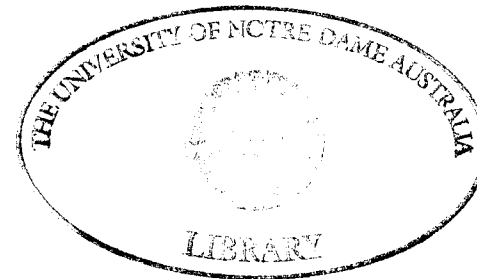


# THE MYSTERIES OF CHRISTIANITY

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By  
MATTHIAS JOSEPH SCHEEBEN



TRANSLATED BY CYRIL VOLLERT, S.J.

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## Translator's Preface

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This book is a translation of *Die Mysterien des Christentums*, by Matthias Joseph Scheeben. The translation was made from the 1941 edition, published by Herder & Co., G.m.b.H., of Freiburg im Breisgau, and edited by Joseph Höfer. Certain historical circumstances, which impart an extraordinary value to this edition and make previous editions obsolete, deserve to be recounted.

Toward the end of 1887 Scheeben's friend and publisher, Benjamin Herder, requested him to prepare a second edition of the book, which had appeared originally in 1865. The great theologian immediately set to work, and in June of the following year wrote that he could send Herder the greatest part of the new edition, so that printing could begin at once; he would prefer, however, to wait until the whole was finished. This was Scheeben's last letter to the publisher. A month later an untimely death put an end to his fruitful apostolate of the pen.

Scheeben had prepared for the projected new edition by extensively annotating two personal copies of the original edition. L. Küpper, the editor of the second edition, which appeared in 1898, knew of one of these, but made slight and uncritical use of it, preferring to inject his own views into Scheeben's book, without indicating in the text the changes he had introduced. Subsequently Scheeben's annotated copy was forgotten. When A. Rademacher worked on the third edition, published in 1912, apparently he was unaware of its existence. He further modified Scheeben's text by adding changes of his own to Küpper's edition.

Of the two copies of the first edition annotated by Scheeben, one had been carefully and copiously worked through. The other contains only rough drafts of new sentences and paragraphs, marginal notes, and underlinings. Höfer made full and scholarly use of both

## CHAPTER XIX

# The Mystery of the Church

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### 77. GENERAL NOTION OF THE MYSTERY

**B**Y becoming man the Son of God has called the whole human race to fellowship in His body. That which was remote, that which was far from God and vastly below Him, He has brought near in His person, and has joined in one body, His own body. Upon Himself and in Himself He has established a great community and society of men. He is at once the head and the foundation of this society. In it He wills to continue His activity and His reign. Through it He wishes to unite men to Himself and to His heavenly Father. This society is the Church.

The Church is a great and stupendous mystery. It is a mystery in its very being, a mystery in its organization, a mystery in the power and activity it exercises. Let us endeavor first of all to determine the perspective according to which it is to be viewed.

When we assert that the Church is a mystery, do we intend to do away with its natural visibility? By no means; the Church is visible in its members, in its external organization, and in the relations existing between its superiors and subjects. It is as visible as any other human society.

I venture to make an even greater claim: the Church is visible not only as it actually stands at present, but in its divine foundation and institution.

The astonishing origin and the no less astonishing continuance and growth of this society, the numberless moral and physical miracles marking its course throughout the centuries and in every quarter of the globe, prove that it is no mere work of man. They prove that it is a work of God, that God has instituted it and continues still to acknowledge and uphold it as an organization that He Himself has founded.

The Church is visible in the very way that its historical founder and head, the God-man Himself, was visible. The God-man was visible both as a real man, and as a man sent by God and standing in a unique relationship to God. Similarly the Church is visible both as a society of men, and as a society founded and sustained by God.

The likeness of the Church to Christ is carried out even in its invisibility and its mysterious character. Despite the visibility of His humanity and its unique relationship to God, the proper character of Christ as true God and true man lay hidden beneath the visible veil in the depths of the Godhead. So too, the inner nature of the Church, the sacred bond which envelops its members and links them together, the marvelous power which holds sway in it and energizes it with life, the heavenly goal which it pursues—all this, notwithstanding the visibility of its external organization and its divine origin, is simply impenetrable to the natural eye of man, and hence is incomprehensible and inconceivable. It is only by belief in divine revelation that we can conceive and know the true nature of the God-man, head of the Church. Likewise it is only by acceptance of this same revelation that we are able to grasp the true inner greatness which marks the Church because of the divine-human character of its head.

The inner nature of the Church is absolutely supernatural, as is that of the God-man. This is the reason why it is so hidden and mysterious; this is the reason why the Church, although conformable to other human societies in its outward organization, differs essentially from these in its innermost character; and this is the reason why its unity, its power, and its organization are so matchless, sublime, and inconceivable.

