

INTO ONE BODY

© Eddy D Field III

Today one hears much of “Identity Politics.” Oxford Dictionaries on the World Wide Web defines Identity Politics as “A tendency for people of a particular religion, race, social background, etc., to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from traditional broad-based party politics.” A person tends to identify with a group, and that group can be anything. It may be his family, and he may affirm, “Family over everything.” He would do anything for his family members, even lie, steal, or kill. Some families, like the Hatfields and the McCoys, engage in violent conflict with each other. A man may identify with an ethnic group. Conflict between ethnic groups can lead to genocide, as with the Nazi’s Final Solution for the Jews. A man may identify with a nation. President Donald Trump, in response to racial conflict in the United States, said, “Above all else, we must remember this truth: No matter our color, creed, religion, or political party, we are all Americans first.” (Donald Trump, 12 August 2017) Sometimes nations fight against each other, as the United States fought against Germany. A man may identify with a religious group. Conflict between religious groups, too, can occur, as with Christians and Mohammedans, or with Protestants and Catholics, or even amongst Protestants. A man may identify with a group as mundane as a sports team. Sometimes supporters of sports teams violently clash. One writer explains the psychology of the sports team fanatic:

A sports team is an expression of a fan’s sense of self, as I learned from dozens of interviews and research articles I surveyed for my book “The Secret Lives of Sports Fans,” [It - EDF] is an expansion of a fan’s sense of self. It is not an obnoxious affectation when a devotee uses the word “we”; it’s a literal confusion in the brain about what is “me” and what is “the team.” In all kinds of unconscious ways, a fan mirrors the feelings, actions and even hormones of the players. Self-esteem rides on the outcome of the game and the image of the franchise. (Eric Simons, “The psychology of why sports fans see their teams as extensions of themselves,” The Washington Post, January 30, 2015)

A man is naturally a member of several groups. He has a biological mother and a biological father, and so he is the member of a family. His parents may die, or they may abandon him; he may abandon them. But they will always be his biological parents. He may add another set of parents, those who have adopted him, and they may be for him better parents than his birth parents. He is part of an ethnic group. So far as this is his heritage, he cannot change it. He may however, change his ethnic identity. He may have Chinese heritage, but adopt American culture. He is a citizen of a nation. He may renounce his citizenship in one nation, and become citizen of another. He may have dual citizenship. In this regard, it is important to consider what it means to be a Jew. A man may be an ethnic Jew, and he may be a religious Jew. An ethnic Jew cannot change his identity. He will always be a descendant of Abraham. He change his religion, however. He may abandon the religion of his fathers. A Gentile, although he cannot become a Jew by ethnicity, may become a Jew by religion. A man may be born an ethnic Jew, but not be a Jew in the most important sense. That is to say, he may be a biological descendant of Abraham, but not a spiritual one; he may not have the faith and obedience of Abraham. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is

outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” (Romans 2:28, 29) A man is descended from Adam, the first man, and so he is a member of the human race. He will always be a member of the human race. This cannot change. As a descendent of Adam, he is born under sin and death. He will always be a descendant of Adam; he cannot change that relation. He may, however, change his relation to the sin and death that Adam brought into the world. He may be joined to Jesus Christ, the second Adam, and so receive righteousness and life. The Christian has an attachment that transcends all others in importance. He is a member of the body of Christ. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13)

Saint Paul taught the Corinthians that there is one God existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In God there is both singularity and plurality, both unity and diversity. So it is with spiritual gifts. There are varieties of gifts, but one God distributes them. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all three, give men spiritual gifts, and they do so for one purpose: the edification of all.

In respect of spiritual gifts, there is in the Church both unity and diversity. Saint Paul identifies the Church as the body of Christ. The human body is a unity: it is one body comprising many members. The body of Christ comprises is the same. It is one body comprising all kinds of people: people of different ethnic groups, and of different stations in life. The Church is not a matter of Gentiles becoming members of a Jewish body; it is a matter of men, whether Jew or Gentile, becoming members of Christ’s body. Its members are drawn from every tribe, every language, every people, and every nation. (Revelation 5:9) They are rich and poor, male and female. God is not a respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34) God has diversity in Himself, and He has created the world with diversity. The body of Christ, although one body, shows that diversity. It is the Holy Spirit who joins people to the body of Christ, so making them members of Christ, and of each other. It is a mystical union, and His body a mystical body, which is to say, its true nature is somewhat hid from us. Yet, we have some understanding of it. Just as the Spirit filled the tabernacle in the Old Testament, so He fills the new temple, the Church, the body of Christ, and dwells within it. Just as a human body has a spirit, so does the body of Christ. Through the prophet Joel, God promised a great outpouring of His Spirit upon all His people without distinction. He said, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28, 29) John the Baptist told the people that he was not the Christ, but rather prepared His way. He said, “I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” (Luke 3:16) The baptism of the Holy Spirit, by which one is ingrafted into Christ, comes by way of water baptism. Drinking from the cup at the Lord’s Table is a bond, not only of Christians’ union and communion with Christ, but with each other, as members of His body. So, at the table, Christians all drink into one Spirit.

