

# The Holy Spirit - The Mystical Body

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## PART II

### THOUGHTS ON THE CREDO OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In this second part of our three-part series of Thoughts on the Credo of the People of God, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, 1968, from the pen of Father Henry Johnston, S.J., we study the role of the Holy Spirit and Mary's part in the work of redemption. The wonder of that work of Christ is examined and, finally, we have some brief considerations of the Church, as the Mystical Body of Christ.

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-THE EDITOR

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#### 1. THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

It is unfortunately true that the majority of Christians do not know and love the Holy Spirit as they should. They are not in as bad a state as those disciples whom St. Paul met on one occasion at Ephesus, who had to confess that they did not as much as know there was a Holy Spirit! They had not received christian baptism, but only the baptism of John.

Modern Christians know indeed that there is a Holy Spirit, but he is not as real to them as the Father and the Son, and consequently does not receive the same attention.

A well-known book of a generation or so ago was entitled "The Forgotten Paraclete". Yet we must remind ourselves that we do not know God as he really is, unless we know the Holy Spirit, because the one true God is a God of three Persons.

It is through Jesus Christ that we know the Holy Spirit just as through Christ we know the Father. The Holy Spirit is revealed first in the person of Jesus Christ. The human nature of Christ, being the human nature of the Son of God, was the special recipient of the action and gifts of the Spirit.

At his baptism the Holy Spirit came upon him in visible form, and then led him into the desert; later he returned "in the power of the Spirit" into Galilee. The Holy Spirit was the source of his joy when he cried out in thanksgiving to his Father for having revealed his secrets to little ones.

But he also made known the Holy Spirit through his teaching, telling us that he would give us this divine Person as our advocate, counsellor, comforter, protector and strengthener, and as the life of our souls.

Through the grace which Christ merited for us we should be born into a new life, and this would come about through water and the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist foretold that when Christ baptized

(as he does in every baptism) he would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Our Lord gave the apostles the Holy Spirit to enable them to forgive sins. He told them that before they began the work with which he had entrusted them they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

We know the change that was effected in them when the Holy Spirit was poured out on them as he had been on Christ himself. From being slow to believe, dull in understanding their Master's teaching, cowardly in time of trial, prone to judging by human standards, they became filled with the spirit of Christ, enthusiastic in proclaiming his message, and glad to suffer anything for his sake.

The pope writes, in the introduction to his Credo:

"Above all, we have unshakeable confidence in the Holy Spirit".

There we too must find our confidence, for we know that the Holy Spirit is with the Church today and will be with it as its guide for ever.

At the Last Supper our Lord told his apostles that he would send them another Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, to be with them for ever.

"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (John 14:26).

"When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you to the full truth... and he will tell you of the things to come" (that is, the new order that the establishment of the Church would bring) (John 16: 13).

How can we learn to know and love the Holy Spirit? We may see his activity in the life of our Lord, and know that he was poured out on the apostles and the early Christians, even on pagan converts. But that may not seem to bring him close to us. Therefore we must learn to look for and find the Holy Spirit where he can most surely be found, that is, within ourselves. A well-known hymn speaks of the Holy Spirit as "the dear guest of the soul". We can ask ourselves whether he is a guest to whom we pay the attention which his dignity and his love for us demand. St. Paul writes to the Romans:

"The Spirit of God has made his home in you" (Rom. 8: 9), and he says practically the same thing to the Corinthians on more than one occasion. For example he writes:

"Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, the gift of God" (I Cor. 6: 19).

Therefore, we need not go far away to look for the Holy Spirit.

But, these similes of guest and temple do not give us the whole truth about our union with the Holy Spirit. He may be called the soul of our souls, for he gives us a new life, since we are "born again of water and the Holy Spirit".

It was a puzzle to Nicodemus how anyone could be born a second time; but the second birth is a supernatural one, introducing us into a life which is a sharing in the divine life. That is why, as explained in a previous section, we are now children of God in a new way.

"The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit that cries 'Abba, Father!' " (Gal. 4: 6).

