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THE FACE OF GOD

by Archbishop Joseph M. Raya



**AN INTRODUCTION TO
EASTERN SPIRITUALITY**

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*To Eddie J. Doherty, Co-founder of
Madonna House, my ideal of the priest
who is ever celebrating life and love.*

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PREFACE

For a Christian there are many ways to sanctify himself and the world around him. In these essays I insist on a very special way of encountering God, of living in and by him. I deeply believe that the Byzantine way is still the most suitable way for modern man to come to a realization of the sheer poetry and grace that are in the Gospels. I believe that Western man, and especially Americans, can easily live it, and that it can add to his enrichment without any intellectual capitulation.

How easy it is to intellectualize the faith, but how hard to dramatize it for all our senses and enable them truly to live life, or a part of life, under a totally new light! How difficult to inspire awe and wonder with a new vision of what life is and should be!

Christianity is not an abstract doctrine divorced from reality and from history. Nor is it some momentary, flickering light which shines for a brief while and then is gone. Christianity is a continual celebration of life and love between God and man lived out in concrete history. Is it perhaps because real life and love are of such dazzling beauty that we cannot plunge ourselves into the celebration?

No, Christianity is not an intellectual exercise. It is a mystery of life in an embrace of Love. The only commandment of Christ that is peculiar to him and to him alone in the whole of recorded history is this: "Love as I have loved." Christianity is the splendor of human life

supported, purified, saved and deified by God's presence. And this Presence is not static. It is the incomprehensible outpouring of God's Love, always active, never ceasing to surrender Himself to man in Jesus Christ.

Such is the real mystery of Christianity which should always be the object of wondrous celebration. Words alone are dry and empty compared to vivid acts. We can give a hundred lectures on the Resurrection, and read fifty books on Christmas; it would still be possible to miss the throbbing life of these feasts. (It's possible to experience more life watching an Easter parade or opening Christmas presents than many Christians experience of the Resurrection!) What we need to do is *celebrate* our faith and *experience* the wonder of it. Only then will we "know" it in the most profound way.

One last word on the style and format of these essays. I have tried very hard to steer away from the jargon of technical theologians. It was a real task, a complicated task, but I assure you a pleasant one as well. It was something like putting pieces of life together for you on a screen so you could then experience for yourself life and love in all their reality and splendor.

Also, these essays were written over a period of years, and re-worked while I was Melkite Catholic Archbishop of Galilee from 1968 to 1974. I wish especially to thank Father Bob Wild of the Madonna House family without whose encouragement and hard work this book would have remained merely scattered papers, or mere thoughts in my meditations and prayers whence this book came.

Critics of these pages—believers or unbelievers—will be welcome to express themselves. Any criticism, sincerely given, can be a contribution in clarifying the faith realities and truths I have tried to express here.

Archbishop Joseph M. Raya
Madonna House, Combermere, Ontario, 1975

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS BYZANTIUM?

Spirituality is the form of life which enables a man to see the Face of God. When man can open to a reality that is beyond his daily experiences, he enlarges the sphere and capacities of his own heart, and experiences in his life the freshness and beauty of the desert, where Christ himself retired to contemplate the Face of his Father (Mk. 1:35).

The most intimate form of spirituality is our relationship with God as a source of love and life. This relationship between man and God finds its most profound reality and expression in prayer. The most exalted and effective prayer is praise, glorification and admiration in awe. Prayer is therefore the act by which man enters into his inner self, calms his imagination, and stills the disturbances of his surroundings to encounter a Divine Person in his own unparalleled beauty, which is the Face of God. Prayer is also encountering Love, and absorbing its majestic power and delight.

It is according to one's own culture and mentality that the life of prayer is expressed. There are as many cultures as there are groups of people, and as many mentalities as there are human beings. These cultures may be very different, and yet have much in common. Peoples

are necessarily directed in their way of life by principles. These principles are determined by human attitudes and directives according to the psychological and social sources of their inspiration and nourishment.

All human beings, though they may be completely different in their cultures and in their human forms of expression, are essentially one, not only in their humanity, but in their longing to see the Face of God and to express it. They are inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

For the Christian there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, one Baptism, one Body, one life in God. Christ, who unites in himself both the Creator and the creation, is too rich, too glorious, too immense to be adequately expressed by any one culture. It is only by respecting and admiring the diversity of expressions that we can begin to get a glimpse of the Face of God.

There are two mainstreams in the origins of Christian spirituality which still prevail today. They are generally called Eastern and Western, or Oriental and Occidental (or Greek and Latin, according to the original languages used in their expression). This book is concerned with a form of the Eastern spirituality.

Thus our Church is called Greek, Eastern or Byzantine. Until recently, the common expression by which we identified ourselves was the word "Greek" or the word "Eastern." We called ourselves, and everybody else called us "Greek," "Eastern Orthodox" or "Eastern Catholics." Because the word "Byzantine" is essentially a Christian term, Voltaire, Montesquieu and after them the famous Gibbon created around this word an aura of "disgust and horror" (Voltaire). Under their influence it came to be, in the European languages, a synonym for "barbarous," "futile" and "inane." Everyone shied away from its use.¹

By contrast, the word "Greek" connotes the glorious history of pagan Greece and its marvelous culture. This

word was better understood and more respected. Furthermore, the original and official language of the Byzantine Empire and of the Church that it sponsored was the Greek language. That is why different nations and cultures, and the Empire itself, were included under the term "Greek." We called ourselves Greeks—"Greek Catholic," "Greek Orthodox," and our rite was the "Greek rite." Even Slavs,² who are no more Greek than the Chinese are French, call themselves Greek.

A language is merely the instrument and sign through which a culture is expressed. For a church, and for us as members of that church, to be called Greek would be a misrepresentation or an error. Do we speak of Americans as "English" people, or as belonging to the "English Church" or "English" culture simply because Americans speak the language of England? The American culture and civilization are an amalgamation of many cultures, civilizations, peoples, and mentalities. We cannot call it simply English or Spanish or French or Nordic or Slavic. It is a very special, a very specific culture and civilization which we call American—and not English, although it is generally expressed in the English language.

The Byzantine Empire and the Byzantine Church used the Greek language in the expression of their civilization and culture as the American people today use the language of England. Byzantium is under Greek influence and contains Greek elements, just as the American culture contains English elements. Besides being Greek, the Byzantine culture is Oriental or Eastern, and it is also Roman. It also possesses elements from many other cultures. We could call a whole by one of its components, and call our Church Greek, but only in a broad sense, and not without qualifications.

Our Byzantine Church cannot simply be called "Eastern" either, even though it was born and developed

in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The word "East" or "Eastern" is a historical and geographical term. In fact, it designates a nebulous reality of foggy contours. The word itself is sometimes so confusingly used that when applied without qualification to us it drowns our personality as a Church in a dark shadow of unreality.

Generally speaking, the word "Eastern" is a collective term which designates the populations, the languages and cultures proper to Far-Eastern countries, as well as certain other regions. Hellenic civilization deeply influenced the peoples of the Near East but never completely dispossessed them of their original ethnic characteristics. Egypt, which occupied a very special place and position in the Empire and in the formation of our religious thought, was Coptic to its very soul. Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and all the surrounding countries which also played important roles, were of the Syriac language, which Arabic later replaced. Georgia and Armenia were of the Armenian language.

All these Eastern nations, with their particular cultures, were in some way united by a common element, the Greek language, without becoming Greek themselves. Successively, they all converged in Byzantium to contribute to its formation and development without making it "Eastern." The rite or cultural expression of the Byzantine Church is a unified expression of many peoples from many parts of the world, from the West as well as from the East. The definitive history of Byzantine science, philosophy, literature and theology has yet to be written. But the main lines stand out in sufficient detail to reveal its diversity in unity.

HOW DID THE EAST COME TO SPEAK GREEK?

The unique trait of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) was his vision and conscious aim of a hellenized East.

Wherever he passed (336-323 B.C.) he established cities peopled by a mixture of his veterans and the native population. His aim was to unite and wed the East to the West.

He himself had been an important example: he married (for love, it is said!) Roxana of Bactira, the daughter of Darius himself. Nearly a hundred of his superior officers and some ten thousand of his humbler followers also took Asiatic brides. "Soon, every Greek who had the strength, beauty or talents to sell was on foot to seek his or her fortune in Asia, and with them went everywhere the Greek trader as enterprising as he was fearless."³

Streams of fortune hunters now in full flood, they quickly overflowed from Greece and from the capitals Alexander and his officers had founded in the distant provinces. As often happens with conquered countries, the language and cultural exploits of the conquerors were assimilated, and the East woke from its sleep with a veneration of Greek culture.

Conquered peoples now spoke Greek, thought in it and wrote in it. Thus they came to recognize the values of Hellenism and how much they were indebted to it. Their gods were not Zeus and Athena, but Plato, Aristotle, Homer and the language they spoke. The East spoke Greek and was intimately connected with Greek culture. While the supreme beauty and delicate texture of Hellenism bound East to West and made them speak a common language, the peoples so bound, in turn influenced Hellenism by creating a new Greek language called *koine*.

To this happy marriage of East and West, Rome later added its own culture, its genius for organization, the peace and order in which Christ was born. Thus, Eastern, Greek and Roman cultures met and wedded. Other lesser cultures will meet with them again in a stronger tie of

unification, the tie of Christianity, which will bring them and melt them again into a new culture called Byzantium.

BYZANTINE CULTURE

In the third century the Latin Emperor Diocletian abandoned Rome and transferred his throne to Nicomedia in Asia Minor. In the fourth century the Latin, Constantine the Great, created a new capital for the Roman Empire: Byzantium. He transplanted there the cultural, intellectual and artistic powers of all the Latin peoples who dwelt within the power of his Empire. St. Jerome rather tartly observed that Constantinople was clothed by denuding almost every other Latin city. Every contemporary Latin artist who could be enticed was persuaded to make his home there.

If Constantine did not Christianize the whole Roman Empire, he did give the Church sufficient power and privileges to overcome paganism and to become the only recognized and official religion. The new Rome, Constantinople, the capital of the Roman Empire, became officially Christian on May 11, 330. On that date, Constantinople was dedicated to the Theotokos, the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Eternal Father. Under Emperor Theodosius, Christianity became the religion of the empire (392).

The cultural wealth of the Roman Empire, from the plains of Latium to the deserts of Africa, started converging upon the capital, giving it a new individuality and establishing it as the center of Christian culture and development. Such concentration is a natural phenomenon which happens with all great capitals of the world. Even dissenters and revolutionaries contribute to the culture and formation of their capitals, and consequently of their nations.

The East as a whole was often in opposition to the despotic colonialism of Byzantium. Almost from the outset the East opposed and reacted against it, while contributing to its culture, formation and development.⁴ Romans, Greeks, Eastern peoples and later, Nordic and Slavic tribes, came together willfully or by force of circumstance to form a nation and an empire. This compenetration and amalgamation of nations was not the result of a systematic plan, or the work of any school of experts, but rather resulted from the natural conditions of life: a symbiosis, a melting of several races and cultures into one.

Culture is a group of human beings who, once bound by a common purpose of life, become fully what they ought to be—or at least strive toward it. As a nation they develop their gifts and powers and try to attain to intellectual and artistic perfection, and to social efficacy. Culture is, then, the very life of society in its rise toward development and progress. Thus, in such a society, man becomes artist, philosopher, poet, saint, and all these together form a Church.

The new Roman Empire brought together East and West. It unified all the tribes and nations which streamed into its capital. It blended them into a new life and culture and bound them together with the thought and inspiration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Under the influence of the Gospel, and through a gradual development, Constantinople became the capital of Christ himself, where public monuments were inscribed in his name: *Christos Basileus*, Christ Emperor.

With Justinian (685-695), the image of Christ appeared on coins, where He was proclaimed *Rex Regnantium*; the Emperor himself was designated *Servus Christi*, the Servant of Christ. Thus the Emperor made it known to the world that he was subject to the King of

Kings. Laws were promulgated "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master." In the palace, next to the imperial throne there stood another throne, mysteriously empty, on which the Gospel was displayed, and which no one approached without bowing. This was the throne of "Christ our true Sovereign."

It is the glory as well as the strength of the Byzantine people to have realized and proclaimed that the real ruler of the Empire was Christ himself: "Christ alone *Basileus!*" "Only the Gospel could be the constitution of a state that had Christ as its sovereign. Christ the Lord directed and preserved, chastised and comforted, often using the unseen forces of the angelic orders or of the saints, and above all the agency of the Mother of God, who was the special patroness of "The City" as Constantinople was called."⁵ Byzantium is, then, the specifically Christian culture of the Byzantine Empire.

GREEK AND LATIN ELEMENTS

At its very beginning, in its universal and universalizing components, Christianity was expressed by Easterners in the Greek language. St. Paul, the Jew from Tarsus, the founder of the churches, the Apostle par excellence, spoke Greek and converted only Greek-speaking people. The whole of the New Testament was written in Greek, with the exception of St. Matthew who wrote his Gospel in his native tongue of Aramaic. Most liturgies in existence today are descended from a Greek original. Our Creeds were thought out and formulated in Greek. Some of the Apostolic Fathers were real Greeks, some were hybrids, and others, not having a drop of Greek blood in them, wrote in the Greek language.

The theology of Origen the Egyptian, and his famous school at Alexandria, are Greek both in their inspiration and in their method; his influence was far-reaching. Antioch and Jerusalem spoke Greek. The most illustrious Fathers of the Church: Athanasius, Basil the Great, the two Gregorys, Chrysostom, the two Cyrils, and later on John of Damascus, are all, if not in their souls, at least in the expression of their thoughts, Greeks. Most of the Christian people were of Greek culture and tongue. Therefore, in Byzantium, the capital of the Roman Empire, we see, experience and honor the Christian Hellenism of the universal Church.

It is evident to any reader of history that Byzantine culture is Roman as well as Greek. The name that Byzantium received at its foundation was "New Rome." Built by Constantine the Roman, Byzantium became his capital, his town, his *polis*. Constantinople is a surname. Constantine is the Emperor, the Roman Emperor. He is the condensation, the summary, the symbol of the whole glory, of all the powers of the people of Latium. Where the Emperor is, there will be the Senate. Where the power and majesty of the Roman people are fixed and stable, there is Rome. Constantine, the Roman Emperor of the Roman Empire, transferred to his new capital the Senate of Rome and most of its noble families. He coaxed, bribed and forced them to move to New Rome. He even transported entire marble palaces, with their statues and fountains, to the shores of the Golden Horn.

Where people settle, their culture will flourish. The official language of the Byzantine Empire up to and long after Justinian was Latin. Some historians (and among them Krauss), insist that "from the foundation of Constantinople to the eighth century, one cannot speak of a Byzantine Empire, and that everything in it: government, law, and language, was Roman."⁶

While New Rome was prospering and growing, Old Rome was dying and being ruined. It was sacked by the Goths in 410, pillaged for a fortnight by the Vandals in 455 and suffered yet again from the entry of Ricimer in 472. Finally, when the last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, a mere boy, abdicated in favor of Odovacar the Ostrogoth in 476, the barbarians became all-supreme in the Western Empire.

With their supremacy and the ruin of the Patricians, Old Rome became for a long time a provincial city dependent upon the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire. Roman culture came to live in Byzantium and to enrich and be enriched by what it encountered, namely, Christian Hellenism. Because of this presence of Rome in the East, all the people of the Mediterranean shores and beyond those shores called themselves "Romans." Even now, sixteen hundred years later, the Melkites of the East, Catholic and Orthodox, still call themselves Romans: "Roum" Catholics or "Roum" Orthodox. Rome came to Byzantium and lingered there for centuries, pouring her spirit, her life and her genius into the creation and formation of Byzantine culture and its theological and spiritual life. Byzantine Christianity has therefore been enriched by Latin culture and civilization.

EASTERN ELEMENTS

The East infiltrated the West long before Christianity did. With their highly developed civilizations people of the East flooded the West. They came from Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt. Christianity was first thought out, developed and formulated by Easterners. Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria were centers of learning and schools of Christian experience, even for the Romans of

the West. It was in the East that Jerome was partially formed, where Ambrose was nourished and whence inspiration came to Benedict.

Constantinople was populated by men from the East: Syrians, Armenians and Orientals of all nationalities converged upon it; artists, philosophers, metal workers, traders, architects and monks found in it a flourishing field for development. Their knowledge, skills and intellectual powers were set free to be creative and expressive. The Church of *Hagia Sophia*, or Holy Wisdom, with its icons and mosaics, was designed and built by Eastern architects. It was to be the model for many churches, from the splendid buildings in Ravenna to the humblest chapel in the Russian steppes.

Proud people of a proud origin, the Easterners would have been unfaithful to the spirit of their race if they had let the world pass by without knowing the glories of their ancestors and of their Churches. The Byzantine hagiography, as attested to by our liturgical books, is indeed full of saints, events and the spirituality of the East. Easterners brought to the Christian capitals relics of their saints and martyrs whose anniversaries and "translations" were never celebrated without oratory and Oriental literary discourses.

Until the late ninth century, monasteries famous for their learning and holiness were peopled and replenished with Orientals. The creative writers and poets whose works fill our liturgical books of today were Orientals: Romanos the Melodist (500), John of Damascus (759), Ephrem (350), Cosmas of Maiuma (734), and many others.

Constantinople also absorbed all the living forces of the dying East. Antioch, the queen city, experienced all the agonies of death; with each destruction she contributed more life to the capital. Completely destroyed by an earthquake in 525, it was rebuilt soon afterwards. The

Persian King Khusrau sacked the city in 540. It was captured again by the Persians in 611 and finally fell to the Arabs in 636. With every disaster much of its intellectual and artistic wealth took refuge in Constantinople. Alexandria was captured by the Persians in 617, attacked by the Arabs in 641 and completely occupied in 646. In all these calamities of war, more and more of Alexandria's intellectuals and artists sought asylum in Constantinople and poured into it all the wisdom and knowledge of the East.

SLAVIC INFLUENCE

In the fifth and sixth centuries Byzantium became a target for the invasions of the Huns and the Slavs who settled within its boundaries and contributed their own cultural elements. In the sixth and seventh centuries the Bulgars and the Arabs flooded the Empire. Provinces fell to these invaders permanently or temporarily. The invaders left many settlements, mostly along the borders and around the cities. Military commanders, government officials and even emperors came from different ethnic groups. Armenians, Arabs, Syrians and especially Slavs, as well as Romans and Greeks, mounted the throne of the *Basileus*. They also led armies and fought in the political arena of the Empire.

During five centuries, Romans, Greeks, Slavs and peoples from Eastern provinces vied with one another in the capital city of the Roman Empire. They mutually influenced each other and coalesced into "one nation under God," ruled by the law of Christ. Their extensive missionary activity and their Christian influence were flexible and consequently successful and enduring, precisely because of their diversified makeup.

Beginning in the sixth century these missionaries carried Christianity from the shores of the Crimea in Russia to the borders of Abyssinia, and even to the oases of the Sahara Desert in Africa. In the ninth century the missionary activity became more complex. Cyril (+868) and Methodius (+885) were already in Moravia, sowing the seeds of Orthodoxy through the liturgy. If these brothers were not real Greeks, they were Slav immigrants or descendants of Slavs whose Slavic origins fitted them so perfectly to be missionaries of their fathers' land.

At this same period Photius was converting the Bulgars who were, in turn, followed by the Serbs; and so the whole Balkan region became Christian. The tribes beyond the Danube: Valachians and Maldovians, and soon after them, in the tenth century, the Russians, embraced the religion of Constantinople. Vladimir, the Grand Prince of Kiev, was baptized at Cherson and married a Byzantine Princess.

Together with religion the Byzantines brought to all these peoples their own institutions and even their form of government: they conducted schools, established churches and translated into these Slavic tongues the most brilliant works of Byzantine literature, thus leading these people to develop their respective national literatures.

We can truly say then that the Byzantine Empire and consequently the Byzantine culture and Church are not the product of one people or of one culture, but rather the sum total of three distinct cultures and civilizations: Greek, Latin and Eastern, with elements and contributions of Slavic and other ethnic groups. It is a complex, mobile culture, enriched by the variety of the turbulent and glorious history of the Byzantine Empire. From the union of all these cultures came forth a new and a very specific culture and civilization, and consequently a new Rite, a Church, a spirituality which was both universal and

universalizing. It is precisely because of these characteristics of Byzantium that its spirituality, theology, liturgy—in short, its Christian life-style which enables it to see the Face of God—it is precisely this rich complex of elements which makes it so very modern and so appealing to all cultures.

For the peoples of the East called “Byzantines,” Constantinople is not only the capital of an Empire; it is first and foremost the capital of the Church and the symbol of the Church’s unity. The strength and triumph of the capital is the strength and triumph of the Church; its weaknesses and sufferings are the weaknesses and sufferings of the Church. For the Byzantines, Constantinople was what Rome has been and probably still is to the Christian people of the West: Rome personifies the whole Catholic Church. Romans say, “Rome has spoken.” They speak of “obedience to Rome” and “permissions from Rome.” There is “Roman infallibility.” He who offends Rome offends the whole Church.

In the East there is a special liturgical feast for the foundation and dedication of Constantinople. The figure of Constantinople as symbol of the Byzantine Church is beautifully expressed in the hymn of the Annunciation which is often repeated in the Canon of the Acathist. The city addresses herself in prayer to the Mother of God: “I am your city,⁷ O Mother of God. To you, Protectress and Leader, my songs of victory! To you, who saved me from danger, my hymn of thanksgiving! In your invincible might deliver me from all danger, that I may sing to you. Hail, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!”

PART I

GOD'S INNER LIFE

CHAPTER 2

TRINITY, SOURCE OF WONDROUS LOVE

The Holy Trinity, one God in three divine Persons, is the unshakable foundation of all Christian religious thought, and the expression of all Christian religious experience and spiritual life.

It is the Trinity we seek when we search for the fullness of being and for the significance and purpose of existence. The Trinity is the foundation upon which the Christian religion stands and from which all its theology and spiritual life proceed. For us, God is not an abstract concept but a most living reality—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—three divine Persons in one God, in one unique nature. There is but one God. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father. The Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Yet, the Three are God, our God, the God revealed through Jesus Christ. There is only one God in three divine Persons.

A Christian is not merely someone who believes in God in general. He believes in a God who is Father, Son

and Holy Spirit. It is this trinitarian character of Christianity that makes it so different and absolutely unique. It is different from paganism for which "three in one" would seem another form of polytheism. It is also different from Judaism for which the notion of "three in one" is inconceivable.

One cannot appreciate Christ, nor apprehend his redemptive worth, nor understand anything Christianity stands for, unless one is constantly alive to the fact that Christ is the Son of God, true God of true God. This very God broke into time and assumed human nature, and thus he became one with mankind. Without this Incarnation, in which the Son of God, God himself, became Son of man and specifically Son of a human mother, Mary, Christianity has neither meaning nor relevance.

Jesus Christ is real God who became real man without in any way losing his Godhead. As God, Christ is one with the Father; as man, he is one with man, and one therefore with the whole universe. Through him and in him, as God-made-man, man can have real contact with God, and the cosmos becomes holy and sanctified. Because of God becoming man, we know that man and the universe are alive in God and that material creation can become and in fact already is (for example, in the sacraments) a real channel through which divine life is communicated to us. It is therefore right indeed to say with our holy Fathers that "God became man so that man might become God."

From the very beginning Christians have based their faith and life on this triadic reality of God. They joyfully professed their faith in the Holy Trinity, understood as the unbounded generosity of God's love. God's love was first revealed in the life of his chosen people, and then enfleshed in the word of man, the Bible. God's love became fully visible in Christ. Subsequently, now and forever, it radiates in the members of the Church which is

the living presence of Christ in the Holy Spirit. From the beginning Christians lived in the experience and reality of the Trinity much more than they attempted to explain it. "Itself the source of all revelation as of all being, the Holy Trinity presents Itself to our religious consciousness as a fact, the evidence of which can be grounded only upon Itself."¹ Eastern theology does not have a place for either a doctrine of the essence of God as such, or a mysticism of the essence of God. Our aim is not the contemplation of the essence of God in heaven. Rather, it is the participation in the life of the Trinity by which man possesses by grace what the Trinity is by nature.

The Christian can only witness to and communicate that which he himself actually believes in and possesses. The Christian's belief in the Trinity is measured by the depth of his union with the divine Persons of God. The relationship of a Christian to God is a relationship to the Person of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, a Christian does not merely believe in general; he believes in a relationship of life with a Person. His belief, therefore, is a joy, and this joy is integrated into all the actions of his life. "You do not see him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe" (1 Pet. 1:8).

EASTERN THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

The depth of this intimate realization of the mystery of the Trinity led the early Christians away from speculative concepts to the simple enjoyment of communion with the Persons of God as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit. Their early way of life, which was a ghetto-type existence, did not compel them to give intellectual rebuttles in

defense of their faith. In the first three centuries of Christianity there were only feeble attempts to expound and explain.

When freedom and official recognition allowed the Church to come out of hiding, Christians faced a need to satisfy the intellectuals and the philosophers. Theologians engaged in great trinitarian discussion and the "trinitarian era" was born. The Ecumenical Councils used the systems of philosophy to formulate the doctrines of the Faith. The writers and Fathers of the Church devoted all their genius to elucidate in human language all the thrilling beauty of the Trinity. Since Greek was their language and culture, the Fathers adapted Greek philosophical concepts and expressions "to give an account for the hope that was in them" (1 Pet. 3:15).

The sublime and the mysterious exert special attraction on the heart of man who thirsts after truth and the transcendent. The reality of God, "Three in One," is the most profound of all realities. It fascinates and overpowers the mind. Its depth and profundity exhibit ever-new splendors and ever-deeper abysses to the exploring spirit.

How difficult indeed it is to speak of God and of the Trinity! In doing so, religious passions can easily be aroused, and once they are unleashed they blind the mind and create fragile idols out of the most mysterious and the most splendid reality of God. In fact, because God is most mysterious, the human concepts which expressed him were inadequate. Ideas often separated men and killed charity in the hearts of many. Wars, persecutions, divisions and hatreds ensued over the meaning of these human expressions and philosophical notions. To talk or write about God, the Trinity, one must be a man of acknowledged competence and discretion, above bickering arguments, deeply convinced that no human formula or expression is adequate, much less "absolute."

A philosophy, or any philosophical expression: Eastern, Western, or "uncivilized," can be a good and valid attempt to speak about God as long as the heart of the philosopher and the spirit of his work rest at the feet of God looking *up* to him. However, any philosophy which attempts to analyze or explain God, or which assumes that God can be understood or examined, automatically loses its validity. To define is to limit. To analyze is to circumscribe. The basic principle of our theology is that "of God we only know *that* he is, and not *what* he is."

Byzantine or Eastern theology does contain elements of a specific system of philosophy, but it never becomes an exclusive system, nor does it enter into a full alliance with a specific philosophy in an attempt to achieve a rational synthesis. All the speculations are centered on the person of Christ and dominated by the idea of loving union with God. Such a theology is always concerned with a relationship of person to person.

The great Councils of the Church tried to avoid too much dogmatic formulation. But when they did apply philosophy they were more truly philosophers than Plato, Aristotle or any other philosopher, because they united to human intelligence and logic an intense vision and experience of the most mysterious realities which no human intellect can penetrate.

Indeed, contemplation of a person elevates and purifies. It engenders love which calms and unites. For this reason the formulations of the Councils were used immediately in the daily liturgy and prayers. They became celebrations as soon as they were adopted.

Several times a day we repeat the Creed of Nicea in the divine office. This repetition is not for the sake of "drumming into the mind" a set of formulae which people have to believe. It is rather a celebration of life, an enumeration of many reasons for joy and hope. We

proclaim and celebrate the divine Trinity. Willingly we accept and joyfully we plunge into the stream of life and love of each of the three divine Persons: the Father who creates, the Son who redeems, and the Holy Spirit who vivifies. This life-giving presence leads us to everlasting life. The Creed is a mirror wherein we contemplate the magnificent mysteries of faith. We bathe our whole being in these streams of living water; we affirm that this life in the Trinity will spring into the life to come, into the resurrection and eternity.

Besides the Fathers of the Church there were other thinkers who tried to expound these same mysteries; but they did not think in harmony with the Church. Consequently they fell into theological errors. We call them heretics.² These people were, for the most part, holy and sincere men who wanted to give a scientific and philosophical explanation of the faith. Their errors were caused by incomplete definitions or mistaken philosophical notions. Thus, their conclusions did not always correspond to the true nature of revelation.

GOD OF MYSTERY

There are two main streams in the theological presentation of the mystery of God: Eastern and Western, also called Greek and Latin. The fundamental characteristic of Eastern theology is that it is "apophatic" or negative. It emphasizes more the ultimately indescribable or "ineffable" mystery of God who is incomprehensible and who is of his very nature unknowable. St. Clement of Alexandria summarizes the whole trend of the Eastern mind and its theological attitude toward God by saying that "we can attain to God not in what he is but in what he is not;" and St. Gregory of Nyssa says that "the highest

degree of knowledge of God is to understand that one cannot understand him.”

