

“THE MYSTICAL BODY MUST FUNCTION AS A WHOLE”

The doctrine of the Mystical Body must receive its due place. It is so much central in the Catholic Church that one could call it the soul of all the other doctrines. It gives full meaning to everything else. Without a reasonable working knowledge of that doctrine, we do not understand what the Catholic Church really is. Therefore a more important work than the comprehending of this doctrine could not be undertaken by us.

The Catholic Church is intended to be visible. Man must see it, hear it, and be enabled to join it formally.

MORE THAN A VISIBLE SOCIETY

Accordingly it has been constituted by God according to the form of a human society. It has its membership, its government, its rulers and its laws. Therefore it is truly a society, but it would be a fatal error if it were to be regarded as that and nothing more. And remember, it would not take it out of that category even to add on the remarkable privilege of infallibility. That could promote it to be the most exalted of all societies and still leave it no more than a human society.

On the other hand, the Church ascends to heights so far exceeding the merely human that there is no comparison between the two points, because the Church is the Body of Christ, really and truly. We call it the Mystical Body to distinguish it from other Presences of Christ, but it is no less a reality than the Eucharist. The image itself, i.e. the comparison with the human body, is drawn from the great apostle, St. Paul. He was ardent on this theme. In one form or another his Epistles contain 163 references to it.

Our Lord Himself, explaining His extraordinary relation to His members, used another image. It was that of the vine. It is the same idea, but if we may speak a little boldly, the disciple seems to improve upon the Master in the choice of images, because the idea of the body is a more expressive one. It aids us better to an understanding of the complicated life of the Mystical Body and of the innumerable offices and duties of Catholics. The vine is of simpler construction. It does not possess so many parts whereas in the Church there is an infinity of roles and a vast perspective of relations between person and person and office and office.

Therefore, the idea of the body is for us a more helpful one, but it will be

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understood that it is only an image. Needless to say, the Mystical Body is not shaped like a man's body, with Our Lord, so to speak, dominating it in the form of a head.

MEMBERS DEPEND ON EACH OTHER

But it is a valuable exemplification showing effectively the mutual dependence of the Head and the parts, and of all the parts on each other. The vital powers, i.e. the life of grace, flow from the Head to the Body and there enter upon their complicated circulation. Graces are conveyed by the members to each other, so much so that each one depends on the other. There is no such thing as an independence in the Body. Each member affects the others to such an extent that the failure of even a single one results in a loss to all the others. If we were permitted to view with the eye the extent to which that operates, I am sure that we would be terrified to see how our failures run through that mystical circulation, and affect the spiritual destiny of every soul. Likewise there is the counterpart position: the excellence of one helps the entire Body.

THE HEAD DEPENDS ON MEMBERS

Now enters an extraordinary dispensation, one to which we do not sufficiently direct our minds. It is not enough to grasp that idea of our dependence upon the Head and our relations to each other. There is another element which is essential. It is that the Head is likewise dependent on the members, though in a different way. In this new life of Our Lord, which continues His life on earth, He makes Himself dependent on His members, so that without them He is like any head deprived of its body; He is cut away from His means of action. What an amazing exchange!

The consequences of this divine arrangement are drastic and far-reaching. It throws the responsibility for the saving of the world on to man himself, because a co-operation must proceed from man. From Christ issues the divine virtue which gives life and grace to the action, but action must be forth-coming from the Body. If it be withheld, a crippling disorder is set in progress. If the Body be inert, the supreme excellence of the Head does not make good that defect. If the Body does not work, then Our Lord is obstructed in His present-day mission on earth.

IF THE MEMBERS FAIL

If the Body functions only in part, what happens? For instance, if half the members of the Mystical Body are inactive, does Our Lord operate proportionately through the other half, so that the Mystical Body is found accomplishing half its mission? This speculation is of great importance. Ordinary arithmetic might lead us to say "Yes." But would this be correct? The

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image of the Mystical Body is based on the natural body, so let us turn to the latter to see what would happen in like circumstances.

