

What is the Church?—III: The New Creation

HERBERT McCABE, O.P.

In this article and the ones which follow we shall be looking in some detail at the system of sacraments which constitutes the framework of the Church. It will perhaps be remembered that in a previous article¹ I said that certain things which are said metaphorically of the people of God in the Old Testament are said literally of Christ; and these same expressions—'first born son of God', 'priest of Yahweh', etc., are to be said sacramentally of the new people of God, the Church. The Church is Christ existing sacramentally in the world; existing, that is, in our hearts by means of the system of sacraments.

It is common to treat of each sacrament as fulfilling some particular spiritual need of a man or as corresponding to some phase of his natural life. In what follows we shall use a rather different method. We shall try to understand each sacrament by seeing what part it has to play in the realisation of the Church. In the sacraments, to make the Church present and to make Christ present is one and the same thing. Denial of the real presence of the body of Christ in the eucharist follows naturally from a denial of the real presence of the body of Christ which is his Church.

We shall begin our examination of the sacramental system by taking a look at baptism. In all the sacraments we have to distinguish between the actual sacramental sign itself and the ritual with which this sign is surrounded. The ritual is something that has slowly grown up in the course of ages and it varies from one part of the Church to another. In its attendant ritual a baptism or a mass or a marriage in the Roman rite differs from one in an eastern rite. In its origins this ritual is simply a matter of illustrating or explaining the meaning of the sacramental sign itself and over the centuries the explanations have become standardized to form a definite rite. The rite is not simply a matter of words spoken; the symbolism of the sacrament is also developed and explained by additional signs and symbols. For example, the sacrament of baptism makes us members of the Church: one of the ways in which this is brought home to those participating is by beginning the cere-

¹*The People of God*, LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, June 1961.

mony outside the church and moving by stages into the building during the ceremony. In innumerable ways the central sacramental symbol has been enclosed within further symbols and signs intended to elucidate its meaning. Inevitably these secondary signs and symbols are themselves sometimes in need of elucidation, and so the thing goes on. The purpose of all liturgical reform is to make these traditional explanations of the Church as lucid and clear as possible. We try to disentangle and simplify so that the proclamation of faith that the sacrament makes is not obscured by a hedge of elaborate and unintelligible ceremony. The task is, of course, one of some delicacy, for to oversimplify is to lose some of the riches which the Church has slowly gathered in centuries of penetration into the meaning and implications of the sacramental symbolism. In general the Church is reluctant to lose any of her ancient ceremonies until they can be shown to be definitely misleading to a later age. We shall have something to say later about these surrounding rites but we must begin at the centre of the sacrament with the actual sacramental sign itself.

In my first article² I suggested that sacramental symbolism has the same structure as the sacred history of the chosen people. In biblical history we have first of all events which are themselves significant, and then on top of that we have words, the words of the Bible which make the symbolism more precise, which highlight the point of the significance. Similarly in the sacraments there is always some significant gesture or thing and then there are words which bring out the point of the symbolism. These are called respectively the *matter* and the *form* of the sacrament; these terms we owe to the medieval theologians, and they can be rather misleading. It is important to see that the form of words does not simply impose all the significance on the gesture; much is already there, the purpose of the words is to make it more explicit. Nor should we think of the words as defining a single simple significance and excluding all other symbolism. What the form of a sacrament does is to organise the symbolism of the matter so that we see first things first. It picks out the central point but it leaves it surrounded by other secondary interpretations.