The reason why God is inaccessible and unknowable is not because of the limited intelligence of creatures but because of the fact that God in himself is unknowable, is the Unknowable. It is an essential characteristic of his Being that he be ultimately mysterious and unlimited. St. Gregory of Nyssa says it clearly: “To understand God one has to be God.” To define and comprehend is to limit. God is unlimited, and there is no scale of comparison to which man can refer to make God known.

The essence of God is incomprehensible. God said to Moses: “No man can see me and live.” St. John Chrysostom adds this reflection: “His majesty is beyond measure, his wisdom beyond understanding. How then can he himself be comprehensible?”³

To stress the unknowability of God is not agnosticism. It is one thing to say that God’s existence is problematic, and another to rest in the paradox that God in himself is unknowable and incomprehensible—that he is beyond being and beyond the reach of the intellect.

Eastern theology nurtures the general attitude of “unwillingness and repugnancy to be compelled into exposing to the uncertainty of human language the mysteries which should be contained only in the adoration of our souls. . . .”⁴ Mystery is an object of contemplation not a subject for human science. Contemplation leads naturally to prayer. Only in prayer does man discover God who in turn can illumine the whole of life. St. Paul writes that “the depths of God can be known only by the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:1). Knowing God and finding him consist in searching for him and desiring him, not confining him to human concepts and expressions.

Holy Scripture reveals that God is love. One can only glorify in love the God of love. The real revelation of God

to man is the love that God pours into man's heart and which binds and unites man to him.

God is a wondrous mystery. Mystery implies inexpressibility, but in essence it is a vision. It is a fact about which we do not know everything, but the deeper we plunge into it, the more we are enriched by it, and the more we learn from it.

Of all human experiences, is there any more unexplainable, more miraculous and at the same time more illuminating than the perception of beauty? Man's spontaneous response to beauty is wonder and worship. The very thought of God-Love is wrapped in these self-same sentiments, free of all cramping inhibitions of logic and analysis.

The act of love, and much more so Love itself, must always remain unlimited, boundless, indefinable, and inexplicable. The explicable has only restricted value and evokes at the most only transient interest. Our surest and most delicate way of knowing and loving lies in perceiving another person in the uniqueness of his being; this is possible only by admiration and reverence. To love is before all else to admire, to approve and to be overwhelmed with the mystery of the Beloved. In the Holy Trinity each divine Person does not affirm Himself but gives witness to the other.

The reality of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a reality that exceeds man's notions and expectations, and naturally man marvels at the unexpected. He is awed by the inexplicable. He is overwhelmed by it. When the object of admiration is a person, man becomes a lover. A lover wants to take pleasure in being present to and being alive in the object of his admiration and love.

It is precisely this mystery of God-Love which merits and arouses our admiration and constantly calls for our ecstatic wonder: "How rich are the depths of God—how

deep his wisdom and knowledge—and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods! Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? Who could ever be his counselor? Who could ever give him anything or lend him anything? All that exists comes from him; all is by him and for him. To him be glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:33-36).

A THEOLOGY OF WONDER

Theology is more existence-centered and consequently more prone to be in wonder at the mystery of being. The vocation of the Christian is therefore to contemplate and to wonder. He is “called to praise his glory” (Eph. 1:12). The formula of the Fathers about God was: “God is! How wonderful it is that he is!”

This attitude of wonder is reflected in the prayers of the daily liturgy, always in terms of admiration, exaltation and awe. All credal formulations, therefore, are incorporated into the daily prayers and transformed into hymns of praise:

It is truly fitting and right and worthy of the magnificence of your holiness to praise you, to sing to you, to bless you, to worship you, to give thanks to you, and to glorify you, the only true God. Who is able to declare your mighty love, or to show your praise in full, and make known your wonders on all occasions? You, Lord, who are without beginning, unseen, incomprehensible, unchanged, Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the image of your goodness, the seal of your likeness revealing you, the Father, the Living Word, Life, Sanctification, Power, by whom the Holy Spirit was made manifest, the Spirit of Truth, the Gift of Adoption, the life-giving Power, the Well-Spring of sanctification. (Anaphora of St. Basil)

Words lose their meaning once they seek to touch

upon this Being of God. They are opaque and cannot convey adequate meaning. Only an inspired poet, a mystic or a saint could have a message about God. Christ could talk so freely about the Father because Christ combined in himself poetry, mysticism and all holiness. His message set the hearts and minds of the apostles on fire. They wanted to know more about God: "Lord, show us the Father." They wanted human concepts, however, words of human size which would limit and define God. The only answer Christ gave them was, "He who sees me sees the Father."

Yet, because he was a poet, he knew how to wonder and how to evoke the sense of wonder in his talk about God. In order to convey the marvelous reality of his Father, Christ invented stories like the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. He made up stories about feasts and weddings and celebrations and banquets. All his poetry and all his stories are alive and vibrant with the tenderness and love of a Father and a Lover. He spoke about God in the language of images and symbols by means of which he penetrated depths which no analysis can ever plumb or reach. His words have a depth that only silence and prayer can apprehend.

Doctrine and dogma are necessary, but they should be formulated only to direct and to nourish an experience. The experience of God is lived in a vision of prayer and wonder. St. Gregory of Nazianzen sang of such an experience:

O you, the One beyond.
Is this not all that I can sing of you?

What hymn can speak the secret language?
No words can speak of you.
What can my spirit cling to?
No thoughts can contain you.

You alone cannot be spoken,
For what is said must spring from you.

All that is,
What speaks and what is silent,
All declare you.

All that is,
What thinks and what cannot think,
All praise you.
The world-desire, the world-sighing,
Moves towards you.

All being prays to you,
All thinking moves to you,
Your world sends up to you
A hymn of silence.

All that abides, abides by you.
All is in movement because of you.

You are the goal of all that is,
You are all being,
And you are none of these.

All names are yours, how name I you
Who alone cannot be named?

What spirit of heaven can pierce the clouds
With which your throne is shrouded?

Have mercy.

O you, the One beyond,
Is this not all that I can sing of you?

TRINITY, SOURCE OF LOVE

The aim and purpose of theology is not to see or understand by human words the divine Essence or Nature of God, but to participate in the divine life by which we are deified and which makes us heirs of God, as St. Paul says: "We become God's heirs and Christ's co-heirs" (Rom. 8:17). The whole teaching of our holy religion revolves around the notion of God who is love. The essence of love is identification. The notion "God is love" is emphatically stressed and frequently repeated because love is synonymous with God himself. "God is love" means an infinitely simple act of communication, an infinite and eternal movement, immeasurable and without succession, which unites and identifies in oneness.

This movement in God and God himself are not two different realities: God and his movement, but it is God moving, acting, pouring out himself and creating. The overflow of love is from all eternity. The Love-God or God-Love overflows in the Trinity and from the Trinity's inner life into creation.

St. Cyprian said that it is a shame for a Christian to use human words when he wishes to touch upon the mystery of God. Nonetheless, in this "shame and sorrow" let us try to elucidate what man understands of being and of love. Thus, we might be led to prayer and to the adoration of God.

In his eternity the Father, who is the Head of the Trinity, knows necessarily and inexhaustibly the perfect image (Icon) of himself. He speaks himself into a perfect knowledge of himself. He speaks himself into the Son. The Son, the eternal and divine Word of the Father, is therefore the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is the Image (Icon) of the Father.

In his Son and through his Son the Father pours out all of himself. He spirates the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the most Holy Trinity. He is the Spirit of love who thus proceeds from the Father through the Son. The Holy Spirit does not have a personal image (Icon). Therefore he remains hidden as a Person. This concealment is what we call the *kenosis* of the Spirit. In Western theology he is thus the inner atmosphere of life and love in which God the Father and God the Son know and love each other. This reality of God's life and love in himself as Trinity is called supernatural life.

This infinite love of God manifested itself again when he created man and the universe. Moved by his love, the Father sends his Son to deify man and creation and save them from sin. The Son becomes man in the Incarnation. He becomes one with man and with creation. He elevates fallen creation and fallen man, and unites them to himself in his human body, in the oneness of his divine Person. It is the Holy Spirit who effects this marvelous union between God and creation in Christ.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you. . . .” It is also the Holy Spirit who becomes creation's life and sanctification. Matter is thus made capable of being a real channel through which God imparts his life and grace.

Let us consider, for instance, the Sacraments. (We shall return to them in more detail later). The Father creates water which the Son purifies in his baptism so that it may be for the Holy Spirit an instrument of sanctification; the Father provides bread also which his Son transforms into his Body and Blood; the Holy Spirit descends upon both elements through the prayer of the Epiclesis. Because of this descent and presence the bread and wine become alive and life-giving. They are now “to those who partake of them, cleansing of souls, remission of sins, communion of the Holy Spirit, and fulfillment of the

Kingdom" (The Divine Liturgy). The Father also sends his Holy Spirit upon oil to bestow on it power "to heal the body and soul" of man.

THE ESSENCE OF LOVE

Let us attempt to describe in human language the wondrous reality of love in the inner life of God, in the Incarnation and in man.

We see that love is a successive unfolding movement which has its beginning in an act of presence, and its highest fulfillment in identification. Love, in fact, is first and foremost an act of presence, a pure, simple act of awareness of the other. A person reveals himself as a person. He opens and exposes himself in what he is—he makes himself known as a person to the other person. He becomes in this way present to the other.

Love is valid and meaningful only to the extent to which it represents a person and refers to a person. We are fascinated and motivated by our movement toward a person who in turn is motivated by a person; thus both become *present* to the other.

This presence necessarily opens out into a second act or stage, which is *communication*. The communication of a person is always a reciprocal act of giving-receiving. It is impossible to understand another without opening oneself to him. This self-revelation or communication is always reciprocated. One cannot open to the other without receiving openness from the other. A relationship of a person to a person is one reciprocal act of giving-receiving.

When this communication of a person to a person, or self-giving, is complete, without any reservation, it reaches the heights and glory of *surrender*, which is the third stage of the act of love. Nothing counts anymore or has value

but the other, who becomes the whole life and breath of the giver.

When the surrender is complete and without reservation, love attains the fourth and most awesome degree of intensity. It reaches then the mystery of *identification* where the two persons become as one. In fact, they are one. There is no greater love than the gift of oneself. By the complete surrender of themselves to each other the two are identified with each other. One's own personality melts and is fused into the other's personality. This mystery of identification is the apex and the fullness of life; it is love.

We can adequately apply these successive acts (which together constitute love) to love as it is known to man. To the Triune God we can apply them only in an analogical way.⁵

In some way we can apply them also to the Incarnation. God the Son becomes present in physical matter. He joins matter to his divine Person. He becomes a real man and the One who does not have a name now has a human face, and his name is Jesus Christ.

He not only takes the form of man; he takes on as well all of man's weaknesses. "He became sin for us," says St. Paul. Christ identifies himself with the whole of fallen creation. In himself, as divine Person, the second Person of the Holy Trinity unites God and man. With the Incarnation, the relationship of man to God is no longer a mere relationship of man to some nebulous idea of God. Rather, it is an intense relationship of a person to a Person, of a son to his father.

The human person is related to the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, as to the source of existence and the point of return of everything. He is also related to God as son having been assumed by the Son in the Incarnation. He is related to the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, the

Incarnate Word of the Father, as to the Person who unites in himself man and the whole of creation and brings it back to the Father. The human person is related to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, as to the atmosphere of life and love who unites the Son to the whole of creation and who in the Son and through the Son makes possible the access to the Father. The Holy Spirit reveals the Son and the Son reveals the Father. Man can therefore relate to each of the Persons of the Trinity and thus attain to his final destiny.

THE ECONOMY

The liturgical language expresses the action of God in creation by the phrase "the providence of God" or "the economy of God." The word "economy" is a Greek word which literally means "construction" or the "administration of a house." The house of God is the universe. God the Father has planned his house. He builds it and organizes it and directs it in good order.

In the inner sphere of the Holy Trinity love flows from the Father to the Son in the Holy Spirit. From this inner sphere it overflows to the outside: to creation and the making of the cosmos in which the Son becomes man by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit.

The Son unites himself to this creation through his Incarnation. He redeems it in his Blood, and glorifies it in his Resurrection. Finally, through his ascension to the Father's right hand, he brings it back to the Father.

The Holy Spirit fills this "house of the universe" with his life which is himself and thus fulfills the whole work of redemption of the Son. He descended at Pentecost, and ever after the Spirit "extends" Christ and makes him really present through time and space in the Church. Thus the

life and activity of the Holy Spirit is to unite and incorporate creation to Christ; Christ in turn leads creation back and surrenders it to the Father.

Our spiritual life, then, is based on a relationship and it develops from a relationship: the relationship of a person to a Person in love.

Our spiritual life and our Christian thought rely primarily on the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father. "No one has ever seen God. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father has revealed him" (John 4:18). Through Christ and in Christ we encounter the Father and attain to our final destiny.

This most marvelous flow of love is a perfect circular movement. It flows from the Most Holy Trinity, the supernatural sphere, and overflows into the outer sphere, the natural sphere of world and man. In Christ and through Christ the whole of creation and man himself return to God and find supernatural life in him. Man's destiny is to be united in love with the God who is Love, and thus become God, not by nature, but by grace.

It is not God's action but God himself in his action who makes himself known to man and gives him the ability to "see" him. God enters into man's love, remaining there in his intimate reality. This presence is real, indeed most real. This communication of God himself is called "Uncreated Energy." The Uncreated Energies of God are not "things" which exist outside of God, not "gifts" of God; they are God himself in his action. They are the very God who is himself Uncreated. They are therefore called "uncreated" because their cause and origin is the Essence of God. In them God, as it were, goes beyond himself and becomes "transradiant" in order to really communicate himself. Thus the Essence and energies of God are not "parts" of God but two ways by which we human beings can contemplate God's essence.

These “uncreated energies” are also called “powers” or “manifestations” of God. They do not have existence by themselves but they manifest to us the attributes or “divine names” of God. These names are unlimited: Love, Beauty, Wisdom, Power, Glory, Omniscience, etc. In relation to God these manifestations are infinite; in relation to man these manifestations are called “grace,” “sanctifying grace,” “deification.” To “receive grace,” then, means to participate in the divine life of God, to participate in his love. For the East, “sanctifying grace” is not a created gift applied to man and which man can lose and recover. It is the gift of God himself, undying and which always exists.

CHAPTER 3

TRINITY, SOURCE OF LIFE

The Christian attains to identification in love in contemplation, which the Fathers called "theoria." This is an encounter with a person, a divine Person, in his spiritual and all-encompassing beauty.

All knowledge is a reflection of what man sees with his physical eyes, contemplates with his physical being, and experiences with all the various parts of his body. Man can experience a thing or a person. He cannot experience an abstraction. If there be any such abstractions in theology, they are only efforts to render experience more understandable to oneself and to others.

Theology is neither sentimentalism nor intellectualism. It is a way of thinking and a way of expressing thoughts in order to establish a meeting place with a divine Person. Thinking seeks an object, while love seeks a Person. To make this personal relationship with God alive and meaningful, we refer to the Persons of the Trinity and not to God or the "Godhead."

The three divine Persons are one in essence and undivided. In each one there is the same dignity, the same oneness in knowledge and identity in nature, while the diversity is the result of the reciprocity of relation and communion. Communion is the imparting of love of the Father to the Son, and through the Holy Spirit. This

communication of love in the Holy Trinity serves as a description of the absolute diversity of Persons, as also of their absolute unity. This mutual giving of one's whole being to another is the essence of personhood.

Because of the weakness of our human intellect and the poverty of our language we use the word "appropriation." We ascribe to each of the three divine Persons some specific action, quality or function. We also appropriate certain qualities to the different Persons of the Trinity. Of course we do not exclude from any one of the Persons any of these characteristics, but by these appropriations we can better encounter each of the Persons and discover in each of them our love and our life.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE FATHER: HE IS HOLY

The Father is the source of all life and love. In our liturgical life no action of Christ or of the Holy Spirit is ever mentioned without mentioning the Father as its source and origin. He is the principle and essence of being and movement. He is the very source of everything, first of all within the Trinity itself, and then in all of creation.

The Father is the source of beatitude in the Trinity, and he creates man for beauty and perfect security. In the Old Testament the Father is described as the Father and Lover of *one* people: the chosen of Israel. In the New Testament he is a real Father, the Father and Lover of *all* mankind.

One of the characteristics of Yahweh in the Old Testament was his holiness. So it is in the New Testament. "Holy" is the common word. This is also the common word we apply to God every time we pronounce his name. The word itself means "separated," "unique," "different," "inviolable," "mysterious," and consequently "awesome."

Holiness is then an ontological quality which is the cause rather than the effect of morality. God is called holy because he is unique and awesome. He is the mysterious Being. He inspires reverence and adoration. He is essentially holy.

In all our liturgical prayers and references to God we proclaim that he is holy. Isaiah the prophet heard the hymn of holiness in his vision of heaven: "I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up. . .and the seraphim. . .called one to another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:1-3).

In the Byzantine Church we call this hymn *Trisagion* or the thrice-holy hymn. Its first form is found in the Apostolic Constitution and later in St. John Chrysostom: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Powers. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. You are blessed forever. Amen." Afterwards, in order to apply it more properly with the "appropriations" ascribed to the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Church sang it in this form: "Holy is God! Holy the Mighty One! Holy the Immortal One!" And later the people added, "Have mercy on us!"

This final form of the *Trisagion* is thought by some authors to be the work of Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople, and by others of Theodosius the Younger (448). Not long after Theodosius it was used by the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon (451) in their condemnation of Dioscorus.

The Church, says St. John of Damascus, used this form to declare her faith in the Holy Trinity, applying this title of "Holy is God" to the Father, "Holy the Mighty One" to the Son, and "Holy the Immortal One" to the Holy Spirit. The Son is called "Mighty" because he vanquished evil and death and gave man eternal life; the Holy Spirit is called "Immortal" because he is the Life and

he is always present and living in the world, and in a special way in the Church.

Every prayer and liturgical office is introduced by this hymn to remind ourselves that in prayer we are joined in a special way with each one of the Persons of God, and that we belong to each one of Them as they belong to each of us. We are holy with the Father, mighty with the Son, and immortal with the life of the Spirit who lives in us:

Three Persons and yet a single Power and Essence, and one Godhead. In deep adoration let us cry to God: 'Holy is God who made all things through the Son with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit! Holy the Mighty One through whom the Father was revealed to us and the Holy Spirit came into this world! Holy the Immortal One, the Spirit, the Counselor, who proceeds from the Father and reposes in the Son! All Holy Trinity, glory to You.'¹

We call Christ the "Holy One" because when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin he was consecrated by a special relationship to the Father: he was the "Chosen One." And the Spirit of Jesus is traditionally known precisely as the Holy Spirit because it is his special function to communicate to others the treasures of grace won by Christ, thus fashioning a holy people.

We refer to priests, monks, to our Fathers in the Faith as holy men or as holy Fathers. This does not first of all indicate a moral quality. It indicates that they have been consecrated and dedicated to the work and worship of God. They participate in a special way in the uniqueness of God. They are "set apart," made "special" by their identification with Christ, and "sealed" by the charisms of the Holy Spirit for the service of God, or for the service of his people.

Poets, artists, singers, writers, dancers and actors are holy also because they are set apart by the same Holy

Spirit to seek and produce a perfection of God for the service of his people. So also every worker "dedicated" to his vocation in life is holy and inspired by the Holy Spirit who lives in him and leads him to perfection.

When a man applies himself to the various disciplines of philosophy, of history, and mathematical and natural science, and he cultivates the arts, he is doing much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and to the formation of judgements which embody universal values. Thus mankind can be more clearly enlightened by that marvelous Wisdom which was with God from all eternity, arranging all things with Him, playing upon the earth, delighting in the sons of men.

(Vatican II, "The Church Today," II,57)

Christian people are called holy also because they have been "set apart" in baptism. They are buried together with Christ and have "passed over" to a new life. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people claimed by God for His own" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Man in his frailty is in constant peril of losing sight of the gulf that separates him from his Creator and Master who is "utterly Other" and beyond the reach of human powers. He needs the help afforded by visible things, mostly by signs that point to the invisible.

In the Old Testament many things were set "apart" and considered "holy" for the service of God's majesty. These things were called holy because they were associated in a special way with the One who was supremely holy; these things belonged to him: the Tent, the Ark, the Temple, the Special Bread, the Sacrifice.

The Church also, in her life and worship, uses many such things in her approach to God: icons, bread, wine, altar, chalice, special vestments, censer, banners, etc. These

objects too are holy in that they are used in the worship of him who is supremely holy.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE SON: HE IS LIGHT

As God-Man Christ is the visible image (icon) of the Father. Only with Christ, through Christ and in Christ, in all his human reality, can we come to know the Father. "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:10). "No one knows the Son but the Father, as no one knows the Father but the Son" (Luke 10:22).

The Son is "consubstantial with the Father." As God he is one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. As man he is one with man and one with the whole physical creation. In him, therefore, God the Father and creation are united in such a close relationship that the abyss that separates the Creator from his creation is bridged and sealed.

When Christ died he redeemed man and creation in the shedding of his blood. We know, in faith, that God himself has redeemed. And when Christ "ascended into heaven" we realize that in him the whole creation was returned to the Creator. Christ is the Icon, the Image of the Father and the way back to the Father. Because Christ is this Mighty One, powerful enough to bring us to the Father, he is also given such titles as "Pantocrator" and "Kyrios" of the whole creation. He is able to unite us to himself and to bring us into the intimacy of the Divine Family.

Our response to the Son as revealer of the Father is acceptance of him and faithfulness to his teaching. Christ not only *is* but *is for us* to the extent that we can identify ourselves with him. "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven." His coming to us joins us to the

Father, making his Father our Father. Consequently, every single human being in this world is the brother of Jesus Christ and therefore our own brother.

Christ is the "Glory of the Father," the "Light that enlightens every man." He is the "Light of our souls and bodies," a "Light of joy and exaltation." He is the Light of divine revelation that shines forth in the darkness of the cosmic universe and establishes a relationship between man and man, between man and time, between man and everything that moves and has life. "And the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world" (John 9:5). The reality of Christ the Light is beautifully expressed in the hymn of vespers:

O Joyful Light,
Light and Holy Glory
Of the Father Immortal,
Heavenly, Holy and Blessed One;
O Jesus Christ!

Now that we have reached
The setting of the sun,
And we have seen the evening light,
We sing to God
Father, Son, and Spirit.

It is fitting at all times
To raise a song of praise
In measured melody
To you, O Son of God
The Giver of Life.

Behold, the universe sings
Your glory!

Since Christ is the real light "that enlightens every man who comes into this world," Christians use oil lamps and candles as signs and symbols of his invisible presence. Their practical necessity in the early church was later enhanced by the imagination of Christians, and they became vehicles and symbols of the Risen Christ: "Make us worthy, O Lord, in your loving kindness, to kindle our lamps with today's light, symbol of your radiant and glorious Resurrection" (Liturgy of Easter).

A candle or two are always lit in the celebration of the sacraments, except for the sacrament of Confession. The faithful burn candles and lamps in their homes before icons and before the holy Gospel Book. We can sum up the symbol of the candle as an expression of faith in Christ by quoting this prayer from the Liturgy: "Let us come to you, O King of Glory, like the wise virgins, with lighted candles in our hands, into your heavenly bridal chamber, to enjoy the light of the indivisible Trinity and to send up glory to the Father. Amen."

Our attitude toward Christ the life and light of the world is love. Imitation is the perfect fruit of love. St. Basil the Great stresses the necessity of the imitation of Christ whose words and deeds should be the model for all the baptized. He says: "Every action and every word of Christ our Lord is a pattern." And St. Gregory Nazianzus says that we must reproduce in ourselves the life and even the gestures of Christ "who slept in order to bless our sleep, who was tired in order to bless our toil, and who wept in order to sanctify our tears."

The imitation of Christ is not simply "doing what he did" in mimic and parrot-like fashion, but allowing him to be in us who he really is: all-embracing, all-open, and all-tenderness. "You know about Jesus of Nazareth, how God annointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were

oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). If, in his holy Gospels, Christ proved anything, he did prove that God is our Father, a real Father, with an infinite love. He is *for* us, not against us. He "makes his sun rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike" (Matt. 5:45).

Imitation of Christ has but one purpose: to give hope and courage to the downtrodden, to heal the sick, to restore the withered limbs, enlighten the blind, even to raise the dead. Christ was generous without expecting any return. Christ was magnanimous; in other words, though sharing fully our humanity, he did not calculate the risks. The truly magnanimous person never complains about the present "bad times" and compares them with the "good old days." He ignores any lack of reciprocity and always pardons—always frees freedom itself. This is the real imitation of the God-Man.

Christ the Son of God who became the Son of Man healed not only souls but bodies too: "The blind see, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the Good News" (Matt. 11:15). He is light. The very presence of the kingdom of God is made manifest in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is life. In him we are "renewed in the image of the Creator, and brought to know God" (Col. 13:10).

Christ was clothing us, not with fetters but with freedom and life. Instead of a God who is always in search of a sinner to destroy, Christ reveals God as a Love that seeks to heal. In Christ the whole spiritual heritage of Judaism bursts upon Jews and Gentiles alike, and it breaks open the limits of man in order to bring him to security in love.

There is no more fear in Christ, no more death; there is only life and love. Christ, the Light of the world, revealed how man's life becomes freer, larger, perfect: "Be

perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Perfection, according to Christ, ever reaches for completeness and totality, and it bursts into a hymn of praise and glory. Man, in the eyes of Christ, should attain to that part of life that cannot be seen by physical eyes nor measured by human cultures and standards. Man, according to Christ, sees only with the eyes of the soul, the real eyes which can see the whole truth.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT: HE IS LIFE

The Holy Spirit is the kiss and the poetry of God. He inspires the prophets, the poets and the artists. He animates the whole of creation and pours his grace into our hearts. Since the Holy Spirit is life and love in the Holy Trinity, he is also life and love in creation. He makes it possible for creatures to become aware of God.

One fundamental principle of encounter with the Holy Spirit is that he is life. He proceeds from the Father, and he radiates Christ. He is the realization in space and time of the all-enveloping presence of God. Because of this awareness of God's presence, we become deified. With his all-pervading presence the Spirit manifests the Son, and makes us aware of the Son's presence. By the Spirit's love and through the Son, we are brought to know the Father.

It is the Holy Spirit who inspired and revealed Christ even before the Incarnation. That is why we say that his special mission is to sanctify, to make holy, to make us seek perfection, and to deify man by uniting him to Christ and by dwelling in him as his supernatural life.

He is therefore a fire which refreshes the human heart and opens it to the sensibility of the presence of the Father and of the Son. In the Spirit man becomes transparent in the presence of God. Through this transparency of the soul which comes from the Holy Spirit,

man sees God in himself, and in God he can see creation in its bond of love with God the Creator. St. Athanasius says that "without the Holy Spirit we are strangers and far from God."

We call the life of grace supernatural life. It is the loving presence of the Spirit within us, enabling us to live in faith, hope and charity. It introduces us into the sphere of God's own life. Through the activity of the Spirit in us a human person enters into a unique relationship with God. He becomes present to a divine Person who possesses him. This possession is a gracious and generous activity of the Holy Spirit in man. The Fathers had this familiar saying: "By his grace the Spirit becomes more intimate to us than we are to ourselves."

Intimate as it is, this presence of the Holy Spirit does not change our personality but rather sustains it and makes it the throne of God. St. Cyril of Alexandria says that "we are as if melted into one body, yet still separate in our personalities" (On John's Gospel, 11:16). Because this life of the Spirit becomes so intimately our own, as the "Uncreated Energy" of God in us, Byzantine theology considers that no sin can ever extinguish this presence. Sin can only hinder the efficacy of the Spirit in us.

The great mystery of the Holy Spirit identifying himself with us, becoming our own life, and adapting himself to our own personalities is also called the mystery of the divine "kenosis of the Spirit." He "empties" himself, leaving his own personality hidden in his Godhead to dwell, operate and remain the ever-active principle of divine life in us.

He is also life and movement of everything. He prepares mankind for the coming of the Kingdom of God, guides our way to Christ, and makes us discover in him the plenitude of life. Symeon the New Theologian expresses all these realities of the Spirit in this prayer:

I give thanks to you, Divine Being above all beings, for becoming a single Spirit with me, without confusion or alteration, for becoming my all in all: the unutterable food and drink, freely given, which is laid between the lips of my soul and flows in streams from the source of my heart; the dazzling garment that covers and protects me and destroys evil spirits; the cleansing from every stain which comes to me with those holy, ever-flowing tears which your Presence accords to those whom you visit. I give thanks that you have been revealed to me as the day without darkness, the sun that never sets, you who have no place wherein to conceal yourself; for you never steal away from us, you despise no one. . .rather it is we who hide, not wanting to draw near to you.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and completed in them the plan of redemption, conferring on them the deep vision of God. He brought all things to their minds that Christ had taught them. He became himself the living source of their awareness of the true depths of Christ's mysteries. The Liturgy of Pentecost expresses the aspects of the living presence of the Holy Spirit in one highly poetic passage:

The Holy Spirit is light and life, a living fountain of all spiritual reality: he is the essence of wisdom, the Spirit of knowledge; he is goodness and understanding, leader to the vision of God. He cleanses from sin; he is divine and makes us so; he is fire proceeding from fire; his word is action and distribution of gifts. Through him God witnesses and the prophets and apostles were crowned. Oh! How marvelous is this truth of the Holy Spirit! Oh! How marvelous is his work!
(Stichera of Vespers)

The Holy Spirit is the very life of the world, the secret inner source of its power to mediate God. In the Incarnation, through Christ's body, all matter was liberated, not only to become the diaphanous witness to God's

presence, but also to be able to receive the breath of the Spirit by which God's life may be transmitted.

