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THE BODY OF CHRIST

by G. J. C. MARCHANT

TWO years ago THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY published a Callaghan Lecture by the Rev. G. J. C. Marchant on "Latimer's Candle". We are glad to publish a further Callaghan Lecture in this issue, on the much-debated concept of the Church as "the body of Christ". Mr. Marchant makes a fresh contribution to the debate in this lecture, which he delivered in St. Nicholas' Church, Durham (of which he is Vicar), on February 25, 1957, under the chairmanship of Professor H. E. W. Turner.

I

As a topic around which the discussion of the Church, sacraments and ministry has been focussed, the Pauline phrase "the body of Christ" has become the subject of a number of books and articles during the last fifty years. The well-known commentary on Ephesians by Dr. Armitage Robinson both cleared and held the field ever since its publication in 1903. But the present discussion has produced two different treatments which, together, represent a thorough treatment of the textual material. The first of these is *The Body* by J. A. T. Robinson¹ (No. 5 in "Studies in Biblical Theology"); the other, *One Body in Christ* by Ernest Best. The latter approaches the subject on a wider scale, with studies in parallel Pauline themes and is more detached in manner. It has the advantage also of following out the theme of the body in St. Paul's writings on historical lines, tracing a development through the different epistles. Thus in 1 Corinthians, where the subject is first mentioned (10: 17) it is in connexion with the unity of the Church symbolized in the Holy Communion. This unity is developed in Ch. 12 to discern the importance of diversity as well within that unity. Best makes the suggestion that this long explanation involves the assumption that the Corinthians had not had that aspect inculcated before; he believes that Paul had given them the term as an idea but not these implications. Yet in 6: 15 Paul refers to their bodies as "members" of Christ in a way that suggests that they must have realized that before he wrote to them—presumably from his previous teaching. It seems difficult to

¹ [Nephew of Armitage Robinson.]

imagine that they could know the idea of 6: 15 and not of Ch. 12—at least in germ.² Remembering that St. Paul's correspondence was occasional, particularly in 1 Corinthians, the longer and emphatic application of the idea of the Church as a body could have been simply the further repetition, possibly with amplification to suit the situation, of what in fact the Corinthians already had been taught in essentials. One can hardly think of what the Corinthians could have done with the bare term alone. It was surely used • to mean something which must have been explained.

The term, which has had a rather obvious meaning so far, receives more weight as it is drawn into sacramental connections in these early epistles. Thus in 1 Cor. 12: 13 St. Paul refers to being "baptized into one body" and in Ch. 10 we saw that he refers to the union in the Holy Communion as of "one body", while in Ch. 11 there is the further remark in a similar context of not discerning the body in the case of an unworthy participant. The theme thus expressed receives fuller treatment in the two later epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians. The former of these has in mind, of course, the Gnostic heresy by which the Colossians were being affected, and in consequence the epistle contains a doctrinal amplification of the work of Christ as the incarnate Lord with reference to the cosmological speculations of the heretics. As in this the drift is to display Christ as supreme over every force and authority so called; so, to bring it home in complete relevance to the Christian in the Church, the body theme is developed to assert Christ as its "head". The term "head" has a certain O.T. background as meaning "leader" as well as "source" (fountain-head), and Best gives references (p. 124, n. 4) for a certain interchange with the terms "beginning" (ἀρχή) and leader (ἄρχων) in the LXX; while the former of these, which became a messianic title, was connected with "first-born" (πρωτότοκος) which also became a messianic title. The first and third of these are associated with the term "head" in Colossians 1: 18. In the use of the term St. Paul evidently has both lordship and source of life in mind. Thus in 5: 19 it is from the head the body grows as it is knit together; yet at the same time with this sense of "head" as source of living growth goes the phrase "not keeping close hold of the head" in referring to those who were swayed to adopt the practices of the heretics. The thought here has also the suggestion of lordship too. Apart from the term "head", which adds to the theme of the body in this epistle, there is also the thought of its

² As, e.g., in Rom. 12: 4, 5, the next epistle to refer to it.

growth (2: 19), which is mainly conceived as qualitative ("of God"), though the numerical extension is also suggested in 1: 6 by the idea of the gospel bearing fruit and growing. But that idea is not drawn into direct relation with the theme of "body". The thought of unity is still there and indeed illustrated by the teaching of 1: 24, where Paul rejoices to fill up what is lacking "in the sufferings of Christ on behalf of his body which is the church". Both Robinson and Best are agreed that this cannot mean "what is lacking in Christ's sufferings for his church" as though Paul's sufferings make up the lack in some way which would in fact be redemptive. Rather he rejoices to bear on behalf of the Colossians some part of the sufferings "for Christ's sake"; or if we follow Best's rendering of the word τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ χριστοῦ as "woes of the Messiah", Paul is glad that his sufferings are in fact exhausting something of what remains of the Messianic woes before the Advent.

