

The Body of Christ (1)

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February, 1930.

My Dear Brother,

You ask if the Pauline use of the word "Body" of Christ is the same as Luke 22: 19, or Luke 23: 52, or is it not in the sense of "Corporation" or "Regiment."

The actual word used is the same. To speak of what is divinely inspired on the human side, the gospel of Luke is universally recognised as written on Pauline lines or under Paul's influences.

There are many occasions on which Paul uses the simple word "body" (Greek, *soma*). Leaving, for the moment, those passages that refer to the Church, all the other instances, I believe, refer to concrete substance animated by life; or (if the life be taken) to that same concrete substance, dead. Romans 6: 6, 1 Cor. 15: 40, and Col. 2: 17, might be cited as possibly needing, if not another interpretation, at least another application. But they do not affect your enquiry.

There remain the passages dealing with the Assembly of God. These are Romans 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4, and Col. 2. What other isolated instance there may be, must be viewed in the light of these.

Romans 12: 4, is illustration, Romans 12: 5, is application of the illustration. Forgive me for saying that if Regiment or Corporation had been what the Spirit had intended to convey, the figure or illustration actually given might appear to be unfortunate and misleading. We have many members in one Body, but these are all organically united. Adapted marvellously as the many organs and members are for their various uses, they are essentially one, and together form one living entity. They are not units each having its independent life, even though all were united under the control of a commander or director.

Romans 12: 5, is the application of the figure. With all the diversity to be found among Christians with individual exercises and activities. they are nevertheless an organic unity in Christ. That is. we are not thinking of a mere congregation of individuals, but of organs and members in a body. This is a wholly spiritual idea: it is not administration in a Corporation or Regiment, where all through training are unified, and as unified work together to a common end: hut a body with differing members functioning with a common life. Hence this verse adds we are all "members of one another." Each is incomplete without all the rest. you cannot possibly say this of any aggregate of individuals even though unified.

One might say I am a servant of a Corporation, or I am a Private in a Regiment, but not "we are members one of another."

1 Cor. 12: 1-11, gives the same idea of diversity in unity, but signifies more particularly the divine Persons in the Godhead Who operate and how They operate in local assemblies. Then in v. 12 the illustration is again brought in of the body. and in v. 13 the application of it to the Church. It is not by enlistment as in a Regiment (nor of course compulsory military service), nor is it by contracting for employment as in a Corporation, but by Divine work, and that viewed in two ways. We are baptised by One Spirit into One Body; the individuals with their once diversified interests are now brought on to new ground, where there is but one life and one interest. Every interest is submerged in the one interest, it is not a multitude of individuals agreeing upon a course of action, but an organic formation under one vital impulse. And further, we have been all made to drink into One Spirit. For there is the taking up on

our part (as we say, subjectively) of this new status, the sinking of our individuality that we might, as members of One Body, be (and no longer regard ourselves as being ought else but) expressive of the life of Christ. Indeed, even as the body of our wonderful Redeemer was the vessel for the expression of the holy and blessed life of Christ in all its gracious and faithful activities on the earth, so is the Church formed as Christ's Body, to be the continuation in His absence of all that He is. The taking up of this wonderful mystery on our part is implied in the drinking into One Spirit. It involves the negation in ourselves and among ourselves of every phase of self-will, of independent action, and all the introductions of the flesh, or the combinations and the suggestions of men after the flesh; and the committal in unqualified complacency to all that the Spirit would produce in us of Christ. The Body is for the expression of the life of Christ. In Corinthians this is taken up on the lines of local responsibility; what is true of the whole Church is to be consistently and locally expressed. And all the detail given in that chapter — foot, hand, ear, eye, nose, head — are such as are necessary to present the picture of a human body and are not such as to present the officials of a Corporation or the Officers in an army.

Ephesians 4 is the part of that Epistle which speaks of Christ as Head, Centre, and Administrator of the whole counsel of God. This particular chapter indicates how the administration is carried on in this present interval in the ways of God. Christ Who descended is now ascended, and is the One Who gave gifts for the perfecting of the saints. But the objects He had in view are the work of the ministry and the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. This administration is continued "till we come . . . to the full grown man"; it is not till we attain the effectiveness of a Corporation nor to the efficiency of a well trained Regiment. His present grace is promotive of stature — the full growth of the body organically considered. Verse 15 is specific in speaking of "growing up to Him in all things which is the Head," and adds that "from Him the whole Body . . . works for itself the increase of the Body unto it self-building up in love." This is by the grace of the Head flowing into the whole Body, fitted together and connected by every joint of supply. Certainly we should not speak of joints in a Corporation nor in a Regiment. The effectual working in its measure of every part is that the Body be well-proportioned, full-grown as to stature, and mature in development.

