

THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

BY

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.



It is the seraphim alone who can utter the name of God: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of Hosts; all the earth is full of his glory'. Before him no man can come face to face and live. The divine mystery is first of all God himself: infinite unutterable, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet it is God, whom no man has seen at any time, who has become man, manifesting in his human flesh the divinity that is hidden from our eyes. It is in Christ that the divine mystery is revealed. His suffering and death, his resurrection and his ascension, are not only truths to be believed: they mark the salvific work of Christ in which we are to be incorporated. 'For to me to live is Christ'. And the mystery of Christ is dispensed now by the Church that is his Body. Christ lives in the Church: redemption is re-enacted in the Church's worship, and pre-eminently in the sacrifice of the Mass. So it is that St Ambrose can say: *In tuis te invenio sacramentis*. We find Christ in the mysteries of the Church, the sacraments. In them and through them flows the life of grace, the life that is a sharing in the very mystery of the life of God himself.

Such is the theme of Dom Odo Casel's *Mystère du Culte dans le Christianisme*,¹ a book that notably reflects the liturgical scholarship which has made famous the name of Maria-Laach. There is nothing novel here, but a great deal that is new in the sense of the 'new and living way' of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'which he hath dedicated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh. The recovery of the Christian mystery—seeing the whole world as the arena of God's will and man as destined for eternity—is nothing less than becoming 'in Christ a new creature'. And the mystery is one and total, co-extensive with redemption itself. The Church is its instrument, fulfilling in her liturgy the work confided to her, the Bride of Christ. And the dynamic core of that work is the *mysterium fidei* of the Mass: it is to the Church that our Lord has entrusted the re-enactment of his sacrifice to the Father. 'Do this for a commemoration of me.' Throughout all ages the redemptive power of Calvary is made available to men; not merely in a symbol, in a gesture, but deeply in a mystery. The mystery is not the grafting of a new life on to the old: it is a new creation. The old unregenerate self must die, and the new life comes pouring in from the streams of living water whose source is Christ our Lord upon the Cross. And all this is achieved

¹ Editions du Cerf; Blackfriars; 7s. 6d.

in the Church, is achieved in us as members of the Church. So it is that the liturgy is not an optional mode of worship. It is rather the expression of the mystery of Christ in the Church; rather it is the mystery of Christ made available in his Mystical Body. St Paul can call the Church simply by the name of 'Christ': 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' cries our Lord from heaven, identifying himself with the Church, his Body.

The life of the Church is the life of Christ, and to grow in the one is to grow in the other. Thus, deriving its power from the divine Redeemer himself, the Church 'makes increase of the body unto the building up of itself in charity'. Every detail of the Church's worship looks to that identity with Christ for its context. The cycle of the seasons of the year, the very days as they pass, the faculties of voice and gesture, sight and sound and smell—all are caught up and transformed and have their part in the mystery of Christ living in the Church. And Sunday, the Lord's Day, has a special meaning here. A recent *Cahier de la Vie Spirituelle*,² devoted to 'The Eighth Day', powerfully reveals the significance of the day that is set aside for God alone. Here the seventh day of Creation, the sabbath rest of God, is recalled; but the sabbath has given place to the day of resurrection, the first day of the new creation achieved by the resurrection of Christ. To the Fathers even this idea was not enough, and the 'eighth day' expressed for them the day that is altogether out of the earthly sequence of time. For Sunday is above all else the day that looks to eternity, the day of anticipation 'until he come'.

Sunday is the day of meeting, when the Christian family gathers about the altar to unite in offering sacrifice to God. The legalised 'obligation' of being present at Mass on Sunday, the prohibition of 'servile' work, in fact all the disciplinary life of the Church finds its meaning here at the altar where the Christian mystery is proclaimed, renewed, shared. The obligations of the Christian transcend the reluctant service of a slave: they are the cords that bind him to the community to which he belongs. They too mirror the mystery of Christ, who 'whereas indeed he was the Son of God, learned obedience by the things which he suffered'. The joy of resurrection, of the new creation which Sunday declares, extends to the whole of life. And Sunday is the still centre where the Christian mystery is to be sought in the fulness of its power to heal, to reconcile, to bring men to God.

The tragedy is that the children of God are too rarely aware of their inheritance. The weight of habit hangs dismally about a duty

² Cerf; Blackfriars; 4s. 6d.

that should be all joy and light and life. It is idle to look for a conscious sharing in the mystery of Christ until Christ himself be known and loved. And the Church's work is precisely ordained to that: the infinite richness of the life of grace; the redemptive work of the sacraments accompanying us from birth to death, cleansing, feeding, restoring, building up the members of the Body to the stature of Christ its Head—all this, once again, is Christ's work achieved through the mystery that is his.

The *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, which is doing so much in France to restore the sense of membership of the Church as demanding an active participation in her life of worship, has recently published (in the *Fêtes et Saisons* series) an illustrated album devoted to the Mass,³ which perfectly expresses in a practical and most readable form the idea which animates Dom Casel's great book. One might wish that priests everywhere should consider this lively plea for the Mass to become once more in ordinary Catholic life a publicly, popularly uttered sharing in the supreme mystery of Christ our Lord.

O B E D I E N C E

BY

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Hoc est enim corpus meum



HE human body formed by the Holy Ghost in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mother, and the mystical body which she brought forth by her travail on Calvary are both alike the body of the Incarnate Word. Indeed, one may say in a sense that the human body was assumed for the sake of the mystical body so that the mystical body could also be formed; just as, according to St Thomas, the first effect of the Sacrament of the holy Eucharist, of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ on the altar, is the unity of the mystical body. Therefore the members of the mystical body are likened to the members of Christ's physical body, his hands and feet, etc. and therefore they must serve his purposes, be used in his work in the same way, and, if completely united to him, to the same extent as were his other members.

By the disobedience of one man sin had entered the world, and such was the injury done thereby to the infinite purity and majesty of God that a reparation and a satisfaction which would be at once *de condigno* and *de congruo*, adequate and fitting, could only be

³ Cerf; Blackfriars; 1s. 0d.