The theme continues in Ephesians where, in Ch. 4 (cf. Col. 2: 19), Christ is again referred to as "head" from which the body, the church, builds itself up in love by what every part supplies so that it grows up into (or unto) the head. Ch. 1: 22 teaches that the one who is head over the church is indeed the one who is head over all creation. The church is "the fulness (πλήρωμα) of him that filleth all in all" (so A.V., R.V.). Both Best and Robinson reject this rendering and its apparent implications, which Armitage Robinson accepted, of the church completing Christ, and render the phrase "the church which is his body which is fulfilled by Him who is being fulfilled in all ways" (i.e., by the Father). This is strongly supported by the prayer (3: 19) "that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God", and brings the passage into line with those which speak of the Church being filled with all the fulness of divine grace and love from Christ as He receives it from the Father. Two further passages in the epistle must be referred to. Ch. 2: 14-16 speaks about the reconciliation in Christ of Jew and Gentile to make "one new man" in one body. Best would urge here that the "new man" is the Christian, the third type or, better perhaps, the one who divides men up anew as Christian or non-Christian. But the drift of the passage seems to be in the direction of a new corporate unity which would suggest that the "new man" is here a new race of those reconciled in the one body which is also (verse 18) the sphere of the Spirit. The other passage is Ch. 5: 23-32, which speaks of the Church as the bride of Christ and which also is related to the term "body". St.

Paul warns in verse 32 that he is speaking of an important theme relating to Christ and to the Church. The passage is probably based on the marriage section of an early catechetical code (see Selwyn on 1 *Peter*, Essay II) in which the subjection of the wife to the husband is one of the leading themes. Hence the reflection of it in this passage (vv. 21, 22) must be determinative for the meaning of "head" with reference to Christ and the Church. It must mean overlordship rather than source of existence here. Consequently, the suggestion of Claude Chavasse (in *The Bride of Christ*) that the theme here is based on the Genesis story of Eve's derivation from Adam and consequently of the church from Christ, fails of sufficient proof. The quotation later in the passage of Gen. 2: 24 was also, it must be remembered, a saying of Christ, who quoted it (Mk. 10: 7 f.) to emphasize the unity of marriage, and may indeed have been part of the catechetical source as an illustrative passage to the same effect. It is therefore a buttress to the argument, not an expression of the theme. The passage has other important details. It emphasizes Christ as distinct from the Church as well as one with it. Christ goes beyond being parallel to the husband as head—he is Saviour of the body (verse 23). Again the comparison drawn between the husband's care for his wife as his own body or self and Christ's care for His Church is drawn out in the phrase "for we are members of his body", which is significant when the strict parallel would have been "we are his body".

II

This short review of the outstanding passages on the use of the term "body of Christ" raises the question of the meaning for Paul of the very word "body" itself. It is not really an explicit Old Testament word, where "flesh" or part of the body is almost always used. "Flesh" in the Old Testament has a number of meanings but its main meaning is the substance of which men and animals are composed and which unites them in a corporate wholeness. In St. Paul it has a more specialized sense, which Robinson falls just short of when he deals with it; for it signifies not only man in his weakness and mortality but in his fallenness. Hence the Christian is still in the flesh (Phil. 1: 24); yet in another sense he is not (Rom. 8: 9), and certainly he must not live according to it. "Body", on the other hand, implies the total self which, though spoiled, is capable of sharing in the final goal of creation. It can be used interchangeably with "flesh" on occasions to mean "oneself" (and here it is difficult to accept