Col. 2 is part of the Epistle which, while it unfolds the glory and the competency of the Head, connects this with the most blessed teaching as to the fulness which resides in Him. Probably Col. 1: 19, refers to Christ in incarnation, and Col. 2: 9, to Him in resurrection glory. As He is the image of the Invisible God, and in Him we see the concrete, and yet absolutely complete, representation of God — Himself being the Eternal Son and ever dwelling in the Father's love — so the very Creation He has formed is the working out in a material form of all His various glories and wisdom and power as Creator and Sustainer of all. But for the display of His glory in the moral and spiritual sphere He is set forth as solving the tremendous question of good and evil, of death and resurrection, of order and disorder, of need and supply. For while every department of Creation has ever present needs and possesses no resource in itself, "in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"; and from Him — our glorious Head in Whom we are complete and require not to add to Him — rolls down into every part of the universe, old creation and new, all the supply that is demanded, that the purpose of God in creating it may be fulfilled. None save the Church, which is his Body, is at present in the secret; none save His saints can trace their formation or their supplies to Him, none but they in this Dispensation are equipped to respond to God's great design and to use to the full His resources. But again in this connection, in the Pauline use of the word "Body" (Col. 2: 19), we have the Head ministering to all the Body, united together by the joints and bands, and so increasing with the increase of God. This is not the increase of a Regiment which would be by the bringing in of recruits, or the increase of a Corporation which would be by the extension of its boundaries, or by the enlargement of its business. It

is the development of the human frame by nourishment, and the healthy and proportionate growth of the parts, which serve the apostle with language to describe the increase of the Body. Here again the Church (the saints who form the Church) gives the idea of the vessel formed in which are to be set out the graces of Christ. We have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man, it is not that we are new men in this connection, but have put on the new man. We are invested with the moral features of the One Who is hid in God, and Christ is all and in all. The totality of Christ's excellencies and beauties requires the totality of His Body to express them in His absence.

Letter 2.

I see in all those who advocate a general reception of Christians — defective presentation of the Body of Christ. Until deliverance is experimentally known there is no apprehension of what it is to be in the Spirit and not in the flesh. It is urgent for us all to apprehend that a new being, and a new state of being exists. The doctrine of the two natures can be held, and yet the Christian not be in true liberty, so as to take account of himself as judicially free before God, and free in conscience, in respect of the old; able to take cognizance of himself as having died with Christ to sin and being alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 8 proceeds on the assumption that Romans 6 and Romans 7 have been learnt, and is really descriptive of the Christian as a new being in a new state of being. It recognises the old creation around him and his having an old creation body with attendant pressure; but he is viewed as a new being shortly to be conformed even bodily to the glory purposed of God.

It is often pointed out that Romans lays the foundation for the truth that there is one Body. (Romans 12). In the Body of Christ as Scripturally viewed there is no evil nature, there is nothing of the world, there is nothing of man. To get a right view of it we must eliminate from each and every person who is a Christian what he is in nature as a child of Adam. A man may be a Jew by nature, or a sinner of the Gentiles. He may be wise, mighty, high-born, or he may be foolish, weak, despised, a nonentity, in fact, in nature. But all these natural features, good or bad, disappear by the Cross. There is no way into the Body but by the Cross on the one hand (eliminating everything of man after the flesh), and by the baptism of the Spirit on the other (bringing in all that is of the new order of Christ). Eph. 2: 13-16, affirms the first, 1 Cor. 12: 12-13, the second.

It is true in the abstract that members of the Body should be received. Nor need a man's simplicity as a young convert, nor his ignorance as a saint, owing to want of teaching, be a barrier to his reception if there be no will or subtlety in his coming. In view, however, of the phenomenal development of the elements of philosophy and vain deceit (Col. 2: 6-10), there is exclusion of ritualism or of rationalism, there is exclusion of every movement under the Christian Name which is of the tradition of man, or after the elements of the world, and "not after Christ". If I may say so, no more is the Crusader movement after Christ than is the Salvation Army movement as such. We thankfully recognise that every Christian in such associations is, as a Christian, of the Body, but his man-made associations are not; they are "not after Christ."