Concerning the nature of the Church, the temptation might arise to form a notion that has regard only to externals, on the analogy of other societies that exist among men, and to account for its radical difference from these only by the fact that it is a religious community founded by God. Such it is, no doubt; but this alone would not place it so high beyond the range of our minds. In the same way that men organize themselves for other purposes, they could also band together for common worship; there is nothing supernatural in this. Indeed, by a positive ordination God Himself could decree the formation of such a society, assign laws to it, bestow special rights

and privileges on it, and, on the other hand, bind men to it and refer them to it for the fulfillment of their religious obligations, as was done through the Mosaic institutions of the Old Testament. A society of this kind would not come into existence without a supernatural, extraordinary intervention on God's part. But this circumstance would not make it supernatural and mysterious in its very nature. The worship of God would be purely natural, except that it would be regulated and conducted according to fixed norms. And if God were to attach a special efficacy to the priestly and jurisdictional functions of this society, so that remission of sins and other graces would be granted through the former, and subjects would be guided with full certitude in the conduct of their religious life by the latter, this indeed would be quite extraordinary. It would be the effect of a special, gratuitous Providence; but it would not be genuinely mysterious and supernatural. If such were the case, the entire Church as an institution would be reduced to a mere system of education and guidance directed by God, and a legal code regulating man's dealings with God; its unity and activity would be only something moral, after the analogy of other human societies.

Faith shows us that there is vastly more to the Church than this. Faith enables us to see in the Church not merely an institution established for the education and guidance of natural man, but one that confers on man a new existence and a new life, a wholly new, supernatural rank and destiny, and that is designed to support, strengthen, and direct him in his striving for this destiny. To the eyes of faith the Church is not merely a society founded and approved by God or a divine legate; but it is built upon the God-man, it is made an organic part of Him, it is raised to His level, it is upheld by His divine power and is filled with His divine excellence. The Church is the body of the God-man; and all who enter it become members of the God-man so that, linked together in Him and through Him, they may share in the divine life and the divine glory of their head. Lastly, as seen by faith, the Church is more than a handmaid of God or of the God-man, a servant who would aid in bringing about a certain limited intimacy between God and man. As the mystical body of Christ, the Church is His true bride who, made fruitful by His divine power, has the destiny of bearing heavenly children to Him and His heavenly Father, of nourishing

these children with the substance and light of her bridegroom, and of conducting them beyond the whole range of created nature up to the very bosom of His heavenly Father.

In brief, the Church is a most intimate and real fellowship of men with the God-man, a fellowship that achieves its truest and most perfect expression in the Eucharist. If the God-man dwells in the Church in so wonderful a manner as to associate Himself with all its members to form one body, then evidently the unity in which He joins them is so august and mysterious that no human mind can conjecture or understand it. And if through the agency of this unity He draws the members of the Church up to and into Himself in order to permeate them with His divine power and glory, to offer them in Himself and with Himself as an infinitely pleasing sacrifice to God, this also is a mystery surpassing all human understanding and all human notions. This mystery induces in us the realization that we can never think too highly of the nature and importance of the Church.

#### 78. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF ITS MEMBERS WITH CHRIST AS HEAD AND BRIDEGROOM

If the mystical nature of the Church, as the fellowship of men with the God-man, culminates and receives its fullest expression in the Eucharist, we cannot better study the Church than by regarding it from the standpoint of the Eucharist, its very heart. Let us begin with a consideration of that fellowship with Christ which is common to all the members of the Church.

The Eucharist, whether regarded as sacrament or as sacrifice, is the sacred and mysterious bond encircling all the members of the Church. Fellowship in the Church attains its full perfection in the actual partaking of the Eucharist, and in actual participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice. The right to participate in the Eucharist as sacrifice and sacrament is the chief factor that determines membership in the Church. Faith and baptism truly initiate us into the Church, but only for the reason that they qualify us for participation in the Eucharist. Indeed, by faith and baptism we spiritually anticipate the power conferred by the Eucharist, and are made members of Christ's body in proportion to our dignity. But this membership looks forward to a closer, substantial fellowship in His body that is to be effected later.

Hence to be a member of the Church is to be a member of Christ's body. In a wider sense man is a member of Christ's body by the very fact that he belongs to the human race, but only so far as he is thereby called actually to attach himself to Christ and to enter into the organism of His body.

On the one hand man is to move toward his head by faith in His dignity and power, and on the other hand he is to appropriate to himself the signature and the seal of his head, so as to belong to His body in the stricter sense, to become a member that will be responsive to the influence emanating from the head and will stand in organic connection with the head. The first step is made by faith, the second by baptism. Faith and baptism together make man a member of Christ in the organism of the Church instituted by Christ Himself.

