

Corpus mysticum: The Eucharist and Catholicity.

I. It is hardly possible to start with any formal definition of the Church. Genuine understanding comes only by experience. The mystery of the Church can be apprehended only from inside, by living in it, by participating in it. The very nature of the Church can be rather described, than properly defined. . . . No definition is given in the New Testament. The name itself, however, adapted by the primitive Church to denote the new reality, presumes a very definite idea of what the Church is. . . . The Greek word *ἐκκλησία* has been many times in the Septuagint version used of the sacred assembly of all Israel, of the Chosen People taken as a *sacred whole*, even as *one Body*. In the Hellenistic language the word *ἐκκλησία* had a similar meaning. It was, usually, an assembly of the Sovereign People, a general congregation of all citizens. Applied to the new Christian community, the word has kept its usual significance. . . . Christians are the New and true Israel, the new Chosen People of God, "a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter, ii. 9). And hence Christians are one, or they constitute one "peculiar people" and one Body, not because they are of the same natural origin, as "made of one blood." They are one, but in Christ, as being born anew in Him, "rooted and built up in Him" (Col. ii. 7), as having been by one Spirit "baptized into one Body" (1 Cor., xii. 13). As St. Athanasius says, "being given to drink of the Holy Spirit, we drink Christ." . . . *One Body*, this excellent analogy, so constantly used by St. Paul, when depicting the mystery of the Christian existence, is the best witness to the intimate experience of the Apostolic Church. The special emphasis put on the organic unity in Christ can be easily recognised. . . . The Church is the Body of Christ and His "fullness." *Body* and *fullness*, τὸ σῶμα and τὸ πλήρωμα, these two terms are closely connected in St. Paul's mind, one explaining the other (cf. Eph., i. 23). The Church is the Body of Christ, because it is His *complement*. St. John Chrysostom commends the Pauline idea in this sense, "The Church is the

complement of Christ in the same manner in which the head completes the body and the body is completed by the head." Christ is not alone, "He has prepared the whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His train." He insists: "Observe, how he (*i.e.*, St. Paul) introduces Him *as having need of all alike*." And he concludes: "Thus His Body is formed of all the members. This means that only then will the Head be filled up, when the Body will be rendered perfect, when we all shall be together, shall be co-united and knit together" ⁽¹⁾. . . . The Church is the "fullness" of the holy Incarnation. The Incarnation is accomplished in the Church. In a certain sense, the Church is Christ Himself, in His all-embracing fullness. "For as the Body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Cor., xii. 12). "Let us rejoice, then, and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ," exclaims St. Augustine. *Non solum nos Christianos factos esse, sed Christum*. . . . "For if He is the Head, we are the members: the whole man is He and we," *totus homo, ille et nos*,—*Christus et Ecclesia* ⁽²⁾. . . . "For Christ is not simply in the head and not in the body, but Christ is entire in the head and body," *non enim Christus in capite et non in corpore, sed Christus totus in capite et in corpore* ⁽³⁾. . . . This term *totus Christus* occurs in St. Augustine's works again and again, especially in his preaching. "When I speak of Christians in the plural, I understand one in the One Christ. Ye are therefore many, and ye are yet one; we are many, and we are one. Because we cling unto Him Whose members we are; and since our Head is in heaven, that His members may follow" ⁽⁴⁾. "For our Lord Jesus is not only in Himself, but in us also,"—*Dominus enim Jesus non solum in se, sed et in nobis* ⁽⁵⁾. "Our Lord Jesus Christ is as one whole perfect man, both Head and Body. . . . The Body of this Head is the Church, not the Church of this country only, but of the whole world as well: not that of

⁽¹⁾ S. John Chrysostom, in Ephes. hom. 3, Mg. lxii; cf. J. A. Robinson's Commentary on Ephesians, the special note on *πλήρωμα*.

⁽²⁾ S. Augustine, in Johannem, tr. xxi, No. 8, M.L. xxxv, c. 1568 Cis; cf. S. John Chrysostom, in 1 Cor. hom. 30, St. G. lxi. 279-253.

