

MEMBERSHIP OF THE  
MYSTICAL BODY

BY

PATRICK J. CANON HAMELL, M.A., D.D.

PROFESSOR OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

ST. PATRICK'S COLLEGE

MAYNOOTH

BROWNE AND NOLAN LTD.

DUBLIN

1958



NIHIL OBSTAT :  
IOSEPHUS A. CARROLL,  
Censor Theol. Deput.

IMPRIMI POTEST :  
✠ IOANNES CAROLUS,  
Archiep. Dublinen.,  
Hibernia Primas.

Dublino, die 20<sup>a</sup> Junii, 1958.

## *Membership of the Mystical Body*<sup>1</sup>

ST. PAUL teaches (a) that Christians are members of Christ ;<sup>2</sup> (b) that Christians are members of the Body of Christ which is the Church ;<sup>3</sup> (c) that Christians collectively are the Body of Christ and individually members of it ;<sup>4</sup> (d) that Christians in the Body of Christ are members of one another.<sup>5</sup> If we have been baptized we have been made members of Christ's Body.<sup>6</sup> Collectively we form the Body of Christ ; individually we are members of the Body, and each one has his own function in the Mystical Body—some are Apostles, some Prophets, some Teachers . . . and we are all members mutually dependent on one another, according to our different capacities, working in harmony with one another as members of the same Body, rejoicing and suffering with one another.

St. Paul employs the metaphor of the body, head and members, to depict the Church and the relationship between Christ, the Church and Christians. The unity of the body, the intimate union between head and members, the flow of life from head to members, the mutual co-operation of members for the welfare of the body—considerations such as these were all conveyed by designating the Church the Body of Christ, and it was to this figure rather than to the Vine and branches, or Bride and Bridegroom that St. Paul loved to return to teach us the nature of the Church and the dignity of membership of Christ's Body.

'Body' and 'member' applied to the Church and to Christians are, of course, metaphorical terms, but St. Paul uses them to convey formal truths, revealed truths, about

<sup>1</sup> Lecture delivered at Maynooth Union Summer School, July, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vi, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. v, 29 ff.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xii, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. xii, 5 ; Eph. iv, 25.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xii, 13.



the Church, and they must be formally true of the Church. Christians cannot be members of the Church in the physical sense in which the hand is a member of the human body, for the Mystical Body is not a physical body. It is a social, moral body having social bonds between its members; but also it is a supernatural body having bonds that unite the members to the body and to one another in the closest possible manner. So to teach that Christians are members of Christ's Body is to teach that they are organically united with a living body, that in this organism they derive life from a life-principle, through a head, and that the members work together for a common end.

Discussion of membership of the Mystical Body involves numerous questions and problems of great complexity, especially in reference to the necessity of membership and to the minimum requirements for membership; and there are more straightforward topics concerning the purpose, dignity, fruits, duties of membership. It would be impossible to treat all these matters in a single paper, and I propose to limit discussion to a general appreciation, chiefly in the light and according to the plan of the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, of what membership of the Mystical Body involves. Even if we were to enter into the theological controversies of the last decade on the minimum conditions of membership and degrees of membership, and arrive at a conclusion, we should still have to treat the broader question of what it means to be a member. A choice must be made, and it is clearly of more general interest to discuss what membership means than what are the minimum conditions for achieving it. However interesting these controversial questions are, they should not distract us from the main question of what membership itself means. And whatever uncertainty there may be about individual cases, we know that those who fulfil stated conditions are members. What does membership bring to those who have achieved it or will achieve it?

The significance and consequences of membership will be determined by what the Mystical Body is. Are the Church and the Mystical Body the same thing? Is the visible Church with rules and sacraments and laws a man-made society? Is the Church of Christ's promises an invisible association? The true Church which is the Body of Christ, is it visible or invisible? Is the Mystical Body an association of persons who have in common only the possession of sanctifying grace, or is it a society of human beings intimately united by visible and invisible ties? Is the Mystical Body a visible, concrete reality with a divine purpose and function among men? Is it something that can be loved or hated, cherished or persecuted? Or is it simply an intangible union of souls which could be termed 'body' only by violence to language, which has no divinely appointed visible manifestation on earth to draw men closer to Christ and to one another, to call forth the loyalty of the good or the hostility of the wicked?

#### THE CHURCH IS A BODY, VISIBLE, UNDIVIDED

The Church is a body. In it are verified the essential characteristics of a body—unity, visibility, members with different functions drawing life from the head. The Church is a body, St. Paul tells us. It is one, and undivided; we, though many, are one body in Christ. The Church by the very fact of being a body is something concrete and visible. Now, a living organic body needs members so connected that they help one another, the healthy members coming to the assistance of the ailing members. This, too, is verified in the Church. Individual members do not live only for themselves; they help their fellow-members and co-operate with one another for their mutual support and for the welfare of the whole Body. [14-15.]<sup>1</sup>

A living organism is provided with members that have

<sup>1</sup> Bracketed numbers refer to numbered paragraphs of *Mystici Corporis*, C.T.S. translation.



different functions but are properly co-ordinated; and the Church for this reason merits to be called a body because it is composed of members different from one another and harmoniously co-ordinated. 'As in one body we have many members, but all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ; and every one members one of another.'<sup>1</sup> The members of the Body that is the Church, range from the grades of the hierarchy, the primary and principal members, through all ranks and classes, clerical, religious and lay. All are called to and can attain the highest degree of sanctity. [16-17.]