In baptism the matter consists in the gesture of plunging under water and emerging, the form consists of the words spoken by another: 'I baptise thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. Let us have a look at the matter first. What is the significance of this gesture? We might answer by saying that the significance is told

²*The Word of God*, LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, March, 1961.

us in the words of the form, but as I have said the function of the words is to organize a symbolism already contained in the gesture. In the matter of the sacraments there are several levels of symbolism. In the first place there is what we might call the natural symbolism of certain gestures. Man is a symbol-making creature. He rarely looks at the world in cold blood, he tends always to see a human meaning in things. It is the business of physical science, it seems to me, to correct this tendency so that we do not see simply a human meaning in, say, a tree, but also an arboreal meaning. It is the business of the scientist to see things for what they are in themselves, not for what they are to man. But it looks as though the health of the human mind requires that we should have both kinds of vision; primitive peoples in general seem to fall short on the scientific approach and I suppose most people would say that our present western culture falls short on the poetic side. As he becomes better able to control his world man has made it more and more of a lonely and inhuman place. Nevertheless the human meaning of things can never be entirely stamped out of man's mind; it finds its last refuge in dreams and in the whole field of behaviour that we call irrational. Whether or not we want to talk about the unconscious mind and whether or not we accept the idea of certain archetypal symbols which are common to all men, it does seem to be the case that a certain type of human meaning attaches for nearly everybody to certain things and gestures. This is what I mean by their natural symbolism. It is because they make use of these natural symbols that the sacraments can have a healing effect on the human psyche as well as their principal effect of bringing us the Spirit of Christ. They fulfil, if they are properly performed, the same psychic needs as are fulfilled by the rituals of a primitive people or by the work of the psychiatrist.

But it would be a mistake to see the symbolism of the sacraments simply in these natural terms. Besides their natural symbolism there is also the significance which the things and gestures have acquired by their use in sacred history, and so on top of what I have called natural symbolism there is something we might call biblical symbolism. When I say 'on top of' here I do not mean that we have two quite separate meanings in the one gesture. What the Bible does is to take something in its natural symbolism and deepen and specialize its meaning. So in any sacramental sign you have, so to speak, a wide basis of natural symbolism, within which you have a biblical symbolism derived from its use in scripture, and finally the whole thing is brought to sharp focus by the form of the sacrament itself.

Now what about baptism? The natural symbolism of water is tied up with creativity and new life, and this in two different ways. On the one hand water is seen as bringing new life to a thirsty land—this is the water of life, the cleansing water, the spring of living water and so on. On the other hand water has a special part to play in another kind of creation myth: here water is either the female element which is fertilized to bring forth the world, or else it is chaos, the enemy which is slain to produce the order of creation. These last two myths are in fact variants of the same theme. In the best known middle-eastern creation myth the male god Marduk attacks the female dragon of the sea Tiamat and divides her with his sword; her blood spurts forth and from it man is made. This is the myth that lies behind part of the first creation poem in Genesis, as the Spirit of Elohim broods over the dark waters; they become fertile, they split open—‘He divided the waters’—and the world is born. The other picture of water—the spring of living water, lies behind the second creation story in chapter two.

Generally speaking, then, in human myth and symbol, water is the female element, the mother’s womb from which we are born. We find these images in the ancient tales of primitive peoples and we find them also, according to some psychologists, in our own unconscious as manifested in dreams, in poetry and so on. They represent the natural background to the symbolism of baptism, but beyond this we have the biblical symbolism. In the Old Testament creation or birth from the waters is a very important image indeed. First of all Israel herself is born out of the waters of the Red Sea. Yahweh conquers the waters and splits them in two so that Israel can pass over into freedom. This new birth from the waters is already prefigured in the infancy story of Moses, the leader of Israel who is delivered from death by being cast into the waters and then taken from them to a new life. Again the entry into the promised land marks a new era for Israel, so this story too is told with a repetition of the Exodus incidents. The river Jordan is divided and Israel marches through the waters into a new land. Finally the creation poems see the whole world as brought into being from the waters of chaos and the flood stories tell of how all mankind was renewed by being cast on the waters like Moses (actually the word for Moses’ basket is the same as that for Noah’s ark), and then starting a new life.

