

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Scripture* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_scripture-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_scripture-01.php)

# Scripture

THE QUARTERLY OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION

VOLUME XV

APRIL 1963

No 30

## PAUL'S VISION OF THE CHURCH IN 'EPHESIANS'

Today the trend toward a strong realism in explaining Paul's theme of the Church as the Body of Christ seems to have gained a very wide acceptance among exegetes, Catholic and Protestant alike. Far from interpreting it as a mere metaphor signifying the collectivity of Christians as an organisation, Pauline scholars explain it as a literal designation of the risen Christ in all his concrete reality. Mgr Cerfaux affirms again and again that for Paul Christians do not form a 'moral body,' a 'mystical Christ,' but rather belong to the real organism of his risen person.<sup>1</sup> And Professor Robinson, in his fully rounded coverage of this theme, emphasises that Paul's 'underlying conception is not of a supra-personal collective, but of a specific personal organism.' The Church for Paul 'is in fact no other than the glorified body of the risen and ascended Christ.'<sup>2</sup>

The position of the Dominican scholar, Pierre Benoit, is essentially that of Robinson and Cerfaux: the Body of Christ for Paul is not a supra-personal collectivity but the full organism of the real historical body-person who rose from the tomb and now reigns gloriously in heaven.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the only objection today to this realistic thesis seems to be from those who argue not from exegesis but from the apparent lack of harmony between such an understanding of Paul and the fuller theological development found in the Fathers and especially in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*. These objections, however, seem to be merely an example of what has already occurred frequently enough: a simple misunderstanding on the part of theologians of thought patterns discovered by the exegetes.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lucien Cerfaux, *La Théologie de l'Église suivant saint Paul*, 2e éd., Paris 1948, pp. 206-209, 210, 212, 254, 259

<sup>2</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body*, London 1952, p. 51

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Benoit, 'Corps, Tête et Plérôme dans les Épîtres de la Captivité,' *Revue Biblique*, LXIII (1956), pp. 7-12, 20-1

<sup>4</sup> For example, Th. Zapelena, 'Vos Estis Corpus Christi,' *Verbum Domini*, xxxvii (1959), pp. 78-95, 162-70. A clear reply to Zapelena as well as an excellent statement of the relationship between Paul and *Mystici Corporis* has been given by J. Havet, 'La Doctrine Paulinienne du "Corps du Christ"', *Essai de Mise au Point*, *Littérature et Théologie Pauliniennes*, Louvain 1960, pp. 186-216.

Along with this wide agreement regarding the realism of Paul's theme of the Body of Christ, there is also general acceptance of the fact that the Epistle to the Ephesians represents the deepest and most profound development of Paul's thought on the Church. It is this development of Paul's thought and its implications for our own outlook which we wish to examine in this article.

At the end of the major epistles, says Cerfaux, the thought of Paul is that all Christians as a group, in so far as they are a spiritual organism, are mystically identified with the Body of Christ. It would be to go beyond the bounds of Paul's thought in these letters, he continues, either to identify this organism with the Person of Christ or to speak of a 'Mystical Body' of Christ as a collective person which forms the Church.<sup>1</sup> This is also the conclusion of Benoit.<sup>2</sup> In the key texts of I Cor. 12 and Rom. 12 Paul concentrates on the fact that every Christian is united really and corporally to the risen Body of Christ. Within this limited thought pattern Paul can only say that all Christians together must be the Body of Christ. How this is possible is simply not his concern at this point. In the captivity epistles, however, there appears quite suddenly a totally new dimension. To appreciate fully what this new dimension is and its effects on Paul's conception of the Church, it would be well firstly to review the two sources of Paul's thinking on the Body of Christ, and secondly to indicate some of the events in Paul's own life which most likely contributed to the development and precision of his thought.

With Professor Robinson and Fr Benoit we can discern two ideas constantly governing Paul's treatment of the Body theme. First of all, because he is a Hebrew writing on religious themes, Paul uses the word 'body' not as a neutral element in the body-soul composite of Greek anthropology, but rather as an animated and corporeal person, whose thoughts and desires are contained and revealed under the sensible aspect of bodily experience.<sup>3</sup> Or to look at it from another viewpoint, because Paul is a Hebrew 'he cannot imagine a man without his body, and therefore associates the body with the whole work of man's ultimate salvation.'<sup>4</sup> Using the word 'body' in a religious context, the Hebrew mentality includes in that term the whole person, with emphasis on what is sensible and somatic.