Robinson's assertion that Paul never uses it to stress individuation; if it does not stress it, it accepts it and asserts it). As the Old Testament gives little assistance in clarifying the actual roots of Paul's use of the word "body", others have explored contemporary Hellenistic influences. Best gives these a thorough sifting and without going any further here we may cite his conclusion that, so far as Stoicism is concerned, although there are interesting near parallels in Philo, the few references are insufficient for any certain influences to be seen. Supposed parallels in Gnostic sources need, as always, to be put first in their own period and many are post-Pauline. He, of course, deliberately adopted some terms like *πλήρωμα* and continually refers to such beliefs in Colossians and Ephesians. But the one significant way Paul looks at the term "body" along lines that can be said to be Hellenistic is in his picture of the Church in comparison of parts and the whole (1 Cor. 12). This Greek attitude of contrasting a body over against its organs is mentioned by Robinson though without applying it to 1 Cor. 12, and is given a full discussion (Appendix C) by Best over a wide range of references. Whatever else may be doubtful as to the influence of Stoic or Gnostic thought on Paul's terminology here, we can hardly ignore this significant Hellenistic way of looking at the body as one which, as an idea "in the air", must have entered into the apostle's thinking.

But when we go further than linguistics and seek for Paul's intention in his use of the term, we are faced with a disagreement. Robinson speaks for those who would wish to press the use of the term in all its "crudity" (to use his own phrase). He will hardly give it any sense of metaphor, because it would be contrary to Paul's theology. This point we must return to later, but it must be said that it is the concept of the body which contributes to that theology. Robinson seems to confuse metaphor with simile when he says that Paul never says the church is "like" the body (p. 51). But that a certain degree of metaphor is involved is clearly seen by the fact of the idea of building being associated with it in Eph. 2: 20, 22, and that of the bride in Eph. 5: 25 ff., so that Robinson himself has to admit some degree of metaphor with these (p. 64). As in the use of metaphor, the important thing is the underlying sense or idea which the metaphor is meant vividly to express, we may agree with Robinson that "whatever the linguistic source or sources may have been from which Paul brought that most characteristic of all his expressions, τὸ σῶμα τοῦ χριστοῦ, it should be axiomatic that it should be elucidated

and interpreted not primarily in terms of these sources but *in terms of his own Christology*" (p. 48). We may here refer to one or two aspects that seem to be relevant.

Christ and Adam. In Rom. 5: 12-21 and 1 Cor. 15: 20-23, Paul deals with one of his important themes for the understanding of what has taken place in Christ. The Romans passage points out that as the one transgression of Adam brought condemnation to all so the one deed of righteousness in Christ has brought salvation to many. The results in each case here are through solidarity of relationship with the fountain-head of the race. Personal responsibility in the one case or response in the other are not matters here in point as the passage deals with the action of God in provision in Christ, not the personal application or responsibility. Best finds unnecessary difficulties in the passage by ignoring this point. In 1 Cor. 15 the simple message is that by the resurrection of the new man, the Incarnate One, we Christians too are risen. Again it stresses a new solidarity in Christ in replacement and transformation of all that solidarity in Adam had meant.

"In Christ." This is one of the most significant Pauline phrases. As Best carefully discusses it, it suggests a sphere of salvation with a "local flavour" yet without being synonymous with the church. It has too great a relation with personal faith for this, although it is not therefore individualistic; rather it has many applications to mutual relations between Christians. It is associated with the phrase "with Christ", which is used of the identification of the Christian with Christ in His Cross and resurrection, particularly in connection with baptism. It is consequently more individualistic in its use. The identification with Christ in His death and resurrection must mean that the work of the cross, effected for all and with all in mind, yet is in fact effective in those who by faith recognize and receive that identification in baptism. The once-for-all sacrament refers to the once-for-all event of redemption and the phrase "with Christ" links the individual in thereby. The phrase "in Christ" refers to continuing experience, not only of the Christian to Christ but also in his relation with others and can be thought as relating to the other sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is in that context that Paul goes on to express his convictions of the relationship of Christians to Christ in these terms as well as of Christ the fountain-head of a new life and righteousness, and of members of his body, the body of Christ. These terms express this new solidarity with Christ and in Christ as the source of a new race through the new man going to the

