

The Mystical Body of Christ in the Spirituality of the Legion of Mary

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The prayer for the beatification of the Servant of God Frank Duff begins as follows: 'God Our Father, You inspired your servant Frank Duff with a profound insight into the mystery of your Church, the Body of Christ and of the place of Mary the Mother of Jesus in this mystery.' There can be no doubt about the truth of the assessment of Frank Duff in this prayer. He loved the Church with his whole being and lived his life in and for her. His vision of the Church was pivotal for him and the Legion of Mary which he founded. For him the Church is a Person. It is the Risen Lord living and acting in his Body the Church. It is in and through and with the Church that he and we legionaries find Jesus. This is truly one of the deepest insights of his life and it is the central truth in the doctrinal and practical life of the Legion. Inseparably connected to this insight is his total conviction concerning the place of Mary in this mystery of the Body of Christ.

There are many different images of the Church in both the old and new testaments, in the time of prophecy and in the time of fulfilment. But the image that meant most to Frank Duff and the Legion is the image of the Body of Christ. I have not found in any of his writings or spoken words concepts like the institutional church or the charismatic church so popular in much post-Conciliar discussion. He does accept the Church as a visible society which was a common understanding of the Church in the pre-Conciliar era but he goes well beyond it. He says: 'it would be inadequate to regard the Church as merely a visible society, gifted with infallibility. It is that. It is visible. It is a visible society with its rulers, its laws, its membership and is gifted with that tremendous prerogative. But it is almost infinitely more.' What is this unimaginable more which is the Church? It is the real presence of the Risen Lord living among us and continuing his redemptive mission in all its rich facets in and through us his members. That is the tremendous truth at the heart of our Faith. One cannot separate Christ from His Body, the Church.

When our Lord said that he would be with us always until the end of the world he kept that promise in several ways. He is profoundly with us by his real presence in the Eucharist and the

other sacraments; he is present in the sacrament of Sacred Scripture and especially in his Church. He abides in us and we abide in Him. We live the same life, He is the Vine and we are the branches or in the image which Frank Duff particularly loves in common with St. Paul, we are one Body, Christ is the Head and we are his members. Christ puts everything he is and possesses at our disposal and we are invited to make our own contribution to the life of His Body. And our contribution is indispensable in God's divine arrangement of things for the continuing implementation of the redemptive mission of Christ.

The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ has so many profound consequences and applications. Let us consider just one here, namely, the relationship of the Mystical Body to the nature of the apostolate which is so central to Legion spirituality and life. Let us explain it in the words of our Founder: 'Now I have said that apostleship depends on this doctrine of the Mystical Body. With that idea taken away, what is apostleship? You and I going out to other people in our own feebleness, trying to tell them something about the Lord and His way. Not at all! It is the Lord going out in us, which is a different thing altogether. The Head depends on its members. If they do not lend themselves to Him, His purposes are frustrated and, on the other hand, without Him, we are nothing and we can do nothing. With Him we can literally do all things. Life becomes an adventure comparable to Christ's own life on earth. If Our Lord is carrying on His life in the Mystical Body, His full life, just as He lived it on earth, though the form seems different, then we should find in that body the exhibition of all His special features. His apostolate is one of them.' The apostolate of the Legion in all its extraordinary variety is nothing else but the apostolate of the Risen Lord working itself out in and through us His members.

Dear Legionaries, we have lost all right to any form of pessimism or to put it more positively, we are called to habitual hope and joy. Why? Because the Risen Christ is always living in us and with us in His Body the Church. The powers of evil and our own human weakness may seem to have smashed us to smithereens but that is only an appearance because Christ is really present in and with us and He has the last word. With Our Lord we can do all things. With him nothing is impossible.