The truth then that there is one Body, and that all Christians are members of the one Body, can only be spiritually discerned. Any Christian presenting himself for Christian fellowship is possessed of the title as being a Christian to reception; but it is his responsibility when challenged to show that he is not using his title to bring in associations which that very title excludes.

We humbly recognise that the Lord has revived His truth this century past, and that as a remnant were restored to the land, the city, and the house, in Divine providence and mercy in the past dispensation — so God has recovered the distinctive truths of the Head, the Body, the Assembly, for us

in this Dispensation. It has led to a movement of separation from all that is of man in the corrupt state of Christendom and the developing apostacy; every gathering should be satisfied that a man presenting himself for reception furnishes credentials which satisfy them as to their validity. If for example a man be introduced to them by a brother who is known to be careless in his own principles, they may justly demand delay until there he corroboration of his testimony.

Further there are some who are confessedly "out" to destroy all "barriers", as they call them and advocate. not only an unquestioning reception, but a free and easy intercourse with groups, companies, missions, churches, systems, from which the truth that there is One Body when rightly understood and held, has separated us.

I am sure that their confusion arises from ignorance of the Body. Any saint pleading this truth as an excuse for receiving from, or going to, all and sundry, does not recognise that a Divine nature. a Divine formation, is necessarily exclusive. The Body is necessarily exclusive for it is wholly the work of the Spirit of God. It is co-extensive with the new man (Eph. 2: 15-16), and nothing that pertains to the old man can pass the Cross. There is in the Body no barrier against Christians as such, but there is obviously an utter and eternal barrier against the flesh in the Christian. There is the exclusion of legality and exclusion of lawlessness. There is the exclusion of both in order that we may be free to practise what is after Christ. This would be impossible in such associations, and hence the out-movement from them. We must all own to failure in the carrying out of this recognition of the Headship of Christ and the spiritual nature of the Body. But, certainly, recovery does not lie in the reintroduction of the conditions from which the knowledge of the truth delivered us. Care in reception is one of the Scriptural instructions given in the wisdom of God which is our safeguard in these days of wholesale departure. Apostles might come unannounced, but some others need letters of commendation (2 Cor. 3: 1). We are instructed to lay hands suddenly on NO man in Timothy days (1 Tim. 5: 22). How much more need to refuse to do so now. A person coming unannounced to a meeting, his case affording no opportunity for consideration, must respect the exercise of those who care for the purity of their associations and the honour of the Name to which they are gathered. To receive such on his own individual testimony is to disregard every warning of scripture, as, for example, Acts 20: 29-30, 1 Tim. 4: 1-3, 11; 2 Tim. 3: 1-9, Phil. 3: 2, 3, 17-19. Moreover, the more active or prominent a man is in Christian circles, the more incumbent it is to be assured in these days that he is not going to use his inside position for propaganda of principles which we believe to be contrary to the truth which we have learnt.

Referring to "Calling on the Name of the Lord," I have no doubt that it is a term descriptive of Christians as such, in contrast with those who call on other gods. But in a day of ruin we have to deal with those who have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. Hence we can no longer rely upon face values, upon the "ipse dixit" of a person, we are to discover the moral qualifications in others, as well as practise them ourselves, which are spoken of in 2 Tim. 2 ere we can find the fellowship suited to our calling and the path of the Lord for us to-day. No one can deny the difficulties nor lightly speak of the exercises that we face, but to cut the Gordian knot and declare ourselves free to go anywhere where there are Christians, is of course simply to abandon the path of separation to Christ, and to surrender all thought of maintaining the truth of the Assembly so graciously revived for us and so long enjoyed.

Letter 3.

It has been said that the root error of Rome has been to apply to the historical Church on earth the statements of Scripture as to what the church is in the purpose of God.

To put the Romish conception into plain language we may state it thus. The Church is one, and since the Papacy is the only Church which makes even any pretension to unity universal, you must belong to the Romish Church or perish. One Church has only One Head, and since the Pope is the recognised head of that Church, submission to the Pope is incumbent on all its members. In the Church is salvation, out of it damnation.