The human body has its own means for fostering the life, health and growth of itself and each of its members. Christ has given to His Church, too, the means of preserving and increasing life in its members and in itself by endowing it with sacraments to cater for the individual and social needs of the Christian Body. Just as God at the beginning of time equipped man's body to exercise dominion over created things and to multiply and fill the earth, so at the beginning of the Christian era He endowed the Church with the means of filling the whole earth and peopling the kingdom of heaven. [18-20.]

#### *Conditions of Membership*

Who are members of the Body that is the Church? Only those are really members who have been born again in the waters of Baptism and profess the true faith and have not cut themselves off from the Body by their own act or been severed from it by legitimate authority. The conditions for actual membership are [18, 21, 26, 29]: reception of Baptism of water, profession of the true faith, communion with the Body of the Church ruled by the hierarchy. These conditions ensure unity of faith, govern-

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii, 4.

ment, communion. In the true community of the faithful there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, and therefore there is only one faith, one communion, one government. He that refuses to hear the Church is as the heathen and the publican. Those who differ from one another in faith or government are not living in the one Body and by its one divine Spirit. [21.]

These three conditions are necessary for membership, and they are sufficient. They are each of them visible elements. They do not exclude sinners. Membership of the Church is not restricted to those of eminent sanctity, to the just or the predestined. Schism, heresy or apostasy of their nature sever a man from the Body of the Church. But a man may lose charity and divine grace and yet retain Christian faith and hope; and if he does, he remains a member, although a frail member, of Jesus Christ. [22-3.]

#### THE CHURCH THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Church, then, is a body: a visible, concrete, undivided organism, composed of members who have different capacities and functions and degrees of honour, all co-operating for the welfare of each other and of the body. Visible bonds, baptism, profession of faith, communion with and submission to lawful authority, bind us to this body and make us members of it.

But the Church is no ordinary body of men and women united by visible ties in a society for the attainment of a common end by common means. It is the Body of Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is its Founder, Head, Upholder and Saviour. [24.]

*Firstly, Christ is its Founder.* Christ gave to the Church its visible and internal, invisible constitution. He began to build the Church when He was preaching and giving His commandments; He completed the constitution of the Church by the invisible mission of the Holy Ghost when He hung upon the Cross; He manifested and promulgated the Church by the visible mission of the



Holy Ghost upon His disciples on the day of Pentecost. [25.]

During His public life He gave the Church its *visible constitution* by handing on to the Apostles the mission to teach, rule and sanctify which He had received from His Father, appointing a Primate, His own Vicar, making known the doctrine to be believed, prescribing the sacraments and the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The work of founding His Church He completed on the Cross. There the Old Law was abolished, and the New Testament took its place. The law of Christ, with its mysteries, its laws, institutions and sacred rites, was ratified for the whole world. The ministers of the New Law were to be Christ's chosen Apostles. On the Cross were purchased the treasures of Redemption and the power to make us members of His Body by baptism. [26.]

On the Cross Jesus Christ gave to the Church its *internal constitution*, for it was through His Blood that the Church was enriched by the communication of the Spirit. In the Incarnation the Son of the Eternal Father had adorned with the fullness of the Spirit the human nature He had assumed, in order that it might be an appropriate instrument of the divinity in the work of Redemption. So now in the hour of His death He willed that His social Body, the Church, be enriched by the Holy Spirit to make it an effective and never-failing instrument in distributing the fruits of Redemption. If the external, visible elements in the constitution of the Church, her juridical mission, her power to teach, govern, administer the Sacraments, are supernaturally effective for building up the Body of Christ, it is only because of her invisible, supernatural mission, it is only because Christ gave to His Church the Holy Spirit, the well-spring of those divine gifts which would enable her to teach infallible doctrine, to rule in salutary government and to sanctify. And as the descent of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove had marked the beginning of His own preaching, so now when the Apostles

were about to begin their sacred work of preaching, Christ sent His Spirit to indicate the supernatural mission and function of the Church. [27-32.]

*Secondly, the Church is Christ's Body because He is its Head.* From Him the whole Body, fitly joined together, grows and increases.

(a) He is Head because He holds the highest place in the Body. [35.]

(b) He is Head because He rules the Church. He gave to the Apostles their juridical mission to teach, govern and sanctify. He also rules directly, in the hearts and minds of men, directing His Church by invisible and extraordinary guidance. And He rules His Mystical Body visibly and ordinarily through His Vicar on earth. His wisdom would not allow Him to leave His social Body without a visible head. Christ and His Vicar constitute only one Head, for Christ, continuing to govern the Church invisibly and directly, rules it visibly through His personal representative on earth. And Christ rules in each diocese through its Bishop. [36-41.]

(c) Christ is Head of the Body because Christ and Christians need one another. In the human body head and members need one another. 'The head cannot say . . . to the feet: you are not necessary to me.'<sup>1</sup> Christians need Christ; without Him they can do nothing. But Christ needs His members, too. As indirect ruler of the Church, Christ is represented personally by His Vicar who must have others to share his responsibility and ease his burden. As direct and invisible ruler of the Church, He needs the help of His members to carry out the work of Redemption. The Church contributed nothing to the winning of Redemption; but it is Christ's will that the Church should have the honour of sharing with Him in the distribution of the fruits of Redemption and that this work of sanctification should arise in a manner out of her labour. [42.]

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii, 21.



(d) Christ is Head because there is a likeness between Head and Body in the human nature which they share and in the divine nature of which the members are made partakers by grace here and glory hereafter. The Word became man so that we might become God-like. And Christ intends the whole Body of the Church, as well as each of its members, to be like Himself. This likeness is seen in the Church when, like her Founder, she teaches, governs, sanctifies, practises the evangelical counsels, nurtures Orders and Institutions, suffers persecution and tribulation. [44-5.]