cross and rising again, through whose death and resurrection the sinner can die daily to his old life and rise to continual newness of life because by faith in Christ he has in baptism entered into the identification of himself with Christ on the cross and in His risen life; and so can share in the fellowship which is the new people of God who gather round the table of Holy Communion to realize continually the blessings of His salvation in a common life of mutual love. Best stresses rightly Paul's creative thought with the various terms which no doubt were "in the air". We have seen that, in response to a specific requirement, he drew out what probably he had taught in principle, the mutual relation of the members of the body one to another in love. He reminded them that the sharing of the common cup and loaf at the table of the Lord was a vital expression of the reality of their spiritual oneness in Christ. Other requirements elicited other developments of the theme consistent with his Christology: that Christ is the head and source of His Church's life, its unity is of Him, its life depends on Him. The Church, he can say further, receives in full from Him the richness of divine power, grace and love, as He receives in full from the Father; and so it can grow in spiritual quality with the growing together of each part in love. Indeed it grows up into Him who on earth in bodily form revealed the fullness of essential deity, who in heaven in His glorified body is still filled with divine glory; who is supreme over all creation and yet is given to the Church as its Lord and life-giver. This is the main theme that Paul is pressing by means of metaphors which he mixes in true oriental fashion and with a close relation between symbol and reality which is characteristically Biblical and Hebraic.

III

Both Best and Robinson agree that an important underlying factor to all this sense of unity expressed by "body of Christ" is that attitude to society as a corporate personality which was a feature of Old Testament psychology. Best on the one hand takes it as basic to the concept and term "body" but sees other kindred themes entering into and modifying the use. The Church and Christ are not then to be thought of as identical but closely related, in terms in which Christ is shown as Lord, Saviour, source of life, present in and with His Church; while it is derived, subject, receptive and responsible for ministering His divine gifts in the mutuality of love. But as the realm of the present relation with Christ is in the mind, the character, the "conversation", it is therefore going beyond St. Paul's careful use to take it further.

This is a caution shared by others (e.g., W. D. Davies in his review of Robinson's book in *JBL*, March, 1953). But Robinson would refuse this; he will say, "in the same way as no clear distinction can be drawn between the flesh-body of Jesus and the body of His resurrection, so too there is no real line between the body of His resurrection and the flesh-bodies of those who are risen with Him; for they are members of it" (p. 53). Further, "it is impossible to exaggerate the materialism and crudity of Paul's doctrine of the Church as literally now the resurrection *body* of Christ". The Church is in fact "no other than the glorified body of the risen and ascended Christ" (p. 51). It may be noticed that to hold this involves the suggestion that the resurrection at the last day is less of the individual than that of the whole Church. It is as part of the Church which is the resurrection body that the individual knows resurrection. Presumably this is an echo of Father Thornton's talking of the resurrection of the church when Christ rose from the dead. As Best has pointed out on that, the Church cannot be said to have put off an old life, or to die to an old nature; this is true only of the individual Christian as the phrase "with Christ" enforces. But Robinson is involved further in holding that "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5: 1) is in fact here now—it is the Church, though only as first instalment. This last concession must be made in view of the next words: "for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven". The meaning of the passage for most would seem to be that the dissolution of our present body (tabernacle), though we groan in it, occasions the worse fear of being "unclothed". (The thought here of "the naked spirit" is not unknown in later Judaism, e.g., Ecclesiastes.) Hence we may be comforted by the assured provision of a new corporeity in the resurrection. But by Robinson's exegesis we ought not to need comforting, because we have the resurrection body in literal fact—though indeed in literal fact we also apparently have it not, but only the first instalment. Now eschatological thinking is profoundly true. But the first instalment of the promised blessings is the presence of the Spirit (cf. v. 5). The Church is the community of heaven; Christians are risen with Christ; but our risenness is known in renewal of mind, in new character; it is ethical and refers to spiritual-mindedness; and it has a strong individual application through personal faith in Christ crucified and risen. This is not yet the knowing of the resurrection body which is always to be waited for, longed for,

and to which we shall be "changed". The inner change prepares for the outer, it is true. But it is not it.

Nevertheless, Robinson's argument here leads him to line up with one of the most pervasive and important theological principles derived from such exegesis as his and, before him, Armitage Robinson's. This is the theme of the Church as the "extension of the Incarnation". Robert Nelson in his book *The Realm of Redemption* (p. 95) describes this as a "loose" phrase which is often used without the intention of being so extreme in its implications as might be imagined. That depends on the user. It is certainly a phrase that has gained currency in very different kinds of theological contexts. J. S. Whale uses it with approval (*Christian Doctrine*, p. 140). Bishop Gore expresses it thus (*Reconstruction of Belief*, p. 767): "The incarnation is the central fact—but that is the mediation of the spiritual, the divine presence and grace, through the flesh. The method of the Spirit in the Church and the sacraments is thus properly called an extension of the principle and fact of the Incarnation". Chavasse in his book *The Bride of Christ* argues that as Eve is a projection from Adam, so the Church is the extension of the incarnation. We have noted the insecure exegesis of Eph. 5 in relation to this. Mascall, in *Christ, the Christian and the Church*, states it in completeness: "Christ has only one body, that which He took from His mother the Virgin Mary, but that Body exists under various modes. As a natural Body it was seen on earth, hung on the Cross, rose in glory on the first Easter Day and was taken into heaven in the Ascension; as a mystical Body it appeared on earth on the first Whit-sunday and we know it as the Holy Catholic Church; as a sacramental Body it becomes present on our altars at every Eucharist when, by the operation of the Holy Ghost and the priestly act of Christ, bread and wine are transformed into and made one with the glorified Body which is in heaven."

