

SHORT WRITINGS FROM TAIZÉ
6

Brother John

Do We Need the Church?

Two thousand years after he journeyed along the roads of Palestine, Jesus of Nazareth continues to awaken interest among our contemporaries. Whether seen as a teacher of wisdom, as the herald of a purified religion, rooted in the heart, or as a social visionary preaching a world of solidarity, that individual almost unknown during his lifetime, relegated to an outlying province of the Roman Empire, still speaks in our day, even to those who profess no faith in God. That fact that his brief career came to an end with a shameful and violent death does not harm his reputation in the least: he thus takes his place alongside all those who, from Socrates down to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, struggled valiantly – and perhaps in vain? – for a better world.

That same esteem, it must be admitted, is not accorded to the institution that claims the heritage of the historical Jesus, namely the Christian Church. Tainted for centuries by inconsistencies, among which a division into numerous factions is only the most notorious, often viewed as a fossil lying outside the course of history or as an enemy of the dynamism of life by its prohibitions, the Church is not infrequently criticized for having drifted far from the outlook of its founder. The famous quip of Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), a French Catholic theologian excommunicated in 1908, expresses a common state of mind today: “Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom and it was the Church that arrived!” As a result, many are they who think they can or must live a Christian life with no explicit reference to the organized community of Christ’s disciples. “Christ without the Church” is their watchword.

In these pages, let us examine the validity of that affirmation. In what way is the Church necessary for the project of Jesus? Was it a historical mistake? Is it merely of relative importance, insofar as it supports the faith of the individual by its collective and organized character, or is it essential for the content of that faith? If so, how can we make its importance more evident?

The roots of the scandal

Let us begin by looking at the reasons why people reject the Church. In the language of the New Testament, this has to do with its character as a *skandalon*, a term which is not exactly equivalent to our word “scandal”. Sometimes, to be sure, true scandals do arise in the Church, as when its leaders make off with its funds for their personal use or are accused of being sexual predators. Such notorious acts quite properly shock the public, since they are in such flagrant contradiction with the content of the faith professed by those who perform them.

But the Greek word *skandalon* has a broader meaning. Literally, it means “a stumbling-block,” something lying on the road that trips us up, that forces us off the right path, in short something that disorients us. Applied to the faith, it refers to the gap between our expectations and the reality lying before us and, as a result, it sets before us an alternative.

If we examine all the New Testament texts that employ the noun *skandalon* or the related verb *skandalizô*, we find two apparently different uses, one negative and the other positive.

The terms refer first of all to any incongruous behaviour with respect to the Gospel that risks turning people against the faith professed by those who act in that way. Such conduct and those who engage in it are to be avoided (Romans 14:13; 16:17); it is the work of the Tempter (Matthew 16:23) and justifies exclu-

sion from God's Kingdom (Matthew 13:41). Consequently, it would even be better to cut off the part of the body responsible for such acts than to perform them (Mark 9:43-48; Matthew 5:29-30; 18:8-9).

Another series of texts, however, apply these words to Jesus himself and to his way of life. He "scandalizes" the residents of Nazareth (Matthew 13:57), as well as the Pharisees (Matthew 15:12), the entire Jewish nation (Romans 9:33), "many" (Matthew 24:10), and even his own disciples (Mark 14:27-29; cf. John 6:61). He does this above all by his ignominious death (1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11). Jesus thus goes to the point of stating explicitly: "Happy the person who is not scandalized by me" (Matthew 11:6; Luke 7:23).

At first sight, it is natural to assume that these two uses of this notion of "scandal" are fundamentally different. After all, Christians alienate others and bring discredit upon themselves by their unfaithfulness to the Gospel, whereas Jesus disconcerts by his unexpected behaviour, so different from what one is led to expect from an emissary of God.

The two realities nonetheless have a common root; they both follow from the manner chosen by God to realize his loving designs. Rather than transforming the world and eliminating evil by awe-inspiring deeds of power, the God of the Bible follows a road which is much more humble and discreet. He joins the human condition from below, so to speak; he enters into creation discreetly, not making too much noise and without violating the freedom of the actors, counting upon

a slow transformation from within rather than precipitating a spectacular reversal of the situation.

