

# “AND GOD SAID, LET US MAKE...AND LET THEM”—THE BODY OF CHRIST AS THE CORPORATE MANIFESTATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE FLESH

BY JOHN PESTER

The Bible is the word of God; it is the speaking of God. As such, the words in the Bible come from God and convey the heart and thought of God. Even though the words in the Bible were written down by humans, they are not a record of humanity's thoughts about God; rather, they are a communication of God's thought, God's consideration, about humanity to humanity. Being directed toward humans who have significant, but nevertheless still limited, capacities for full comprehension (1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2), the Bible is necessarily circumscribed in the scope and manner of its communication. There are, for example, many things that God in Christ accomplished in the days of His flesh that are not included in the Bible (Heb. 5:7; John 21:25). It is not that these details are insignificant but that we do not need to know them in order for the mystery of His will to be made known to us. In order for this will to be effectively communicated in just sixty-six books, the Bible is also selective in the content of its communication. The Bible is a record of the central, significant thought of God. Its every word and even its form of construction, down to the smallest iota and serif (Matt. 5:18), have significance.

Nowhere in the Bible is the central thought of God, the matter of paramount importance to God, more selectively revealed than in the book of Genesis. In Genesis God speaks only of important matters related to His plan, His desire, and His operation in humanity to achieve His desired goal. In order to show that an environment has been prepared for the fulfillment of His plan, Genesis begins with a simple and short utterance to show that God is a God of creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1). There is no detailed scientific explanation of creation, because Genesis is not a treatise designed to elicit either scientific validation or invalidation. The creating God has no need to validate His actions with scientific treatises. In His eyes the existence of creation is the proof of His existence because His creating acts produce expressions of His eternal power and divine characteristics (Rom. 1:20).

In order to show that His prepared environment ultimately serves to accommodate His interaction with humanity, Genesis is also filled with the biographies of many men and women. Even these biographies, however, present only a selective accounting of the details of their lives by speaking of the significance of these men and women in relation to God Himself. Thus, although Enosh lived for nine hundred five years (5:11), the only detail that God speaks of, the only detail of importance to God in his life, is that “at that time men began to call upon the name of Jehovah” (4:26). Similarly, Enoch lived for three hundred sixty-five years (5:23), but the only detail of importance to God is that “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (v. 24). It matters to God that men would call on the name of the Jehovah and walk with Him, and so He speaks of these not only in Genesis but throughout the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in order to show the purpose of His interaction with humanity, Genesis speaks of the Triune God's desire to make a corporate man, Adam, in His image and likeness for the purpose of exercising His dominion. The simplicity of this thought is conveyed in 1:26: “And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion.” The Triune God's action in making a corporate man, Adam, who is a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14), speaks of His singular intention to create the Body of Christ to be a corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh (Eph. 2:10, 15; 4:24; Col. 3:10). The simplicity of this thought is conveyed in a hymn sung by members of the Body of Christ in its early history, the words of which are fittingly recorded as the word of God in 1 Timothy 3:16: “He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.” The manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh, confessedly, is a great mystery, a mystery that encompasses both the living of Christ in the days of His flesh and the extended living of Christ in His days of being joined to redeemed and regenerated humanity as the Body of Christ. It is the Body of Christ, as the

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enlarged manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh, that fulfills the purpose of God in the creation of humanity, because it is the Body of Christ that expresses the image of God and exercises the authority of God.

The Body of Christ fulfills the purpose that was designated for Adam by the Triune God—image and dominion. God’s desire for a manifestation of His triune being in the flesh is presented in Genesis 1:26. God’s accomplishment of the manifestation of His triune being in the flesh is extolled in 1 Timothy 3:16. The element that connects Genesis 1:26 with 1 Timothy 3:16 is the Body of Christ, which is a divine reality, not a theological metaphor. The Body of Christ manifests the fullest development of the image of God and exercises the dominion of God in the kingdom of God. The association of image and dominion with the Body of Christ is present throughout the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

### “And God Said, Let Us Make...and Let Them”

The word of God in Genesis 1:26 is deep and profound in its revelation. To many, it is an account of God’s consummate act of creation—the making and forming of an individual man, the forefather of the human race, in the image and likeness of God. To be sure, the creation of Adam, the first man out of the earth (1 Cor. 15:47), represents a monumental elevation of the significance of the human life within the realm of the created universe in comparison to other forms of created life. This elevation is explicitly referenced in the use of the words *very good* in God’s assessment of the totality of His creation following the creation of Adam in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:31). The words *very good* are in contrast to the word *good*, which was used in God’s assessment of the other items in the created and restored universe prior to the creation of Adam in His image and likeness (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). This elevation is also implicitly referenced by the statements that all living things—grass, herbs, fruit trees, sea creatures, animals, birds, cattle, and creeping things—were created “according to their kind” (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25). Although the text does not provide details of the prototypical source for these lower forms of life, Christ was surely involved (John 1:3). Nevertheless, the source is not clearly identified. It is clearly stated, however, that Adam was created according to God’s kind, based on the words *Our image* and *Our likeness*.

Notwithstanding the elevated importance of Adam’s creation as a living person, the speaking of God in Genesis 1:26 and the circumscribed account of Adam’s creation in verse 27<sup>3</sup> also indicate that these verses contain a deeper revelation about God Himself, about His heart’s desire, and about Christ’s role and position in the divine economy to fulfill God’s heart’s desire through the

enlargement of the image of God in the Body of Christ. At this deeper level, the account of Adam’s creation is more about God than it is about Adam, and it speaks more about the ultimate goal of God’s move among humanity than it does about the creation of the person who marked the initiation of this move in time. Genesis 1:26 and 27 begin by revealing that God is triune, and when the implications of this revelation are fully unveiled in Matthew 28:19, there is an implicit promise out of faith and an assurance to faith that God is able to move not only among humanity but also within redeemed humanity. These verses also unveil that God’s desire involves a living, corporate organism that both bears the image of Christ and exercises the authority given to Christ through His manifestation as the Body of Christ.

### Revealing the Being and Desire of the Triune God

In Genesis 1:26 God’s self-referential consideration and speaking concerning the creation of Adam involve the use of the plural pronouns *Us* and *Our*, but in verse 27 the reference to God involves the use of the singular pronouns *He* and *His*. According to Witness Lee in a footnote to the word *God* in 1:1,

Heb. *Elohim*, meaning *the Mighty One*. The Hebrew name here is plural, but the verb *created* is singular. Furthermore, in v. 26 the plural pronouns *Us* and *Our* are used in reference to God, whereas in v. 27 the pronouns *He* and *His* are used. These are seeds of the Trinity. God is one (Isa. 45:5; 1 Cor. 8:4; 1 Tim. 2:5), but He is also three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19). He is the Triune God. It was the Triune God who created. (Recovery Version, note 3)

In the initial account of the creation of the heavens and the earth in verse 1, which says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” the truth of the Triune God is understated but present in the pairing of the plural subject *Elohim* with the singular verb *created*. In the account of the creation of Adam in verses 26 and 27, however, the truth of the Triune God is more clearly indicated with the alternating use of plural pronouns in verse 26 and singular pronouns in verse 27. In the account of the creation of man, the Triune God is more forcefully revealed because redeemed and regenerated humanity, which has been made in His image, has the capacity to know God as He truly is (Heb. 8:11), even to the point of expressing His divine attributes, such as love, light, holiness, righteousness, and wisdom, through uplifted human virtues.

*Let Us*...reveals that a council was held among the three of the Godhead regarding the creation of man. The decision to create man had been made by the Triune God in

eternity past, indicating that the creation of man was for the eternal purpose of the Triune God (Eph. 3:9-11). God's intention in creating man was to carry out His divine economy for the dispensing of Himself into man. (Lee, Recovery Version, Gen. 1:26, note 1)

The revelation of the Triune God in Genesis 1:26 and 27 is intrinsically related to the accomplishment of His eternal purpose because His eternal purpose is not limited to the creation of just physical things, including the heavens, the earth, and even man. The fulfillment of God's eternal purpose requires a new creation that is the issue of God's divine life and nature being dispensed into human vessels bearing His likeness for the enlargement of His image. And this dispensing is possible within the realm of the divine economy because God is triune. In the economy of the Triune God, each of the three persons coexists and coinheres eternally, and each of the persons incorporates the actions of the other persons. In this incorporation<sup>4</sup> it is foremost the Father who plans, the Son who accomplishes the Father's plan, and the Spirit who applies the Son's accomplishments of the Father's plan. The Spirit applies the Son's accomplishments by dispensing the divine life, which has been compounded with the Son's accomplishments of becoming flesh in incarnation for redemption through His death and of becoming the life-giving Spirit in resurrection for regeneration through His indwelling (John 1:14; Eph. 1:7; 1 Cor. 15:45; 1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 8:10). This dispensing is directed toward the human spirit that God formed in man by forming a physical body for Adam from the dust of the ground and by breathing the breath of life, the human spirit, into his nostrils, thereby producing man as a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

The breath of life breathed into man's body became the spirit of man, the human spirit (cf. Job 32:8). Man's spirit is his inward organ for him to contact God, receive God, contain God, and assimilate God into his entire being as his life and his everything. It was specifically formed by God and is ranked in importance with the heavens and the earth in God's holy Word (Zech. 12:1). The spirit of man is for man to worship God (John 4:24), to be regenerated by God (John 3:6b), and to be joined to God (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:22) that man may walk and live in an organic union with God (Rom. 8:4b) to fulfill God's purpose.