The second concept influencing Paul's thought, one quite familiar

<sup>1</sup> Cerfaux, *op. cit.* p. 215. See also the excellent study of the major epistles by Barnabas Mary Ahern, 'The Christian's Union with the Body of Christ in Cor., Gal. and Rom.,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* xxxiii (1961), pp. 199-209.

<sup>2</sup> Benoit, *art. cit.*, pp. 13-18

<sup>3</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-8; Ahern, *art. cit.*, p. 200

<sup>4</sup> Benoit, *art. cit.*, p. 18

to the Old Testament, is that of the corporate personality. According to this theory the Semites conceived their nation or community, including its past, present and future members, as a single individual, who could be represented in turn by any one member of the nation. As a result there was frequently a natural oscillation in speech between group and individual, as can be seen for example in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah. Originating most probably from the role of the chief in Israel's tribal life, this concept is most important for understanding Paul's presentation of Christ as the new Adam who died and rose again with vicarious efficacy.<sup>1</sup>

These two concepts are quite sufficient for understanding Paul's teaching, nor is it necessary to think of the Body theme as ambiguous or, as some have done, to search for its source in the Persian myth of celestial man.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that there was no influence on Paul's thought from the doctrine of the Eucharistic Body of Christ. On the contrary, in 1 Cor. 10:17 Paul himself directly grounds the unity of the Church on the Eucharist: 'The one bread makes us one body, though we are many in number; the same bread is shared by all.' Such an emphasis, moreover, highlights again the intense realism of Paul's concept of 'Body of Christ'; in so far as the Christian community feeds on the body and blood of Christ, it actually becomes the glorified body of the risen and ascended Christ. But as Robinson points out, there is a jump here from 'feeding on' to 'becoming' which is taken by no other New Testament writer, all of whom must have been as familiar with the words of institution as Paul himself. The Eucharist, therefore, however significant it may have been for Paul's theology of the Body, is in no sense a full explanation of its development. Some prior experience is necessary to explain the jump in thought just indicated, and this experience Robinson places on the Damascus road. 'The appearance on which Paul's whole faith and apostleship was founded was the revelation of the resurrection Body of Christ, not as an individual but as the Christian community.'<sup>3</sup>

With these two main sources of Paul's thought in mind, we may now look briefly at the experiences which Paul himself underwent between the time he wrote Romans, probably in the winter of A.D. 57-8 and his arrival in Rome in the spring of 61, where he was

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Robinson, 'The Hebrew Concept of the Corporate Personality,' *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments*, ed. by J. Hempel, Berlin 1936, pp. 58ff. Also A. Feuillet, 'Mort du Christ et mort du Chrétien d'après les épîtres pauliniennes,' *Revue Biblique* LXXVI (1959), pp. 483-7.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Wikenhauser, *Die Kirche als der mystische Lieb Christi nach dem Apostel Paulus*, Münster 1940, pp. 232-40. cf. Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 58. This is one of Robinson's most interesting hypotheses.

to write the captivity epistles. In the first place, during these years Paul must have been impressed with the phenomenon of the Church, successfully organised in many places under its own hierarchy, yet very consciously united with the mother-church in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these were years of suffering and danger and finally imprisonment for Paul. His life was threatened by the Jews at Corinth, Jerusalem and during his more than two years' captivity in Caesarea.<sup>2</sup> The long journey to Rome, lasting all winter, brought shipwreck off Malta and three months there in hardship and danger.<sup>3</sup> He finally sailed to Puteoli, where there was a Christian community, and came eventually to Rome where he was met and welcomed by the Roman Christians. Such experiences must have impressed on the Apostle the solidarity of all 'in Christ' as well as the universality of the Church.

Secondly, judging from Luke's account, Paul's mystical experience must have increased considerably during the whole period which led up to the Roman captivity: he seems to live more continually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He goes to Jerusalem on the last journey from Greece 'under compulsion by the Spirit' and 'in every city the Holy Spirit assures me that imprisonment and persecution are awaiting me.'<sup>4</sup> In Jerusalem even some of the scribes and Pharisees sense Paul's intense spiritual life, and in prison he is comforted by a vision of Christ himself.<sup>5</sup> Finally, on the journey to Rome, he prophesies, receives the vision of an angel, prophesies again.<sup>6</sup> All this seems to indicate how deep was Paul's spiritual growth during these years, a growth which, to judge by the captivity letters, had for its object the contemplation of Christ present in his Church.