"The Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God" (Rom. 8: 16).

If the Holy Spirit is truly our life, surely we may expect to find wonderful results coming from this. From him come light and truth, and through him therefore, we may expect our faith to be strengthened.

The second chapter of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians puts a point before us which is particularly relevant to the present day, when we find human speculation relied on even to the neglect of teaching guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. He tells his converts that when he spoke to them he did not rely on the wisdom of men but on the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet it was a true wisdom he brought them, revealed through the Spirit. He is the only source of the knowledge of the things of God. The thoughts of a man are known only to his own spirit, and in the same way the thoughts of God can be known only to his Spirit.

That is why we cannot understand the gifts which God has given us except through the Spirit of God speaking to us. And that is why the truth of God often seems nonsense to one who is not guided by the Spirit. It is not for us to set ourselves up to teach God what his revelation really means; it is Christ who makes us understand it, and he does so through the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit that unites us with the Father and the Son. That is why our life of prayer depends so much on him. It is the Spirit, St. Paul tells us, that cries out in us, and makes us in turn cry out, "Abba, Father!" Our prayer must always be "in union with the Spirit", so that we do not rely on our own efforts, as we are too much inclined to do.

"The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself presents our prayers for us with yearnings that cannot be put into words" (Rom. 8: 26).

If the Spirit of light and truth and love is truly living in us, then surely we should ourselves be shining lights and burning fires. Did our Lord not ask of us to let our light shine before men so as to bring glory to our Father in heaven? When the electric current passes through the wires the lamp gives light and the radiator heat. So it should be with us through the living presence of the Spirit. If "God's own love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5: 5), that love must flow out from us to others.

St. John in his first letter tells us that this is the proof we must give that we are really sharing in the Spirit of God. This logic is constantly being stressed in the New Testament. If the Spirit is truly our life, St. Paul argues, then let our conduct show it. The fruits of the Spirit, he says, are:

"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5: 22).

There is matter for examination of conscience there. Finally, this life of grace is meant to develop and blossom forth into the life of glory.

"This is the end for which God made us," writes St. Paul, "and he has given us the Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Cor. 5: 5).

It is an idea that recurs several times in St. Paul, often linked with the image of a seal or anointing:

"You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Eph. 1: 13-14).

The New Testament warns us against resisting or saddening or quenching the Spirit. On the contrary, it is our duty to try to be more and more submissive to his guidance. But how can we attain this?

We must remember that we have received a special sacrament, confirmation, which links us in a special way with the Holy Spirit and gives, or at least strengthens in us, special gifts which prepare us to accept his guidance.

Too many of us look on our confirmation as a thing of the past which no longer concerns us; but this is a great mistake. The sacrament sows seeds in our souls which are meant to grow, and the maturity of the resulting plants depends largely on the attention we give to them.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural dispositions imparted to the soul which render it sensitive and docile to the impulses of the Spirit. Our spiritual progress depends very largely on the extent to which we allow these gifts to be developed in our souls.

#### Gifts of the Spirit.

We cannot here go into a detailed explanation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The number seven is not of any particular importance, but is of the tradition and points to the completeness of the Holy spirit's gifts. Actually, in the original Hebrew text of Isaiah, (11: 1-3), from which the names of the gifts are drawn, there are only six as such. It is the Greek and Latin translations which add one more by saying that the spirit 'of the Lord' is a spirit 'of piety' (or godliness).

The New Testament gives no enumeration of these gifts, but it describes the effect they have in our souls by ascribing to the Holy Spirit the functions of commanding, exhorting, driving, instructing, deciding, enlightening, invigorating, strengthening, witnessing, reprimanding, consoling, inspiring, and of taking possession of us.

All the actions of God which affect creatures are the actions of the three Persons in God; they can never be separated. Even when we receive our Lord in holy communion we must receive the Father and the Holy Spirit as well.

It is true that some actions are commonly assigned to one particular Person, on account of the affinity the actions have with the position of the Persons in the Trinity. This is known technically as "appropriation"; but it is doubtful if this is more of a help than a hindrance to understanding on the part of one who is not a theologian.

