

MEMBERS OF CHRIST

IN a previous article upon the "Mystical Body of Christ" I attempted to present more especially the collective aspect of that doctrine—or of that fact, as it may also be called. The present complementary article is devoted to the individual aspect of the Mystical Body, to an attempt to show what the Mystical Body does and should mean for the individual Catholic, how it should enter into his individual life and experience, how he should endeavour to reap to the full all the benefits which the membership of that Body is designed by God to confer upon him. At the same time I am treating the subject from a strictly Pauline point of view; these two articles are intended to sum up his central doctrine and characteristic point of view, thus (as I hope) making it easier to read his epistles with a fuller understanding. Where it has seemed necessary, I have inserted some details which he does not treat explicitly, in order to round off the exposition, and not leave any awkward gaps for the modern reader.

For it is important to note that St. Paul never wrote an epistle for the mere sake of expounding a doctrine; there is always some practical need to be met, though it may be dogmatic no less than disciplinary or hortatory. There is no sufficient ground whatever for looking to his epistles for a complete body of doctrine; least of all should our modern rationalists do so, for upon their own premises they must be satisfied with the immediate occasion, usually fairly obvious, which induced the apostle to write, whereas Catholics may well see a merciful providence in the number of important points which he found it wise to treat. How welcome, for example, is his insistence on the Real Presence in I Corinthians! And yet, from a purely human point of view, it would seem obvious that he would never have touched upon the subject, if he had not felt it necessary to urge his Corinthian Christians to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with more reverence.

It is important also to notice that he was dealing for the most part with adult converts, usually pagans, though there was a nucleus of Jews among them. The question of infant baptism does not arise explicitly; though it would be rash to say that he did not administer it upon such an occasion as that of Acts xvi, 32-4, where there is an emphasis on the whole household in the very mention of the act of baptizing. Tertullian, as is well known, protests against infant baptism at the beginning of the third century (*de Baptismo*, xviii, 14), but as against a practice already at least to some extent existing, and without vehemence; in the patristic age the custom of postponing it became so common as to affect strongly the Easter liturgy. I may mention in passing, as another point seldom noticed, that in II Tim. i, 16-18 it seems more likely that St. Paul is praying for Onesiphorus as already dead, since he prays for him and his household separately.

In spite of the fact that he was dealing mostly with adult converts, the Apostle does not speak of conversions as gradual; the contrast between his own treatment of the subject and that of the Council of Trent (Denz. 798) is rather marked, and is doubtless due in part to the miraculous manner of his own conversion. There is no inconsistency between the two, since Trent is setting forth the more ordinary preparation for justification. St. Paul, changed in a moment from a bitter persecutor to a fervent believer, was emphatically one who "worked not, but believed" (Rom. iv, 5), though elsewhere he writes that albeit he was a blasphemer and a persecutor, yet he found mercy because he acted in ignorance—yes, though he was the first of sinners, he found mercy (I Tim. i, 13–16). And he found light: he found that it was Christ whom he was persecuting, and he discovered who and what Christ really was. Already he had had misgivings: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (Acts xxvi, 14). But these doubtless had only made him the more bitter and vehement.

Everything had come to him in one overwhelming flood; and so he came to regard conversion as a single great process, though he shows himself well aware of its distinctive aspects. From the side of man we find them summed up in Gal. iii, 24–7: "And so the Law hath been our tutor unto Christ, that we may be *justified* through *faith*. But now that *faith* hath come, we are no longer under the tutor. For ye are all through your *faith* sons of God in *Christ Jesus*. For all of you who were *baptized into Christ, have put on Christ*." And we may add one more verse, because it is so clear and explicit: "In him is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female: for ye are all *one person in Christ Jesus*."

