

XI. THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE

(A) HOW IT COMES TO THE SOUL

THE ground of the map is now sketched in. The end of the road of life is Heaven, and death is a gateway on the road. God has given us means of knowing all that mass of Truth by which we know what God and man are, what life and death mean, what conduct will bring man to heaven. Yet truth and law by themselves do not say all. Man's destiny is above his nature and therefore nothing in his nature will fit him for it. Something must be added to his nature to elevate it. Since what he has to do is to live the life of heaven—a life which his nature as such does not possess the power to live—he must receive the necessary powers from outside. And, as we have seen, he must receive them in this life. These powers, which enable the soul to live a life above its nature, flow from the possession of the Supernatural Life. In this chapter and the next, the Supernatural Life will be discussed. In this, the main question will be the way in which the soul receives it: in the next, the question will be what its effects are in the soul.

First, then, as to the way the soul receives it. In an earlier chapter, our Lord's phrase "I am the Life"

was worked out fully. Here I shall repeat the main points very briefly. If Christ *is* the Life, then *He* must live in us: and that He really does so, St. Paul bears witness when He says "I live, yet now not I, but Christ liveth in me." The idea of one being living in another is already familiar to us in the case of the cells of the body: here the cells are living cells: yet they live not with some independent life of their own but with the life of the whole body. The cells of my body live with my life: it is I that live in them. This is shown to be more than a suggestive comparison by St. Paul's clear working out of the idea of the Church as Christ's body. The Church is a body, a living thing, united to Christ as really as His natural body was upon this earth. He is the Head, the directing principle, union with which is a condition of life in the Body: and every member of the Church is a cell in the body and, as such, lives with the life of Christ, whose Body the Church is. This membership of Christ's Body—what we call incorporation with Christ—is the condition on which He can live in us. Only if we are members of a Church thus vitally united with Him does His life flow through us.

We are incorporated—built into the Mystical Body—by baptism. We speak of baptism as a re-birth, a being born again. And rightly. Birth means entry into life. By birth we enter into the life of man. By re-birth we enter into the life of Christ: equally the life of Christ enters into us. Thus Our Lord Himself

A MAP OF LIFE

says of baptism: "Unless a man be *born again* of water and the Holy Ghost, he shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

PRAYER

Now the very first condition of human life, whether in the Body or out of it, is prayer. Prayer is simply the directing of life to God. Of prayer, thus understood, the most direct form is the turning of the soul to God that it may speak to Him. This is not, as is sometimes thought, the whole of prayer, since every action of a life directed to God is a prayer. The proportion between this more direct form of prayer which consists in speaking to God and the less direct form which consists in work done for God's glory, is different for different men according to God's special will for each. At one end is the contemplative life, which is almost wholly direct prayer: at the other end is the active life, but this can and should be prayer also. In any case, if direct speaking to God is not the whole of prayer, it is prayer at its highest, and must underlie all the rest. What have men to say to God? Endless things. But they may be grouped under four headings.

There is first adoration. It is of the nature of an intelligent being to honour excellence. God is supreme excellence and man's intellect is therefore false to itself if it denies Him its homage. Second, there is thanksgiving: we owe all things whatsoever

to God and the failure to acknowledge it is literally fraudulent. Third, there is sorrow for sin. Fourth, there is petition—asking for things—spiritual and material, for ourselves and others. Mere petition, without the other three elements, is a poor shadow of prayer. With them it is an act of real enrichment to the soul: since it expresses not only a right relation of man to God, but a right relation of our wishes to God's will: man is sufficiently certain of God's love to ask for what he wants: sufficiently certain, also, to be assured that God will not grant him what he wants if it would be against his truest interests.

