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## TOWARDS A PERSONALIST UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH

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### ABSTRACT

One of the interesting phenomena related to the Vatican II is its reception by the local Churches. It takes a long time, but it certainly changes the consciousness of the ecclesial community. A real and serious response to the message of *Lumen Gentium* became the personalist conception of the Church. It was developed at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland) mainly by eminent theologians and philosophers such as Karol Wojtyła (1920-2005), Wincenty Granat (1900-1979), Czesław Bartnik (1929-2020), and Marian Rusecki (1942-2012).

Their numerous theological works were written to emphasise the mysterious, communal and personal aspect of the Church in the context of the pressure of atheistic ideologies that reduced the Church to a purely institutional dimension. The aim of this paper is to present the personalistic image/understanding of the Church in three fundamental aspects: the origin of the Church, her essence and relation to the world. The specifics of the personalist method will also be briefly discussed.

The personalist vision of the Church proposed by Polish theologians from the Catholic University of Lublin does not constitute a simple commentary on the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nor a detailed discussion of its subsequent parts. Rather, it is the fruit of a creative reception of the conciliar document made in the context of the atheistic and reductionist communist ideology. It reduced the Church to the role of a quasi-party institution with a purely natural origin and more or less overt political goals. The personalist vision of the Church, based on the main ideas of *Lumen Gentium*, shows the Church above all as a personal entity, as a complex, bipolar reality, divine-human and spiritual-bodily. According to Polish personalists, the Church is a social person equipped with self-consciousness, conscience, rationality, soul and body, will and feelings. It has the capacity to build lasting interpersonal relationships based on selfless love and responsibility. It also has the potential for the positive transformation of the temporal world in its pilgrimage towards the fullness of eschatological happiness. The personalist ecclesiological model helps to understand the Church as a living organism, as a personal union of the risen Christ with people of all times and finally as a community of persons (*communio personarum*) united by the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It clearly exposes the meaning and value of the Church for a better future of the world (*ad melius esse mundi*).