In the natural body the failure of half its members or organs would have a truly deplorable effect, most probably the effect of death. Such a body would not be found working with half its strength, performing exactly half its work, and bringing off half its number of due achievements. No, it would be a helpless, miserable thing, dragging out its existence, if indeed that existence would be able to continue.

True, the Mystical Body has a greater survival power, for the Lord would pour His life into even a few healthy cells and through them preserve the Mystical Body in existence.

But we must not conceive Him as radically contradicting that image of the body which He has so solemnly proposed. Therefore His own excellence will not substitute for the ill health and inactivity of the members. That inactive body which He would be keeping supernaturally alive would not be a healthy body, fulfilling all its purposes. The body which has its members healthy and active will fulfil its work, and otherwise it will not. I repeat that the inactive members will leave many souls in misery, through not bringing to them the divine nourishment.

To sum up: The members of the Mystical Body have a function which is not less fundamental than that of the members of the natural body. If they fail, and to the extent that they fail, there will be unhappy consequences. Conversion will be lacking, and the Catholics themselves will languish and decay. Lapsing will set in. Sores will break out in the Mystical Body. Every grievous problem will declare itself.

THE INACTIVE ARE “HALF-CIRCLE” CHRISTIANS

But what would be the definition of “inactive” as applied to a member or cell of the Mystical Body? What is the position if a person is going to Mass and the Sacraments and doing no more, without attempting to serve in any real meaning of the word the Church or his neighbour? Is such a one active or inactive? Pius XI did not regard such a person as healthy or active, and he applied to him a strong expression. He called him a “half-circle” Christian. And you will understand that half a circle is not a circle. Half a loaf is half a loaf but half a circle is only an anomaly, serving no purpose. The half-circle Christians may preserve the life in themselves, but they will not build the Church.

Perhaps some may say that it suffices to pray; that prayer establishes one in full activity in the Mystical Body. Certain it is that prayer is necessary. To adhere to the imagery of the body, it is like the natural breathing which is essential to life. But is it enough by itself so that other activity may be dispensed with? St. Pius

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X answers this question in decided terms. Prayer alone would not represent a full functioning of the Mystical Body:-

“Certain souls believe it is quite sufficient to pray, because God knows best how to defend the Faith, humiliate His enemies, and make the Church triumphant. But these good people, whom I would call optimists, will wait in vain for society to re-Christianise itself simply by the prayers of the good. Prayer is absolutely necessary because in the ordinary economy of salvation God does not concede graces except to him who prays, but India and Japan would never have been converted by the prayers alone of St. Francis Xavier. The apostles would never have conquered the world if they had not done the work of heroes and martyrs. It is necessary, therefore, to join prayer with action.”

In fact by that law of circulation, whereby each one is made dependent on his neighbour, what will happen to persons who do not pass on what they receive? Scripture is full of stern statements in regard to that obligation of serving. It was from the lips of our most sweet Lord came those uncompromising words: “Depart from Me into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.” The reason ascribed is not that those people did evil deeds, but that they had failed to serve their neighbour. When those persons, horrified at hearing their condemnation, asked for an explanation they were told that in failing to serve their neighbour they had failed to see and serve Him.

CHARITY MEANS HEALTH, GROWTH, CONQUEST

Faith - the Christian root - without charity is dead. Another devastating condemnation! And what is charity? Charity is the love of God and the active love of mankind for the sake of God. Charity is not a sentiment; it is a service. Apostleship is traditionally the special Christian characteristic. Where it is, health and growth and conquest will be. Where it is absent, the individual or the section of the Church is on its way to decay.

Only too often are excuses made for places which are rendering no more than the merest practice, where hardly anyone is active in an apostolic sense. By way of corrective I state a suggestion which is in sharp contrast. It is that a mere fulfilment of the elemental duties without any spirit of apostleship, will drift in a few generations into non-practice; and then that the non-practice will over another period pass into unbelief. It is true that in particular places circumstances will mask that gradual transition, which will only be made evident by revolutionary events occurring at intervals.

