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Ube American Ecclesiastical IReview

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION FOR THE CLERGY
Cum Approbatione Superiorum

VOL. CXV

JULY—DECEMBER, 1946

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Phil. 1:27

Published by
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA PRESS

OUR LORD'S PRESENCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The central, the most important fact about the Catholic Church, that which primarily differentiates it from every other religious organization on the face of the earth, is the living presence of Jesus Christ Our Lord within it. This actual indwelling of Our Blessed Lord within the society which He founded is the great and essential glory of the Catholic Church. It is the basic reason why the Catholic Church can be and should be accurately designated as the true Church of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom and the City and the House of God. Because the fellowship and the company of Christ are to be found within this, the society of His disciples, our present Sovereign Pontiff, in his masterly encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, could correctly insist that "nothing more glorious, nothing nobler, nothing surely more honorable can be imagined than to belong to the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church."¹

Certainly no man can begin to realize what the Catholic Church really is until he considers it in the light of the living presence of Christ within it. Unless we become aware of the fact that Our Lord actually resides within the Church, any designation of this society as the Mystical Body of Christ or as the Spouse of Christ is bound, for all intents and purposes, to be practically meaningless to us. Furthermore, in order to love the Church as we should love it, we must also take cognizance of Our Lord's abiding life and activity within it. Pope Pius XII reminds us of this in that section of the *Mystici Corporis* in which he exhorts us to love the Church, "In order that such a solid and undivided love [of the Church] may abide and increase in our souls day by day, we must accustom ourselves to see Christ Himself in the Church. For it is Christ who lives in His Church, and through her teaches, governs and sanctifies."²

Catholics today, subject as they are bound to be to the influence of the propaganda and the attitudes of the world around them, are in some danger of failing to appreciate the complete reality of Our Lord's presence within the visible Catholic Church. Amidst the turmoil of pressure in favor of "inter-faith" movements and the like,

there is an almost inevitable tendency to imagine that Christ is in the Church only in a kind of imaginary or metaphorical way. That unfortunate tendency is sometimes aided and increased by books and instructions which, though otherwise creditable, constantly persist in employing metaphors and other figurative expressions in dealing with the Church's relations to Our Lord. For one reason or another, modern men and women are inclined to discount as imaginary or unreal, and therefore as basically unimportant, any subject which is presented to them in predominantly metaphorical terms.

Failure to appreciate the full reality of Our Lord's presence within the Catholic Church is responsible for one unfortunate and even dangerous phenomenon in modern religious writing. This is the habit of placing the true Church of Jesus Christ, if not on a level with other religious societies, at least in the same general class with these outside organizations. In some cases this tendency resolves itself into the essentially Protestant tactic of imagining the existence of an invisible church, an assembly of good-intentioned men and women of all religions, which is supposed to constitute the true Mystical Body of Jesus Christ

Likewise forgetfulness of the fact that Christ *really* lives and acts within the Catholic Church leads to the mistaken but unfortunately all-too-prevalent belief that the essential difference between the Catholic Church and other religious societies is to be found in the fact that the Catholic Church teaches the entirety of religious truth while these other organizations present only a portion of it. Such a difference does in fact exist, but it is by no means the ultimate and essential distinction. In the last analysis the real reason why the Catholic Church is something apart from and superior to all *of* the other religious societies in the world is to be found in the fact that Our Lord actually dwells within this Catholic Church and within it alone. Within this society, and in no other way, do we find the fellowship of Christ, our God and our Redeemer.

CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH DURING HIS PUBLIC LIFE

It is quite impossible to appreciate the reality of Our Lord's presence within the Church today. We consider carefully His position within the society of His disciples prior to the time of His ascension into heaven. The fact of the matter is that, although

Christ's sacred body is now *located* in heaven, and hence in a *place* far remote from that in which His followers do His will in this world, the basic and essential relation of the Church to Our Lord remains unaltered. He lives and acts in the Church, He speaks to the world from out of the Church, in essentially the same way today as He did during the period intervening between His baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan and His ascension into heaven.