In one of the oldest icons of Pentecost, Old Man Cosmos is represented right in the middle of the mystery, waiting with as much eagerness for the Holy Spirit as the Mother of God and the Apostles themselves. It is thus that matter is prepared to be a vehicle of the grace and life of Christ. We find beauty and joy in creation to the degree that our own body, with all its senses, is placed under the delicate sway of the Holy Spirit. It is this same Spirit who inspired the Saints of this world: "All things are yours and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:23).

In the celebration of the Sacraments it is the Holy Spirit who pours forth his gift on the baptized, gently and powerfully moving him to the building up of the perfect Man, Christ (Eph. 4:13). It is he who searches the deep things of God and reveals them to us. The formulae of the Sacraments always mention the Holy Spirit by a prayer called *epiclesis*.

It is the Holy Spirit and not the priest who dispenses the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit is the One who really imparts the grace. The Holy Spirit was given to the Church at Pentecost to sustain her through time and space by the diffusion of grace. "This is the seal of the gift of the Spirit" (Chrismation); "changing them (the Sacred Species) by your holy Spirit so that they may be for those who partake of them a cleansing of their soul, (and) the remission of their sins" (Eucharist).

Christ declared the bread and wine to be his Body and his Blood. The Holy Spirit is asked to be sent by the Father to transform them into life, to be life-giving. "Because," says St. Cyril of Jerusalem, "the Spirit transforms into life all that he touches." Now the bread and wine by the descent of the Holy Spirit, become the life-giving food "for those who partake of them."

The other sacraments too, mention this Spirit of new life: "Divine grace which is lacking raises the Deacon N. (or the Priest N.) to the priesthood (or the Episcopacy). Let us pray that the grace of the all-Holy Spirit come upon him. . ." (Holy Orders).

No life nor truth nor beauty can flicker if not lit by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He is, as we call him, "the Immortal One," always present, always acting in every person's life. He is always radiating God the Father in divine sparks of knowledge, of shape, of color and of sound.

In Byzantine spirituality no prayer or work of any kind is initiated without first calling on this Spirit to be present and to act in us. "Heavenly King, Consoler, the Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things, the treasury of blessings and giver of life, come and dwell in us, cleanse us from all stain, and save our souls, O Good One!"

Every race and nation on the face of the earth, in their social as well as in their religious life, are inspired by the Holy Spirit. The prophets of the Old Testament were illuminated and guided by him. Wise men and poets of every human culture derive their inspiration from him. As the prayer of Pentecost says: "All of us and all mankind receive from the Holy Spirit the seed of the knowledge of God in our tongue and in our own mind."

The Fathers of the Church point out with pride that it was the Holy Spirit who inspired Homer and Virgil and all the poets and artists. It was the Holy Spirit who guided the hands of Phydias as he hewed his figures of beauty out of the rock. The traditions of the Old Greeks and Romans, of India and China, of Central Africa, always were and still are guided by the light of the Holy Spirit. He is the wind who blows where he wills.

All these inspirations, especially those concerning the life and the working of God, were necessarily partial, and incompletely received by men down through the ages. The plenitude and perfection of the inspiration and manifestation of the Holy Spirit were made only in Christ to the Church: "When he comes he will guide you into the whole truth" (John 16:13).

We can say a great deal of good and bad things about the Church. The greatest evil, for example, was not the Inquisition or the attempt, at times, to build the kingdom of God on earth. In preaching the Gospel, the Church did not always bring to the fore the paradise of life and poetry which is the true life of the Holy Spirit. A truth that does not sing is a truth betrayed. Human words cannot convey the whole truth about God. The Holy Spirit can only be partially expressed in human concepts. Source of Truth, the Holy Spirit is the Giver of life, complete and alive with all beauty and brilliant colors. He sings and wants to make us sing in joy and wonder at the discovery of God and of all things in God.

PART II

MANIFESTATION OF GOD-LOVE: ECONOMY

CHAPTER 4

GOD-LOVE PRESENT IN THE COSMOS, MAN, AND CHRIST

The Greek word for “plan of redemption” is *economia*, which, as already mentioned, means the good management of one’s household, or a well-organized business enterprise. Applied to the work of God it means that what God does is well planned and well managed.

The Father chooses and accepts us as his own (Eph. 1:3-6). God the Son, as the perfect Image of the Father, identifies himself with us in his Incarnation and Resurrection so that we might return to the Father (John 10:38). The Holy Spirit gives us the life of the Trinity and deifies us by imparting to us the life and knowledge of the Son (1 Cor. 12:13).

We turn now to the magnificent unfolding of this divine *economia*. We have already touched briefly upon the activity of the Trinity among the sons of men. Now we wish to penetrate more deeply into God’s plan as it works itself out in its manifold manifestations.

“Philanthropia,” or God’s love for man, is first of all God’s presence in creation, which is the starting point for all the other modes of his presence outside the circle of his inner life. Man cannot enter into relationship with the essence of God, but he can live in his presence. According to the Gospel of St. John, the excellence of God lies in the fact that God is a being who by his very nature communicates himself: He is Love. This means that the infinite, existential and practical essence of love is revealed in a presence, the presence of God in his creation. God’s goodness and love are not static realities, but dynamic, infinitely-charged energies which overflow in unreserved communication. Self-communication and self-giving are indeed an unfolding of one’s self, the essence of presence and consequently of life and love.

God is present in as many dimensions as exist in the life of man. Thus, God makes himself present in the material world (the cosmos), in the human word (Bible, Gospel), in our most intimate life (grace), and wherever people gather in his name (Church). The very same God, and not part of him, is whole and active in each and every one of these modes. The presence of God is not an immobile or static reality. It is a movement ever-radiant and life-giving. The mode of presence is different; the divine presence is the same. We cannot oppose one mode of presence to another. The most that can be said is that God is present to us in different ways.

PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE COSMOS

God wills that his inner triadic love overflow outside himself; thus he creates the cosmos. Creation is not a diffusion of the divine nature itself, or a replica of the Godhead. It is an entirely new being, a work of the will of

God, an overflowing of his goodness. While generation and spiration within the Trinity are a work of the Godhead that proceeds necessarily from the very substance of God and is co-eternal with God, creation is the free act of the will of God. And this free act is the sole foundation of the existence of all beings which thus cannot be co-eternal with God. "All creatures are balanced upon the creative word of God, as if upon a bridge of diamond; above them is the vault of the divine infinitude, below them the abyss of their own nothingness."¹

Since creation was begun by an act of the will of God, an expression of his overflowing love, it will never cease to exist. The divine will which made it is unchangeable. It is a work which has had a beginning. Beginning presupposes a change, a passage from non-existence to existence. Creation, therefore, is, by virtue of its origin, something which changes; it passes from one state to another state. God alone remains absolute repose. The concept that the whole universe is in continual change and evolution is a traditional characteristic of Byzantine thought. It is a biblical theme. God intends to bring all things into the movement of his saving history. The world is created that it might be deified, always tending toward its final goal: the hypostatic wisdom of the Father.

The graded physical aspects of creation are like a ladder always in movement. The first stage is the inanimate, the chemical nature. It is at the bottom of the rung. But it is also a veritable hymn of praise and glorification of the wisdom, power and majesty of God. "The heavens declare the glory of Yahweh, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

On the second step of the ladder is the vegetable, the plant, which is a mineral endowed with a power to grow and reproduce. Once it loses this power it returns to the chemical.

The vegetative mounts to the third level of created being: the multitudinous species of animals. An animal is a chemical endowed with a vegetative life, informed by sensate knowledge and appetite. It too, once it loses its power to grow and reproduce, returns to the chemical world from whence it came.

At the top of the ladder, at the peak of the material cosmos, is man, the crowning achievement of creation, a micro-cosmos, combining in himself the chemical, vegetative and sensitive elements of the universe. Furthermore, man is endowed with the very special power of knowledge: he is made "according to the image and likeness of God." He has a specific element we call "spiritual." Man can know, reflect, he is a free author of his actions; he opens onto the Invisible. The whole of creation is thus re-created and summarized in man who enjoys the further ability to know the Beyond and yearn for the Infinite.

When man's body loses its vegetative and sensitive power, it returns to the chemical; but his image and likeness to God remain alive. We say that the soul is immortal. "If the orderly arrangement of the whole universe is a kind of musical harmony whose maker and artist is God. . .and if man himself is a microcosm, then he too is an imitation of him who fashioned the universe. Thus all the harmony that is in the universe is rediscovered in the microcosm, man" (Gregory of Nyssa).

"ACCORDING TO THE IMAGE OF GOD": MAN

Man is more than a microcosm, more than the sum total of the material universe. His dignity and worth flow from the fact that he has been made precisely in the image of God. Only man has been made according to this image. Only in something free can God see himself. Freedom is

the faculty of choice and the power of communion with God.

“Image of God” is not a characteristic of man added after creation, nor a moral quality to be identified with man’s condition before the Fall. It is rather a simultaneous result of the boundless love of God in the very act of creation. It predisposes man for communion with God and openness to the infusion of the Holy Spirit who deifies man. “Image of God” connotes, then, a human-divine relationship and communion which are the essence of personality, its sovereign dignity and worth.

“Image of God” enables a man to rise above all creatures and seek “his likeness to God who stamped our nature with the likeness of the glories of his own nature, as if molding wax to a pattern” (Gregory of Nyssa). “Person” eludes all rational definition and description. In response to the invitation of God, man is able to free himself from all created contingencies and open himself to the Creator, in order to live in union with him. This makes of man a *microtheos* (a little god).

Man’s whole being, with his senses, his passions, his soul, intellect and will—his totality as a man—is the “image of God.” He was fashioned out of the dust and into this very dust God breathed his own life and his own image. Heaven and earth were mingled in man. The breath of God and the chemical, vegetable and animal of this world were mixed in one whole which became man.

Therefore, we cannot think of nature and grace in opposition. The grace of God is not a thing that penetrates only a part of a man. It is an encounter of the whole man with a living, divine Person, ontologically present and working in him. It is a divine power and a participation of the whole human being in the divine energy. God entered into man’s whole being, not only into a part of him. Man is infused by the grace of God and is sustained by his love to

become ultimately a possessor of God. Man, therefore, is a "relative of God" and can know God and attain to a mystic union and vision of him.

At one period of history man looked at the universe and deified the natural manifestations of power and beauty which, in fact, were only faint reflections of God's power and beauty. In another period he deified the powers of the mind which he thought were the only true divine parts in him; he spurned the body as evil. In our own times we are witnessing man deifying his own body and almost forgetting entirely the beauty of his soul. Thus every age tends to worship some creature instead of the Creator.

Made for God, man yearns, deep within himself, for what is beyond him. He has an unquenchable thirst for God that cannot be obliterated. He is always in search of the ultimate, and he knows intuitively that only a Being beyond his own powers can satisfy his thirst and his yearnings. There can be no "dominion over the earth" unless man is free from slavery to serve his Creator. He can rule the earth and be free only when he is free for God.

Choice is not independence. Man is presented with different possibilities and makes certain choices. The most perfect acts of freedom would involve immediate acts of recognition of the most perfect objects to choose. It is when this *sophia*, this wisdom, opens man to the grace of God and unites to God that freedom becomes perfect.

The whole human being tends toward God. Only in God can man find his repose and his beatitude. "Image" points to the prototype: "It is by his freedom that man possesses his resemblance to God and attains to his eternal happiness, because sovereignty and independence are the essential characteristics of divine beatitude."²

Freedom unites man to God. Self-centeredness is a bondage and a slavery. It separates and divides God from man. It is sin. Sin is, therefore, a block-out, a separation, a

turning away from God to center on oneself. If sin separates from God and distorts the image of God in man, it never completely destroys that image. "You fashioned me a man and put me in the world, a being made of grandeur and weakness."³ There is no sin nor any amount of sins that can ever obliterate the image of God in a man. "Image of God" is a power, a seed, the living kernel of what man is. This life of God in man can be hampered or paralyzed, but never lost. When this original vibrance and beauty is lost, it is in Christ that man again tends toward perfection.

PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE FLESH: CHRIST

Love is realized by self-diffusion and self-giving. All communication is a sort of "agression" which offers a new dimension to the receiver. Communicating with someone is a calling to freedom in that it is a calling to liberate from interior contingencies. Furthermore, the perfection of love consists in identification with the one we love. Its unique characteristic lies in this, that the lover renounces existence for himself in order to exist for the person he loves.

God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son (1 Jn. 4:9). . .who, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

(Phil. 2:6-12)

God's most splendid expression of love is manifested in the Incarnation where the Son of God became the Son of man, and where a maiden from our race became the Mother of God. We know the *fact* of the Incarnation. But the *how* of this union of God and man in the one Person of the Son is and shall remain a most astonishing and beautiful mystery.

By taking the nature of man the Son of God became one with mankind; indeed, one with the whole of creation. He thus united Creator and creation and bridged the abyss that separates God from man. God opened and externalized himself in the form we could best understand: our visible human nature. He became real man. Thus God identified himself with man in order to bring man into his divinity. "God became man in order that man might become God," said St. Athanasius. This is not meant in the sense that man becomes God by nature, but, as St. Peter says, we become "sharers in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

The Incarnation of God and the deification of man mutually imply each other. What Adam ought to have attained by obedience to God, God achieved through the obedience of Christ. Nicholas Cabasilas, a Byzantine theologian of the 14th century, said: "The Lord allowed man, separated from God by the triple barrier of nature, sin and death, to be fully possessed of him and to be directly united to him by the fact that he has set aside each barrier in turn: that of nature by his Incarnation, of sin by his death, and of death itself by his Resurrection. This is the reason why St. Paul writes: 'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death' (1 Cor. 15:26)."⁴

The historic fact that the Son of God "emptied himself" of the form of his divinity and took the form of our humanity is called by St. Paul *kenosis*.⁵ Since Christ is at one and the same time fully God and fully man, we can

say that *God* emptied himself, that *God* suffered, died and was resurrected from the dead, but only in that which could suffer and die: his humanity. God's identification with his creation is not an impoverishment of his Godhead, but a mysterious and ineffable act of love by which he became that which he was not.

When we say that God became man we do not mean that Deity became humanity, nor that humanity was transformed into Deity. It is interesting to quote here how the Council of Chalcedon (451) described this dogma:

"In conformity with the tradition of the Fathers, we unanimously proclaim that we should confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in deity and perfect in humanity, true God and true man, composed of a reasonable soul and body, being consubstantial with the Father through the Divinity, and consubstantial with us through the humanity, alike to us in all, save sin, born of the Father before all the worlds in his Deity, born in these last times, of Mary the Virgin, Mother of God, in his humanity, for us and for our salvation; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-Begotten, who was made known in two natures without being mingled, without change, indivisibly, inseparably, in such a way that the union does not destroy the difference of the two natures, but on the contrary the properties of each nature only remain the more firm since they are found united in one person or hypostasis which is neither separated nor divided into two persons, being the one and the same Person of the Son only-Begotten God and Word, Lord Jesus Christ."⁶

We quote at length this text of the Council because it is like a poem of wonder and awe on the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God who transfigures the cosmos. It is a divine work, coming from above and not from below. All the optimism of the Fathers is based on this doctrine. What Adam could not achieve by uniting in

himself all the elements of the cosmos in order that deification might be conferred upon them, God himself realized by the Incarnation of his Son.

Christ, the Son of God, came to this world to give full meaning to man's existence. Christ is the Way to the Father and in him only can man become deified. In this world, where there is so much sadness, suffering and fatalism, man cannot know why he exists. But in Christ he clearly recognizes that his existence is of an unsurpassed grandeur and beauty. This knowledge is indeed the source of our Christian joy, the real joy of living: "I say these things in the world that my followers might have joy fulfilled in them" (John 17:13). For this reason the Church sings at the celebration of the Incarnation:

Today is the announcement of joy. Today is the virginal festivity. Today heaven joined the earth. Adam is renewed and Eve released from sorrow. The dwelling place, our own substance, has become God's temple because a portion of it has been deified. What a marvel! The way of condescension is incomprehensible and the manner of conception ineffable. An angel is announcing the marvel. A Virgin conceives a Son. The Holy Spirit is sent and the Father on high is pleased. Christ our God and Saviour takes our nature in order to be united with us.

(Feast of Christmas)

Such an act of love on the part of God is for the entire world, and not the private possession of some elect. God is uniting to himself—deifying and redeeming—the whole world, all of humanity, all the people of the earth, their cultures, their achievements, their creations of beauty. This cosmic dimension of the Incarnation is an essential part of the redeeming mission of Christianity. It should always be present in our announcement of the Good News and in our celebrations.

At which should we marvel more: God lowering himself to the level of a servant, or God raising us to the dignity of the Godhead? The Creator and Possessor of all enters into the society of his creatures and invites them to his life by admitting them to fellowship with his Son. What an overwhelming act of love and condescension! Earth is transferred to heaven and man is changed by the Divinity! The Son becomes the Way to the Father and the Father's visible sign: "Who sees me sees the Father" (John 14:9). The vision of Christ is, then, the vision of the Father, and in the humanity of Christ man encounters the divinity.

When, therefore, we speak of God's descent to man, we imply man's ascent to God. If man cannot possibly have a knowledge of the divine essence, that is, of God in himself, he nevertheless can live with God in human form: Christ, and enjoy his presence in the Son. Communion with God is realized at the level of persons, the Person of Christ and the human person. The Incarnation is the presence of God in the flesh. The Father sent his Son to his creation, and the Son, accepting the will of the Father, took upon himself the "form of a servant," thus pouring forth his Divinity into all created being, and identifying himself with the entire cosmos. The full grandeur and sublimity of this mystery was revealed to St. Paul, and it made him exclaim: "How rich are the depths of God, how deep his wisdom and knowledge, and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods! Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? Who could ever be his counselor? Who could ever give him anything or lend him anything? All that exists comes from him; all is by him and for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

On the feast of the Incarnation the hymns of the Liturgy oscillate between songs of admiration and songs of praise. There is admiration of God who gave himself to

earth; at the same time there is praise to God who gave us to heaven. "How can the One beyond understanding, the Most High himself, come to be born of a virgin? How can the One whose throne is heaven and to whom the earth serves as a footstool ever be contained in the womb of a woman? How can he have condescended to be incarnate of her, he upon whom the six-winged and many-eyed Seraphim are not allowed to gaze? He who is coming is the Word of God" (Vespers of the Incarnation).

Christian people contemplate this mystery and sing because the feast is the greatest of all the wonders of God. One does not have to be a Christian to believe in God. But one does have to be a Christian to believe that God has come to earth and that he became man. The mission of Christianity is indeed to announce and proclaim such a mysterious miracle of love. Without this proclamation, Christianity is incomprehensible (and it actually became incomprehensible when preachers of the Gospel stopped witnessing to it).

Behold our call is repeated, for God is ineffably joined to mankind, and error has vanished at the voice of the Archangel. The Virgin has accepted the joyful news, the earth has become heaven, and the world has been relieved of the ancient curse. Let the whole creation rejoice and sing a hymn of praise: 'O Lord, our Maker and Redeemer, glory to You!'

Today the fountainhead of our salvation and the revelation of the Mystery that was planned from all eternity is here. The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel announces the grace. Let us join him in crying out to the Mother of God: 'Hail, O Woman full of grace. The Lord is with you.'

DEIFICATION OF THE UNIVERSE: THEOSIS

Since the Father is the source of beatitude for the

Son, out of his overflowing love for the Son he created the whole extra-divine reality. This he destined to return to himself through his Son, "desiring to be desired and loving to be loved."⁷

At the Incarnation the Son assumed human flesh. He became man, a microcosm. He used matter as a vehicle for his Godhead. He inserted himself not just into humanity but into the very universe which supports humanity and of which humanity is a part. He united the "stuff" of the universe to his divine Person, and thereby purified it, redeemed it, elevated it to share in his life.

By his Transfiguration he glorified the cosmos. By his Ascension he sustains it with his living presence. For the resurrected and glorified body of Christ does not live "up there" somewhere but it now lives here, immanently everywhere in this universe, working in it to bring it eventually to its final fulfillment. No, Christ did not ascend "up there" to a local, circumscribed place. At his Ascension Christ united the earth and the heavenly spheres, the world of the angelic hierarchies with the sensible world. Having restored the totality of the universe to unity in himself, he now presents it to his Father. This is what "he sits at the right hand of the Father" means.

The first man, Adam, "became a living soul, but the last Adam had become a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). "After fulfilling for us your plan of redemption, and joining the things of earth with those of heaven, O Christ our God, you gloriously ascended without abandoning us, but remained with us forever and resurrected all who love you by telling them: 'Behold I am with you: no one has power against you.'"⁸

What is true of Christ's material body is also true of matter in general. Christ, in whom and for whom all things were created, is radically present to the entire universe as

its ultimate fulfillment. Creation is, then, a part of salvation history. Christ, the God-Man, unites in his divine Person God and earth, the Invisible and the visible, the Eternal and the temporal, the Infinite and the finite. It is in Christ that creation finds its fulfillment and deification.

In creation we contemplate, as in a mirror, the light of God's face; we gaze on his vision. God is always present and continually working his cosmic act until all creation is perfected and transfigured from "glory to glory" at the day of the *parousia*.

The word *sophia* or Holy Wisdom of God contains the deep feeling and expresses the inner beauty of the world. God is continually perfecting the world, man and matter because he has given them the power of being assimilated to him. There is no distinction between creation and deification. The earth is sanctified by the very fact of its creation. For Eastern theology, even if original sin never had occurred, the Eternal Word of God would have become man just the same.

Creation is, therefore, the revelation and manifestation of God. Man is the high priest of thanksgiving, awe and admiration. Where there is admiration there is an *ex-stasis*, a going out of oneself, a movement toward another. In this instance, it is a movement toward God as experienced in creation.

Admiration is a return of love. Man, the microcosm, returns the whole universe to God through his priesthood. By admiring and studying the universe man recreates it and sanctifies it. Man is not a being isolated from the rest of creation. He is, by his very nature, bound up with the rest of the universe. This notion of the cosmic dimension of man is always present in our spirituality and especially in our worship. A Christian, according to the Fathers, is a man who

is burning with charity for the whole of creation, for man, for birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for all creatures. He who is such a man cannot see or call to mind a creature without his eyes becoming filled with tears by reason of the immense compassion which seizes his heart, a heart which is softened and can no longer bear to see or learn from others of any suffering, even the smallest pain being inflicted upon a creature. This is why such a man never ceases to pray also for the animals, for the enemies of the faith, and for those who do him evil, that they may be preserved and purified. He will pray even for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of all those who are becoming united to God.⁹

St. Gregory of Nyssa calls God's presence in the world a "musical harmony" through which man comes to know the Unknowable, see the Invisible, and touch the Untouchable. The Christian embraces the whole world, even though disordered by sin, that it may be transfigured in him by grace. The rays of the Divinity penetrate the whole created universe and through creation man comes to unite with God and unite the universe to God. "The world was created from nothing by the sole will of God—this is its origin. It was created in order to participate in the fullness of the divine life. This is its vocation. It is called to make this union a reality in liberty, in the free harmony of the created will with the will of God. This is the mystery of the Church inherent in creation."¹⁰

CHAPTER 5

GOD—LOVE APPEARING IN THE FLESH: NATIVITY, THEOPHANY, RESURRECTION

THE NATIVITY

According to St. Gregory, the Nativity of the Lord is the festival of “re-creation.” In the beginning God created the earth, the stars, the trees, the animals and man. Man is the summary of the whole creation. When man fell into sin the whole creation fell in him and with him. Paradise was closed. Through the Incarnation of the Son of God creation was transfigured and paradise acquired a new meaning.

The manifestation of God in the flesh is not a static reality. It is an act of love, and therefore a dynamic act of imparting life and deification to the world. It is only fitting that, if God was to become man and appear in the flesh, all of his creation should be there to greet him and show its gratitude for his coming.

Faith is not expressed in a formula. It is, rather, a feast of admiration for the work of God and of joy for his saving love. The icon of the Nativity is just this expression of gratitude and joy. In it Mary appears to be the first and greatest admirer and worshiper. Since she is the “renewal of all born on earth,” the “new Eve,” she is also the most exalted thanksgiving to God. She occupies the center of

the icon. Her whole being points to God and her eyes are fixed on Joseph. Joseph is usually shown in a far corner, puzzled and bewildered. What is happening is beyond his understanding. Mary looks at him with tenderness. She seems to warn him against that old man behind him who represents the devil of incredulity.

At the top of the icon there is a white circle. It represents the Father from whom a ray of light comes down to rest on the Child. The ray is the Holy Spirit descending to show the Son in a manger. The background is a black cave which signifies the troubled and sinful world which Christ came to purify and save. The midwife and her wash basin proclaim that in Christ God is a complete and real human nature. The ox and the ass surround the Lord Jesus. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib."

The wise men and the shepherds represent mankind in all its social and intellectual degrees and manifestations. God is for man, for all men, without consideration of status, color or race. The star represents the celestial universe; the angels: the spiritual beings. The whole creation is jubilant and seems to sing with the liturgy:

Christ is born,
Give him glory!
Christ has come down from heaven,
Receive him!

Christ is now on earth!
Exalt him.

O You earth, sing to the Lord!
O you nations, praise in joy!
For he has been glorified!

Let us turn to St. John Chrysostom who expresses the thoughts and feelings that should pervade our minds as we contemplate the mystery of the Nativity:

That Christ should die when he was a man was a thing natural to man. But that when he was God he should be willing to be made man, and condescended to humble himself beyond all imagination and conception, this is indeed wonderful and astonishing in the highest degree. In admiration of this, St. Paul, in a rapture as it were, says: 'Great is the mystery of Godliness; God manifested in the flesh.' Chiefly for this reason I love and embrace this day. The Lord wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger; a tremendous and wonderful sight indeed!

We prepare to celebrate the mystery of God's appearance in the flesh by a forty-day fast, by honoring the ancestors of Christ and those who longed for his coming: the prophets, and by spiritually reliving with his holy Mother the last few hours of loneliness the world need ever know.

Every day we look forward to his appearance and every day we sing a hymn of longing:

Today the Virgin is on her way to the cave
Where she will give birth
In a manner beyond understanding
to the Word who is in all eternity.

Rejoice, therefore, O Universe,
And with the angels and shepherds glorify him
As a new born babe,
While being God for all eternity.

(Vigil of Christmas)

The whole human drama of existence is represented by the Magi, the wayfarers and pilgrims. They are in search

With all the amazement and awe that this mystery inspires, there is an immense joy and gladness that penetrates our heart because the Son of God has been given to us. He is one with us and we become aware of our new dignity in this partnership of love with him. He is here to gather us up and to bring us to the Father. This generous love of God calls for love in return—his gift evokes the gift of ourselves:

O Christ, what shall we offer you today
For your coming on earth as a man for our sake?
Every creature that has its being from you,
Gives thanks to you:
The angels offer you a hymn of praise,
The heavens give you a star,
Wise men present their gifts,
And shepherds their wonder;
The earth provides a cave, and the desert a manger;
As for us, we offer you a Mother, a Virgin Mother.
O God, who are from all eternity, have mercy on us.
(Matins of Christmas)

There is a lovely hymn which is repeated during the whole octave of Christmas, a composition of Romanos the Melodist. It is said that the Blessed Mother dictated it to him in a special apparition. This hymn was always sung, not only in churches but at the table of the Byzantine Emperors, as it is sung today at the tables of our Christian families:

Today the Virgin gives birth to the One
Who surpasses all created essences.
And the earth offers a cave to God, the
Inaccessible One.
Angels sing his glory with the shepherds
And the wise men follow his star.
For unto us is born an Infant,
God from all eternity.

Christ came on earth to be the light in the darkness of this world. His nativity shines upon the world. The mystic star of Bethlehem points to this light in the darkness of the vastness of the skies. It is the luminous symbol of the "Uncreated Light" let loose upon the entire creation. The darkness of ignorance is pierced with the light of knowledge, and man can now be illumined and can ascend to the source of light and life.