I do not try to analyse this estimate, but I do think that the general idea is correct. Examine any section of the Church where an unproductive practice has prevailed over a considerable period, and it will be found that a distressing

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descent has taken place. And why should this not be the case: If an essential element is missing, a price will have to be paid, and the price that always attaches to defect in the divine order is the subtraction of grace.

EVERY MEMBER MUST WORK

It would be an improper limiting of the Mystical Body to think only in terms of a sort of health and vigour. It is an essential idea that the Body be found using those things for conquest, even unto the conversion of the whole world. It is utterly important, accordingly, that every member be caused to function fully in the Mystical Body, that is, be filled with a sense of responsibility and seeking to fulfil it in some adequate manner. For it is unquestionable that the Body, thus co-operating faithfully with its divine Head, would renew all things in Him.

On the other hand, what would happen if that due functioning of its members were to flicker too low? Logically there should be a state of things analogous to that of a human body whose parts, organs and cells are all inert. It would solve no problems, and a thousand complications would create themselves. So far from triumphing, that body would be in danger.

PRESENT ATTITUDE DISASTROUS

If we apply this logic to what is before us in the world today, does it not seem as if the Mystical Body is working below its capacity? The position in regard to Protestantism, Mahommedanism, Judaism, Buddhism, Communism, and other great problems is that we are not making headway against them. It could almost be said that they are making headway against us.

Even in the face of the great lapsed Catholic populations we seem to be powerless. What about those areas of Europe where great parts of the population are now in unbelief, many of them in militant unbelief. And so scanty are the forces at our disposal - that is the apostolic manpower - that we are not able to get into close touch with those people. They are snug in their aloofness from religion, left in their misery, not being approached, for there is nobody to go after them.

In South America, where it can be roughly said that the total population has fallen into those ways, things are very bad. Protestantism there has filched seven millions of our people from us. Our Envoys, instructing the Legionaries there in home-to-home visitation, report that in no place have homes been previously entered in the interests of Catholicism.

In many places throughout the world the very idea of making conversions has been abandoned as a practical proposition. This situation is cloaked by talk of preparation, planning for the future. Fine phrases like “Confessional Peace” are used to gild a position where Catholics and Protestants informally agree to

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respect each other's belief and abstain from attempts to convert.

CHRIST IS IN ANGUISH

Often proposals to approach non-Catholics have been met with such cries of dissent as: "Surely you are not going to imitate the Jehovah Witnesses?" In one town the following incredible comment was made: "We Catholics here have won for ourselves the name of being nice, quiet people who never interfere with the beliefs of others. Do not seek to strip us of that reputation." This sounds terrible, but it displays a mentality which is common.

To anyone who glimpses Our Lord in anguish for souls yet held back effectively from them by the absence of means to approach them, the foregoing is distressing. It becomes a nightmare when we see the determination of militant atheism. This is organising itself ferociously through the nations, and in the near future we will be subject to a worse wave of attack than Russian Communism has presented us with in the past.

WE MUST POUR LIFE INTO EACH SOUL

Is not all this a painful proof of the suggestion that to achieve its purposes the Mystical Body, like the natural body, must function fully; that only thus will the Head be enabled to carry on His mission - that is to reach out to all souls, to talk to each individual soul, to pour His own life into each one? Such is the purpose of the Mystical body.

The uprise of the Legion forms a sign of hope. For it represents a large-scale movement of the ordinary Catholic body. It is not composed of select material. It is just typical human material, so that what has been accomplished with the existing Legionaries could be done with all Catholics. As an example of what might be expected to happen if millions were at work instead of merely thousands, I must place before you some examples of what the mere thousands have done. Please note that, though spectacular, these instances are not isolated. They are typical of what is taking place on a wide scale, in fact everywhere. Obviously it is what can be obtained in all places where the Mystical Blood begins to press strongly through the Body. Things begin to happen. Success begins to come. Souls are approached in bulk.