What high, supernatural dignity is attained by man when he becomes a member of the Church, how astounding the union into which he enters with Christ, and through Christ with God, and at the same time with all his fellow members in the Church! What a tremendous mystery lies even in simple membership in the Church! It is a mystery as great as the mystery of the mystical body of Christ, as the mystery of the Eucharist in which it culminates, as the mystery of the Incarnation upon which it is based, as the mystery of grace which is its fruit.

To conceive of the integration of all members of the Church in Christ under the notion of a mystical marriage with the God-man, as the Apostle does,<sup>1</sup> is merely to express the truth in another way. By the Incarnation Christ has assumed our nature in order to yoke Himself with us. The Fathers view the Incarnation itself as a marriage with the human race, inasmuch as it virtually contains everything that can lead to the full union of the Son of God with men. But the relationship of unity it sets up comes to full fruition only in the Church. Man is to attach himself to his divine bridegroom by faith; and the bridegroom seals His union with man in baptism, as with a wedding ring. But both faith and baptism are mere preliminaries for the coming together of man and the God-man in one flesh by a real Communion of flesh and blood in the Eucharist, and hence for the perfect fructifying of man with the energizing grace of his head. By entering the Church every soul becomes a real

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 5:22-33.

bride of God's Son, so truly that the Son of God is able, in the Apostle's words, not only to compare His love and union with the Church and her members with the unity achieved in matrimony, but can even propose it as the ideal and model of the latter. Is not such unity an ineffable, stupendous mystery, which infinitely transcends all the notions of natural man?

If the Church in all its members is thus the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, the power of its divine head, the Spirit of its divine bridegroom, must be gloriously operative in it. In all its members the Church is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in it as the soul in its own body, and manifests His divine and divinizing power in it. He is active in the Church not only in the way in which, as the Spirit of eternal wisdom and order, He guides and directs all well-regulated societies, not merely by sustaining with special assistance individuals and the entire community in its religious pursuits, by granting the remission of sins, and by helping to heal our moral weaknesses and infirmities. No, He must be active in the members of Christ's body as He is in the real body of Christ, namely, by filling them with the plenitude of the divinity. He must overshadow the bride of Christ as once He overshadowed Mary's womb, so that in her the Son of God may be reborn in His divine holiness and majesty. With His divine fire He must gloriously change Christ's bride into the image of the divine nature, transform her whole being by adding splendor to splendor, and pervade her with His own divine life. All this He must do so radically and powerfully that it may be said of her that she does not herself live, but God lives in her. He must make her so like her divine head and bridegroom that she seems to be Christ Himself.

When it is asserted of other societies that the member joining it becomes like a plant that is transplanted in a new soil, or grafted onto a new trunk, the figure is to be taken in a very diluted and weakened sense. For in such cases the soil and the trunk of the society can do no more than give a new bent to the member's growth, and aid him in the developing of existing aptitudes. These societies cannot transform the new member's innermost being and nature, or the root of his life. All that is possible is a moral suasion by moral influence. But when a person becomes a member of the Church, he is taken up to the bosom of God in Christ and through Christ; he is planted in a heavenly soil, and grafted on a divine trunk;

he enters into a new, supernatural sphere where his nature is transformed and transfigured. A wholly new life is infused into him, and this new life is nourished and cultivated under the sun and dew of a new heaven. The Holy Spirit, it is true, reigns in the members of the Church by guiding, assisting, and healing them. But such aid is granted only on the basis of that elevation and transfiguration of man beyond his nature which is effected by the Holy Spirit. Its purpose is to inaugurate and foster the divine life which must first be implanted in human nature by Him, and to furnish and adorn the divine temple which must first be built by Him.

We shall see later how the Holy Spirit gradually unfolds His activity in the individual members of the Church. Here our object is to make clear that the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the members of the Church, as the members of Christ, must be intimate and mysterious to a high degree, inasmuch as it is the emanation and the continuation of that presence and activity with which He dwells in the humanity of the Son of God. Since the Holy Spirit Himself proceeds from the Son of God and as such belongs to Him, He necessarily enters into the Son's humanity and into His whole mystical body, and belongs also to the latter. This is true all the more inasmuch as in the Eucharist the Son of God dwells bodily and essentially, with all the plenitude of His divinity, among His members in the bosom of the Church. In the Son and through the Son the Holy Spirit dwells there also, personally and essentially. He is the very Spirit and, as it were, the soul of the Church.