The Catholic Church, the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, started out as a band of disciples or learners, gathered around and ruled by Our Lord, acting in His capacity as the Teacher of the divinely revealed public revelation. Men and women were admitted to this group only by personal invitation, issued by Our Lord Himself. The company had neither reason for nor bond of corporate existence apart from Christ. He was not merely present within the group, but the company itself was seen and understood preeminently in terms of its association with Him. Looking back on the days of Our Lord's public life, St. Peter could refer to the original members of the band as those "who have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, until the day wherein he was taken from us."s

Knabenbauer notes that the Greek words *ἀσήμερον καὶ ἔξηλθα* which the Douai renders as "came in and went out" constitute an authentic Hebraism, found in many sections of the Old Testament.⁴ The expression signifies an intimate and continual association. The Greek τ«ν συνἑλάοη-ωι» rendered as "who liave companied with us," involves another form of the word *ἰρχομαι* and gives point to the truth that not only the twelve, but the rest of the company of the disciples as well, were continually in the presence of the Master. Thus the Church was originally, as it is now, the group of men and women in the company of Christ.

Long before the ascension, however, Our Lord taught His disciples that He would be present among them even while they were in a flare remote from that which He occupied. To the seventy-two whom He sent on a preaching mission during the course of His

public life He said: "He that heareth you heareth me."⁵⁶ That notice, as it stands, contains far more than the mere declaration that these men were appointed as His representatives. It implied that these preachers who had received their mission from Him within His Church actually spoke to the people with His voice, in such a way that the persons who heard them listened to the voice of Christ.

Not only did Our Lord speak in and through the disciples whom He commissioned to preach in His name, but He habitually spoke to the multitudes from the midst of the disciples, who formed a group apart. Both St. Matthew and St. Luke make this clear in describing the setting of the Sermon on the Mount. St. Matthew tells us that "seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain. And when he was set down, his disciples came unto him. And opening his mouth, he taught them."⁶ St. Luke writes that "coming down with them [the twelve apostles], he stood in a plain place: and the company of his disciples and a very great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast, both of Tyre and Sidon" were there to hear Him. Our Lord spoke to the multitudes in parables. He explained these parables to the disciples.

Furthermore, during the course of Our Lord's public life, His enemies were so aware of the intimate union of the corps of the disciples with Him that they spoke in such a way as to hold Him responsible for the actions of His followers, the members of the Church, and conversely they considered the disciples responsible for Him. When the scribes and the pharisees saw Our Lord and His disciples partaking of the banquet which St. Matthew had given to celebrate his call to the company of Christ, they angrily questioned the disciples about Our Lord's conduct and about their own.⁸ The question addressed to the disciples was answered by Our Lord Himself. Again, when the pharisees objected to the disciples' practice of plucking and eating grains of wheat on the Sabbath, Christ answered for them and defended them.⁸

⁵ *Luke* 10:16; cf. *Matt.* 10:40.

⁶ *Matt.* 5:1.

⁷ *Luke* 6:17.

⁸ Cf. *Matt.* 9:11; *Mark* 2:16; *Luke* 5:30.

⁸ Cf. *Matt.* 12:1 ff; *Mark* 2:23 ff; *Luke* 6:1 ff.

During the time of Our Lord's public life, then, He was not only locally present among His disciples, the men and women who then constituted the Catholic Church, the true Church of the New Testament, but He also worked within this group, teaching and ruling and sanctifying the society and its individual members. He taught them directly. He taught the multitudes, the people whom He was preparing for the call into the society of the disciples, in His capacity as the Head of the company of the disciples. Furthermore He taught the multitudes Himself in and through the preaching of the disciples.

Up until the time of the ascension Our Lord was the only visible Ruler of the company of the disciples. It is perfectly true that, as a part of the course of divine instruction which He gave to His followers, He promised and announced that Peter was to possess a real primacy of jurisdiction over his fellow disciples, but even then it was made perfectly dear to Peter and to the rest that the authority was to be exercised over the Church which would always belong to Christ¹⁰ Thus the governing authority which was promised to Peter was that of Christ's vicar on earth. Furthermore a definite social authority was promised to the entire membership of the apostolic college, but this, too, was something subject to the power of Peter within the Church of Christ.¹¹

It was not, however, until just before the ascension that the jurisdiction which had been promised to the Prince of the Apostles and to the apostolic college as a whole was actually given by Our Lord.¹¹ Up until the moment of the ascension, the complete rule and direction of the society came visibly from Christ, visibly dwelling and working within that organization. Visibly and truly then, and invisibly though just as truly now, every order emanating from a superior within the Catholic Church was and is the command of Christ. Both the rule within the Catholic Church and the monarchical and hierarchical organization within which the followers of Christ are to be guided and sanctified until the end of time were the personal work of Our Lord.