We have therefore four different aspects or parts of conversion: (1) faith: (2) justification: (3) baptism: (4) incorporation in Christ. Faith may come to the adult in single acts, helped, as Trent remarks (loc. cit.) by divine grace. This is not yet justification, for, as that great council also explains, "nothing that precedes justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace itself of justification" (Denz. 801), which is the free gift of God. Justification itself brings justness; we have preferred to use this latter term in the Westminster Version, in order to exclude the legal connotation of "justice," while keeping the connexion with "just" and "justify." "Justness" is a good English word, as may be seen in the large Oxford English dictionary, and has not been invented for the occasion. In the adult, justification may precede baptism, if he make an act of perfect contrition or of perfect love of God; in the baby, baptism will bring justification with it. The essence of this justness, as Trent explains, "is the justness of God, not that justness whereby He Himself is just," not therefore of course the divine attribute as it is in itself, "but that whereby He makes *us* just" (Denz. 799), producing in our souls that supernatural quality, that inherent and transforming

“accident” which reflects by analogy His own infinite justness. It is essentially sanctifying grace, which brings with it the infused virtues of faith, hope and charity (Denz. 800), even though these are not consciously exercised at the time or for some years afterwards.

Of baptism I have written in my previous article; it is an external rite, admitting to membership of the Church, but also effecting the grace which it signifies, the washing away of original sin, and also of any actual sins, mortal or venial, of which an adult may have been guilty. At the least, acts of faith and hope and attrition are required; and even temporal punishment is remitted. If the recipient retains an attachment to venial sin, neither its guilt nor its punishment are remitted; but both are remitted if he dies in grace. If he receives the sacrament in mortal sin unrepented, the seal of the sacrament is still impressed upon his soul, and attrition will suffice to remove all guilt and punishment, apart from any venial sins of which he may not have repented.

“All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. iii, 27). This corporate identification with Christ is St. Paul’s chief doctrine and all-embracing synthesis. Justification was the controversial aspect of the matter: against the rabbis he argued that mere works could not justify, but only faith working through charity (Gal. v, 6). It is also the Catholic doctrine, which was vigorously defended against the Protestants, that this justness is a quality actually imparted to the soul, and not merely imputed; it comes *from* God (Philip. iii, 9), and is called by the Apostle not merely grace, but life, and even glory. “All,” he writes, “have sinned, and need the glory of God” (Rom. iii, 23), and he prays (for example) that the Colossians may be strengthened through the might of God’s glory (Col. i, 11). But our corporate identification with Christ expresses something more than this. In the first place it comprises our membership of Christ’s mystical body the Church, of which enough was said in the previous article. St. Paul insists vigorously that in baptism (for, as I have said, he does not distinguish and analyze the different aspects of the great process) the hitherto sinful life of the adult has come to an end, having been crucified with Christ, in order that he may rise from the baptismal waters a new creature, one with Christ in His glory. In Rom. vi, 1-11, for example, evidently with adults in his mind, he writes of this death, wherein our sinful body (as subject to passions and lusts) is brought to naught, in order that we may walk in newness of life. Of the new creature that arises from the death of the old he writes in Gal. vi, 15 that “neither circumcision is aught,” since in the New Testament it no longer helps to salvation, “nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” And in Eph. ii, 8-10, verses which sum up so much of St. Paul’s doctrine, we read that we have been “*created* in Christ Jesus for good works, which God hath prepared beforehand that therein we may walk.” It is in this way

that we must understand that fine verse in a well-known hymn to our Lady :

Thou, to whom a Child was given,
Greater than the sons of men,
Coming down from highest heaven
To *create* the world again.

This death of the old man, this crucifixion of the former life, has a great significance in the spiritual life ; for the perfection of the Christian, if we look at this perfection upon its negative side, lies in the completeness with which he carries it out. When the Apostle, for example, cries out, " With Christ I am nailed to the cross," con-crucified with Christ, as we might say, " it is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me." (Gal. ii, 19-20), he is evidently not thinking merely of his resistance to mortal sins, but of his being as good as dead to all that resists the full action of Christ in his soul. And so it evidently should be with the Christian ; he must be so crucified to self as to save his soul by rejecting mortal sin, but he ought to reject venial sin too, and absolute perfection demands that he should master any inclination whatever to refuse anything that God asks of him. " What do I still lack ? " So asked the young man in the gospel (Matt. xix, 20) ; and doubtless he thought himself ready to assent to anything that might be asked of him. But he deceived himself.