Paul's thought on the Church in Ephesians is best put in perspective with a word on Colossians, since the two letters are linked so closely. While Paul was captive in Rome, the Church at Colossae began to be threatened by dangerous speculations on the heavenly powers, basically Jewish in origin but highly coloured by Hellenistic philosophy. So much importance was being attributed to these 'powers' in their control of the universe and the course of events that the supremacy of Christ would seem to be compromised. The reaction of Paul was instantaneous, almost belligerent. His letter to Colossae asserted with vigour the supremacy of Christ as *Kyrios* over the whole universe. In the famous two-strophied hymn of Col. 1:15-20 Paul went back to the pre-existence of Christ with the Father, in whose image he is the

<sup>1</sup> Acts, chapters 20-8, gives us a picture of well-established communities in many places. In an unpublished text David M. Stanley, S.J., has developed at length the influence of these experiences on the captivity epistles.

<sup>2</sup> Ac. 20:3; 21:27ff.; 23:12-21; 25:27

<sup>4</sup> Ac. 20:22-3

<sup>5</sup> Ac. 23:9-11

<sup>3</sup> Ac. 28:11

<sup>6</sup> Ac. 27:1-34

source as well as the instrument and final end of creation. The Incarnation, crowned by the triumph of the Redemption, was seen as placing the human nature of Christ at the head not only of the whole human race but also of the entire created universe, the latter indirectly concerned in the salvation of man as it had been in his fall.<sup>1</sup>

It will be noted that the movement of Paul's thought here was the result of a situation which was imposed upon him. He himself did not choose the heavenly spheres as a terrain on which to do battle. Yet in accepting the terms of the contest at Colossae he placed himself on a psychological plane which was to have enormous consequences. For it was on this 'celestial' level of thinking that he was soon to compose Ephesians, there to elaborate the full vision of the Church barely hinted at in Colossians.<sup>2</sup>

It is surprising that Mgr Cerfaux sees nothing essentially new added to the idea of the Church in Ephesians.<sup>3</sup> This is true only in the sense that the full flowering of the thought adds nothing essential to the seed of the idea. For throughout Colossians the perspective is clearly christological. Paul's whole energy is brought to bear on the supremacy of Christ over the heavenly powers. The concept of the Church, on the other hand, is kept well in the background and indeed, in the key text of Col. 1:18, seems to be added only as an afterthought, forced upon Paul by the very vastness of the canvas he is painting. The idea dominating Colossians therefore is one of subordination, with the idea of identification touched upon but left undeveloped. In Ephesians, however, it is precisely this latter notion of identification between Christ and his Church which is rethought under the full light of Paul's spiritual and intellectual maturity.<sup>4</sup> The perspective now becomes ecclesiological, and one senses immediately an atmosphere of serenity and calm reflection quite absent from the previous letter—as on the field of battle after victory has been won.

But what is of capital importance to recognise is that this ecclesiological perspective of Ephesians is itself situated within a new angle of vision, an angle defined by Benoit in Paul's own phrase: 'in the spaces above the earth.'<sup>5</sup> The errors at Colossae had forced Paul to turn his gaze toward the 'powers' that ruled the heavens, and to affirm with full vigour that over them Christ was supreme. Forced by circumstances to think for the first time in these terms and sustained

<sup>1</sup> Benoit, art. cit., pp. 34, 40

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Benoit, 'L'Horizon Paulinien de l'Épître aux Éphésiens,' *Revue Biblique* XLVI (1937), p. 508

<sup>3</sup> Cerfaux, op. cit., pp. 221-2

<sup>4</sup> Benoit, 'L'Horizon Paulinien . . .,' pp. 523-4

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 511, 513; Eph. 6:12. Also Eph. 1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10. These expressions do not appear in Colossians.

undoubtedly by his own growing mystical experience, Paul's attention focused more and more on heaven and away from earth. When his gaze had finally adjusted itself and he looked back again to the Church on earth from this new point of view, he found that he saw her under a completely new light. Her role in the plan of salvation had obviously not changed, but Paul's angle of vision had. Viewed from heaven, the drama being played out on the vast stage of the cosmos did not look the same as it did when viewed from earth. The scenery was indeed still the same; the lighting was quite different.

