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"Ἴνα ἡ ἐκκλησία οἰκοδομηγὴν λάβῃ
I Cor. 14: 5

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THE EXTENSION OF CHRIST'S MYSTICAL BODY

The term "Mystical Body of Christ" is only one of many names employed in sacred theology to designate the Catholic Church. Certain theologians, among them the great controversialists John Eck¹ and Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius² have used the term body of Christ as a definition of the Church. This practice has been countenanced and encouraged by our Holy Father Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*.³ Objectively there is no one of all the traditional names better fitted to aid men in appreciating the Church.

However, there have been those who thought that the term Mystical Body of Christ applied more properly to some group or organization wider in extent than the Catholic Church. These men have held that persons in this world who are in the state of grace, and who are not members of the Catholic Church are still members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Some have even feared that the application of the name Mystical Body to the visible Church militant of the New Testament would in some way imply that the blessed in heaven and the souls in purgatory are not members of this Body. At all events they have taught that the Catholic Church, properly so called, has an extension narrower than that of the Mystical Body.

We can best meet this attitude by comparing the traditional definitions of the Catholic Church with the Pauline declarations about the body of Christ. The Church which St. Paul designated as the body of Christ is the same organization which has been defined and described in Catholic ecclesiology.

Now it happens that there are three distinct types of definitions of the Catholic Church. All of them have legitimate scriptural and traditional background, but they did not enter the literature of scholastic ecclesiology together. Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, theologians have used the three types together to explain the nature of the Catholic Church.

St. Robert Bellarmine's classical formula is the best example of the

¹ Cf. *Recherches de la Couronne de la Sainte Eglise catholique*, *Lebanon*, *Ad authors seu generis scriptores*. Venice, 1535, cap. 1, tit. 1, sect.

² Cf. *Confessio Catholica Fidei Christianae*, cap. 26, in the *Opera Omnia*, Cologne, 1584, Tom. I, pp. 21-25.

³ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 35, (1943), p. 199. The NEWC translation, # 13, p. 11.

first kind of definition of the Catholic Church. According to the *De Ecclesia Militante* the Church is "the gathering of those men who are united in the profession of the same Christian faith and in the communication of the same Sacraments under the rule of legitimate pastors, and particularly of the Roman Pontiff, the one Vicar of Christ on earth."⁴ The theologians who held that the mere profession of faith would not suffice to keep a man within the Church offered definitions similar to that of Francis Sylvius. He wrote that the Church is "the society of the faithful, ordered and united under one head, Christ, and under His Vicar on earth, the Roman Pontiff."⁵ These formulae apply exclusively to the Church militant of the New Testament. They did not become common in scholastic ecclesiology until well into the sixteenth century. In most modern manuals of theology they are called something like "definitions of the Church in the strictest or the most proper sense."

The second type of definition applies to the Church militant since the beginning of the human race, or at least since the time of our first parents. A good example of this type is found in the *De Ecclesiasticis Scripturis et Dogmatibus* of the great Louvain theologian, John Driedo. "The holy Church is the multitude which rejoices in holy unity, a unity understood not according to a gathering in one land or in one province, or in any bodily place, but rather in the union of one sign of faith, of one Spirit giving life in every place and nation, whether they [the members of this multitude] know each other or not."⁶ The formula, "congregation," or as some preferred, "convocation of the faithful," employed by the Cardinal John de Turretremata⁷ and Francis Suarez⁸ was likewise intended to describe the Church militant as it had existed on earth since the days of our first parents. Suarez's brilliant Jesuit contemporary, Gregory of Valencia, was one of the first to use an equivalent formula as a "narrower" definition of the Church. He taught that the Church on earth since the first days of the human race may be described as "the multitude of men whom the true worship of God and the true but obscure knowledge of faith join together in this life, partly by an internal communication through faith itself, and

⁴ *De Ecclesia Militante*, cap. 2, in the Inghelstadt edition of 1886, vol. I, col. 1263.

⁵ *Controversiarum Liber III*, q. 1, n. 3, in the Opus Opera, Antwerp 1608, tom. V, p. 237.

⁶ In the Louvain edition of 1533, p. 503.

⁷ *Cl. Summa de Ecclesia*, Venice, 1860, Lib. I, cap. 3, p. 4 recto.

⁸ *Opus de Triplici Virtute Theologiae, Fidei, Spei, et Charitatis*, Lyons, 1521. *Tractatus de Fide*, Disputatio IX, Sectio I, p. 136.

partly by an external communication in the outward protestation of that faith."⁹ This type of definition is the oldest among the scholastic formulæ. Early theologians, like Turrecremata and Driedo, preferred to treat of the true Church as an institution which had been in existence since the time of Adam and Eve, and which had reached its perfect status in this world with the advent of its divine Founder.