There is, however, a truth about the actions of God which is important, and that is that there are no impersonal actions in God. When God acts, it is the three Persons who act; and consequently we expect to find in their action the character of each distinct Person impressed. So, though the sanctification of our souls is undoubtedly the work of the three divine Persons, equally undoubtedly there is a quality in the action which reveals the special character of the Holy Spirit.

Every illustration from creatures applied to God must be imperfect, but we may compare what happens in human generation. Father and mother form one single principle of generation; there cannot be parenthood except through the co-operation of both. But in the offspring we find qualities which show likenesses to both parents.

## 2. MARY - THE MOTHER OF GOD

As I sit down to write this I am confronted by a headline in a Catholic paper, MARY WAS A TROUBLED TEENAGER. But what is most startling is not always what is truest, and we must stick to the truth. In this particular case, if you take the words in isolation in their dictionary sense, the statement can be shown to be true.

Mary was a teenager and Mary was at times troubled. We are explicitly told this when her humility and self-effacement were shocked by the praise implied in the angel's message. She must have been troubled, too, when her Son's life was threatened by Herod, or when he disappeared in Jerusalem without a word of explanation to her. But take the expression, "a troubled teenager", in the sense it has in the world today, and nothing could be more false as applied to Our Lady.

By "a troubled teenager" we mean one who is doubtful about what life is all about, one who has lost her sense of direction; one whose scale of values is upset, one who has no understanding of her real importance, one who has lost touch with God.

How very different was the Blessed Virgin Mary. We are not left to conjecture, because she has written her autobiography - a very short one, it must be admitted, but one that gives us everything that is important about her life: "I am the handmaid (or slave girl) of the Lord". That gives us the meaning and purpose of her life, which makes her anything but the "troubled teenager" of today, who has the feeling of not belonging to anyone.

Her Inmost Thoughts:

We do not need a psychiatrist to give us information about Mary's character and inmost thoughts. In her Magnificat we have a window through which we can look into her soul. There we see the joy with which she is filled through the realization of what God has done for her. "My heart thrills with joy", is what she says; and exactly the same word is used by St. Luke when he describes Our Lord as "thrilled with joy in the Holy Spirit" at the thought of his Father's secrets being hidden from those who consider themselves wise and prudent, and made known to little ones.

The Magnificat shows us Mary's understanding of her own nothingness joined with profound gratitude for God's wonderful favours. To him alone she gave all the glory. She is therefore the first to proclaim the fulfilment of God's promised plan for Israel, a theme prominent a little later in Zachary's Benedictus, and developed so richly later still by St. Paul.

Why Honour Mary?

A listener at the Catholic Evidence Guild pitch in the Domain in Sydney once asked: "Why do you Catholics give so much honour to the Virgin Mary?" The speaker on that occasion said, in substance: "The briefest and simplest answer, and at the same time the most satisfactory one, is, because God honoured her so much. We are always right when we are on the side of God".

Mother of God.

The incarnation, with all it involved, is the master plan of God. It is the centre of our history in time and in eternity. But right at the heart of this plan is a woman, a mere creature, raised by God to the incomprehensible dignity of being mother of his Son. No creature ever entered into such a close relationship with God as that.

Mary was truly the mother of God. She was not, of course, mother of the godhead; that would be impossible. But she was mother of the man who was God. For all eternity the Son of God can address one of our human family as "mother".

As Christ was the new Adam, Mary is the new Eve. It was God's plan, the Council tells us, that as a woman had contributed to death, so a woman should contribute to life. "Death through Eve", wrote St. Jerome, "life through Mary." She was associated, therefore, with her Son in the work of redemption.

In the promise of victory over the evil one, given at the beginning of human history, a mysterious "woman" figured as sharing in the victory.