(e) Christ is Head of the Church because all the virtues, gifts and miraculous powers to be found in the Christian community exist in Christ its Head in full perfection. In Him is the plenitude of supernatural gifts and of His fullness we receive. [46.]

(f) Christ is Head by reason of His dynamic influence. As the head transmits to the body power to feel and move, so from Christ flow into the Church all the light that illumines men and all the grace that sanctifies them. Christ is the source of light, the fount of holiness. [47-9.]

*Thirdly, the Church is Christ's Body because He is the Upholder of the society which He founded.* Christ so lives in the Church that it may be called 'another Christ.' The Church is even called 'Christ.' Christ Himself said: 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'<sup>1</sup> Why is the Church called 'Christ,' 'another Christ'? What kind of union is there between Christ and the Church? The union between them is not a hypostatic union. What then does the identification of Christ and His Church mean? It means that Our Saviour shares so intimately with the Church the things that are His own that the Church in the whole manner of her life, visible and invisible, portrays most perfectly the likeness of Christ Himself. [50-1.]

In what way? The Church resembles Christ:

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix, 4.

- (a) by reason of her juridical mission. Christ sent His Apostles as He had been sent by the Father, and it is Christ who baptizes through the Church, Christ who teaches, governs, absolves, binds, offers and sacrifices.
- (b) The Church resembles Christ by reason of her invisible mission, her supernatural life. The Church actually lives by Christ's supernatural life. His divine power pervades the whole Body. Christ feeds and sustains each member in the Body as the vine-stock nourishes the branches. [52-3.]

The divine principle of life given to the Church by Christ, the gift *par excellence*, the source of all created gifts and graces, is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from Father and Son and is called in a special manner 'Spirit of Christ' and 'Spirit of the Son.' Christ merited the Holy Spirit for us; and it is from the fullness of Christ and according to the measure of the giving of Christ that He is bestowed on the members of the Body. The Holy Spirit is given to make us resemble Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit transforms us into adopted sons of God. [54.]

The Spirit of Christ is the invisible principle uniting all the members of the Body with one another and with their Head, dwelling as He does whole in the Head, whole in the Body and whole in each of the members. He is the source of every single vital salutary action in all parts of the Body. He is present in all the members and divinely acts in each, though He also acts in the lower members through the ministry of the higher. And He refuses to dwell by sanctifying grace in members which are completely severed from the Body. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the soul, therefore, of the Church, the Body of Christ. [55.]

*Fourthly, the Church is Christ's Body because Christ is the Saviour of the Body.*<sup>1</sup> Christ saved His Body, the Church, on the Cross; He purchased by His Blood the

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v, 23.



members who constitute the Church. And He continues the work of salvation now. Some members He scourges, some He cleanses, some He consoles, corrects, renews. It is for us to co-operate with Him in the work and by one and the same means save and be saved. [57.]

#### THE CHURCH THE MYSTICAL BODY

The Church, then, is the Body of Christ and to describe this true Church of Christ which is the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church, there is no name more noble, none more excellent, none more divine than the 'Mystical Body of Jesus Christ.' [13, 58.]

The word 'mystical' distinguishes Christ's social Body from His physical Body now seated at God's right hand and hidden beneath the Eucharistic veils; and it distinguishes it and raises it above every body of the natural order, whether physical or moral. In a physical body the principle of unity joins the parts in such a way that each part lacks a subsistence of its own; in the Mystical Body the principle of unity unites the members most intimately but each member retains his own existence and personality. In a physical body the individual member exists solely for the welfare of the body. A social structure in the natural order has as its object the good of the members, for they are persons. The Church was founded for the benefit of the individual members, and also was itself destined for the glory of God and Jesus Christ.

Comparing Mystical Body and moral body we see a very great difference. In a moral body the only principle of unity is a common end and a common pursuit of that end under authority. But in the Mystical Body there is, besides this, another, internal principle really existing and operative in the whole structure and in each one of its parts and this principle is of such surpassing excellence that by itself it immeasurably transcends all the bonds of

unity by which any physical or moral body is knit together. It is the Holy Spirit. [59-60.]

Hence the *unique excellence and dignity of the Mystical Body*. It is a society perfect in its own order, but it does not consist merely of social and juridical elements. It transcends all other human associations as grace transcends nature. The social, juridical bonds of the Church do not constitute the whole Church any more than the structure of the human body constitutes the whole man. The juridical grounds on which the Church rests have their origin in Christ, and contribute to the achievement of her supernatural purpose. Yet what raises the Christian society to a level utterly surpassing any order of nature is the Spirit of Christ. The framework of our body is a marvellous work, yet falls short of the dignity of the soul; so the structure of the Christian society, though it is proof of the wisdom of its divine Architect, is of an utterly lower order in comparison with the spiritual gifts which enrich it and give it life, and with Him who is their divine source. [61.]

#### *Errors concerning the Church*

It is, therefore, a grave error [14] to imagine the Church as something interior and invisible, or to regard the Church as a merely human institution with external rites and laws but having no communication of supernatural life. [62.]