Thus in the Bible the natural creation-symbol of plunging into water has been given a sharper edge. To the notion of creation is added that of re-creation and renewal. Noah, Moses and Israel come through the

waters to a new and better life. The waters here are both the waters of destruction in which the old life dies, in which evil is cleansed away, and the waters of life from which the new life is born. The passage through the waters takes the form of a conflict, a battle in which the power of Yahweh defeats the enemies of his people. Thus already in the Old Testament plunging into water has acquired the symbolism of a victory over the enemy, the new life is a life of triumph. I suspect that this is part of the meaning of the ritual cleansing which the soldiers of Israel had to perform before they went forth to battle. The main reason for this was that battle was a sacred activity; in battle the army of Israel was the agent of the holiness of Yahweh destroying his enemies. The Hebrew soldier washed before battle as we take holy water before entering a church; it would be wrong to enter upon a holy activity in a profane state. But I suspect that besides this the washing represented a prefiguring of the result of the battle, it symbolized the triumph over the enemy, and by ritual magic made the victory more certain.

The first creation poem tells of a victory of the Spirit of God over the waters of chaos or, if you prefer, the fertilization of the waters by the Spirit, and in the use of water symbolism throughout the Bible there is a close association between water and the Spirit. In fact living water, that is running water that sparkles and is full of life, is a common symbol of the Spirit, the life of God. In the New Testament this symbolism becomes much more explicit. For St John the purpose of Christ's coming is to baptise in water and the Spirit. The plunging into water and rising from the waters now indicates a defeat of the evil spirit by the Holy Spirit and new life in the Spirit of God.

There are three great interventions of the Spirit in the life of Christ. The first is at his conception. At the creation of the world the Spirit came down upon the waters, the female element, the mother of the world, and now at the conception of Christ, the Spirit comes down upon Mary who is to be mother of God. Secondly at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the Spirit comes down as a dove (the reference here is to the dove which intervened in the baptism of mankind in Noah). The point about this is that Jesus is beginning his public life, in which the Spirit that is in him begins to overflow from him into others. The first move in this public life is a contest with the evil spirit in which Christ is victorious. The third great intervention of the Spirit is the resurrection of Christ from the dead. He himself compares his death to the planting of a seed: 'Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it brings forth much fruit'.

Here the mother earth has the same symbolic force as water. Jesus goes down under the earth and then rises again by the power of the Spirit to become what St Paul calls 'the first-fruits of the dead'. Once again this 'baptism' represents a conflict and this time there is definitive victory. The evil spirit is defeated, death is conquered. The strange liturgy of Holy Saturday *Tenebrae* brings out this point very clearly by interweaving the themes of sleep and victory. Good Friday shows us Christ triumphant on the cross, Holy Saturday shows him going down into the underworld, as we go down beneath the waters of sleep to encounter the unconscious forces that lie submerged in our lives. Christ goes down to carry his victory to the roots of man's being.

His victory is shown forth by his rising from the dead. He comes to life again by the Spirit and it is this new life that he pours forth into the world.

'We are buried together with Christ by baptism into death, so that just as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may live by new life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection'. (Rom. 6. 4). In this well-known passage St Paul compares baptism to the death and resurrection of Christ, and the comparison is not an accidental one. Baptism is for each Christian a re-enactment of the Resurrection. The new birth, the new creation which it symbolizes and makes real is a participation in the new creation of the resurrection of Christ. Christ coming back from the dead inaugurated a new world, and by baptism we are born into this new world, the world of the Spirit. There is much more to say on this theme but for the moment I want to show how these themes—new birth, battle, resurrection, new life in the Spirit, are worked out in the ritual surrounding the central symbol of baptism. When we have looked briefly at this we shall be in a position to take stock and ask ourselves: How much does this show us of the nature of the Church?