The breath of life breathed into man's nostrils was not the eternal life of God nor the Spirit of God...Man did not receive the Spirit of God until the Lord breathed the Holy Spirit into His disciples on the day of His resurrection (John 20:22). Nevertheless, because the human spirit came out of God's breath of life, it is very close to the Spirit of God. Thus, there can be a transmission between God the Spirit and man's spirit, and the human spirit is able to contact God and be one with God. (Lee, Recovery Version, Gen. 2:7, note 5)

The creation accounts of Adam in Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:7 show that God is triune and that created humanity is tripartite. Verses 26 and 27 in chapter 1 speak of the Triune God, and verse 7 in chapter 2 speaks of the tripartite man. God reveals Himself as triune in 1:26 and 27 in order to lay the foundation in the Word that His desire is to dispense Himself as life into humanity. This dispensing occurs first into our human spirit for our regeneration (Rom. 8:10), then into our soul for our transformation, sanctification, and conformation (v. 6), and ultimately into our physical body for our glorification in this age and in the coming resurrection (v. 11; 1 Cor. 15:42-44).

In order to carry out this dispensing, God first prepared an environment for the producing and nurturing of human life—the heavens and the earth, light, and lesser forms of created life—and then He prepared a human vessel with a human spirit to receive and contain the Spirit of life. Thus, when the Spirit applies the Son's accomplishments to believing humanity, the Father's desire for image and dominion can be fulfilled. This fulfillment, however, is not something that is done apart from Christ, because only Christ bears the image of God and because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ (2 Cor. 4:4; Matt. 28:18). Furthermore, this fulfillment does not involve an outward imitation of Christ based on human religious concepts, because only God's life and nature can produce an expression that is according to God's kind. Rather, it entails the enlargement of the image of Christ in created and redeemed humanity that is identified with the synonymous terms *the Christ* in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and *one Body* in verse 13. While the speaking of the Triune God in Genesis 1:26-27 certainly pertains to the creation of Adam as an individual human, His speaking also serves as an opportunity for Him to more deeply reveal His triune being and His desire for an

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enlarged corporate expression of Himself in Christ as the Body of Christ.

### *Revealing the Corporate Image of Christ*

The words *Let Us* in verse 26 indicate that God is triune, that He has a will, and that He is not passive in His execution of His will. The words *Our image*, however, point to the goal of His executed will—an enlarged expression of His being with all His attributes and virtues as His corporate image. The corporate aspect of the man created in God's image is signified by the use of plural pronouns in reference to Adam: "let them have dominion" (v. 26); "male and female He created them" (v. 27); and "God blessed them; and God said to them..." (v. 28). This corporate aspect is reinforced in the account in chapter 5 of the creation of Adam with a similar use of plural pronouns: "male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name Adam, on the day when they were created" (v. 2). God created a corporate man, not just a man from whom humanity derives its paternity.

Adam was a corporate man, a collective man, including all mankind. God did not create many men; He created mankind collectively in one person, Adam. God created such a corporate man in His image and according to His likeness so that mankind might express God corporately. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:26, note 4)

**A**lthough Adam was created according to the image of God, the term *image* is not a nebulous reference to a physical form or psychological construct. Rather, the image of the invisible God is Christ (Col. 1:15). And although Adam was created according to Christ, Paul, nevertheless, reciprocally identifies Adam as a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14). Thus, Adam was made according to Christ, but Christ is also according to the type of Adam. Consequently, when the Word of God speaks of Adam as a corporate person, the term *image* in Genesis 1:26 must also be seen as a reference to Christ as the image of the Triune God. So when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image," in reference to Adam, He was more deeply saying, "Let Us make the image of God in Christ corporate in humanity." The image of God in verse 26 must be corporate, because the type of Adam as a corporate man can be fulfilled only with the image of God in Christ becoming corporate, and this corporate image in Christ must also be in humanity, because in Adam humanity was chosen by God to be the vessel to bear His image (Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:21-23). In order for the image of Christ to be corporate in humanity, the Triune God had to make Adam in His image and likeness as a genuine human being, but He also had to "make" Christ corporate in humanity by "making" Him the Body of Christ.<sup>5</sup> While the making of Adam in God's image

was initiated at the beginning of the Old Testament, the making of Christ as God's corporate image in the Body of Christ was initiated at the beginning of the New Testament, at the fullness of the time, when God sent forth His Son into humanity (Gal. 4:4). Since Genesis 1:26 speaks of the Triune God's desire to enlarge the expression of His image, Christ, in humanity, there was a need to make Christ corporate as the Body of Christ. This making process began with the incarnation of the Word, continued in His death on the cross, and was realized in His resurrection and His coming as the life-giving Spirit into redeemed and regenerated humanity.

The process of making Christ corporate is typified by God's building of Eve as a counterpart for Adam (2:20, 22). In this making, Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam (v. 21), typifying the delivering up of Christ in death according to the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:18-20). God then took a rib out from Adam during his sleep in order to build Eve as a counterpart with his life and nature (Gen. 2:22), typifying the release of the divine life on the cross for the creation of the Body of Christ with His life and nature (John 19:34).<sup>6</sup> God's building of Eve was consummated with Adam receiving his counterpart as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh and with the two becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:23-24), typifying Christ's acknowledgment of His being joined to redeemed and regenerated humanity, which shares His divine life and nature, and with the two becoming one spirit (Acts 9:4; Eph. 5:27, 31; 1 Cor. 6:17). Thus, the man made by the Triune God and the woman built by the Triune God typify the enlargement of Christ to be the corporate image of God. In this type of the enlargement of the image of God in Christ, Adam represents Christ as the Head, and Eve represents the church as the Body of Christ. Just as Adam and Eve became one flesh, the Head and the Body are the one Body of Christ (Eph. 5:29-31).<sup>7</sup>

**T**he enlargement of Christ as the image of God is the Body of Christ, and the process of His enlargement as the image of God began in His incarnation as the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among us (John 1:14). During the process of His human living, death, and resurrection, the Triune God was "making" the humanity of the God-man Jesus in His image. In His human living, God's making involved the perfection of Jesus through His human sufferings, in which He learned obedience to the will of God as a God-man (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9). In a body prepared for Him, He came to do God's will (10:5, 7). In His human living, Jesus Christ expressed the image of God to men and exercised the authority of God toward Satan and his minions (Matt. 17:2; 4:10-11; 8:28-32). Even though He expressed the image of God and exercised the authority of God, the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to enlarge Christ as

the image of God for the purpose of exercising dominion was not fully accomplished through just the human living of Jesus Christ, the first God-man. His perfect human living was insufficient to fully satisfy the will of God because there was still a need for redemption in order for humanity to be joined to Christ. Thus, a further step in making Christ the corporate image of God occurred through His death on the cross.

Through His death Christ accomplished an eternal redemption for the preparation of a corporate vessel that was fully qualified in Him to share His life and nature in order to express Him as the corporate image of God. In His death on the cross He created the one new man in Himself and reconciled the constituents of the one new man—Jews and Gentiles—in one Body to God. According to Ephesians 2:15-16, Christ abolished in His flesh “the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross.” The one Body in verse 16 is the one new man mentioned in verse 15.

It was in this one Body that both the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled to God through the cross. We, the believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, were reconciled not only *for* the Body of Christ but also *in* the Body of Christ.” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 16, note 2)

In His death Jesus Christ expressed the image of God to men and exercised the authority of God over the rulers and authorities of darkness (Mark 15:39; Col. 2:14-15). Even in His death, however, the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose to enlarge Christ as the image of God was not fully accomplished. The final step in making Christ the corporate image of God, a step involving the mingling of redeemed and regenerated humanity with the Triune God, occurred in His resurrection.

In His resurrection the Body that Christ created on the cross was enlivened together with Him (Eph. 2:5) and regenerated unto a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3). “God enlivened us together [with Christ] when He enlivened the crucified Jesus. Therefore, He made us alive together with Christ” (Lee, Recovery Version, Eph. 2:5, note 2). Now in resurrection, Christ, as the life-giving Spirit, can impart all that He is into redeemed and regenerated

humanity. Thus, there is a continuing process of making the image of Christ corporate in the Body of Christ through the life-giving Spirit’s application of Christ and His accomplishment to the members of His Body. L. S. Thornton in *The Common Life in the Body of Christ* says,

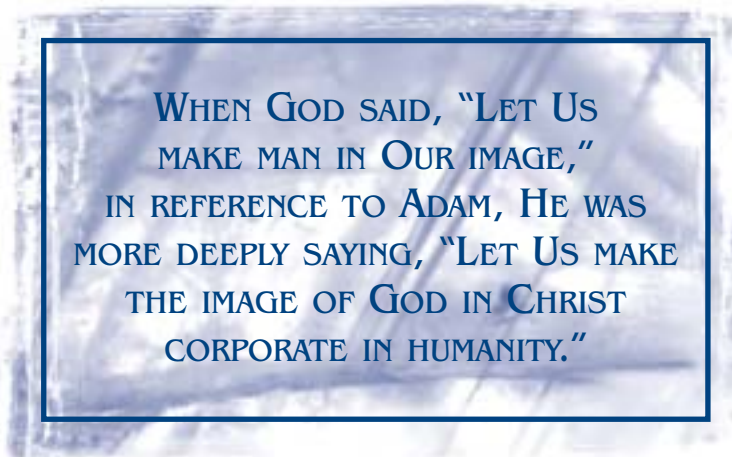
In his present glorified state our Lord must possess the capacity to exercise his life-giving powers throughout the redeemed order, howsoever it may be conditioned, in all its extent and in all its stages of manifestation. Nothing less than this will correspond to the reality of the spiritual body of him who became a life-giving spirit...The character of that order as redeemed depends upon the fact that he is able, as life-giving spirit, to impart the substance of his risen life to us now *in our present condition*. (302)

By imparting His risen life through the life-giving Spirit into us even in our present unrenewed condition,<sup>8</sup> the Body of Christ, which was created on the cross and enlivened through resurrection, is now being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Col. 3:10).