It was at the word of Mary that the Precursor was sanctified before his birth; when the shepherds got the message about the new-born saviour, it was with his mother that they found him; when he was presented in the temple and Simeon prophesied the opposition this child would meet, the mother was shown as sharing his passion through a sword that would pierce her heart; when the Magi came, the first from outside the Jewish race to acknowledge the kingship of Christ, again it was with his mother they found and worshipped him; the first miracle of Christ was worked because his mother called attention to a need; when the life of the Redeemer came to an end on the cross, his mother was there, representing, we might say, all those who were ever to join in the offering of that sacrifice; and finally at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to transform the apostles and send them forth on the task that would never have an end, there is special mention of the prayer of Mary during that first novena.

The sanctification of Mary, brought about through the merits of her son, is a reminder to us that we, too, are called to be made holy. She was redeemed in a special way, as befitted her unique dignity, but still she was, as we were, redeemed. As such she stands out as the ideal for all members of the Church. Her Immaculate Conception was only a higher form of the cleansing from original sin and new union with God which we all share. The whole Church must strive for greater purity, that she may be "without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish". (Eph. 5: 26-27).

Model for All.

Mary is a model for all of us in her unwavering faith, her ardent love, and her perfect submission to the divine will. She is a model for the Church as virgin, for the Church, too, St. Paul says, is a virgin promised in marriage to one man only, Christ (2 Cor. 11: 2). She is also a model as mother, for the Church is also truly our mother and the mother of all men. She is the model of the Church and all its members in her assumption into heaven, for what was given to her in an exceptional way is meant to be the final lot of us all.

Just as the pope who is a bishop among bishops, is also head of the episcopal college and of the whole Church, so Mary, who belonged to the Church, is also mother of the Church. Because she is Christ's mother, she must be mother of all those who are one with him through sharing his divine sonship; she is mother of what St. Augustine calls "the whole Christ". Christ along with the members of his mystical body. Here are some of the words used by the Vatican Council in this connection: (The figures refer to the sections of the Constitution on the Church.)

"Mother of God and mother of men" (69);

"Mother of Christ and mother of men, especially of the faithful in the Church, members of that head" (quoted from St. Augustine) (53);

"She co-operated in a very special manner in the work of the Saviour... in order to restore supernatural life to men. For this reason she became our mother in the order of grace" (61);

"She brought forth a Son whom God made first-born among many brothers, that is, the faithful, and Mary co-operates in their birth and upbringing with a mother's love" (63) ;

"The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honours her as a most loving mother in a spirit of filial devotion" (53)

Honour to Mary Honours Her Son.

It is hardly necessary to say that the honour we give to Mary in no way detracts from the honour due to her Son. Rather does it increase the honour we give the Son, because we love and honour Mary precisely because she is the mother of her Son and because he so much loved and honoured her.

Mary herself was the first to proclaim that all she had she owed to God. When we praise the masterpiece of an artist, we honour the artist. Mary is God's masterpiece in the order of grace; it is God we honour primarily when we honour Mary. We could never honour her as much as God did. As he has given us his Son as our redeemer, so he has also given us that Son's mother as our mother, too.

In these days when the value of a life of consecrated virginity is sometimes questioned, it is well to recall that one of Our Lady's most splendid titles is one which appears in the pope's Credo, "ever virgin".

Her life was consecrated in a special way to God, and she has been an inspiration and model for countless others throughout the history of the Church. The perpetual virginity of Our Lady is the defined doctrine of the Church, and that, for us ordinary Catholics, settles the matter.

Those for whom the Catholic Church is not Christ's authorized teacher have found difficulty at times in the fact that the gospels mention "brothers" and "sisters" of Our Lord. The simple explanation is that the Jews had no word for cousin and apart from this practical difficulty they were in the habit of using the terms quoted in a great variety of senses. We may recall one instance. When the people of Abraham and Lot were beginning to quarrel over the pastures for their flocks, Abraham said, "Do not let this happen for we are brothers". (Gen. 13: 8) But Abraham was uncle, and Lot was his nephew.

"First-born".