In the first place the close connection between baptism and the Resurrection was at one time emphasized by the date at which it took place. In the early Church, baptism (except in cases of emergency) only took place once a year during the ceremony of the Easter Vigil; as a part, that is, of the celebration of Christ's Resurrection, the celebration of the Christian Exodus, the creation of a new people of God. For various practical reasons this restriction no longer exists, but in the liturgy Easter remains a feast of baptism. This is emphasized by the blessing of the baptismal font during the Vigil, and, even where there

are no actual baptisms, by the new ceremony of the renewal of baptismal vows. In this ceremony I shall pick on one detail: the image of the baptismal font as the womb of mother Church from which her children are born: 'So that those who have been conceived in holiness, may come forth from the immaculate womb of the divine font, born again as new creatures, as a heavenly offspring'. A parallel is here made between the baptismal font and the immaculate womb of the blessed Virgin. By the power of the Spirit the virgin mother Church brings forth Christ into the world in her children. You will remember that the celebrant takes the paschal candle, the symbol of the risen Christ alight with the new flame of the Spirit, and dipping it into the water sings:

'May the power of the Holy Spirit descend into the depths of this font, and make the whole substance of the water fertile for new birth'.

The fertility symbolism is here evident enough, and the sign is completed by the priest breathing on the surface of the water as the Spirit of God brooded over the waters at the creation.

There is not space here to look into all the wonderful ceremonies of Holy Saturday night—the greatest celebration of the Church's year. What I want to look at next are the ceremonies surrounding the administration of baptism. One of the things that makes these ceremonies a little difficult to follow is that they are very much abbreviated. In fact they compress into about twenty minutes ceremonies which used to be spread over the whole of Lent. Lent originated as the final stage in the preparation of catechumens for baptism, and what we have in the present ritual of baptism are vestiges of the ceremonies which took place week after week in preparation for the Vigil of Easter.

At the beginning of the ceremony the candidate for baptism is asked what he seeks from the Church of God, and he answers 'Faith'. This is the key to the whole of what follows. It is because he has faith in Christ that a man has the life of Christ in him. Faith means a new birth, a new creation in Christ. There follows a little ceremony which symbolizes the presence of new life in the candidate. The priest breathes on him as God breathed into the first man to fill him with life. It is at this point that the symbolic contest begins, for when he breathes upon him the priest says: 'Depart from him you evil spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the paraclete'. The battle between Christ, the bearer of the Holy Spirit, and Satan the evil spirit is represented again and again during the ceremony in what are called the exorcisms. These show us that

baptism represents not merely a new birth but a victory over the powers of evil; they also indicate that the new Christian as another Christ will have to carry on this battle in the world. He too is to be a Christ, an anointed one, a bearer of the Spirit, and in token of this he is anointed with oil. But throughout the ceremonies there is constant return to the theme of faith. Faith appears as a new wisdom, symbolized by the salt; as a re-awakening of the senses, as in the anointing with spittle, but above all faith appears in the solemn proclamation of the creed. The renunciation of Satan is complemented by an acceptance of Christ. 'Dost thou renounce Satan?' asks the priest and the candidate replies 'I do renounce him'. It is immediately after this renunciation, this defiance of Satan, that he is anointed and comes to the font. At the font itself he passes over into acceptance of Christ 'Dost thou believe in God the Father . . . etc.?' 'I do believe' . . . 'Wilt thou be baptised?' 'I will'. Then comes the actual sacramental sign of baptism. We do not usually plunge into water now, but it is laid down that the water must at least flow over the body to represent a passing through the waters. The form of the sacrament, the words 'I baptise thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', set the seal on the symbolism we have seen up to now. The new life which the candidate receives is to be life of the Trinity itself.

After the sacramental sign there follows a ceremony of great importance, the anointing with chrism; this symbolizes an important effect of baptism which we shall be saying more about in a moment—the effect that we call 'baptismal character'. It is followed by two ceremonies of lesser importance whose symbolism is extremely clear. The candidate puts on a white garment, to indicate the new life of grace which is his, and he carries a lighted candle in token of the victory of light over darkness. It is his personal paschal candle, symbolizing that he too has come from death to new life.