It is a calamitous error which invents an imaginary Church, a society nurtured and shaped by charity, and contrasts with that another society disparagingly called juridical, which opposes an imaginary society of the just to another society of an inferior order and constituted by juridical bonds. It is one and the same society which has a visible constitution, a juridical mission to teach, rule, sanctify, and which communicates supernatural life. It is totally erroneous to set in opposition these two elements, the visible and invisible. They are both God-given



elements constituting the same society; and it was for the same purpose—to perpetuate the work of Redemption—that the Redeemer gave the Christian community a constitution of juridical, social, visible elements and enriched it with the Holy Spirit, source of heavenly gifts and powers. God willed the Church to be the 'kingdom of the Son of His love,'<sup>1</sup> but He also willed it to be a true kingdom where believers would yield complete homage of intellect and will. There is no opposition, no incompatibility between the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit and the juridical office which Pastors and Teachers have received from Christ. Like body and soul in us, the two realities are complementary and perfect one another. The same Saviour who said 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost'<sup>2</sup> also said 'As the Father hath sent me, I also send you.'<sup>3</sup> . . . 'He that heareth you, heareth me.'<sup>4</sup> One cannot share the supernatural life of Christ's Body without belonging to the juridical society. One cannot adhere to Christ as Head of the Church without loyal allegiance to His Vicar on earth. [39, 63.]

The presence of human defects in the Church, and of sinners in the Mystical Body, must not be attributed to its juridical constitution but to the tendency to sin of free human beings born in original sin, to the inclination to evil which God allows to exist even in the higher members of His Mystical Body for the testing of virtue in flock and Pastors. Christ did not exclude sinners from the Mystical Body and the presence of sinners is no reason for loving the Church less but rather a reason for increasing our compassion towards the members.

#### DIGNITY OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE MYSTICAL BODY

The dignity conferred by membership of the Mystical Body is the dignity of union in and with Christ, of our union with Christ in the Body of the Church—a mysterious, sublime and divine union which is likened in Scripture

<sup>1</sup> Col. i, 13.

<sup>2</sup> John xx, 22.

<sup>3</sup> John xx, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Luke x, 16.

to the union between husband and wife, the union of vine and branches, to the structural unity of our body. It is a union so intimate that the divine Redeemer and His social Body constitute one mystical person, the whole Christ, a union which Christ Himself compares with the unity by which the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son. [67.]

The union arises first from the common striving of the members towards a common end. In a society, unity of purpose and action among the members is necessary for the attainment of the end, and the nobler the end sought and the more exalted the source of the common aspiration towards it, the more noble is the unity resulting. In the Church the end is the most exalted—the continuation of Redemption—and the source which inspires and activates the pursuit of this end is most exalted, namely, the decree of the eternal Father, the desire of Our Saviour and interior inspiration and impulse of the Holy Spirit under whose activity countless multitudes of every race conspire with one intent to the glory of God. Hence the resulting union of members in and with their Head is sublime. [68.]

As the Mystical Body of Christ has visible and invisible aspects, visible and invisible elements combine to produce this union in and with Christ. Because the social Body of Christ is visible, visible elements must manifest this union—profession of the same faith, common use of the same sacraments and sacrifice, observance of the same laws, obedience to the supreme Head appointed by Christ to direct the members. These juridical ties of themselves transcend the links that unify even the most noble societies; but there is in addition a further principle of unity arising from the three theological virtues which unite us most closely with God, and from the gift of the Holy Ghost. By faith we adhere to God and Jesus Christ. By hope we seek God as the source of happiness. And charity more than any other virtue unites us closely to Christ and bids



God to come to us. 'If any man love me . . . my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.'<sup>1</sup> And our love of God must be accompanied by a love of our neighbour, a love of the members of Christ's Body. Indeed, the more we love one another, the more closely we are united with Christ; and the closer our union with Christ, the closer will be our union with His members. Christ's love for us and His knowledge of us, infinite and everlasting, embraces us all. The members of His Body have always been present to Him from the first moment of the Incarnation and from that time He has continuously embraced them in His saving love. [69-75.]

*Christ in us through His Spirit*

Christ is in us and we are in Christ. He is in us through His Spirit whom He imparts to us and through whom He so acts within us that any divine effect operated in our souls by the Holy Spirit must be said to be operated in us also by Christ. [76.]

*The Church the fullness of the Redeemer*

It is due to this communication of the Holy Spirit that all the gifts, virtues and miraculous powers found fontally in the Head stream into all the members of the Church, and that the Church becomes as it were the fullness and completion of the Redeemer, Christ in the Church being in some sense brought to complete achievement. So much so that Christ, the Mystical Head, and the Church, which like another Christ represents His person on earth, constitute one new man joining heaven and earth in continuance of the saving work of the Cross. [77.]

*Divine Indwelling*

This doctrine of our union with Christ and especially the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul is a deep

<sup>1</sup> John xiv, 23.

mystery, to be examined reverently. In endeavouring to explain it we must reject any explanation of the mystical union that makes the faithful pass beyond the order of created things and trespass on the divine sphere, and we must hold that all operations *ad extra* are common to the Blessed Trinity. The Divine Persons indwell in us. That is, they are present to us in a mysterious way, attained by us through knowledge and love, and we gain some knowledge of what this indwelling means if we realize it differs only by reason of our condition from the union of the blessed with God in heaven. In the Beatific Vision it will be granted to the eyes of the mind, by the aid of the light of glory, to contemplate the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for all eternity to witness the Divine Processions and to enjoy a happiness very similar to that with which the Trinity is blessed. [78-79.]

*The Eucharist the culmination of this union on earth*

In this life the intimate union of the Mystical Body of Christ with its Head reaches its culmination in the Eucharist. In the Eucharistic Sacrifice this union finds a special manifestation. The sacred ministers represent Christ, the whole Body and each of its members. The faithful, through the priest, offer the Victim to the Father; and Christ, who offered Himself on the Cross, offers in the Mass not only Himself as Head but in Himself His mystical members, even the weak and frail amongst them. And the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which presents a marvellous picture of the unity of the Church since the bread to be consecrated results from the kneading together of many grains of wheat, gives us the very author of supernatural grace from whom we are enabled to draw the spirit of charity which bids us live the life of Christ and whereby we love the Redeemer Himself in all His members. [80.]