Because the new man was created with us, who belong to the old creation (Eph. 2:15), as

his constituents, he needs to be renewed. This renewing takes place mainly in our mind, as indicated by the phrase *unto full knowledge*. The new man was created in our spirit and is being renewed in our mind unto full knowledge according to the image of Christ. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 10, note 3)

In His resurrection Christ is now expressing the corporate image of God to men and exercising the authority of God toward Satan through His Body (1 Cor. 14:24-25; Eph. 3:10; Rom. 16:20), which is being renewed according to the image of Him who created, which is being transformed into the same image by beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord, and which is fulfilling the goal of the Triune God’s predestinated selection by being conformed to the image of the Son (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). Consequently, we are assured that just as we have borne the corporate image of the earthy, we will also bear the corporate image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49). When the Body of Christ expresses Christ as the corporate image of God and exercises the authority of God on earth, the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose will be



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fully accomplished and manifestly displayed. It is the Body of Christ that proves the good, well pleasing, and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2-5) because it is the Body of Christ that is the corporate image of God in Christ.

The making of Christ as the corporate image of God in humanity is the issue of the human living, death, and resurrection of Christ in His incarnated status as a God-man and the issue of His living in the Body of Christ in His resurrected status as a corporate God-man. Emile Mersch, a Catholic theologian,<sup>9</sup> comments on these two statuses in *The Whole Christ*, saying,

Christ has a twofold life on earth: one visible and historical, the other invisible and mystical; the first is the preparation for the second, and the second is the prolongation of the first. In the second, which is His mysterious existence in the depths of souls, Christ is far more active, far more truly alive than ever He was in the days when He walked and preached in Judea. Therefore it is quite natural and in keeping with the supernatural economy of God's plan that His life should be represented in the Gospel as already directed toward His death, since His death is the climax of His life. Are we not justified in saying that the sacred text demands some such commentary, and that this is God's way of suggesting the doctrine of the Mystical Body? (44)

In the mystical prolongation of Christ as the Body of Christ, Christ, as the image of God, is wrought into the members and displayed through the Body of Christ. Through the expression of the corporate image of Christ in the Body, God's purpose for creating Adam as a corporate man to be His corporate image can be fulfilled. And through the expression of the corporate image of Christ in the Body of Christ, the type of Adam being the corporate image of God is fulfilled in Christ, who was made in the corporate image of God through incarnation, death, and resurrection. In Christ's incarnation the image of the Triune God was manifested through the mingling of the divinity of the coinhering Triune God with the humanity of Jesus in the person of Christ. In Christ's resurrection the image of the Triune God was further manifested through the mingling of the divinity of the coinhering Triune God in the glorified humanity of Jesus with the humanity of those who have been redeemed and regenerated in the person of the corporate Christ.

Because the Body of Christ is Christ in His corporate enlargement, the principles of coinherence and incorporation that are present in the union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ also apply to the Body. In the being of the Triune God there is coinherence, and in the actions of the Triune God there is incorporation. Through incarnation, the divinity of the coinhering

Triune God was mingled with the humanity of Jesus. In the God-man Jesus all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily (Col. 2:9). He was the complete God and the perfect man, and thus, all His actions, which incorporated the actions of the other persons of the Godhead—the Father and the Spirit—were an expression of the image of the Triune God. The degree of this expression was such that Paul could only exclaim in 1:19 that “in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,” which is reminiscent of God's declaration that His creation of a man in His image and likeness was “very good,” signifying His great pleasure in His Son, the Beloved (Gen. 1:31; Matt. 3:17).

The word *fullness* has no modifier, indicating that this fullness is the unique fullness. It denotes not the riches of what God is but the expression of those riches. The full expression of the rich being of God, in both creation and the church, dwells in Christ. All creation and the whole church are filled with Christ as the expression of God's riches...

The fullness in this verse refers to the image of God in v. 15, who is Christ, a living person. Such a fullness is pleased to dwell in the expression of God and to reconcile all things to the expression of God. (Lee, Recovery Version, Col. 1:19, note 2)

The expression of Christ's fullness as the image of God in His status as the incarnated God-man was enlarged in the Body of Christ when this fullness was further mingled with the humanity of those who have been redeemed and regenerated in Christ. Thus, within the Body of Christ there is a union of the divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ with the humanity of the members of the Body of Christ, and this mingling has produced the Body, which is now the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23). In *The Nature of the Mystical Body* Ernest Mura tentatively explores this mystery, stating,

Our union with Jesus is modeled on the union of Jesus with his Father. This idea is expressed still more forcefully by our Lord in his priestly prayer...“That all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21). It is in God himself that this perfect unity is consummated, and our Savior is the divine connecting link between us and his Father, as he himself makes clear: “I in them and thou in me; that they may be perfected in unity” (John 17:23). (9)

By speaking of our union as being merely “modeled on the union of Jesus with his Father,” Mura leaves open the possibility that the Body of Christ does not genuinely share the same life and nature as the prototype, the God-man Jesus. However, if there is not a mutual sharing of



the divinized human life of Jesus and the humanized divine life of Christ in redeemed and regenerated humanity, the Body of Christ is merely a spiritual metaphor rather than the mystical reality that it is, as Paul clearly states, "You are the Body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). Mersch, in contrast to Mura, is not so tentative when he says,

Men have a true union with Christ, a real and ontological union; He is really and truly in them and we are in Him; we are really and truly one in Him as He is one with the Father. That this union be hard to explain is of small moment; is it to be regretted that God should have given us a union with His Son that transcends our own limited views? (8-9)

While marveling at the mystery of this union, Mersch later presents further thoughts related to his understanding of the nature of our true union with Christ, relating it to two specific defining attributes associated with the Triune God. These attributes include circum-incession, the mutual coinherence of one person in the Triune God in the other persons, and consubstantiality, the oneness of nature among the persons of the Triune God.

All Christians...will all be united together because they will all be in Christ, by reason of an interiority that flows from the eternal circumincession; all together they will form one and the same entity, just as the Divine Persons, by reason of their consubstantiality, are one and the same God. (190)

**T**he mutual sharing of the attributes of circumincession and consubstantiality with redeemed and regenerated humanity defines the reality of the Body of Christ because these attributes cannot be separated from Christ in His expression of the corporate image of God that now is part of His corporate being. Mersch can speak of the Body of Christ as being a product of a "real and ontological union" because the Body of Christ, which is Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), cannot be constituted with Christ without involving the ontological realities that are present in His person, specifically, the realities of mutual coinherence and consubstantiality. If the Body of Christ is not constituted with these realities, then these realities, which exist in Him as the second of the Trinity, would have to be separated out from Him in His status as the corporate Christ. Thus, if those

who have been redeemed and regenerated are not joined in life and nature with Him, the principle of consubstantiality in the person of Christ would be violated. Furthermore, if those who have been redeemed and regenerated are not in Christ and Christ is not in them through the mutual indwelling of one another, the principle of coinherence in the person of Christ would be violated. Such violations, however, would be in direct conflict with the Word of God (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:4; John 14:19-20; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27) and would reduce the speaking of God and the work of God to the realm of mere metaphor, making us of all men most miserable. The Body of Christ is not a metaphor but an ordained reality that fulfills the promise of God to make the image of God in Christ corporate in humanity. This is the implicit promise contained in His words, "Let Us make man in Our image."

**JUST AS ADAM IS A TYPE OF CHRIST,  
THE HUMAN BODY IS A TYPE OF THE  
BODY OF CHRIST, MAKING THE  
HUMAN BODY THE METAPHOR, THE  
REPRESENTATION, OF THE SOURCE,  
THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

### *Revealing the Reality of the Body of Christ*

The making of the Body of Christ is promised in the Old Testament, and the manifestation of the reality of the Body of Christ as the Triune God in the flesh is realized in the New Testament. Genesis 1:26 speaks of the Body of Christ as a reality in type, as a living organism, a corporate man,

and the New Testament reveals that the Body of Christ is the fulfillment of this type as a reality created in Christ (Eph. 2:15-16). It is spoken of as being one Body in Christ (Rom. 12:5), as being the Christ (1 Cor. 12:12), as being the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23), as being in Christ (3:6), as being out from the Head (4:15-16), as being His members (5:30), and as being the growth of God (Col. 2:19). All these references are organic denotations of the reality of the Body of Christ; they are not metaphorical references drawn from the organic connotations related to the human body seemingly contained in the term *the Body of Christ*. Just as Adam is a type of Christ, the human body is a type of the Body of Christ, making the human body the metaphor, the representation, of the source, the Body of Christ. It is regrettable, however, that theologians and commentators reverse the reality with the representation in their discussion of the Body of Christ, making the Body of Christ the representation and the human body the source.

