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What Is This

MYSTICAL BODY?

by

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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What Is This Mystical Body?

LIKE the rest of the intelligent Catholic world, they were studying the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. In fact they had made a number of trips out from the city to see Father Hall and to sit at his feet while he showed them the depths and heights and beauties and tremendous consequences of this revolutionary doctrine. Their text had been Father Lord's "Our Part in the Mystical Body." And Father Hall had supplemented the book with his enthusiastic appreciation of the subject.

Now, on this crisp winter evening, they sat in the comfortable if slightly shabby rectory parlor and watched Father Hall scratch on a block of paper weird and inexplicable signs and symbols.

"Quite an artist, aren't you?" said Dick Bradley, with brash irony.

"Or are you doing problems in analytics?" asked Sue, Dick's twin.

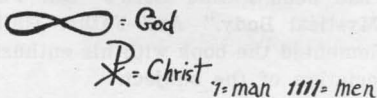
The priest furrowed a long wrinkle across his forehead and concentrated on the pad.

"Neither," he replied. "Just attempting to draw pictures of the Mystical Body for you." And the twins hooted at the idea that these pen scrawls should be called pictures. But Father Hall was unperturbed. "It al-

ways seemed to me that theology was a lot like mathematics. So if we start with a few symbols. . .”

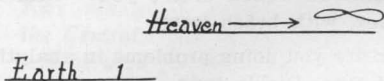
The two shifted their chairs closer and gazed in amazement at the weird drawings on the pad. Only one sign was clear, the beautiful symbol for Christ that they had seen so often in the liturgy.

“Three signs,” said the priest, almost to himself: “The infinity sign out of mathematics we’ll use for God. The *Chi-Rho* for Christ. (Those are the first two letters of the Greek word *Christos*.) The 1 means man, any man. More 1’s, more men. [Fig. 1.]



“Now let’s get the two levels, the level which is heaven and the level which is earth.”

Two more scratches on the pad and this was accomplished. [Fig. 2.]



“Now we’re back to our old question. How can a man get from earth to heaven? Heaven is clearly out of reach. There are no stairs, no elevator, no ladder between earth and heaven, unless someone should make that connection. If someone leaned down from heaven and united human nature with himself, there would be a divine ladder

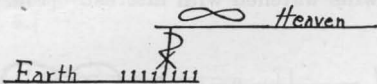
connecting earth and heaven, and on that ladder we could go up to the level of God. Did that happen?"

"That," volunteered Dick, "certainly did."

"It was the Incarnation," added Sue.

"Correct. Let's make a drawing for that.

"There you have it. [Fig. 3.] The Second



Person of the infinite Trinity leaned down from heaven, united man, human nature, with Himself. And when He did that, He formed, so to speak, a ladder between earth and heaven. Heaven, in the person of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, stooped to earth. Earth, in that human nature which the Second Person had taken and united with Himself, was lifted up to divine, heavenly heights."

"I get it," supplemented Dick. "And the ladder that united heaven with earth was Christ, whom you have indicated there in the *Chi-Rho* sign."

"Haven't I a very smart brother though?" purred Sue.

"I'm dumbfounded that you admit it," the brother ungraciously retorted.

Father Hall pushed on. "Because of this ladder it was possible for the rest of us who have human nature (there we are, all the other little 1's) to mount to heaven."

"Through Christ our Lord." It was Sue's time to answer, and she did.

"Now let's take the next step," said Father Hall. "Even if we did mount to heaven, we could not see God face to face; we could not directly know, love, and possess Him as He is. Why not?"

He was scratching new drawings, which the twins watched with interest. [Fig. 4.]



"I remember," replied Dick, quickly. "Because God is without limits, and we are entirely limited. He is too big for us to see or know or possess. Something without limits couldn't fit into something with limits unless—"

Again Sue took it up:

"—unless there was a change in the nature of the limited thing—if this Number 1 here" (and she pointed back at the diagram) "could be made to share the divine powers of this infinite, limitless being who is God."

Her finger was reaching the infinity sign and racing back again to the small 1 which must be made to share the powers of God Himself.

"And that," said Father Hall, "was what Christ promised He'd do for us. He was God-Man and hence had the unlimited powers which He needed to see, know, love, and possess the unlimited Trinity. Where

precisely did He promise us that He would share His divine powers with us, who don't otherwise have them?"

They both responded to that.

"At the Last Supper," they chorused.

"Let's see if we can diagram that." Again the priest's pencil worked rapidly and crudely, and he had another rough drawing. [Fig. 5.]