⁽³⁾ S. Augustine, in Johannem, tr. xxviii, 1, c. 1622.

⁽⁴⁾ In Psalm cxxvii, 3, M.L. xxxvii, c. 1679: *cum plures Christianos appello, in uno Christo unum intelligo*. Cf. in Psalm xxix, enarr. 11, 5, M.L. xxxvi, c. 219: *quia omnis homo in Christo unus homo est, et unitas Christianorum unus homo*; in Psalm lxxxv, 5, M.L. xxxvii, 1083: *unus homo usque ad finem saeculi extenditur*.

⁽⁵⁾ In Psalm xc, sermo 1, 9, M.L. xxxvii, c. 1157.

this age only, but from Abel himself down to those who shall to the end be born and believe in Christ, the whole assembly of the Saints, belonging to one city; which city is Christ's body, of which Christ is the Head" (1). St. Augustine is alluding here to this glorious description: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." . . . (Hebrews, xii. 22-23). . . . The Church is one Body, one organism, more than a congregation or corporation. And many are integrated or perfected into this organic unity as partakers of the Holy Mysteries. "For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1. Cor. x. 17). . . . The image of the Body grew up in the Christian mind just from the Eucharistic experience. The Church of Christ is one in the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is Christ Himself, and He does abide *sacramentally* with His faithful, with His flock still. The Eucharist was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper as a Sacrament of unity and love. It was of love that Our Lord spoke that night, it was of love that He taught His disciples. And He gave them a "new commandment" of perfect love, such as His own love was: "even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (St. John, xiii. 34). Our Lord, as the High Priest of the New and perfect Covenant, offers then a prayer for the unity: "that they may all be one . . . , that they may be perfected into one" (St. John, xvi. 21, 23). And the measure of this perfection is the mystery of the Holy Trinity. One and Undivided: "even as we are one" (v. 22). It is in the Church that this unfathomable Trinitarian Unity is reflected on the earth and many are one, are perfected into one, in Christ, in His Love, in the oneness of His Body. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts, iv. 32). . . . The Church realises and recognises its mystical unity just in the Eucharistic experience. And so the Eucharist is a *catholic*

(1) In Psalm xc, enan. 2, 1, M.L. xxxvii, 1159: *Dominus noster Jesus Christus tamquam totus perfectus vir, et caput, et corpus . . . talem ergo scientes Christum totum atque universum simul cum Ecclesia.* Cfr. in Psalm xxxvii, 7, M.L. xxxvi, 399: *tamquam plenum et totum Christum, id est, caput et corpus, . . . non dividuntur personae, sed distinguitur dignitas;* or else in Psalm xxx. enarr. ii, 1, 3-7, c. 231: *una quaedam persona,—loquatur ergo Christus, quia in Christo loquitur Ecclesia, et in Ecclesia loquitur Christus, et corpus in capite, et caput in corpore;* sermo 2, c. 239: *sit accipiendus Christus totus cum capite et corpore . . . , ut non sit disscissio.* Some more references cfr. E. Mersch, S. J., *Le corps mystique du Christ, Etudes de théologie historique*, Louvain, Museum Lessianum, 1933, tome ii. p. 37-131.

sacrament, a sacrament of Catholicity—*mysterium pacis et unitatis nostrae*, to use the words of St. Augustine ⁽¹⁾. . . .