A mysterious radiance now pours over all creation and over all creatures. Kings are led by it; humble shepherds are bathed in its glow. Because of it a cave becomes like the fiery column that led Israel through the desert to the Promised Land. Christ was born in a stable, in a cave of the earth, thus emphasizing the descent into the darkness of the earth, into the darkness of the night. By this descent he became the Light of the World:¹

Your nativity, O Christ our God, has shone the light of knowledge upon the world. Through it those who had been star worshippers learned through a star to worship you, O Sun of Justice, and to recognize in you the One who rises and who comes from on high. O Lord, glory to you.

Your coming, O Christ, has shed upon us a great light. O you, Light of Light and Radiance of the Father! You have illumined the whole creation! (Kontakion)

Naturally, the Mother of God is present and active in these events. In the words of Gogol, Mary is the "mystic grotto wherein heaven came down to earth: when heaven became a grotto and a grotto became a heaven." Like us she adores and marvels; she prays and meditates. Whatever is said of the Son is an amazement to the Mother who "treasured all these things in her heart:"

Why are you wrapped in wonder, O Mary?
Why are you all astonished in your inner self?
And she answers: 'Behold, I have given birth
In time to a Son who is not bound by time.
I do not even understand how I conceived:
How is this possible when I knew not man?
Who ever saw a birth without a human seed?'
But whenever God wills,
The laws of nature are upset.
It is written: Christ shall be born of a Virgin
In Bethlehem of Juda. (Matins of Christmas)

At the sight of all these wonders we feel deeply our inadequacy to express in human words this miracle of love:

O Virgin, we would prefer to be silent
And our love is too great
When compared to our poor attempts to
Sing your praises.
O Mother, grant us the ability to match
The greatness of our desires. (Lauds)

It may be helpful here to compare briefly Byzantine and Latin expressions of devotion. Byzantine piety dwells on the divine aspect of the mystery of Christ. The Latin piety tends to emphasize the humanity. The latter has for its object Jesus, the Son of Mary; the former goes directly to the Eternal Son of the Father. On Christmas Day the East reads the Gospel of Adoration (Matt. 2:1-12); the West dwells more on the new-born babe. These are the two aspects of one and the same incomprehensible reality. The Western attitude engenders a piety marked with a tender familiarity; the Eastern attitude inspires awesome adoration. Together they form a beautifully-balanced attitude of reverential fear and awe before God's majesty, combined with a humble and child-like love.

Under the influence of such a mentality, Christmas acquired, in the Roman Church, a picturesque character: a beautiful little Baby surrounded by animals and birds in an idyllic setting. For the Byzantine Church it is a feast which synthesizes all the aspects of the love of God who sends his only-begotten Son, and by whose *kenosis* the world is brought back to the Father. Byzantine Christmas, in its artistic expressions, has little of the photographic character of the Latins, but it is this variety in unity which makes the Church of Christ on earth so colorful, so attractively human and rich.

THEOPHANY: THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Theophany means manifestation of God. In salvation history it is the first manifestation of the Most Holy Trinity. (The second was the Transfiguration, where the Spirit appeared as a bright cloud; the third was Pentecost, where the Spirit took the form of tongues of fire.)

On the occasion of the Baptism of Christ the Father proclaimed Jesus his beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a Dove. What is celebrated at the Theophany is the historical fact of the manifestation of the Most Holy Trinity to the world, the beginning of Christ's public ministry, and the baptism performed by John. Most important, it is the celebration of the appearance of God's glory, of his mercy and compassion as expressed in the Person of Jesus who submits to the ritual of a sinner who needs cleansing.

In every epoch, and in every century and culture, the Byzantine Church has attached a great importance to this feast, principally because of its deep theological significance and spiritual consequences. The Lord, the Son of God, became man in order to become Salvation for all

mankind—nay, for the whole of creation. We cannot consider the humanity of Christ apart from his Divinity whose fullness dwells in him bodily (Col. 2:9).

The Troparion of the feast gives us the setting of the celebration:

At your Baptism in the river Jordan, O Christ,
The worship due the Holy Trinity was made manifest;
For the voice of the Father bore you witness,
Calling you 'Beloved Son';
And the Holy Spirit, in the form of a Dove,
Confirmed the Immutability of this declaration.
O Christ God, who came forth,
And filled the world with light,
Glory to you!

At his Baptism, Christ enters into the very center of his mission. He brings redemption and reconciliation to men, to beasts and to the whole cosmos. Spirit and matter are made temples of the indwelling grace of the Holy Spirit. When Christ plunged his human body into the Jordan, the rays of his divinity penetrated all the elements of nature. The whole universe became alive in God to whom it can now sing a hymn of praise.

When John washed the body of Christ, humanity, which Christ had assumed and whose guilt he took upon himself, was washed and cleansed. "He who is surrounded with light like a garment has no need for purification" (Vespers). When he came out of the water, not only humanity but the whole universe rose with him, purified and youthful.

Christ is baptized,
He comes out of the water and raises with him the
whole universe,

He sees heavens open which Adam had closed
 for himself and his descendants.
 The Holy Spirit gives testimony and sanctifies
 all the elements of this world.

Today the Creator of heaven and earth
 Comes in the flesh to the Jordan river.
 The One who is free from stain seeks baptism
 In order to cleanse all mankind from the
 enemy's error;
 The Master of all is baptized at the hand of the
 servant
 In order to grant mankind the cleansing through water.
 Let us cry out to him:
 O God made manifest, have mercy on us! (Matins)

This feast is also called "Epiphany." In antiquity this word signified the triumphal march of a victorious prince. The Christian *Epiphany* celebrates the victory of the King of kings over the powers of evil, and the triumph of light and of knowledge over darkness and ignorance. It proclaims that the true Light, Jesus Christ, has shone upon the world and conquered its darkness. Thus the Epiphany is the feast of the real effulgence of God in Christ, and his manifestation as a visible phenomenon. It is the feast of light:

Today there shines the Sun that never sets,
 And the world is sparkling with the Light of the Lord;
 Today the moon is bright, together with the earth,
 In glowing radiance of its beams.

Today the brilliant stars adorn the universe
 With the splendor of their twinkling;
 Today Paradise has been opened to mankind
 And the Sun of righteousness has shone upon us.

The voice of the Lord sounds on the water and says:
'Come, all of you, receive from Christ who has appeared
The Spirit of wisdom, the spirit of intelligence,
The spirit of the fear of God.

You have appeared in the world,
You, who have created the world,
In order to enlighten and illumine
Those who were dwelling in darkness.

(Vespers)

Christ appeared and revealed himself as the Son of God, Redeemer and Lover of mankind. The full depth of the Christian mystery is to sing the awesome condescension of the Father, Source of all freely given salvation. This salvation was manifested in the Incarnation and accomplished by the Son who stooped (*kenosis*) to share our wretchedness, and who healed it in the water. Before such a mystery the intelligence feels its poverty, and theological thought cannot find a proper word to express its depth. Christ did not withdraw from our weakness, but rather, in his own body, freed us from the grip of all hostile forces. By his Incarnation he united sin-scarred human nature to his Divine Person, to heal this nature, and to raise man up and so save him.

According to Psalm 136 heaven is the abode of God and earth is the dwelling place of man; the waters house the darkness and the forces of evil. But if water can be a symbol of destruction and death, it is also an element of purification and life. Water stands for the whole world. All life comes from it. Water is an essential and primary element of creation. By his contact with water, Christ blesses it and makes it an element of healing. He attaches to it a power of sanctification and makes it an instrument of life and salvation.

This mystery of grace and life is explained in terms of great beauty by Sophronius:

Today the land and the sea divide between them
the joy of the world,
And the world is filled with rejoicing.
The waters behold you, O Lord;
The waters behold you and they fear;
The Jordan River turns back its course
As it beholds the fire of the Godhead coming
down upon it,
And entering it in the flesh;
The Jordan River turns back its course
As it beholds the Holy Spirit descending in
the likeness of a dove
And hovering above it;
The Jordan River turns back its course
As it beholds the Invisible made visible, the
Creator existing in the flesh,
And the Jordan River turns back its course and
the mountains shout with glee,
As they behold God in the flesh.
And the clouds give voice, and are filled with
awe by the One who in the Jordan River
Has drowned the death of sin, the thorn of error,
and the bond of Hades,
And granted the Baptism of Salvation to the world.
(The Blessing of Water)

The Holy Spirit is there also. He descended and remained upon Christ, thus uniting in the waters of the Jordan, mankind to Christ and Christ with the Father. The human race is thus renewed in a new birth and it becomes a new creation.

THE RESURRECTION

After the Sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went down to visit the sepulchre. And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe was as white as snow. The guards were so shaken, so frightened of him, they were like dead men. But the angel spoke and said to the women: 'There is no need for you to be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here for He is risen, as He said He would' (Matt. 28:1-6).

This is a simple and plain enunciation of a fact, like many other facts related in the Gospels. This one however is fraught with excitement and joy because it shouts that all Christ stood for is true and real!

A tomb, by its very nature, contains the dead which has been laid in it. Every tomb since the beginning of humanity, and every tomb until the end of time, is marked with a sign which tells of the person lying there: "Here lies Moses. Here lies Mohammed. Here lies Stalin." The bones of all the saints, prophets, world conquerors and of all men lie in the ground where they have been deposited. However, the tomb of Christ carries a special sign, unique and incredible: "He is not here; he is risen!" That very same person who lived for 33 years and at the end suffered, died and was buried, instead of turning into dry bones and ashes, is now alive. "I am he. Do not be afraid. And they came up to him, and falling down before him, clasped his feet" (Matt. 28:9).

The event of the Resurrection is the most astonishing fact of human history. It disturbs. It frightens. The Apostles themselves were upset by it. They announced it to each other, yet wondered if it were really true. "Some

women of our company amazed us. . .they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of the angels who said that he was alive. . ." (Luke 24:23).

Real as it is, the Resurrection is unexplainable. It has to be experienced. It has to be seen and touched. "Why do questions arise in your minds? Why are you troubled? See my hands and feet, that it is I myself; touch me and see for yourself; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24: 38-44).

The Apostle Thomas, a philosopher at times and a skeptic by nature, was emphatic in his doubt when he heard the astonishing news. "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). A week later Thomas had his experience, and he believed.

All those who lived with Christ for so many years could now experience the same touch of his skin, and squeeze his hands. What a marvel! He is just as real now as he was before—more so! This tangible, visible experience of the Apostles and all who were accustomed to be with them lasted for forty days. "Have you anything to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it before their eyes. Luke, who reports this most ordinary physical fact, was a medical man, a scientist. He talks about flesh and bones and eating in front of people.

The Risen Christ is consequently no ghost. This experience of the physicalness of the Risen Christ filled the Apostles with wonder and joy for the rest of their lives. All of the writings of St. Paul are inspired by this light of the Resurrection. His preaching, and all of his theology, stem from the light he had seen on the road to Damascus, the light of the Resurrection.

The most extraordinary and the most unbelievable becomes a matter of fact in Christ, a matter of reality and truth. His risen body, for instance, is no longer a mixture

of life and death; it is life in its fullness, whose power and radiance nothing can stop or even mar. "The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood in their midst" (John 20:26).

In his Incarnation, the person of the Son of God assumed in himself matter, which is the whole world, the whole of creation. In the Resurrection this same matter becomes, in him, life and life-giving. The Resurrection is therefore the transfiguration of matter, of earth, of man and of the whole cosmos. It is not creation of a new life, but the victory of life itself over death. It is life shining out of death. It is life transfigured into perfect, beautiful light, shining in Christ and through Christ. "How holy and radiant indeed this salutary dawn, in that it announces the most dazzling day, the day of the Resurrection on which light that existed before time comes forth again from the tomb in flesh, and shines for all" (Office of the Resurrection).

The Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ on Mt. Tabor, as related in the Gospels, is the first manifestation of this mystical and invisible power of God that transforms, transfigures, and draws into the Kingdom of God not only the human but the sub-human stuff of creation as well. The Evangelists seem to be at a loss for words to describe the amazing event of the Transfiguration. One says that "the face of Christ shone like the sun" (Luke 9:28-36); another that his raiment (that is, matter itself) was transfigured: "His garments became as white as light" (Matt. 17:1-18). And Luke says: "His clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them" (Mark 9:2-7).

The Transfiguration is but the herald and symbol of the Resurrection. The Resurrection is not the Creation of a new life; it is its transfiguration into fullness of life. After the Resurrection Christ's hands are still scarred from the

nails, and his side is still wide open from the spear. The marks of his struggle are still visible and real. He himself, body and soul, becomes life and life-giving. So it is with our humanity. Now, after two thousand years of the Resurrection, humanity indeed still carries the marks of sin, separation and alienation, but evil has been vanquished and annihilated, and reconciliation effected.

CHRIST IS RISEN! LIFE IS GIVEN!

If the Resurrection of Christ is the triumph of Christ, it is also the triumph of God, and it is the triumph of man. It is the redemption of the past and the liberation of the future. The virtue and grace which issue forth from the blood of Christ shed upon the cross—and which now streams from the Resurrection—move backward as well as forward in the time and space of the history of mankind. Here a universal redemption is offered to humanity, and the divine life, the life of the Trinity, is now within the reach of man's grasp. Reconciliation is not the reconciliation only of man with God; it is also the reconciliation of man with man, and of man with the universe. Furthermore, in the risen Christ, a new form of love, a love that transforms all reality becomes possible, and faith is lived and absorbed into the infinite generosity of God.

The following excerpt from a homily of St. John Chrysostom is the history of mankind. Whenever it is chanted and solemnly proclaimed in the Church it conveys to the whole world the message that the reality of the Resurrection is salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the most generous love of God to all. For man, the Resurrection is joy, confidence, celebration, and faith.

Let all pious men, and all lovers of God, rejoice in the splendor of this feast; let the wise servants blissfully enter into the joy of their Lord; let those who have borne the burden of Lent

now receive their due reward; let any who come after the third hour be grateful to join in the feast, and those who may have come after the sixth, let them not be afraid of being too late, for the Lord is gracious, and he receives the last even as the first; He rewards the one and is gracious to the other; He repays the deed and praises the effort. Come, all of you, enter the joy of the Lord. You the poor, dance together. You sober and you weaklings, celebrate the day. You who have kept the fast and you who have not, rejoice today. The table is richly loaded, enjoy its royal banquet. The calf is a fatted one, let none go away hungry. All of you enjoy the banquet of faith; all of you enjoy the riches of his goodness. Let none grieve over his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed; let none weep over his sins, for pardon has shone forth from the grave; let none fear death, for the death of our Saviour has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it; He has despoiled Hades by going down into its kingdom. He has angered it by allowing it to taste of his flesh. When Isaias foresaw all this, he cried out; 'O Hades, you have been angered by encountering Him in the nether world.' Hades is angered because frustrated; it is angered because it has been reduced to naught; it is angered because it is now captive. It seized a body, and lo it discovered God. It seized earth and behold it encountered heaven. It seized the visible and was overcome by the invisible. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are abolished. Christ is risen and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life is freed. Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead. For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the Leader and the Reviver of those who had fallen asleep. To Him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

The Resurrection is the wondrous fact which brings humanity the greatest joy because it is the passage of man from death to life and from slavery to freedom. Man becomes a participant in the life of God, and the heavenly kingdom can now be seen on earth.

Today is the day of the Resurrection. O Nations, let us be jubilant, for this passover is the passover of the Lord in that Christ our God made us pass from death to life and from earth to heaven. . . . Let the whole universe, visible and invisible, rejoice in the feast, for Christ, our eternal joy, is risen!

(Byzantine Missal)

The full realization of all the Resurrection is and of what it brings to man cannot but make the heart sing for joy, triumph and exaltation. This full significance of the Resurrection is depicted in its icon. The general theme of the icon is that of the abyss that fallen, human, free will has opened. Having separated man from God, it has now been bridged; the "death of the Saviour has set us free."

In the center of the icon of the Resurrection Christ stands victorious on the broken gates of Hades. The expression "Gates of Hades" is a symbol of the mastery of evil, of death and of slavery. When Christ "breaks the gates of Hades" he vanquishes all of these evils.

Where is your sting, O Death!

Where is your victory, O Hades!

Christ is risen and you are abolished.

Christ is risen and the demons are cast down.

Christ is risen and life is set free.

Christ is risen and the tombs are emptied of the dead.

(Byzantine Missal)

In one corner of the icon there is a pit where demons lie, deprived of their power, while Christ gives his helping hand to humanity, represented by Adam and Eve. In the background there is a triple circle, symbol of the cosmos; it is bathed in quiet light. This light emanates from Christ, and from him it spreads over the rocky landscape and overflows into the whole of creation. It has a special radiance. It is not like ordinary light. It is capable of

penetrating everything, even matter. The risen Christ radiates the presence of God. The icon says that the Resurrection is the transfiguration not only of man but of the whole earth.

Lord Jesus Christ, source of light and immortality, eternal light born of eternal light, immortal light, invisible, incomprehensible, unchanging, and unchangeable! You are the true light who dwells in unapproachable light, and shines forth from this: You are the light of the Father's glory, and its radiance. You are the light of the heavenly hosts, and of every man who comes into the world.

(Prayer of the New Light)

The celebration of the Resurrection, Easter, is the center of the Church year. It is not simply a feast among other feasts, but the climax, the center to which everything converges, and from which everything takes meaning. It is the most significant fact of the Christian religion and of the Christian life. To understand the Resurrection one has to live it and experience it. The celebration of the feast allows one to enter into this experience.

Very early in the morning, or at midnight, the Church is completely darkened. The Bishop emerges from behind the iconostasis holding a lighted candle, which symbolizes and represents the risen Christ. The silence is then broken. Christ is proclaimed to be the light in the darkness of existence. The Bishop sends forth the invitation: "Come ye faithful, take light from the light that never fades, and glorify Christ who is risen from the tomb."

The flame from the Bishop's candle is passed from candle to candle until all the people and clergy have a light. Then all the banners, icons, flowers and swinging censers emerge from all the corners of the Church. A huge procession moves to the outside of the Church. The Gospel of the Resurrection is chanted. The announcing of the

living Christ fills all hearts, and the message that Christ is risen and life is given is repeated by everyone.

The people then walk back into a Church that is filled with light, perfume and flowers. Everything must be turned into a great, jubilant triumph of glory and joy. A tremendous clanging of bells and swinging of censers accompany the singing of the hymns. The chandeliers are ablaze—they are even set swirling in motion. They too must swing and sway to signify that the whole cosmos is dizzy with joy. Nothing can stand still. The intoxication is extreme. God is among his people. Even the mountains are invited to “clap their hands” and the oceans to “leap like deer,” and the morning star to “sing together with men.”

Usually, the hymns of feasts are long, very descriptive, and convey a theological message. The hymn of Easter is very short. It states a fact, simply and clearly: “Christ is risen from the dead. He has crushed death by his death, and bestowed life on those who lay in the tombs.”

This hymn is repeated over and over again throughout the whole celebration. Each time it sounds stronger and more balanced until it penetrates the very fibre of our being. It is as though one were drinking heady wine, and the reality of the Resurrection becomes just as intoxicating: “O faithful, let us drink of a new drink, springing miraculously from the tomb which is a fountain of immortality: the tomb of Christ from which we are strengthened.”

The mystery of the Resurrection cannot be understood in human terms, nor can it be defined. We can only marvel at its reality. Death has been conquered by death. “Christ is risen and life is supreme! Christ is risen and there are no more dead in the tombs” (Matins). Resurrection is the annihilation of Hades and the beginning of a new life. We have been buried with Christ in death in order that as Christ is risen from the dead we too may live a new life.

The Resurrection still goes on. Everyone is invited to receive and to live in it. Only the personal encounter with the risen Lord allows man to participate in his life and to recover our semblance to the Creator. It is like the wedding encounter when the two become one. In Christ we discover that God is love and that this love animates the whole of creation; it now gives to the human face the transparency of God. "Blessed is the man who sees every face as God's" (Prayer of Evagrius of Pontus).

But there is an apparent and blinding paradox. Centuries after the Resurrection of Christ man seems to continue to face death, failure, hatred, loneliness. This four-fold alienation which original sin has set in motion in man is still at work in him. Indeed, man feels alienated from himself. "He is no more himself" and does not know what to do with himself. He wants to withdraw. He mistrusts his spiritual powers. He wants to run away and hide even from himself. And, of course, the most basic alienation, the source of all the others, is man's alienation from God. God no longer seems to be the friend of man who walks with him in the cool of the evening. Rather, God seems to be the hard task-master from whom man must hide to avoid God's anger and possible punishment.

All these alienations have their roots in man, not in God. Thus the new life, the transfiguration of creation which the Resurrection has inaugurated, is not an automatic delivery from without, imposed on man. It is rather a progressive deliverance which man must desire and in which he must actively participate. It must be a vigorous and full acceptance of his destiny. It must be done freely and with full consciousness. No one else, not even God, can do it for us. All the powers in man: physical, moral, psychological and spiritual, have to be set in motion, all working together to assimilate what the Resurrection has achieved.

Often man's powerlessness: his moral enslavement and weakness, seems to make such a task of assimilation too great—even impossible. Furthermore, there is no human reasoning process, no amount of words that can "prove" to him the possibility of such a redeeming process. It is precisely the role of the Baptized to witness to the possibility of such a realization. The invincible power of the Invincible Love must stream forth from every Baptized person. Each Christian must live this new life, breathe with this new hope, walk upright with the new reality of reconciliation in his breast.

It is this Christian love in each Christian which exorcises demons, eradicates evil and heals sicknesses. It is Christian love which liberates and frees. The world does not believe such a love is possible. It is only by living such a love, witnessing to its reality and power, that the Christian will arouse and inspire the world to the conviction that its problems can be solved. Only living love will ever convince the world that it can become a family, a family of man one day worthy of being the family of God.

It is only in the power streaming from the risen Christ that man can acquire this fullness of life—only in Christ can he discover that what was once the road to death has now become the road of return to the Father. The road that previously led to nothingness and failure has now become the road of return to the One who is Life. What we long for most deeply is already a reality in the risen Christ, who is coming, always coming, until the Kingdom of God is supremely fulfilled.

We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. We are, therefore, as Christians, "convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or in the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in the heights or depths, nothing in all creation that can separate us from

the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38). It is by Christians living out this affirmation in their lives that the world will come to believe in the possibility of its own resurrection.

PART III

THE DRAMA OF SAVING LOVE: CHURCH

CHAPTER 6

“SHE WHO BELONGS TO THE LORD”

The Fathers never gave a specific definition of the Church. They understood the words of the Lord that “the Kingdom is here” as referring to his Person encountered in his actions. This activity of the Son of God is, in fact, continually carried out by the presence of the sanctifying Spirit whom the Father sent to us when Christ withdrew his physical presence. Consequently, for Byzantine tradition, the Church is life and the source of life. It is the plenitude of spiritual life in the risen Christ. As the stem is grafted to the branch and the two lives become one, so the baptized person is grafted onto Christ by the Holy Spirit, and the two become one Body and one Life. And just as life is a perpetual renewal that can neither be defined nor organized, so neither can the Church. She is a ground of experience, an object of faith, a vision of the Invisible (Heb. 2:1). In short, she too is a mystery.

The reality and essence of life in the Church is the conversation of peace and love in which God and man are

involved. This conversation began from all eternity in the Trinity (Eph. 1:4). It was made manifest in Paradise where God came "in the cool of the evening" (Gen. 3:8) to converse with Adam and Eve. It came to its fullness in the Incarnation of the Word of God, and it will continue through space and time to the end of the world through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, through the imparting of the life of the risen Christ through his mysteries, the sacraments, will gather up all the baptized to make them one Body.

The Church is founded both on the economy of the Son of God who became Man, died, rose and lives, and on that of the Holy Spirit who sustains his presence in those who are united to Christ. The sacraments are the creation of the living Christ, not simply because he established them in the past, but because he is now living and acting in them, and because in them man can encounter him in a personal relationship; then, through Christ, man encounters the Father.

The Church is, therefore, the coming of the Eternal into time, God's theophany, and the manifestation of his life and love. Considering the Church in this light, some attention must be given to law, order and human arrangement, but the stress and the real emphasis are directed to union with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This union begins at Baptism where the Father creates a new man. In Chrismation the Holy Spirit breathes into man a new intensity; finally, union, glory and transfiguration are achieved in Holy Communion, in the partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord. The divine philanthropia of the Father, who unites heaven and earth through the Incarnation of his Son, is always at work to unite himself with all the baptized. He does this through the power of the Holy Spirit who, in turn, becomes life of their life and their very soul.

The English word "Church" is a happy term which comes from the Greek *kyriakee* and means "she who belongs to the Lord." Because the Holy Spirit animates the Body of Christ, it is he also who is the life of the Church and who unites her to the Lord. She "belongs to him."

The word often used in our liturgical books for Church is "house" (*oikos*) which, by extension, means also a "family," or some community. The Church as family, then, is an organization of the baptized, bound together by the concern for the "Sacred" in their midst. As a family they communicate with each other and with God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit who lives in them.

MANIFESTATION OF THE MYSTERY

The immediate reality of the Church is expressed and fulfilled in the Holy Eucharist where the love and life of God are poured upon creation, and where our union with God is enacted and made manifest in a bodily embrace. What Christ did at the Last Supper becomes the very principle of the activity of the Church, the mystery by which she unites herself and the world to the sacrifice and Resurrection of Christ. At the altar, Jesus represents the whole of creation. The Son of God transforms matter into his own divine person, sanctifies it and offers it back to God who is not only the source of life and love but the goal as well: "We offer you your own from what is your own, in all and for the sake of all" (Holy and Divine Liturgy).

Where the Eucharist is, there also will the Church be. The structure of the holy and divine Liturgy or Mass, taken as a whole, is that of a meal. Mass and Communion are not two juxtaposed actions—one a sacrifice and the

other a sacrament—but they both belong to the unity of one Sacrament. The Sacrament of Christ's sacrifice is a sacred commemoration meal in all its human dimensions, and the family which gathers around the Eucharistic Christ makes visible the Church. This gathering is the witness to the Kingdom of God, witness to the Good News of salvation, and witness to the new life in God. This outward manifestation is multiplied an infinite number of times in an infinite number of places; it is still the one and the same Christ, the one and the same Body manifested in the one and the same Church.

As Icon of the Father, Christ is the only Head, the only Priest, the only King and Prophet of the people of God. As Head of mankind, he is the principle of integration by which all the members are united into one living organism. The Church in this sense is called "Fullness" or the *pleroma* of Christ: in him all the members are made one and linked together. The kiss of peace at the Divine and Holy Liturgy is the affirmation of this fullness. When celebrants exchange the kiss of peace, they say to one another: "Christ is in our midst." The other responds: "He is and he always will be!" Here the Church is seen as the Body of Christ. Enmity is cast away and love prevails. The whole Christ is present and living in all the members.

It is in the Eucharist then that the Church is made manifest and clearly shown to be one with Christ. "Between the body and the head," says St. John Chrysostom, there is no possible interval, and the least hiatus would kill the life within us" (In 1 Cor. Hom. 8). This is the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit where even sinners are integrated into deifying participation with the "only One who is holy, the only One who is Lord, Jesus Christ, in the glory of God the Father" (Divine Liturgy).

BISHOP: IMAGE OF THE FATHER

The Church is composed of communities, each headed by a bishop who, in the early Church, was the normal celebrant of the Eucharist. As Christ is related to the Father, so also the community of the baptized is related to the bishop. "All of you should follow your bishop," says St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnians, "as Jesus Christ follows the Father" (VIII:1). For Ignatius, the Father of Jesus Christ is the "bishop of all" (Magn. III:1). "I exhort you," he says elsewhere in the same letter, "to strive to do everything in a divine harmony under the leadership of the bishop who holds the place of God the Father" (VI:1).

The holy and divine Liturgy is a dynamic movement that sweeps up the whole of creation, directs it and offers it in Christ to the Father. Through Christ and in Christ on the altar the Church celebrates our return to the Father. The very interior disposition, the very arrangement of church furnishings expresses this "fatherhood" of the bishop.

In the center of the apse stands the altar where the Son, the Lamb of God, is sacrificed and offered. Directly behind the altar, alongside the throne of Christ (*Etoimasia*), stands the throne of the bishop, image (*typos*) of the Father. (This is one of the reasons why the altar in our Byzantine churches cannot be turned around to face the people.)

From the fullness of the bishop's fatherhood and from his eucharistic action the Church is filled with splendor and glory. Thus, the *Dikarion*, or double candle, which the bishop carries in his left hand, symbolizes the dual nature of Christ and Christ himself. The *Trikarion*, or triple candle, symbolizes the Holy Trinity. The bishop blesses with them to signify the real presence of the

Trinity with him and in him—the Trinity in whose name he moves and acts and prays, as if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were really and truly in our midst.

At a certain time in history, when the bishop could not himself provide the eucharistic service for all of his people, we see his *presbyterium*, his priests, who previously were only advisors, counselors, and helpers, share both in his fatherhood and in his function as “sacrificer.” This practical necessity was also the origin of parishes. But, to show their dependence on the bishop, the identity of their sacrifice with his, these parishes always used a parcel of the consecrated bread from the sacrifice of the bishop in their own eucharistic liturgies.