This account of the sacrament of baptism has necessarily been very superficial, but even from what has been said we can see something of what the Church must be. The Church, we may say, as a first shot, consists of those who are baptised. And what does this imply? It means, to put it as briefly as possible, that the Church is the new creation. She is not just a group of people within the world, she is a new world. The sacramental world which we enter through baptism is a distinct new creation dating from the time of Christ's resurrection. Secondly the Church is the fellowship of faith, for faith is the first effect of baptism. Faith is the beginning of the new life in the soul; it is the reality

which is symbolized and brought about by the sacrament. Faith is a divinely given response to the word of God, and in what we may call normal circumstances this faith is expressed as it is in the baptismal ceremony by the proclamation of the creed. It is thus that St Peter first gives expression to his union with Christ: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. Every statement of the Christian faith is an account of what this implies. I say 'in normal circumstances' because the condition of the man who receives faith may be such as to prevent this kind of proclamation. If he happens to be deaf and dumb and illiterate he will not be able to show that he has the faith in this way. Similarly a lunatic or a baby cannot proclaim the faith immediately, though a baby can do so when he grows up. Again an ignorant man may not be able to proclaim his faith accurately, he may miss bits out or put bits in through sheer lack of information. Thus various kinds of defect on the part of the subject may interfere with what is normally the characteristic expression of faith; and this inability to proclaim the creed is not incompatible with the presence of faith. What would be incompatible would be a proclaimed denial of the creed. It is one thing to be unable to affirm, it is quite another thing to deny. Thus if a man actually denies any part of the Christian faith it is impossible to baptise him. Baptism is not magic; it will not give the faith to one who rejects it. Such a baptism would be play-acting, a pretence, and not a sacrament at all. It is important to see that it is denial of the faith, and not just wickedness, that invalidates a baptism. A man whose heart is full of hatred but who does not deny the creed can be genuinely baptised and receive the faith, though in a such a case the faith he receives is what we have called 'dead faith', a faith which is not enlivened by charity.

Now notice that when the candidate comes for baptism he is asked 'What do you seek *from the Church of God?*' and he answers 'Faith'. Faith is something he receives from the Church. It is the Church which will baptise him and so it is the Church which will tell him how to proclaim the faith. A Church which is constituted by baptism must be the custodian of faith. It is for the Church to say whether or not some statement amounts to a denial of the faith such as to invalidate a baptism. This in fact is thought to be the origin of the first Christian creeds. They were formulae to be recited by the candidates for baptism. The Church is not an advisory body on the sacrament of baptism, but is constituted by it. She does not therefore just give her opinion on what constitutes the faith: she must know with certainty. With the same

kind of infallible sureness with which the sacrament confers the grace of faith, the Church must be able to define what does and what does not constitute the proclamation of that faith.

To repeat the argument. Baptism is not magic; it is a human thing and the least it requires is that the recipient does not actually deny the faith which it gives him. The Church therefore which is constituted by the sacrament must at least be able to say what would count as such a denial. It is, of course, the Church as a whole, not the individual Christian who must be able to do this. It is the Church which is wholly constituted by the sacraments, not the individual man. As I have said an individual may for a variety of reasons be unable to proclaim his faith adequately, or at all. The doctrine of the infallibility of the Church is just the statement that *this* kind of defect cannot overtake the Church as a whole.

I keep speaking about the Church as a whole, and you may well ask what I mean by this. How are we to know the faith of the Church as a whole? We must be able to know this, otherwise the sacrament of baptism becomes mere magic. Consideration of the sacrament of baptism simply by itself in isolation from the rest of the sacraments and from its liturgical surroundings does not, I think, give us the answer to this. The faith of the whole Church might be discovered in a variety of ways. Certain kinds of people might have special charismatic powers which enabled them to assert what the teaching of the Church is, there might be meetings in which God would endow the majority with the power of defining correctly the Christian faith, there might be an oracle which could be consulted . . . there are all sorts of possibilities in the abstract. In fact as we shall see when we look at more of the sacraments, the Church has a definite structure which enables us to answer this question.