It may be noticeable from these citations that two points are basically involved. One which Gore states is that the theme of Incarnation is the mediation of the spiritual, the divine presence and grace, through the flesh (the material, presumably). The other is, as stated by Mascall, that the body which Christ took from the Virgin Mary is something that is etherealized and somehow re-embodied in a number of different guises. By the resurrection and ascension, it apparently takes the attributes of the divine in omnipresence. This is, of course, a Lutheran doctrine in which it is alleged that the attributes of the divine and the

human in Christ intercommunicate so that what is true of the one is also true of the other. An adequate discussion of this in the field of Christology would take us too far afield at the present but this much may be said. The whole trend is towards a docetism in which incarnation is subtly changed in the direction of Christophany; it must come to terms with the blunt statement of the Athanasian Creed: "not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh". Mascall tries to cover himself by asserting a glorified Body in heaven, a sacramental body on the altars, a mystical body in the church, a natural body on earth once; but, by referring to it as one body under different modes and in different places, he has broken down the essential difference between Christ, who took our nature, not just a body, upon Him, and the Christian, in whom dwells the Spirit and the grace and power of God. The result is either a divinization of the Church (which is what Robinson comes very near saying) or, to quote P. T. Forsyth (*Church and Sacraments*, p. 77, quoted by Nelson, p. 98), "the Catholic form of the engaging fallacy of liberalism"—the fallacy that Christ is simply "God-in-man" for all men". It will be noted that Gore's way of putting it sounds just like that. As a doctrine that came to the fore in the latter half of last century, it probably owed not a little of its popularity and development among the liberal Anglo-Catholic school to the idealist philosophy which William Temple adapted along widely sacramentalist lines in *Nature, Man and God* and which underpinned so much of Anglican thinking at the time. What Temple says of God as creator—"If He had no creatures to redeem or if He had not redeemed them, He would not be what He is" (*N.M.G.*, p. 494), or again, the creation is "the means whereby He is eternally that which eternally He is"—sounds very similar to what Armitage Robinson can say of the Church as that which "fills out Christ". Temple could allow himself a contradiction elsewhere to these statements, but the theology that continued this theme failed to see the phrase "the body of Christ" as one which expressed unity and yet not an ontological and essential identity.

Probably the continuing reason for the appeal of this concept is its suggestion that, as a "body", the Church, sacraments and ministry extend the work of Christ in the world. Almost every time the theme is referred to by writers of all shades of opinion, it is with this practical and pastoral outcome in mind. Quick, in his book on *The Christian Sacraments*, can go on to suggest that in the Church, "which is the extension and fulfilment of that life

through a human society", not only the aspect of incarnation (spiritual presence, presumably), but even atonement is implied. The Church is not only redeemed but redemptrix. Here Best's study delivers a fatal blow. The New Testament discusses the Church as the body, not as an instrument in which Christ dwells like a spirit or soul or personality in a body, but as a metaphor of unity and mutuality. The look is inward not outward. It is a theme of internal structure, not of work in the world; of the relation of Christians to Christ, not of their activities in the world as being His. The New Testament, in fact, rather suggests that the Church as active in the world is not an extension of the incarnation but of the Messianic ministry. But even in that, it has to remember that its situation is always that of redeemed sinners who live in the contradictory situation of being "in Christ" and yet "in the flesh" But as regards the body of Christ, so many of these writers—including our two whose work is the basis of this lecture—fail to follow Paul to his final goal in his description of the union with Christ and His people. They point out that the Christian dies and rises with Christ in spiritual and ethical experience. But the Epistle to the Ephesians goes further. The passage in chapter 2 which takes up the well-known theme also goes on to say: "and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus". This, like so much else in our discussion, speaks of what Armitage Robinson would call "a realm of ideas". But it corrects that field of ideas that thinks of the Church as extending earthwards the body of Christ incarnate and glorified, by reminding us that not only is the Head of the Church in heaven but it is there that the Church must recognize her life to be. We must also "in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell" (Collect for Ascension Day), which has its sacramental side expressed in the words of Cranmer: "The true worshippers of Christ worship Him in spirit, sitting in His high glory and majesty, and pluck Him not down from thence . . . but 'spiritually in heart ascend up', as St. Chrysostom saith, and feed upon him where he sitteth in his high throne of glory with his Father" (see R. R. Osborn, *Holy Communion in the Church of England*, p. 92). As "the body of Christ" is a phrase that with others speaks of the close unity of the Church with its Lord, so it links up with the glory of the Lord in heaven and its own ideal position there with Him. Hence comes the theme of the church as a heavenly city, the new Jerusalem which St. Paul refers to in Philippians and Galatians, and which finally the Apocalypse combines in its later