Such is a legitimate conclusion if their conception of the Church be the truth of God.

I have noticed how very distinctly of late there has been creeping in a tendency to an advanced school of objective thought among Christians, which leads them to apply to Christians in an absolute way what is true of them only in Christ, or as viewed in the Spirit, and in the purpose of God.

For example, take our membership in the Body of Christ. It seems so simple, and is so true, to say that all true Christians are members of the Body of Christ. Yet we need to understand that in the One Body as presented in Scripture there is no flesh, as we speak of the flesh in a believer; and there is nothing of man, as we speak of man after the flesh. All pertaining to man as in Adam, and all pertaining to the believer of inherent sin, has been eliminated by, because judged in, the Cross and death of Christ, and nothing of this enters into the mystical Body of Christ. Members of the Body of Christ? Yes, but only when viewed apart from flesh, or the workings of will, or the innovations of man as distinct from the work of the Spirit of God. We are reconciled to God in one body by the Cross. This rules every element of man out. We are by one Spirit baptized into one body for we have all been made to drink into one Spirit. This brings in all that is of the Spirit's work.

It is obvious then that in speaking of the privileges of Christians as members of the Body of Christ, we must regard ourselves as entitled to those privileges only in so far as we judge ourselves with regard to an independent will, to the workings of the flesh, or to any distinctions which man brings in his intrusive zeal in the things of God. Christians are responsible to recognise in each other only what is of the Spirit of God; certainly not to recognise what is of the flesh, nor of fleshly zeal, nor of man. One who is a true Christian may present himself as a member of the Body of Christ, but we are bound to challenge him if under cover of that privilege he would bring in much that is of man, or flesh, or will.

There is exercise to be cultivated on this line in relation to much of what is true of every Christian. If I take the purpose of God in Eph. 1. "We are chosen in Christ . . . that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Thus is the delightful purpose of God unfolded to us. It is said, "chosen in Him," but "in Him" means the exclusion of all we are in ourselves. As to our historical presence and ways on earth, it is sheer folly to speak of every Christian being holy and blameless. A man must be conscienceless to apply to himself now in an absolute way what is true enough in the purpose of God. When the purpose of God is completed with the Christian, and we are in the place that that purpose has counselled for us, we shall be indeed absolutely so; and the light of that purpose shines upon us to guide our hearts now; but we have to discern the difference between love's purpose for us as seen in Christ and love's work in us now to wean us from all else!

I refer to one thing more. Christians are said in Scripture to be those who call on the Name of the Lord. This is our privilege as Christians. The Christian who calls on anybody else is inconsistent with his position as Christian. But to say that every Christian calls on the Lord out of a pure heart is confounding things that differ. Purification as presented in relation to the heart of a believer is a process. It is not part of his standing, but is connected with his personal state. See 1 John 3: 1-3. If Acts 15: 8-9, be quoted, be it noted that the question in that Chapter is law versus grace and faith. It is shown by Peter that God in His sovereignty did not employ any injunctions of law on circumcision to effect

the change that had come over them, but that on the principle of belief of the Gospel, and through the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, they were saved and delivered from the impurities of their former lives, and their former national disqualifications. That every Christian will be pure in heart to see God goes without saying. To say that every Christian is pure in heart now is to say that every Christian is holy and without blame now; it is a blind surrender to the holiness by faith doctrine.

It is admittedly difficult in these days — not to find Christians, for Christians there are in tens of thousands in our land, but — to secure any definite concrete number of Christians all of whom have pure hearts. Yet difficult as it is, and more difficult as it must become, such when discoverable are to be acknowledged as our companions in the path of today. We certainly shall not discover them all; we may be disappointed in some of whom we hoped much, but with them we are to follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace. This path will still require patience with some who oppose every demand for consistency with the truth, and ability to teach positively what we trust will produce consistency; but these four do not include self-will, expediency, laxity or acquiescence in what is contrary to holiness and truth. Calling on the Lord implies quiet holy reference to Him in every matter and in every contingency, and not turning to man or men. They who, being separated unto Christ nominally, and in the circle where the whole truth is welcomed, run away from difficulties and form for themselves another path, or join themselves to another company, may escape exercise, but it is not calling on the Name of the Lord.

Ever yours, W. H. Westcott.