Thus the great mystery of the Eucharistic Christ is the center around which is grouped the noble community of Christ's faithful. This community we call the Church. It is a fellowship that is a great mystery in its own right, because it elevates all its members in a mysterious way, and operates in them in a mysterious way.

#### 79. THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH IN ITS MATERNAL ORGANIZATION

With all this we are still far from appreciating the mystery of the Church in all its greatness. The God-man had no intention of making the members of the ecclesiastical community His members simply in order to act in them as their head. He willed further to appoint some of them as representatives and organs of His own

activity, so that His mystical body might be equipped with an internal organization, which would, however, find expression in external signs. As bridegroom He had a higher object in view than merely to be yoked with all the members of the Church so that they might benefit their own persons by sharing in His dignity and honor. In a part of its members the Church, as His bride, was meant to be a true mother to the children who were to be reborn to Him as bridegroom, so that the heavenly rebirth of the human race might correspond to its natural generation, and the organization of the God-man's family might conform to the family of earthly man. To this end He weds a part of the members of the Church in a special way, entrusts to their keeping the mystical resources belonging to the Church in common, and overshadows them beyond all others with the power of the Holy Spirit, so that they may bear Him children and bring them into closest fellowship with Himself.

This is the great mystery of the maternity of the Church in her priesthood. In general the priesthood of the Church functions as intermediary between Christ and His children, much as the mother does between father and children. But the similarity between this twofold intermediacy must be adequately understood.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with its office the priesthood must bring Christ to birth anew in the bosom of the Church, both in the Eucharist and in the hearts of the faithful, by the power of Christ's Spirit reigning in the Church. Priests must build up the organism of Christ's mystical body, as Mary, by the power of the same Holy Spirit, brought forth the Word in His own humanity, and gave Him His physical body. The miraculous conception of Christ and His birth from the womb of the Virgin is the model and also the basis of the further spiritual conception and birth of Christ in the Church through the priesthood. And this priesthood stands in a relationship to the God-man similar to that of Mary to the Son of God who descended into her and was born of her. The two mysteries are complementary; they illuminate and set off each other.

As Mary conceived the Son of God in her womb by the over-

<sup>2</sup> The close connection between the sacerdotal dignity and the sacrifice which Christ has bequeathed to His "beloved bride, the Church," has been pointed out by Pius XI in his encyclical *Ad catholici sacerdotii* (December 20, 1935, no. 1). [Tr.]

shadowing of the Holy Spirit, drew Him down from heaven by her consent, and gave Him, the Invisible, to the world in visible form, so the priest conceives the Incarnate Son of God by the power of the same Spirit in order to establish Him in the bosom of the Church under the Eucharistic forms. Thus Christ is born anew through the priesthood by a continuation, as it were, of His miraculous birth from Mary; and the priesthood itself is an imitation and extension of the mysterious maternity that Mary possessed with regard to the God-man. The priesthood is for the Eucharistic Christ what Mary was for the Son of God about to become man.

With this maternity which the Church in her priesthood exercises over Christ who is to be received into her bosom, is connected, or rather from it proceeds, her mysterious motherhood over her individual members. Christ is brought into the Church in the Eucharist because the Church is to be joined with Him in one body, because He is to be reborn in her members. For this reason also the priesthood has the power, through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, to bring forth Christ anew in the hearts of the faithful, and the faithful in Christ, in order to effect a substantial union between them and Christ in His real body, and to nourish them with His own flesh and blood in their new, supernatural life. As the priesthood gives rebirth to Christ, the head of the Church, so it must also impart new birth to the members of the head.

The underlying idea and the essential functions of the sublime motherhood that we must ascribe to the Church in her priesthood consist in making the real body of Christ present in the Eucharist for union with His mystical body, and in building up this mystical body itself. Hence this maternity is no empty formula, it is not a weak analogue of natural motherhood. It implies more than the fact that the Church has the attitude of a loving mother toward her members by caring for them, nourishing them, instructing them, and rearing them like children. All such activity exercised by the Church and its priesthood has its basis and receives its true meaning and character from the fact that the priesthood is supernaturally related to the children of the Church with a relationship no less real and true than that of a natural mother to the children she has borne. In its own way this relationship is as real and objective as the real presence of the God-man in the Eucharist which is effected through the cooperation of the priesthood, or as the new, supernatural existence

and life of the children of God which is brought into being through the agency of the same priesthood.

