

THE MYSTICAL BODY

JUSTIN ROUTH, O.P.



UMAN nature is perfected and sanctified by affiliation with the divine. For as in the Person of Adam all men had sinned, now through the humanity of the God-Man, mankind was to be freed from the penalty of that sin and human nature forever glorified in Christ. Christ, then, is not the monopoly of any nation; He is for all men and for all time. He is God and He is man: He is the model man. He is the way, Who will show us the way. He is the Truth, Who will teach us the truth. He is the Life, Who will give us life. From the humble home at Nazareth, when "the Word was made flesh," on through time and eternity, the life of Christ is to continue for the Catholic Church is the extension of the Incarnate Word. To teach us the way, the truth and the life; to bring man to the fruition of the inborn, God-given longing for the Divinity, Jesus Christ instituted that visible society which we know as the Catholic Church, His Mystical Body.

When we speak of the Mystical Body of Christ we mean the Catholic Church. This metaphorical expression has been given to us by Christ Himself, yet it is more than a metaphor, it is a divine equation. Our Lord speaks without distinction of Himself and His Church as one. In fact the primer lesson of the Apostle of the Gentiles was the "oneness" of Christ and His Church. "And as he (Paul) went on his journey, it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus; and suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And falling on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Who said: Who art thou, Lord? And he: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."¹ Paul, the proud Pharisee, the disciple of Gamaliel and the ardent persecutor of the Christians learned that in persecuting the lowly Christians, he was striking at Christ Himself. It was Jesus Who complained.

¹ Acts of the Apostles ix, 2, 5.

The vessel of election learned his lesson well, for the Pauline Epistles are Christocentric and their stress is on the union of Christ and His Church. That this doctrine is fundamental in the Epistles of Saint Paul is quite evident: "One Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us; that whether we watch or sleep, we may live together with Him."² "For it has been signified unto me . . . that there are contentions among you. Is Christ divided?"³ "Know you not that your bodies are members of Christ?"⁴ "For as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office: so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."⁵ "We may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ."⁶ Thus we see that the doctrine of the Mystical Body is native to Saint Paul. Hated by Jews, distrusted even among the Christians, worn out by long journeys, imprisonment, shipwreck, hunger, thirst and finally death, all these meant little to the Apostle of the Gentiles as long as they helped us to grow in Christ. It is he who has given us the terminology wherewith to express this truth of being one in Christ, the terminology of the Mystical Body.⁷

The Fathers too were fond of teaching the doctrine of the Mystical Body, and as Saint Paul excelled among the inspired writers of the New Testament in preaching this doctrine, so Saint Augustine excelled among the Fathers. He wrote of the union of Christ and the Church saying that "the two are one, one body, one flesh, one and the same person, one Christ, the whole Christ." From the Fathers on down through the golden age of Scholasticism this was the doctrine that all loved to write of and preach. It so continued until the Protestant revolt of the 16th century. At that time the Church was forced to assume a defensive attitude which has continued in many places until our own day. It is no exaggeration to say that some people actually think the expression "The Mystical Body of Christ," to be no more than a pious expression for the Blessed Eucharist. It is encouraging to note the revival of interest in the Mystical

² I Thess. vi, 9, 10.

³ I Cor. i, 10-13.

⁴ I Cor. vi, 15.

⁵ Romans xii, 4, 5.

⁶ Eph. iv, 15.

⁷ The same proofs in a somewhat lesser but nevertheless positive way, can be deduced from the other Epistles and the Four Gospels. It is one of the doctrines that clearly stands forth in all of the New Testament.

Body. Despite an unprecedented variety of philosophical notions; a world upset from an unnatural desire to drive God from civilization; and a materialism which will ever be written across the pages of the history that we are now making, this revival of Apostolic teaching, seems to point the way to the realization of the desire of that great Pontiff, Pius the Tenth, "to restore all things in Christ."

