

REVIEWS

THE COMMON LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. By L. S. Thornton, C.R. (Dacre Press; 30s.)

The study of the implications of the Common Life of the Mystical Body involves the whole of Catholic doctrine from Original Sin to Papal Infallibility. Fr. Thornton, of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection, has tried to reduce the vastness of such a task by limiting his researches to the Scriptures of the New Testament. His book, however, remains difficult, tightly and sometimes disorderly packed with ideas; there is hardly a sentence, for example, in St. Paul's Epistles which does not spring from this ground, the doctrine of the Mystical Body. The author resolutely declines to be drawn outside the limits he has set himself, but this makes his book more complex. The Body of Christ is a living, a growing reality, the Mother as it were of all dogma and morals in whose fecund womb the Scriptures are a living source of truth. For Fr. Thornton, however, the Church is not easily distinguished from 'the broken mirror of Christendom,' which distorts truth; for him therefore any departure from the language of the New Testament, although necessary, endangers true interpretation. This may explain why he refers seldom to any other writers, even such as the Fathers, and not at all to modern Catholic works on the subject.

If these factors make for difficult reading, effort and perseverance will nevertheless bring great reward; the author's assiduous comparison of texts and his deep reflection on them throw many shafts of light on the doctrine. Of the greatest importance is the Common Life itself. The Greek word *koinonia*, for which this stands, has received far too little stress from Catholic writers on the Mystical Body. It is used in the New Testament for the fellowship or common life of the first Christians in Jerusalem (Acts ii, 42), for the fellowship in, or partaking of, Christ (I Cor. i, 9), for the fellowship in, or partaking of, the Spirit (II Cor. xiii, 13), for the fellowship in Christ's suffering (Phil. iii, 10), in the Eucharist (I Cor. x, 16), in the ministry (II Cor. viii, 4), etc.—there could scarcely be a more significant word. The common life, then, 'on the divine side was a mystical union with and participation in the life of Christ through receiving the gift of the Spirit. On the human side it consisted in a fellowship of brethren, whose mutual relations were transformed in quality and significance through the gift which they shared' (p. 76). And the author goes on to show how grace, the indwelling presence and activity of the Spirit, brings about this unique fellowship. The great importance of the conception of *koinonia* is this objectivity, and here Fr. Thornton makes his most valuable contribution. The fellowship does not in the first place arise from a com-

mon, subjective, experience, but from an object shared by all Christians, an object which envelopes all things from the blessed Trinity to the alms of the faithful. Grace may indeed be considered objectively as the redemptive act of Father and Son giving reconciliation and justification, as coming from the Holy Spirit; it is also the Blessed Trinity taking up its abode in the Christian soul as an object known and loved. But in order to gather the full meaning of these suggestions one must turn to the Catholic doctrine as given in the recent Encyclical (cf. par. 79) and in the theological explanation of the special presence of God in the graced soul, founded on the creative presence of God in all things. Fr. Thornton does not clearly show what subjective transformation takes place in the soul through possession of this object, yet it is there that the secret of the mysterious union of all in the one life of Christ is to be found. But this should not dim our gratitude to the author for his constant warning against the false subjectivism of emotional experience; the common life in the body of Christ is no merely spiritual union of those who love God, but an external life of the many living together in the world as the Church.

The whole doctrine may be reduced to the simple fellowship of a meal. All the members partake of the one spiritual food at the one table. The visible community of the Church grows from 'Communion,' the *koinonia* of the body and blood of Christ. The effect of the Eucharistic food may be expressed in two ways, either as the unity of the Mystical Body or as the fervour of actual love of God (cf. St. Thomas, III, 73 and 79). In this 'consummation of the spiritual life' the two elements of the Church, the juridical and the mystical, are joined indissolubly. Fr. Thornton here does great service by insisting that this 'Communion' in the Pauline sense was essentially sacrificial (cf. p. 326), so that the fellowship of the Church being drawn into the chalice flows out from it. 'The mystical body is the fulness of Christ because it is like a chalice into which the precious blood of Christ is poured. The whole sacrifice of Christ is therefore present in the mystical body . . . It is a reasonable supposition that the whole Pauline doctrine of the Body of Christ is to be traced, in part, to the words "This is my body," spoken by our Lord at the last supper' (p. 330). The complementary aspects of the Body of Christ are welded together in the Eucharist, where the obedience of the sacrifice is intimately united with the love of the communion; here is the *koinonia* the Common Life in the Body. The book as a whole provides an excellent commentary on the papal Encyclical.

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THE SPIRIT OF CATHOLIC ACTION. By Charles K. Murphy. (Longmans; 10s. 6d.)

There is such a dearth of literature in English on Catholic Action, and we have been cut off from all supplies from the Continent of