chapters with the other picture of the temple. The unity therefore of the Christian with and in Christ, right up to His ascended glory, suggests not only the character-theme of heavenly mindedness, but also associates with it the important themes involved in the New Testament doctrine of salvation—access to the Father, boldness and confidence through faith. And it is this implication of Paul's doctrine of identity right to the throne which suggests another underlying concept which, with all due regard to that of corporate personality, may be said to be more vital to St. Paul's thinking.

IV

The really integrating factor in the Old Testament consciousness of unity as the people of God is not simply a social consciousness expressed as corporate personality or racial solidarity, but the dominant consciousness of covenant. It linked each generation with the patriarchs, the promises (cf. Ps. 105; Rom. 9: 4, 5), the Mosaic foundation of the nation, which the whole cultus repaired and preserved. It came from God and by His initiative and faithfulness, and involved the privileges of drawing nigh to Him, of knowing Him in obedience to His laws, of enjoying His protection and provision. The failures of the race only underlined the need for a closer identification of the true Israel with its God in a new covenant which would effect a reality of experience by a new heart and spirit whereby God would be loved, obeyed, served from the very centre of man's being. For St. Paul and the other New Testament writers, this hope, expressed particularly in the prophets and psalms, was also aimed at by the cultus, however ineffectively. They saw it brought to actual reality in the cross and resurrection of Christ and in the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, which was verified in their own experience. It involved reconciliation and the putting away of sin first of all, so that sinners could become sons of God in Christ. It is noteworthy that we have two passages in which "the body of Christ" is used in contexts of reconciliation through sacrifice (Rom. 7: 4; Col. 1: 21, 22). In the second passage the phrase "in the body of His flesh" must mean more than "earthly existence", as Best would hold (p. 217 n. 1); it rather emphasizes the real identification of Christ with fallen humanity. It echoes the thought of 2 Cor. 5: 21 where "reconciled to God" is followed by "made sin for us". The unusual thing about these two passages is the association of sacrifice with "body" rather than "blood". But the use of blood in sacrificial themes is with a view to propitiation,

justification, redemption, nearness, peacemaking—all having the implications of the Old Testament sacrifices or the Day of Atonement or the Passover behind them and the significance of the use of the blood therein. It speaks of purgative, propitiatory aspects of covenant sacrifices. But the verb rightly rendered “reconcile” (καταλλάσσειν and its cognates) is always in direct relation to the person of Christ or, as here, to His body. This then probably suggests the other part of the sacrificial action—the burning of the body (flesh) on the altar. This is supported by Eph. 5: 2, where Christ’s sacrifice is spoken of as “a sweet-smelling savour”—the phrase which refers to the meaning of the smoke going up from the burning flesh of the sacrifice. (Cf. also Heb. 10: 10; 1 Pet. 2: 24.) The shed blood therefore is referred to when the sacrifice of Christ is explained as His life laid down in violent death on behalf of sinners with whom the Saviour identified Himself in order to make atonement and to put them right with God by purging away sin. But the reference to the body takes the act of reconciliation through to sacrificial completeness in which the perfect covenant position of sonship is completely established by the offering that has come right into the Father’s presence in reality and thereby brings the sons into the presence too (cf. Col. 1: 22). They are now, through it, nigh to God and one with Him. St. Paul saw the Holy Communion as expressing this. As Jeremias has pointed out (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 144), the reference of Jesus to His body and blood points to Himself as sacrificial victim. He significantly does not say “flesh and blood”, which could simply mean “mortal man”, but “body and blood”—the terms of covenant offering. W. D. Davies has shown (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, pp. 251 f.) that Paul seeks to emphasize this even more by referring to words, either originally given or what he would see implicit in those given, that emphasize the rite as a new passover for the new covenant. But many see the meaning of the Holy Communion as leading Paul to a good deal of his teaching on the church as the “body of Christ”. For in it he sees the new people of God as the covenant community, one with God through Christ and one with each other. But the Hebrew idea of the people of God was that of a physical, bodily unity as a race descended from Abraham, which gave them a sense of oneness not only as living but also with the ancestors. But the people was also the spouse of God. The covenant ideally related them to Him not only as *Baali* (“my lord”) but in the intimate sense of *Ishi* (“my husband”), as in Hos. 2: 16. The Hebrew concept