A difficulty has been found in the word "first-born" which is applied to Mary's child. It is hardly a serious one. Even in ordinary language we speak of a woman having her "first" baby, without any thought of whether others are to follow or not. "First-born" had a special meaning for the Jews.

The first male child in a family belonged to God and had to be "redeemed", or bought back, 40 days after birth. It could not be known at that time, obviously, whether the "first-born" was to be an only child or the first of a series. It made no matter. An only child was "first-born" in the eyes of the law in the same sense as the eldest of a large family. Many an only child in the course of Jewish history had been called and dealt with as "first-born".

Prejudice against Mary's perpetual virginity shows itself in the translations of the passage of St. Luke where she asks how the angel's prediction can come true in view of her resolve to lead a virginal life. (Luke 1: 34)

Nearly all modern non-Catholic translations have, "Since I am not married", or "Since I have no husband" (which unfortunately appears even in the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version). Apart from the fact that this is not an accurate translation, it does not make sense in the context, where we find Mary betrothed, about to be married.

The translation, "For I am a virgin" (as in the Jerusalem Bible and the latest non-Catholic version, Good News for Modern Man), is better, but it is not completely satisfactory, because it does not give the full sense. These words by themselves do not exclude future marital intercourse; every mother could once have used them.

It seems clear, from her reply to the angel, that Mary had resolved to consecrate her virginity to God and that she was conscious that God had approved of her resolution. However, then, we translate the words, they must be understood to mean, "I am, and intend to remain, a virgin".

Let us repeat the pope's words: "Mary, Mother of God, ever a Virgin".

### 3. THE WONDER OF REDEMPTION

St. Paul, especially in his letter to the Romans, stresses the seriousness and the universality of sin. But he does this in order to bring home to us the incalculable benefits that are ours through the redemption wrought by Christ.

"All alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendour and all are justified by God's free grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus, For God designed him to be the means of expiating sin by his sacrificial death, effective through faith." (Romans 3: 23).

Redemption means literally "buying back", and was applied often in ancient times to the freeing of slaves by paying the price for them. We must not take in this literal sense the redemption we receive through Jesus Christ.

He did not pay a price for us to the devil, as was sometimes strangely and erroneously suggested. He did not pay a price to his Father, as if his Father demanded that punishment should be paid by someone and his Son became a substitute for us. It is true that St. Paul twice says in his first letter to the Corinthians (6:20 and 7:23) "You were bought at a price", but this is only a way of expressing the "cost" it was to our Lord to suffer and die for us.

These metaphors of buying and paying a price have their uses, but we must be careful not to take them too literally. Redemption is a much more sublime and mysterious thing than such metaphors might suggest. Just as the Son of God took to himself our sinful nature (though untouched by sin himself) and died in this nature to rise glorious and immortal, his human nature being then transfigured by his divinity, so we, through his grace, share in this passage from the human life to the divine.

#### Original Sin

Christ died to free us from our personal sins and from the effects of that primeval sin which we call original sin. It is, perhaps, in dealing with this last (which we do in this section) that it is most necessary to stress the wonder of redemption. We have, it would seem, dwelt too much on original sin as sin, and the many problems to which it gives rise, and neglected the more important truth of the glories of salvation wrought by Christ. The primeval sin is the beginning of the story, but it is not the whole story, nor is it the principal part of the story. In the wonder of the dawn we do not think so much of the darkness that preceded it.



Sin (as already mentioned) figures prominently in St. Paul, but only as a background for the wonderful picture of salvation which he paints. Adam, St. Paul tells us, prefigures Christ; perhaps we have given too much attention to the figure and not enough to the great reality which was prefigured. It is this positive side which we find stressed by our Lord, that he has come to bring life through the sacrifice of his own life. Understanding this, we are in a better position to understand what must appear strange in the language of the Exultet on Holy Saturday:

"Surely that sin of Adam had to be, that was wiped out by the blood of Christ. Surely it was a happy fault seeing that it deserved to have such a wonderful Redeemer."