It is this basic option on God's part that makes the two kinds of scandal possible. Precisely because Jesus does not come as a triumphant ruler but leads a life that is ordinary in so many ways, and above all because he does not resist evil by making use of human power, he disconcerts those who were expecting a divine intervention that would change the course of history, and their own lives, in a sensational fashion. When, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus performs acts of healing to indicate God's presence breaking into the world, crowds of people flock to him, but in a relatively short time many of them are disappointed that such wonders do not increase in frequency. In Jesus' mind, however, the signs he performed were never an end in themselves; they were intended to bring people to a new way of seeing and to an attitude of trust in him. Those incapable of taking this step were soon "scandalized" by his apparent ineffectiveness. In the best of cases they became indifferent, but the disillusionment of some soon turned into an active opposition.

It is this same divine humility, God's refusal to impose a solution by force, that makes the "negative scandal" possible. Jesus entrusted his message to his disciples, women and men subject to all the limitations that characterize the human condition. He assured them of his permanent support, to be sure, by the active presence of his Breath of life (see John 14:15-16.26); he even promised to be with them "until the end of time" (Matthew 28:20). But he never claimed

to change their humanity into something else, to turn them into supermen exempt from all shortcomings.

Let us pause for an instant to consider the incredible gamble that this basic option represents. The lesson of the centuries' long history of Israel was unambiguous: the transformation of human society into a reign of justice and peace had to be the work of God. Left to themselves, human beings would continue to crawl along in the mud of their inconsistencies and their exclusions. The only authentic hope could come from a divine intervention, totally undeserved. For the disciples of Jesus, this intervention occurred in the life, death and resurrection of their master. Seen from the outside, however, by eyes focusing on verifiable consequences, the balance sheet was not impressive. The man known as the Son of God lived a rather ordinary life, barring a few cases of healing in out-of-the-way places. His claim to inaugurate the Kingdom of God resulted in a violent death and the scattering of his disciples. If, later on, some of them claimed that he did not remain a prisoner of death but returned to life, it must be admitted that this new form of presence had an impact above all on the conviction of his followers. To all intents and purposes history followed its usual course, trailing all kinds of evils along in its wake. God's way of acting apparently allows a great deal of uncertainty to remain and does not win over hearts and minds automatically. What can be called "the logic of the incarnation" sets human beings before a choice which is all but evident.

Seed and yeast

Did God intend to act in this way? Should Jesus have accomplished his mission differently? A convincing argument against the thesis of a failure comes from the fact that, during his earthly life, Jesus himself did all he could to explain this disconcerting logic of God. He did so above all in that part of his teaching that most scholars hold to be the most authentic, namely the parables. According to the gospels, Jesus was in the habit of communicating his message by images taken from daily life, aiming not at a passive assent to abstract truths but rather to a new awareness, to an active perception of what was taking place. Two of the key images used by Jesus illustrate wonderfully this divine approach to things that makes the *skandalon* possible, and even virtually inevitable.

The first of these images is that of a *seed*. Jesus compares the coming of God's Reign to a sower who casts his grains everywhere. When it comes into contact with the right kind of soil, this seed produces a rich harvest (Mark 4:3-9). Or again, God comes into the world to transform it like a mustard-seed, something scarcely visible, that in the end turns into one of the largest garden plants (Matthew 13:31-32). Other parables describe the process more precisely. The seed grows by itself, in stages; despite its small size, it possesses a dynamism that transforms everything (Mark 4:26-29). And, in order to accomplish its task, it must "fall into the earth and die" (John 12:24): its disappearance

and apparent failure are, paradoxically, the conditions of its effectiveness.

This image is paired with another one, *yeast*, which reinforces both the hidden quality of God's activity and its inexorable power: "The Kingdom of God is like some yeast which a woman took and kneaded into three measures of flour until it all rose" (Luke 13:20-21).

These parables describe God's entry into the world as a tiny event, practically unrecognizable, almost nothing in human eyes. And yet this "almost nothing" contains a dynamism that takes possession of elements of the world to create something unexpected. Without making any noise or drawing attention to itself, God's activity inevitably achieves its goal (cf. Isaiah 42:2-4; 55:10-11). Thus all that air and earth have to offer is assimilated by the tiny seed in order to give birth to a brand-new and impressive reality – a large tree. Similarly, a pinch of leaven works through a mass of dough to change its appearance completely. These images describe an authentic collaboration between two heterogeneous elements, giving rise to something unexpected and beautiful.