Prayer, thus understood in its fourfold subject-matter, may also be considered with regard to its *mode*. It must primarily be in the soul: if it is not an act of the knowledge and love of man's soul, then it is of no value at all. But, thus rooted and grounded in the soul, it will make a twofold use of the body. First, the body affects the soul; second, the soul expresses itself through the body. As an example of the body affecting the soul, a crucifix seen by the eye may help to fix the soul in meditation upon Calvary. As an example of the soul expressing itself through the body, a man meditating upon Calvary and so coming to see the horror of his own sinfulness in the light of the love of God, may find relief to the power of his soul's sorrow by falling on his knees or striking his breast. In a full life of prayer, then, the body will not be excluded. But there is a *third* thing. Man is not an isolated unit, but a being linked by

his very nature to other men. He owes his coming into existence to a man and a woman: he owes his continuance in existence, the development of his powers of mind and body, the full life of his emotions, to a certain co-operation with others. If prayer is to be a directing of his life to God, this necessary social element in his nature must not be excluded: otherwise there would be a whole side of his nature not consecrated to God. Therefore not only must he pray for his fellow-men, he must from time to time join with them in the worship of God. The man who never goes to church is not merely dispensing with a particular piece of ceremonial. He is refusing to join his fellows in God's worship.

This rough analysis of prayer—into the four kinds of things to be said to God and the three ways of saying them—does, as has already been noted, apply to all men, whether in the Church or out of it, whether aware or unaware of any revelation of God to man. It is an analysis based upon the very nature of God and man and is therefore of universal application. But it has special application to the Catholic. For his knowledge of God in Christ our Lord gives him all the more reason for adoration and thanksgiving and sorrow, all the more confidence in petition; and in every part of his prayer, a true ground of intimacy and personal contact. The use of the soul in prayer is the same for him as for all men; the use of the body is greater since he knows that God took to Himself not only a human soul but a human

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body too; and the social element in prayer is inevitably stronger with men who realize that they are not only in a loose sense members of the human race, but in a strict sense cells of one living body, and so joined, not only to Christ but to all others, living and dead, who are likewise cells of the Mystical Body of Christ.

There is not only a prayer of the individual cell but a prayer of the whole body. And if for its own individual prayer the cell uses the life of the whole body, equally it joins in the prayer of the whole body and so makes it its own.

THE MASS

What, then, is this prayer of the whole body? Obviously it must be the prayer of the Head, of Him whose body it is: that is, it must be the prayer of Christ. Here again we come to something of quite vital importance for the understanding of the Catholic scheme of life. There is a powerful phrase in the Epistle to the Hebrews which may serve as a starting point for thought, "Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us." This involves several things: (1) Christ is in Heaven, at the right hand of the Father. (2) His intercession for us is not a thing done upon Calvary once and for all, but a continuous thing, a thing that never ceases. In other words, Christ in Heaven is unceasingly making intercession for us. (3) But the basis of Our Lord's

intercession is Calvary. That is what He is offering to His Father on our behalf. Therefore, Christ in Heaven is continuously offering His own death upon Calvary to His Father on our behalf. That is the prayer of Christ Himself.

The prayer of His Body is an earthly participation in that. The smallest individual prayer of every member of the Body is joined with, flows into, Our Lord's continuous offering of Calvary: that, indeed, is the meaning of the phrase "through Jesus Christ our Lord," which is affixed in so many words to some of our prayers and belongs in idea to all of them. As with the individual prayer of the members, so with the prayer of the whole Body: it is a joining up with the continuous offering of Christ.

That being so, it is not surprising that it should find its highest point in the Mass, which is the exact projection here upon earth of the continuous offering in heaven. This truth is worth stating with some precision. In heaven, as we have seen, Our Lord unceasingly offers Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, for all men. In the Mass Our Lord offers Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, for all men.

First, it is Our Lord that makes the offering. He is acting through His Mystical Body as though through His natural body: it is therefore *His* offering, the Body simply being the instrument He uses: thus every member of the Church is joined in the offering: but certain special members, the priests, have been given

by God special powers enabling them to act for the Body. They are, in a sense, the immediate instrument. Thus three truths must be kept in mind: (1) Christ is the chief priest, offering Himself by His own power; (2) the priest offers for the people by power granted him by Christ; (3) the people offer Christ's sacrifice through the priest.