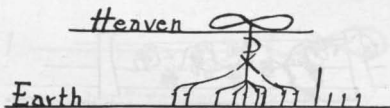
"There we have it. Christ, according to the record kept by St. John, promised His disciples that He would unite His followers as closely with Himself as branches are united with the vine. He said that He was the vine. There we have the vine." His finger sought the drawing. "He said that if His followers remained, like the branches, united with Him, the vine, His life would pour through their souls and bodies. Because of this life there would be nothing they could not do. They could do the very divine things He did—they could see, know, and possess the unlimited God in heaven as He did. Just as the branch separated from the vine (there are two poor separated branches in the drawing) could do nothing, bear no fruit, so the branches that remained united with the vine would bear much fruit...merit for heaven. And the life that flows through the vine and the

branches is precisely the same in quality and character. Christ said we should share His divine life and powers."

The priest was sketching again.

"It shouldn't be difficult to get a drawing now in which we see Christ substituted for the vine and ourselves for the branches."

His rough drawing was soon done. [Fig. 6.]



"This is," said Father Hall, looking carefully at the drawing, "really the same picture as the picture of the vine and branches."

"Only turned upside down," supplemented Dick.

"Naturally," said Sue. "What could you expect when Christ is rooted, so to speak, in heaven, in God?"

"All right then; we have the picture. As the vine is rooted in the earth and draws its life out of the earth (that life-giving sap which is essential if the vine and branches are to live), so Christ is rooted, to use Sue's quite descriptive word, in the Blessed Trinity in heaven." He indicated this in the drawing. "From that Blessed Trinity the divine life flows through Jesus Christ—"

"—to us who are united with our dear Lord." Sue's voice was almost triumphant.

"Absolutely right. There we see, in those extensions of the *Chi-Rho*, Christ, as it were stretching out His arms toward us. No. Much more intimately than that—He is uniting Himself with those who are His followers so that His divine life will flow straight from the Blessed Trinity through Himself to us who are part of Him in that mystical union.

"And if the branches share the life of the vine, so we who are united with the God-Man share the life of the God-Man, which is divine. Hence we can do the divine things He does, see, know, and possess God in eternal happiness."

Dick pointed almost regretfully to the three 1's which had been separated by a stroke of the priest's pencil and which clearly were not united with the symbol of Christ.

"These poor chaps," he said, in a sincere minor, "are not united."

"They are the same as the branches cut away from the vine," volunteered Sue.

"And hence," continued her twin, "as far as the divine life is concerned, dead."

"The tragic situation," the priest added, in the same regretful tone, "of those who decline to unite themselves with Jesus Christ. But for those who do, the divine life, flowing through them as life flows from the vine to the branches, makes it possible for them to look forward to a divine life in eternity. Without that life—"

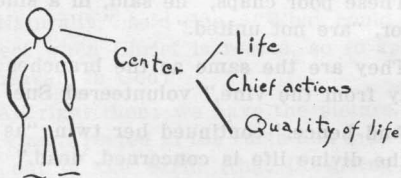
“—‘without me you can do nothing’,” said Sue, quietly.

“Those are Christ’s words. They are relentlessly true as far as any divine actions relating to the limitless God are concerned.”

“That,” said Dick, “makes clear the vine-and-branches comparison. But now let’s see you draw the Mystical Body.”

Father Hall laughed. He knew this was going to be a struggle. So first he warned: “Remember that the figure of the Mystical Body really does not advance the truth of our union with Christ far beyond Our Lord’s own comparison to the vine and branches. But let’s see what we can do. You won’t mind if I made it crude?”

“We’d expect it,” retorted Sue, cruelly. And Father Hall struggled with a conventionalized figure of a man. [Fig. 7.]



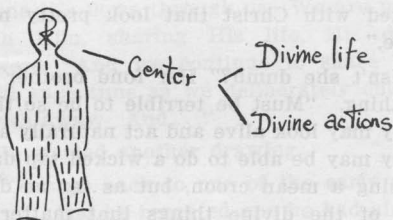
“Not much of a man.” Dick pretended to grumble.

“We’ll use it only for an example and then rub it out. Now the first thing we notice about a man is his head—inevitably. For his head is the center of his life; his head, clever, stupid, sane, mad, determines

the quality of his life. His head is the center of all his most important functions—seeing, hearing, speaking, and, with the brain as organ, thinking and willing. So from the head there flow through the man all the operations of life. And if his head is gone—”

“I know; if he loses his head—”

“Precisely. It’s all over, including the shouting. Now St. Paul, in order to impress upon us the perfection and closeness of our union with Christ, said that Christ and we together made up one body; that Christ was the Head and we were the members. Let’s draw that crudely, using once more our *Chi-Rho* and our little 1’s. [Fig. 8.]