Christ sanctified His society and its members, not merely by giving them the teaching of holiness, but by communicating the life of grace to the individual disciples within the Church and to the

WCL Matt. 16:18-19.
 << CL Matt 18:18.

¹² CL *John* 20-22223; 21:15 ff

company itself as a whole. He, the Master and Lord, around whom the society itself was constructed, earned the remission of sins and the life of divine grace for men through His death on the cross. He brought that life of grace to His followers through the channels of that sacramental activity which He instituted within His Church. He gave His disciples the gift of newness of life, separating them from the world and sealing them to Himself through the Sacrament of Baptism which He inaugurated. He constituted that sign as the rite of initiation into His company in such a way that it was ready for use as a gateway into the Church and a departure from the generation ruled over by the prince of this world at the very moment of the Church's first missionary activity after the ascension.¹³ Then and now it is Christ Himself who communicates the grace, and Christ Himself who is the principal agent of baptism. "The bodily ministry," said St. Augustine, "was the contribution of the disciples. His contribution was the aid of majesty."¹⁴ He was present and He remains present to the Church in the work of baptism.

As the perfective center of the sacramental system within the Catholic Church He instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In this rite, which is preeminently the act of the Church as His Mystical Body,¹⁵ He is truly, really, and substantially present under the accidents of bread and wine. Furthermore at every Mass He is present to His Church as the High Priest, offering this true and commemorative sacrifice through the instrumentality of His priest as the ultimate cohesive sign and force of the unity of His society. He was visibly and truly living in the Church when He instituted and first confected this Sacrament. He remains invisibly and no less truly living in the Church through this Eucharistic Sacrifice today. In His Sacerdotal Prayer, set forth in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, He petitioned the Father that the assembly of the disciples might remain one with Him. St. Paul tells us that, even in Heaven, His prayer of intercession for us continues.¹⁶

<<Cf. *Acts* 2:41.

¹¹ In *Ioan.*, XV, c. 3.

¹⁵ CL the article "The Act of the Mystical Body," *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, C, 5 (May, 1939), 397 ff, and the discussion occasioned by this article, *AER*, CH, 4 (April, 1940), pp. 306 ff.

<< CL *Rom.* 8:34.

THE DEPARTURE AND THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF OUR LORD

With Our Lord's ascension into heaven a new status of the Church of Jesus Christ came into being. That society had been gathered together, organized, and conducted in the visible and local presence of its divine Founder. Now, with the ascension, that visible and local presence was taken away, not to be restored to the disciples of Christ as a complete society until that day when the Church will finally see Him again and forever at His second advent. The *place* in which Christ dwells locally is heaven. Since His ascension, as the epistles of St. Paul especially show so well, the Church on earth labors and struggles against its spiritual and earthly adversaries in order to enjoy the visible presence of Christ once again.

To sustain the society of His disciples during the period in which it suffers the loss of the visible presence of its divine Founder, He promised and gave to the Church the indwelling Spirit of Truth and Love.¹⁷ This indwelling of the Blessed Trinity within the Catholic Church, appropriated by Our Blessed Lord Himself to the Holy Ghost, gives the Church the understanding and the fortitude requisite for its task of acting as the instrument of Christ in calling and aiding men to salvation and in overthrowing the efforts of the world against God. By reason of His divine nature Our Lord thus continues, though invisible, to reside within the Church, to guide and to instruct it, to sustain it and to give it strength. Moreover, in His human nature also, Our Lord remains within the Church. He told His disciples that they would see Him no longer,¹⁸ but He also promised them that He would be with them until the consummation of the world.¹⁹ The promise of His continued though invisible presence and the accomplishment of that promise were given to the disciples as Christ had formed them, organized into a society which is His Mystical Body on earth.

THE INDWELLING OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO HIS DIVINE NATURE

In His divine nature Christ is in all created things according to the three ways which St. Thomas Aquinas designates as es-

«CL Wm 14:16.

1BCf. *Matt.* 28:20.

