
❖ Other Voices ❖

What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of GOD.
Even the anchorite who meditates alone,
For whom the days and nights repeat the praise of GOD,
Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ incarnate.

T . S . E L I O T , “The Rock” (1934)

The Christian is called not to individualism but to membership in the mystical body [of Christ]. ... [T]he head of this Body is so unlike the inferior members that they share no predicate with Him save by analogy. We are summoned from the outset to combine as creatures with our Creator, as mortals with immortal, as redeemed sinners with sinless Redeemer. His presence, the interaction between Him and us, must always be the overwhelmingly dominate factor in the life we are to lead within the Body, and any conception of Christian fellowship which does not mean primarily fellowship with Him is out of court.

C . S . L E W I S , “Membership” (1945), in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (1949)

It is easy to miss the radical nature of Christian membership, particularly if we approach it from a modern, individualistic point of view. Membership is here reduced to one’s voluntary and occasional participation in a group (as when I say I am a “member” of a club or national organization). The Pauline understanding of membership, much like the Johannine depiction of Jesus as the vine onto which his disciples are grafted, is much more organic and vital. If each person is joined to another like a limb is joined to a torso, then there is nothing voluntary or occasional about the relationship. For the limb to flourish it must draw its life from the whole body. To be cut off from the larger body, even momentarily, is to precipitate the member’s death. Joined together, all the members of the body share a common life. Though need and nurture establish the relationships and each member is indispensable, it is our care and responsibility for others that has the potential to turn mutual service into mutual celebration.

For Paul it is imperative that the membership be the body of *Christ* rather than some other body. Why? Because it is Christ who manifests what

life really ought to be. Christ represents another order of life because unlike the life and death known through Adam, Jesus inaugurates a mode of living that joins people to heaven. Though Adam was a “living being,” Christ is the “life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45) who leads humanity through death into resurrection life. Jesus overcomes the alienating power of death that sin is. Unless people participate organically in, rather than merely associate with, Jesus’ life, they don’t really know what it is to be alive. To be fully alive is to live sympathetically within the membership that the community is called to be, suffering with those who suffer and rejoicing with those who rejoice. It is to extend Christ’s self-giving life in the world as the model for how life should be (Galatians 2:20).

NORMAN WIRZBA, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating (2011)*

You cannot surrender to God a self you do not know. This was surely in the design of community that we might find ourselves in the mirror of that community. As we share the common life, one unredeemed area after another comes to light. The joy of involvement is interwoven with the pain of it.

ELIZABETH O’CONNOR, *Call to Commitment (1963)*

The Christian community is an organic unity in which the members are vitally related to each other through participation in a common life. By love they are bound together in a mode of existence which is the antithesis of the individualistic mode of existence that constitutes the “world.” Only in this mode do they exist as the creator intended humanity to exist.... This community is “Christ” in that it prolongs incarnationally the power of love that was the essence of his mission. It represents the saving force of Christ because in the world it demonstrates the reality of an alternative mode of existence in which humanity is not dominated by the egocentricity that provokes possessiveness, jealousy and strife.

JEROME MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting the Major Issues (2009)*

The instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if a man’s self is not kept clean and bright, his glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon seen through a dirty telescope. That is why horrible nations have horrible religions: they have been looking at God through a dirty lens.

God can show Himself as He really is only to real men. And that means not simply to men who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another, helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; like players in one band, or organs in one body.

C. S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity (1952)*

Like the Baby Jesus, I need a 'holy family' to belong to. I need to belong to something bigger than myself. If I don't, then I run the risk of developing a sort of God-and-me spirituality with no support systems to hold me up when I am weak, no prophets to challenge me when I am wrong and no party-mates with whom I may celebrate the Lord's goodness in my life.

MARK E. THIBODEAUX, S. J., *Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer (2001)*

[T]he church is not simply the place of our baptism. We are baptized not simply *in* the church, but *into* the church.... This is much more than church membership or a matter of confessional identity; it is an ecclesial way of being in the world.

SUSAN K. WOOD, *"I Acknowledge One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins," in Christopher R. Seitz, ed., Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism (2001)*

By "ecclesial solidarity" I mean the conviction that "being a Christian" is one's primary and formative loyalty, the one that contextualizes and defines the legitimacy of other claimants on allegiance and conscience—those of class, nationality, and state, for example.

Ecclesial solidarity means that the welfare of one's brothers and sisters in Christ makes special claims on one's affections, resources, and priorities. It means that the unity of the churches in visible and tangible ways is a key expression of Christian conviction and vocation, even in the face of centrifugal pressures and the demands of lesser, more partial communities and ideologies. It means that processes of Christian discernment and worship cross the divides of patriotism and other types of tribalism, making one's coreligionists the "to whom" we owe service, love and mutual support.

Ecclesial solidarity is not in conflict with the love and service that Christians owe their proximate neighbors, those with whom they live and work and interact on a regular basis. Taking care of one's non-local relatives need not, after all, invariably oppress one's next-door neighbors or work colleagues. It does, however, prohibit Christians from harming their non-local relatives on the assumption that one's neighbors always and inevitably present morally determinative claims on Christian allegiance, priorities, and actions.

MICHAEL L. BUDDÉ, *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church (2011)*