



The Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and its Application to the Legion Apostolic System

Who is the Mystical Body of Christ?

Rather than starting with the ‘what’ first we must establish the ‘who’. Who is the Mystical Body of Christ? The Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, issued on June 29, 1943, states that the Holy Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ – with Christ as the Head and we, the baptized children of God, the members of His Mystical Body. Therefore, we can truly say that “We are all part of the Mystical Body of Christ.” “We are all one with Christ’s body” (not his physical body – but his mystical body, the Church)

Metaphor (Analogy) the Natural or Physical Body

Saint Paul in his epistles referred to the mystical body of Christ as the Church consisting of members. He uses the analogy (or the imagery) of a physical body made up of different organs (members) working together to keep the body healthy and alive.

Metaphor (Analogy) the Natural or Physical body

In a mystical and spiritual sense, the Church with its head, Jesus Christ, and His body, its members, are in need of nourishment to keep them alive. Christ then provide the necessary graces to help each member grow in their spiritual lives. Each member helping each other to be healthy in order to live in accordandance with their own vocation so as to fulfill their goal, HEAVEN.

Scriptural Basis of the Mystical Body of Christ

Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans (12: 4-7) writes: “For as one body we have many parts, and all and all the parts do not have the same function, so we though many are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise then, if prophecy, in proportion to the faith, if ministry in ministering, if one is a teacher in teaching; if one exhorts in exhortation....”

The Church is a Supernatural Reality (Not a Mere Society)

The Church, like all social or human organizations, is a society composed of members. However, the Church is not a mere society in the same vein because of its supernatural character where Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is the Head and with the Holy Spirit as its very soul. Therefore, to belong to the Church is to belong to Christ, and to belong to Christ is to belong to one another as Christ is the vine and we, God's people, are the branches.

An Act of Faith in the Church

Since the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, it is vital to understand this fundamental truth: our act of faith in the Church (faithfulness to Her teachings, for example) is an act of faith in Christ. Christ our Lord, who revealed to us His commandments, teachings and mandates have entrusted them to His Church and his apostles.

An Act of Faith in the Church

And while they are imperfect men, they are however, guided by the Holy Spirit. “Our act of faith in the Church is our act of faith in Christ ever active in our midst, ever speaking, ever teaching, ever guiding, ever sanctifying those who are with him, through the organism he has willed to exist in the world.”

The Church is United Through an Invisible Bond – But is also VISIBLE

The Church, then in the mysterious sense of the Mystical Body of Christ is made up of divine and human elements as Christ possessed both divine and human nature. Thus, in the Church there is an invisible element (grace, faith and charity) that unites and binds the members of the Church (visible elements).

The Church is United Through an Invisible Bond – But is also VISIBLE

It must, however be brought to the attention of every Catholic, that it is an error to negate the visible aspect of the Church (its hierarchy, structure and members) because it leads to the heresy of religious indifferentism, i.e., all religions are the same for as long as we are united in Christ.

The Church is a Visible Reality of Christ – The Catholic Church the One True Church

“The Church is visible because she is a body. Hence, they err in the matter of divine truth who imagine the Church to be invisible, intangible, something merely “pneumatological” as they say, by which many Christian communities, though they differ from each other in their profession of faith, are united by an invisible bond.” (Encyclical Satis Cognitum, Pope Leo XIII).

The Church is a Visible Reality of Christ – The Catholic Church the One True Church

“ Thus, the Church is **VISIBLE** through its members, the baptized Christians who are united to its head for the purpose of bringing **ALL** men and women towards the Eucharist, the source of grace and Divine Life.

The Mission of the Church and the Mystical Body of Christ

Pope Pius XII sums up the point of the visible and invisible elements of the Mystical Body by stating that Christ and the Holy Spirit (now invisible to men) continue their work of salvation by a mandate to all baptized men and women (the visible members of the Church) to bring forth God's Kingdom through apostleship and works of evangelization.

