

The Mystical Body of Christ

Fulton J. Sheen

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Sheen's historic focus on the potential of the church to bring peace and social justice is inspiring in this book written by a believer, for believers.

A reissue of a 1935 classic, *The Mystical Body of Christ* is a passionate exploration of the belief that the church is the body of Christ in the world. It is one of more than sixty books written by Fulton Sheen (1895-1979), a renowned Catholic archbishop who became one of America's first televangelists. Sheen is a candidate for canonization, and this edition is one of several works attracting closer attention.

The concept of the "mystical body of Christ" dates back nearly to the church's origins and was explored in many other works of contemporary and traditional Catholic theology. The church is the body of Christ incarnate on earth. Christ is the head of that body, the Holy Spirit is its soul, the Eucharist its "source of unity."

Sheen's writing is lucid and urgent, revealing an intellect steeped in biblical language and classic works of Catholic theology. He quotes St. Thomas Aquinas and fluidly moves through the Bible, particularly the Gospels and Paul's letters, where the metaphor of the body of Christ is used often.

Even though Sheen cites the Bible frequently, he believes the mystical body supersedes the Bible: "the Church was already waking in the souls of men throughout the Roman Empire at least twenty-five years before even the first of the Gospels had been written." The church affirms the truth of scripture, not the other way around.

The primacy of the church is a driving force here. Sheen does not offer any systematic reasoning to prove his beliefs or attempt to convince the skeptic. *The Mystical Body of Christ* reads like a sermon; it's erudite and moralizing, written for a community of the faithful on the purpose and role of the church in the world.

Sheen believes passionately in the mission of the church and its members to improve the world. His work is especially engaging when he urges the reader to take positive action.

KRISTEN RABE (Summer 2015)

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