Second. It is Himself that Our Lord is offering at Mass. On the night before His death, Our Lord, at supper with His apostles, took bread and consecrated it so that, while retaining the appearance of bread, it ceased to be bread and became His body, His real body, the body in which He walked the earth and was nailed upon the Cross. Likewise, He took wine and consecrated it so that, while retaining the appearance of wine, it ceased to be wine, and became His blood. He gave His body to the apostles to eat and His blood to drink. And all that He had done, He empowered them to do. The apostles passed on the power, and to this day, in the Mass, the priests of the Church consecrate bread and wine so that they become the body and blood of Christ. And because the body is the body of the *living* Christ, where the body is, there is the living Christ in his totality—Man and God. And equally, where the blood is, there is the living Christ in His totality. At Mass the priest (acting as an instrument in the hands of Christ) offers Christ thus totally present. In other words, at the altar Christ is offering Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary,

but now ever living: just as in Heaven He continuously offers Himself, the Victim slain upon Calvary, but now ever living. The Mass is really Heaven as it were breaking through to earth to be seen of men.

But the priest does not only consecrate: he consumes: he receives Our Lord, whole and living, into his body just as the apostles did. And the congregation likewise may receive Him. This is Communion, the Blessed Eucharist, receiveth Christ Himself into ourselves. "He that eateth Me, the same shall live by Me." The members of Christ's Mystical Body have as their proper food nothing less than Christ Himself—"the Life." Other food gives life: this food *is* life.

Our situation as Catholics may be seen in its simplest elements. By baptism we are built into the Body of Christ, and as cells in the Body we are able to live with the life of the Body. The condition of all life in God is prayer: our prayer in the Body culminates in the supreme prayer of the Mass: and from the Mass we receive Christ Himself to be the food of our life in the Body. Communion, then, is God's supreme gift to us upon earth. Everything in our life is vitalized by it. Baptism leads up to it, everything else flows from it.

THE SACRAMENTS

But there are other ways in which the life of Christ flows to the individual cell. Beside Baptism and the

Blessed Eucharist Our Lord instituted five other sacraments.

First a word as to sacraments. These are material things which are by God's power made to convey grace—or life—to the soul. We say of them that they are symbols, differing from other symbols in that they actually effect what they symbolize. Thus baptism—with its pouring of water on the body—is a symbol of cleansing, and it does cleanse the soul. The other five sacraments are Confirmation, Penance, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction.

A very brief word of these individually: Confirmation and Holy Orders are linked with Baptism in that they can only be received once, because, as it is phrased, they confer a character on the soul; which means that they confer some share in the priesthood of Our Lord. Baptism makes a man a member of Christ: Confirmation gives him the right and the duty to defend the Mystical Body of Christ: Holy Orders makes him a priest, confers upon him among other things the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, and to absolve from sin. The fullness of the priesthood is in the bishop, who has certain further powers, including those of confirming and ordaining. But whether priest or bishop, the point to be held firmly is that the man is not acting of himself, but of his own will gives himself to be used as an instrument by Christ. What is done through him, Christ does and no other: so that his moral character, whatever effect it may have on his own

salvation, has no effect at all on the sacramental work Christ uses him to do. To hold otherwise would actually be to place a man between us and God. If his moral character could affect the grace we receive, then it would be in some way derived from the priest and not wholly from God.*

Of the others, *Penance* is the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins. A man receives the Supernatural Life at Baptism, he can lose it only by a deliberate act of rebellion against God—what is called a mortal sin: mortal because it brings death: for death is the loss of life and by mortal sin the soul loses the Supernatural Life. The life thus lost is regained when we

* There are two truths that must be seen in proper relation: (1) the priest is simply an instrument in the hands of Christ: yet (2) as minister of the sacrament he must have the right intention. According to the first, the sacrament does not flow from the priest but from Christ and the sacrament is not affected in the faintest way by the priest's character—neither gaining from his holiness nor suffering loss from his sins. According to the second, the priest, simply withholding his intention, can prevent the sacrament from taking place. The priest's character cannot affect the sacrament, yet his intention can. At first sight this may seem a contradiction. But it is not so. The priest is an instrument: that is, he gives certain of his human acts, and these are used by God as channels of grace. But for a complete human act, intention is necessary. The act a man does not intend cannot be called his act at all. Therefore if a priest has the true intention, God uses him—as an *instrument*, God doing the work. But if the priest withholds his intention, God cannot use him as a sacramental instrument, and nothing happens at all.