In short, Jesus describes his undertaking as a progressive transfiguration of earthly realities by a hidden, interior power or energy. This power is above all that of his word (see Mark 4:14), borne by his Spirit (see John 6:63); entering through the ear, it works upon the human heart. The parables suppose in addition the presence of matter that is more or less resistant and a fairly long time of transition. The image of the mustard-seed distinguishes two periods, the growth

of the tree and the coming of the birds to nest in it, whereas in the case of the leaven there is only one, but in both parables the final result is the same: an extensive and radical transformation starting from "almost nothing" in human terms.

It is this "almost nothing" that gives rise to the *skandalon*. First of all in Jesus. Confronted by his claims on the one hand and his appearance and activity on the other, his hearers were necessarily set before a dilemma: could this man, outwardly so insignificant, indeed be God's Chosen One, sent to inaugurate the promised Kingdom? The only way out of this dilemma consisted in an act of faith brought about by God himself, enabling the believer to penetrate outward appearances and to discern the true identity of the one sent. "Happy are you, Simon Bar Jonah, because flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17; cf. John 6:44). Where this act of faith does not take place, one is "scandalized" and, as a result, "from then on many of his disciples stopped following him and no longer went about with him" (John 6:66). But where it does take place, God truly takes root in our earth: the seed starts to grow; the yeast begins secretly to raise the dough. The community of disciples, in other words the men and women whose faith goes beyond appearances to see God at work in Jesus the Christ, henceforth possesses "the keys of the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Through them, all humanity will have (or else will not have) access to the mystery of God's presence at the heart of creation.

A pilgrim Church

As Christ's Body, re-presentation of the Risen Lord across the centuries, the community of believers necessarily follows the same logic as that of its founder. It too is a mixed reality, the point where the Absolute of God encounters the limitations of our world. With the essential difference that, whereas the humanity of Jesus was entirely at the service of his mission – no obstacle in him to letting the divine light shine through (cf. John 5:30; 6:38) – that of his disciples does not benefit from a similar transparency. Our human condition is handicapped by an unavoidable dimension of self-centredness: rather than being fully open to the Source, we are beset by the permanent temptation to seek our foundation in ourselves. As a result of this, the human side of the Church is not merely characterized by weakness, but by a vulnerability that perpetually runs the risk of hardening into a false autonomy or self-sufficiency.

Divine logic refracted through the human condition thus places the Christian Church before a dilemma, expressed by the two kinds of *skandalon* we have examined. On the one hand, when it follows faithfully in the steps of its founder, the Church will be criticized for being unrealistic or will unsettle by its uncomfortable stands. And on the other, when it leaves the narrow road of imitating Christ and tries to “succeed” according to the criteria of the surrounding society, its visibility – even and especially when this is

impressive – will only serve to conceal its true identity. When the Church places its confidence in what it possesses rather than in the One it follows to a land yet unknown as did Abraham (see Hebrews 11:8ff), when it no longer imitates the outlook of Moses, “considering the disgrace of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26), it ceases to be a faithful transcription of the Absolute of God at the heart of earthly realities. Ineffectiveness or unfaithfulness: this would seem to be the sterile alternative with which the community of believers is doomed to wrestle.

If we look more closely, however, we can see that these two modes of being have always existed in the life of the Christian people. To return to the image used by Jesus, part of the dough allows the yeast of the Gospel to do its transforming work, while another part remains more or less resistant. The dividing-line is constantly in motion; it passes not only between “the Church” and “the world” but between different sectors of the community, and in the final analysis is found within every believer. The Church taken as a whole is perpetually tempted to be unfaithful to its founder and, at the same time, constantly shaken by winds of the Spirit, commonly called “renewals” or “reforms,” calling it to a life more in line with the Gospel. Such developments always have a paschal quality: they involve a dying to oneself and to one's own limited views in order to be reborn, transfigured by the newness of the Gospel.