The relationship of the different parishes to their bishop made up the local diocese. Both congregation and priest are related to the bishop in a special bond of unity—a bond analogous, on the part of the bishop, to the bond of marriage. Thus, toward the end of the 4th century, the bishop came to be regarded necessarily as an unmarried man. Another factor which enforced this trend was that at about the same period many bishops were chosen from the ranks of monks famed for their learning and holiness, for whom celibacy was a way of special perfection and a permanent state of prayer.

If a priest (helper and assistant of the bishop, a man taken from the community for the service of his own community) is generally a married man, after the 4th century the bishop is always celibate. Celibacy, in the Byzantine Church, is the specific vocation of the monk and of the bishop, as they must always be on their knees in prayer and contemplation.

The specific vocation to celibacy was not necessarily that of the priest. He is a servant of the community and only a sharer in the fatherhood of the bishop. Priesthood is considered, at least in the East, primarily as a service,

spiritual as well as corporal, rather than a state of life. He is not ordained for personal perfection as the monk is, but for the service of the people of God. The monk is the celibate man, while the priest generally is not.¹

The relationship of the community to the bishop as to the Father is fundamental in the thought of the East. To this gathered community the bishop represents God the Father, and in the celebrations of the Mysteries he represents, before the face of God, the Eucharistic community, the Church. This fatherhood of the bishop which belongs to the episcopal function cannot really be shared with priests or deacons. But all bishops, because of this fatherhood, share in an essential equality. The East never ceases to affirm this equality and recalls it with an impressive insistence. The fullness of catholicity of the Church resides in each particular church by virtue of its bishop, who sacramentally is representative of God himself.²

The bishop also came to be seen as a symbol of Christ because of his incarnation of the Gospel in his life. The bishop must continually read that Gospel with new eyes and with a new mind, according to the daily needs of his people and the times in which he lives. The Gospel is life, and as life the bishop must be alert to its many facets.

At his consecration the Holy Gospel Book is opened wide on his head to signify that It alone is to be his only inspiration and the sole object of his thoughts and meditations. The second prayer of the consecration of a bishop asks God to make of him a true Pastor "ready to give his life for the flock" (Christ the Shepherd), and to be "a light in the world" (Christ the Light of the World).

He is vested with the *Sakkos* (outer garment) which symbolizes the divine splendor of Christ. He is given the *Omophorion* (Episcopal stole) which signifies the Incarnation "by which Christ took upon himself our human

nature and restored it to the Father." When this *Omo-phorion* is placed upon his shoulders, the deacon proclaims: "On your shoulders, O Christ, you did place our wayward nature, and in your Ascension you did present it to the Father."

He is also given the staff of the Shepherd. When we see the bishop, we see Christ, just as when we "know Christ we come to know the Father." Like Christ, the bishop is considered to be a savior of his people, a helper and a kinsman. Since he is identified with Christ the Lord, the bishop is also a ruler and a Master (*despotis*).³

Like Christ, the bishop is also—and above all—the servant of his sheep. Service is not an occasional action but the structure of his whole life, his proper state of being, as it were. He is the Father of the family who feeds the hungry, heals the sick, and reconciles the sinner. And, as the bishop shared his power of sacrificer with his presbyterium, so he also shares his function of servant. Thus, the priest becomes a spiritual father also, a healer and a conciliator of sinners.

These deep, biblical emphases concerning the characteristics of bishop and priest color the response on the part of the people. The freedom of the baptized is a personal responsibility and a personal dignity which cannot rightly be abdicated or even supplanted by any impersonal system of laws. Even Church laws are not necessarily imperative or binding in the same way as they are in the Church in the West. Laws for the East are rather directives and helps. The message of the Gospel and the teaching of Christ himself stress the primacy of the personal experience over what is abstract and "organized." One of the greatest gifts of the Spirit is precisely this freedom. "Christ has set us free to be free men. Stand firm, then, and refuse to be tied to the yoke of slavery again" (Gal. 5:1).

This freedom negates clericalism, but not hierarchy. The "pastoral charism of love," "fatherly tenderness," and "spiritual fatherhood" are gifts of the Spirit poured upon every bishop in his consecration and shared to some extent by priests. But Jesus warns us of being "over others" in the wrong way: "The kings of the nations lord it over them and those who have authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. . ." (Luke 22:25-26). Bishops, consequently, do not govern by general rules or laws. They set up the "ladder of Jacob" and direct, guide and coordinate human efforts in man's ascent to heaven.⁴

In the prayer for the consecration of a bishop, we pray that God make of this man a true teacher and servant:

O Lord, our God, since it is impossible for human nature to bear the divine substance, therefore, through your providence you have appointed teachers, men of weakness like us, to wait upon your throne and offer sacrifices and oblations for all your people. O Lord, make him, who is now becoming the dispenser of the graces contained in the office of bishop, and imitator of you, the true Shepherd, who laid down your life for your sheep, make him a leader of the blind, a light to those who walk in darkness, an instructor of the ignorant, and a teacher of the infants, that he might shine in the world; that, with souls committed to his care, he may stand before your tribunal without shame, and receive from you the great reward prepared for those who boldly strive to preach your gospel.

Obedience on the part of the baptized to such a shepherd, is also a personal commitment of respect and faithfulness to the manifestation of the Lord in the one who bears the Lord and witnesses to him. It is another form of fidelity to the Word of God and to fraternal communion in him.

The power and the rights of bishops are a part of the mystery of the Church, and consequently cannot be compared with any worldly power structure or administrative organization. The Church is in the world, but she is not of the world. Her supreme law is communion in love and freedom.

It would take us too far afield if we were to compare the Byzantine conception of the Church with the Roman conception. It will be sufficient to point out that we have here two different outlooks and two completely different approaches. In the Byzantine spirit the Church is seen as a reality that transcends immediate expression—it is a mystery of fellowship with God and man. The Romans insist that the Church is a visible society dependent on juridical rules. Western theology seems to believe that Christ entrusted his Church to Peter, who is assisted by the Apostles. The Byzantines envision the Church as entrusted to the Apostles over whom Peter presides in love. In practical life, when East and West use the same word “Church,” they are talking two different languages.

Finally, another person traditionally associated with the office of the bishop is the deacon. The deacon is the servant of the community in a special way, namely, in the practical arrangements of the Liturgy, in its artistic presentation and enactment. He can also be a theologian, a speaker, or a speech writer. He may serve the bishop and the community in any special capacity. Deacons are married people taken from among the community to help the bishop in that community’s needs. This *oiconomos* is a special function by which priests and deacons also help to distribute the goods of this world to the brothers.

Deacons and the *oiconomoi* are permanent institutions around the bishop and subject to his supervision and guidance. They share in what the bishop himself is, a servant. They are his helpers, and imitators of his

fatherhood. "Each of you," says St. Peter, "has received a special grace. So, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others. If you are a speaker, speak in words which seem to come from God; if you are a helper, help as though every action was done at God's order, so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ. To him alone belongs all glory and power for ever and ever" (1 Peter 4:10-11). Each order then has its function in the Church and must have its own personnel. What an aberration and spiritual misrepresentation it is, for example, to see a priest parading around performing the functions of a deacon. It also becomes a distortion of a Christian reality when a bishop serves as a deacon in the celebration of the Sacrifice of Christ.

THE POPE

As the local church manifests its reality and union with Christ by the presence of a bishop at the eucharistic action, so also the different bishops express their unity and identity with Christ by their union in love, and by their cooperation with each other. Christ himself established a center and a symbol of this cohesion and harmony in his Church. He made Peter the head of his college of Apostles. He clearly wanted him to be the leader and perfect example of his own love for his brothers and peers. "Feed my lambs...feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). The primacy of Peter is, therefore, of divine institution, willed by Christ as the link and manifestation of union in his Body.

The Pope is the brother who confirms others in the faith, who runs to the aid of his brothers the bishops when they need his intervention and service. He is not the arbitrary dictator above and beyond the law of Christ who

lives in the Church. At the Second Vatican Council Patriarch Maximos IV Sayeg explained clearly and unequivocally the meaning of this primacy according to Byzantine theology:

It should be clear to all of us that the only head of the Church, the only head of the Body of Christ which is the Church, is our Lord Jesus Christ and he alone. The Roman Pontiff is the head of the College of bishops, just as Peter was the head of the College of Apostles. The successor has no more power than the one whom he succeeds. For this reason it is not appropriate to say of the Roman Pontiff as we say of Christ—in the same way and without distinction—that he is the head of the Church, *caput Ecclesiae*.

The foundation of the Church is made up not of Peter alone, but of all the other Apostles as well, as is proven by a number of texts in the New Testament. This truth is in no way opposed to the primacy of Peter and his successors, but sheds new light on it. Peter is one of the Apostles, and at the same time head of the College of Apostles. Similarly the Roman Pontiff is a member of the College of bishops and at the same time head of the College. The head is the link for the whole body. It is not separated from it.

It should be clear that the power of the Roman Pontiff over the whole Church does not take away from the power of the College of bishops as a whole over the Church as a whole. . . a College which always includes the Pope as its primate. . . nor does the Pope's power take the place of the power of each bishop in his diocese. Every canonical delegation of authority within the limits of a diocese comes from the bishop of the diocese and from him alone.

We must emphasize that the universal power of the Roman Pontiff, complete though it is, and remaining in its own order, is given to him essentially as head of the whole hierarchy and precisely to enable him to fulfill this primatial act of service.

The 'You are Peter' of St. Matthew 16:18 should not be separated from the 'Lend strength to your brothers' of St. Luke 2:32. Furthermore, this power is pastoral in character and strictly personal. It is pastoral by nature in this sense, that it is not a prerogative of command merely for the sake of command. It is ministry, a service, a diakonia, a pastoral charge, as his Holiness Pope Paul VI has well emphasized. This power is of a personal character and since it remains such, cannot be delegated in any way.⁵

This Byzantine doctrine of the papacy does not diminish the privileged position of the Pope of Rome. It rather purifies it from human exaggerations and distortions, and presents it as a blessing instead of a domination. Explained in this way, primacy means the principal thrust of grace which calls for and sustains unity in the Church. It becomes, then, an object of gratitude to the Lord and not a cause for stumbling.

A general council is the place where this mutual love of Pope and the bishops is exercised and manifested, and where God manifests his will present through the Holy Spirit and living in the Body of Christ.

THE PATRIARCH

Besides the primacy of the bishop of Rome founded on Holy Scripture, there are other primacies which were recognized in the historical development of the Church. From early history we see that the Church, in the name of the whole episcopal college, has bestowed on particular bishops of a special territory the title of "Metropolitan" or Archbishop, together with a certain jurisdictional position and place of honor; but the supreme dignity and honor was always accorded to the bishops who occupied the sees of the Apostles themselves.

A Patriarch is clothed with a very special dignity which makes him the primate of all bishops of a large territory. His spiritual and paternal authority, recognized and confirmed by the whole Church and by the Ecumenical Councils, extends, in union with his synod, to the election and consecration of local bishops, to the creation of new dioceses (aparchies), and to all spiritual matters concerning the welfare of the people of God. A Patriarch, as head of his synod, enjoys a special autonomy, limited only by the rights of other Patriarchs and by the necessity and obligation of union and harmony with them—and especially with their primate, the Bishop of Rome.⁶

The thirty-fourth article of the Constitution of the Apostles declares emphatically that "the bishops should recognize their Primate and do nothing without him. The Primate, in turn, can do nothing without the others. Thus, by this unity, God will be glorified in the Holy Spirit." Every bishop is a responsible guardian of the faith and of its integral diffusion. The Patriarch, as major bishop, is all the more responsible. The Pope, the first Patriarch, is supremely so. Infallibility in teaching the sacred tradition does not rest, according to Byzantine theology, primarily in the hierarchy alone, but in the Holy Spirit who inspires and sustains the whole Church and opens her to the full consciousness of his presence in the truth.

According to the tradition of the Eastern and Western Churches, there are five Patriarchs. The first is the Patriarch of Rome, who is also called the Pope. Then there is the Patriarch of Constantinople (New Rome), the Patriarch of Alexandria, the Patriarch of Antioch, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem. These Patriarchs have, throughout the course of history, borne together, under the primacy of the Titular of the Roman Church, the weight of the responsibility of the Universal Church.⁷

This Universal Church, as the community of the baptized, continues the life of the Son of God on earth. She must now watch and pray until his final coming. She has two elements or dimensions: one is invisible and "hidden with Christ in God" as St. Paul says; the other is visible, and composed of the members who try to live out in a visible way that presence of Christ. There is indeed a distinction between these two elements of the Church, but there is no separation or confusion between them. The same love embraces the whole and forges one unique reality: that of the incarnate Son of God living in his members. If this reality cannot be defined, it can nevertheless be described. The Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (318) described the Church as "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic." We will look briefly at the meaning of each of these dimensions.

THE CHURCH IS ONE

The Church is one because She is the one Body united to the Father in the person of Jesus Christ, and animated by the one Spirit of life and love. She is also one because of her vocation to praise, with one mind and one heart, the holy name of the Trinity:

When the most High came down
and confused the tongues of Babel,
He divided the nations;
but when he distributed the tongues of
fire at Pentecost,
He called all men to unity.
Wherefore we magnify the Holy Spirit
with one accord. (Kontakion of Pentecost)

The Christian life is a movement toward God, a life of love, a self-giving and surrendering to the invitation of God

to be united and identified with him. It is not a solitary life. The closer we come to God, the nearer we approach one another until we become "one body in Christ" (Rom. 12:5) and "members of one another" (Gal. 6:2). This is what Byzantine theology understands by the Communion of Saints. All the baptized live in and for one another in Christ-Jesus: "Blessed is the soul that loves her brother, for our brother is our life. . . .As God is love, so the Holy Spirit in the Saints is love."⁸

The visible Church on earth is not the whole Church. She embraces also the Saints, the angels, all those who have died in Christ. The love that binds all these members is the source of unity in the risen Christ. "There is one Body, and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling: One Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

The Church, as a whole, displays the most admirable unity in her belief in the mysteries of the faith. But when it comes to the doctrinal presentation of these same beliefs, or in designating the role of people and hierarchy, there is a great difference. There are three main groupings: the Roman, the Orthodox, and the Protestant. Protestantism appeared rather late in the Western Church, in the sixteenth century. Its fragmentation into innumerable sects, its substantial inner divisions and opposing doctrinal stances make it a special case; we will prescind from commenting upon it here; a brief comparison of the other two, however, will be helpful.

From the very beginning the genius of two civilizations, the Greek and the Latin, created and developed two currents of thought, and two manners of life in Christ. One was called Eastern or Orthodox, the other Western or Roman. The former is largely mystical, emphasizing the mystery of God; the latter more legalistic and realistically

practical. The Eastern Church spirit is popular, spontaneous and improvising, while the Roman tends to be rather juridical and methodical: its essence is clarity and systematization. The Byzantine is rather awed by the incomprehensibility of God, by the mysteries of his mercy, his Incarnation, and our transformation into God and identification with him. The Roman, on the other hand, has been more concerned with the humanity of Christ, with his heart of flesh and blood. This difference of attitude between the Byzantine and the Roman is particularly noticeable when it comes to defining the nature of the Church and organizing its government. Byzantines view the Church, as we have noted above, as a reality that transcends immediate experience, as a mystery of fellowship. For the Romans, the Church is mainly a visible society dependent on juridical rules.

For the first thousand years of the life of the Church these differences were recognized; each one respected and accepted the other's orientation. Thus the Church of the East lived in harmony and peace with the Church of the West. At certain times this harmony was disturbed by accidents of history which created temporary hatreds and estrangements. But as soon as the psychological and historical impact of the event had had time to subside, the hatreds were forgotten and unity and love were restored.

Until recent times the breaking point between East and West was seen to coincide with the conflict that opposed Michael Cerularius of Constantinople and Cardinal Humbert, the Legate of the Pope, in their discussion on the doctrinal expression of the procession of the Holy Spirit. The West held that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father *and* the Son:" *Filioque*. The East held that he proceeds "from the Father" or "from the Father *through* the Son." Whatever is behind the philosophical concept of these expressions, the East considered the addition of the

word *Filioque* to the Nicene Creed as an abuse, and consequently as an error. It was held that no one party had the right to add to the Creed on his own any word or any dogmatic expression without the decision of an Ecumenical Council.⁹

(Another difficulty that one time inflamed the passions of Greeks and Latins was the question of the *azymes* or the kind of bread used at the Divine and Holy Liturgy. The East used leavened bread, the West unleavened.)

Michael Cerularius of Constantinople, all wrapped up in his Byzantine traditions, could not conceive of any other practice or dogmatic expression than his own. Cardinal Humbert, the representative of the Pope of Rome, was no less intransigent and no less stubborn. In a gesture of unbelievable misunderstanding and boorishness Humbert hurled an excommunication against the Church of Constantinople (1054). In reaction, Michael Cerularius excommunicated the Church of Rome!

Historians now see in this incident more of a clash of personalities than of real doctrinal dispute. Doctrine was but a screen to hide political ambitions and national pride. The event was hardly noticed by contemporaries. Peter, the Patriarch of Antioch, wrote to Cerularius reminding him that “after all, these Latins are our brothers.” Soon after the mutual excommunication, Cerularius and the Pope of Rome (John VIII) became better friends than any previous Pope and Patriarch. Some forty-four years after, in 1098, Pope Urban II reminded the Latins as they went off to the Crusades and would be among many peoples of the East: “You are brothers. . . you are children of the same Christ and of the same Church.” Up to the twelfth century, East and West thought of themselves as perfectly Catholic, as both perfectly orthodox, as perfectly one in Christ.

LOSS OF EQUILIBRIUM IN THE CHURCH

As long as Byzantines and Romans remained united in Christ, theological equilibrium and harmony in personal relations could be maintained while their differences were both understood and respected. But as soon as they became estranged, especially under the influence of the Crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the balance was lost. Differences hardened into rigid positions which made any further understanding and cooperation impossible without some kind of miraculous intervention.

The East owed and still owes nothing to Rome but respect for its primacy. Rome never interfered with the ecclesiastical affairs of the Eastern Church unless called upon to exercise its role of arbitration. Such a role, however, was not a unique privilege of Rome, but was shared by all the five patriarchates.

The relationship of Rome to the nations and churches of the West was entirely different from her relationship to the East. Rome was the Mother Church and benefactress of the West. It civilized and organized the West and the latter owed almost everything to its Patriarch, the Pope of Rome. Interference was therefore natural, and it became more and more frequent. By the end of the eleventh century, with Pope Gregory VII, these interferences developed into a form of centralization.

After the reform of Cluny, the ecclesiastical affairs were controlled in such a strict manner that the Church of Rome assumed the form of an exclusively monarchical system of government in imitation of the absolute monarchies of the times. The Pope, being a monarch and a king of an earthly kingdom, transposed the manner of government of his estates onto the government of the Church. The Council of Trent, in reaction to the Protestant Reformation, tightened this absolutism into formal cen-

tralization by the creation of the Roman Congregations (Curia) whose major goal was uniformity in every ecclesiastical field, and the elimination of diversity, which was considered as a source of heresy and division. This trend toward uniformity was further pushed to the point of loss of freedom of conscience. These were some of the consequences of the estrangement of East and West.

For the Church of the East, the greatest loss was the break in communion with the Bishop of Rome, who was considered to be the symbol and sign of unity for the whole Church. More attached to the mystical and spiritual reality of the Church as a fellowship, and more humanely spontaneous in its own organizational set-up, the Eastern Church also lost much of the spirit of vigor and unity in her spiritual administration. The different apostolic sees loosened their ties of unity among themselves and among the churches that were later established. New "autonomous" or "autocephalous" sees were created, not only for reasons of national necessity, but also out of a spirit of overt opposition, and with a feeling of power or superiority toward the other churches. This fragmentation further resulted in the loss of many elements of strength and in the sense of partnership.

Throughout the upheavals of history, and in spite of the catastrophic human incidents between East and West, the Holy Spirit kept alive an anxious longing for unity and for the restoration of peace in the Church. The evident good will appeared on both sides in several movements toward reconciliation. The two Councils of Lyons, in 1245 and 1274, and the great Council of Ferrare, Florence, 1439, failed only because of the political factors which had brought them into being.

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

The second characteristic by which the Nicean Creed

described the Church was holiness. *Ekklesia*, in fact, means "called forth" and "set apart." It is in God that the Church gives birth to her children and makes them a special people—set apart, "holy." Holiness is not a consequence of morality, of "being good." It is, rather, an ontological quality which causes it. Born in the blood of Christ, the Church is perfected by the Holy Spirit in whom she finds all her reality and responds to God's reconciling love by prayer and worship.

The special mission of the Church is to witness and proclaim the wondrous reality of God in herself and his marvelous works in creation. Because she is the Body of Christ, she is continually in contact with him who is the cause and source of all good things. By the sacraments, and especially by the Holy Eucharist, she imparts to her children, and intensifies in them, participation in the Divine Nature. Even in the face of death, when the bodies of her children are carried into church, she realizes her unique relation with God and proclaims his holiness by singing the thrice-holy hymn: "Holy is God! Holy the Mighty! Holy the Immortal!" There is no prayer, no office, no public gathering where she does not start by proclaiming this most intimate relationship with him.

It is precisely because of her mission as herald and witness of the holiness of God that the Church is in continual conversation with God. Men and angels, just and sinners, all prostrate themselves before his awesome holiness. Sin may render the heart heavy or make it more impervious to the grace of God, but sin can never destroy that grace.

The life of holiness and sanctification is, according to the infirmities of our human condition, a continual struggle for cooperation with this grace which seeks to transfigure our nature. Grace is not something static and fixed, something that can be lost and then rediscovered. It

is real life, a continual pulsation and movement toward God. It is thus a mixture of victories and falls; it is a struggle. All members of Christ are more or less in a state of grace, more or less sinners or just. The Church is, therefore, the Church of sinners and penitents, as well as the saints of God.

All the members of the Church live for each other and by each other. Every prayer in the Byzantine rite concludes by what is called an Apolysis or dismissal: "Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and save us." Our "holy Fathers" are not only those who preceded us into eternity in God. All the members of the Church are our brothers and fathers: we live in them and somehow because of them, because of their lives. We sustain them in God, just as we are sustained by their prayers. The Church is holy because she gives the victory over sin, distributes sanctification, and anchors all her members in Christ the Lord, the Rock. Thus, the members communicate with each other and together they are united to God through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: they are holy: the Church is holy.

THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

The Church Catholic (*Kath-ollou*) means plenitude, embracing and uniting, like Christ in his Incarnation, the whole reality of creation, both spiritual and material: "Where Christ Jesus is, there also will be the Catholic Church" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Smyrn.* 8,2).

Catholic means, then, a divine achievement of a common understanding where the same judgments among the bishops becomes the norm. Everyone rejects or accepts what all the others accept or reject. Such harmony can never be the work of mere human beings, but is a work of

the Spirit. Such oneness of mind links the community to Christ and flows from Christ to his servants.

In the primitive Church the word "Catholic" was a surname to distinguish the members of the Church from all sects who were known by a party name, or simply by the common name of Christian. Heretics or dissidents confined their religion either to a particular region, or to some party, and therefore had no pretense of styling themselves "Catholic."

The Catholic Church had only one title, and it justly had this title because it alone was diffused throughout the whole world and yet remained one in perfect harmony. In this sense, the name is as ancient as the Church herself. "As we see in the acts of Pionius, the martyr, who, being asked by Polemo the Judge of what church he was, answered: 'I am of the Catholic Church, for Christ has no other.'"¹⁰

When we use the terms "Eastern Church" and "Western Church" we do not imply any division or spiritual separation. We simply mean that there are two separate and convergent expressions, two outlooks, two faces to the one and unique reality of the one Body of Christ. The term "Byzantine" does not include in its meaning a geographical or racial identity. Likewise, the word "Roman" refers to a style of ecclesial life and outlook, and not to places or nationalities.

Even the estrangement and separation of the Catholic Church into Roman and Orthodox are only accidents of history and of sick, human blunders which do not affect the essence and reality of the Church's catholicity. The character of non-Romanism of the Byzantine Church, for instance, does not mean that it is anti-Roman; nor does it mean that it denies the Roman privilege of primacy. The Byzantine Church is the Catholic Church with a special outlook, just as the Roman Church is the Catholic Church

with a Western outlook. They are both equal in honor, worth, and holiness.

In her mission to the world the Church embraces all nations with their customs, habits and special cultures. She is not out to "Romanize" or "Byzantinize" them, but to baptize them in Christ Jesus. She melts them into one hymn of love which elevates them and offers them to God as "a Bride, holy and undefiled, not having any spot, wrinkle or any such thing."

THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

This last characteristic by which the first Ecumenical Council of Constantinople described the Church is that she is Apostolic. This is of great importance because the term affirms that the Church is bound to the Apostles and identified with them and through them with the Lord Jesus himself. The Apostles were chosen by the Lord, taught and formed by him. He himself sent them into the world for a special mission and identified himself with them: "He who listens to you listens to me, and he who accepts you accepts me."

The special mandate of the Apostles was to bring salvation to the world and to sanctify and save the world through the power of Jesus. This divine task no one can arrogate to himself. It must come from God. St. Paul himself attaches great importance to this origin of his own calling. He declares that he is "Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Gal. 1:1). Paul often begins his letters by saying that he was *called* to be an apostle (cf. Rom. 1 Cor.).

Christ did not commit his Church to one particular apostle to the exclusion of the others; he committed it to

all the apostles. The concrete expression, "The Twelve" recurs again and again in the Gospels to indicate that all the apostles were collectively and in solidarity entrusted with the mission of Christ. The Twelve are forever the foundation of the Church, of the new Israel of whom they are the judges (Matt. 29:27). If Christ is the cornerstone of the Church, he made "the Apostles and Prophets her foundation" (Eph. 2:19-20).

St. John describes this reality of the Church in his vision of heaven: ". . .and the angel showed me Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. . . .The walls of it had twelve foundation stones, and on them were twelve names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb" (Apoc. 21:10-14). The apostolic succession does not mean that such and such a bishop replaces such and such an apostle of the Lord. Rather, it means that the college of bishops has received from the "college" of the Apostles supreme responsibility over the reality of the Church. Collegiality means, then, that all bishops together constitute one apostolic college.¹¹

In the Holy Scriptures, wherever the Apostles are at work, we notice that they exercise their duties and carry out their responsibilities in a group. The Lord sent them "two by two." When Paul wanted to start his mission, Barnabas presented him "to the Apostles." Later, after fourteen years of apostolic work, he "went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. . .and submitted to the Apostles the Gospel which he preached" (Gal. 2:2).

The Apostles understood well that their role was to be a collective one, and that when there was a decision to be made for the whole Church, no one Apostle, not even Peter, took upon himself the responsibility of the outcome. They all met together, and together they worked in a normal, human way by investigating, deliberating, studying and praying. Their solution was the result of a

common searching: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." Thus they instituted what we call a "council" in which doctrinal or moral matters are decided upon by all the bishops for the good of the whole Church. The term "apostolic" connotes, therefore, collegiality, because the ministry is a power of service rendered to the Church by the successors of the Apostles.

The power of the bishop is therefore the power of the Apostles, a power of grace that sacrifices to God, heals and sanctifies human activities, and gives them glory by absorbing them into the Kingdom of God. This power is the only power in the Church, and there exists no higher power than that of a bishop. Every local church united to its bishop is the Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. Also, every bishop is not only bishop of a local city or a part of the Church. He is the bishop of the whole Church, even though his jurisdictional and administrative capacity is limited and localized. St. Cyprian (200-258) said:

This is what constitutes a church: the people united to their high priest, the sheep following the shepherd. You must understand that a bishop is constituted by his church and a church by her bishop; whoever is not with his bishop is not in the Church.¹²

The college of the Apostles, or the "Twelve," is not a loose, disorganized group. It has a president, Peter. Holy Scripture often points to this president by the expression "Peter and those who are with him" (Mark 1:36; Luke 9:32; 8:45). Peter is one of the Twelve. He is not an entity by himself or aside from the others. He is their brother and their companion who directs, sustains and coordinates their efforts. His role completes the role and functions of the other Apostles; he is indispensable to them. "Consequently, according to Byzantine theology, the successor of

Peter in the see of Rome does not have more power than Peter himself; and the college of bishops, successor of the college of the Apostles, does not have any less power than the college of the Apostles."¹³

The term "apostolic" was so very important to Christianity that those who first succeeded the Apostles were also called "Apostles," not as a title of honor but to identify them with the Twelve and with Christ from whom they derived their power of service. Later on, Christianity thought it was honor enough to simply call them "successors" of the Apostles, or bishops, as they came to be known. Again, they were not successors to the exact places where the Apostles were, but they took care of the church wherever they were in the name of the Apostles.