*Not a physical union.*

Close as is our union with Christ it is not a physical union, for that would involve attributing divine properties to man and human frailty and error to Christ. St. Paul combines Christ and His Mystical Body in a wondrous union, but also he contrasts the one with the other as Bridegroom with Bride. Another dangerous error would be to make the union between Christ and His members the basis of an unsound quietism, attributing the whole spiritual life of Christians solely to the action of the Holy Spirit to the exclusion and neglect of the co-operation we must provide. Christians must so co-operate with Christ. They must exercise themselves in virtue. If members of the human body must exercise themselves, still more is this so in the social Body of Christ in which each member retains his own liberty, conscience and mode of acting. [78, 85, 86.]

*Human responsibility and individual action*

Human responsibility and human individual action are not excluded, and hence private exercises and devotions, private confession, prayer, all remain lawful and necessary. Public prayer, public general confession with the priest, all the public exercises of the Church have, indeed, a special value, but we must always realize that the Redeemer holds in close union with Himself not only His Church, as His beloved Bride, but in her also individual souls with whom He ardently desires to have converse. [87-89.]

## EXHORTATION TO MEMBERS

*Love the Church.*

Let us love the Mystical Body, then, with a charity of thought, word and action. For no greater glory, no higher dignity, no honour more sublime can be conceived than that of belonging to the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church in which we become members of this

Body, are governed by this one august Head, filled with the one divine Spirit and nourished with the one Bread of Angels. Let us love the Church as she is by Christ's will, loving her sacraments, her feasts, her functions, her Christ-given authority, her laws. [91.]

*See Christ in the Church and in its members*

Let us see Christ in the Church and in each of the members, honouring her rulers especially, holding dear the weak, the sick, the young, the poor. Let our love be all-embracing, ever active, members mutually loving one another in Christ. [92-98.]

*Prayer for all*

Let us extend our love to those who are not yet in the Body of Christ but are called to be members of it. All members should work zealously for the building up and increasing of the Body. Let that love be shown in prayer for all the members of the Church, for those who are not yet members, and for those who, though they may be related to the Mystical Body of Christ by some unconscious yearning or desire, yet are deprived of those many heavenly gifts which can be enjoyed only in the Catholic Church. If there are unhappily many who wander outside the path of the Catholic faith and fail to give their free consent to the inspiration of divine grace this is due to the fact that not only they themselves, but the faithful also, omit to offer to God more fervent prayers for this intention. (99-104.)

*Follow Christ in suffering*

Lastly, this love must be shown in the willing acceptance of suffering, for it is a condition of ensuring salvation that we follow Christ in the path of suffering. The treasures of Redemption are unlimited, but God grants them to us only little by little and their greater or less abundance



depends in no small measure on our good works, including voluntary mortification, relieving the needs of others, and acceptance of trials. In this way 'we shall fill up in our flesh those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, for His Body, which is the Church.'<sup>1</sup> [105-108.]

#### WHAT MEMBERSHIP MEANS

We are now in a position to see more clearly what membership of the Mystical Body means and entails. The human body is a living organism, one, undivided, concrete, visible. It consists of head and members, the head ruling and transmitting life to the members, the members collectively forming the body, individually belonging to it, united in it with one another under the head. The body has a visible structure and a life-principle, the soul, giving it life and unity. There is a vital solidarity between head and members. Members and body are mutually dependent on one another. No member exists for itself alone. Members exist for the welfare of the body, and, as a means to that end, for the welfare of each other. Members have not all the same function or the same importance, but each is necessary and each has an important function; and in harmonious co-ordination, according to their respective functions, the members work for the good of each other and the welfare and increase of the whole body.

In a moral body made up of human beings unity is achieved not by an internal principle but by external, juridical bonds, the common pursuit of a common end under a single authority. Each member lives by his own life-principle and retains his own personality and responsibility. The ultimate purpose of such a social structure is the good of each person in the body.

<sup>1</sup> Col. i, 24.

The Mystical Body is a living organism and a social Body consisting of Head and members, the members deriving life from a life-principle, through the Head, and co-operating with one another for their mutual well-being and the welfare of the whole Body. The members of this Body are united with Christ, their Head, and with each other by social bonds and by an internal principle really existing and operative both in the whole structure and in each one of its parts, a principle that immeasurably transcends all the bonds of unity by which any physical or moral body is held together. Hence the Mystical Body is a body, a unity, a living organism and a social collectivity in a sense more perfect than we can predicate of any physical or moral body. The social bonds (doctrine, laws, sacraments) uniting members and Head, 'by themselves sufficient to transcend the links which unify even the most exalted of human societies' [70] are not the only, or even the chief force giving unity to the Body of Christ. They do not constitute the whole of the Church, just as the structure of our mortal body does not constitute the whole man. They have their origin in Christ, and contribute to the achievement of her supernatural purpose. But 'what raises the Christian society to a level utterly surpassing any order of nature, is the Spirit of our Redeemer, the source of all graces, gifts and miraculous powers, perennially and intimately pervading the Church and acting in her.' [61.] 'It is the divine Spirit, who, "numerically one and the same, fills and unifies the whole Church."' [60.]

In the Mystical Body, the cohesive force, 'intimate though it is, unites the members with one another in such a way that each of them retains his own personality.' [59.] And whereas the members of a physical body exist ultimately for the benefit of the whole organism, and a moral body exists for the good of each person in it; the Body of the Church was founded to secure the happiness of souls and for the glory of God. 'For as the Church is



fashioned for the benefit of the faithful, so it is destined for the glory of God and Jesus Christ.'