Hence the priesthood itself is as great and mysterious as the two effects with which it is associated. Inexpressibly sublime is the dignity imparted to the priesthood, and in it to the Church: to be the mother of the God-man in His sacramental existence, and of men in their higher, divine existence. Incomprehensible is the fruitfulness which the Church reveals in this maternity, unspeakable the union with the overshadowing Holy Spirit, who in her bosom and through her brings about marvels similar to those that took place in the most pure womb of Mary. This supernatural motherhood is the central mystery of the Church as an organically constructed society. For it is this motherhood by which the ecclesiastical fellowship is made a soundly constituted society, wherein the children are linked to the Father through the mother. By it the body of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, is developed and extended by a process of growth from within; by it the real presence and the real union of the head with His members is sustained and perfected. Finally, this maternity is the basis of all the other social relations and activities which regulate and shape the Church in the unfolding of its life. It imparts to these a supernatural, mysterious stamp which they would lack apart from union with the Church.

The activity of the priesthood in the Church, to use the Apostle's words, amounts to this: to fashion Christ in its members, to unite them to Christ, to conform them to Him, to build them up to the full measure of the stature of Christ.<sup>3</sup> Because of this end the activity of the priesthood receives, to a greater or less extent, a higher, supernatural significance wherever it is exercised. The sublime motherhood of the Church leaves its mark upon all the functions of the priesthood.

As a heavenly mother, the Church nourishes her children with heavenly bread, the flesh of the Son of God. With this same flesh and blood of God's Son she places in their hands a gift by the oblation of which they can offer a perfect sacrifice to their heavenly Father. In this oblation they can also offer themselves to Him in a fitting manner, so as to honor Him as He deserves, to thank Him, to make satisfaction to Him for all their sins, and to obtain abundant gifts from Him. As heavenly mother she stamps on their forehead

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 3:14-19; 4:11-16.

the seal of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of confirmation, to equip and strengthen them for strife and battle. As heavenly mother she washes her children clean from the filth of sin, and after the disastrous separation from their heavenly Father leads them back into His arms. As heavenly mother she cures and heartens them in their illnesses of body and soul, particularly at that decisive hour when in the midst of harsh conflict their very entrance into the joys of their heavenly Father is at issue. As heavenly mother she reproduces herself in the persons of the priests who bear her maternal dignity, and with her blessing accompanies those of her children who, animated with her dispositions and by virtue of the Holy Spirit's consecration imparted to them, join in wedlock for the bodily propagation and multiplication of her members.

In all these activities the Church operates on the basis of her motherhood, with an ever-growing manifestation of the marvelous fertility she possesses by reason of her union with the Holy Spirit. But, since she is a mother, she must do more than prove herself fruitful in her children by the communication or renovation of an increasingly intimate fellowship with Christ and His heavenly Father. She must also guide and regulate the activity which her children are to undertake for the purpose of entering into that fellowship; or, when in it, of making it known and further developing it. She must teach and educate them. She must instruct her children especially concerning those supernatural, mysterious truths which the Son of God has brought down to her from His heavenly Father. She must initiate her children into the mysteries of God and of their own supernatural nobility and destiny. She must teach them with an authority and infallibility which correspond to the dignity of Christ's bride who occupies the place of God, and to the sublimity of the faith which is to be engendered in them. And she must so guide and rule her children that, led by her hand, they may with certainty and confidence set out toward the mysterious, supernatural goal which, in the person of her divine head, she has long since anticipated and taken into possession.

The power to teach and educate, even when exercised with a certain infallibility, may perhaps not seem to be a very great mystery. But at any rate there is a great mystery in the teaching and educating power which the Church possesses as the heavenly mother of the human race, and which is inseparably bound up with that



motherhood. For this power supposes that the priesthood of the Church is truly the bride of Christ and the organ of the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit, by the glorious presence and union whereby He imparts to the priesthood its sublime fruitfulness, enables Christ's bride to keep alive and cultivate her fruit in the faithful, and to make that fruit beneficial and salutary to the faithful through their obedience in matters of faith and conduct.

#### 80. RELATION OF THE SACRAMENTAL MATERNITY TO THE JURISDICTIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

The maternity of the Church, which is represented by a specially favored number of its members, comprises two functions: the power to confer grace, and the power to direct the use or acquisition of grace. A clearer understanding of the relationship between these two functions is indispensable for a deeper insight into the mystical organization of the Church.