Ernest Best, a Protestant theologian, illustrates this tendency in *One Body in Christ*, saying, "The various phrases

or metaphors...are attempts to express this non-logical truth in logical categories; they are projections of the conception of corporate personality upon the plane of metaphor; they are attempts to rationalize a mystical idea" (185). Best's view is shared by Catholic theologian Philip L. Hanley in *The Life of the Mystical Body*: "St. Paul developed the concept underlying this metaphor of the vine and branches into the concept of the 'body of Christ.' His metaphor is scattered through many of his epistles" (7). Despite this "metaphor" being "scattered" throughout some of the most significant Epistles in the New Testament—Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians—many theologians, Protestant and Catholic alike, are reluctant to consider the organic implications that flow from acknowledging the truth of the reality of the Body of Christ, a truth that Paul committed to faithful men and laid before the church (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:6). Ernest Best illustrates this reluctance, saying, "The phrase, 'the Body of Christ', is not, however, used realistically and ontologically but metaphorically in the New Testament; for that reason we must be careful in the deductions we draw from its use" (195). When the Body of Christ is viewed as a metaphor drawn from the human body, the careful "deductions" that come out of such an understanding will denude the truth of the Body of Christ of the divine and mystical elements that define its organic reality in Christ.

What is most striking about the theological claim that the term *the Body of Christ* is only a metaphorical reference to the church is that this claim is in direct contradiction to the plain revelation in the New Testament. This revelation does not speak of the Body of Christ as a metaphor drawn from the human body; instead, it speaks of the human body as a metaphor in order to explain the reality of the Body of Christ. In the most detailed passage in the New Testament that draws comparisons between the human body and the Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:14-27, it is clear that the human body is referenced in order to illustrate the organic realities in the Body of Christ, which include the indispensable need for every member of the Body (vv. 12-17), the God-ordained placement of the members in the Body for their effective functioning in the divine life (vv. 18-22), and the blending of the members of the Body for the manifestation of its inherent oneness in Christ (vv. 23-27). At the end of this lengthy passage, Paul does not conclude by saying, "Now you are like a body," but by saying, "Now you are the Body of Christ" (v. 27). The Body of Christ is not a metaphor that is defined by references to the human body; rather, the human body is a metaphor that illustrates the spiritual realities in the Body of Christ. Commenting on Ephesians 1:22-23 in *The Economy of God and the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, Witness Lee sees the relationship between the human body, the representation, and the Body of Christ, the reality, more clearly:

Immediately after Paul mentioned the church in Ephesians 1:22, he said in verse 23 that the church is the Body of Christ. Some Bible expositors have considered the Body of Christ to be a metaphor. But the Bible says explicitly that the church is the Body of Christ. It is not a metaphor, but a fact. Christ is the Head, and the church is His Body. Since the Head is an organism, the Body must also be an organism. (65)

A proper understanding of the distinction between the source, the Body of Christ, and the representation, the human body, is important in terms of its impact on the fulfillment of God's economy in this age. If the making known of the real contents of God's mystery is limited by the "careful" teaching that the Body of Christ is merely a metaphor, then God's economy, which is unto the fullness of the times and which causes all things to be headed up in Christ, will be stunted in its operation, and the expression of His image in and through the Body will not reach the standard that He desires, the standard of being to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:10-12). And if the Body of Christ is presented merely as a metaphor, then the riches of His grace that produce the corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh, the goal of God's promise in Genesis 1:26, will not abound (Eph. 1:7-9). However, when the real contents of this mystery are recognized and extolled in the Body and by the Body, there is a manifestation that can worthily elicit a hymn of praise from the Body.

#### **"And Confessedly, Great Is the Mystery of Godliness"**

First Timothy 3:16 is a poetic hymn that most biblical commentators agree was sung by saints in the early church; it is a hymn of praise concerning the manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh: "He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory."<sup>10</sup> Before writing these six lines of poetry in his letter to Timothy, Paul adds a prefatory word that shows his deep understanding of and appreciation for the truth contained in this hymn, saying, "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness." This word and the subsequent content and arrangement of the hymn highlight the truth that godliness is related to the manifestation of the Triune God in the perfect humanity of Christ and in the redeemed and regenerated humanity of His corporate Body.

Most commentators interpret the content of this hymn only in relation to the manifestation of God in Christ during the days of His incarnation in the flesh. This is certainly true, but the content of Paul's gospel is not limited to Christ in His earthly ministry; it also includes the ongoing heavenly ministry of the resurrected Christ to produce and build up the Body of Christ, a ministry that



Paul participated in through the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to him (Eph. 3:2-6). With the grace of the incarnated and resurrected Christ as the source and content of his ministry, Paul completed the word of God by unveiling the mystery of godliness, the great mystery of Christ and His corporate Body (Col. 1:24-25). This completed word, no doubt, was the truth that Paul expected the church, as the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), to proclaim and manifest (2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; Rom. 16:25; Titus 1:1-3; 2 Cor. 2:14; 3:3; 4:11).

As a matter of truth, Christ is no longer just an individual God-man; He is a corporate and enlarged God-man, being mingled and joined with redeemed and regenerated humanity as the Body of Christ. Thus, the mystery of godliness no longer involves only the flesh of Jesus; it also involves the manifestation of God in Christ in the flesh of redeemed and regenerated humanity. This hymn would still be worthy of singing even if it was only about Christ and His accomplishments in His earthly ministry, but imagine the joy of the saints singing with grace in their hearts about their identification with Christ as the Body of Christ, as the corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh. And with the word of Christ dwelling in them richly through their singing to one another (Col. 3:16), there should be little wonder that this hymn is one of the few surviving fragments of early church hymnody. It has survived because it was recorded by a member of the Body, Paul, as the word of God in a letter to another member of the Body, Timothy, a letter that the Body itself would later acknowledge as the Word of God. With a deep and enjoyable appreciation for God's organic operation in Christ and in His Body, Paul encouraged the Body to sing of the mystery of godliness with the view that the Body of Christ is the manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh.

The phrase *great is the mystery of godliness* introduces the subject of this hymn, and the six subsequent lines of poetry develop the content of this subject, which most commentators associate with the incarnated Christ. In *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, for example, George W. Knight III says,

Having ended the last verse with emphasis on the truth of the gospel, Paul now writes of the confessed grandeur

of the gospel in terms of him who is its reality. It is the revelation (μυστήριον) of true godliness (εὐσεβείας), a godliness seen and known in Jesus Christ. (182)

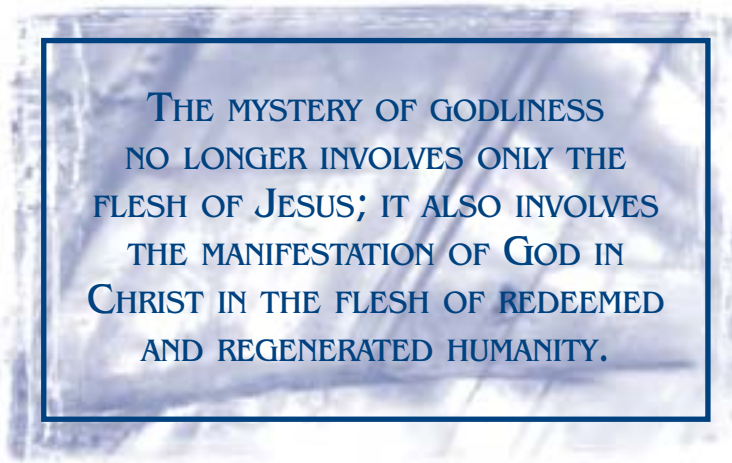
In contrast to Knight's assertion that godliness in verse 16 relates to what is seen and known in Christ, Kenneth S. Wuest in *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament for English Readers* says, "The word 'godliness' is *eusebeia*, 'reverence, respect,' in the Bible everywhere, 'piety towards God, godliness.' It is a term used, not of God, but of men" (63). Although Christ is both God and man, Wuest specifically uses the word *men* in his discussion of the term, indicating that the word *godliness* in the New Testament is associated with redeemed and regenerated believers rather than with Christ. Thus, the use of the term *godliness* in 1 Timothy 3:16 poses difficulties for commentators who view this hymn as being only a reference to Christ in His incarnation, because the

term must be explained as a reference to Christ when it more consistently applies to the expression of God in the believers. Paul, for example, exhorts Timothy to exercise himself unto godliness (4:7). God, being God, has no need for such an exhortation or such an exercise. In *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Timothy*, John MacArthur Jr. attempts

to navigate through this difficulty, saying,

The **mystery of godliness**...refers to the great truth of salvation and righteousness through Christ, which produces **godliness** (*eusebeia*) in those who believe. It is also possible to understand **the mystery of godliness** as a reference to Jesus, who was the very revelation of true and perfect "godlikeness," since He was God. **Godliness**, then, first refers to the incarnation and secondly to those who are saved and become godly in Christ. (139)

Although MacArthur acknowledges that *godliness* applies to "those who believe," he broadens its connotations in verse 16 by saying that it is also "possible" to understand it as "a reference to Jesus." But then, without any support, he relegates the primary connotation of the word *godliness* to secondary status with the use of the words *first* and *secondly* in order to give priority to the "possible" connotation. Following this relegation, MacArthur's subsequent discussion of the content of the hymn is focused entirely on Christ in His incarnation. In the context of Paul's discussion of the church as the pillar and



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base of the truth, however, *godliness* is not just a reference to the individual Christ; it is also a reference to the corporate Christ as the Body of Christ, to both Christ and the believers, who corporately manifest the Triune God in the flesh. This understanding is further supported by Paul's use of the term *great* in relation to the mystery of godliness.