The mere readiness to sacrifice anything and everything can never be an end in itself ; there must be something positive to be gained that is worth the sacrifice. That positive gain is Christ. " I have suffered the loss of all things," writes the Apostle, " and count them but refuse, in order that I may gain Christ " (Philip. iii, 8). " The Church—is his body, the fullness of him who is wholly fulfilled in all " her members (Eph. i, 23). Christ reaches His fulfilment corporately in the Church, and likewise in each individual thereof, thus accomplishing the full purpose of the Incarnation. And conversely each individual attains his fulfilment in Christ (Col. ii, 10), so far as he will allow Christ to work out His full purpose in him, and thus is " filled unto all the fullness of God " (Eph. iii, 19). This is indeed his true self-expression and self-realization, in a manner of which so many modern exploiters of this glib term have no conception. Let us endeavour to fathom what it means, only stopping a moment to remind ourselves that our Lord at the Last Supper had expressed the matter, if anything, even more strongly : " as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us—I in them as thou in me " (John xvii, 21-2).

St. Paul was Christocentric even in his faith. It is often (but not always) in explanation of Christ's true being and purpose that we find him introducing the Blessed Trinity. Col. i, 18-19 may serve as a good example of this, though the Holy Ghost is not mentioned : Christ is the Head of the body, which is the Church, *because* it has pleased (we may

fill in here, "the Father") that in Him all the fullness should dwell: the fullness of the Godhead, as we may confidently fill in from Col. ii, 9. This is in a manner an extreme example; it would of course be easy to show how the Apostle brings under his central view of Christ the example set by His life, the redemption effected by His death, the hope held out by His resurrection and ascension.

It would be a more elaborate business to work out all that it meant by Christ bestowing upon us His Spirit, the Holy Ghost. Such internal effects the Apostle tends to ascribe directly to the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, but as to the Spirit whereby Christ unites the Christian to Himself; for "if anyone hath not the Spirit of Christ, that man is not of Christ" (Rom. viii, 9). As making up that work upon the soul which is our spiritual life may be enumerated the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, the gifts of the Holy Ghost (well treated lately by Father Bernard Kelly, C.S.Sp. in his little book, *The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, published by Sheed and Ward in 1941), the seals of baptism and confirmation and (if so be) of the priesthood, and those priceless graces which pour in upon us, which would make a saint in a short time of anyone who would put them into effect without reserve. To pursue all these through the epistles of St. Paul would be a long task, but it would bring home to us more clearly what he means when he writes, "For me to live is Christ" (Philip. i, 21).

One last vital force remains to be mentioned, the Holy Eucharist, the Food which we do not transform into our own substance, but which transforms us into itself, thereby making us one with each other in the manner propounded (as we have seen) by our Lord Himself at the Last Supper. "We many are one bread, one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor. x, 17). This is the mystery, not merely of faith, but of love, that love which in urging us to unite ourselves with our Blessed Lord, moves us to extend that very same unity to each other.

And let me conclude with a humble ambition: it is that a paper such as this may be taken, not as a substitute, but as a preparation for reading St. Paul. At the best his epistles do not make very easy reading, because he is struggling, as it were, to overtake his own thoughts, without much regard for strictly logical arrangement, or even at times for strict grammar. But if we can work ourselves into his characteristic ideas and his characteristic ways of putting them, we shall gradually find ourselves more at home with him, and thus draw more easily upon the unfathomable riches of Christ, which none have set forth more powerfully than he.

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