The question "How can a bad priest administer a sacrament?" misses the point. In this sense there is no such thing as a bad priest. There are priests who are bad men, just as there are doctors who are bad men. But as one only calls a man a bad doctor if he practises medicine badly, so one can only call a man a bad priest if he does his work badly. But, in the case in point, priestly work consists simply in giving certain of his acts which can be used by God sacramentally. Provided he does this, he does all that the holiest man can do. If he does not do this, there is no sacrament at all.

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receive the sacrament of Penance, when, that is, with true sorrow for having offended God, we confess our sins to His priest, and from the priest, as God's instrument, receive God's forgiveness and the return of the Supernatural Life to the soul.

Matrimony is the sacrament of the entry upon the married state. When two people marry, they take each other as husband and wife for life—this, whether they are baptized or not. If they are baptized, then their marriage is a sacrament—a means whereby God's grace flows to their souls to give them the aids they need for the sanctification of their life together and the overcoming of such difficulties as may arise in it. It is to be noted that the priest does not administer this sacrament to the parties, they administer it to each other.

Extreme Unction, the Last Anointing, is the sacrament for grievous illness and the danger of death.

But all these other sacraments draw their efficacy from their relation to the central sacrament, the Blessed Eucharist. And this is not a mere chance. Prayer and the sacraments are both means of life. In prayer man approaches God. In the sacraments God approaches man. But both culminate in the same point. For the highest prayer is the Mass, and the highest sacrament is the Eucharist. Thus at the point where man's approach to God reaches its uttermost intensity, God's response is at its most measureless richness.

It is to be noted in the sacramental system how

closely God has followed the lines of human life. *First*, observe that the very nature of the sacrament is a representation of the nature of man: man is the union of a body and soul, that is, of matter and spirit: God chooses to act upon him by means which are likewise a union of matter and spirit.

Second, observe that the sacraments bear the same relation to life as a glove to the hand—they are made to fit it. The natural life of man has certain fixed points: he is born, grows to manhood, marries or becomes a priest, dies. Roughly corresponding to these five points are five sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony or Holy Orders, Extreme Unction. Beyond these five points there are two things to be considered: man sins, and for that there is the sacrament of Penance: and running through all is daily life—and for that there is the appropriate food, the Blessed Eucharist. Thus provision is made for man's sanctification not only in his individual life, but also in his relation to the community—on its social side by Matrimony, on its religious side by Holy Orders.

Third, observe that the sacraments are built upon the natural life in still another way: they make use of four everyday things—bread, water, wine, oil—and two everyday situations—the exercise of authority and marriage. Now to these four common things and two common situations, the natural life might be reduced in its simplest elements.

Throughout, then, the sacramental system is a

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reminder of two things: (1) that matter and spirit are not eternally at enmity, but that matter may be the vehicle of spirit—a truth taught at its very highest in the fact of the Incarnation itself, when God took to Himself a human body and made it as His own;* (2) that the Supernatural Life does not abolish the natural life and take its place, but enters into the natural life and supernaturalizes it.

Here then is man: a member of Christ's Mystical Body by baptism, open to the inpouring of the Supernatural Life.