2. The spirit of Catholicity penetrates the whole of the Eucharistic service. First of all it is *prayer in common*. St. Cyprian of Carthage emphasises well the corporate character of all Christian prayer. "Prayer with us is public and common, *publica et communis oratio*,—and when we pray we do not pray for one but for the whole people, because we, the whole people, are one, *quia totus populus unum sumus*" ⁽²⁾. . . . We pray for the whole people, and it is the whole people who are praying at the Eucharist. . . . It is remarkable that all Eucharistic prayers and litanies are composed in the plural. And even the prayer of consecration is recited by the priest in the plural,—for he is offering prayers in the name of all the people of the Church. "Moreover we offer to Thee this reasonable and unbloody service (*τὴν λογικὴν ταύτην καὶ ἀνάιμακτον λατρείαν*), and we entreat and pray and beseech, send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts set before Thee." And the congregation confirms: "We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks to Thee, O Lord, and we pray to Thee, our God" ⁽³⁾. . . . It is not in his own name that the priest celebrates, but in the name of the people, as it is from the people too, that the gifts are offered and spread forth on the Altar: "that our God, the lover of mankind, who has received them at His holy, heavenly, and spiritual altar for an odour of a sweet spiritual savour, may in answer send down upon us His divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit." . . . But it is the priest only who is given this authority to offer these common supplications to speak in the name of all. And this authority is given not by the people, but from the Holy Spirit. The minister does not represent the congregation only, but Christ above all, who is truly ministering to His brethren. The authority is given to the priest not by the people, but for the people, as one of the manifold gifts of the Spirit. And in the name of the whole Church the priest speaks: *We pray* This *we* in our liturgical prayers has two meanings. First,

(1) cf. the author's article, Sobornost, the Catholicity of the Church, in: *The Church of God, an Anglo-Russian Symposium*, S. P. C. K. 1937, p. 51-77.

(2) *de dominica orat.*, 8.

(3) Most of the quotations in the text are from the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the regular rite of the Orthodox Church. The Greek text vid. in F. E. Brightman's *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, v. I, 1896, or the recent edition of P. N. Rebellas, *αἱ τρεῖς λειτουργίαι*, Athens, 1935. There are several translations into English. In the text that of Mr Athelstan Riley is used, *A guide to the Divine Liturgy in the East*, A. R. Mowbray, 1922.

it betokens the unity of the assembled Church, the undivided Christian fellowship of all those who pray. "Thou, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto Thee." . . . And prayers of the faithful are to be said really "with one voice and one heart,"—"let all the people pronounce in concord," is the rubric in the liturgy of the "Apostolic Constitutions," καὶ πάντες συμφώνως λεγέτωσαν⁽¹⁾. . . . And this "symphony" is not a mere composite of many private and separate prayers. The real symphony and concord can be achieved only when every individual prayer should be set free from all its limitations, should cease to be only personal, should become one of Christian communion and fellowship. In other words, one has to pray not as a separate individual, but as a member of the Body, of the mystical brotherhood in Christ. Only as a member of the Body can one be Christian—*unus Christianus nullus Christianus*. For Christianity is the Church, the fellowship. And only as a member of the Body is any Christian entitled to participate in the mystery. In the rite the prayer of consecration (the "Anaphora") is preceded by a solemn invitation: "let us love one another," ἀγαπήτωμεν ἀλλήλους—here comes the kiss of peace. . . . Only this love and peace enables us to bring our offerings worthily and truly. Not only because the lack of peace or love would be a personal failure; but just because we, the whole people, should be one,—*totus populus unum sumus*. . . . And secondly, the liturgical "we" has another and deeper meaning. This liturgical plural points to the universal fullness and unity of the Catholic Church. For every liturgy is celebrated in communion with the whole Church and in the name of the whole Church. And spiritually in every celebration the whole Church takes an invisible, yet very effective part. "Now the Powers of Heaven with us invisibly do minister" (ἀοράτως λατρεύουσιν). . . . And the Church upon earth repeats and proclaims the glorious song of the Seraphim, repeats these heavenly Hallelujahs, for in Christ the Church of the Angels and the Church of men have become one. . . . Likewise there is no division between the living and departed within the Church. There is here no final separation between "earth" and "heaven," and the power of death is overcome. And in the righteous departed the Church witnesses to its own

⁽¹⁾ Brightman, p. 17; cf. Nicolas Cabasylos, *Exploration of the Divine Liturgy*, Mg. 150, c. 701: οἱ πιστοὶ πάντες τὸ Ἀμήν ἐπιλέγουσι, &c.

