

XVII.

Like One of Us.

“But a body Thou hast prepared Me.”— *Heb. x. 5.*

The completion of the Old Testament did not finish the work that the Holy Spirit undertook for the whole Church. The Scripture may be the instrument whereby to act upon the consciousness of the sinner and to open his eyes to the beauty of the divine life, but it can not impart that life to the Church. Hence it is followed by another work of the Holy Spirit, viz., the *preparation of the body of Christ.*

The well-known words of *Psalm xl. 6, 7*: “Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; *mine ears Thou hast pierced*; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,”—are rendered by St. Paul: “Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, *but a body Thou hast prepared me*; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings Thou hast no pleasure: lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me.” (*Heb. x. 5*) We do not discuss how the words, “Mine ears hast Thou pierced,” can mean also, “A body Thou hast prepared me.” For our present purpose it is immaterial whether one says with Junius: “The ear is a member of the body; by the piercing of the ear hearing becomes possible; and only by the hearing does the body become an instrument of obedience”; or with another: “As the body of the slave became an instrument of obedience by the piercing of the ear, so did the body of Christ become an instrument of obedience by the conception of the Holy Spirit”; or finally: “As the Israelite became a servant by having his ear pierced, so has the Eternal Son adopted the form of a servant by becoming partaker of our flesh and blood.” St. Paul’s infallible exposition of *Psalm xl. 7* does not raise any serious objection to any of these renderings. It suffices our present purpose if it be only acknowledged that, according to *Heb. x. 5*, the Church must confess *that there was a preparation of the body of Christ.*

This being conceded and taken in connection with what the Gospel relates concerning the conception, it can not be denied that in the preparing of the body of the Lord there is a peculiar work of the Holy Spirit. For the angel said to Mary: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (*Luke i. 35*). And again: “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (*Matt. i. 20*). Both passages, apart from their proper meanings, evidently seek to produce the impression that the conception and birth of Jesus are extraordinary; that they did not occur after the will of man, but result from an operation of the Holy Spirit.

Like all other outgoing works of God, the preparation of the body of Christ is a divine work common to the three Persons.

It is erroneous to say that the Holy Spirit is the Creator of the body of Jesus, or, as some have expressed it, “That the Holy Spirit was the Father of Christ, according to His human nature.” Such representations must be rejected, since they destroy the confession of the Holy Trinity. This confession can not be maintained when any of the outgoing works of God are represented as not common to the three Persons.

We wish to emphasize, therefore, that not the Holy Spirit alone, but the Triune God, prepared the body of the Mediator. The Father and even the Son cooperated in this divine act.

However, as we have seen in Creation and Providence, in this cooperation the work of each Person bears its own distinctive mark. From the Father, of whom are all things, proceeded the material of the body of Christ, the creation of the human soul, and of all His gifts and powers, together with the whole plan of the Incarnation. From the Son, who is the wisdom of the Father, disposing and arranging all things in Creation, proceeded the holy disposition and arrangement with reference to the Incarnation. And as the correlated acts of the Father and the Son in Creation and Providence receive animation and perfection through the Holy Spirit, so there is in the Incarnation a peculiar act of the Holy Spirit through which the acts of Father and Son in this mystery receive completion and manifestation. Therefore it is said in [Heb. x. 7](#) of the Triune God: “A body Thou hast prepared Me”; while it is also declared that that which is conceived in Mary is of the Holy Ghost.

This, however, may not be explained in the ordinary sense. It might be said that there is nothing wonderful in this, for Job declares ([chap. xxxiii. 4](#)), “The Spirit of the Lord hath given me life,” and of Christ we read that He was born of Mary, being conceived by the Holy Ghost. These two cover the same ground. Both instances connect the birth of a child with an act of the Holy Spirit. While, as regards the birth of Christ, we do not deny this ordinary act of the Holy Spirit, which is essential to the quickening of all life, especially that of a human being, yet we do deny that the conception by the Holy Spirit was the ordinary act. The ancient confession, “I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only-Begotten Son our Lord, who *was conceived by the Holy Ghost*,” refers to a divine miracle and a deep mystery, in which the work of the Holy Spirit must be glorified.

Accordingly a complete analysis of this work is impossible. If not, it would cease to be a miracle. Wherefore let us look into this matter only with deepest reverence, and not advance theories contrary to the Word of God. What God has been pleased to reveal we know; what His Word only hints we can know only in faint outlines; and what is advanced outside of the Word is only the effort of a meddlesome spirit or unhallowed curiosity.

In this work of the Holy Spirit two things must be distinguished:

First, the creation of the human nature of Jesus.

Secondly, His separation from sinners.