«CL John 16:10.

sence, presence and power.²⁰ God can be said to be in all things in so far as He keeps them in existence, in so far as they are visible to Him and subject to His power. In this way Our Lord remains within the Church, sustaining it and preserving it for what it is and what He made it, His true Church and the sole ark of salvation on earth. He sees it, and He is available to the prayers of mankind. Since true prayer is essentially the petition of fitting things from God²¹ and since a thing is truly fitting only if it is in line towards salvation and union with God in heaven, the divine work of hearing and answering prayers on earth is in itself a mode of indwelling within the Catholic Church.

This does not mean, of course, that only the prayers of those who are truly disciples of Christ and thus truly members of the Catholic Church are heard and answered by God. It is perfectly true that the prayer of the Church is always answered because this is, in the last analysis, the prayer of Christ Himself. But all true prayer has its efficacy from this central petition to God, and all true prayer is answered in so far as the essential and central good sought in the petition is concerned. This dominant petition is always for God's glory, to be attained through the granting of eternal life to men. Since, in the providence of God, eternal salvation or the attainment of eternal life is to be achieved only through association with Christ through membership in the Catholic Church or through the sincere desire for that association, the granting of the petition of prayer by God constitutes a divine indwelling in the true Church, drawing men to this society and strengthening them in its life and in its communion.

According to this same divine presence, through the power of God the Church is kept safe from the attacks of its enemies and preserved against the dissolution which would naturally be the lot of any merely human society. The divine protection accorded to the Church is in itself easily visible to mankind. As the recipient of this protection against the forces which naturally tend to overthrow and transform merely human organizations, the Church is visible in the world as a social miracle, and thus, according to the

²⁰ Ci. Sum. *theol.*, I, q. 8, a. 3.

²¹ Cf. St John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, III, c. 24, and the author's *The Theology of Prayer* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1939), pp. 1 ff.

Vatican Council, it stands as a true and perpetual motive of credibility and as a real witness of its own status as the bearer of divine revelation.²²

There is one, and according to St. Thomas Aquinas, only one, distinctively supernatural and invisible mode of the divine indwelling. It is the divine presence according to the activity of sanctifying grace,²³ according to which God really dwells in those creatures whom He strengthens and renders competent to live the divine life of the Beatific Vision. In this way God is present to a man who is in a position to see God as He is in Himself, rather than merely to recognize the fact of His existence by a recognition of the truth that there must be a First Cause of created things. The man who lives the life of grace in this world possesses charity, and possesses the life to which the Beatific Vision itself belongs, even though, by reason of his status as a *viator*, he does not exercise the act of the Beatific Vision. Christ, as God, is present in every person who has this life of grace. It is the presence of which He was speaking when He told His apostles: "If any one love me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him: and we will come to him and will make our abode with him."²⁴

According to this intrinsically supernatural mode of divine presence, Our Lord lives within the Church, drawing men into it and strengthening them in its communion. Those who have the life of grace must be either members of the Church or sincerely, albeit perhaps only implicitly, intend to enter it. By dwelling in the souls of those who love Him and the Father, Christ thus lives really and actually within the visible society which He founded and over which He presides.

Moreover there is still another way in which Our Lord can truly be said to dwell within the Catholic Church according to the divine indwelling in line with the life of sanctifying grace. The life of grace and charity is more than a merely individual affair. It is something which has a corporate existence and a corporate expression. The corporate life of grace within the world is that divine charity of which the only authorized and authentic expression is the Eucharistic sacrifice. Although that sacrifice can be performed by a priest not in communion with the true Church, it re-

²² Cf. *DB* 1794.

²³ Cf. *S«m. thiol.*, I, §j. 43, a. 3.

²⁴ *John* 14:23.



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mains properly and essentially the act of the Church, and the indwelling of Christ in the society of His disciples is thus the source of the Eucharistic liturgical activity, the visible sacrifice within the Church which is the expression and the manifestation of the invisible sacrifice of prayer and devotion and charity among the children of men.

THE INDWELLING OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO HIS HUMAN NATURE

According to His sacred human nature, Our Lord remains truly though invisibly resident within the Catholic Church in governing, instructing, and sanctifying this society. He rules the disciples within the Church invisibly and directly. At the same time His divine teaching within the Church makes it perfectly clear that the judgments and the commands of the Church officers who hold their position by reason of the commission which He has given them are to be accepted by the disciples as His judgments and His commands. This presence of Christ in the Church as its supreme though invisible Ruler is the guarantee of and the reason for the Church's indefeasibility. It is manifestly impossible that a society within which Christ governs until the end of time can ever lose its identity or the substantial character which He gave to it.