The Mission of the Church and the Mystical Body of Christ

Our Lord has willed that his Church should be what it is and that is to be the instrument of salvation of all. In our spiritual life, our faith journey, Jesus understands the imperfections of our human nature and thus founded the Church as a source of supernatural help in order for us to grow in holiness.

The Mission of the Church and the Mystical Body of Christ

Under the leadership of the successor of Saint Peter, the Christ-founded Church teaches, safeguards, and sanctifies its members and their coordinated directed prayers and efforts combine to achieve the purpose for which Christ founded his Church by mutual help and intercession and example.

Baptism Necessary for Salvation and to Belong to the Mystical Body of Christ

It is essential that all peoples of the world know and acknowledge that Baptism is necessary for salvation. It is a fundamental requirement to belong to the Mystical Body of Christ. CCC 1257 states: “The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them.

Baptism Necessary for Salvation And to Belong to the Mystical Body of Christ

Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit." *God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.*

Baptism Necessary for Salvation And to belong to the *Mystical Body of Christ*

If then we are baptized in the Spirit then we become united unto Christ and Christ in us. For this reason, Saint Paul writes to the Romans that indeed we are to experience our own death, suffering and resurrection as Christ had done before us: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

Baptism Necessary for Salvation and to belong to the Mystical Body of Christ

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.” (Galatians 6: 4-5)

**Encyclical: *Mystici Corporis Christi*
On the Necessity of Baptism**

“Actually, only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed. “For in one spirit” says the Apostle, “were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free.”

Encyclical: *Mystici Corporis Christi* On the Necessity of Baptism

...As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith.[18] And therefore, if a man refuse to hear the Church, let him be considered - so the Lord commands - as a heathen and a publican. It follows that those who are divided in faith or government cannot be living in the unity of such a Body, nor can they be living the life of its one Divine Spirit.” (MCC # 22).

The Church as a Living Organism – The Holy Eucharist as a Means to Grace

Saint Paul provides us a metaphor in which he compares the physical body and the Church to a living organism. In order for the physical body to stay healthy and alive, it needs food and nutrition. On the other hand, the Church, particularly her members, also require suitable means to enter into life, to grow, mature and prosper. This spiritual nourishment, are made possible through the graces from her sacraments such as the Holy Eucharist which is the food of the soul.

Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Mystical Body

Saint Robert Bellarmine, who expounded on the doctrine of the Mystical Body stated that if Christ is the Head of the Mystical Body, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the neck that connects all the members to Christ. “The Head of the Catholic Church is Jesus Christ, and Mary is the neck which joins the Head to its Body. Because she has merited so well of God by her perfect conformity to His holy will, He has decreed that "all the gifts and all the graces which proceed from Christ as the Head should pass through Mary to the Body of the Church.

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Even the physical body has several members in its other parts — hands, shoulders, arms and feet — but only one head and one neck. So also, the Church has many apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins, but only one Head, the Son of God, and one bond between the Head and members, the Mother of God.

Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Mystical Body

By virtue of her transcendent merits before God, the Blessed Virgin stands closer than any other creature to the Head of the Mystical Body; it is no exaggeration to say that she unites the Head to the Body, and that therefore through her, before all others, flow the heavenly blessings from the Head, who is Christ, to us who are His members.”

The Doctrine of the Communion of Saints

The communion of saints when referred to persons, is the spiritual union of the members of the Christian Church, living and the dead, but excluding the damned. They are all part of a single "mystical body", with Christ as the head, in which each member contributes to the good of all and shares in the welfare of all. The communion of saints is a Catholic doctrine that refers to the spiritual solidarity which binds the faithful on earth (Church Militant), the souls in purgatory (Church Suffering) and the souls in heaven (Church Triumphant).

Mystical Body Christ

And the Legion Apostolic System

Frank Duff states that the Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ is the foundation of the Legion apostleship. The members of the Mystical Body of Christ must help each other carry the mission of Christ and since every member (organ) of the Church are related to each other (like the branches of the tree or the different parts of the body), each member of the Legion must offer a life of sacrifice for the benefit of the entire body. Therefore, must take care of each member in the spiritual sense. This is what we call “APOSTLESHIP.”