Christians are united with and in Christ in a union that is at once vital and social, a union effected by invisible and visible elements. They are members of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Collectively they form the Body of Christ, individually they are members of it, and in the Body they are members one of another. The members of Christ's Body have not all the same office or the same importance. Some are primary and principal members and through them Christ rules, teaches and sanctifies. Others have a less exalted role. But all are necessary, all have a part to play in developing the Body and all are called to and can attain the highest degree of sanctity. Individually and as a collectivity, they are united with Christ, the Head, by visible ties and by the supernatural life which is derived, through the Head, from the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church. 'Deriving its power from the divine Redeemer, its Head and source, "the whole body, being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system, according to the operation in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the building up of itself in charity."' [49.] 'This divine principle of life and power given by Christ inasmuch as it constitutes the very well-spring of every created gift and grace . . . is none other than the Paraclete. . . . This Spirit of Christ is the invisible principle to which we must also attribute the union of all the parts of the Body with one another and with their exalted Head, dwelling as He does whole in the Head, whole in the Body, and whole in each of its members. . . . He, with His heavenly breath of life, is the source from which proceeds every single vital and effectively salutary action in all the parts of the Body.' [54.]

The union of Christians with Christ in the Body of the Church is, therefore, sublime, mysterious, divine. Not only is it likened in Sacred Scripture to the bond of chaste

wedlock, and to the vital union of branches with the vine, or to the structural unity of our body; it is even represented as so intimate that tradition teaches that Christ with His social Body constitutes one mystical person, the whole Christ. Our Saviour even compared this union 'with that wondrous unity by which the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son.' [67.]

Christians are members of a Body that is at once a living organism and a social structure, one, concrete, undivided, visible. There are not two entities—on the one hand an invisible Church consisting of individuals vitally united with Christ by supernatural life, and, distinct from it and inferior to it, a visible, juridical society bound together by external elements. It is one and the same society which has a visible and an invisible constitution, which has a juridical mission to teach, rule and sanctify and which communicates supernatural life. 'Like body and soul in us, the two realities are complementary and perfect each other.' [63.] One cannot belong to one without belonging to the other; one cannot be cut off from one without being cut off from the other.

#### *Conditions of Membership*

The conditions of actual membership are: baptism of water, profession of true faith, communion with and subjection to the rulers of the Church under the Vicar of Christ. There are degrees of membership. There are eminently holy members, sound members, frail members. The union of members with their Head and with one another is not simply a union by grace—that would make Christ's Body an invisible Church. A man may lose grace and yet retain faith, and hope and the sacramental character, all of which link him with the Body of Christ, and he remains a member, though a frail member, of the Mystical Body, living by its Spirit from whom, through the Head, he draws life, for the Spirit is the source of



every single vital and effectively salutary action in all the parts of the Body. As long as he adheres to the Body, he can be healed within the organism.

#### *Purpose of Membership*

Christ's purpose in founding the Mystical Body is the perpetuation of the work of Redemption. The Church is the vehicle of subjective Redemption. Objective Redemption was won on the Cross and the Church contributed nothing to that. The graces Christ won on the Cross He might, had He so chosen, 'have bestowed directly upon the whole human race; but He willed to do this by means of a visible Church in which men would be united and through which they would co-operate with Him in distributing the fruits of Redemption.' [12.] Hence the purpose of membership of the Mystical Body is, fundamentally, that Christians may co-operate with Christ in a visible society in distributing the fruits of Redemption. Christ and Christians need one another. Christians need Christ; but Christ requires His members, too, for so He has willed. [42.] In the distribution of the treasure of Redemption He not only shares the work of sanctification with the Church but wills it to arise in a certain manner out of her labour. He has graciously decreed that we shall have the incomparable honour of working out our own salvation.

The Mystical Body exists 'to obtain and secure the beatitude of immortal souls' and for the glory of God and Jesus Christ. For its growth the Saviour has endowed it with sacraments to meet its individual and social needs, and He has given it the means to develop, expand, and fill the whole earth and the kingdom of heaven. [20.] The Church, in the whole of her manner of life, visible and invisible, is meant to portray most perfectly the likeness of Christ Himself. She is meant to portray the likeness of Christ in virtue of her juridical mission and of the supernatural life which feeds and sustains each member

according to the place which it occupies in the Body. [53.] 'The Holy Spirit is communicated to the Church in abundant outpouring, in order that she and each of her members may grow daily in likeness to our Saviour.' The Spirit of Christ makes us adopted sons of God, 'so that one day, "we all, beholding the glory of God with open face, may be transformed into the same image from glory to glory."' [54.] In a word, we become members of the Mystical Body that we may co-operate with Him in the work of salvation. Christ has willed that we share with Him in the sanctification of members and Body, that we both save and are saved, all working together for a common end, the salvation of each other and the Body.

#### *Dignity and excellence of Membership*

Members are united with Christ and with one another in Him in a union so intimate that Christ and His social Body constitute one mystical person, the whole Christ. 'The Church becomes as it were the fullness and completion of the Redeemer.' In common pursuit of the noblest of and most exalted of ends—the perpetuation of Redemption—the members are united by visible ties of divine origin and by the Holy Spirit. Body and members, living by the life of Christ, receiving of His fullness, come more and more to portray the likeness of Christ, and deriving its power from the Head 'the whole body . . . makes increase of the body unto the building up of itself in charity.' The climax of our union with Christ is the indwelling of the Divine Persons, and through the Eucharist the intimate union of the Mystical Body with its Head reaches its culmination on earth. [80.] 'No greater glory, no higher dignity, no honour more sublime, can be conceived than that of belonging to the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, wherein we become members of this one venerable Body, and governed by this one august Head, filled with the one divine Spirit, and nourished during this



earthly exile with one doctrine and with one Bread of Angels, until at last we come to enjoy in heaven one everlasting happiness.' [90.]