If the Christian community is thus necessarily a mixed body, always on the road, it follows that any attempt to

solve its problems by separation misconstrues the true dynamics of its existence. Faced with a Church that seems to make peace too easily with the powers of this world rather than to trust in the paradoxical strength of the Gospel, which looks like weakness to human eyes (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18ff), the temptation is great to leave behind the apparently unbelieving masses and to take refuge in a small group of people possessing the same outlook, people seemingly more attentive to the demands of the Gospel. But with eyes made more perceptive by the lessons of history, we realize that the visionaries of today quickly become the conformists of tomorrow, and so the process of division continues, leading to the splitting up of Christ's disciples into a host of sects indifferent or hostile to one another. If it can be useful – and at times indeed necessary – to concentrate the yeast to a certain extent in order to ensure greater effectiveness, we should not forget that it cannot be removed from the dough without ruining the entire process.

In another of his parables, Jesus warns us explicitly against such an undertaking. Describing a field where the wheat and the weeds are mingled, he cautions against any premature attempt to separate them, if we are not to spoil all the work. A discernment with a view to sorting into different categories can only occur at harvest time, and even then, it will not be accomplished by human beings but by God (see Matthew 13:24ff; cf. 13:47ff).

Does this mean we must simply tolerate the myriad ways in which the followers of Christ are unfaithful, or even consider this as the inevitable and normal coun-

terpart of any attempt to live out the Gospel? On the contrary, Jesus himself is quite explicit in this regard:

Scandals are bound to happen, but woe to those through whom they come! It would be better for them for a millstone to be placed around their neck and for them to be cast into the sea than to scandalize one of these little ones. Be careful! (Luke 17:1-3; cf. Matthew 18:6-7)

Similarly, Saint Paul expresses his annoyance at those who claim that, if God can make use of sin to accomplish his ends, then evil is permitted, sometimes even necessary:

Should we not say, as some slander us by accusing us of saying: "Let us do evil so that good may result"? They deserve their condemnation! (Romans 3:8)

We are thus invited to remain at the heart of a tension that can at times prove agonizing: to seek God's will with all our strength, while refusing to distance ourselves from those who, walking along the same road, lag behind or are in the process of going astray. Otherwise we run the risk of eliminating all scandals at the cost of an even greater scandal, that of having torn apart the seamless tunic of Christ.

Discerning the Body

Let us go back to the beginning. Two thousand years ago, a man appeared in Palestine with a startling message. He announced to the people of Israel the good news that the event it had been expecting for centuries was about to occur: “The Kingdom of God is at hand!” (Mark 1:15a). In other words, God is now taking matters in hand, offering human beings a communion with him that leads ineluctably to a communion among them, to the transformation of the earth into a realm of justice and peace.

In Jesus’ mind, however, this longed-for Kingdom was to arrive in a somewhat disconcerting way. Far from dropping down from the sky ready-made, eliminating the imperfections of this world by the wave of a wand, it would involve a slow transfiguration of human realities from the bottom up. In this way God shows his total respect for human freedom, desiring the response to his call to come from trusting hearts not subject to any coercion. This confident response of the human heart (“faith”), which is then translated into outward acts, thus becomes the very foundation of God’s presence on earth.

“Change your outlook and trust in the good news!” (Mark 1:15b). The transfiguration of the world begins where men and women, setting out in the wake of an inner call perceived in their heart of hearts, look beyond appearances to discern in Jesus the One sent from God. By following him they take their place

in the community of disciples, those who remain with Jesus and are sent out to others in his name (cf. Mark 3:14).

In the wake of Jesus’ death and resurrection, this community kept his work alive. It has continued to proclaim the message of a restored communion with God and among human beings, and to anticipate it by the way it lives. By inviting the hearers to enter into this communion and by incorporating them into it through Baptism, by celebrating their unity in the Eucharist, the congregation of Christ’s disciples (called in the New Testament *ekklêsia*, the Church) becomes on earth the herald and the nucleus of the great work that God is undertaking. As the Second Vatican Council expressed it in concise fashion, the Church is “the sacrament, or in other words the sign and instrument, both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 1).

At the same time, because of God’s “incarnational” way of proceeding, the divine presence and activity in the community of Christ’s disciples are not immediately evident but must be *discerned*. With respect to the Church, human beings are set before a choice analogous to the one they were confronted with by Jesus during his life on earth, and even after his resurrection (see Matthew 28:17). Are they able to go beyond often contradictory appearances to discover God at work? In the language of Saint John (cf. John 6:26,36), can they read the sign correctly and believe? In the case of the Church, however, this discernment is more complex

than it was with respect to the historical Jesus. The obstacle to seeing God in Jesus of Nazareth resided in his human indigence. The paradox of God's strength in human weakness is present in the life of the Church as well, but it is often concealed by another pattern of behaviour: the refusal of this weakness by members of the Church, including its leaders, and the corresponding attempt to fashion the Christian community according to the criteria of the surrounding society.