The doctrine of original sin is a defined doctrine of the Catholic Church; which can never change, because it is the revelation of God, though, it may always be more clearly explained, or set forth in more suitable terms. It was the Council of Trent, following closely the teaching of earlier Councils, which set it forth most comprehensively. The teaching of Trent has been summarized in the Pope's Credo.

The doctrine means that man received the marvellous gift of supernatural union with God, a share in the divine life which was to lead him to a life of intimate union with God in eternity. But man had been given the dignity of being a free agent; he could accept God's gift or reject it. Unfortunately, he turned against God and thus committed sin.

We are not responsible for that sin. Original sin in us is sin in a very different sense from personal, freely-committed sin. (This is not sufficiently understood.) But God had attached to that original choice consequences for the whole human race. He then substituted a more glorious plan, by appointing another, immeasurably superior, head of the race, who would confer on us inconceivably greater benefits than could have come from the first one.

We now claim grace and eternal life with God, not because of our membership of the human race, but because we have been incorporated in Christ and share his divine sonship. The Second Vatican Council concludes the chief passage it has devoted to this subject with these words:

"It is in the light of this revelation that the sublime vocation and the deep misery which are alike the experience of men find their ultimate explanation" (The Church in the Modern World, 13).

It is in the 5th chapter of his letter to the Romans that St. Paul has most to say about original sin, though this term came into use only later:

"It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death (he is here quoting the Book of Wisdom), and thus death pervaded the whole human race, inasmuch as all men have sinned."

Then, having alluded to Adam as prefiguring one to come, he goes on to develop the theme which is his chief interest:

"But God's act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam's wrongdoing. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many, its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the gift that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ.

"And again, the gift of God is not to be compared in its effect with that one man's sin; for the judicial action, following upon the one offence, issued in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace, following upon so many misdeeds, issued in a verdict of acquittal.

"For if by the wrongdoing of that one man death established its reign, through a single sinner, much more shall those who receive in far greater measure God's grace, and his gift of righteousness, live and reign through the one man, Jesus Christ. It follows, then, that as the issue of one misdeed was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act is acquittal and life for all men. For as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of the one man many will be made righteous."

In the 15th chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul sums the matter up thus:

"Since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought resurrection of the dead. As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life."

Evil From Man.

The essence of the doctrine, then, is that evil in the world comes from man, not from God; that apart from Christ there is a lack of a supernatural life which was part of God's original plan for the race; that this state of affairs stems from a primeval sin.

As with other parts of God's revelation, explained by the Church, this presents problems for our human minds. One particular difficulty which has become prominent in recent times is that of polygenism, the theory that the human race had a number of ancestors and did not stem from a single pair.

We are always ready to accept any proved scientific truth, but we cannot forget that the shores of time are littered with the wrecks of scientific theories and hypotheses and that it is truly scientific to wait for sure proof. Moreover, science can give us information only about the physical qualities of the remains of early man which it digs up; it cannot tell us whether these remains possessed a spiritual soul or not. That would depend on a special activity of God, which cannot be checked by science.

Pope Pius XII could not see how the theory of polygenism could be reconciled with Catholic doctrine. Some reputable theologians today hold that it could be. Much remains to be established before we are called upon to face the issue.

A Protest.

It may not be out of place to enter a mild protest against those teachers today who tell young children that "there is no Adam and Eve". Passing over the shakiness of the foundation on which such a statement rests; we might ask what good purpose it serves. Admitted that the narrative of Genesis is an artistic portrayal of the truth and not a photograph, and that the truth is conveyed in story form rather than as a transcript of a shorthand report, the story still gives the essential truth in a way that is easily understood.

It does not seem good pedagogy to substitute something of an abstract nature which children cannot understand. It is like taking away a baby's bottle to put a beef-steak in its place. Nor are the children told (perhaps it would only add to their confusion if they were) how much pure speculation and uncertain deduction are contained in many hypotheses that are current.

But let us end with what is our chief concern.

"Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and that is God's own proof of his love for us" (Romans 5: 8).

"He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

"The Son of God has loved me and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2: 20).