#### *Duties of Membership*

The members of the Mystical Body retain their personality, liberty and responsibility and must work out their salvation by using the means made available by Christ. But there is a solidarity between them. 'In the Church individual members do not live only for themselves; they also help their fellow-members, all co-operating with one another for their mutual support and for the constant growth of the whole Body.' [15.] The duty of all, individually and collectively, is to perpetuate the work of Redemption, to co-operate with Christ in the distribution of the graces He merited on the Cross. He wills the work of sanctification to arise in a certain manner out of the labours of His Mystical Body. 'This is truly a tremendous mystery, upon which we can never meditate enough: that the salvation of many souls depends upon the prayers and voluntary mortifications offered for that intention by the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, and upon the co-operation which Pastors and faithful, and especially parents, must afford to our divine Saviour.' [42.] It is our privilege and duty as Christians by one and the same means to save as well as be saved. [57.]

Christians are dependent on one another, working in harmony with one another as members of the same Body, rejoicing and suffering with one another. On the spiritual health and activity of each member the welfare of the collectivity and each individual in it depends. Christians save while being saved, and if some members omit to do their part they jeopardize their own salvation and the salvation of others and retard the growth and development of the whole Church. A true love of the Church requires that in the Body we should be members of one another

and care for one another. [95.] The graces of Redemption are unlimited, but by God's providence will be bestowed upon us only little by little; 'and their greater or less abundance depends in no small measure upon our good works by which this rain of heavenly gifts is drawn down upon the souls of men.' [106.] If we fail to do our part, there are some souls that will not be saved. [42.] And the fact that many are still outside the Catholic Church is due in some degree to the failure of the faithful to pray to God for their conversion. [103.]

By prayer and sacrifice, penance and mortification, by good example, by participation in the sacraments and Eucharistic Sacrifice, by works of piety and almsgiving the members of the Mystical Body help each other while sanctifying themselves and they co-operate with Christ in distributing the graces of Redemption. This solidarity of members with Head and one another in the Mystical Body is one of the dogmatic foundations of the doctrine of indulgences. The treasury on which the Church draws to remit temporal punishment by granting indulgences arises in part from the labours of Christ's spotless Bride. The whole Body benefits by the excess of merits and satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin and the saints. 'One man can make satisfaction for another. On the other hand, the saints, whose satisfactory works are superabundant, did not perform them for one particular person but in general for the whole Church, according to the words of St. Paul "I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and make up in my flesh what is lacking to the sufferings of Christ, on behalf of his body which is the Church."<sup>1</sup> And so these merits become the common property of the whole Church. Now the common property of a society is distributed to the different members of a society according to the decision of him who is head of the society.'<sup>2</sup>

The duties in detail stem from the purpose for which

<sup>1</sup> Col. i, 24.

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, iii, Suppl., Q. XXV, art. 1.



the Church exists. If the Mystical Body has been founded to continue the work of Redemption, then it is incumbent on Christians to bring to as many as possible the saving graces which the Church distributes, to work for the growth and development of Christ's Mystical Body. Individually and collectively we must strive that the work of sanctification which Christ wills to arise from the labours of the Church will not fail for lack of our effort, that Christ's saving work will not be impeded through our failure to provide the necessary co-operation for the building up of the Body. We are called, as individuals and as a collectivity, to become ever more God-like, to portray in our lives and as a society ever more perfectly the likeness of Christ Himself, to surrender ourselves more and more fully to the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, making us resemble Christ, transforming us into sons of God. In the Body of Christ we are called to ever closer union with our Head and with one another, union of wills in our common aspiration to the noblest of ends, union in the vital force and power which nourishes and upholds the Body and each of its members, even to the point where 'the Church, as well as all her holy members, may make her own the words: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me,"'<sup>1</sup> union in and through the Holy Spirit. Our union with God and Christ will become closer as we become more and more members of one another and love one another; our union with each other will become more intimate as we cleave more ardently to God and to Christ. [73.]

So, we must love the Church through which salvation comes to us, loving her as she is, visible and invisible, seeing Christ in the Church and each of her members, seeing in all outside her fold potential members for whom Christ died. In all our works, let us remember our dignity and duty as members of His Mystical Body privileged to enjoy individual and collective life in

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii, 20,

intimate union with Him and to constitute with Him one mystical person, the whole Christ, joining heaven and earth in the most noble and sublime work of perpetuating Redemption.

#### *Necessity of Membership*

The Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing.<sup>1</sup> There is only one true Church of Christ and it was founded to be the effective and never-failing instrument in the work of Redemption. Through Christ's will, it is by means of this visible society that the graces won on Calvary come to us, and only in it can we receive them. If we are to be saved we must be united with Christ; and the Church is not something that stands apart from Christ, it is 'the fullness and completion of the Redeemer constituting with Him one new man joining heaven and earth in continuing the saving work of the Cross.' [77.] St. Paul teaches corporate fall of man in Adam, corporate salvation in Christ. 'As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.'<sup>2</sup> Only in Christ shall we be made alive, 'neither is there salvation in any other,'<sup>3</sup> and only to the Church did Christ entrust His saving mission, only in Christ's Mystical Body can we be united with Christ through the Spirit of Christ. So membership of the Mystical Body is necessary—necessary by necessity of means, because Christ has made salvation available only through His social Body; necessary by necessity of precept, because Christ has commanded us to enter the Church. Actual membership of the Mystical Body is not always required, but membership *in voto* at least is necessary, at least a person must be united with Christ's social Body by desire or longing, explicit or implicit. All who are saved are saved in and through the Mystical Body.

