

Ecclesiology

A history of the major developments in ecclesiology from the Catholic Reformation to the present time shows the consistent influence of Jesuit ecclesiologists.

Robert Bellarmine, SJ (1542–1621), identified the Church as a perfect society in the sense that the Church contains all the necessary elements to accomplish the end for which it was intended, the salvation of all humanity. He stressed its visible elements, defining the Church as “the community of men brought together by the profession of the same Christian faith and conjoined in the communion of the same sacraments, under the government of the legitimate pastors and especially the one vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman pontiff,” concluding, “And it is as visible as the Kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice.” His famous definition reinforced a notion of the Church as an institutional society (see *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, 1586, 1588, 1593).

Ecclesiological developments in nineteenth-century ecclesiology included several Jesuits associated with the “Roman School” such as Giovanni Perrone, SJ, (1794–1876), Carlo Passaglia, SJ, (1812–87), Klemens Schrader, SJ (1820–75), and Giovanni Battista Franzelin, SJ, (1816–86).

Émile Marsch, SJ (1890–1940), spent much of his life working on a systematic study of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ and influenced Pius XII’s encyclical, *Mystici corporis* (1943). His works include *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition* (1933, English translation [ET]

1938), *Le Christ, l'Homme et l'univers: Prolégomènes à la théologie du corps mystique* (1962), and *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (1944, ET 1951).

Sebastian Tromp, SJ (1889–1975), professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University from 1929 to 1967, appointed a consultor to the Holy Office in 1936, participated in the writing of Pius XII's encyclical, *Mystici corporis* (1943), which retrieved the biblical and patristic image of the body of Christ. He also greatly influenced the description of the Church as the body of Christ during Vatican II. His major ecclesiological works were *De nativitate ecclesiae ex corde Iesu in cruce* (1936) and *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia* (1946).

Henri de Lubac, SJ (1896–1991), contributed to a Eucharistic ecclesiology through his historical study, *Corpus mysticum: L'Eucharistie et L'Église au moyen âge* (1949, ET 2006), which traces the evolution of the term *Corpus Mysticum* from designating the Eucharistic body to its use, from the middle of the twelfth century, to designate the ecclesial body, the Church. He identifies the Church as a sacrament in *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme* (1947, ET 1950). Other Jesuit theologians who also developed this idea prior to its use by the Second Vatican Council include Otto Semmelroth, SJ (1912–1979), in *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, 1963, and Karl Rahner, SJ (1904–1984), in *Kirche und Sakrament* (1960, ET 1963), who also published numerous articles on the Church collected in the series *Theological Investigations*. *Lumen gentium* identifies the Church as a sacrament in three different articles, each with a slightly different nuance: sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity (§ 1), the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation (§ 48), and the Church as the visible sacrament of saving unity (§ 9). Even though the concept of the Church as the sacrament of Christ is closely related to the image of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, it escapes a major weakness of this image by avoiding too close of an identification between Christ and the Church. The concept of sacrament expresses the unity between the sign and the referent of that sign while maintaining the distinction between them, because what is signified is not absolutely identical with the sign that makes it present.

After Vatican II, Avery Dulles, SJ (1918–2008), favored the model of Church as sacrament in his *Models of the Church* (1974). The most prominent American ecclesologist of the twentieth century, Dulles authored twenty-two books including *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (1982), *The Catholicity of the Church* (1985), *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (1988), and *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (2007).

Francis A. Sullivan, SJ (b. 1922), professor of ecclesiology at the Gregorian University 1956–1992, is especially noted for his work on the question of authority in the Church through such publications as *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (1983), *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (1996), and *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* (2001).

Jon Sobrino, SJ (b. 1938), known mostly for his contributions to liberation theology, wrote a liberation ecclesiology, *The True Church and the Poor*, in 1984.

See also Bellarmine, Robert, SJ; Dulles, Avery, SJ, Cardinal; Lubac, Henri de, SJ; Theology