#### 4. WHAT IS THE MYSTICAL BODY?

This section is an attempt to explain a very important doctrine which is revealed to us in the New Testament. That is why it involves referring to a great number of New Testament passages. It is suggested, therefore, that the reader (at least on second reading) should have the New Testament at hand and look up the passages as they occur; and this for two reasons: first, because it would take up too much space to print all these passages in full, and second (and more especially) because the Church is anxious that her children should become much more familiar with Scripture than they are, and this might be a beginning for some.

We all appreciate to some extent the wonderful nature of Christ's Church, divine in its origin, supernatural in the means of grace which it dispenses, glorious beyond comprehension in the end to which it is leading us. But we have always to be on our guard against regarding it as just a society of human beings, even though we place it above all other such societies. The Church is not a mere social body, an organization, for it has an inner life which makes it an organism, a living body. For St. Paul this was the great mystery, kept secret in the heart of God for countless ages; and at last revealed to us. There are 15 passages in his writings where he refers to this mystery of Christ and the Church:

"The wisdom we speak of is God's; it is mysterious, hidden, which he devised for our glory from eternity" (1 Cor. 2: 7).

He applies to it the words of Isaiah: (1 Cor 2: 9, see Is 64: 3)

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what has not entered into the mind of man."

This text is often understood as referring to the rewards of the next life, but neither in Isaiah nor in St. Paul is this the primary meaning.

We are faced here with the difficulty which always confronts us when we try to express divine truths in human language, which is necessarily inadequate. So we need not be surprised to find so many different images used in the New Testament to illustrate the hidden mystery of our union with Christ in the Church. The Church is God's vineyard, in which all must labour and from which he looks for a return (Matthew 20: 1-16; 21: 33-43). Our Lord speaks of his Father as the one who tends the vines (John 15: 1). We are the flock of the Good Shepherd; we are the kingdom over which Christ reigns as king. The Church is a city, of which God is the architect and builder (Hebrews 11: 10); it is the house which Christ builds on a firm foundation (Matthew 16: 18), God's building (1 Cor. 3: 9), with Christ himself as the foundation (1 Cor. 3: 11). We are living stones, built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), a temple holy to the Lord, a spiritual dwelling-place of God (Eph. 2: 21-22; 2 Cor. 6: 16). We are members of the household of God (Eph. 2: 19); Christ regards as knit with him in the relationship of brother, sister, and mother those who do the will of his Father (Mark 3: 35); Christ is the bridegroom, the Church is his bride (John 3:29; Matthew 9: 15; 2 Cor. 11:2). We are members of the household of God (Eph. 2: 19-20), his children and heirs (1 John 3: 1; Rom. 8: 16).

Our Lord's Teaching

All these images are full of meaning, and all contribute something to our understanding of the nature of the Church, but even taken all together they fall short of the full reality of St. Paul's "mystery". The deeper revelation was first given by Our Lord himself at the Last Supper in the words:

"I am the vine and you are the branches" (John 15: 5).

The branches can live and bear fruit only when sharing in the life of the vine. From this we see that our union with Christ in the Church is not something that can be explained merely by likeness to him, or by close friendship or any similar bond, or even by family relationship; it is something closer still.

If Christ is the vine and we the branches, then we share in his life, and we are in a true sense one with him. That is what St. Paul says to the Galatians:

"You are all one person in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28).

St. Paul tells us that the great work of the Redeemer was to abolish the distinction between Jew and Gentile:

"...and make of the two one new man" (Eph. 2: 15).

It does not matter whether we are circumcised or not; all that matters is that we should be a new being (Gal. 6: 15), and that is what we are through union with Christ (2 Cor. 5: 17). Jew or gentile, circumcised or not, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free, male or female - all these differences are of no account; it is only our complete unity with Christ that matters (Gal. 3: 28; Col. 3: 11). This is the great mystery Paul has to preach:

"Christ in you, bringing hope of glory to come". (Col. 1: 27).