On the first point, the Scripture teaches that no man ever could claim paternal connection with Jesus. Joseph appears and acts as the stepfather of Christ; but of a fellowship of life and origin between him and Jesus the Scripture never speaks. Indeed, Joseph's neighbors regarded Jesus as the Son of the carpenter, but the Scripture always treats this as an error. St. John, declaring that the children of God are born not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God, undoubtedly borrowed this glorious description of our higher birth from the extraordinary act of God which scintillates in the conception and birth of Christ. The fact that Mary was called a virgin; that Joseph was troubled at the discovery of his bride's condition; that he intended secretly to leave her, and that an angel appeared to him in a dream—in a word, the whole Gospel narrative, as well as the unbroken tradition of the Church, allows no other confession than that the conception and birth of Christ were of Mary the virgin, but not of Joseph her betrothed husband.

Excluding the man, the Scripture thrice puts the Holy Spirit in the foreground as the Author of the conception. St. Matthew says ([chap. i.18](#)): "When Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Ghost." And again, in [ver. 20](#): "For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Lastly, Luke says ([chap. i. 35](#)): "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." These clear statements do not receive full recognition unless it be plainly confessed that the conception of the germ of a human nature in the womb of the virgin was an act of the Holy Spirit.

It is not expedient nor lawful to enter more deeply into this matter. How human life originates after conception, whether the embryo immediately contains a human person or, whether he is created therein afterward, and other similar questions, must remain unanswered, perhaps forever. We may advance theories, but Omnipotent God allows no man to discover His workings in hidden laboratories of His creative power. Wherefore all that may be said according to Scripture is contained in the following four particulars:

First, in the conception of Christ not a new being was called into life as in all other cases, but One who had existed from eternity, and who then entered into vital relation with the human nature. The Scripture clearly reveals this. Christ existed from before the foundation of the world. His goings forth were of old, from the days of *eternity*. He took upon Himself the form of a servant. Even tho the biologist should discover the mystery of the human birth, it could not reveal anything regarding the conception of the Mediator.

Second, it is not the conception of a human *person*, but of a human nature. Where a new being is conceived, a human person comes into existence. But when the Person of the Son, who was with the Father from eternity, partakes of our flesh and blood, He adopts our human nature in the unity of His Person, thus becoming a true man; but it is not the creation



of a *new* person. The Scripture clearly shows this. In Christ appears but one *ego*, being in the same Person at once the Son of God and the Son of man.

Third, from this it follows not that a *new* flesh was created in Mary as the Mennonites used to teach, but that the fruit in Mary's womb, from which Jesus was born, was taken from and nourished with her own blood—the very blood which through her parents she had received from *fallen Adam*.

Last, the Mediator born of Mary not only partook of our flesh and blood, such as it existed in Adam and as we have inherited it from Adam, but He was born a true man, thinking, willing, and feeling like other men, susceptible to all the human emotions and sensations that cause the countless thrills and throbs of human life.

And yet He was separate from sinners. Of this we speak in the next article.

Let this suffice for the fact of the conception, from which fact we derive the precious comfort: "*That it covers in the sight of God my sin and guilt wherein I was conceived and brought forth*" (Heidelberg Catechism, quest. 36).

XVIII.

Guiltless and Without Sin.

“For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.”—*Heb. vii. 26.*



Throughout the ages the Church has confessed that Christ took upon Himself real human nature from the virgin Mary, not as it was before the fall, but such as it had become, *by and after* the fall.

This is clearly stated in *Heb. ii. 14, 17*: “Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same . . . Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” It was even such a partaking of our nature as would make Him feel Satan’s goad, for there follows: “In that He Himself hath suffered, *being tempted*, He is able to succor them that are tempted.” Upon the authority of the divine Word we can not doubt then that the Son of God became man in our fallen nature. It is our misery, by virtue of the inherited guilt of Adam, that we can not live and act but as partakers of the flesh and blood corrupted by the fall. And since we as children are partakers of flesh and blood, so is He also become partaker of the same. Hence it can not be too strongly emphasized that the Son of God, walking among men, bore the same nature in which we spend our lives; that His flesh had the same origin as our flesh; that the blood which ran through His veins is the same as our blood, and came to Him as well as to us from the same fountain in Adam. We must feel, and dare confess, that in Gethsemane our Savior agonized in our flesh and blood; that it was our flesh and blood that were nailed to the cross. The “blood of reconciliation” is taken from the very blood which thirsts after reconciliation.

With equal assurance, however, bowing to the authority of the Scripture, we confess that this intimate union of the Son of God with the fallen human nature does not imply the least participation of our sin and guilt. In the same epistle in which the apostle sets forth distinctly the fellowship of Jesus with the human flesh and blood, he bears equally clear testimony to the fact of His sinlessness, so that every misunderstanding may be obviated. As by virtue of our conception and birth we are *unholy, guilty, and defiled, one with sinners*, and therefore burdened with the *condemnation of hell*, so is the Mediator conceived and born *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens*. And with equal emphasis the apostle declares that sin did not enter into His temptations, for, altho tempted in all things, like as we are, yet He was ever without sin.



Therefore the mystery of the Incarnation lies in the apparent contradiction of Christ’s union with our fallen nature, which on the one hand is so intimate as to make Him susceptible to its temptations, while on the other hand He is completely cut off from all fellowship with its sin. The confession which weakens or eliminates either of these factors must, when logic-