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY GHOST

But there is another great truth about man's membership of the Mystical Body. Our Lord, while constantly speaking of Himself, as the Life, also speaks of the Holy Ghost whom He is to send, and associates Him most intimately with the continuing work of man's salvation. St. Paul speaks almost interchangeably of life in Christ and life in the Holy Spirit. When Christ promised to live in us, something more was involved than our sharing

* This consecration of matter, seen in the Incarnation and in the Church's Sacraments, is carried to its furthest conclusion in the Church's practice with regard to what is called Sacramentals. These, unlike the Sacraments, are not instituted by Our Lord, but by the Church. Yet they follow from Our Lord's own practice. As He blessed bread before He ate it, so the Church blesses the material things man uses in his daily life: and further attaches her blessing to material things (as in Holy Water) and material actions (as in the sign of the Cross) which man may use in his prayer. In all these cases material things are brought into the full stream of the Church's prayer and so into a special relationship with God.

the life of His human nature. For He was God. And, therefore, since we are united organically with Christ as Head, we are indwelt by the Blessed Trinity. But we have already seen the principle of appropriation by which the works of sanctification are especially associated with the Holy Ghost. It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that God became man in His mother's womb: and it is by the power of the Holy Ghost that man is re-born into the Mystical Body—"unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." When He was giving his apostles the power to forgive sins, He breathed upon them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost": the Holy Ghost came upon the Apostles in the Upper Room and sent them forth for the conversion of the world: by Christ's own word, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter was to abide with His Church. Everything the Church does for the sanctification of its individual member, every step that a member takes in supernatural development, is attributed to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

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A. HOW IT COMES TO THE SOUL

Discussion Aids

Review the map of life as far as it has been sketched in. Is man's destiny above his nature? Has he any powers in himself by which he may reach that destiny? How may a soul live a life above its nature, that is, what power must be added to it from outside itself? What is this power? (Review the Supernatural Life in Chapter III). What is meant by our Lord's phrase, "I am the Life"? What experience that we all have makes us familiar with the idea of living in another? Does this experience help to clarify St. Paul's idea of the Church as Christ's Body? Elaborate this idea of St. Paul's. How are we incorporated, or built into, the Mystical Body?

Prayer

What is the condition of all life in God? In general terms, what is prayer? What do we mean by the more direct form of prayer? the less direct form? Classify and justify prayer in its four-fold

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subject matter. What do we mean by the *mode* of prayer? How is the body concerned in prayer? What obligation in prayer has man as a social being? Is prayer a matter that concerns only the Catholic? Discuss. Discuss prayer in relation to the Mystical Body.

The Mass

What is the prayer of the whole body? Note St. Paul's pronouncement in Hebrews, "Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us." What three considerations does it involve? How is the prayer of His Body a participation in this prayer of Christ? What is the connection between the Mass and St. Paul's teaching that "He ever liveth to make intercession for us"? What precisely is the Mass? Who makes the offering? Whose offering is it? What instrument does the Offerer use? Who are joined in the offering? Who act for the Body? Summarize in three points. Describe exactly what happens at Mass. Sum up our situation as Catholics, emphasizing especially our reception of the Supernatural Life and the nourishment of that Life in us.

The Sacraments

What are sacraments? How do they differ from other symbols? Name the sacraments. Which ones can be received only once? What is the character which these three confer on the soul? Define the

DISCUSSION OUTLINE FOR A MAP OF LIFE

nature of the priesthood that each of these three confers on the soul? What two tremendous powers, among others, does the last of these three confer? Who possesses the fullness of the priesthood? How do you distinguish between the man and the office in the priesthood? Discuss fully. Give a full definition of Penance. Define Matrimony. Who is the minister of the sacrament of Matrimony? What is Extreme Unction for? From what central sacrament do the other sacraments draw their efficacy? What is the highest prayer? the highest sacrament? Discuss the three points in which the sacramental system follows the lines of human life. Discuss the friendship between matter and spirit as shown in the sacramental system, and that between the natural and the Supernatural Life. In what way have we seen that man becomes capable of receiving the inpouring of the Supernatural Life?

The Indwelling of the Holy Ghost

Discuss the Holy Ghost in His association with the continuing work of man's salvation, remarking on St. Paul's teaching in the matter and giving scriptural passages quoted in the text. What power in the development of our Supernatural Life is attributed to the Holy Ghost?

Practice: Work manfully at the task of uprooting your bad habits that you may have a greater inpouring of the Supernatural Life. Make the Holy Ghost a partner in your efforts.