A NATION MOBILISED FOR APOSTOLATE

First I give the case of the Philippines. Mr. Douglas Hyde, as the result of his world tour some years ago, said that the Legion was regarded as having its prime achievement in China. Without seeking to take from that superb feat, he said that he would regard what had happened in the Philippines as still greater. Without any stir, a handful of devoted Missionaries have built up all that wreckage into a big, healthy Church, possessing infinite promise for the future. There are 6,000

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Praesidia in the Philippines today, a number which continues to grow rapidly. This shows that it is no fantastic proposition to think in terms of the mobilisation of an entire Catholicism into the ranks of apostleship. If people are supposed by God to be apostolic, then a reasonable effort will render them so.

THE ENEMY FORCED TO PERSECUTE

Having talked of the Philippines, I proceed to China, where the might of Communism was thrown against the hurriedly raised band of Legionaries. You know the result. Mao-tse Tung and his lieutenants would no doubt say that they had won, because they were able to kill, torture, imprison and enslave. But did they win? Did ancient Rome win when it pitted itself against the early Christians? It appeared to win. It was able to martyr and to drive underground. But we know to whom the final victory fell. It was to the Christians. They were destined to take over the empire.

NON-CATHOLICS HEAR THE TRUTH

In the diocese of St. Louis in America as the result of a concerted move lasting for seven or eight days, 25,000 non-Catholics were found who declared that they wanted to be better informed concerning the Catholic Church. Several thousands of these have already been ushered into the Church. Perhaps we may contend that what was possible in St. Louis is possible anywhere else. But a like effort must be made there.

In Chicago in one parish a Legionary visitation of every home brought into Instruction Classes 360 non-Catholics, of whom 230 were received into the Church soon after. There was nothing special about that parish. Presumably the same could be obtained in the next parish, if gone about in the same way.

If it is possible to do those things with a limited number, that is a mere fraction of the total number of Catholics, we may ask ourselves what could not be done out over the world if there were a complete mobilisation of the manpower of the Church - in other words with a fuller working of the Mystical Body.

THE MOTHER MUST HAVE HER FULL ROLE

I have left to the last a vital condition for the functioning of the Mystical Body. That condition requires the giving to Mary, the Mother of the Mystical Body, of her full role. It is an exalted one, a unique one. She is the first member of the Mystical Body after the Head itself. In fact her position is quite extraordinary inasmuch as she was a foundation member, though she was not the head. She started everything. Everything was built upon her. Without her, it would not have been possible, under the order that God arranged, for the Incarnation to take place at all.

That essential service she still continues to render. She still remains pivotal.

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Grace does not come other than by her. To fit her into the imagery of the Mystical Body, she is sometimes described as its neck, which connects the Head with the Body, and through which pass the vital influences of the Head. Alternatively she is spoken of as the heart of the Mystical Body. And perhaps the latter image is the more eloquent inasmuch as it indicates her active co-operation with the Head, her continuing, incessant function in the Mystical Body without which that Body would not continue to live. Kill the heart and the body dies.

Another feature of the imagery of the human body has strange applications. Though the head of the human body is the controlling organ, still it lives out of blood supplied to it by the heart. This can be beautifully applied to Our Lady too, because it is through her that Our Lord has been enabled to bestow on us the continuing benefits of redemption.

Such is Our Lady's position, whether we understand it or not. Most people do not properly understand it, even those who practise a devotion to her. But the understanding of that arrangement is essential. We would not, for instance, be honouring Our Lord if we did not attribute Divinity to Him. To talk about Our Lord in the highest terms and still to regard Him as no more than a man, would be to reduce our religion to nullity. We might use many words which sounded like extreme praise, but we would only be degrading Him. Much the same could be said of Mary. If we are ignorant of the fullness of her motherhood, our faith is defective. The divine impulses will not penetrate into us. Without Mary, the Mystical Body does not function fully.

Neither does the Mystical Body function fully without the co-operation of every one of its cells. The Mystical Body must be enabled to function as a whole.