It is this change of lighting which must be taken into account. To read Ephesians from the perspective of the major epistles, without allowing for this new angle of vision, tends to produce the odd sensation that the book one is studying is slightly out of focus and that one is somehow seeing double. Initially this can be rather disconcerting and has itself been enough to make many serious exegetes doubt Paul's authorship, but this is another and more complex question. The point being made here is that when Paul looks back from heaven to earth on the members of the Church working out their salvation, he sees them now with a physiognomy quite different from that sketched in his earlier letters. They now appear more clearly distinct from Christ himself and more strongly united among themselves. That which strikes Paul most is the Church's collective unity, and this he begins to vest more and more in the attributes of a living person. The Church is now seen in process of growing and building up *toward* Christ who watches and directs this growth from his triumphant seat 'in the heavens.'<sup>1</sup>

Does this mean that Paul now wishes to assert a *separation* between Christ and his Church? Quite the contrary. What he is trying to do in Ephesians is precisely to preserve that intimate and vital union between Christ and the individual Christian which so dominated his earlier thought, and at one and the same time to express what he now sees from the new angle of vision forced upon him by the Colossian controversy. This is no easy task, and he accomplishes it by a skilful if sometimes laborious deployment of three images, the very ones he had earlier used to emphasise union: those of Body, Temple and Bride. In Ephesians these images play a double role: they emphasise the collective unity of the Church, personified as it were and distinct from the person of Christ, and they serve as well to recall and underline the Church's lack of autonomy, her intimate union with Christ and total dependence upon him for her very being and life.<sup>2</sup> Let us see how each of these images accomplishes this double purpose.

<sup>1</sup> Paul had already hinted at this development in Col. 1:18 and 24; 2:19; 3:1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Benoit, 'L'Horizon Paulinien . . .', pp. 515-17

Paul first perfects the image of the Body until it is able to express the new physiognomy of the Church which he has discovered. To appreciate what he does, it is important to realise that until now the word 'Church' had served almost always as a designation for local communities.<sup>1</sup> In the major epistles it had almost never appeared in the ecumenical meaning we take for granted today, that of universal Church, the entire assembly of Christians.<sup>2</sup> Originally linked in Paul's mind with the Old Testament concept of 'God's People,' the term 'Church of God' had gradually been applied by him to the individual Churches he had founded. Not until Col. 1:18 did it suddenly take on a strong ecumenical sense, and it did so there as a result of a synthesis of the themes of Head and Body that seem hitherto to have undergone separate developments in Paul's mind.

The Head theme, for example, when it appeared in 1 Cor. 11:2-4, was used to express not the union of Christians with or in Christ but a certain hierarchy of subordination: 'head' in the sense of 'superior.' Thus in 1 Cor. 12:21 the 'head' is simply a member of the body and is not identified with Christ at all. The Body theme, on the other hand, had always been used to express the idea of unity which was central to Paul's concept of salvation.<sup>3</sup> Through physical contact with the physical Body-Person of Christ through Baptism and the Eucharist, the Christian received as through a channel the life of the Spirit, and so in a very real sense became Christ, his members, his Body. The linking of these two themes of Head and Body, therefore, was natural enough when it occurred for the first time in Col. 1:18. Paul was emphasising the superiority of Christ as Head of the heavenly powers, and there was an easy passage from the use of 'head' in the sense of 'superior' to its use in the physical sense as Christ himself, Head of his body the Church. The word 'head,' moreover, when applied to the body, already contained the idea of vital principle and source of nourishment.<sup>4</sup>

It is in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, however, that one finds the full implications of this linking of the three concepts of Head, Body and Church. At the start of the chapter Paul affirms the collective unity of Christians along with their organic diversity (vv. 3-11), followed by an emphasis on the new idea that the Body of Christ grows and perfects itself. What enables Paul to assert this is precisely his identifying Christ not with the Body but with the Head. The

<sup>1</sup> Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-57, gives a full treatment of texts.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 241. Benoit ('Corps, Tête . . .', p. 22) finds the ecumenical meaning weakly asserted in three or four early texts, especially 1 Cor. 12:27ff.

<sup>3</sup> cf. 1 Cor. 6:15, 10:17, 12:7-11; Rom. 12:6-8

<sup>4</sup> Benoit, 'Corps, Tête . . .', pp. 23-9. For quite another interpretation see J. A. T. Robinson, pp. 65-7, and Benoit's answer in *Revue Biblique* LXXIV (1957), p. 585.