This is already clear from the liturgical surroundings of baptism. In the early Church it was the business of the bishop to baptise just as it was his business to expound the scriptures. The Church being constituted by visible symbols, the sacraments, is a visible fellowship. In one clear sense you can count the members of the Church. They are all the people who have been baptised and who have not renounced their faith. This visibility is the visibility of the sacrament and is dependent upon the eye of faith. This is a point which has sometimes been misunderstood. When we say that the Church is visible we do not mean that everyone can see her for what she is. We are not referring to the outward things which are equally visible to everybody—some

details of her organisation and so on—the things that give her, according to an American estimate, a business efficiency equal to that of the Ford Company. When the unbeliever looks at baptism he does not see the operation of the Spirit and hence he does not see the Church. But the sacraments make the Spirit of Christ visible to the Christian; that is what they are for. When the Christian and the non-Christian look at the Church they see different things.

Associated with the visibility of the Church is her visible cult, the liturgical worship that she offers to the Father. In order to understand this cult there is one further thing we must say about baptism. This sacrament, like Confirmation and Order imparts what we call a 'character'. It was one of the great achievements of St Thomas to have worked out an impressive theology of sacramental character. Briefly what he said was this: character means a participation in the priesthood of Christ. By baptismal character every Christian is a priest. The very early Church refused the word 'priest' to Christian ministers; they called them overseers and elders and servants, but never, so far as I know, priests. This was deliberate. The word 'priest' belonged first of all to the one priest Jesus Christ, who offered the one sacrifice on Calvary. As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews insisted, there was but one sacrifice in the Christian Church, the one which Christ had offered once and for all, so there was no need for a continuing priesthood. Apart from the person of Christ, the only other subject of the word 'priest' is the whole people of God. Just as the whole of Israel in the Old Testament had been a priestly people, so the new Israel, St Peter insists in his first epistle, is a nation of priests, a royal priesthood. Because it shares in the life of Christ, because it is Christ sacramentally, the Church shares in the priesthood of Christ. The Church is able to offer sacramentally the sacrifice which he offered physically on Calvary.

When the Church felt that she had made her point against the Jews and pagans, that she was different from them in not having a class of priests in their sense, when the need for distinguishing herself in this way was gone, she became less finicky in her language and allowed the use of the word to those whose priesthood was of a special kind. That is briefly those whose priesthood was exercised in ways that are themselves sacramental. Although all Catholics at mass offer the mass together, although all are priests, there is a difference in the way in which the celebrant offers and the way in which the congregation offer. Of this more in the next article—for the moment the important thing is

that all are priests, and this they owe to their baptismal character.

This point about baptismal character is important when we try to draw a boundary around the Church, to say who is in it and how. There is, to my mind, no simple formula which expresses what membership of the Church is, although we can start from the on-the-face-of-it formula that the Church consists of those who are baptised and have not renounced their faith. Those at least are members of the Church in a clear and simple sense. The complications begin because of a principle that the characteristic grace which a sacrament gives us can also be received by one who *desires* to receive the sacrament but is in some way or another prevented. Thus the grace of faith is not something that waits on actual baptism. It was generally assumed in the early Church that an adult catechumen already had the faith before he was baptised; thus he would be saved even though some accident prevented the ceremony of his baptism. He was thought to have the faith and therefore was admitted to the readings of the scriptures, but because he had not yet been baptised he was not admitted to the sacramental sacrifice of the mass. The reason for this was that although he had the faith he did not yet have the priesthood of Christ, he could not yet offer the sacrifice with those who had been baptised. And since the early Church saw no point in the presence of mere spectators at the mysteries these catechumens were excluded.