**I**n the New Testament the words *great* and *mystery* are used together in only two instances, here in 1 Timothy 3:16 and in Ephesians 5:32, which says, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church." The great mystery that Paul speaks of involves Christ and the church, referring to the corporate Christ, the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head and the believers as His members (v. 30). In *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker point out the use of the terms *great* and *mystery* in these two instances, but they do not draw any interpretive conclusions:

Ephesians 5:32 describes the way in which the Scripture teaches about the relation of Christ with the church in terms of the relation of a husband to his wife by saying to *mystērion touto mega estin*, "This is a great mystery." The Christians in Ephesus had heard a Pauline phrase about a great mystery previous to First Timothy. (318)

The notable conclusion that they fail to draw is that the great mystery of godliness in 1 Timothy involves the same identification of Christ with His Body that Paul emphatically asserts is the focus of his speaking in Ephesians with his use of the phrase *but I speak*. A similar emphatic assertion of the importance of the great mystery of godliness is present in 1 Timothy 3:16 with Paul's use of the word *confessedly*. Thus, the mystery of godliness is equal to the mystery of Christ and the church, and this mystery is great in both instances because it involves the mingling of redeemed and regenerated humanity in Christ in order to produce the Body of Christ as the corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh.

Thus, this hymn is not just a hymn of truth concerning the individual Christ in human history; it is also a hymn of the Body of Christ as the continuation and fulfillment of God's manifestation in the flesh. As such, every line in this hymn applies to Christ in the days of His incarnation and also to Christ in the days of His corporate expression through His corporate Body.

#### *"He Who Was Manifested in the Flesh"*

The hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16 begins by speaking of "He who was manifested in the flesh," and this manifestation surely involves the person of Christ in His incarnation. John Calvin speaks of this truth, saying, "Christ was made

manifest in the flesh: that is to say, became man; like unto us in all things, sin only excepted (Heb. 4:15)" (17). Witness Lee acknowledges that the word *He* in the first line of the hymn refers to Christ, but he also acknowledges that the manifestation of God in the flesh can be seen in the living of a proper church:

*He* refers to Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from *the mystery of godliness* to *He* implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living also is the manifestation of God in the flesh. (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 3:16, note 3)

**I**t is interesting to note that the two verses that Witness Lee references to support his view that Christ is the manifestation of God in the flesh are verses that speak of Christ's identification with the Body, that is, the Christ who is in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27) and the Christ who not only indwells but also lives His life in the believers (Gal. 2:20). Although not speaking directly concerning 1 Timothy 3:16, Emile Mersch speaks of the Body of Christ as "a kind of prolongation of the Incarnation, or rather, it is the Incarnation in its fullest realization," which gives "dignity to all the members of the Incarnate Word" (199). In resurrection, the incarnate Word, the manifestation of God in the flesh, now has members, who also are the manifestation of God in the flesh by virtue of the "unity that proceeds from the unity of the Divine Persons, beloved of the Father, vivified by the Son, and sanctified by the Spirit" (199). The manifestation of God in the flesh is not merely a historical event related to Christ's human living; it is an ongoing mystical reality related to the Body of Christ in the realm of Christ's resurrection, and so we should joyfully sing of both manifestations.

#### *"Justified in the Spirit"*

The second line of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16, which says, "Justified in the Spirit," speaks of the mystery of godliness manifesting the Spirit's justification of God's righteous operation in Christ and in His Body. During His human living in His incarnation, the Spirit justified the righteousness of Christ's person and work, and in God's ongoing operation in the Body of Christ, the Spirit is continuing His justifying work in response to the manifestation of Christ's righteousness through the Body. Witness Lee speaks of the Spirit's justification of both Christ and the Body of Christ in a footnote to the word *justified*:

The incarnated Christ in His human living was not only vindicated as the Son of God by the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17;

Rom. 1:3-4) but also justified, proved, and approved as right and righteous by the Spirit (Matt. 3:15-16; 4:1). He was manifested in the flesh but was vindicated and justified in the Spirit. He appeared in the flesh, but He lived in the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14; Matt. 12:28) and offered Himself to God through the Spirit (Heb. 9:14). His transfiguration (Matt. 17:2) and His resurrection are both justifications in the Spirit. Furthermore, in resurrection He even became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17) to dwell and live in us (Rom. 8:9-10) for the manifestation of God in the flesh as the mystery of godliness...Since the manifestation of God in the flesh is justified in the Spirit, and the Spirit is one with our spirit (Rom. 8:16), we must live and behave in our spirit that this justification may be accomplished. (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 3:16, note 5)

Christ fulfilled God's righteous requirement in His human living, death, and resurrection in the Spirit, and in the Spirit He is now fulfilling God's righteous requirement in those who walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). There is no justification of the members of the Body apart from the union and mingling of the Spirit with our spirit. When those who are according to the spirit mind the things of the Spirit, the divine life containing God's attribute of righteousness is manifested, and there is peace with God based on our satisfaction of His righteousness (vv. 5-6). Life and peace are the means and the proof of the Spirit's justification of the members of the Body. The justification of God in the flesh is not limited to its manifestation in Christ's human living; it is being manifested in the ongoing mystical living of the Body of Christ in the Spirit, and so we should joyfully sing of both manifestations.

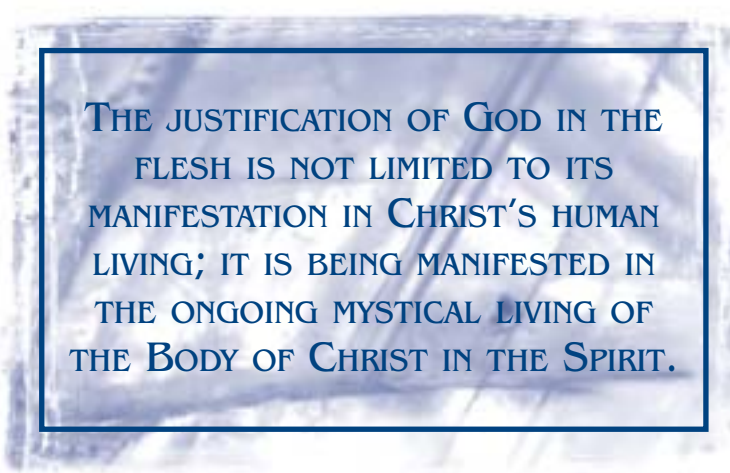
### *"Seen by Angels"*

The third line of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16, which says, "Seen by angels," speaks of the momentous importance of the mystery of godliness in God's economy, an importance deserving of constant observation by the angelic beings who serve to assist God in its manifestation. Angels observed the mystery of godliness in the incarnation, human living, and ascension of Christ because they were keen to observe and assist in matters related to God's salvation (Luke 2:9-14; Matt. 4:11; Acts 1:10-11; Rev. 5:6; 11-12). Peter writes of the interest of both

prophets and angels in the things pertaining to the entire scope of God's operation in humanity, saying,

Concerning this salvation the prophets, who prophesied concerning the grace that was to come unto you, sought and searched diligently, searching into what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them was making clear, testifying beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these. To them it was revealed that not to themselves but to you they ministered these things, which have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, which things angels long to look into. (1 Pet. 1:10-12)

The footnote to the word *look* in verse 12 of the Recovery Version says,



The Greek word portrays one who is stooping and stretching his neck to look at some wonderful sight. This shows how interested the angels are in observing the things concerning Christ for God's salvation. They declared and celebrated the Savior's birth (Luke 2:8-14), they rejoice over the sinners' repenting to receive salvation (Luke 15:10), and they are

happy to serve those who inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14; Acts 12:15; Matt. 18:10). (Lee, note 3)

The angels certainly were interested in the details of God's economic operation of salvation that was initiated in time with the incarnation of Christ, the Author of salvation (Heb. 2:10), but their interest did not cease with Christ's accomplishment of this salvation through His death and resurrection. Their interest now extends into matters pertaining to the Spirit's application of these accomplishments to the Body of Christ, to those who are inheriting this great salvation (1:14; 2:3), a salvation that involves bringing many sons into glory, into the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh. Toward this end, angels are ministering spirits, and in their ministering, they are surely observing and even assisting. They observe both the face of the Father who is in the heavens and the face of the little ones entrusted to their ministering service (Matt. 18:10). They observe with joy the repentance of sinners who enter into God's salvation (Luke 15:10). They observe the advancement of God's salvation through the members of the Body (Acts 8:26;



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10:3; 1 Cor. 4:9). They observe the persecution and travail of the members of the Body that stem from their participation in the advancement of God's salvation (Acts 5:19-20; 12:7; 27:23). They observe the members' participation in this salvation in the details of their godly living (1 Cor. 11:10; Heb. 13:2). They observe the festal gatherings of the church of the firstborn (12:22-23). And they will observe the fulfillment of God's salvation at the end of this age with the return of the Firstborn, the corporate Christ (1:6). The angels' observation of the manifestation of God in the flesh is not limited to the historical details related to Christ's human living; there is an ongoing observation of God's economic operation in the Body of Christ, and so we should joyfully sing of both manifestations.