of the historical existence of the race is not simply as an outcome of past events ; rather those events are vividly contemporaneous (Deut. 5: 3 ; 10: 15). The race at each stage manifests the living God and His faithfulness, love and power by its existence ; He was touched in them at His most sensitive spot (Deut. 32: 10 ; cf. Zech. 2: 8). At a time when this basic conviction seemed denied, it was reaffirmed in Isa. 40-66 on a level of identification of God with His people (cf. Isa. 63: 9, "In all their afflictions He was afflicted"), which had had anticipations at other times, but not quite to this degree. Nevertheless it is a natural development of the repeated description of God as "The Holy One (or 'the Lord') in the midst of thee" (Israel) which is used always with the sense of blessing as a result. In the covenant, therefore, we see united the terms of relationship with God both as Head over His people and yet as one with them in covenant love. It means also their own unity as a physical whole in which the generations all are one. As therefore St. Paul faced the work and experience of Christ, these were the operative concepts that interpreted it all. The work of the cross was in terms of covenant offering ; its result was a real access and joyful condition of living in the presence of the Father ; to be brought nigh "in Christ" echoed the drawing nigh "in" the sacrificial victim. But with the day of Atonement ritual in mind, Paul thought of Christ's work not only involving the sinner as something done on his behalf, but also the sinner as identified with the offering. The great Pauline phrases "in Christ" and "with Christ" have covenantal undertones, both as regards their sacrificial connections and also, as a result, their communal associations. His richly stored understanding went on to see believers as given a new solidarity in a new Adam, and also as true sons of Abraham. They enter into a union with Christ and each other that takes up the covenantal terms we have already referred to, and sees them enriched in the experience of Christ through the Spirit. In the Holy Spirit they are one with Him and He with them. He "dwells in their hearts" by faith—the Holy One in the midst indeed ! And the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion realize this vital unity both with His once-for-all sacrifice and with His living presence in the midst and united with His people.

But these are concepts that are particularly effective for those used to covenantal concepts. Paul was writing to a mixed community of Christians in Gentile countries with other ways of thinking about existence. As he wrote to them in Corinthians,

Romans, Colossians and the Ephesian circular, he needed some vivid picture to bring alive to them the varied aspects of the covenantal relationship. The term "body" was there to hand; not only was it "in the air" but in fact it linked up with the thought of the offering of Christ's body on the cross, the event with which in baptism each Christian had been taught to identify himself by faith. In the Holy Communion it could easily arise as a theme linked with the words of institution in which the new covenant finds explicit expression in the Pauline tradition, and it simply remained to apply the word as a term for the Church. In this Paul carefully explained what he meant, by developing it along Hellenistic ways of regarding the body as a whole compared with its parts; he amplifies it by other metaphors of "bride", city, building, temple, all of which had Old Testament backgrounds, but all of which were capable of use in a partly Gentile audience. It was capable of having other important aspects raised and emphasized such as "head" and "fulness". In fact this use of "body" was far more used for the Church than for the sacrificial body, possibly to prevent the confusion that has not been escaped by later theologians. Apart from the early reference in Romans, the other passage in Colossians emphasizes a difference between the body of the cross and the body which is the Church. The sacrificial body was indeed the physical part of Christ and the Christian is identified with it by faith, not ontologically. The "body of Christ" in the sense of the Church is a metaphor expressing spiritual experience which is real, unity with Christ and His people which is actual, but not in the actuality of His body glorified with theirs of the flesh, but in the participation and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

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