If Martin Luther came back today he would look in vain for the religion he founded. His fundamental tenet was faith without good works. Today the basic principle has been reversed and the tenet, good works without faith, is the practical principle of all Protestantism. And this is just the difference between a man-made religion and one that is divine. The Catholic Church after nineteen hundred years is the same today as she was during the life of Christ because Jesus Christ is the same today, tomorrow and forever. Protestantism is an organization; Catholicism is an organism. Reunion conferences are held at Stockholm or Lausanne, but these only proclaim to the world their lack of unity. They forget that the Church is not created by the faithful but for the faithful and that Christ spoke only of *a* Church. It is a truism that a river can never rise above its source. The revolt of the sixteenth century, therefore, can never be more than a revolt. Time has proved the malice of that movement. In consequence, thousands of Christians have never known the consolation of the comforting doctrine of prayers for the faithful departed; the Sacred Oils have never been administered to them in that last dreadful hour when eternity was about to begin for them; the confessional, one of the most consoling gifts to our fallen race has been held up to them only for mockery; and the Holy Eucharist, the food of the soul, has never been administered to them in the battle of life.

The Council of Trent, the counter-reformation, proves that the Church is inherently able to counteract any wickedness that may sap her vitality. The vitalizing principles of the Catholic Church can never be successfully imitated by the humanitarian activities of our separated brethren. Construction in any form must be positive as well as negative. For example, to build a home, an excavation must be made before the foundation can be laid. Protestantism is purely negative; Catholicism is both. It is negative in regard to heresy but very positive in claiming to be the Mystical Body of Christ. Only one Church in this

world has ever made the astounding claim and that is the Roman Catholic Church.

There is nothing half-hearted about the Catholic Church. She believes in her mission; she believes in the words of Christ; she knows that she alone can produce saints; that her way is the safe way; and most of all she knows that she is the body of Christ. Hence the Catholic Church is an enigma in this materialistic world of ours. From the time of the Apostles even to our own day, she has stood as an eternal stumbling block to those outside her fold. Only recently in our own country the Presidential election brought her to the notice of millions. Sacriligious hands were laid upon her; the flood waters of an infernal malice were let loose; she was calumniated and reviled but like her Divine Master, she was reviled but did not revile. It is a mark of our fallen nature to err, but only a nature endowed with divinity can forgive. The sudden prominence which the Church attained during that campaign, made men ask questions about her. When humanly speaking she should have sought reprisals she held the even tenor of her way. What sort of institution could this be? What could make it carry on? Whence the vitality to stand serene against the millions that opposed her? This is what men asked about her. When they spoke of her vitality they came near to the solution of their question. For she is living, pulsating, and divine blood is in her veins. She has life which is Christ. "For by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive."⁸ The Catholic Church is intensely human but her soul is divine. She is human because her mission is with the children of Adam. She is divine because she is one with Christ: "Behold I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world."⁹ The life of the Church is a real life. Christ in the Gospel narrative speaks of His Church as living; it is represented as leaven which permeates the world, as the seed that is sown and then grown up as a field in harvest time which shelters both wheat and cockle. The types of the Church are taken from living things because it possesses Christ the Promised One, while Protestantism is greatly concerned with the Old Testament and its figures that are now dead.

In the third part of the *Summa Theologica* we find the treatise of Saint Thomas Aquinas on the Mystical Body, where he

⁸ I Corinthians, xv, 21.

⁹ Matthew, xxviii, 20.

says; "As the whole Church is termed one mystical body from its likeness to the natural body of man, which in divers members has divers acts, so likewise Christ is called the Head of the Church from a likeness with the human head."¹⁰ The Angelic Doctor then develops a threefold comparison of position, perfection, and power, between Christ as the Head of the Church and our head in relation to our body. Christ is the foremost of all the sons of Adam just as the head by its position excels the other members of the body. Christ is the most perfect, for being God He is also man, as the Beloved Disciple says of Christ: "We saw Him . . . full of grace and truth, of His fulness we have all received."¹¹ And in some faint way at least we can say that the head of man has perfection when compared to Christ, for therein dwell all the senses, while to the remainder of the body is restricted the sense of touch. Christ is the most powerful, the power of Christ is the spark which has set man on fire with the love of the Godhead, a power which is poured out and directs all the members of His Mystical Body, the Church. From the head of man, too, there proceeds a power which we call thought and this directs not only the other parts of man but his actions as well.