### *"Preached among the Nations"*

The fourth line of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16, which says, "Preached among the nations," is the start of a more clearly defined shift in emphasis toward the manifestation of the mystery of godliness in the Body of Christ, because this line relates to the role of the Body in the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension by the Spirit through the disciples. For those who insist that verse 16 speaks only of Christ in His incarnation, this shift in emphasis makes their position more difficult to defend. Even though Christ preached the gospel of the kingdom during His public ministry (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), His preaching concerning Himself was limited primarily to the fact of His impending death and resurrection (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22), and even these details were spoken primarily to the small group of His disciples, none of whom could adequately comprehend His words (Matt. 16:22; Luke 18:34). When He spoke of the gospel of the kingdom being preached to the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to the nations (Matt. 24:14), it was in response to the disciples' question concerning the consummation of the age (v. 3). And when He spoke of discipling the nations, He was speaking in His status as the ascended Christ, following His resurrection. The preaching of the word that is referenced in this hymn, therefore, is the preaching that is carried out through His corporate manifestation in the flesh, the Body (Acts 15:19; 1 Cor. 1:23; 15:11; 2 Cor. 1:19; 4:5; 11:4), during the days that lead up to the consummation of the age. And the truth that the Body should preach and uphold as the pillar and base of the truth is that redeemed and regenerated humanity can be joined to the Triune God by being baptized into the name, into the person, of the Triune God and into the Body (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:13). Even though the Body is the primary agent for this preaching among the nations, Christ's participation is still manifested through the authority that He gives to the Body and through His indwelling presence within the preaching disciples, an

indwelling that is unto the consummation of the age (Matt. 28:18, 20). The manifestation of God in the flesh through the preaching of the mystery of godliness among the nations is not limited to Jesus' preaching during the days of His incarnation; there is an ongoing manifestation of this preaching through the members of the Body of Christ, and so we should joyfully sing of both manifestations.

### *"Believed On in the World"*

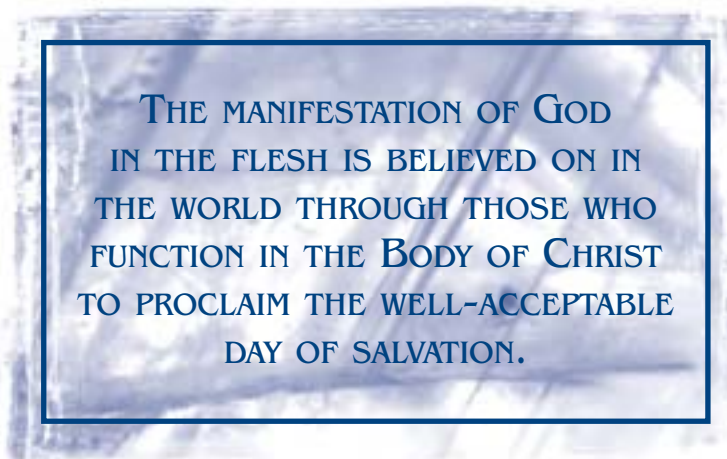
The fifth line of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16, which says, "Believed on in the world," continues the shift in emphasis toward events that are associated with the post-resurrection manifestation of the mystery of godliness. Believing is a response to hearing the word of Christ that imparts the faith of Christ into sinners (Rom. 10:17; 3:22; Gal. 2:20), who then receive the riches of Christ as saving grace out of faith to faith (Rom. 1:17). The hope of the gospel was hidden in God and not made known to the generations prior to Christ's resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit and His coming as the Spirit to preach the gospel (Col. 1:23, 26; Eph. 3:3-6). Thus, it was not even possible for the mystery of godliness to be believed on in the world during the days of Christ's incarnate manifestation. The disciples were not foolish and slow of heart to believe because of some limitation in their mental capacities or dispositions (Luke 24:25). Rather, they could not believe in the mystery of godliness because the Spirit of the resurrected and glorified Christ, who alone can impart the word of Christ through the preaching of the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17), was not yet (John 7:39). Following Christ's death and resurrection and in His coming as the Spirit (Eph. 2:17), the work of preaching Christ has been given to the Body, and although the preaching of the Body is the primary means for people in the world to believe, Christ's participation in this preaching is still manifested through the operation of His empowering and laboring grace within those who are sent to proclaim the word (1 Tim. 1:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:10; Rom. 10:15). The manifestation of God in the flesh is believed on in the world through those who function in the Body of Christ to proclaim the well-acceptable day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-2), and so we should joyfully sing of this manifestation.

### *"Taken Up in Glory"*

The sixth line of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16, which says, "Taken up in glory," is the most striking indication of a shift in emphasis toward events that are associated with the post-resurrection manifestation of the mystery of godliness. If this hymn were merely speaking of the incarnated Christ, then the matter of being taken up in glory would have to be a reference to the ascension of Christ,

and thus, it should have been mentioned prior to lines 4 and 5. Gordon D. Fee acknowledges this apparent chronological inconsistency in *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, saying that the whole of the hymn “seems to have a degree of chronology, moving from the Incarnation to further aspects of Christ’s life and ministry, yet breaking down in line 6” (93). Fee is able to overlook the chronological problem by asserting that “this line also emphasizes his triumph and glorification more than the actual event of the Ascension itself, chronologically understood” (94). George W. Knight III offers a similar thought, saying, “Even though there is not a strict chronology in the liturgical statement in v. 16, we may speak of a sense of theological direction” (186).

Like Fee and Knight, Witness Lee acknowledges that line 6 is inconsistent with a chronology that relies on the history of the incarnated Christ for an explanation of the mystery of godliness. But unlike Fee and Knight, he sees no inconsistency in the placement of line 6 but rather a deeper insight into the fact that *the mystery of godliness* also refers to the corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh of redeemed and regenerated humanity, which will be taken up in glory at the consummation of the age:



According to the sequence of historical events, Christ’s ascension preceded His being preached among the nations. However, it is listed here as the last step in Christ’s being the manifestation of God in the flesh. This must indicate that the church too is taken up in glory. Hence, it implies that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body are the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church is well taken care of according to the instructions given in the first two chapters...the church will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on the earth, and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church becomes the continuation of Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh! (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 3:16, note 9)

Although the mystery of godliness was manifested in the taking up of Christ in glory following His death and resurrection, the mystery of godliness will be fully manifested

in its totality with the taking up of the Body in glory (1 Cor. 15:51-52; Rom. 8:17, 29-30). The glory of Christ will become the glory of the Body because when Christ is glorified, He will be glorified in His saints as His corporate Body (2 Thes. 1:10), and so we should joyfully sing of this mutual manifestation. We can joyfully sing 1 Timothy 3:16 to the music on page 32.

### From Genesis 1:26 to 1 Timothy 3:16

First Timothy 3:16 is a joyful proclamation of the corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh, a joyful exclamation of the accomplishment of the Triune God’s desire for the enlargement of Christ as the image of God in redeemed and regenerated humanity. In Genesis 1:26 there is the creation of an actual person, Adam, but this corporate person is also a type of the Christ, who is the image of the invisible God.

Thus, the words *let Us make...and let them speak* of God’s desire to make Christ corporate in the humanity that He created in Adam, that He redeemed in Christ, and that He regenerated by the Spirit through a person’s receiving of the living and abiding word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). First Timothy 3:16 is the proof that God’s speaking in Genesis 1:26 is being fulfilled through

His making of a corporate man in His image. In this making process He has redeemed and regenerated the humanity of the believers, who were created in His image and likeness; He has made Christ corporate through Christ’s incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection; and He is now manifesting these accomplished realities as the mystery of godliness, the corporate manifestation of the Triune God in the flesh. **AFC**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Verses that speak of calling on the name of the Jehovah in the Old Testament and calling on the name of the Lord and walking by the Spirit in the New Testament are plentiful and easily documented by reference to any exhaustive concordance. For the sake of illustration, Paul identifies the church in Corinth as “those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place” (1 Cor. 1:2). He also charges the churches in Galatia to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25).

<sup>2</sup>In the New Testament the Body of Christ is explicitly spoken of in the Epistles of Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. In each of these Epistles the revelation of the Body

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of Christ is always presented in the context of spiritual and practical matters that pertain to the manifestation of God's image and dominion. This is a further indication that the Body of Christ is the fulfillment of God's will in Genesis 1:26 through its manifestation of the image of God for the exercising of the dominion of God.