Now there are many things which may exclude a man from baptism besides being run over by a bus. He may have what God sees to be an inchoate desire for baptism—a desire in its most general terms for renewal in the spirit—while being impeded from baptism by the simple fact of never having heard of it. Such a man would receive the new life which baptism gives without being baptised though he would not receive baptismal character. Now are we to say that such people are members of the Church? It seems to me that this is a question which has no simple answer. Instead of adjusting our definition of the Church so that we can say either yes or no, we should, I think, have a clear definition of what is manifestly the Church and then say that such and such different classes of people have a certain relation to the Church, and leave it at that. All such people are, of course, saved through the Church, and are members of it in that sense at least. It is their desire, however implicit, for membership, for baptism, which saves them. This is the meaning of the adage 'outside the Church there is no salvation'. Whoever is saved is saved in virtue of his union with the Church, though that union may take a variety of different forms. The

members of the Church are those who having been baptised do not renounce their faith—but what is it to renounce the faith? Every child who is baptised is baptised a Catholic, no matter who baptises him and where it happens. If he is brought up in a non-Catholic household we speak of him later as a non-Catholic. But it is usually different to say that such a child has actually renounced the faith. Could there not be here mere ignorance as in the case of many who are brought up in Catholic households and yet know next to nothing of the faith? It seems to me that once baptised you cannot cease to be a Catholic except by the formal *sin* of heresy and this is a very difficult thing from professing heretical opinions. Any Catholic may at some time hold heretical opinions through ignorance or bad instruction; the ignorance may be more or less culpable but it does not have to amount to the actual sin of heresy. Now can we pretend that even a minority of, let us say, Anglicans who have been brought up in a wholly Anglican environment have committed the formal sin of heresy? If we think that they have not done so then we are claiming that they are Catholics just as we are—uninstructed Catholics no doubt, but frequently enough so are we. We should, to my mind, look upon the vast majority of non-Catholic Christians in this country simply as fellow Catholics who have the misfortune to be deprived of the full sacramental life of the Church. The body of Christ is the visible historical Roman Catholic Church—there can be no doubt that this is the teaching of the Church; but there may be many invisible ways of being united to it. The man who professes some peculiar heretical opinion does not look like a member of the Church but he may be so for all we know, for his error may not be due to the *sin of heresy*. Even the man who has never been baptised may yet have received the grace of baptism through some hidden desire for the sacrament. But it is exceedingly important to emphasize that these links with the visible Church *are* invisible. When we speak of these things we are speaking only of what may be the case; we have no means of telling whether it is the case, for only God knows this. We know who are visibly members of the Church, and as to the rest we cannot tell, for they lie outside the sacramental sphere and only the sacraments make the Spirit visible to us. It is perhaps worth pointing out here that we are talking about the invisibility of various kinds of link with the Church, not about that other invisibility, the invisibility of a 'state of grace'. To guess that many apparent non-Catholics are in reality members of the Church is by no means the same as guessing that they have charity within them. For while it is

impossible to love God in charity unless we are in some way linked with the Church, it is all too possible to be linked with the Church, visibly or invisibly, and yet not to love God.

It is, of course, one thing to hold the opinion that a great many or even all the living members of, say, the Anglican Church are in fact, though not apparently, members of the Catholic Church, and quite another thing to hold that the Anglican Church is a part of the Catholic Church. The Anglican Church is a venerable institution with a long history of service to Christ in this country. If England is still a Christian country we owe it primarily not to the minority who are visibly Catholics but to the faith and devotion and sheer hard work of the priests and ministers and layfolk of non-Catholic churches. Nevertheless these organisations are not parts of the Church. The Anglican Church may provide the circumstances in which a man is saved, it may and surely does provide an immense amount of help to the Christian but it does not save him. Nobody is saved *precisely* because of his membership of the Anglican Church; everyone who is saved is saved because of some link he has with the one Catholic Church.

There is a special class of Christians who belong visibly to the Church in the sense of having a true sacramental life and yet who are cut off from the centre: these are the schismatics. The problems raised both by schismatics and by the Protestant Churches we shall have to leave until we take a look at the sacrament of Order later on. For the moment we have made a beginning of seeing how the Church is defined and constituted by the sacrament of baptism; she is a new creation, a new world brought into existence in each of us by the life of faith which we receive from 'the immaculate womb of the divine font'.