achievement, in them the Kingdom of God is still revealed in strength and power. The Saints are our brethren who have now entered into the joy of their Master, into the rest and glory of Christ,—and they are with us still, in Christ, for here all are but one. In the unity of Christ's body death loses its power to separate. . . . And thus the commemoration of the Saints at the Eucharist is not merely a remembrance of them, not only an exposition of our human sympathy or love; it is an insight into a true mystical union, a mysterious fellowship of living and departed in Christ. The Eucharist is, in an eminent sense, *the Mystery of the Church*, the Revelation of the *whole Christ*, —τὸ μυστήριον τῆς συνάξεως, τὸ μυστήριον τῆς κοινωνίας. . . . “For by one Body, that is His own, blessing through the mystical communion those who believe in Him, He makes us of the same Body with Himself and with each other (συσσώμους). For who should separate or remove from a natural oneness with each other those who are knit together through His Holy Body, who are bound up into oneness with Christ. . . . One cannot divide Christ” (1). . . . This vigorous statement of St. Cyril of Alexandria only expresses the common feeling or intuition. . . . The Eucharist is instituted in the Church just as a way of unity, as a means to grow up to the plenitude of the Lord. . . . In the Eucharist the Church is aware of its unity, and anticipates the final perfection. This is very emphatically expressed in the symbolism of the rite. Special altar-breads (προσφοραί) are used for the service (2). A large portion is cut out and taken for the consecration and laid on the paten, in the centre. It represents Christ Himself, the corner-stone, the Head. And then some other pieces are taken from the bread and placed around the central one with commemoration of the whole Church, both triumphant and militant. Symeon of Thessalonica, the illustrious commentator on the liturgical rites in the xvth century, gives the following explanation of the prothesis, of this preparatory service. “In this divine figure and action of the sacred proskomidia we contemplate, in a certain manner, Jesus Himself, we contemplate also His whole Church. In the centre we see Him, the very Light, Life Eternal, which He had obtained, sanctified, preserved. For He Himself is present here in the image of the bread, in

(1) *S. Cyril, Alex.*, comm. in Joh., xi, 11, Mg. 77, c. 560.

(2) In the Russian Church five separate loaves are ordinarily used, in the Greek one big loaf, but there is no real difference in the rite.

the middle place. The particle at the right—His Mother ; at the left—Angels and Saints. And at the foot—the pious congregation of all who believed in Him. It is a great mystery : God in the midst of men. . . . There is here the Kingdom to come and the Revelation of the Life Eternal” (1). . . . Only one central piece of bread is consecrated. But after communion all particles are put down into the chalice and so immersed into the Holy Blood, while the priest is saying : “ Wash away, O Lord, the sins of all who are here commemorated by Thy precious Blood, through the prayers of Thy Saints.” . . . The Byzantine commentators have interpreted this sacramental symbolism as a kind of “ spiritual communion,” so that a special eucharistic grace is given to all for whom the eucharistic prayers have been said (2). One has to bring this conception of a “ spiritual communion ” into connection with the mystical unity of the Church. . . . The very Communion is the union with Christ, the participation of His glorified life. And this is granted indeed even to the departed, in an eminent measure to the Saints. In the Eucharist the Church is sacramentally made into a very congregation and co-united, the undivided Church of the living and the dead. . . . “ And unite us who partake of the one Bread and the one Cup, one to another in the communion of the Holy Spirit, . . . that we may find mercy and grace together with all the Saints who in all the ages have been acceptable unto Thee and . . . with all righteous souls who have died in the faith ” (Anaphora of St. Basil). . . . Every time that the Eucharist is celebrated we witness to, we live in, this perfect unity, and we pray in the name of all mankind, of all those who have been called and redeemed. We pray *as the Church*, the whole Church prays . . . And again, the fullness of the life is embraced in Eucharistic prayers,—the whole of God’s Providence, all the complete acts of Divine Wisdom and Love. The liturgical commemoration has a cosmic character, for in Christ, in the Incarnate Word, in the Resurrection of the Incarnate, the Divine purpose of Creation has been accomplished. Man is a “ small world,” a world within the world, or an “ ornament of the world,” *κόσμος τοῦ κόσμου*. And the fullness of creation is restored and sanctified in Christ. . . . In the Eucharist

* (1) *Symeon of Thessalonica*, Dialogos, 64, Mg.