This distinction coincides with the distinction familiar to theologians of a former age, between the power of orders and the power of jurisdiction, as two powers essentially different and even separable in those who possess them. In more recent times the distinction has repeatedly been assailed; the contention has been advanced that it is inadequate because it excludes the teaching authority, and that it sets up too great a cleavage between the powers which it distinguishes. It may well be that many theologians have given occasion for such strictures, owing to a superficial appreciation of the purport of the distinction. But at bottom it is a profound concept, and is rich in most weighty consequences.<sup>4</sup>

By the power of jurisdiction we must here understand not only external legislative power in the ordinary sense, as it is found in other societies, but especially the power by which the Church authoritatively directs and regulates the activity of its subjects, and by which it establishes and enforces the norms for that activity. But the Church does precisely this and nothing else even in the exercise of its teaching power, since in virtue of its divine authority it rules and regulates outward actions and also their inner principle,

<sup>4</sup> Scheeben defends this distinction against the division, current in his day, into "regal, sacerdotal, and prophetic power," and gives the dogmatic bases for it in his *Dogmatik*, Bk. I, sec. 10, nos. 109-26. [Tr.]

and the inner attitude of those who perform them. By jurisdiction we usually mean no more than disciplinary power over external actions and over the external order prevailing in a society, since it is only in such cases that an external code of laws, or jurisdiction in the narrower sense, can be administered. But the Church has judicial competency even in matters of faith; although it can pass no judgment concerning the fact of interior belief, it can at least determine the obligation of believing. Were it not for this competency, we could well forgo the expression "power of jurisdiction," and substitute "pastoral office" for it. This is the term used by the Savior Himself; it implies the competence which the Church possesses with regard to the guidance and education of its children, an office to be discharged by feeding and leading them. The Church feeds its children by setting up norms for their belief, and guides them by setting up norms for their conduct. At the same time this term tones down the opposition of this power to the power of orders, that is, the priesthood, and clears the way for an understanding of the connection between them.

Despite such connection, we must hold fast to the truth that the pastoral power is not formally bound up with the power of orders, since there can be priests and bishops without actual jurisdiction. In virtue of its higher "order," the priesthood constitutes, so to speak, the nobility in the Church, a nobility whose higher dignity and control of the society's supernatural goods in the realm of grace set it apart from the other members. On account of its rank it is called upon, as a body, to wield the pastoral power in the Church. As the spiritual mother of the rest of the faithful, the priesthood is also the natural custodian of the educational authority over them. Moreover, since the priesthood is so closely related to the God-man, and since the Holy Spirit resides in the sacerdotal order with the rich fruitfulness of His graces, it is the organ by which the same Holy Spirit wills to lead the Church to all truth and to guide it to all good.

This is not to say that the pastoral office is entrusted wholly or in part to any individual simply because of his priestly rank. Nor do we assert that any individual has, without further consideration, even the right to exercise his sacerdotal fruitfulness, or to dispose of the treasures of grace contained therein, either for himself or in behalf of the faithful; for this disposal does not belong to the sacerdotal

power as such, but to the pastoral power. In virtue of the title by which the pastoral power has the exclusive right to guide and to regulate the ecclesiastical activity of the rest of the faithful, it has the right to govern and to regulate those activities by which the Holy Spirit distributes His graces. In general, of course, the Holy Spirit entrusts the guidance and government of His Church to His priestly organs, as is in keeping with their position. But if the great number of these organs is to prove no detriment to the union and order of the Church, He must regulate the exercise of their sacerdotal power and the transmission of the pastoral office to them according to a definite hierarchy, and place it under undivided control. Hence the organism of the Church, which is based on the segregation of Christ's priestly organs from the lay members, must be carried on and be brought to perfection by the organization of its governing power.

Therefore the unity of the Church in its social life depends in a special way on the unity of the pastoral power. This unity of the pastoral power must be a clear sign that the Spirit of the Church operating in many organs is a single Spirit, who brings all these organs together in one whole, and causes them to exercise their activity in an orderly manner conformable with the unity of the whole. The members and organs of the Church form one body of Christ and assemble around the Eucharist as the source of their common life, and they are called to image forth the highest unity of all, that of the Trinity. In the unfolding of their life and activity, these members and organs constitute a closely knit whole, in which the unity and harmony of external social life is the faithful reflection of its true, internal, mysterious unity. This fact must be manifested by the unity of the pastoral power.

This unity of pastoral power in the Church is guaranteed by the revealed doctrine that the entire plenitude of such power is in one supreme pontiff. Moreover, this power is so vested that the whole flock of the Church and even the priests and high priests are entrusted to his care and are subject to him, and that all these high priests and priests can obtain and exercise their pastoral office in the Church only in dependence on him and in union with him. The entire social structure of the Church rests on him as its foundation. The pastoral power passes from him to the other pastors of the Church as rays proceed from the sun, brooks from their source,

branches from the tree. Owing to the fact that the plenitude of the pastoral power resides in him, and that no such power can be envisaged in the Church as independent of his, the Church is made truly and perfectly one, not only in its summit, but in its deepest base—and from the base up; not only in its topmost branch, but in its root—and from the root up. Any other, lesser unity in the Church is unthinkable, unless the structure of its social organization is to be quite at odds with its inner nature.