The third type of definition, that which is most general, is intended to describe the Church as it exists, not only in this world, but in purgatory and in heaven. Gregory of Valentia offers as his "wisest" definition of the Church the formula "the multitude of those who through the benefit of divine calling are in some way associated in the true worship of God and in the true and supernaturally acquired knowledge of God, whether that knowledge is in the obscurity of faith or in the clarity and directness of the beatific vision."¹⁰ A more common form of the most general definition was used by Honoratus Tournely. Thus the Church is "the assembly or society of the saints, serving God under one Head, Christ."¹¹ Tournely and the other orthodox theologians who utilized this formula were careful to point out that the sanctity in the definition involved, as a minimum, only the profession of the holy faith by the members of the Church militant.

The three classes of definitions we have just mentioned do not describe distinct societies. They apply to an organization which exists visibly on earth here and now, but which has its roots in the corporate supernatural life among men before the coming of our Lord, and which has its extension and its ultimate home in the courts of heaven. The first type of definition describes *this society* in such a way as to distinguish it from other social units now existing in this world and claiming the attributes and the prerogatives of the true Church of God. The second type presents it as an organization which is at once the continuance and the perfection of the social body composed of those who believed in the coming of Christ before the Incarnation. The third type, a society which extends now into purgatory and into heaven and which is destined to live forever in the light of the beatific vision.

St. Paul, through whom the expression "body of Christ" came into the language of the people of God, applies this designation to the

⁹ *Commentariorum Theologorum Liber Tertius, Insuperior, 1623, Disp. I, Q. 1, Function 7, col. 164.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Psychologus Theologus de Ecclesia Christi, Quæ in Scholis Sorbonicis Habuit Honoratus Tournely, Tom. I, Paris, 1739, q. 1, a. 2, p. 22.*

visible Church of the New Testament. He writes to the Romans that "we, being many, are one *body* in Christ, and every one members one of another. And having different gifts, according to the grace that is given us: either prophecy to be used according to the rule of faith, or ministry in ministering, or he that teacheth in doctrine."¹² St. Paul makes it clear that the group whom he addressed as one body in Christ were those organized with a definite ministry and a definite teaching office. They were the men and women who composed the Catholic Church in the city of Rome. They were the social body whose members could be expected to live "loving one another with the charity of brotherhood."¹³

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians also, the Apostle of the Gentiles leaves no room for doubt about the fact that he applies the term "body" immediately to the visible Church of the New Testament. "For we, being many, are one bread, one *body*, all that partake of one bread."¹⁴ The one bread is of course the Eucharistic food. Those who partake of the one bread, within the visible Catholic Church to whom this Sacrament is entrusted, are the members of this Church. Thus here the designation "one body" is applied immediately to the group described in the definition of St. Robert.

In the same document St. Paul shows that the body of Christ which he describes is an organized society, into which men are initiated through the rite of baptism, a society in which there are diversities of races, ministries and operations.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body: so also is Christ.

For in one Spirit were we all baptized *into one body*, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free: and in one Spirit we have all been made to stick.

For the body also is not one member, but many.¹⁵

St. Paul called the Church the body of Christ in order to emphasize, not only the dependence of this society upon the life of our Lord, but also to bring out the mutual dependence of the members among themselves. He uses the analogy of the interdependence of members within a human body and then proceeds to show that those who form a part of the society which he calls the body of Christ are thus organized to

¹² Rom. 12: 5-7.

¹³ Rom. 12: 10.

¹⁴ I Cor. 10: 17.

¹⁵ I Cor. 12: 12-14.

serve one another. The life of charity is incumbent upon all of those who pertain to the body of Christ, but among these men, some are called upon to exercise the functions of hierarchical ministry. The body is manifestly the society in which this ministry exists by right.

Now you are the *body of Christ*, and members of member.
And God indeed hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondly Prophets, thirdly Doctors, after that miracles, then the graces of healings, helps, governments, kinds of tongues, interpretations of speeches.¹⁶

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul speaks of the Church as the body of Christ:

... raising him [Christ] up from the dead, and setting him on his right hand in the heavenly places:

Above all principality and power and virtue and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

And he hath subjected all things under his feet: and hath made him head over all the Church,

Which is his body, and the fullness of him who is filled all in all.¹⁷

St. Paul taught that the organization which he termed the body of Christ was a society which exists in this world, strong in the hope of its divine calling. It is something united and organized here in order to attain, through definite corporate social activity, to a fullness ineffable.

I therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.

With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity,

Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

One body and one Spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in us all, giving of Christ.¹⁸

¹⁶ I Cor. 12: 27-28.

¹⁷ Eph. 1: 20-23. The Greek text, and for that matter the critical edition of the Vulgate differ here from the Clementine rendering. Where the Clementine reads "*supra omnia Ecclesiam*," the Wordsworth and White critical edition reads "*supra omnia Ecclesiam*." The Greek text "*ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἐκκλησία*" is best translated "over all things to (or for) the Church."

¹⁸ Eph. 4: 1-7.

This grace is given in the visible Church, through the Apostles and the Prophets and the Evangelists:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Until we all meet into the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ:

That henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive.