All bishops were successors of all the Apostles and as such they bore the responsibility of the entire mission of Christ everywhere. This is what we call "collegiality" in the proper sense, and St. Cyprian explains it this way: "In fact, there is but one Church for the bishops, one soul and one heart. . .by the institution of Christ there is but one unique Church, spread over all the world, one unique episcopate, represented by a multiplicity of bishops, united among themselves. . . .The Church forms but one entity whose link is the union of bishops" (Epis. 66:8,3).

During the first millenium the successors of Peter and of the college of Apostles in both East and West governed the Church in harmony. Collegiality appeared in three different forms: in local synods, occasionally in Ecumenical Councils, and more frequently in the "Letters of Communion and Fellowship" which the five Patriarchs exchanged on the occasion of their election to office. These Letters consisted in a profession of faith which each newly-elected Patriarch—including the Bishop of Rome—sent to the other four, and to none besides them. The other bishops proclaimed and signed their profession of

faith and their communion with their Patriarchs at their consecration.

The Church, then, is apostolic by the solidarity of all the bishops united together as "one soul and one heart," in communion with the Pope of Rome, their head. Such is the Church willed by Christ: "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic."

CHAPTER 7

GOD—LOVE IN A WOMAN: MARY: THEOTOKOS

MARY OF NAZARETH

Mary, the Jewish girl from Nazareth, who was chosen by God from all eternity to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, is, in Eastern spirituality, not so much an object of devotion as an all-pervading presence, a person who has been intimately linked with God's *economia*. Our love and admiration of her person are human expressions by which we are helped to plunge into the marvelous act of God by which he burst into human history, thus making it a history of salvation. At the sight of God's condescension and the *economia* by which he chose to impart to man his infinite love, the intellect as well as the imagination are set on fire to discover and clarify the wonders of Mary as a human being, as a woman and as a mother. Christ is her son. He is also her God and her Redeemer. It is in Mary that womanhood becomes what it really ought to be: the perfecting and salvation of the human soul.

St. Paul, steeped in an oriental culture which prohibited women from being seen or heard in public, considered them a rather negative element in human and consequently divine affairs. This cultural bias passed to the West which accepted it as sacred and unchangeable. Nevertheless, the Christian soul burst into the most magnificent expressions

of womanhood present in Mary. In Mary we are shown that womanhood is the dynamic power that can and will transfigure the world and weld all human beings to each other in one family.

This unification has already begun in Mary as the Mother of God. It is in Mary, as a woman and as a mother, that we also realize the relationship of grace and love which God contracted with the human race. The Christian expression and feeling about woman is summarized by Goethe: "Woman is the road to heaven." No other way exists for heaven to come to the human race or for the human race to go to heaven, than through Mary. What a glory indeed, beyond understanding, that the Son of God, God of God himself, is carried—physically carried!—and cared for by a woman. "The One that nothing can contain, is now contained in the womb" (Hymn of the Incarnation).

No theological or philosophical system can gauge the depth of such a glorious fact; but the believer can stand in awe and admiration and celebrate the event:

In you, O woman full of grace, all creation exults, the hierarchy of angels, together with the race of men.

In you, sanctified Temple, Spiritual Paradise, glory of virgins of whom God took flesh, from whom our God, who existed before the world was, became a child!

By taking flesh in you He made your womb his throne. He made it more spacious than the heavens.

In you, O woman full of grace, all creation exults: glory to you. (St. Basil)

THE ALL—PERVADING PRESENCE OF MARY

The Roman Church of Hippo (393) prescribed that "all prayers said at the altar should be addressed to God

the Father." This prescription was also stated by the Council of Carthage in North Africa (379). Rome extended this ordinance to all liturgical prayers, even those not said at the altar or during Mass. These prescriptions were faithfully observed for centuries, but outside Rome and Christian Africa, no church felt obliged to observe this rigidity.

The East, which recognized many of the disciplinary Councils of Africa, never took into account this prescription. The Council of Ephesus (431), in condemning Nestorius, liberated Christian consciousness and permitted more exteriorization of the devotion to the Theotokos (Mother of God) which goes back to the very beginning of Christianity.

The liturgy indeed is the expression of faith that lives in the hearts of the Christian people. It is the outward expression of the deepest reality of the living Christ in the Church. He who mentions Christ, mentions his Mother. So the devotion and love directed to Christ was also expressed toward his blessed Mother. This devotion later became solemn celebrations of events in her life intimately connected with the events of the life of Christ; finally, these events were also celebrated by some extra-liturgical services.

These latter are woven garlands of delight, hymns of joy, more in honor of God who showed such generosity and love to mankind through Mary. The dogmatic presentation that these services contain is not an intellectual or scientific exposition of faith. They are rather deep meditations which gradually grow into contemplation of the mystery of God and burst into prayer, love, admiration and hymns of thanks.

The poetic language of the hymns in honor of the Mother of God lend themselves to the expression of a devotion which seems to have no bounds but is the natural

expression of man's transformation by love. Man becomes infinitely eloquent. The attributes and praises of the Virgin Mary roll forth in a torrent that makes us understand the ecstasy and poetry that woman can draw from a soul.

From eternity, God had chosen Mary as the instrument for the expression of his infinite love. She is, then, the symbol and sign of the whole creation. As woman and mother she is the unifying force to make the world aware of the grandeur of both spiritual and physical motherhood. Eve was the mother of all the living. Mary is the mother of all believers and of the new creation in all its fullness. Because Mary is not only real mother but the Mother of God—more mother than any other mother—hymns of glory are often repeated in her honor.

MOTHER OF GOD

Theotokos, or Mother of God, is not a title of honor. It is a statement of an historical fact and a profession of faith. "The term 'theotokos,' " says St. John of Damascus, "contains all the history of the divine economy in this world, and the whole mystery of the Incarnation" (*De Fide Orth.*, III,12). St. Cyril of Alexandria (431) calls Mary "complement of the Holy Trinity," precisely because she participates in this divine *economia*.

The most important fact and solemn teaching of the Church about Mary is that she is the Mother of God. She is a real mother in the same physical and concrete sense as any other human mother. Motherhood is a personal relationship, a real relationship between two persons which identifies them as belonging to each other. In the very special instance of the Incarnation, according to the Holy Scriptures, sexual union and human fatherhood had no share in the Motherhood of Mary. The Holy Spirit, the

life-giving Spirit of God, being life and love in the Holy Trinity, "overshadowed" the Virgin, and by a marvelous action animated the seed of her womb to become a complete human entity, a perfect human nature which the Son of God united to his divine Person. The conception is not then the producing of a new person who did not exist previously, but the giving of a new nature. In the real flesh and blood of Mary the Son of God wedded our human nature and became one body with us. There is but one Son, the Son of God himself, who was made flesh in Mary. Mary is then the Mother of God: Theotokos. Again, St. John of Damascus says: "The Holy Virgin did not bear a common man, but the true God, yet not naked, but in the flesh" (*De Fide Orth.* III,12).

The fact that no man provided her with human seed does not, in the least, derogate from the physical reality of her motherhood. It is because she surrendered herself to God that Mary's love becomes life and source of life. Being a virgin does not make her any less a mother; rather, it reveals in her the fullness of motherhood, because her virginity is the fullness of surrender to God in love. Therefore, Mary is to be considered more mother than any other mother. For this reason we have the numerous and often-repeated expressions in our hymns such as, "Without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. . ."; "you, Bride, who remained undefiled. . ."; "you did not know wedlock. . ."; "you did not know man. . . ." The genius of St. Cyril of Alexandria was behind the definition of this divine maternity of Mary at the Council of Ephesus. Any attack or compromise on the subject of Mary's motherhood would be an attack on the reality of the Incarnation, and on the reality of Christ himself.

Mary became a real Mother because of her total obedience in love, and only obedience to God and acceptance of him give love its true direction and make it

true love. It is not passivity, but acceptance of a proposal and a surrender to the art of love in its highest degree in identification which is the mark of true love. Thus, Mary's relationship with God is unparalleled. Consequently, she is given a unique and unprecedented dignity and position with mankind:

In you, O Woman full of grace, all
creation exults, and the hierarchies
of angels, and the race of men.
O Temple of the Most Holy,
O spiritual Paradise and Glory of Virgins,
In you God took flesh,
In you, our very God,
Who existed before the world,
Became a Child!
For He has made your womb His throne,
And has made it more extended than the heavens.
In you, O full of grace, all creation exults.
Glory to you!

THE GLORY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Byzantine spirituality tends to apprehend the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word not in itself, which is incomprehensible, but in the human events which surround it. Once we have fully realized that Mary bore the Lord, that she suckled and handled the Eternal in the form of a Child, no limit is conceivable in ascribing to her beauties, dignities, graces and glories. What awe and surprise must stir in a human soul which considers that creation has been brought so close to the Divine Essence that the Son of God himself dwelt in a woman's womb and was identified with her as her son! Every other title of glory that can be predicated of a human being is applicable

to her. She is the Mother of our Lord, and that is more glorious than any glory we can ascribe to her. Therefore she is all-holy, all-pure, all-blessed and ever-virgin. She is our Lady, Queen of us all and Queen of the whole universe. The rest is silence.

This silence accounts for the reticence of the Byzantine Church on multiplying definitions about Mary. Too many dogmatic definitions about Mary would be like an attempt to make of her a superhuman creature, a creature from another world, which would be an attack on the simple reality of the Incarnation. When we talk about the glories of the Mother of God, we do not mean favors that were given to her arbitrarily to set her apart from the rest of humanity. All her supereminent gifts are immediately related to her being the Mother of God, and consequently to her role in our salvation. This theological attitude creates an admirable balance in the devotion to Mary, all based on the scriptures.

EVER-BLESSED, EVER-VIRGIN

On every commemoration of the events of Mary's life, the Byzantine Church reads the passage of St. Luke in which Christ proclaims her "blessed." When, out of the multitude of people surrounding the Lord, a certain woman lifted up her voice and said to him, "Blessed the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" Jesus replied, "Still more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27-28).

These words of the Lord are the perfect expression of what Mary really is, and Holy Scripture insists on proving it. She is "blessed" not only because of her physical connection with the Lord as his Mother, but because she is the most perfect example of "hearing and keeping the

Word of God." It is the same evangelist who insists repeatedly on the fact that Mary was the faithful keeper of what the Lord had said and done: "Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). She could not always understand the behavior of her child, yet she believed in him. Our Church, with untiring repetition, calls Mary "blessed" because of her faithfulness in keeping and treasuring the Word of God in her heart.

The reality of Mary as "ever-virgin" was officially proclaimed at the second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (553). Mary is Ever-Virgin. This is perhaps the essence of her particular dignity as the Mother of God. "Ever-virgin" is not simply a physiological statement. It is above all an inner spiritual attitude. Spiritual virginity lends significance and beauty to the physical. Neither is "ever-virgin" a mere negation or absence. It is rather a wholeness and fullness of love. It stresses the thirst and hunger for total identification in love.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sanctification, is always mentioned as intimately connected with Mary's sanctity. It is through his action that God was united to creation. He enveloped her body and soul and communicated to her the greatest sanctity possible. He effected the Incarnation in her womb. He directed her and illumined her. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctified and transfigured her. She is "irreproachable," "venerable," "immaculate," "without blame or stain." The freedom of heart which enables one to "see God" is all perfect in Mary. "She ever preserved virginity in mind and soul and consequently in body" said St. John of Damascus. The virginity of Mary was the expression of her liberty and of her perfect human response to the will of God.

INTERCESSOR FOR SALVATION

Mary is the "intercessor for the salvation of our souls."

This special role of Mary in Heaven is often mentioned in our prayers. She is the Mother of our Savior and Redeemer and "the prayers of a mother are all-powerful with her Son" (Compline). She mirrors the bounty, generosity and marvelous love of God for us. She gives a human voice to the mercy of her Son and Lord. All that she is becomes for us a channel of divine grace.

This evangelical outlook on the intercession of Mary is always present in the traditional icon. No icon of the Blessed Mother is possible in Byzantine piety without the presence of the Lord in it. Only the love of the Lord can explain the role of Mary. The tender condescension of the Son by which he humbled himself and came down to us can give us assurance of the powerful intercession of the Mother. Because of her Son, she is called Sovereign, Despina (Empress), Lady and Queen.

CELEBRATIONS IN HONOR OF MARY

The Byzantine Church does not consider Mary's life as a succession of isolated episodes to be remembered for their historical accuracy; much less does she draw up a list of dogmas for their own sakes. Mary's whole life was directed to the realization of the mysteries of our salvation. She played an essential role in the accomplishment of God's plan for the redemption of the world. Every step in her life is a step toward the Incarnation of the Word of God and the salvation of mankind. She is the link that unites God to his creation. Her faith and love and voluntary acceptance of God's invitation make her a model of mankind.

At the sight of the goodness and infinite generosity of God our imagination staggers. Instinctively we look and search for poetic forms in which we can express our

Christian intuition and our faith in the Lord and God who made her what she is. The Byzantine celebrations in honor of Mary are directed to the One who first effected these miracles in her. We have at least¹ fourteen different commemorations in her honor.

In the presence of the incomprehensible mystery of her motherhood, all the events of her life take on a special brilliance. Her birth is considered a prelude to the work of redemption. Her presentation in the Temple announces that she is to become the Temple of the Word of God. Her voluntary acceptance of the call and invitation of God made at the Annunciation ushers in the Incarnation and cooperates in its realization. Her Assumption proclaims that death cannot hold down the "Mother of Life": "Since she is the Mother of Life, you lifted her up to life" (Office of the Dormition). Because Christ, as God and man, penetrated the whole universe by his Ascension, Mary also, by a special grace of God, joins her Son in this penetration of the universe in her Assumption. Now we would like to consider these wonders of Mary as expressed in the Byzantine liturgical life.

MARY PREFIGURED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We often speak of Mary in the language of devotional poetry, in the language of metaphors and images. Since Mary is the fulfillment of the whole history of salvation, incidents and themes in the Old Testament are often revived and woven into the texture of her life. She is, for example, the real daughter of the Old Testament, its last and most beautiful flower. Abraham and Sarah live again in Joachim and Anne. Samuel's presentation to the Lord is echoed by Mary's presentation in the temple. Details of the taking up to heaven of Enoch and Elias are woven into

the symbolism of Mary's own going up.

Mary is the new Eve. Her obedience offsets the disobedience of Eve. The real significance of this comparison lies in the fact that as the fall of man originated in Eve's refusal, so the Redemption has its human origin in a voluntary response of Mary to the divine will. Eve was so bold as to make a proposal of division between God and man; Mary waited and accepted the proposal of God for unification. As Eve was tempted by an angel to disobey God, Mary was drawn to obey him by the message of an angel. As by a virgin the human face had been bound to death by sin, by a virgin it is saved. "Death by Eve, life by Mary. The light of an eternal spring comes to us when on the day of the Annunciation we hear the decisive 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word' (Luke 1:38). This is indeed the whole creation, the whole humanity, and each one of us recognizes the words that express our ultimate nature and being, our acceptance to be the Bride of God, our betrothal to the One Who from all eternity loved us."²

Mary is continually called the Ark of God. The ark was first introduced by Joshua with a solemn procession into Jericho. The assembly of the people of Israel prefigures the Church entering the Promised Land. The second and joyously triumphant translation of the ark was when it was taken into the holy city of Jerusalem (II Sam. 6). The priests carried the ark and deposited it in the Holy of Holies. It is to this final translation of the ark that our liturgical books refer when they call Mary the Ark of the Covenant which is carried in most joyous procession. Psalm 132 is often quoted in this context:

Yahweh, go up to your resting place,
You and Your ark of power.
Your priests are vesting in virtue,
And your devout are shouting for joy.

While Moses kept his flock on Mt. Sinai he saw one of the well-known acacia trees (or thorn trees of the desert) burning and crackling with a fierce fire, "and the bush was not consumed" (Ex. 3:5). As he came near he heard the voice of God which commanded him to take off his shoes, for the place was holy ground. Mary is like that burning bush:

Moses foresaw in the burning bush the
mystery of your tremendous maternity. . .
O cause of our joy, be gracious to us;
Enlighten our minds so that we may cry out to you,
'Hail, O burning and unconsumed bush,
All-brilliant cloud spread out above the faithful'
(Akathist, 6th Ode).

King Nabuchadnezzar of Babylon gave orders to his whole empire to adore idols. Three Hebrew children refused to obey the king, and they were thrown into a fiery furnace. Instead of burning, they walked in the heart of the flames, praising, singing and blessing the name of the Lord. So too, the blessed Mother of God contained in her womb the divine Word of God, and she was not consumed or burned by his infinite majesty and splendor. She was not consumed but exulted for joy. The three young men were even singing of the wonders of grace to be accomplished in Mary: "The three young men in the furnace foretold your maternity and described it in clear words as they stood unscathed in the midst of the flames. . ." (Akathist).

When Israel was sunk in adoltry and sloth and was oppressed by the plundering incursions of the Amalekites, God sent Gideon (Judges 6:36-40) to deliver his people. They did not believe in his mission until God gave him a special sign of his presence and power. Gideon spread out a fleece and said to the Lord: "If there is dew only on the

fleece, and all the ground is left dry, then I shall know that you will deliver israel. . . .” And so it happened. Next morning the fleece was all dewy and the ground around it dry. Gideon again told the Lord: “Let the fleece alone be dry and let there be dew on the ground all around it.” And so it happened. The fleece stayed dry and there was dew all around it.

Mary is like Gideon’s fleece. She was the only creature preserved from the sin and corruption which existed in every human being; and she was filled with grace when humanity was longing for it:

From you, O Virgin, came forth the dew through which the flame of paganism was made to die, and so we cry out to you: Hail, O Virgin, dewy fleece whom Gideon in olden times had seen. (Akathist hymn)

NATIVITY OF MARY

On September 8 we celebrate the Nativity of the Mother of God, having prepared for it with anticipation on the previous day. An atmosphere of joy pervades the whole Office. In terms of the most exalted poetry and inimitable dogmatic precision, the Liturgy contemplates in Mary that which has been ordained from all eternity: the Immaculate, all-pure virgin, the creature who is to mark the beginning of the redemptive work of God. She is the temple wherein the hypostatic union will be accomplished. She is the realization in human terms of God’s eternal plan of redemption. Her nativity is the “dawn of salvation and of the deification of mankind.” The Church employs all her poetical resources in order to bring out the meaning and spiritual value of the event.

First of all, the story of the Nativity is told by using an account contained in an ancient manuscript written

about the beginning of the second century. It is called the Proto-Evangelium of James.

The parents of Mary: Joachim and Anne, were God-fearing and faithful observers of the Law, but they had not been blessed with children. Neither prayers nor tears helped relieve them from what was considered by all Jews to be a curse. For to be without children meant that a couple was therefore excluded from the possibility of giving birth to the Redeemer.

One day, as Joachim entered the temple to present an offering to the Lord, the High Priest drove him away, reviling him cruelly because he was without heirs. Depressed and greatly grieved by these reproaches, Joachim wandered into the desert to hide his shame. In his solitude he opened his desolate heart to the Lord. At that very moment his wife Anne was praying in her garden and pleading: "O Lord, look down with pity upon your servant, and see her shame. To what shall I compare myself, Lord? Shall I compare myself to the birds of the sky? No, they are better than I. You have blessed them with offspring and I have none. Shall I compare myself to the beasts of the earth? No, they are also more fortunate than I. You have blessed them with offspring, and I have none. Shall I compare myself to the fishes in this pond? No, they have their young, swimming around them, but I have no infant to fondle!"

While Joachim prayed in the desert, and Anne in her garden, an angel of the Lord appeared to both and announced to them the conception of a daughter who would have a great destiny. Overwhelmed with joy, Joachim hurried home with the happy tidings. At the Golden Gate of the city he met Anne, who was also running to tell him the same joyous news. In due time Joachim and Anne had a baby girl, whom they called Mary, and they cared for her with the utmost tenderness

until the day came for her presentation in the Temple.

PRESENTATION OF MARY

November 21 is the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the temple. It was first known in Jerusalem in the 6th century. In the 7th century it was celebrated throughout the whole East, and thence spread to the West. The general theological theme of this feast is that Mary, the Immaculate one, the Temple of the living God, is offered to the Almighty in his Holy House in Jerusalem.

Writers of theological treatises (homilies) and poets (hymnographers) such as Andrew of Crete, Joseph the Hymnographer, the great Photius, John of Damascus and others, delight in describing this event. Using every possible literary form and style, they vie with one another in trying to bring out the spiritual value and the divine message of the feast. They put at the service of their Despina all their poetical and scholarly talents, impregnated with their profound love and enthusiasm. The following quotations are from the liturgy of the feast.

O faithful, let us exchange glad tidings today,
Let us sing psalms to the Lord
and hymns of praise in honor of Mary, his Mother, our Queen.
She is his holy Tabernacle, the Ark
That contained the Word whom nothing can contain.
She is offered to God as a child in a marvelous way,
And Zachary, the High Priest, receives her with great joy,
For she is the dwelling place of the Most High.

The celebration of Mary's Presentation in the Temple is a perfect example of how Christianity should treat the realities of the Spirit. Once the event is contemplated in

God, faith and love sing praise and admiration.

Come and receive joyfully the one whom the
Prophets of God announced by the inspiration
Of the Holy Spirit.
Introduce her into the Holy Temple
That she may be brought up in holiness
To become the throne of God, a palace,
A palace of delight to the Lord of us all.

Even legends and popular fancy enter into the expression of faith to make it a delight. Who cares if the details are exact history or not? It is a beauty, and we find joy in it and limitless horizons for our meditation.

When Anne was graced with the pure and ever-virgin Mary, she presented her to the Temple of God, and called all of her little companions to carry flaming torches and walk before her. And she said: 'Go, my child, to the One who sent you to me. For you are promised to him by vow. You are an incense of delicate fragrance. Enter into the veiled places and learn the mysteries of God. Prepare yourself to be a delightful dwelling place of Jesus, who grants great mercy to the world.'

The day of the Presentation (so the legend goes), Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary, invited all the neighborhood children to accompany their daughter to the temple. They all carried candles and walked with her in a joyous procession while "the angels looked down from their balconies of heaven to admire Mary and clap their hands for joy saying, 'Behold! O Wonder! The Virgin enters into the Holy of Holies. Today the young maidens come forth in great joy, carrying flaming torches before Mary, the holy spiritual Torah. They bring her with great honor to the Holy of Holies, foretelling that from her will

shine forth the Splendid Light that will enlighten those who sit in the darkness of ignorance.' ”

In the temple, Mary becomes the example of those who seek in contemplation the vision of God. Gregory Palamas (1290-1359) writes: “Introduced at the age of three into the Holy of Holies of the Jewish Temple, Mary gives herself up to silent contemplation, better yet, to the very radiance of grace, the deifying power. The Mother of God unites her mind with God by attention and unceasing divine prayer. . .by rising above the multiform jumble of thoughts and above every intellectual endeavor. She beholds the glory of God and contemplates Divine Grace without in the least being subject to the power of feeling, while she herself was a sacred sight and a delight to those whose minds are set free” (Homily on the Entrance of the Blessed Mother of God).

ANNUNCIATION

When God wanted to restore human nature and bring it into fellowship with himself, he took a human body. The Annunciation is the celebration of this event. “The Son of God becomes the son of man.” “The Word is made flesh” (John 1:14). This is the story of the Incarnation, which no human intelligence can gauge or apprehend. Our Christian Church ceremonies endeavor to describe its significance, not by definitions and explanations but by poetry and action. She clothes this divine truth with garments of exaltation, admiration and awe.

At the Annunciation heaven and earth are a single stage where a great drama of love takes place. Love requires presence, and because God is Philanthropos, the Lover of man, he decided to dwell among men as a man. He needs, then, a mother, a woman. The veil is lifted, and

we gaze on the divine face of condescension in the fullness of its brilliance. In Nazareth of Galilee a young maiden was ready. Her humility, her longing and love invited the eternal plan. God does not force his grace on us. He offers it. And his offer must be received in full obedience. Successively, we see the virgin now in anguish, now wrapped in wonder in the light of what is revealed to her. She asks for an explanation. When the will of God is made known to her she gives her consent. She is willing to give herself and her flesh to God She surrenders herself wholly and unreservedly: "Be it done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

The truth that runs through the whole celebration of this mystery is that Mary's consent which was necessary for the divine plan of redemption, made her the most perfect cooperator in the work of salvation. The hymns that describe the event are all inspired with the most exquisite poetry. Indeed, no intellectual explanations could make any clearer the facets of this great mystery; only poetry, piety, and tender admiration can wrap them in the warmth of the truth.

Gabriel came to you, O Maiden, and disclosed God's plan which was from all eternity. He joyfully offered you his greeting: 'Hail, O land without human seed! Hail, O fleece receiving the heavenly manna! Hail, O Virgin who returned Adam to grace! The Lord is with you!'

The virginal Maiden replied to the Captain of the heavenly hosts and said

You come to me in a human form. Why then do you speak in words beyond human understanding, saying: 'The Lord will dwell in your womb'? Explain to me how I am to become a spacious vessel, a dwelling place of holiness for the One who is

above the Cherubim. Mislead me not, for I know no pleasure of the body, nor do I know man. How then shall I give birth to a son?

Gabriel answered the Maiden and said:

Whenever God so desires, he can overcome the laws of nature. What is impossible to man may be accomplished by him. Wherefore, O woman, most holy and pure, believe the truth of my word.

With all determination, courage, and self-dedication, Mary accepted the invitation of God: She answered and said:

Be it done to me according to your word,
And I will give birth to the bodiless God
Who will take flesh from me,
So that by being in union with a body
He might raise man to the original state or grace;
for God is all-powerful.

The Holy Spirit then effected in Mary the miracle of making her womb fertile without the intervention of a human male. The laws of nature were overcome, and a virgin received a real human child. At the sight of this unbelievable miracle of God Christianity marvels and sings a hymn of praise:

Today is the announcement of joy,
Today is the virginal festivity,
Today heaven is joined to earth,
Adam is renewed and Eve released from sorrow;
The dwelling place, our own substance,
has become God's temple,
Because a portion of it has been deified.
What a marvel!

The way of condescension is incomprehensible
and the manner of conception ineffable.
An angel is a minister of the marvel.
A virginal womb conceives the Son;
The Holy Spirit is sent;
The Father on high is well-pleased.

In the person of the Virgin humanity has given its consent to the Word of God who became flesh. She is the human medium through whom the Invisible becomes visible and the Unlimited becomes circumscribed. God the Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, becomes flesh in the womb of a mother. "Listen, O heaven, and give ear, O earth! The One whom nothing can contain is contained in the womb, and the Son of God becomes the Son of a Virgin" (Office of Matins). Through this mother, God communicates his inner life and love to creation.

THE AKATHIST

In the presence of this great and indescribable mystery the Church composed a hymn called the Akathist. It is the most celebrated poetic achievement of the Byzantine Church. The Akathist expresses at its highest the exuberant praise of her who gave birth to the Child, God among us. It is also the hymn that gave our mothers and sisters the pride and the consciousness of their glory and position in the life of humanity. This hymn exalts the mystery of the Incarnation in its fullness. The miraculous maternity and perpetual virginity of Mary cannot be admired without concurrent adoration of the wisdom and omnipotence of God who enclosed his Infinite Word in the Virgin's womb. This mystery is so great that the angels could not look at it without admiration and awe:

Gabriel was rapt in amazement as he beheld your virginity, and the splendor of your beauty, O Mother of God, and he cried out to you, 'By what name shall I call you? I am bewildered, I am lost! I shall greet you as I was commanded to do: Hail, O woman full of grace!'

This whole office (probably composed in the year 532) is to the Byzantine Church what the Rosary and the Litanies are to the Latin Rite. There is in the Oriental Church no better prayer expressing love and veneration for Mary. All the figures by which she has been represented in the Scriptures are repeated here, not in any dry or repetitious style but as coming from a living people who participate in the universal concert of praise.

The episodes of Holy Scripture come back to life before our very eyes. They set our hearts aflame and lead us to join the chorus of saints who, at the time of Mary, witnessed the great mystery of the Incarnation. The excellence of the Akathist hymn is seen in this, that it always brings us back to theological truth, to the fact that Mary is great because she is the Mother of God, the bridge between heaven and earth. For her intercession is all-powerful with God her Son; her holiness and beauty are such that even the angels in their glory fall in admiration before her.

DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

The great and tender devotion our Church has for the Mother of God finds its most beautiful expression in the celebration of Mary's death and Assumption into heaven. We call it the "falling asleep" or the "dormition" of the Mother of God. The feast was first solemnly celebrated in Jerusalem around the year 450. Almost immediately

thereafter the Maternity of Mary was theologically established at the Council of Ephesus (431).

Because of their understanding and realization of the meaning of the Divine Motherhood of Mary, Christians put no bounds to their enthusiasm and love for Mary when they recount her death and Assumption. Fantastic stories were woven according to the literary forms of the times. Some of these stories lack taste and balance. Some are most delicate and tender human expressions of love and exultation. But imaginary details will never invalidate the basic fact of the apostolic tradition of the death and Assumption of the Mother of God.

The central fact of the Assumption is beyond human understanding. It is so great a mystery that it set afire the imagination of the first Christians who wove these many legends and incorporated them into their prayer life.