Head does not grow, yet it is from the fullness of perfection already present in him that there comes the vital energy responsible for the Body's growth (vv. 12-16). This distinction between Christ as Head and his Church as Body had never before been made so strongly by Paul, and it illustrates in a most striking way the preoccupation of his thought in Ephesians.<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that the intense realism of the Pauline conception of the Body of Christ is in any way lessened. He can still affirm without hesitation that the universal Church is identified with the physical Body of Christ in heaven.<sup>2</sup> This he can do because, as Cerfaux points out, the ontological distinction seen from his new angle of vision in no way excludes a 'mystical' identification at one and the same time. The physical Body of Christ pours out its life on Christians and these become his Body in the sense that the mystically present cause is attributed to the effect.<sup>3</sup> The Church quite literally is Christ's Body because she is composed of all Christians who in their material personality are united to the risen Body-Person of Christ and receive through him the new life of the Spirit. It would be vain, says Benoit, even false, to force Paul's terminology here to mean exclusively either Christ's physical Body and Spirit, or his Body the Church, which is his Spirit communicated to men. In Ephesians Paul means both together, indissolubly united: the individual Body of Christ grown to include all Christians united to him in their own bodies through faith and Baptism, with the fullness of the Spirit flowing from the Head down through all the members.<sup>4</sup>

What has just been said may be seen more clearly, perhaps, in the perfecting of the second of Paul's images of the Church, that of Temple of God. Never does Paul use this metaphor to describe the Christian's relationship to Christ, but always to God and to the Spirit, and in the earlier letters its chief function was to bring home intimacy of union.<sup>5</sup> In Ephesians, however, it is rather distinction and growth which the image emphasises, both key aspects of Paul's new angle of vision. In chapter two, for example, Christ is already enthroned 'above the heavens' and all Christians on earth are mounting up little by little toward him, all the while receiving support from Christ's representa-

<sup>1</sup> Again, there is a hint but no development of this idea in Col. 2:19. cf. Benoit, 'L'Horizon Paulinien . . .', pp. 359-60.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 1:23 is explicit, while Eph. 5:23 is implicit from the use of 'Church' and 'Body' in a parallelism.

<sup>3</sup> Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, p. 259. 'To say that the Church is the Body of Christ because the life of grace and the life of Christ are alike is not enough. To say that there is an identity of life and therefore an identity of the Church and the Body is too much.' (*ibid.*, p. 258, n. 4.)

<sup>4</sup> Benoit, 'Corps, Tête . . .', p. 21

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16

tives on earth (vv. 6 and 19-22). On the other hand in chapter four (vv. 12 and 16), where, as we have seen, Paul develops anew the themes of Body and Head, Christ is seen as the key-stone of the Temple, toward which it is slowly rising. Head and key-stone are thus made to correspond in position as well as function, since both give strength and unity while yet remaining distinct from the whole.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note how this second image of the Church is linked in chapter two with Paul's preoccupation with unity and his effort to underscore the collective aspect of salvation. His earlier synthesis, achieved with such anguish in Romans, is now rethought and fitted into a larger horizon. The mental and visual adjustment necessary from the vantage-point of Ephesians has enabled Paul to see Jew and Gentile united at last and integrated into the heavenly Temple mounting up toward Christ the key-stone. The hateful division existing between them in the past has been blotted out by Christ's blood, which, by reconciling them to each other, has reconciled them to God (vv. 1-19). Salvation for both Jew and Gentile remains, as always for Paul, essentially human and moral, but now it becomes part of a much vaster setting. In Colossians Paul had insisted on a cosmic conception of Christ and the salvation he wrought, and this enables him now to see the Church too on a cosmic plane. Always limited to a group of human beings, she appears nonetheless to guard within herself the destiny of the whole cosmos. It is in this way that the Church, as the risen Body of Christ, becomes extended, as it were, or swelled in Paul's mind to the dimensions of the new universe, 'the fullness of him who is filled all in all.'<sup>2</sup>

But Paul has not yet said his last word on the Church. In chapter five, through the moving image of the Bride, he brings to a focus all the disparate rays of his thought and presents us with a synthesis, a fusion of the themes of Head and Body and, implicitly, that of heavenly Temple. This remarkable text on marriage gives an extraordinary expression to the new angle of vision from which Paul views the Church in Ephesians. There is present, first of all, the fundamental idea of 'Body of Christ' of which Christians are now 'members,' and which Christ has incorporated into himself by the purifying action of Baptism (vv. 26 and 30). But this baptismal action and salvation are presented in a collective fashion which gives to the group of Christians a personal quality: it is the 'Body' which Christ has saved (v. 23) and it is the 'Church' which he has baptised (v. 26).