“Christ is the Head. But, we said a moment ago, the head is the source and center of life. The head determines the quality of our life. The head is the center of all of life’s most important functions. So if our Head is Jesus Christ, who is the God-Man—”

“Our life which comes to us from Him,” Dick explained, “is divine, as His was.”

“Exactly. And if He can see, know, love, and possess the Blessed Trinity, infinite, limitless God—” coached the priest.

“We can do as our Head does. We can see, know, love, and possess God too.”

“And suppose that we are separated from our Head, suppose that through mortal sin ‘we lose our Head.’”

“Supernaturally dead as a doornail,” said Dick, emphatically. “No doubt of that.”

“No doubt whatsoever,” agreed Father Hall. “We’re as dead as if we were a hand that has been amputated, or a foot that has been cut off by a passing train.”

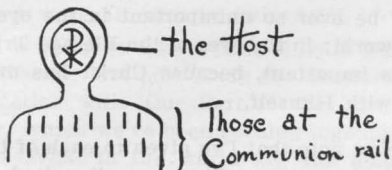
“Seems to me,” ventured Sue, perversely, “that I know a lot of people who aren’t united with Christ that look pretty much alive.”

“Isn’t she dumb?” Her fond brother was scathing. “Must be terrible to be so thick. They may look alive and act naturally alive. They may be able to do a wicked tap dance or sing a mean croon, but as far as doing any of the divine things that matter for heaven, as far as seeing, knowing, loving, and possessing God, they’re dead, dead, dead.”

“Which,” said Father Hall, quietly, “is what makes the tragedy of the world. People who seem so gifted, brilliant, wealthy, far in the front of civilization are, as far as the divine actions which make up a man’s real life, utterly dead. Nothing could be more terrifying than that.”

"And all this happens—how?" Sue's question was a lead for another drawing. Father Hall scratched on his pad again.

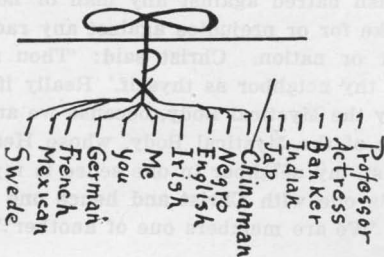
"Let's skip union in baptism, which is after all the first union and our real incorporation in Jesus Christ. Instead we'll take the simpler fact of Holy Communion. [Fig. 9.]



"Christ is the Host. We are the little 1's kneeling at the altar rail. Christ unites Himself to us in Holy Communion. His divine life flows through us. We are united with Him, sharing His life, His divine powers. And we continue to share them until such time as we deliberately cut ourselves away. And..."

He started another drawing.

"Let's go back to one of the early drawings." And he repeated one he had already made. [Fig. 10.]



“See the consequences of this truth? First of all there is the tremendous consequence to my personal dignity. I am united with Jesus Christ. I share His divine life. When I pray, I pray with and through Him. When I work, my work is dignified and made important by my union with the Savior, whose every action was and is pleasing to God. I may be ever so unimportant in the eyes of the world; in the eyes of the Blessed Trinity I am important, because Christ has united me with Himself.

“Now note that I’ve given to each of these little I’s a name. They are all united with me in the Mystical Body, as my hands and feet and arms and legs and stomach and lungs all go together to make one person. Now how ridiculous it would be if I loved my left hand but hated my right; or if I were careful of my right leg but tried to get my left leg run over; if I took exercises for my lungs but declined to eat because I had a grudge against my stomach. Yet how terrifyingly stupid it is that I pretend to be a member of the Mystical Body and then cherish hatred against any man or hold a dislike for or prejudice against any race or color or nation. Christ said: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ Really if you study the Mystical Body, because we are all parts of the Mystical Body, whose Head is Christ, my neighbor in one sense is myself. He is one with Christ and hence one with me. ‘We are members one of another.’”

"I think I see the next consequence," said Dick, slowly. "Here are those poor chaps out there who are separated from Christ and hence are dead. It is our job to work might and main to see that they are united. They must have the divine life flowing through them."

"And that is what we mean by zeal."

They were all silently thoughtful.

"It is going to take a little time to get all this clearly. But now study the diagrams in connection with 'Our Part in the Mystical Body,' which we've been reading together . . . and— What in the world are you doing?"

Sue was carefully folding up the scraps of paper.

"Taking 'em along with us."

"As souvenirs?"

"No. Just as little charts in supernatural geography and spiritual physiology," she replied.

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