But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ:

From whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in charity.¹¹

The Church is called the body of Christ since it is subject to Him, and by reason of the fact that He loves it and has saved it. "The husband is the head of the wife: as Christ is the head of the Church: he is the saviour of his body."¹²

But even here the designation is applied immediately to a society. "Because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones."¹³

In the Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul likewise insists that the organization which is designated as the body of Christ is precisely that in which he is a minister. It is the society of which our Lord is the head.

"And he is the head of the body, the Church."¹⁴ At the same time it is the society in which St. Paul labors, and for which he suffers,

"who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh, for his body which is the Church: whereof I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God, which is given me towards you."¹⁵

The body grows in this world through its salutary contact with the head, "from which the whole body by joints and bands being supplied with nourishment and compacted, groweth unto the increase of God."¹⁶

That body, which is the Church, lives in charity and in peace.¹⁷ But

That body, which is the Church, lives in charity and in peace.¹⁷ But

¹¹ Eph. 4: 12-16.

¹² Eph. 5: 23.

¹³ Eph. 5: 30. Conversely, the bodies of the members of the Church are said to be the members of Christ. "Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6: 15).

¹⁴ Col. 1: 18.

¹⁵ Col. 1: 24-25.

¹⁶ Col. 2: 19.

above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection; and let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also ye are called in one body: and be ye thankful."²⁵

In the light of these texts and definitions it appears that the extension of the Mystical Body of Christ is exactly that of the Catholic Church. The Catholic or universal Church is the proper designation of that holy society described in all three kinds of formulae used as definitions of the Church in scholastic theology. St. Paul has indicated this society, and no other, as the Body of Christ.

Thus, when we say that the visible Church militant of the New Testament, the Roman Catholic Church, is the Mystical Body of Christ, we do not in any sense withdraw that appellation from the glorious assembly of the blessed in heaven or the souls in purgatory. These do not form a society or a Church in any way distinct from the Church militant. The members of the Church on earth are "fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God."²⁶ The same society which works on earth, under the leadership of Peter's successor, lives in perfect beatitude in heaven. That society is designated as the Mystical Body of Christ.

When we say that the Roman Catholic Church is the Body of Christ we do not imply that the Church exists only in this world any more than we mean that every member of the Army of the United States is in Italy when we say that the American Army captured Salerno. When we designate the Church militant as the Mystical Body of Christ we merely state the fact that this society, alone among all the social organizations in this world, lives a supernatural corporate life which it receives from Christ, and in which the saints in heaven and the souls in purgatory co-operate.

In this world only those who are members of the Catholic Church can properly be designated as actual members of the Mystical Body. The Body of Christ is a society. It is perfectly true that the person who is not a Catholic can have the gift of sanctifying grace. If he has this grace, he has at least the implicit desire of entering the true Church of Jesus Christ as a member, and he receives his grace as a gift from our Lord. But he receives it precisely as one who intends to become a member of the Mystical Body, and not as an actual member of this society. It is at best misguided kindness to describe such a person as a member of Christ.

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²⁵ Col. 3: 15.

RECENT DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

Continuing his series of dogmatic text-books under the general title *Commentarius in Summam D. Thomae*, the Rev. A. Ferland, S.S., has published the fourth volume, containing the treatises "De Deo Uno" and "De Deo Trino" (Grand Seminaire, Montreal, 1943). This commentary embraces the matter of the first 43 questions of the *Summa*, Part I. The outstanding features of Father Ferland's work are clearness and brevity. While following in substance the order of St. Thomas, he does not hesitate to introduce certain modifications. Thus, immediately after the proofs of God's existence he considers the problem of the intuitive vision of the divine essence by the human mind (which the Angelic Doctor discusses in Q. 12), and only then treats of the divine perfections (the subject of QQ. 3-11 in the *Summa*). Questions of present-day importance, such as the existence of God and the formal constitutive of the divine essence, are discussed in detail, while other matters to which St. Thomas gave considerable attention but which are less important nowadays, such as the Book of Life and the happiness of God, are passed over.

Father Ferland is consistently Thomistic in his choice of opinions. Discussing the desire of the human soul to see God face to face, he admits the possibility of an elicited natural desire, which however can be only inefficacious and conditional. From this he concludes that it is very fitting that God should elevate the created intellect to the supernatural plane; hence, there is a great probability that the human soul possesses the power of being elevated to the beatific vision.

Father Ferland teaches that the future free acts of man are known by God in His predetermining decrees; he rejects the *scientia media*. In conformity with Thomistic principles he holds that predestination to glory is *ante praevisa merita*. Discussing the number of those predestined, he expresses the opinion that, although the majority of men do not attain to eternal salvation, the greater part of the baptized are among the elect. Negative reprobation he regards not as a positive exclusion from glory as from an undeserved benefit (as some theologians have taught), but as a divine decree permitting that some men reach the goal of eternal life.

Father Ferland presents an excellent exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Worthy of special note are his treatment of the