The Mother of God finds her crowning achievement and her most glorious recognition in her Assumption. The fact of the Lord's holy Mother occupying in glory a particular and exalted place is inherently reasonable and thoroughly in keeping with the sense of Scripture. God granted Mary victory over death before the general resurrection. She who received the source of Life, Christ himself, could not remain under the dominion of death. Her tomb was like a nuptial chamber where a divine life was at work. Mary, whose flesh and blood were assumed by Christ, is a unique mother in that the flesh of her Son has no other source than her overshadowed womb.

Death and the tomb could not contain the Mother of God.
Since she is the Mother of Life, You lifted her up to life, O
Christ, who dwelled in her ever-virgin womb.

The Assumption of Mary's body is an extension of Christ's risen body. As in the Ascension Christ's body

penetrated the very fibres of the cosmos, so also Mary's body in her Assumption realizes the crowning achievement of the new creation. The yearning of created matter is here fulfilled and its hope realized. Here we see fulfilled the initial plan of the cosmos which was to be saturated with the Divinity. The sacred Humanity of Christ is the very seat and source of the transfiguration of the cosmos. So too, Mary's body, which is of the very same essence and texture, is joined at her Assumption to the One who came from her. Mary's Assumption has been considered by Christians as the personal triumph of Christ.

Come you feast-lovers, let us form a chorus,
Let us fill the Church with hymns of praise
at the falling asleep of the Ark of God!
For today heaven has opened its bosom.
It has received the human who gave birth
to the One whom nothing can contain.
Today the earth gives back to heaven the
woman who was the source of life.

The angels join the crowd of Apostles, and
Together they gaze upon the woman who gave
birth to the principle of Life, and who
now moves up from life to life.

Let us therefore venerate here, and beseech
her, saying: 'O Lady, do not forget those
who share your humanity and who celebrate
your holy Dormition with fervor and love.'

The most common legend about the Assumption of Mary is described in the Liturgy. While the Apostles were scattered all over the world, preaching and teaching the Good News, Mary remained in Jerusalem in the house of St. John. Her love of God, like an ardent flame, burned

steadily in her body. It was revealed to her that her life on earth was about to end. She expressed the wish to see the Twelve once more before she died. Each one of them was miraculously carried away from where he happened to be and borne on a cloud to the house on Mt. Zion where Mary was approaching death. The Apostles buried her body with great devotion and love. On the third day after her death Mary appeared to the Twelve telling them to rejoice, declaring that her body would not be with them anymore. The Apostles went to her tomb and found it empty. They understood that she had risen like her Son.

The tender love and awesome devotion of the Church and of many generations of Christians for Mary are expressed in hymns of the most delicate and precise theology. Sentiments of wonder are further expressed in the musical composition of these hymns. The following one, taken from the Vespers of the feast, is the work of a great poet and a psychological genius. Each strophe is sung in one of the eight tones. All possible melodies of the Byzantine musical world play and sing in succession; and there is a variety which creates a special thrill and conveys more depth to our amazement and to our exaltation:

The holy Apostles were taken up from every corner of the world and carried on clouds by order of God. And they gathered around your pure remains, O Source of Life, and kissed them with all reverence. As for the sublime powers of heaven, they came with their own leader to escort and pay their last respects to the most honorable body that had contained Life itself. Filled with awe, they marched together with the Apostles in silent majesty, professing to the Princes of heaven in a hushed voice: 'Behold the Queen of all, the divine maiden is coming! Lift up your gates and receive with becoming majesty the Mother of Light that never fades.' Because through her, salvation was made possible for the human race. She is the one upon whom no one may gaze and

to whom no one is able to render sufficient glory. For the special honor that made her sublime is beyond understanding. Wherefore, O most pure Mother of God, forever alive with your Son, the Source of Life, do not cease to intercede with him, that he may save and guard your people from every trouble, for you are our intercessor. To you we sing a hymn of glory with loud and joyful voices, now and forever.

When Mary is laid in the tomb, the wonder becomes infectious, and our love requires that we share it with the company of heaven:

O marvel! The Source of Life is laid in a tomb; the grave becomes a means of ascent to heaven! Rejoice, Gethsemane, holy chamber of the Mother of God! As for us, O faithful, let us cry out with Gabriel: 'Hail, O Woman full of grace! The Lord is with you, the Lord who because of you bestows great mercy upon the world.'

Mary's splendors and exalted role as Mother of the Savior make her a Queen of humanity, our Queen, "more honorable than the Cherubim and infinitely more glorious than the Seraphim." The angel proclaimed her to be so when he assured her that her Son was to be an eternal King from the loins of David. St. John Damascene proclaims that Mary "became the Queen of the whole universe when she became the Mother of the Creator" (*De Fide Orth.* IV:14).

All the glories of Mary are reflections of the glories of her Son. Psalm 45 is applied eminently to her: "At your right hand did the Queen stand in a robe of gold. . . ." The Assumption signals that the Queenship of Mary is not only a preeminence of honor. It implies a real link that binds heaven to earth:

In your maternity you did retain your virginity, And even ascended into heaven, you could not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life, being Mother of Life. Through your intercession save our souls from death.

CHAPTER 8

GOD-LOVE IN RENEWED CREATION: GOSPEL, ICON, CHURCH BUILDING

THE HOLY AND DIVINE GOSPEL BOOK

The Incarnation of Christ is intimately connected with the Holy and Divine Gospel Book which in fact prolongs, explains and mediates the Incarnation to our human experience. Since the Son of God is essentially life and life-creating, he communicates himself not only in his actions but also in the words he spoke and in the words spoken about him. These words are a medium for living, personal knowledge of him; they are spirit and truth.

When Christ communicates himself to us and pours himself out upon us, at one and the same time he reveals the Father and communicates the life of the Father to us. Jesus speaks to us in order to come to us as a gift of self-revelation and self-giving. In this communication our own transformation into deeper faith, hope and love is effected. "God spoke to our Fathers in fragmentary and varied fashion through the Prophets. But in the final age he has spoken to us in the Son" (Heb. 1:1-2).

Indeed, in the Old Testament, God revealed himself in an incomplete and fragmentary fashion. It was a slow unfolding of the mystery to come and a stimulus and an expression of longing for the revelation of God's splendor

and God's very being. The Old Testament is a "pale manifestation of what was coming: the reality is Christ" (Col. 2:17). Revelation means a "rolling up of the veil." Slowly, the curtains of the mystery of God are raised through book after book of the Old Testament, revealing little by little more and more of God. But Christ came as the fullness of God, as the "icon of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15).

Just as the Holy Spirit effected the Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin and thus the Son of God became Son of man, so the Spirit also inspired the Evangelists to write down the mystery of the Word of God, who thus became Word of man: the Holy and Divine Gospel Book. The very Divinity, the Eternal Word of God, entered the world and was fleshed in the word of man.

The Gospels are the Word of God, not because they mechanically reproduce everything that Christ said but because they are written about him under the impulse of the Spirit whom Christ has sent. "I have told you all this while I am still here with you. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will call to your minds all that I have told you" (John 14:25-26). The Holy Spirit came and "overshadowed" the Evangelists. He inspired them to verbalize in the best possible way the message of the Gospel.

The Gospels translate into human language and into human experience the life-giving Incarnation of the Son, who thus became again "incarnate of the Holy Spirit" in the word of man. God allows us to meet him in his mystery in this other way. The Word of God is now living with us forever in a Book, through which he will come alive in us and will awaken in us the same life that he awakened in its authors and in those to whom he originally spoke.

The Gospel Book is then the reality of the presence of Christ. It is the throne where the Logos presides and lives and teaches his people and the whole world. In the Byzantine Church, the ministers of the altar never touch the Gospel Book without bowing to it. They offer incense to it as they offer incense to Christ himself. This Book must be bound, not with regular binding used for any ordinary book, but with silver, gold or some other precious material. Christ is our King and our Pantocrator; therefore we have to clothe him with the raiment worthy of kings.

Also, we place the Gospel Book on the altar of our churches as on the throne of heaven where Christ presides over the whole worship and economia of his people. We carry it high above our heads in solemn procession and we prostrate as it passes by. This prostration is the sign of our acceptance and admiring gratitude of the great wisdom of God. Standing in awesome adoration before this mystery of love, we bow profoundly in worship to Christ present in his word, living in his Gospel Book: he, himself, speaking to and teaching us. The proclamation of the Word is a sacramental act because it is a transforming act of dialogue with God.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

When the Gospel is to be proclaimed, candles are always lit around the Gospel Book. As far back as the fourth century St. Jerome mentions this custom with admiration: "Whenever the Gospel is read the Eastern Churches light candles, partly to demonstrate their joy because of the Good News which the Gospel brings, and partly as a tangible way of representing the light of which the psalmist speaks: 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my paths'" (Cant. Vigilant c.III).

It is also a strict custom for all the people to stand to hear the proclamation of the Gospel. St. John Chrysostom remarks: "If the letters of a King are read in the theatre with great silence, much more ought we to compose ourselves and stand up with attentive ears when the letters, not of an earthly king, but of the Lord of the Angels, are read to us" (Hom. I in Math.). The Apostolic Constitutions state that "when the Gospel is read, let the priests and deacons and all the people stand with a profound silence" (Lib. II, c.vii.).

The holy monk Isidore of Pelusium in Egypt mentions a custom which is still faithfully practiced by all ecclesiastic dignitaries and people in the Eastern Church: "When the true Shepherd appears at the Opening of the Holy Gospels, then the Bishop himself rises and lays aside all symbols of his dignity or authority, signifying thereby that the Lord himself, the Author of the pastoral function, his God and his Master, is present" (Lib. I, op. CXXXVI).

The proclamation of the Holy Gospel is not only the manifestation of the Kingdom, but its realization in the community: "The Lord is here!" the parousia is realized. The proclamation of the Holy Gospel is always introduced by the words, "At that time," which is the sacred time, the "now" of the Lord which opens onto eternity. The Church is a pilgrim, and Christianity is a way, always opening and moving toward its destination.

Early Christianity was so deeply conscious of this "parousial" mood that it shifted the Sabbath from the final day of the week, which was a day of repose, an ending, to the first day of the week which heralded a new beginning. This bright, new day became the Lord's day. This modification indicates the change in attitude from one of repose to that of a great march toward the parousia, toward the Presence.

Each morning at Matins, at the commemoration of

the Resurrection, the Gospel Book is brought in a procession with great reverence to the middle of the community for the adoration of all the people. It is like a real manifestation of the "now" of the Resurrection of the Lord. It is the coming of the Eternal into the now of time. In order to express security and joy in Christ, all those present come forward and kiss the Book and bow to it, while the bells of the Church peal their joyous, triumphant sounds.

In order to make the message of Christ more mysteriously living and efficacious, the Holy Gospel is chanted. A text is read—no, more, a message is proclaimed. The Gospel is the message of God's salvation and of God's love which needs no interpreter but only a powerful declaration in the Holy Spirit. "Sanctify them in truth. Thy word is truth," said the Lord. For this reason the Gospel is not held in the hands while being proclaimed. It must rest on a special stand, or on the head of a server or member of the congregation. It is then sung with majesty and melodious solemnity. The chanting of the Gospel is an invitation to calm and recollection, to hunger and thirst! "Wisdom! Let us all stand and be ready to hear the Good News! Let us pray to the Lord our God that we may be worthy to hear the Good news! Wisdom! Let us all stand!" And the people answer: "Glory to you, O Lord, glory to you!"

The Gospel is not a text. It is the great majesty and wisdom of God and the revelation of the Eternal Word. It is the coming of Someone. It is the Lord Jesus Christ in the here and now. St. John Chrysostom says that after the Emperor has spoken we all say, "Glory to you, O Lord," but when the Lord Jesus speaks in the Gospel we say the formula twice: "Glory to you, O Lord, glory to you!"

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE ICON

We call the sacred paintings of our Church icons because they manifest the otherwise hidden presence of God and are sacraments which put the soul in direct contact with this presence. The icon is a witness which in some way extends the presence of the saints, of the Holy Scriptures, and makes them present realities. The theology of icons, which received its formal pronouncement at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicea (787 A.D.), is based on the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Redemption.

“Christ,” says St. Paul, “is the icon of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Christ is the Icon of the Father because he manifests the Father to mankind. “He who sees me, sees the Father,” Jesus said to Thomas. The underlying idea of icon, as indeed of the Logos, the Word of God, is the manifestation of the hidden. The icon not only manifests the hidden, it shares in the reality of what it represents. “Icon does not demand equality with the archetype,” wrote St. John of Damascus, “but in fact we know that Christ, the Icon of the Father, is identical with the Father in every particular, differing from him only by the fact of being begotten.”

Since the days of Constantine the Great (315 A.D.), faithful Christians have rendered honor to icons, statues or images representing Christ, his Mother or the Saints. Such practices, however, encountered heavy opposition, particularly on the part of the Jews and Moslems. The Jews regarded images as a grave infraction against the law of Moses (Ex. 20:4), and the Moslems referred to the Koran, which forbids any representation of God, or even of any living creature. Also, some superstitious practices of some misguided souls made certain Christians believe, in good faith, that the veneration of images was in fact a return to paganism.

Under the influence of these latter ideas, Emperor Leo III, the Isaurian, declared in the year 726 that the cult of images was forbidden, and he ordered all of them to be destroyed; he thus earned the name of "iconoclast" or the "destroyer of images." The general contention of the iconoclasts was that since God is nonmaterial he cannot be present in matter: in paint and wood. St. John of Damascus was the greatest defender of the legitimacy of the veneration of icons. He replied that one who denies that God can be present in material things must also deny the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. And he specified: "I worship the Creator of matter, who for my sake became material and dwelt in matter and through matter effected my salvation. I will not cease worshiping the matter through which my salvation has been effected."

Because of their close connection with the primary Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and Redemption, icons have long played an essential role in the liturgical and family life of Christian peoples. Icons are hung on walls, placed on small altars, or set permanently in elaborate shrines. Before every icon burns a hanging lamp which conveys and externalizes the mysterious, invisible Presence of God. The Council of Nicea mentioned above decreed that icons are to be venerated in the same way as the Sacred Scriptures. As the Scriptures convey God's presence in words, so the icons convey this same Presence in pictures. The icons are not an arena for artistic innovations anymore than the Bible is a showplace for displaying one's literary abilities. In both cases, the personality and technique of the artist, as of the biblical writer, are always to be subordinated to the word of God.

Besides being a witness to the Incarnation, the icon is a proof and a pledge of the Christian's power to redeem creation. St. Paul writes that the whole of nature "groans in common travail to be set free from the tyranny of

corruption, to share in the glorious freedom of God's sons" (Rom. 8:21-22). The icon is a further instance of the divine Presence revivifying matter.

In an icon all the elements of nature are represented and transformed into a vision of God. The mineral world is represented by chalk and alabaster which is covered by paint and by the jewels and precious metals which adorn the icon. The plant world is represented by the wood on which the icon is painted. The animal world is represented by the eggs with which the paint is mixed. And even the human world is represented by the relics of the saints which are added to the paint. This amalgamation of all the elements of creation in the icon is an ascertainment of and emphasis upon the indwelling holiness of the entire created world which participates and shares in the redemption of Christ.

Icons are generally painted by monks or by families who for generations have dedicated themselves to this art. In their preparation, the study of the Bible and a life of gospel simplicity are as essential as the mastery of the artistic technique. An icon painter begins his icon by forty days of prayer and fasting, after which he and the wood on which he is to paint are blessed by the Church.

A true icon of Christ must reveal both his humanity and divinity. A photographic image can only portray the humanity. An icon painted deliberately avoids a too-realistic or photographic representation. Icons seek to symbolize the transfigured, resurrected body of Christ and the Saints. This glorified body, as St. Paul says, is not like the earthly body; it is a "spiritual body." The colors of paint, then, must be as bright as the precious stones blazing with flames of light; and the background of gold and jewels signify the glory of heaven where God resides and which is the home of "spiritual bodies."

This image of glorified bodies is achieved by various

stylizations of a symbolic nature. The icon must never present a three-dimensional appearance. The elongated features of the figures seem to stretch toward heaven, while the proportionately small hands and feet denote sensitivity.

Thus an icon of Christ or of a Saint tells us next to nothing about his "real" physical appearance. It does not give any detail of the person's social or historical background. A Saint announces the end of time when everything is perfected in the risen Christ in the parousia. An icon, therefore, radiates the influence of man beyond human history. It bears history in itself, but it proclaims it in a different manner. We contemplate the mystery that the icon portrays in silence and awe because the powerlessness of human words compels us to veneration by silence and meditation.

The face is never shown in profile because the profile is considered an absence, while the icon must reveal the fullness of redemption. And the most important feature of an icon is the eyes! They gaze beyond time, thus suggesting the real face of man, fixed in eternity. The eyes express wisdom and contemplation beyond the reach of passion—a spiritual calmness, yet full of compassion. There should be no shadow in an icon because there is no shadow in the Kingdom of God.

The icon is not only an aesthetic entity, it is also a little compendium of the faith and worship life of the Church. It is, in miniature, the life of the Church as lived in Christ. A saving truth is not communicated by word alone but by awakening the vital forces of life, and by the presentation of beauty. It is because God loved us that he turned a visible face toward us, a human face. He turned to us the face of absolute beauty, a face filled with the fullness of God and the fullness of being. It is the love of this beauty, and the beauty of this love which the icon bears and reveals.

Truly the icon is, in the words of St. John of Damascus, "a revelation and a song of triumph." It is a grace and a life, namely, the life of God that penetrates and purifies. From the icon properly venerated emanates a power that inspires hope and gives consolation. St. John of Damascus calls the icon a "channel of divine grace." It is a bearer of the Spirit, a concrete example of matter restored to its original harmony and beauty, a first fruit of the transfigured cosmos. By the contemplation of a sacred representation the mind becomes filled with its meaning and mystery. The Divinity represented there takes possession of the viewer. It is a basic psychological principle that the contemplative becomes transformed into that which he beholds: "You become what you contemplate."

The proper and most acceptable way to pray before an icon is to extend one's elbows and hands, palms opened upward in a gesture of humble begging and peaceful resignation.

In a Byzantine church the altar is regarded as heaven, the throne of God. The altar, therefore, is hidden by a screen representing the division between heaven and earth which no human eye can penetrate. This screen is covered with icons, visible figures which serve as a point of contact between heaven and earth. Their visible presence reminds us of the invisible presence of the court of heaven. The entire church, in fact, is filled with a definite arrangement of icons, the whole forming one great icon of the kingdom of God. "If anyone asks 'What is Christianity?'" says St. John of Damascus, "take him to the church and show him the holy icons."

In the year 843, at the instigation of the Empress Theodora, the Synod of Constantinople instituted for the First Sunday of the Great Lent a special celebration to commemorate the triumph of the Church in the explanation and theological vindication of the icon. They called this day "Sunday of Orthodoxy," or "Sunday of the True

Faith." Later the feast was extended to include the celebration of the triumph of the true Faith over the heresies of the past.

A final word here about mosaics would be in order. Mosaics are small cubes of enamel, glass, marble and sometimes Mother of Pearl cemented together to produce a picture or pattern. They were first inspired by the necessity and taste for monumental decoration. They were the natural, necessary complement of architectural realizations, the soul and inspiration of the monument itself.

The technique which Byzantine artists employed to produce these marvelous works of art is still a mystery to our modern science. They were made in such a manner as to absorb and reflect, at one and the same time, the light which strikes them, so that the representation looks alive. Thus the representation becomes more of a vision than a picture. As the observer changes position the small cubes light up or fade, creating the impression of something changing and alive. Mosaics are more like poems which speak about life in beautiful shades of meaning and which breathe and radiate the invisible atmosphere of the presence of God. The most famous mosaics are those of Ravenna, Italy, and those discovered in Saint Sophia, Constantinople, and in other famous shrines of Orthodoxy.

ICONOGRAPHY OF THE THEOTOKOS

In Byzantine thought icons must express and explain a basic truth of faith. Mother of God, Theotokos, is the main idea expressed in the representations of Mary. The veneration given the Mother of God is addressed, in fact, to the God-Man she bore. She is never presented for our veneration without her Son; only at the foot of the cross is

she alone. There she stands in an attitude of prayer, extending her arms to gather all the prayers of creation and to offer them to her Son and her God. She is the symbol of the praying Church. By this same attitude she offers to mankind her own Son as the way to the Father.

The clouds of incense that surround her icons and the multitudes of candles which burn around them are testimonies of a profound devotion and of a tender filial love for the very Mother of Christ and Mother of us all. Her icon occupies a place of predilection in our churches. In the apsis of the sanctuary, when the Lord himself is not represented as presiding over the worship of the faithful, it is his Blessed Mother who attracts attention. Her title here is "Mother of God higher than the heavens."

She is generally depicted in this icon as standing in beauty, or seated on a throne, holding her Son on her lap or clasping him with both hands to her bosom. She appears fully conscious and proud of her motherhood. Her oval face, her large brown eyes, fixed and immobile, give her the appearance of being firmly rooted in eternity. She is clothed in the vestments of a Byzantine Empress.

In order to accentuate the solemnity of this attitude, the artist uses a completely frontal exposition of direct representation of the whole person of Christ and of his Mother. This icon is also called "Virgin of Majesty" or "The ground where stands the Tree of Life," or "Sanctuary broader than the heavens." God, whom nothing can contain, is here contained in Mary. Most inscriptions of this icon bear the title "Incarnation." Art could not express in any lovelier way the mystery of the Word present in Mary. Since this is the "Mother higher than the heavens," her court is a retinue of saints and angels, of virgins and princesses surrounding her on both sides of the apsis.

Mary is also represented on the small altar of

preparation. Since this altar represents Bethlehem where Christ was born, it is highly appropriate to see his Mother beside him in an attitude of awe, adoration and joy. She bears three stars: one on her forehead and one on each shoulder. They signify her perpetual virginity before, during and after she gave birth to Christ.

We are mostly impressed by the presence of Mary on the icon screen. Even at the time of Justinian, when the icon screen was only a simple enclosure, Mary was represented as a "vase of eternal splendor" (Paul the Silenciary, 535).

On the south side of the screen, which is the right side of the altar and the place of honor, is our Lord holding in his left hand the Gospel Book of his word; with his right hand he is calling for silence and attention. On the north side of the royal door is the "Hodigitria" or the "Leading Lady." Mary holds our Lord in her lap with one arm, and with the other hand she points to her Son, thus inviting the faithful to go to him. Her gesture is one of respect and humble meditation and serenity. This icon has an infinite variety of expression. To name but a few: "Virgin of Smolensk," "Virgin of Vilna," "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour," and the Virgin called "Painted by St. Luke." The most perfect reproduction of this last type is the one in Maria Maggiore in Rome. There it is called "Salus Populi Romani." On the royal door it is the Annunciation which reminds us that the Incarnation is the center of all the mysteries of our holy faith.

The Slavic mentality and sensibility turned the icon called "Painted by St. Luke" into another type called "Our Lady of Tenderness" (Oumilenia). It is also called "Our Lady of the Kiss" or "Our Lady of Consolation." The Divine Infant, "forgetting" his character as Son of God, appears as a true infant. He cuddles up to his Mother's bosom, lays his cheek close to hers, and hugs her

with one arm. With his other hand he caresses her chin or her face, or sometimes hugs her with both arms. This icon, humanly so tender, was greatly loved, especially in Slavic countries. The perfect representation of it is "Our Lady of Vladimir."¹

In the first iconographical period we hardly find any icons depicting the Dormition or the Assumption of Mary. From the ninth to the twelfth centuries, the "golden" period of Byzantine iconography, the themes of the life of Mary entered into the icon and mosaic representations. A typical theme is Mary on a bed in the center of the icon, with a group of Apostles on either side. Peter is incensing the body of the Mother of his Master with great devotion and respect. At the center of the icon stands Christ with the soul of Mary in his hands; her soul is in the form of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. Two angels descend from heaven with veiled hands to receive the soul. Some architectural designs in the background often suggest the house of Mary, or perhaps the Temple.

A less well-known theme of Byzantine iconography of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the "Suffering Mother." Mary is at the Cross or at the Descent of the Body from the Cross. At the foot of the Cross Mary is represented as heavy with suffering and overcome with bewilderment at all the bloody events of the crucifixion. Her tears run over her face. Yet, she stands straight and majestic, sustained by a superior strength of soul. She seems to realize the full meaning of the death of her Son. Her hands are extended under her heavy veil, not only to implore salvation and peace for the world, but also to unite herself and the whole world to the suffering of her Son.

At the "Descent from the Cross," once the sacrifice is consummated and humanity redeemed, Mary becomes again a Mother in her attitude. Mary's immense suffering and agony are expressed by a gesture of her hand clasping

her chin or covering her face. She is bowed over her Son's body which she tries to kiss with tenderness and compassion; yet, she is not crushed by her feelings. Her attitude reveals as much adoration of the mystery as relief at the realization of the final outcome. "Mother, do not cry. I will rise on the third day" (Office of Matins).

In the Byzantine Church icons of Mary are created for very specific theological reasons, and they are not multiplied at random through an exaggerated piety. Rather, they follow a precise theological order, preconceived according to the role and place of Mary in the *economia* of God as expressed in the liturgical life of the Church.

This theological order and rationale is twofold: the divine Motherhood of Mary, on which all her privileges are founded and from which they all take their meaning; and her universal mediation, which is exercised in Christ and through Christ "who is the only mediator" (1 Tim. 2:5).

The whole meaning of who the Blessed Mother of God is, and the reasons for our devotion, love and awe for her, are most beautifully and succinctly expressed in the prayer of thanksgiving we recite to her after having received the mysteries of the Holy Eucharist. I quote it here because of its great literary beauty and theological precision:

O most Holy Lady, Mother of God, light of my poor soul, my hope, my protection, my refuge, my comfort and my joy: I thank you for having enabled me to be a partaker of the most pure Body and the most precious Blood of your Son. Enlighten the eyes of my heart, you who did bear the Source of Immortality. O you, most tender and loving Mother of the merciful God, have mercy upon me, and grant me a repentant and contrite heart with humility of mind. Recall my thoughts from wandering into all kinds of distractions, and make me worthy to receive always and until my last breath the most

pure mysteries of Christ for the healing of my soul and body; and give me tears of repentance and thanksgiving, that I may chant and praise you all the days of my life, for you are always blessed and glorified. Amen.

*THE CHURCH BUILDING: LITURGICAL EXPRESSION OF THE
SANCTIFICATION OF THE WORLD*

The idea of theosis (divinization) is expressed in the architecture of the church itself. In its rich and elaborate decorations it is beautifully sensuous. "The Divinity," writes Fedotov, "is accessible through matter; It cannot only be seen, but even smelled, tasted, and kissed; sounds, holy persons, sacraments, relics, icons and incense, convey the divine Presence to each and every sense."

While the European mentality expresses its conception of God in the clean, clear and directly *pointed spire* of Gothic construction—signifying the positive foundation of faith—the Byzantine expresses it by the *dome* that gathers together in one embrace the whole universe, transformed and transfigured by the all-pervading presence of God.

This typical Byzantine conception looks upon the church building as the earthly heaven, one and the same as that heavenly place where God dwells. The church is called "heaven on earth" because it is lit by the light of the Resurrection, filled with the joy of triumph over death; it is the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit who is Life and life-giving.² The church as the house of God contains the whole world in figures, and in it we are the invited guests, eagerly awaited and feasted. We encounter God at the banquet of love; we hear him in the proclamation of the Gospel; we touch him in our brother with whom we sing and play and enjoy the pardon of all our stumbling—our complete reconciliation.

Here is the fountain that made us members of Christ. There is the oil that flowed over us in the power of the Holy Spirit. The friends with whom eternity will be a sunrise are all here with us, praying, waiting, celebrating the wedding feast of the Lamb. We see here the marvels of the Incarnation: the Resurrection and the Ascension. We are in the Kingdom. The Church was conceived and constructed to contain the Kingdom. The Kingdom is depicted in the icons that cover the walls, the ceiling and every corner of the building.

As I have explained, the icon which combines in itself all the elements of the cosmos, and which we salute and kiss, is not an object in and for itself; it is a window opening onto the eternal. Icons say nothing, do nothing; they simply are. Before they are messages they are presences. They are mirrors containing and reflecting a divine presence. They localize in a given pinpoint of space the all-pervading presence of God in the world. The church building is the place where all these reflectors of the Presence are brought together.

This theology of the icon is also a key to the understanding of our sacraments, on which we shall comment later. For example, we do not stress the actual moment of transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ because for us it is but a different mode of the Presence which is always there if we could but see it. The elements are truly changed into Christ's Body and Blood, but God's Presence is always radiant and living in creation.

Likewise with the baptismal water. The water is somehow already redeemed, sanctified and ready to yield another mode of the Presence; Chrismation does but seal that Presence by the imparting of the Holy Spirit. Matter is "spirit-bearing." It transmits the life of God. There is about the world something closely and intimately allied

with God so that it can even in some way “intercede” for us:

Most honoured Paradise, garden of beauty and delight.
Dwelling place made perfect by God.
Hope of the sinner, home of the Saints,
And delight of the Prophets.