Mystical Body Christ

And the Legion Apostolic System

Legion of Mary Apostolate is Based on the Doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ - “These principles, upon which the Legion system is built, are a consequence of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. This doctrine forms the main theme of the epistles of St. Paul. This is not surprising, for it was a declaration of that doctrine which converted him. There was light from heaven... St. Paul describes the union which exists between Christ and the baptized as being like the union between the head and the other members of the human body. Each part has its own special purpose and work. Some parts are noble and some are less so; but all are dependent one upon the other, and the same life animates them all. All are put to loss by the failure of one, as all profit by the excellence of one.” (HB p. 59)

Mystical Body Christ and the Legion Apostolic System

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Our Lay Vocation as Apostles of Christ and the Church

The Legion apostolic system emphasizes the importance of both PRAYER and WORKS – both are vital to our missionary purpose. Our works are weakened without a life of prayer. However, prayer alone falls short of God's expectations. The object or purpose of the Legion of Mary as stated in the HB reflects this principle of prayer and work as necessary elements of our apostleship: "The object of the Legion of Mary is the glory of God through the holiness of its members developed by prayer and active co-operation, under ecclesiastical guidance, in Mary's and the Church's work of crushing the head of the serpent and advancing the reign of Christ." (HB p. 11)

Mystical Body of Christ and the Legion Apostolic System

Suffering in the Mystical Body

As Christ has suffered in his human nature for the sake of mankind, so too will the members of the Mystical Body will undergo suffering. Suffering comes in different forms for us – physical (as in the case of a sickness or disease); social and economic (as in the case of prejudice or discrimination and poverty); and spiritual (as in the case of persecution because of one's faith – and also because of one's sinfulness). It is therefore our duty as Christians and members of the same Mystical Body of Christ to assist our brethren to alleviate suffering and learn to accept and offer such pains for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Mystical Body of Christ and the Legion Apostolic System

Suffering in the Mystical Body

“Let this teach the legionary his sublime vocation in the Mystical Body. It is to supply what is wanting to the mission of our Lord. What an inspiring thought for the legionary: that Christ stands in need of him to bring light and hope to those in darkness, consolation to those who are afflicted, life to those who are dead in sin. It goes without saying that it must be the legionary's place and duty to imitate in a quite especial manner the surpassing love and obedience which Christ the head gave his Mother, and which the Mystical Body must reproduce.” (HB p. 56).

Mystical Body of Christ and the Legion Apostolic System

TO BRIDGE MUST BE THE AIM

Each Praesidium and Council should be a reflection of the Mystical Body of Christ. The HB states this fundamental or cardinal point under the section: “TO BRIDGE MUST BE THE AIM” – “Of the set purpose, the Legion should aim to combat the divisions and the innumerable antagonisms of the world.

Mystical Body of Christ and the Legion Apostolic System

TO BRIDGE MUST BE THE AIM

This process must begin in the Legion's unit of organization, the praesidium itself. It would be sheer futility for the Legion to talk of bridging differences if at the same time the spirit of disunity were evident in its own ranks. So let the Legion think in terms of the unity and charity of the Mystical Body, and try to organize accordingly.” (HB p. 304).

Mystical Body of Christ and the Legion Apostolic System

A Paramount of the Legion Apostleship – Heroic Apostolic Works

In conclusion, the Church which is the Mystical Body of Christ must be brought to all as Christ has commanded his apostles. This mandate requires for all the baptized to do their part in the evangelization of the world. It is not enough to be a ‘passive’ or ‘bystander’ Catholic.



The Legion of Mary is in the forefront for the battle for souls. We are a complement of the missionaries, the martyrs and saints who have died fighting for the Faith so that we all must live. We are a partner of our priests. We are Christ's messengers of peace and charity to the world. Frank Duff exhorts us to go leave our comfort zones. Let us all 'get out' and undertake the most difficult and heroic apostolic works where we fear no more.