A body includes eyes, ears, nose, and hands. These are all different parts, and they all have different functions; yet, they, along with other parts, constitute an integrated whole. God has perfectly designed the human body, so that all the members work in harmony. One without eyes cannot see. One without ears cannot hear. One without nose cannot smell. One without hands cannot touch. One who lacks one of these members is considered to be handicapped, or disabled. Every one of these members has its function, and they all work

together toward some end. Every one of them is necessary for best performance. One may consider which of his members he regards as most important; which he would least like to be without. However, no sane person would say he has no need of his eyes, his ears, his nose, his hands, his feet. No person in his right mind would say he would rather do without any one of these members. One might regard the sense of smell as unimpressive, but what would he do without it? The fact of the matter is, those parts of the body that seem the least powerful are actually indispensable. Some parts of the body, like the ears and the feet, people regard as having less honor than the eyes and the head. Yet, people adorn the ears with earrings, and the feet with shoes. Moreover, some parts of the body are considered indecent, not to be seen in public, and yet they are covered with beautiful garments. The lovely part of the body, like the face, is left uncovered. The parts shown in public, like the face, are important, but are not so important as the parts kept private. Some parts of the body are necessary for its being, others for its well being. God has designed the body; every part is necessary, and all the parts work together. Those parts that seem inferior are, in fact, necessary. Every part is integral. Consider an analogy: one commentator has said, "The meanest trades are those with which we can least dispense. A nation may exist without an astronomer or philosopher, but the day-labourer is essential to the existence of man." (Robertson) So it is with the body of Christ. God has by His Spirit sovereignly joined every member to Christ's body, and the Spirit gives gifts to everyone. Every member has his place, has his purpose, and every one has need of the other. Not one member is dispensable. Each one is necessary for the proper functioning of the body. Moreover, Because the parts of a body are interdependent, if one member suffers, then the entire body suffers; if one member is honored, then the entire body is honored. So, Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." (Romans 12:15) To the Galatians he wrote, "Bear ye one another's burdens." (Galatians 6:2)

This is not to say that all the gifts are equal in importance; they are not. All the gifts are necessary, but some are more beneficial. Saint Paul laid out for the Corinthians a list of some of the gifts in order of their importance. He wrote:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:28-31)

First in order of importance were the apostles. They were the ones whom Christ chose to found His Church. Through them He revealed His Word, and through them He confirmed His Word with signs and wonders. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians in another letter, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (2 Corinthians 12:12) Next were the prophets. They also revealed to the people the World of God, especially as it related to the future. So Agabus did when he prophesied about about famine, and about Saint Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. (Acts 11:27, 28; 21:8-14) These together, apostles and prophets, laid the foundation of the Church. As Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together

groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Next are teachers, who explain the Word of God to the people. Then there are miracles, helping, administration, and speaking in different languages, the least of all the gifts. Saint Paul wrote that the Church should make the most, not of the lesser gifts, but of the greater gifts.

Many in the Church do make use of the best spiritual gifts. There are no more apostles, and no more prophets, so one of the best gifts remaining is that of teaching. The teaching of the Word of God is one of the most important means for the building up of the body of Christ, and many avail themselves of this gift. It is not the only gift, however. There are others, and they are all important. Sadly, too many Christians only care about being ministered to; they care little, or nothing, for ministering to others. The Christian ought to be edified by the gifts; but he ought also to edify with his gifts. If a Christian edifies himself alone, not only is he selfish, but he does not build up the body of Christ. Only when all use their gifts is the body made healthy and strong.

The body of Christ, comprising as it does living beings, is itself a living thing. It is no inanimate object. It is living and always growing. Saint Peter compares the Church to a temple for which the people act as living stones, Christ being the cornerstone. (1 Peter 2:4, 5) It is not like the pagan idols, which are not living, but dead. Of them the Psalmist writes, "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat." (Psalm 115:5-7) The body of Christ is a living thing, and it grows. It grows both in size and in maturity. In fact, the Spirit gives gifts to the body of Christ so that it may grow to maturity. He gives gifts, Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12, 13)

Let us always remember that no member of the body is unimportant. Let us rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Let everyone be edified by spiritual gifts that the body of Christ may be built up. But let everyone use his gifts to edify others to that same end.

And now to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be ascribed by us, and by the whole Church, as is most due, the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*