This inability or refusal to trust in God's power has extremely serious consequences. To the extent that the community of Christ's disciples attempts to be a "success" in human terms, it obscures the face of the crucified and risen Christ, replacing it with a mask, perhaps extremely well made but in the final analysis lifeless. As a result, it disappoints those who came looking for the living water promised by Christ, engendering in them indifference or the desire to flee. At the same time, it becomes more appealing to those who are seeking something other than the Gospel, for example the justification of a particular way of life, the defence of a nation or a civilization. People approach Christ for many reasons, of course, and they should never be turned away (cf. John 6:37). Just as during the earthly ministry of Jesus, those who come at first for self-interested reasons can subsequently discover the treasure of the Gospel and undergo a conversion. Nonetheless, the proponents of "Christianity without Christ" do not help the Church to live out the calling which is proper to it and to go forward on the straight and narrow path of bearing testimony to the Gospel.

It is no accident that it is often at times when the Church is rejected by the surrounding society that it begins to rediscover its authentic features. This certainly does not require us to revel in a "persecution complex," but rather to recognize that at times persecution can come as a grace, insofar as it distances the Church from the powers of this world and makes its identity with its founder more evident.

Even though a permanent purification of the Christian community is essential for its mission, we should not imagine that the Church still on pilgrimage through history can ever bear witness to the presence of God unambiguously. An act of discernment will always be necessary, requiring us to go beyond appearances that are often opaque and sometimes even repellent. As was the case for Peter (see Matthew 16:15-17) and for the "good thief" (see Luke 23:40-43), this can only come as a grace, an undeserved gift of clear vision.

Emerging from the labyrinth of our divisions

Where this purification and this discernment is lacking, the community of Christ's disciples enters unavoidably into a process of division. A fatal rift occurs in people's minds between Christ as found in the New Testament and his Body as we see it around us.

And this rift then takes tangible shape in the relations between believers. To return to the categories of the parables, people attempt to remove the yeast from the dough in order to use it elsewhere, or to dig up the seed and plant it in different, more favourable soil. Or else they try and uproot all the weeds and throw them out. In short, they imagine that they can create an ideal Church based on goodwill and with the means at their disposal. Human nature being what it is, sooner or later such attempts end in failure and the process begins all over again. In the end, the splintering of the Christian people makes it harder than ever to discern the Body of Christ, that irreplaceable locus of reconciliation with God and among human beings.

We see the results of this centuries-long process in the Christian landscape all around us. The point is not to put history on trial and to criticize those who came before. Without the advantage of hindsight, they doubtlessly had a different notion than we do today of what was at stake. Our task is rather to live out the words of Pope John XXIII, often quoted by Brother Roger, the founder of Taizé: “We will not seek to know who was wrong or who was right; the responsibilities are shared; we will simply say: let us be reconciled!” In our century, this reconciliation begins inevitably by discovering anew the reality of the Church, and by the steadfast resolution to leave behind once and for all those petty quarrels which only serve to reinforce a narrow identity at the expense of others.

To reply to our initial question: yes, we do need the Church, for it is the place where the leaven of the

Gospel encounters the human dough in all its opacity. Far from being a historical mistake, a regrettable alternative to the Kingdom of God, it is the setting in which this Kingdom takes shape in an utterly realistic manner, taking into account human beings in both their wretchedness and their greatness. The road to true life does not pass through an ideal, disincarnate Christ, accessible only by historical reconstruction, but through the “Christ of communion,” living and mysterious, in other words the Christ who comes down through the centuries in the community of women and men walking in his footsteps. Hard as it may be to imagine, it is only through this community that we can have a living relationship with him; otherwise we will never find him at all.

Discerning the mystery of Christ present in the Church goes hand in hand with a commitment to make the Christian community the place where this mystery shines out ever more brightly. And this must necessarily begin with ourselves. The more we follow the road of the Gospel, leaving behind all attempts to achieve victory for our cause using the means of this world, the more we remove from the Church the man-made cosmetics that make it unrecognizable and the more we restore its authentic beauty, “with no blemish or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:27).