Now, as during the period of His public life in this world, the Church speaks to the world with the voice of Christ. He it is who teaches within the Church and who, from out of the Church, teaches and calls the men in the world. Furthermore Christ, truly present in the Church, perfects and authenticates the divine message which He preaches through the Church by sealing that doctrine with motives of credibility. St. Mark's Gospel says of the apostles that "they going forth preached everywhere : the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed."²⁵ The presence of Christ teaching within the Church is the cause and the explanation of the Church's infallibility. It is obviously impossible for an institution within which Christ will dwell until the end of time and from which He teaches to do other than set forth His teaching accurately.

St. Clement of Rome in his epistle to the Corinthians speaks of

²⁵ *Mari* 16:20.

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Our Lord living in the Church as “the high priest of our offerings.”²⁰ In His human nature He continues to sanctify the Church by communicating the life of grace in the channels of those sacraments -which He instituted and of which, in His human nature, He continues to act as the principal agent. As the high priest forever, offering the sacrifice of the New Law, He effectuates and expresses the unity of that society which He holds in existence and over which He presides.

OUR TWOFOLD BOND OF UNION WITH CHRIST

The classical Catholic ecclesiologists and more recently the Holy Father’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis* speak of two different kinds of forces which bring us into union with Our Lord within the Church. The first of these, the so-called external or bodily bond of union, includes those factors which together constitute a man as a true member of the society of the disciples. The second, the internal or spiritual bond, is composed of those elements which go to make a man a living member of this society. Both of these bonds bring us into contact with Our Lord dwelling within the Catholic Church. The fault which vitiated many of the earlier twentieth century writings of the Mystical Body was an absolute neglect of the *external* bond of unity with Christ.

A man is joined to Our Lord within the Church by the external bond of unity when he has the profession of the true divine faith, the communication of the sacraments, and subjection to his legitimate ecclesiastical superiors.²⁷ The external profession of the true faith involves contact with Christ dwelling within the Catholic Church because it means the visible acceptance of that message which Christ teaches infallibly here and now within the Catholic Church and which men receive only from the Church. Communication of the divine sacraments is available only to one who has the baptismal character, and who, consequently, has been invited or called personally by Our Lord to enter into the company of His followers. Furthermore this communication is open only to those baptized persons who have not been cast out by the Church, and

ⁱ* Cap. 36, n. 1.

²⁷ Cf. St. Robert Bellarmine, *De controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, Hem. I, *Quarta controversiae generalis*, Lib. III, *De ecclesia militante*, cap. 2 (Ingolstadt 1586). col. 1264.

who have not abandoned that society which is the fellowship of Christ. Subjection to legitimate ecclesiastical superiors carries with it the acceptance of that authority which speaks and commands with the voice of Our Lord Himself.

Through the internal bond of union within the Catholic Church we come into vital contact with Christ residing in the Church in the possession of faith, hope, and charity.²⁸ By faith we have in our own minds that truth which Christ comprehends as God in the divine understanding, which, as Man, He sees in the Beatific Vision, and which He preaches in the Church. Through Christian hope we long for the intuitive vision of the divine essence and for the visible presence of Christ which belongs to, and on the last day will be granted to, the Catholic Church within which He resides. By charity we love Christ who lives in our soul, and who gives us our love for God and our fellow men within the society of His disciples.

It is this life of Christ within the Catholic Church which makes this visible society a mystery of our faith. The mystery of the Church is, as it were, the center of the divine economy with mankind. The Church within which Our Lord lives and works is that visible organization within which bad members will be mingled with the good until the day of judgment. Yet it is the Church apart from which we shall not find Christ. Our Lord's presence within this visible society is not imaginary but real and active. "Wherever Jesus Christ is," said St. Ignatius of Antioch, "there is the Catholic Church."²⁹

Joseph Clifford Fenton

*The Catholic University of America,
Washington, D. C.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ad Smyrnaeos*, cap. 8, n. 2.

Mission Intention

"An end to Christian Disunity as a Scandal to Unbelievers" is the Mission Intention for the month of July, 1946.