In the Epistle to the Romans Paul presents the gospel of God, which speaks of sinners being made sons to constitute the Body of Christ, which is expressed as local churches. And the corporate Body, locally expressed, is revealed as bearing the image of God and carrying out the judgment of God. Paul's initial reference to the organic Body of Christ in verse 5 of chapter 12 says, "We who are many are one Body in Christ." This is a continuation of his speaking concerning the organic operation of the law of the Spirit of life in chapter 8, following his parenthetical word concerning God's selection in chapters 9 through 11. This organic operation begins in the regenerated human spirit of the members of the Body (8:10), spreads to the members' soul, which is in need of transformation in the divine life (v. 6), and ultimately enlivens the members' physical body (v. 11), renewing every part of the God-created tripartite man with the divine life in order to conform the members of the Body to the image of God's firstborn Son, His corporate Son (v. 29). The will of God revealed in Romans is fulfilled organically by the inward operation of the divine life in redeemed and regenerated humanity, not by magisterial, objective decrees from on high. What is high in Romans is the Body of Christ (12:2, 4-5), being good and well pleasing and perfect. The elevation of the Body of Christ as the focal point of God's will in Romans is ultimately derived from the organic union of the one Body of Christ with Christ in the divine life that unites the members with Christ and with all the other members of Christ. The divine life, which is accessed through the organic union of the Body of Christ with Christ, is the factor that makes sinners sons of God and constitutes the corporate Body of Christ, which is expressed in local churches. Ultimately in Romans, Christ is organically manifested in the local churches as the corporate image of God, and God organically carries out His crushing judgment on His enemy under the feet of the Body (16:20), establishing a realm of expression in the local churches that is predicated on His image and indicative of His dominion.

In the first Epistle to the Corinthians Paul speaks of the Body of Christ being joined to the corporate image of Christ for the purpose of the orderly exercise of God's dominion in the administration of the church in its local expression. Paul's initial reference to the Body of Christ in 10:17 says, "Seeing that there is one bread, we who are many are one Body; for we all partake of the one bread." This is spoken in the context of his discussion of the Corinthians' disorderly conduct in their fellowship of the blood and the bread (v. 16), symbolizing the physical body of Christ broken on their behalf to produce the one Body, which should not be marred by dissension and divisive practices that unprofitably undercut the divine administration for God's dominion (vv. 23, 32). In chapter 12 Paul speaks of the Corinthians being baptized into one Body (v. 13), which baptism has

organically joined the members of the Body to Christ to the other individual members of the Body so that the Body can bear the image of the heavenly corporate Christ in the blended functioning of the members in the Body (6:17; 12:12, 14-22, 24; 15:49). In 1 Corinthians Paul's stress is on the restoration of the corporate image of Christ in the Body, which is revealed in 12:12 as being the one mysterious corporate Christ. The term *the Christ* in verse 12 does not refer to the individual Christ but to the corporate Christ, which is composed of Christ as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as His members.

Since the Body of Christ is the corporate Christ as the corporate image of God, the divine administration for God's dominion must be carried out through His Body, because dominion only issues forth from God's image. And since the judgment associated with God's divine administration through the church must begin in the church (1 Pet. 4:17), Paul speaks in detail about the problems of the church in Corinth, addressing each of them in order to bring the immature Corinthians into an orderly living in the Body by pointing them to Christ as the solution to all the problems in the church, problems that stem from their identification with the image of the earthly (1 Cor. 15:49). Paul's exhortations are all related to the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to have a group of saved and regenerated people who have become one in Christ's organic, corporate Body to carry out His administration (Eph. 3:10-11; 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12-13, 27).

In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul unveils the mystery of the Body of Christ as the organism of the Triune God, which is produced through the dispensing of the Triune God for heading up all things in Christ, for exercising God's authority over His enemies, and for displaying the Body as the end product of His wise and prudent operation in His revealed economy (1:3-14, 22; 3:3-5). Paul's emphasis in Ephesians on the Body is so significant that there are explicit references to the Body in every chapter, with the exception of chapter 6. Each chapter of the book of Ephesians speaks of the Body from a particular point of view. From the dispensing of the Triune God, which is spoken of in chapter 1, to the defeating of His enemy, which is spoken of in chapter 6, the thought of image and dominion is paramount in Ephesians.

Ephesians 1 reveals that the Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who fills all in all (v. 23), which issues from the dispensing of the processed Triune God (vv. 3-14). This dispensing reproduces the image of the Triune God in redeemed and regenerated humanity in Christ (vv. 3-4, 6), and it issues in the spread of God's dominion through the heading up of all things in Christ (v. 10). Ephesians 2 reveals that the Body of Christ is the issue of Christ's creating work on the cross, a work that reconciled both Jews and Gentiles in one Body to God, producing a masterpiece of the Triune God—the one new man, which bears the image of Christ and no longer walks according to the ruler of the authority of the air but rather as the members of the Body who are fellow citizens of God's organic kingdom (vv. 2, 10, 15-16, 19). Ephesians 3 reveals that the Body of Christ is the fullness



of the Triune God, the overflowing expressive image of God, by the members of the Body being supplied with the riches of Christ and by Christ's making His home in their hearts (vv. 6, 14-19). This fullness vindicates God's operation in humanity through an open display of the Body of Christ as the multifarious wisdom of God in Christ to the shame and defeat of the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies (v. 10). Ephesians 4 reveals that the one Body of Christ, which is the mingling of the Triune God with redeemed and regenerated believers (vv. 4-6), is built up by the one ministry of the Triune God that ministers the Triune God through the Body and to the Body (vv. 11-16). This Body grows into the Head to display God's heading up authority and to bear the stature, the image, of the fullness of Christ, having been delivered from systems of error brought in by teachings of men who are under the crafty influence of God's enemy (vv. 13-15). Ephesians 5 reveals that the Head of the Body is also the Savior of the Body (v. 23), which is composed of children of light to be the bride of Christ (vv. 8-9, 26-27), who is one with Christ and subject to Christ as the Head (v. 24), displaying God's image of holiness and God's dominion through His divinely ordained order (vv. 27, 31-32).

There are no explicit references to the Body of Christ in Ephesians 6, but perhaps this is because Paul intuitively understood that the readers of his Epistle would eventually realize that spiritual warfare with God's spiritual enemies can be carried out only by the Body as a corporate warrior (vv. 10-20), especially given his presentation of God's operation to produce the Body in the previous five chapters. It is implausible to assume that Paul's corporate emphasis in chapters 1 through 5 would recede in importance in chapter 6 into an altogether new focus on individual spiritual warfare. The defeat of God's enemy is the issue of the spread of God's dominion, and the fiat of this authority has been given to a corporate man in type and can be exercised only by the corporate Christ in reality.

The Epistle to the Colossians, written by Paul at the approximate time that he wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians, reinforces Paul's emphasis on the Body in Ephesians by speaking of Christ as the Head of the Body (1:18), which is an organic entity constituted with the Triune God and His chosen and redeemed ones. In the Body, Christ is the Head, and we are the members of His Body. This is seen in verse 24, where Paul speaks of his part, as a member, in filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for the Body. In Paul's eyes his afflictions had no exaggerated significance because of his function as an apostle, but they were simply a needed contribution

from a member. When the members see and accept their status as members, there is a spontaneous holding of the Head, a spontaneous living under the authority of the Head, out from whom all the Body grows with the growth of God into the image of God (2:19). God's growth in the Body fulfills the corporate calling of the members in the one Body to bear the image of Him who created him (3:10, 15).

The subtext of image and dominion is present in every Epistle that explicitly speaks of the Body of Christ. In Romans there is the conformity of the Body to the image of the Son and the exercise of God's crushing judgment through the Body. In 1 Corinthians there is an orderly restoration of God's authority in the Body through the impartation of Christ as the life-giving Spirit in order to reproduce Christ's heavenly image in a local church plagued with dissension and division. In Ephesians there is a dispensing of the divine life of the Triune God to produce the Body of Christ as the fullness of His image to empower His Body, as a corporate warrior, to defeat His enemy. And in

Colossians there is a calling in one Body for the Body to hold the Head for the renewing of the Body according to the image of Him who created him. The Body of Christ is clearly associated with the fulfillment of God's desire for image and dominion in all these Epistles, which speaks of the central place of the Body of Christ in God's mind when He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to

Our likeness; and let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26).

<sup>3</sup>The account of the creation of Adam in Genesis 5:1-2, which begins with a genealogy of individual men, who are part of the ancestral lineage of Christ, stresses the two matters of significance in 1:26-27—the likeness of God, which is related to the image of God, and the corporate aspect of Adam's person through the use of *them* and *their* with Adam's one name.

<sup>4</sup>For a fuller understanding of my use of the term *incorporation*, see the series of article in *Affirmation & Critique* by Kerry S. Robichaux on this topic. This series spans many issues, one of which is included in this issue.

<sup>5</sup>It is not accurate to apply the word *make* to Christ as the image of God when speaking of His pre-incarnate status as the Word of God, who was in the beginning with God and who was God (John 1:1), because in eternity past Christ bore the image of God and even the form of God, "being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance" (Heb. 1:3; Phil. 2:6). From eternity to eternity the image of the Triune God is Christ, whether this image resides in His person as in eternity past or is expressed through His corporate Body in eternity future.

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<sup>6</sup>Ephesians 2:15 speaks of Christ creating the one new man on the cross, not the Body of Christ, but in the very next verse Paul speaks of the constituents of the one new man—Jews and Gentiles—being reconciled in one Body to God, indicating that the one new man and the Body of Christ are the same corporate entity that is unveiled from different perspectives for the purpose of emphasizing different aspects of the church. In regard to the one new man, Christ is unveiled as the corporate person of the church, but in regard to the Body of Christ, Christ is unveiled as the corporate life of the church.