(2) Cf. *Symeon of Thessalonica*, de templo, No. 103, Mg.; *Nicolas Cabosylas*, explanation of the Divine Liturgy, 72, Mg.

we pray and praise Our Lord together with the Heavenly Hosts, the choir of men in unison with the hosts of the angels. All planes of existence meet and mingle,—the cosmic, the human, and the seraphic. Thus the world is revealed as a veritable cosmos, one and undivided, gathered together into a true Christian fellowship. "For Thou broughtest us forth from nothing, and when we were fallen didst raise us up again and leave nothing undone to bring us to heaven and to bestow on us Thy kingdom which is to come."

. . . Eucharistic commemoration includes the whole World. "We offer Thee this reasonable service for all the world, for the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" . . . And the prayer goes on to mention by names all those for whom it is offered. "Name" means personality. And thus the commemoration of the members of the Church by names at the Eucharist points to the fact that each person has his own place in the completeness of the one Body. We have to ask God to help our limited memory: "And those whom we, through ignorance, or forgetfulness, or the multitude of names, have not remembered, do Thou Thyself call to mind, O God, who knowest the age and the name of each" (Anaphora of St. Basil). The Eucharistic commemoration embodies also all complex situations of our life upon the earth: "Be Thou Thyself all things unto all men (*αὐτὸς τοῖς πᾶσι τὰ πάντα γενου*), O Thou who knowest every man, his petition, his abode, and his need." . . . Thus again the whole people is praying for the whole people.

3. The Eucharist is a true revelation of Christ. In it the beginning and the end are united: the reminiscences of the Gospel and the prophecies of the Revelation, the fullness of the New Testament. The Eucharist is a sacramental anticipation of the final Resurrection, "a betrothal of the Life Eternal." And one can say also that the Resurrection will be just the universal Eucharist, a Supper of Life, a Supper of the Lamb. . . . It is indeed a foretaste of the Resurrection, "an image of the Resurrection" (*ὁ τύπος τῆς ἀναστάσεως*). For it is an intimate union with the Risen Lord, with the Master of Life. . . . The whole life is yet changed or transfigured within the Church. All our mutual relations and connections are changed. The new communion is established. Love itself grows into something new. In every one of our neighbours, in "each of these little ones," Christ reveals Himself to us. We feel that we have grown organically together with Him, and

this permits us to "love our neighbour as our own selves," which would otherwise be hardly possible. There is not only a psychological or moral unity, not only a unity of experience or feeling; it is an actual unity, much deeper than what can be described by any human word. There is a mystery of faith. There is a unity of the Body, *corpus mysticum*. . . . And yet the fundamental contradiction still exists. The world still stands outside the Church. Till now the Church is like an island in the midst of the "stormy earthly seas." A bright, light-giving island,—here shines the Divine Sun of Love, *Sol salutis*. But the storms on earth wax high, and so often the world does not accept unity and love. Or the unity it wants is not the true one. The world knows not how to receive the unity of Christ, even when it is worn out with strife and discord. There is always a contradiction in our souls between the fullness of the Eucharistic life and all these struggles of the world. The temple seems to be so full of the Eternal love. But the world remains loveless, and rarely seeks love. And however much or little we do "for the unity of all," it always remains too little. The unity still is only a distant goal. . . . It is not likely that it will be given to any single generation to achieve the complete unity. Yet the path towards unity exists and has been revealed from the beginning. The path is the Church. . . . For us this only path is made up as of many by-ways, the ends of which lose themselves beyond the historical horizon in the Kingdom to come. Yet this does not stop the pilgrim from journeying on; even at the eleventh hour he must go forward. We must not be troubled because our path on earth is tortuous and winding. . . . We pray for the fulfilment of the Church, as the primitive Church of early days used to pray: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy Kingdom" (Didache, ix. 4).

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