Prior to the Vatican Council many theologians could not rise to this lofty idea of the position of the papacy in the Church. One of the reasons for this failure, and not the least, is the fact that they did not sufficiently know or view the Church in terms of its supernatural, mysterious nature, which is reflected and expressed precisely in the papacy. The Church, although founded by God, was made to conform too much to the pattern of natural societies. In natural societies the undivided ruling power, even when the form of government is monarchical, is never more than representative of the common interest; the unification of power in one hand does not pertain to the essence of such societies, but constitutes only a special mode of their existence and structure. Hence the monarch is the pinnacle of the society rather than its base or an essential condition of its existence. The Church, on the contrary, is formed around an already existing, supernatural center, namely, Christ and His Holy Spirit, and this center must, by intrinsic necessity, manifest itself in the social organism in the person of a single representative, a single organ. The Church does not project this central point from itself; nor is the center set up by God merely for the purpose of completing the Church as an undivided whole. Rather it is intended to be the foundation upon which the Church is constructed, by which the Church rests upon the God-man and the Holy Spirit, and by which the unity of the Church is not incidentally brought about or crowned, but is essentially procured. The Church, as a society, is held together in this central point, as it is in Christ; through it the Church is in Christ, because it is only through it that Christ Himself, as the supreme head of the Church, is in the Church with His pastoral power.

If such is the true notion of the unity of the pastoral power in the Church, and of the unity of the Church which stands or falls with the unity of the pastoral power, the infallibility which is associated

with it or, rather, is intrinsic to it, must evidently reside in him who possesses the pastoral power in its plenitude. The pastoral office must involve infallibility, at least with regard to the regulation of faith and morals, since otherwise it could not with absolute reliability guide those who are subject to it. It is so in fact, because they who possess it administer it as representatives of Christ and organs of the Holy Spirit. Consequently he who has this power in its plenitude, who therefore is the fully qualified representative of Christ and the spokesman of the Holy Spirit, must possess infallibility, so far, of course, as he acts in virtue of his full power and asserts the full range of his authority. Through him Christ wills to bring all the members of the Church together in unity of faith and love; through him and in him all the faithful are to attach themselves to their supernatural head and permit themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

This supernatural infallibility of the pastoral power in the pope is, like the radical unity of the same power in his person, the reflection of the inner, mysterious character of the Church. Hence it is itself a supernatural mystery, which the Church in its divine greatness offers for our contemplation. A mere infallibility of the whole—that is, of the whole Church, or even of the entire episcopate, as resulting from the agreement of individuals—would be only an imperfect, deliberately planned measure of expediency, unworthy of the sublime activity which the Holy Spirit unfolds in the Church. On the other hand, its center of gravity would be withdrawn from the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and would be shifted to a natural basis. If none other than the Holy Spirit is to gather the many together, why should He not group them organically, by assigning them to a common center? Surely, where such agreement in matters of faith actually exists among the faithful or their pastors, it must be referred to the Holy Spirit, who operates in all. But their infallible certitude would at the same time have a predominantly natural cause and warrant in the fact that the constant agreement of so many men could not otherwise be procured than by the objective truth of the matter agreed upon.

An explanation thus based on natural causality obviously weakens the mystery of infallibility. Those who acknowledge the root of the Church's infallibility only in such accord, show only too clearly that they shy away from whatever is supernatural or mysterious in the Church, and cannot reconcile themselves to these qualities of the

Church. Indeed, they undermine even the external organization of the Church, which rests essentially upon supernatural foundations. If this view is justified, the Church is lacking in an organ to produce such accord among the faithful, when it is not already present; the pronouncement of the pope is no more than an official witness of the existing agreement, and the pope himself is but the spokesman of the community, and only in this sense is also the spokesman of the Holy Spirit who abides in the community. His faith, therefore, would not be the basis of the faith of the community; and instead of upholding the community, in accord with the words of the Savior, his faith would be upheld by the community.

But why should we be reluctant to admit a mysterious foundation for the external organization of this structure, whose entire being is a mystery? Why should not the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the priesthood with His marvelous fruitfulness in order to distribute His graces in the Church through its agency, be able so to dwell, and why should He not actually dwell, in the central point of the Church's social structure, in the bearer of His pastoral power? Why should He not bring the whole flock together in faith and love from that point, and through it impart unity and stability to the structure? Such union of the Holy Spirit with the head of the Church would be a tremendous wonder; but it ought to be precisely that. The Church is throughout an awe-inspiring, divine edifice. What wonder that its foundation should be so remarkable? The Church is the bride of the God-man. What wonder that it should be so closely united to Him through its head, and be so marvelously guided by Him through its head?

