

THINKING IN CHRIST

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"The Christian," says Olier, "is properly speaking Jesus Christ living in man." There is no more extraordinary idea than this one of the Mystical Body, whereby Our Lord has placed Himself in a position of a genuine dependence on His members. We are His present-day means of action and expression. Through us He continues to lead His life on a far wider scale than He did long ago in Judea, His native land. It follows that by His own law He is constrained to utilise us fully. So He requires that we should play the part of which we are capable in our salvation and in our sanctification.

There is a very important phrase in St. Paul which marks a decisive difference between our outlook and that of the Protestants. It is the text: "With fear and trembling work out your salvation" (Philippians 2:12). I am not here stressing the aspect of fear and trembling, but the aspect of working out. We are not going to be saved without our co-operation. This is basic in the Catholic position; but is something which in Protestantism has passed into eclipse in varying degrees. The original Protestantism which was created by Luther and Calvin and some other reduced man to a very low dimension. They held that the part played by man in his own salvation was almost negligible; that salvation was altogether the donation of Christ and that all that was called for from man was an Act of Faith.

In many of the evangelical sects that teaching still lingers on. That is what is at stake when they declare themselves to be "saved". They have made the Act of Faith in Christ. It has entitled them to salvation there and then; and according to the full rigour of that doctrine they cannot be "unsaved", not even by big misdemeanours on their part.

That is something radically different from the Catholic and Biblical teaching: "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." As they have undoubtedly read the Bible, one is left wondering what is the meaning which they attach to this text.

Similar to that text in general import is that other intriguing one from the same inspired writer, where he refers to a "filling up of what is wanting of the sufferings of Christ" (Colossians 1:24). This sounds mysterious, for of course nothing was defective in what Our Lord suffered or otherwise did. He left nothing undone that he had come to do. What is meant is that He gave what had to be given, that is what was beyond the power of man to produce. He imparted divine value to our acts. Without that contribution of divine worth which proceeds from Him all our acts and prayers would have no more value than the wind blowing through the trees or the flying of a bird. He also suffered to pay much of what man would refuse to expiate, but after that it was His policy to call on us to weigh in fully in every department of life. For instance, we can give faith, and it is something that is demanded from us; faith is the basis of the Christian system. We can also contribute other virtuous ingredients - effort, suffering, prayer; and so we are permitted and stimulated to supply those things and to the fullest possible extent.

That idea of looking to us, and indeed requiring of us, to make our own contribution towards Redemption is not a severity transaction - as if we were members of a chain gang or slaves where the task master wants to get the last drop out of us. On the contrary it is part of the law of love. It is for our benefit. It is the noblest conception imaginable. We are being moulded to the life of Christ here, rendered like unto Him in His earthly conditions, permitted to share every burden of His, privileged to play a real co-operative part in His mission. As the author of a standard treatise on the Mystical Body observes: "There is nothing in the life of Christ so personal as to exclude participation by His members therein" (Anger). We are thus formed into a one-ness with Him on earth, so that later on we merge into His heavenly state and share His divinity.

The final end will be in strict proportion to our behaviour while on earth. If we give little here, that proportion will be carried on into Heaven. If we share much in His life here, we will enjoy the

fullness of Him in the life hereafter.

Therefore the position in regard to Our Lord and ourselves is very much like that of the human body, in which the head does not do everything. It does not take over the duties of the feet, or the hands, or any other organ of the body. It has its own quite essential duty, but it does not supplant the other functions. The other parts must play their respective roles to the full.

Our work in the Legion is a practical recognition of this law. We aim to conform ourselves to it by supplying things which Our Lord looks to His members to furnish. For instance, we offer apostleship as a filling up of Our Lord's own apostolate. It is not our apostolate alone. We are immersing ourselves in His apostolate, even to the remarkable degree that He is using us as His agency. But that association with Him must be animated by the understanding that we are doing it in Our Lord. He has left a part for us to do, so that we are filling up what is wanting in His own apostolate.

This principle does not refer to the apostolate alone, but to every other item of Christian activity. For instance, we have in a similar sense to supplement Our Lord's dutiful behaviour to His Mother. Again there is no question of defect in Him, for He loved her more than all other creatures who would ever be. And this would be just, for the Saints have said that He got more consolation from her than from all other creatures together. Even if everybody else were to fail Him, from her alone He would have received compensation for His life and his sufferings. So it is to be realised that He repaid her with an affection which surpasses understanding. After His love for His Heavenly Father, His love for His earthly Mother was His special feature. Accordingly - and this is wonderful to contemplate - that characteristic of his earthly life has now to be evidenced by His Mystical Body.

Does it suffice if that distinctive love be shown forth by certain select members of the Mystical Body, such as St. Bernard, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Louis Marie de Montfort and others who have been pre-eminent in their love for Mary? The answer to that is "NO". There are certain functions of Our Lord which He had not assigned to every Christian. For example His prerogative of Infallibility is reproduced by the Pope alone; the main exercise of His authority by the Bishops; the offering of sacrifice and the forgiving of sins by the Priests; His miracles by certain chosen ones.

But not His love for His Mother. That is a quality which must proceed from every Christian. In a family it would obviously not be enough for one son or daughter to show forth love for their mother, the rest being free to love her or not just as they thought fit.