<sup>1</sup> *Mystici Corporis*, nn. 13, 26-29, 37-39, 50-56, 58-64 and *passim*. *Humani Generis*, no. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Acts iv, 12,



Outside it no-one at all is saved. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*<sup>1</sup>

To appreciate to the full the dignity and consequently the duties of membership of the Mystical Body of Christ, we should see the Church in relation to the other mysteries of religion. Father Sebastian Tromp, S.J., in his *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia*, presents a splendid theological synthesis which I take the liberty of truncating and summarizing here. It tells the story of God's dealings with man, but we must supplement it by considerations of members in their relation as a collectivity to Christ and as mutually linked with one another, aspects which this synthesis does not sufficiently emphasize, as will be realized from the foregoing.

The Father contemplating the divine essence generates the Son. The Father and the Son in mutual love spirate the Holy Ghost. The Son proceeding eternally from the Father by way of knowledge, the Holy Ghost proceeding eternally from Father and Son in love—this is the life and happiness of the Blessed Trinity, and God in His goodness willed to share this life and happiness with man by giving him grace and glory to know and love God as He is, to witness the Divine Processions and enjoy a happiness very similar to that of the Blessed Trinity. When sin robbed man of this destiny, God sent His only Son that man might recover life through Him. The Son of God became man, and in Him human nature was united with the divine nature. Christ as man received the fullness of the Spirit, not merely for Himself but for the purpose of giving the Holy Spirit to men through His redemptive death. In the Incarnation Christ received from the Father His mission as King, Priest, Prophet—a threefold mission showing forth the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son and the love of the Holy Ghost.

<sup>1</sup> For detailed treatment of this see 'No Salvation Outside the Church' by the present writer, I. E. RECORD, September, 1957, pp. 145-61.

Christ handed on that mission to His Apostles. He founded a social, visible kingdom with power to rule, sanctify and teach. As it is God's will that men should not only be saved but should be savers, that kingdom has as its function to perpetuate Christ's redemptive work. So the Church founded by Christ becomes the continuation and fullness of Christ in the work of salvation.

On the Cross Christ redeemed man and merited for the Church the Holy Spirit, source of all graces and gifts, and the Church, already founded in its visible constitution, was vivified at the moment of Christ's death by Christ's Spirit and was made, with Christ, a new man, the Mystical Christ. That is objective redemption and it was accomplished by Christ alone, and on the Cross.

Subjective redemption is accomplished only in the Church. Baptism incorporates a man into Christ, into the visible Church, and by incorporation man receives the Holy Spirit who gives life to the Church. Receiving Christ's Spirit he becomes a member of Christ and is united with the Divine Word. As a member of the Son, a man becomes an adopted son of the Father and is thus united with the Father. So by subjective redemption in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, a man acquires a threefold relation—to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost according to the order of Divine Missions and Divine Processions, he shares in the divine nature and he is united with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

#### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to set out the teaching of the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* on the significance and consequences of membership rather than to examine the minimum requisites for membership or discuss the necessity of membership. It has aimed at expounding the nature of membership and indicating the dignity that membership confers, the duties it entails, the hope that it inspires. It may be helpful, perhaps, to



draw together the various threads and to see in outline what the Mystical Body is and what membership of it means.

The Church of Christ is a body, one, visible, undivided. It is a social body of surpassing nature constituted by visible and invisible bonds, with saints and sinners making up its membership. Its author is Christ. Its purpose is the sublime one of continuing the work of the Redemption, co-operating with Christ in applying the treasures Christ won on the Cross and contributing to that work of salvation, saving while being saved. The visible bonds that bind members to this social Body are of divine origin; and they contribute to the achievement of the Church's purpose. Yet they are utterly inferior to the invisible bonds that bind the members to their Head and to one another, namely the Holy Spirit, the source of all supernatural gifts and graces. United to Christ and to one another by visible, juridical ties and by an invisible principle, the members retain their full human existence, liberty, responsibility, even their freedom to sin. All co-operate with Christ in continuing the work of Redemption, rejoicing in the incomparable honour of working with Christ at the salvation of Christ's Mystical Body.

The essential dignity and excellence of the Mystical Body, the visible Church, is that it is a divinely appointed society for continuing Christ's redemptive work. It is actually the vehicle of subjective redemption, the fullness and continuation of Christ in His saving of mankind, united so intimately with Christ that it forms with Him one mystical person, a new man joining heaven and earth in the perpetuation of Redemption. No greater glory, no honour more exalted can be conceived than that of belonging to it. The dignity and fruits of membership of the Mystical Body are summed up in union in and with Christ, our union with Christ culminating in the presence of Christ in us through His indwelling Spirit,

in the indwelling of the Trinity, in our elevation to be brothers of Jesus Christ the God-man and adopted sons of God, destined to know and love God as He is, One and Three, Father eternally generating the Son, Father and Son eternally spirating the Holy Spirit. Our duties—to develop this supernatural life within ourselves; to build up and increase the Mystical Body of Christ; to love the Church, to see Christ in it and in each of its members.

'Recognize your dignity, O Christian,' says St. Leo the Great . . . 'having become a partaker of the divine nature. Remember the Head and the Body of which you are a member.'



Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.