included in Christ, it can find a new life.⁹⁸ In *Paradoxes* he adds that Christianity, "incarnated and existing in the most essential depths of human life," must place a cross at the bottom of that depth so as to lead it to the resurrection through a "reviving death."⁹⁹ This

⁹² C 213; cf. F. Bertoldi, *De Lubac...*, op. cit., pp. 99–100.

⁹³ C 213.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ C 204.

⁹⁶ H. de Lubac, *La Lumière du Christ*, [in:] *Révélation divine. Affrontements mystiques. Athéisme et sens de l'homme*, Paris 2010, pp. 390–391.

⁹⁷ C 44.

⁹⁸ C 280.

⁹⁹ P 34.

does not change the fact, however, that human nature enlightened by grace is not destroyed, but finally finds its deepest truth.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

A careful reading of Henri de Lubac's works helped to bring to light his understanding of the 'catholicity' of the Church. The word, which in everyday language is simply used to distinguish Christians who recognize the Pope's authority from those who are not in communion with Rome, has proved to have a much richer content. Above all, by referring to the word's etymology, the French theologian showed that its primordial and central meaning makes us think not so much about closure and separation as about an infinite extension of the horizon. 'Catholic' means 'truly universal.' Following the evolution of the understanding of catholicity in early theology, de Lubac proved, however, that the simple identification of catholicity with universality does not reflect the whole content of the concept. 'Catholic' means both 'universal' and 'one.' The universality which is a trait of the Christian mystery and one of the marks of the Church means not only unlimited openness, but also truly organic unity. Christ, around whom this unity is organized, thus acts as a magnet with an unlimited field of attraction, around which chaotically scattered metal filings begin to form a certain structure.

As a concrete manifestation of this universality and unity of the Church it is usually the observation that she is present all over the world, embracing people of all races, cultures and latitudes and uniting them, despite their differences, in the unity of faith. The French theologian attaches great importance to this social dimension of Catholicism, but at the same time he shows that a holistic view of true Catholic universality calls for two more dimensions to be taken into account: historical and internal. The Christian mystery is Catholic by its universal reach in space (length and breadth), in time (past and future) and in the sphere of spirit (depth). Expanding in these three dimensions, it binds all creatures – and each one of them in the entirety of its nature – into a single, all-embracing synthesis.

Analysing each of the three dimensions of catholicity, de Lubac tried to show that each of them combines seemingly opposing features: authentic universality and organic unity. As far as the social dimension is concerned, the theologian first stresses that from the beginning salvation in Christianity was understood

¹⁰⁰ C 203; cf. MC 194.

as the union of all people. The collective dimension has never been secondary to the individual, and the salvation of each was seen in close connection with the salvation of all. At the same time, since the basis for this union was the belief of the primordial unity of mankind, it has never been understood in a totalitarian manner, as the subordination of all to a single cultural norm, but as universal unity in diversity. The historical dimension is first associated with a typically Christian vision of history as a unity whose sense and purpose are an ever more perfect community of God and people. In this vision, history as a whole is not a chaotic collection of facts and processes but a place where the one divine plan is being realized. Hence, people living in different epochs are not strangers to each other because in one way or another they are referred to Christ. His impact, however, is truly universal, which means that he reaches every epoch, not just some privileged episode in history. Finally, the internal dimension of the mystery is that it does not constitute an ideology that subordinates man to externally imposed norms. On the contrary, it is a true, supernatural complement to human nature and a profound transformation of it. The inclusion of new members in the Body of Christ does not, therefore, require the demolition of all that the human spirit achieved; the Church does not need to be afraid of any genuinely human values because if they are genuinely human they already have their place in the Catholic synthesis.

It is as a three-dimensional synthesis – in space, in time and in the human being – that Christianity is a truly Catholic, universal unity and the only true universality. It spreads in all directions and has no predetermined boundaries, apart from the boundary of human freedom. While spreading, it is not like a drop of ink being let into a vessel with water, which is increasingly losing its colour. Reaching everywhere, the Church remains one and remains herself. She does not dissolve in the world, but embraces it and directs it towards Christ, present in the Word and the sacraments.

The vision of Catholicism presented in the writings of Henri de Lubac seems particularly worth recalling today, in times that are not easy for the Church. On the other hand the world in which she has to function today rejects her, as a relic of pre-modern civilization, but on the other it feels attracted and fascinated by the promises of peaceful coexistence, if only the Church is fully conformed to it. In this situation, it is often difficult for believers to believe in her vocation to universal union. Sometimes this leads to succumbing to the temptation to remain in a position of a distinct particle, with its strictly defined boundaries, turned back to the modern world. On the other hand, the dream of universal influence is sometimes realized at the price of the unity and identity of Catholicism. In the “evangelical values,” these *membra disjecta*, absorbed in part by

post-modernity and continuing in it independently of the Body, one wants to see an authentic and only possible realization of the universality of the Church today. In this context de Lubac's voice sounds as an encouragement to think of oneself soberly yet hopefully "according to the whole" – without sectarian limiting of horizons and without losing sight of Christ working in the Church.