In our day, a new awareness of the reality of the Church in all its dimensions, in other words a discernment of the Body of Christ, is the indispensable road to making the future of the Christian faith possible. It was the great merit of what came to be known as the

ecumenical movement of the last century to have led to this discovery. Previously, by and large one identified the Church of God with one's own faith community, relegating other believers to the outer darkness of oblivion or even of disdain. Or else the importance of visible fellowship among all Christians was minimized; the accent was placed on personal faith or, at most, on living one's Christian life as part of a small group or congregation. The unity and the universality of the Church were considered either as purely visible, in other words exhaustively determined by the sociological and juridical structures organizing part of the Christian people, or else as purely invisible, known to God alone. And in both cases, the Church was envisaged in static terms, as an already completed reality.

The logic of the incarnation laid out in these pages enables us to grasp the limits of such an outlook. Like the life of its founder, the Christian community as it springs from the pages of the New Testament is not at all invisible: it is made up of flesh-and-blood women and men brought together by the preaching of the Good News, living a common life at the heart of human history. At the same time, its empirical reality, necessarily incomplete, marred by a host of inconsistencies and divisions, does not correspond fully to its deepest identity, that of being "the offer in progress of a universal communion in God" (see *Short Writings from Taizé*, 3). That identity can only be discerned by the eyes of faith, which go beyond often deceptive appearances to see God at work in human indigence.

This way of looking sees everything, so to speak, from the viewpoint of its fulfilment in God. It enables people still on the road to glimpse the large bush full of birds and to grasp its identity with the tiny mustard-seed. It sees the Church as a universal fellowship in a constant process of becoming (see Ephesians 4:16).

In the case of Christians in full communion with the See of Rome, it was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) that marked a significant development in this respect, notably in the constitution *Lumen gentium*. In post-Reformation Catholic theology up to that point, the Church of Christ had been virtually identified with the Roman Church. In this document, however, we read that although the Church, "constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him" (for the Church cannot be a purely invisible or future reality, and a real continuity connects it to its beginnings, notably by means of ministry and sacraments), nonetheless "many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure," and this makes imperative the movement towards a more encompassing unity (*Lumen gentium*, 8). These words, too often interpreted in the most contradictory manner, not without the complicity of an insufficiently informed mass media thriving on controversy, are in fact the charter of an "ecclesiology of communion," depicting Christians as already linked by varying degrees of communion. Such a vision sees the Church as a complex reality in constant development,

a mystery of faith which, in the final analysis, is identical with the mystery of Christ.

Such a change or conversion of outlook is the essential step to leave behind the scandal of our divisions. This becomes evident if we consider the biblical *skandalon* par excellence, the cross of Christ. The cross is a stumbling-block in the two ways we have already examined: it testifies to God's unimaginable weakness ("Let him save himself if he is the Christ, God's Chosen!" Luke 23:35) and at the same time to the inability of God's people to discern the day of his visit (Luke 19:44) and to live out their calling fully ("Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar." John 19:15). Yet it is precisely in this locus of the twofold *skandalon* that God becomes fully present, at the very heart of human history marked by evil. For those able to see, then, this place marked by a curse (see Galatians 3:13) becomes a wellspring of life and unity, the only gate that opens to the resurrection.

In analogous fashion, it is only when we can discern in the Christian Church, seen in its full extent, the *totus Christus*, the "Christ of communion" communicating himself across the centuries, that we will find the key to pass from the winter of our inconsistencies to a springtime of reconciliation, for us as well as for the world as a whole. Do we need the Church? Yes, because when all is said and done it offers the only access to the mystery of God made flesh in order to attract all human beings to himself (see John 12:32). If it can appear, like its Master, to be a "rock that causes people to fall and a stumbling-stone", that stone is, in

fact, the "cornerstone" of God's dwelling among mortals. It is our task, then, solidly attached to Christ, to be living stones forming, all together, a spiritual building where worship pleasing to God can take place (see 1 Peter 2:4-10). Contemplating Christ present in his Body, risen but still showing the wounds of his passion, we will become that Body ever more truly, the place where the universe opens itself to the dazzling mystery of God.

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