The special image which Paul uses to explain this mystery (which he says in Eph. 3: 3 was made known to him by revelation) is that of the body. Sixteen times does he use the term of the Church or of Christ and the Church. Two simple examples may be given:

"The Church, which is his body" (Eph. 1: 22-23). and "His body, which is the Church" (Col. 1: 24).

Sometimes he speaks of the body as distinct from Christ the head, and sometimes he makes no distinction, as for instance when he writes:

"As the human body, though made up of many parts, is a unity, and all the variety of parts makes up a single body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12: 12). or in the same letter (6: 15) : "Your bodies are members of Christ."

St. Paul means by body a reality, made up of men and women, a unified whole as distinguished from the parts which compose it, parts which vary in their functions. It is not merely an organization which is called metaphorically a body. On the other hand, it differs from a physical body, because, unlike the physical body, its members have their own individual existences and responsibilities. It is a body in a unique sense, in a higher and truer sense than any of those natural things from which the term is derived. We have always to keep in mind that when we apply terms drawn from natural things to things that are supernatural we are applying them to things of a higher order far beyond our experience, and the meaning of the terms has to be amplified accordingly. The term, mystical body, which has been in use since the twelfth century, helps us to distinguish the

body of Christ from all other bodies. "Mystical" conveys the notion that we are dealing with supernatural realities, and with a truth which we cannot hope to comprehend fully in this life.

### A Great Reality

At the same time, we must guard against the suggestion that we are here dealing with something unreal. The supernatural is far more real than the natural.

In and through the Church, the body of Christ, God has given us a new mode of being. The son of God was the perfect image of the Father (Col. 1: 15; Hebrews 1: 3), containing in himself all the fullness of the godhead (Col. 1:19). Even in the natural order created beings could only be the partial and imperfect imitations of the only-begotten Son; "all creation is through him and for him" (Col. 1: 16), all things find their centre in him (Col. 1: 17; Eph. 1: 10), and then - the marvellous culmination of God's plan - Christ is made the head of the Church, which becomes his body. "Head", again, is a human term which cannot hold or express all the fullness of meaning which the reality possesses. Christ is highest in dignity (Col. 1: 18), he is supreme ruler (1 Cor. 15: 25), it is his wisdom that guides the body (Col. 2: 3), it is his power that gives it its new life (Eph. 4: 16; Col. 2: 19), it possesses no gift that does not come from his bounty (Eph. 4: 7), the perfection of the Church is the overflowing of the infinite perfection of its head (John 1: 16; Eph. 1: 23). As members of Christ's body we must expect to share his sufferings in this life, with the assurance of also sharing in the glory for which they prepare.

### The Unifying Principle

In order that many may become one there must be a unifying principle; that there may be life there must be a vivifying principle. If, therefore, the Church is in the highest sense a body, the living body of Christ, so that Christ and the Church form in St. Augustine's phrase, "The whole Christ", there must be an assignable cause of this life and unity. St. Paul frequently attributes to Christ the function of soul to the body. But more commonly it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ, as he is called indifferently in the New Testament, who is named as the soul of the mystical body. We are here, of course, caught up in the mystery of the Trinity, and the attribution to particular Persons of what is the work of all. We are frequently told that this Spirit has been given to us; that he dwells in us; that we are his temple; that it is through the Holy Spirit we are baptized into one body; that it is his power that operates in us. St. John sums up:

"This is how we know that we are living in him and he in us, because he has let us share his Spirit" (1 John 4: 13).

That is why St. Augustine says:

"What our spirit, that is our soul, is to our members, that the Holy Spirit is to the members of Christ, which is the Church."

The Church in this world is only part of the mystical body of Christ. Here it is imperfect; we must constantly be striving to become more and more fruitful branches of the vine, and show forth more clearly the manner of life that befits those who are sharing Christ's life (1 John 2: 6), gradually becoming that full-grown man which the fullness of the perfection of Christ demands (Eph. 4:13). But when the Kingdom of Christ has reached its full extension, then will he surrender us with himself to the Father:

"...that God may be in complete possession of all" (1 Cor. 15: 28).

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