References

- Balthasar H.U. von, *Henri de Lubac: la obra orgánica de una vida*, transl. A.G. Rosón, Madrid 1989.
- Bertoldi F., *De Lubac. Cristianesimo e modernità*, Bologna 1994.
- "Bulletin Association Internationale Cardinal Henri de Lubac" 15 (2013).
- Chantraine G., *Catholicisme. De quelques idées*, "Communio" 33 (2008), 5, pp. 13–27.
- Dreher R., *Opcja Benedykta*, transl. M. Samborska, Krakow 2018.
- Feliga P., *Czas i ortodoksja. Hermeneutyka teologii w świetle Prawdy i metody Hansa-Georga Gadamera*, Toruń 2014.
- Guibert É., *Le Mystère du Christ d'après Henri de Lubac*, Paris 2003.
- Halík T., *Co nie jest chwiejne, jest nietrwale*, Krakow 2004.
- Löwith, K., *Historia powszechna i dzieje zbawienia*, transl. J. Marzęcki, Kęty 2002.
- Lubac H. de, *Catholicisme. Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Paris 2010.
- Lubac H. de, *Corpus mysticum. L'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1949.
- Lubac H. de, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, I, 2, Paris 1959.
- Lubac H. de, *Katolicyzm. Społeczne aspekty dogmatu*, transl. M. Stokowska, Poznań 2011.
- Lubac H. de, *Kościół partykularny w Kościele*, transl. M. Spyra, Krakow 2004.
- Lubac H. de, *La foi chrétienne*, Paris 2008.
- Lubac H. de, *La Lumière du Christ*, [in:] *Révélation divine. Affrontements mystiques. Athéisme et sens de l'homme*, Paris 2010.
- Lubac H. de, *Le mystère du surnaturel*, Paris 2000.
- Lubac H. de, *Medytacje o Kościele*, transl. I. Białkowska-Cichoń, Krakow 2012.
- Lubac H. de, *Najnowsze Paradoksy*, transl. K. Dybeł, A. Ziernicki, Krakow 2012.
- Lubac H. de, *Paradoja y misterio de la Iglesia*, transl. A. Ortiz García, Salamanca 2002.
- Lubac H. de, *Paradoksy i Nowe paradoksy*, transl. M. Rostworowska-Książek, Krakow 1995.
- Lubac H. de, *Słowo Boże w historii człowieka*, transl. B. Czarnomska, Krakow–Kiev 1997.
- Madrigal S., *Tiempo de concilio. El Vaticano II en los Diarios de Yves Congar y Henri de Lubac*, Santander 2009.
- Milcarek P., *Nadprzyrodzoność w centrum debaty teologicznej XX wieku*, "Christianitas" 44 (2010), pp. 167–172.
- Moulins-Beaufort É. de, *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri de Lubac. «L'esprit de l'homme» ou la présence de Dieu en l'homme*, Paris 2003.
- Moulins-Beaufort É. de, *L'actualité paradoxale de Catholicisme*, "Communio" 33 (2008) 5, pp. 87–97.
- Mszal Rzymski*, <http://ordo.pallotyni.pl/index.php/mszal-rzymski/czesci-stale/87-liturgia-slowa> [access: 1.05.2019].

- Ressourcement. A movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, G. Flynn, P.D. Murray (eds.), Oxford 2012.
- Shanley B.J., *Tradycja tomistyczna*, transl. R. Mordarski, Krakow–Poznań–Warsaw 2017.
- Taylor C., *Nawrócenia. Chrześcijaństwo w poszukiwaniu nowych szlaków*, transl. T. Kunz, "Znak" 654 (2009).
- Taylor C., *Świecka epoka i różne ścieżki wiary*, transl. A. Pawelec, "Znak" 665 (2010), pp. 20–29.
- Villemin L., *Fecondite ecclesiologicalue des "aspects sociaux du dogme"*, "Communio" 33 (2008), no. 5, pp. 104 ff.
- Wagner J.-P., *Henri de Lubac*, Paris 2007.

ANDRZEJ PERSIDOK (REV. DR.) – presbyter of the Archdiocese of Warsaw, lecturer in fundamental theology, assistant professor of the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, Collegium Joanneum. In 2016, he defended his doctorate at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Navarra in Pamplona on the basis of a dissertation on the relationship between Christology and anthropology in Henri de Lubac's theology. Member of the editorial staff of "Warsaw Theological Studies."