The Angelic Doctor has another analogy regarding the headship of Christ that may be developed in consideration of Adam. The two striking figures in history are Adam and Christ. Adam is a member of the human family, but he is also the head of the human race and this by God's creation. Christ, the God-man, is a member of the human race but He is the Head of regenerated humanity. We are all one with Adam by our birth but it takes an effort to be one with Christ. Adam was of the earth, earthly; he was made from the slime of the earth. Christ the Redeemer, true God and true man, was of heaven, heavenly.¹²

To every man who has given this subject serious consideration the plurality of heads will arise as a difficulty. Our country has but one head; fraternal or commercial bodies have but one head and finally man as created by God must have but one head, or be classified as a monster. How then are we to explain the plurality of heads in the Catholic Church? Do not the Scriptures clearly teach that Christ is the Head of the Church and yet at

¹⁰ Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 3a q. 8, a. 1.

¹¹ John, i, 14-16.

¹² Saint Thomas notes that we must not expect a likeness in every respect for then there would not be likeness but identity.

the same time is not the Pope the head? Yes, both Christ and the Pope are the head of the Church, but the primacy of the Pope rather supposes than excludes the Primacy of Christ. The penny Catechism clearly tells us the difference; the Pope is the vicar of Christ while Christ is the one true head. From Peter to Pius the XI, not one of the Fishermen ever claimed to be successor of Christ. They were simply His Vicars. Saint Thomas explains this point fully. Christ alone may be called the Head of the Church in so far as He alone can cause grace to flow into the souls of the members of the Church. However in the external government, others such as the Pope may be called the head, but he receives this title in a very limited way in comparison with Christ. The Pope is the head of the Church only during the time of his Pontificate and this headship is limited to the Church Militant. Christ is the Head of the Church Militant, Suffering and Triumphant. His Headship is for all men, for all times and even after time has ceased Christ will continue to be the Head of the Church Triumphant. This privilege Christ enjoys by a power proper to Himself, while the Pope is merely a participator in His power.

It is axiomatic that all life must come from life. Christ said of Himself that He is *the* life. To-day men are seeking that life just as did Nicodemus two thousand years ago. Protestantism tells them "Jesus saves," but men ask, "How?" Catholicism shows them the way. "Unless a man be born of water and the Holy Ghost he cannot have life."¹³ Baptism then is the necessary condition for our incorporation with Christ and the continuation of this life is grace. Grace is the perfection of nature, grace is life and sin is death and the two cannot coexist. Christ is in us to give life and we are in Him to receive it. Collectively we are the Body of Christ, distributively we are His members. Nationality makes no difference in the Mystical Body, for we are all one in Christ. The Master promised that He would not leave us orphans, "I shall be with you all days even unto the consummation of the world."¹⁴ Of all men of all times He only could make and keep such a promise. Some may continue their life by their progeny, others by their doctrine or example but to the God-man alone has been given the unique distinction of the extension of His life by life. His filiation is just as real to-day as it was during His life of three and thirty years in Pales-

¹³ John, iii, 5.

¹⁴ Matthew, xxviii, 20.

tine. He is loved and hated to-day even as He was then. He is not divided. He is for all men and for all time.

The man of to-day takes as the criterion of his religion the same pragmatic principle that he would use in his business—"Does it work?" To this we may answer that the Mystical Body of Christ is one of the most practical things in the world to-day. The birth of Its Founder marks the dividing point of time. It has given us our present civilization. It has preserved for us not only the inspired word of God but also the great works of antiquity. It alone can give the true solution to the riddle of life—Who am I? From whence did I come? Where am I to go? The religion then that can solve these questions surely demands our attention. The Catholic Church, the living Gospel of Jesus Christ, His Mystical Body, is the life of Christ in our own day. It is not a story of what Christ has done for us but rather a living account of what Christ is doing for us. Salvation is from God alone, there is no way to God but through Christ, and the Catholic Church, the extension of the Incarnate Word, is the one road to Christ.

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