The fact of this matter is that love of Mary is obligatory on every member of the Mystical Body, just the same as Faith is obligatory on every member. Faith in Jesus Christ and love of Mary are the basic requirements - the foundation stone of Christianity, without which salvation is a doubtful proposition. So also to the loving of Mary we can apply that text of St. Paul and say that we make up what is lacking in Our Lord's love for His Mother.

There is another feature of that supplemental duty of the Mystical Body which is insufficiently appreciated. It is the filling up what is lacking in the thinking of Our Lord. It is not enough to work or pray in a merely energetic fashion, bestowing time and crude effort and nothing more. Too many people make that mistake in religious matters. They forget that it is our noblest privilege to think. They pray without thought, satisfied to expend a certain amount of time. They do not consider the quality of their prayer. This chiefly depends on the thought which enlivens it. The uttering of the words empty of the ideas which are their true life could be a display of good intention, but that does not suffice. Prayer is a communication with God. It must carry with it our mind, and in our mind a realisation of the great doctrines in which God reveals Himself to us and which make prayer meaningful.

Nor should this thinking in Christ reserve itself to the times of formal prayer. Thought must not be relegated to special thinking sessions. It must be vigorous in everything we do.

So every act must be given life by thought, and higher life by living it in Christ. To quote once more from our friend, St. Paul: "We must have the mind of Christ" (1Cor. 2:16). We must reflect with a view to producing good work and advancing in every respect. We must plan. We must be ingenious. We must strive as a very part of the work itself to devise better methods, to hammer out new ideas, and to solve the problems. In a word, we must give to religion the same concentrated and intelligent approach that we lavish on the world. Take any one of the professions or sciences of today and measure the unlimited thought that goes into them with a view to making improvements. Look at modern

industry! Many of the firms set aside for the purpose of research annual sums of money which seem to be disproportionate. But it is a life and death calculation. If they do not think, they fall behind in the race and that means extinction.

If people have no capacity for thinking, then of course nothing can be done about it. As the saying goes, "blood cannot be extracted from a turnip". But who among us is prepared to accept the category of being a turnip. We may not all be geniuses, but one and all we have "the power of thought, the magic of the mind", as Byron says. It is the faculty which separates us from the animal, so we must apply it intensively to the field of religion. If we do not, then we are not filling up what is lacking in the Thinking of Christ. This is a startling notion, one amounting to the suggestion that we are, so to speak, disfiguring Our Blessed Lord. We know the way He was brutally disfigured at the time of the Passion. In our own little way we, too, can diminish Him. We are supposed to be projecting Him, His actions, His qualities, His total likeness onto the screen of life. But if we do not think for Him and with Him, we are not casting on to that Christian screen the true image of Christ, whose "thoughts are more vast than the sea, whose counsels are more deep than the ocean" (Eccles. 24:39). He is the Eternal Wisdom in the form of a man. He wishes to assimilate us to Himself in that respect as in others. We are outlets of that Wisdom into the world, but so often we give Him no scope. We restrict Him in that particular department. We give Him rough energy, but not thought; so that we do not let Him think through us, or plan, or solve things, or otherwise manifest His genius. It is the very logic of the Mystical Body that we should make available to it every quality we possess. We must not omit the grand prerogative of intellect. When we give room to Our Lord to think in us, then important things must happen.

If in that spirit we consecrate to Him our thinking, He assumes it into His own thought. His thought is potent. He shares in the creative power of the Trinity. The thought of God is omnipotent. He thinks the universe, and the universe with its billions of parts forthwith exists in all its vast diversity. Through the Mystical Body we are brought into touch with that process of eternal, omnipotent thinking. To the measure that we are in Christ and part of His operation, incredible though it may seem, we have somehow or other been taken into the very life of the Blessed Trinity. Of ourselves we are nothing, but through Our Lord we have been united to the Holy Trinity, and our little efforts of whatever kind are made part of the Divine force which arranges all things. "We are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1Cor. 3:23).

The conversion of man, the sanctification of man, the shaping of men's destinies forever! No employment could be higher than that! Yet we have been entrusted with a responsible part in it all. So as a first principle of our effort we must THINK. Our mind is the highest part of our natural make-up and we must place it fully at the service of Jesus Christ. We must think and plan as if everything depended on it. Indeed I suppose that everything does depend on it, and that the Lord could say: "I have need of your thinking" even in a more expressive sense than He says to the foot: "I have need of your help" (1Cor. 3:21).

This does not mean that He will honour our ideas precisely in the manner in which we have worked them out. It may be a mercy to us that He should not, because we think defectively. As St. Paul says, we only see as through a glass darkly. It is His principle to use what we present. Perhaps He remodels it a little to make it fit into His designs; or adds splendour to it, as He did to Judith to help her project. (Judith 10:4). He may even act creatively through it and cause it to fashion the future. So when we plan, it should be with faith, ambitiously, a little beyond what we judge to be our reach so as to leave some room for Him to operate.

Often He lets us see the use He has made of our various offerings, even to the extent of incorporating them in the fabric of the Church.

Take some of St. Thomas Aquinas' hymns - the *Tantum Ergo* for instance - and reflect that in every Benediction service in the world these words of his are being used. What an unutterable joy would have seized him when he was penning them, if he could have known that everywhere people would be singing his words as part of their worship.

But it is not with St. Thomas alone that God would deal thus. He treats the little people no less considerately.