<sup>1</sup> Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, p. 260

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 1:23, following Benoit, 'Corps, Tête . . .', pp. 40-4. For a different interpretation see J. A. T. Robinson, pp. 67-70. cf. also A. Feuillet, 'L'Église plérôme du Christ d'après Eph.', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* LXXVIII (1956), pp. 446-72, 593-610.

And yet though so clearly attached to Christ as his Body, the Church is nevertheless distinguished from him as 'Head.' Subject to him always, she becomes the model of that obedience which every wife owes her husband (vv. 23-4). This image of 'head' as 'superior,' however, has a divisive connotation and Paul does not wish to insist upon it. For Christ is also the Saviour, who 'loved the Church and gave himself up for her,' dying in the place of sinners so that he could make them pure and holy by his sacrifice. At this point we should expect Paul to insist once more on the other meaning of 'head' as vital principle. But no, he finds this too impersonal to express the closeness of the union, too weak to bear the weight of this gift of love. And so he employs a more striking image, one already found in the Old Testament, that of marriage, and we now see sketched in Paul's richest lines the theme of the Bride of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

This particular theme, so intimately bound up with that of the Body, had occurred explicitly only once before, though Paul had already twice used the metaphor of sexual union at least implicitly.<sup>2</sup> Moreover there is a chance, as Cerfaux says, that the virgin-Church of Ephesians is a personification of the heavenly Temple and the heavenly Jerusalem. Christ delivered himself up for the Church and purified and washed her, just as Yahweh purified Jerusalem and washed away its sins. He loved the Church as Yahweh loved His people in the Old Testament. He desires her to be glorious and holy and without flaw, just as Yahweh wished Jerusalem to be rescued and renewed.<sup>3</sup> This image of the Bride is thus far stronger than that of Head-Body, since it contains, in addition to an intimate physical union, a union of hearts which can demand the total gift of oneself. The husband is not only the 'head' whom the wife must obey, he is also, and above all, the intimate associate who loves his wife as his own flesh and sacrifices himself for her. This is what Christ has done for the Church which is his Bride (vv. 25-9). In this union, model of all human marriages, there is fully realised and definitively clarified the 'mystery' seen by Paul to be present in the opening chapters of Genesis (vv. 31-2).

In these final lines we may be allowed to see the ultimate flowering of Paul's thought on the Church as the Body of Christ. This thought, we have found, underwent a profound development between the period of the major epistles and the writing of Ephesians. One key to this development is very likely Paul's growing mystical experience. Yet this alone might never have sufficed were it not for the new angle of vision forced upon him by the Colossian controversy. It is this

<sup>1</sup> Benoit, 'Corps, Tête . . .', p. 28

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 11:12 is explicit; 1 Cor. 6:16-17 and Rom. 7:4 are implicit.

<sup>3</sup> Cerfaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-4

which enabled him to look down from 'the spaces above the earth' and to see the Church at one and the same time identified with the risen Body of Christ yet clearly distinct from him. This new vision he communicates to his readers by a skilful transformation of three images in such a way that he preserves intact his prior vision of intimate union.

With Benoit we may summarise Paul's deployment of these images by picturing a diptych, the two panels of which are heaven and earth, the two personages, Christ and his Church.<sup>1</sup> On the one side is Christ, seated triumphantly in heaven as Head of the Church, communicating to his Body the life of the Spirit necessary for its growth. From here he constructs the heavenly Temple of God, of which he is the keystone. More than that, he loves and cherishes the Church as a man does his wife, delivers himself up for her at the time of their marriage and thus saves and purifies her and renders her immaculate.

On the other panel is the Church saved by his blood, a single Body with him, subject to him as a wife to her husband. Yet all the while the Church herself is in process of growth and development, as a body nourished by its head, as a spiritual edifice rising up toward heaven, to become at last 'the fullness of Him who is filled all in all.' It should be noted that each of these three images is linked in turn not only with the word 'Church' used in an ecumenical sense, but also with the Person of Christ, thus showing the degree to which Paul's theology of the Church is simply an extension of his christology. The images are likewise imposed one upon the other, a veil being lifted each time, as it were, revealing a new depth in the total mystery. And at every step too there are those expressions of wonder and love, so characteristic of mystical experience, which culminate at last in the image of the Bride, the ultimate development of Paul's thought on the relationship between Christ and his Church.

CHRISTOPHER F. MOONEY, S.J.

*Paris*

<sup>1</sup> Benoit, 'L'Horizon Paulinien . . .', pp. 517-18