Only in terms of the mystery of the fullness of the pastoral office in the head of the bishops, can we form an adequate notion of the mystery of the sublime maternity of the Church, as it has been described above.

The motherhood of the Church in the strict sense pertains not to the whole community, but to those persons endowed with the fruitfulness and the pastoral power by which the children of the Church are begotten, reared, and guided.<sup>5</sup> In a word, it belongs to the fathers

<sup>5</sup> Such motherhood can be ascribed to all the members of the Church only in an analogous sense. They cannot be the ministers of the sacraments by which grace is conferred, or acquire grace by offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, or guide others authoritatively. But they can implore grace by

of the Church. We call them "fathers" because of their natural sex character, which in conformity with propriety is demanded by Christ for the carrying out of the higher offices in the Church. But if their function in the Church is considered formally according to its supernatural side, and if attention is focused on their dignity rather than on their persons, they obviously have a maternal character. Thus viewed, their persons are seen in a special way to be wedded to the God-man in His Holy Spirit: they are persons through whom the God-man begets, rears, and educates His children, as the father of the family does through the mother. In this particular respect the multiplicity of their persons does not enter into consideration, but rather the unity of their relationship to Christ and to the Holy Spirit; and even in the external organism this unity is represented by the dependence of them all on him who possesses the pastoral power in its fullness.

In virtue of this double union (internally with Christ and the Holy Spirit, and externally with the representative of both), the priests constitute the one bride of Christ. Christ Himself renders them fruitful for the purpose of begetting and nourishing the children of the Church, and He crowns their head with His pastoral power. Thereby they are likewise made the one mother of the faithful. They possess this dignity when all of them are taken together as a unit, whereas their head, the pope, possesses it by himself alone. So far as they proceed and act in virtue of their double connection, the qualities of their individual personalities do not enter into consideration. Whether such personality is good or evil, Christ acts through them as through His organs. This activity is ever fruitful, or infallible according to the nature of the case; no account is taken of the personal condition of the organs. They are fruitful in the exercise of the sacerdotal power, and infallible in the exercise

prayer and by personal sacrifice, and lead others to good by their personal influence. This common fruitfulness and activity of all the members does not at all exclude the aforesaid motherhood in the narrower sense. Indeed, the former can exist only in close dependence on the latter, as the latter can successfully realize its fruitfulness and activity only in connection with the former. The two kinds of motherhood are intimately related, and must support each other. The justification and significance of the general motherhood rest on the fact that all the members of the Church are the brides of Christ, and as such are made fruitful by His Spirit, and so are called to bear fruit to their bridegroom both in themselves and in the community to which they belong, and to contribute to the building up of His mystical body.

of the complete pastoral office, with regard to faith and morals. This is the concrete sense of the words that are often understood but vaguely: the Church as such cannot err; the errors of her members and of him who holds authority do not touch the Church herself. Her womb remains ever undefiled and immaculate, for it is the abode and vehicle of the fructifying and ruling power of the Holy Spirit. And so, too, the children of the Church, so far as they are begotten of her and are reared and guided by her in the power of the Holy Spirit, are unstained and holy: they are children of God in their very being and in their life.

But since even those who are endowed with the glorious maternity of the Church do not always personally measure up to their dignity, and since the children of the Church do not always conduct themselves as such, but thwart the fruitfulness of their mother and withdraw from her guidance, the outer countenance of this heavenly bride is often stained and disfigured. In her womb, but not from her womb, rankly grows many a weed that casts a shade over her heavenly blossoms. And although often enough her inner majesty and greatness are manifested in luminous rays, these brilliant signs are not sufficient to disclose the entire wealth of her grandeur. The true glory of the King's daughter is from within; it lies hidden within the wonderful power with which the Holy Spirit acts in her and through her. That glory will be completely unveiled only when it will have completely purified, sanctified, transfigured, and deified all her true children. The less that glory can be perceived and grasped from without, the greater and more sublime it is; and the less the sordidness clinging even to the Church can tarnish or destroy her inner glory, the more divine must that glory be. These reasons show the august mystery that is the Church; a mystery calling forth a vigorous divine faith that will soar above whatever is visible and natural, but also providing that faith with an inconceivably lofty object.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> During the period of the Kulturkampf and the following decades German theology paid less attention to such ideas as developed by Möhler and Scheeben than to pointing out the notable achievements of Catholic culture. Scheeben did not by any means, however, overemphasize the spiritual character of the Church. Rather he suggests elements for a new exposition of the moral and cultural contribution made by the visible Church. The value of this contribution stands forth as prominently in the chaos of the modern world as during the greatest spiritual periods of the Church's long history. [Tr.]