<sup>7</sup>Christ is the Head of the Body (Col. 1:18), but this does not mean that He is separate from the Body as the Head. Just as there is distinction but not separation in the Triune God, there is distinction in the Body of Christ, as implied by the terms *Head* and *Body*, but there is no separation between the Head and the Body. Hence, the term *Body* also serves as a broader reference to Christ as the Head and to the members who have been mingled with Christ. In *The Life of the Mystical Body* Philip L. Hanley says,

Viewed from one aspect, the Church is the *Body* of Christ, united by an interior principle, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ and of the members, through grace. Viewed from another aspect, the Church is Christ, Head and Body *together*, one mystical person. (22)

This is the thrust of Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 12:12, which says, "Even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ." This verse compares a physical body, which has a head and many members, to "the Christ." Ernest Mura comments on verse 12, saying,

St. Paul does not say, as we may have expected, "So also is it with the Church." He says: "So also is it with Christ"—"*ita et Christus*." The Christ of whom the Apostle speaks in this verse is not our Lord Jesus Christ alone. Paul includes all of us with him; he includes all the faithful united to Jesus in one Spirit and through the common grace of baptism. He is speaking of the Mystical Christ. (24)

In a footnote in the Recovery Version, Witness Lee states that the term *the Christ* refers to the corporate Christ, which is

composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted with His life and element and have thus become His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head but also the Body. As our physical body has many members yet is one, so is this Christ. (v. 12, note 2)

Since Christ is both the Head and the Body, there is distinction but not separation. The absence of separation can be further seen in Ephesians 4:15, which says, "Holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ." The Body grows into the Head, Christ, because the

Body is Christ, and it is impossible to separate Christ's status as the Head of the Body from Christ Himself. He is the Head, and when we grow, our growth is into the Head. This does not mean that our growth gives us the headship of Christ but rather that our heading up in Christ is derived from our experience of Christ as the Head (1:10).

<sup>8</sup>Although we the believers are in the process of being perfected in the divine life (Heb. 7:11; 10:14), we are still sinners and unrenewed in many aspects of our living, especially in matters that touch the parts of our untransformed soul—the mind, emotion, and will. In spite of these elements that offend God's righteousness, holiness, and glory, it is still possible for the divine life to flow in our being, because of the provision of Christ's God-satisfying blood. When we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness based on the blood of Jesus His Son (1 John 1:7-9). In the Old Testament, God said to Moses in regard to the passover blood, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exo. 12:13). Similarly, in the New Testament the blood that cleanses in 1 John 1:7 is not just "the blood of Jesus" but "the blood of Jesus His Son," indicating that it is the blood that the Father sees and approves. Our forgiveness and subsequent entrance into the Holy of Holies (Heb. 10:19), our regenerated human spirit as the source of the flowing divine life, is based on God's appraisal of the effectiveness of the blood, not on our feelings or our appraisal.

<sup>9</sup>Catholic theologians, it seems to me, have a more organic understanding of the mystical aspects of the Body of Christ, while many Protestant teachers, especially those with an inclination for popularization, tend to view the Body as being merely metaphorical. Thus, it is easy for them to deviate from speaking of "the Body" to speaking of "a Body" or "Bodies." With this subtle shift in emphasis, the organic aspects of the Body in Christ devolve into common organizational concepts that undermine the reality of the Body of Christ, especially the unity of the Body, even though the promulgation of these concepts may be carried out with good intentions. Charles Colson and Ellen Vaughn illustrate this tendency in *Being the Body*:

Individuals commit to one another to form a local, visible, confessing congregation in order to fulfill the purpose of the church. It is within that community that we worship and study and participate in the ordinances and sacraments. There we can...insist upon doctrinal agreement, and sometimes agreement on practices we follow. Within that body, which we help to create, we have a clear biblical warrant to hold each other accountable for faithfulness in confession and living...And nothing is more destructive of our communion, regardless of its cause, than disunity. (67-68)

Colson and Vaughn speak of creating a local body that maintains unity by insisting upon doctrinal agreement and "sometimes agreement on practices" within a "local, visible, confessing congregation." Such an insistence may be temporarily effective in preventing disunity within a limited group of believers that they

identify as “that body,” but if these believers impose any standard other than the receiving of Christ, the self-created, local confessing congregation will be merely a local sect that manifests divisions within the Body of Christ.

Despite a more accurate understanding of the organic aspects of the Body of Christ in Catholic doctrine, there are still significant limitations in its teachings related to the Body of Christ. One of these limitations is a lack in seeing that there is an organic connection between the Body and the Spirit, who indwells a believer’s regenerated human spirit. Our mysterious union with the Lord is a matter of being one spirit with Him in our human spirit (1 Cor. 6:17); it is not, as Mersch vaguely defines, a “mysterious existence in the depths of souls” (44). The Catholic Church also largely measures and views the oneness of the Body within the context of the observance of the communal sacraments, in the honoring of an earthly head, and in a commonplace insistence that only Catholic adherents of the faith are the Body.

Mersch links the believers’ inward union with Christ to the outward observance of the communal sacraments, saying, “Our union with Christ is something real. It is accomplished by the mysterious bread that gives us communion with the Body of Christ, and which unites all the communicants into one body” (114). Ernest Mura in *The Nature of the Mystical Body* also stresses the sacraments

as the means of our union with the Lord, but he takes this concept to an even further extreme, saying, “The fact is that Jesus does *abide* in us through Holy Communion. How is that possible? Sacramentally, he dwells within us only for a half-hour, more or less, after the reception of his sacred Body” (10). Philip L. Hanley, quoting from Pius XII’s papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, contributes to the leavening of the fine flour of Christ being the one Head of the Body by affirming the position of the pope as “a visible Head”:

We must not think that He (Christ) rules only in this hidden and extraordinary manner. On the contrary, our Divine Redeemer also governs His Mystical Body in a visible and normal way through His Vicar on earth... Since He was all wise He could not leave the body of the Church which He had founded without a visible Head. (5)

Hanley also equates the Roman Catholic Church with “the Mystical Body,” excluding all other believers:

That St. Paul had in mind an inspired idea of the great intimacy between Christ and the faithful is evident from

his frequent use of the term “body of Christ.” What he meant, however, has been variously interpreted, even by Catholics. Let us see precisely what the Mystical Body on earth, the Roman Catholic Church herself, teaches, for let us make clear from the outset that we are speaking of the Roman Catholic Church as the Church of Christ. (9)

Whether Catholic or Protestant, the revelation of the Body of Christ in the pure word of the Bible should govern the vision and practice of the Body life that all genuine believers have received. We should take nothing away by diminishing the organic and mystical elements in favor of organizational conformity, and we should not add the elements of human hierarchy and exclusion. Those whom Christ has received are members of the Body, and as members one of another, they should express the oneness that is the reality of the Body of Christ by receiving those whom the Lord has received. Such a receiving is not an objective action but a subjective reality

that comes from transformation through the experience of the divine life that flows in the Body of Christ.

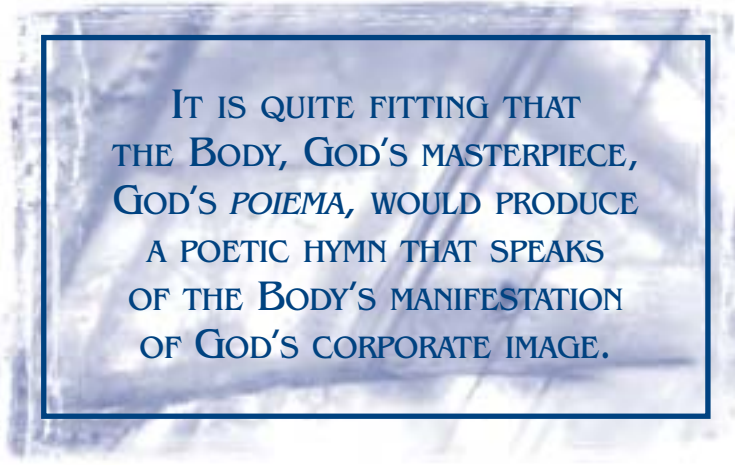
<sup>10</sup>It is quite fitting that the Body, which bears God’s corporate image and which is described in Ephesians 2:10 as God’s masterpiece, God’s *poiema* (Gk.), would produce a poetic hymn that speaks of the Body’s manifestation of God’s corporate image.

In effect, a work of poetry, produced through God’s poetic operation in redeemed and regenerated humanity, has become the Word of God.

The Greek word, *poiema*, means *something that has been made, a handiwork, or something that has been written or composed as a poem*. Not only a poetic writing may be considered a poem, but also any work of art that expresses the maker’s wisdom and design. We, the church, the masterpiece of God’s work, are a poem expressing God’s infinite wisdom and divine design.

The heavens, the earth, and man, created by God, are not God’s masterpiece; but the church, the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:23), the corporate and universal new man (v. 15), is a masterpiece. (Lee, Recovery Version, 2:10, note 1)

First Timothy 3:16 is a work of poetry produced by the Body of Christ in response to the Triune God’s poetic production of the Body of Christ as His masterpiece. In a sense, it is a mingled production, being out of both the Triune God and His corporate manifestation, the Body of Christ.





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### Great Is the Mystery of Godliness

Great is the mys-ter-y of god - li - ness, Great is the mys-ter-y of god - li - ness.

God was man-i - fest - ed in the flesh, Jus - ti - fied in the Spir - it,

Seen by the an - gels, preached a - mong the na - tions, Be -

lieved on in the world, tak - en up in glo - ry.

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