Pray to the Lord our God,
By the harmony of the rustling of your leaves,
That He may open to me the gates that I closed by my sins.
(Vespers, First Sunday of Lent)

Precisely because of this ineffable presence of God, the universe becomes a living reality, redolent of God, though not assimilated into the Divinity. Matter is not evil, but neither is it divine. It is a meeting place for God and man, sharing at one and the same time in the mystery of the Presence and in the fragility of man. Nothing in this world is neutral; everything has its center of reference in God. It is probably because certain trends in theology opposed “sacred” to “profane,” “natural” to “supernatural,” and “religion” to “life” that much of life became meaningless and unredeemable.

Byzantine hymnology pictures Adam cast out of Paradise, looking toward it and weeping because he was expelled from that place where he should have recognized and adored God. We hear from the simple heart of the Russian pilgrim how this rift can be repaired:

And when I prayed in my heart, everything about me appeared to be pleasing and lovely. It was as though the trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, and the light were saying that they existed for the sake of man, in testimony and proof of the love of God for mankind. It was as if they were saying that everything prayed and praised God. The world is full of joy

and delight. Everything draws me to love and thank God—people, trees, plants, animals. I find in them the magic of the name of Jesus.

Our religious activity is directed toward blessing the elements of this world so that the mystery of redemption becomes effective in us now. Thus the blessing signifies the return of matter to its pristine and essential meaning and function. To bless is to give thanks. In and through thanksgiving man acknowledges the true nature of the things he receives from God; thus, he makes them to be for *him* what they essentially are: holy and redeemed vehicles of the Presence.

In the beginning of the Liturgical year, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14), the Church blesses the four corners of the earth with the Holy Cross. She turns to the East, West, North and South, as if to plant the Cross in the four corners of the world and seal the whole cosmos with the presence of the Pantocrator.

At the feast of the Baptism of Christ the Church sanctifies all the waters of the earth after the example of him whose touch first purified the waters of the Jordan, and whose words praised the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. On Holy Saturday the Church blesses the “new light” and the “new fire.” At Pentecost, flowers, laurel leaves and evergreens are strewn on the floor of the church and hung in clusters from its pillars. At the feast of the Transfiguration, food is brought to the church as an expression of thanksgiving and ceremonial offering. On the vigils of the great feasts of Christ and his Mother, bread, oil and wine are blessed and distributed to “rejoice the heart of man”; and after the ceremonies, in many places, there is often folk dancing in front of the church.

Nor are the animals left out! Many icons portray animals looking with admiration and hope at man who is

now saved and sanctified. There is a special icon of Pentecost which summarizes everything we have been trying to describe in this last section: the mystery of the sanctification of the world, and how these elements are symbolized in the church building. The icon pictures "Old Man Cosmos" right in the heart of the pentecostal event. He is crowned; yet his hands are extended to receive the Holy Spirit with as much eagerness as the Church and the Apostles. We might say that the church building is the "New Man Cosmos," the physical place where the kingdom shines forth and from which it radiates onto the whole of creation.

PART IV

NOSTALGIA FOR GOD: RETURN

CHAPTER 9

GOD'S GLORY AND MAN'S SIN

THE MYSTERY OF SIN

The mystery of man's sinfulness cannot be understood except by faith in the appearance of the Son of God in the sinful flesh of man. Christ did not give an explanation of evil, nor did he propound any thesis about it. His only answer to evil was a practical one: he defeated it.

The purpose of Christianity is to give the same answer and to remove evil from life as much as possible. Only in Christ and through Christ can the "image of God" in man be healed and fulfilled. For Eastern theology, Christ's mission is less the remission of sins or the satisfaction of divine justice, as the restoration of the "image of God" and the deification of man.

In the Incarnation the Son of God emptied himself in order to unite himself to mankind. By this union he purified human nature and redeemed it. He sanctified it

and returned it to its center of life and love, the Father. The "circular movement of love" in creation was perfected in Christ and through Christ. The Eastern view of sin can be expressed by saying that if sin is a falling away from God, redemption will be a re-integration of man into the life of God. "Paradise becomes once again accessible to man" (Gregory of Nyssa).

This notion of the deification of man, propounded by Athanasius of Alexandria, became a key concept in Eastern theology. "Christ is true God and true man. As consubstantial with the Father in his divinity, he is one with him. As consubstantial with man in his humanity, he became what we are in order that we might become what he is." From this theology came the famous, often-repeated saying, that "God became man so that man might become God."

According to Holy Scripture, as soon as the first Adam became fully aware of his powers, he made a bad choice and cut himself off from God by seeking to be independent. God summoned him to response and responsibility, but Adam answered by choosing to be self-centered and self-sufficient. The grace moving him toward a personal and intimate covenant was rejected. Adam ate of the fruit and made himself his own god. He dared to determine by his own power what is right and what is wrong in defying the precept of God; thus he came to know "good and evil." He turned away from God and from his real nature by setting himself, instead of God, as the goal of his life. The "first beauty of creation" was spoiled and reduced to sterility and death. This is the meaning of the expulsion from the garden of Eden, and the placing of an angel with a flaming sword to guard the gate to Paradise.

By sin, man's course of life deviates from its only true direction and becomes centered in himself. Man cuts

himself off from the tree of life. Sin is that act by which man, raised to the level of having a rational, moral choice, and capable of opening up to the flow of God's reality, deliberately returns to an inferior state, preferring his will to that of God's. In this egocentricism man sees things in terms of his own fragmentation. He disengages himself from God and thus cuts the bond of love by which God holds him in close embrace; he loses the harmony of life and love which is that "original justice," our proper orientation to God.

Instead of rising up to God and perfecting his union with him, man follows a path contrary to his calling. He thereby creates for himself a new situation which can only be called death. The wage paid by sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Death in the bible means first of all the separation from God. What could be more lethal than that! When Adam sinned he died, at that very moment—not physical death, for he continued to live—but he had cut himself off from true relationship with God. This is death in the deepest sense. Byzantine hymnology depicts Adam "sitting outside of Paradise" and weeping at the loss of his garden. Man now always remembers that he was made in and for Paradise. He ever yearns to return to his proper relationship with God, which is what Paradise really is. This yearning and longing is man's nostalgia for God.

Man ought to be reaching beyond the world and touching God. Instead he yields to the world's pressures and inescapably settles down in it and clings to it. Thus the material world, instead of deepening his vision of God, helps to hide it. The inexorable tendency of self-centeredness and forgetfulness of God expresses itself in man's greed, anger, lust, domination and pride—in a word, egoism. Egoism darkens the mind and holds man back from his ascent to God. St. Paul gives classic expression to this most universal of all experiences when he says: "I

cannot understand my own behavior. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate" (Rom. 7: 15-17). Man's struggle is not a struggle with his true nature but with the deformation of this nature. Man, by Adam's choice, was alienated from God, from himself, from creation and from the human family whose members now were at variance with one another. Thus, man in the world stands between curse and hope and between the knowledge of good and evil which he stupidly wished to taste.

PERSONAL SIN AND ITS BURDEN

Sin is not only the breaking of a commandment or the violation of a law of God. It is also a self-glorification, a self-exaltation, a refusal to recognize God as the center and the focal point of one's life and love. It is a rebellious act against the will of God and a denial of his loving presence. Sin immerses the soul in fetters and blocks communion with God. The soul enters into a prison-like state of egotism and confusion called by the Fathers the "captivity of the soul."

Because of this inclination to self, man feels his guilt as inexplicable and inexcusable; it becomes for him an immense burden. As a creature of God he realizes that sin is a deformity, realizes that by sinning he commits an anti-Godly act, and for this reason he experiences guilt. He seems to himself to live in a cursed world; because it is "God's curse," he feels even more heavily burdened. His self cannot satisfy him. His heart becomes restless, as St. Augustine says, because it does not rest in God.

This guilt inclines man to think of God as a hard Master who makes laws and imposes heavy sanctions. Because of his own tendency toward egoism, he tends to

picture God as a tyrant, always on the lookout to catch him doing wrong so that he can inflict punishment on him. Because of man's experience of the burden of his sin, it is difficult for him to realize that God is a Father, and that he is tender and compassionate. So his ordinary response down through the ages has been to devise sacrifices and offerings of all kinds in order to placate this irate and vengeful God.

Throughout his whole life, in all his teachings and especially in his parables, Christ assures us that God is a Father, that he is good and that he is "for us," full of infinite love and mercy. His love is all-embracing: "He causes rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike" (Matt. 5:45). God, then, is not a hard taskmaster or an irate, vengeful individual. He is a generous and loving Father, the *Philantropos*, the lover of men. He is good and the source of all goodness:

Because of our many sins,
 Where shall we hide, O Lord?
 In the Heavens?
 There resides your majesty and your glory.
 In the bottom of the earth?
 There your hand is all-powerful!
 Even in the caves of the earth your presence is all-pervading.
 We rather come to you, O merciful Lord,
 and hide in the palm of your hand,
 for your love is immeasurable,
 and your tenderness without limit.

(Octo-Ectos)

The Christian is called to show that man can acquire that forgiveness which God bestows in abundance. Conversion, *metanoia*, is, in a real sense, the very heart of the Christian's life, of man's life. By sin we have turned away from God. Now our constant attitude must be an

ever-deepening turning toward him. The Christian, in particular, is called, throughout his entire life, to a continual metanoia by following Christ in his humility and his life of glorifying the Father. The Christian ought to proclaim to the world that the Lord is *for us* and *with us*, that he is in touch with us to gather us to himself where his forgiveness is always at work.

Christ opened the minds of his apostles to understand the scriptures on the road to Emmaus. He said to them: "So you see how it is written...that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of this" (Luke 24:45-47). The Christian is the leaven which the Holy Spirit places in this world to make the whole dough rise and mature into the realization of the Fatherhood of God. The Christian is called to witness to the fact that the radical egoism by which all mankind is wounded has been healed by Christ. By the graciousness of God and by the gift of his love, we are freed and brought to full human existence. In Christ we are forgiven and restored to the image of God.

FORGIVENESS OF SIN THROUGH PRAISE

The forgiveness of sins can be viewed from many different aspects. The spirituality of the West tends to accentuate man's activity in receiving the sacraments, performing good works and believing in Christ. These are all part of the total response; but Byzantine spirituality has the peculiar emphasis of seeing the forgiveness of sins effected through *praise* of God.

Christ's act of love in his passion and resurrection is a victory over the forces of evil and over sin itself. We share in this victory when we acknowledge it and praise the

Victor. We actually enter into the Kingdom as we recognize him, in praise, to be the source of our sanctification, and we participate in his glory and holiness when joyful praise cleanses our hearts while celebrating his victory:

We beg forgiveness for our stumblings, Christ God; because you chose, of your own free will, to ascend upon the cross in the flesh in order to deliver from the enemy's yoke those you had created. For this reason we cry out to you in thanksgiving: 'You our Savior have filled all things with joy when you came to save the world.'

(Feast of the Ikon of Christ)

Sts. Basil and Chrysostom and many other Fathers of the Church often repeat that one of the effects of praising God is to "forgive sins," "purify the soul," "bring down the grace of God." St. Cyril of Jerusalem insists that "by our spiritual hymns our sins are forgiven, and we sanctify ourselves." St. Basil says that "when the day is breaking (his community) sings together with one mouth and one heart the psalm of confession (Ps. 51) to the Lord, each making his own the words of repentance and thus having his sins forgiven him." St. John Chrysostom explains that "Psalm 141 has the effect of purifying a soul and forgiving sins. This evening psalm is a medicine that removes all defilement of sin. By stirring up the soul it enkindles a desire for God. Once the soul has burst into flame and overflows with joy and love, sins are removed and forgiven. Where there is love, every evil vanishes from the soul. When God is thus remembered, sins are forgiven and evil destroyed."

Confession, therefore, is not only an acknowledgement of man's misery and of his need for help, it is also (and perhaps more so) a joyful proclamation of God's

saving goodness; it is an act of worship:

My heart is ready, O God,
My heart is ready!
I will sing and play.
Awake my glory!
Awake lute and lyre,
I mean to wake the dawn. (Ps. 57:8)

Thus, as we contemplate the beauty of God in praise, we discover our own inner beauty, the image of the original innocence and the traces of future glory. This discovery makes us sing and praise because "we become what we contemplate." In the very act of praising God our hearts are changed, metanoia is realized, and repentance is both effected and manifested by our song. In praise, the Incarnate Word of God takes hold of our nature and transforms it into his own inner life. Sins, all sins, are then forgiven. It is nothing else but the movement of the Holy Spirit catching hold of a man and identifying him with the eternal movement of the Trinity whence he came. This Spirit, who bears witness to our spirit, gathers fragmented man together, elevates him, and submits him in joyful surrender to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Seen from man's perspective, praise and the glorification of God is a change of heart, a metanoia, a personal sense of one's need for God who, because he is the Lover of man, is all forgiveness. But this knowledge of one's sinfulness, while engendering a sense of reverence for God, can also produce an experience of anguish. Such praise can be a crucible, a kenosis, the emptying of one's whole soul. It can be an actual share in the humiliation, suffering, poverty, and lowliness of Christ—in short, a participation in the Act of Redemption. We sinners can experience something of that mystery by which Christ who "was like

us in every way except sin" (Heb. 4:15), "offered up prayers and entreaties, with loud cries and tears, to the One who had the power to save him from death; and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard" (Heb. 5:7).

Forgiveness, then, is freely given to those who seek it and accept it by glorifying the name of the Lord. The Father has been moved by his great love and has sent his Son into the world so "that anyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This is not a "justice" response on the part of God. The phrase "justice of God," in Byzantine spirituality, means, as it does in the Holy Scripture, "the help that God bestows on the poor and the needy." It is not a juridical verdict that dispenses punishment for evil and reward for good. Rather, the justice of God is his love shown in freeing the oppressed and delivering the slaves. It is his fidelity to his promises. We had become slaves to Satan and to sin. Christ is now our justice and our reconciliation (1 Cor. 1:24).

The spiritual life has humility for its point of departure. A spiritual man is a saint who confesses himself a sinner. Humility in the presence of God is not an *act* but more of a *permanent attitude* of awareness of the love of God and of one's own inadequacy in responding to such love. Humility is an openness to God's love even in the face of our inadequacy to respond.

Byzantine prayers place a great stress on our basic sinfulness and our numerous failures in love. Every Office and Liturgy is replete with expressions such as "my sinfulness," "my unworthiness," "my guilt," "my many sins, voluntary and involuntary."

O Lord, my offences exceed in number the hairs of my head!
What evil have I not done! What sin have I not committed.
What wickedness have I not imagined within my soul. Have I

not sinned through pride, vainglory, slander, idle speech, unkind laughter, intemperance, hatred, envy, selfishness, ambition, and falsehood? O Lord, I know well that my iniquities are so deep that they have reached over my head!

(Prayer of Symeon)

Indeed we are sinners and we have all deformed the beautiful primordial creation of God. Even the baptized who have accepted Christ and have been accepted by him experience the wounds of nature within them. There is no saint who is perfect and who responds in every area of life to the full call of God. If Byzantine spirituality stresses so much the sinfulness of mankind it is only to stress in a much more glorious way the goodness of God and the universality of his forgiveness and salvation.

Our repeated expressions of repentance, when practiced as a way of life, engender in the soul a deep, inner awareness of resistance to the love of the all-merciful God. It gives rise to an inner suffering also, and can cause tears. Such weeping, however, has nothing to do with sadness and scrupulosity. Rather, it is a gift of peace in which our souls and our whole beings are pierced by the realization that God's beauty shines less in us because of our abuse of our freedom.

"Weep for your sins and for the sins of others," the Fathers tell us, "for there is no other way to salvation." The Fathers saw in the tears of the sinful woman who washed the feet of Christ an image of the power of true weeping. Tears of the heart are a gift for which we often pray in our liturgy. This gift can be so powerful that it is manifested externally:

Give me tears, O Lord, as you gave to the sinful woman. Make me worthy to wash with tears your feet which delivered me from the ways of error. Grant that I may offer you, as a

fragrant ointment, an innocent life redeemed with repentance, so that I also may hear your sweet voice: 'Go in peace. Your faith has saved you.' (Great Compline)

This ancient tradition of tears of repentance was also found in the old Roman liturgical books; unfortunately it has been omitted in some of the modern translations:

O Omnipotent and kind God, who caused a fountain of water to arise out of rock for your thirsting people, bring forth from the hardness of our hearts tears of compunction so that we may weep for sins and obtain their remission by your mercy. (Roman Missal. Prayer for the Gift of Tears)

Another characteristic of the prayers of praise by which we obtain forgiveness of sins is the recalling of incidents in the life of Christ in which the twofold mystery of God's mercy and man's gratitude and praise is expressed:

I know, O Lord, that my iniquities are so deep that they have reached over my head, but I also know that the mercy of your goodness is beyond words. . . Therefore, O Most wonderful King, O Most Loving Lord, show forth your mercies in me a sinner. Manifest in me the might of your goodness and the power of your loving kindness, and receive me who turn to you. Receive me as you received the Prodigal Son, the Thief, and the Sinful Woman. . . If there is hope of salvation for me, be my Savior: O you, the God of penitents and the Savior of sinners, save me for your mercy's sake.

Where man recognizes his own unworthiness as a sinner and the goodness of God as a Father, there is praise, and he finds forgiveness of his sins. If he be silent and attuned to hear the voice of the Beloved, it is a

glorification of God, and his sins are forgiven. In this "ascetical act" by which man goes beyond himself to encounter God, he encounters Christ who is always listening, always waiting to receive the sinner. Christ loves sinners!

Thus does man desire to return to the hands of God whence he came. His sighs and longings for God render the inner qualities of his soul all pure. The love of God penetrates to the very root of nature, of instinct, and "changes even the substance of things," as St. John Chrysostom says (P.G. 61, 273). The sinner casts himself into God where he finds the quenching of his nostalgia for God. Holiness and real purification are nothing else but the unquenchable thirst and the intense desire for God, expressed in praise and glorification.

This metanoia of the heart, this longing to praise God for his mercy to us, is the proper attitude for man as he approaches the liturgy and the sacrament to receive the life-giving Spirit. "What must we do, brothers?" the early converts asked of the Apostles. "You must repent. . .and every one of you must be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37-38). And so, having described the attitude of metanoia which is our proper attitude as we approach God, we turn now to those fountains of mercy—the Liturgy and the Sacraments—through which we are progressively immersed deeper and deeper into the mystery of Christ.

CHAPTER 10

BAPTISM, HOLY CHRISM, HOLY EUCHARIST AND CONFESSION

For the Byzantine mentality, the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, and Holy Eucharist are one single process by which a person enters the life of the Holy Trinity. The Father creates a new life, the Spirit "seals" it, and the Son nourishes it with his own Body and Blood. We are thus initiated into the life of the Trinity, and we thus partake of the Love that is God.

In the Incarnation, Christ took the physical body of our humanity and made us his members. Thus, in his Person he bridged the abyss that separates God from his creation. Indeed, it is in his Son that God sees us. He beholds us substantially united to Christ as his brothers and sisters. In the Incarnate Christ we become perfectly worthy to be adopted as God's children. Sonship is not a childish dependence on God but the full freedom of what it is to be human. We are not "mere comrades" of Christ in some superficial sense. We have been admitted into the majesty and eminence that belong by nature to the Eternal Word alone. We are, in some real sense, one single Son of the Father in Christ and with Christ. And it is because of this oneness that we can disengage ourselves from the darkness of sin and come to the light of union with God.

In the Incarnation Christ took upon himself all the sins of mankind. When he was scourged, the blows fell

upon Sin. When he was crucified, Sin was nailed to the cross. And when he died, Sin was slain. Consequently, in Christ we can renounce sin and be readmitted to the life and love of the Father. We can return to our pristine dignity and original state of union with God. By our acceptance of Christ, sin is destroyed and man is put back on the road to the Father. We return to the Father who is the "inheritance of Christ." "Inheritance" is a relationship of love and the reception of a gift. It cannot be imposed. It must be accepted, and this acceptance takes place in Baptism.

BAPTISM

The whole theme of the liturgy of Baptism is an affirmation of the will of the person to accept Christ, his teaching, his ways as our ways, and to turn away from anything that diverts us from God.

N., Do you renounce Satan, all his works,
all his angels, all his services, and
all his pride?

R., Yes, I renounce Satan, all his works,
all his angels, and all his pride.

N., Have you really renounced Satan?

R., Yes, I really have.

N., Do you unite yourself to Christ?

R., Yes, I do.

N., Have you united yourself to Christ?

R., Yes, I have.

These questions, and the affirmation of the will to accept Christ and all that he stands for, are repeated three

times, each time in a stronger and louder voice. In the words of Tertullian: "Pagans are born; but Christians are made." In his graciousness and love God is offering a new orientation, a new relation, a new dimension of life, and a new level to our personality which is the life of "grace."

Remove from him his former delusion and fill him with faith in you, with hope in you, and with love for you, so that he may know that you are the true God, together with your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and your all-Holy Spirit. . .open the eyes of his understanding, that the light of your Gospel may shine in him. . .make him a reasonable sheep of the holy flock of your Christ. . .a vase of holiness, a child of light and an heir of your kingdom; so that having lived according to your will. . .he may attain unto the blessedness of the saints in your kingdom.

God offers man the reintegration into his own love and life, and man answers by renouncing sin, renouncing separation and any estrangement from God. It is a wedding feast between God and man in which both enter into a most intimate relationship. Man acquires a new possession and a higher character of a person to person relationship with his Creator.

St. Didymus of Alexandria (313-398) summarizes this relationship in a very beautiful way: "In baptism. . .the Holy Spirit, as God, renovates us in the union with the Father and the Son. He brings us back to our pristine beauty and fills us with grace, so that we can no longer make room for anything that is unworthy of our love. . ." (*De Trin.* 2:12).

Once more, let us recall to mind that love is a personal relationship and commitment; it cannot be imposed but only offered. Salvation is a process of leading man to the fulfillment of life in Christ; it is the perfect

acceptance of the Fatherhood of God. Baptism is therefore the reorientation of the soul, the reconstruction of the likeness which flows from our insertion into the Resurrection of Christ. Man trusts and believes and allows himself to be won over. Without this belief no love is possible. Knowing another person in love reaches to the depth of the self of the other person. In that depth there is communication and identification. For this reason the liturgy insists again on asking:

N., Do you believe in Christ?

R., I do believe that Christ is King and God.

If so, say the Creed.

This saying of the Creed is not a mere recital of a list of truths. Rather it is a plunging into that "river of flowing water" which is the life of the Trinity. We plunge into the life of the Father, we give ourselves up to the life of the Son who died for our salvation, we surrender to the life and action of the Holy Spirit who will fill everything and make us rise to the eternal life to come.

The Creed, therefore, is recited solemnly and with conviction. Such a proclamation involves a change in our whole being, in our consciousness and awareness of God and others. Baptism is called "newness of life." Since life is a progress, we commit ourselves to keep moving into the attitudes, the "mind of Christ." The "old life" was a disorientation where man found himself wandering away from God in isolation and self-centeredness. New life is "putting on Christ" with whom we are in the Father. God brings forth his Son anew and breathes his Spirit into man, thereby uniting man to himself in the closest supernatural fellowship of love and life. It is, then, for man, a real rebirth, so real, objective and factual that it operates

effectively even upon an unconscious infant.

The liturgy of Baptism is an enactment and a realization of the "now" of union in love and life of the God-Man. In its external presentation, Baptism is an immersion of the whole person into the water, into a sacred bath which symbolizes and effects an entombment, a disappearance and a death. Our sinful flesh vanishes in the water in which we are "buried in Christ" (Col. 11:12). The going-down into the water symbolizes and effects death. The coming-up out of the water symbolizes and effects resurrection. We are plunged and buried into death and we rise again into the likeness of the Resurrection, unto a new life.

We took existence as man from the first Adam, and so now, through Christ, the second Adam, we really take on a new existence according to his own image and likeness. We receive this new image by dying to one kind of existence and by passing over into a new one. Baptism is a victory! Death and resurrection are irreversible events. Since there is no way by which a baptized person could be reborn into the old Adam, so Baptism can never be repeated.

In his Epistle to the Romans, which is sung at the liturgy of Baptism, St. Paul condenses in a few words the admirable plenitude of the effects of Baptism:

When we were baptised, we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection. We must realize that our former selves have been crucified with him to destroy this sinful body and to free us from the slavery of sin. When a man dies, of course, he has finished with sin (6:3-7).

For every Baptism, fresh water is blessed and used.

Water in our prayers is the symbol and representation of all creation and is its basic element. Water is the natural sign of life: it gives and creates life. The blessing of the water signifies the real cosmic and redemptive power it now possesses. The long and very beautiful prayers said over the water testify to the tremendous significance we attach to it and to the fact that God himself holds water in such great importance.

His creative Spirit passed over the waters in the beginning. By water he saved Noah. Through water he led his people Israel to freedom. Now he has made water the sign of our rebirth: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:4).

Water is not only something that brings life; it can bring death also (v.g., floods). If, after the water has flowed over one's head, one comes up out of the water alive, this symbolizes new life, a resurrection and regeneration. Immersion into the baptismal water is a dying and a separation. Mystical though it is, this death is nonetheless real and effective: a death to sin, to the old man, to the law. It is not simply a *wish* to die; it is the declaration of the fact. "In baptism you are dead to sin," says St. Paul. The coming out of the water is a real resurrection: ". . . In such wise then you must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). It is precisely because of the theological realism of Baptism that Byzantine spirituality shudders with repugnance at seeing Baptism performed with only a bare minimum of water, hurriedly and skimpily poured.

The last declaration of the baptismal liturgy is a triumphant and an unwavering affirmation of what has happened and of what the baptised has become:

N., you have been baptised, purified; you are sanctified, justified, and illumined in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

You might have been a sinner, an idolater, a blasphemer. Now you are among the "initiated," a "saint."

Baptism is then the initiation into the life and mind of Christ. Man becomes chosen, holy, set apart in order to pass into a sacred state of life, into the mystery of Christ. His very structure of being is changed. He is now deified. The Christian has to move progressively and faithfully into becoming, like Christ, a "servant" of God, and, like Christ, servant and brother to all. Thus the initiation is not an end but a beginning. It is the real beginning of development of one's thoughts, activities and motivations into becoming those of Christ.

Here now we can understand the dimensions of holy Baptism which Byzantines have always stressed, sometimes to a certain exaggeration. All the baptized, lay as well as clergy, share in the "priesthood" of Christ. It is a priestly identity not only in theory but also in the practical life of the Church (the election of Bishops, of priests, etc.). All the baptized are responsible for the Church as a whole and for her mission in the world. It is not that lay people should replace priests in their functions. Each has his role, and the functions of the lay people that have been taken away by a powerful clergy should be restored to the former.

HOLY CHRISMATION

The flowing waters of Baptism signify cleansing as well as birth. Baptism washed away the sins of men, all the sins, and even the roots of sin—original sin, as we call it. Love has taken us up to live the one and same life with Christ, fused into us by the Holy Spirit. We are filled with the "life of grace," the grace of the Holy Spirit who has set us apart and has selected us for a very special task. It is this

idea that the first prayer of Chrismation proclaims. The priest, having dipped his thumb into the holy chrism, places it on the forehead of the newly baptized and says:

Blessed are you, O Lord Almighty, Fountain of all good things, Sun of righteousness, who through the manifestation of your only begotten Son, our Lord, shines forth as the light of salvation upon those who were dwelling in darkness. Lord, who granted unto us, unworthy as we are, the blessed cleansing in holy water and the divine sanctification of life-giving anointment, Lord, you have been well-pleased to regenerate your servant through the water and the Spirit and have granted unto him the remission of his sins both voluntary and involuntary. . . .

Now that all these treasures have been given and received we call on the Holy Spirit to protect, to strength and to "seal" these gifts in the recipient, who is thus called to become a living witness to the goodness and love of God. The newly baptized offers his faith and good will to the sign which imparts grace. He offers his senses and his whole person to be "sealed" by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Almighty and Adorable, so that he may be kept in sanctification.

The Holy Spirit then seals all the senses of the baptized to keep them fixed in the life of the Trinity. Chrismation is applied to the eyes, the nose, the ears, the mouth, the heart, the hands and the feet. The whole human being is thus "sealed," consecrated to live the life of the Trinity. The grace of the Holy Spirit is now the real presence of a divine power, and a participation in the divine energy acting in us to deify us. With this grace and power man can move and progress in the likeness of God, who gradually will reveal himself. The prayer goes on:

Confirm in him the right faith; deliver him from the evil one and all his devices; preserve his soul in purity and uprightness through a fear of the Lord that brings salvation, so that having pleased you in every deed and word, he may be your child and heir to your heavenly kingdom. . . .

Because he is now holy and set apart, the Christian is called to witness to his new life by living it totally—to live it and live by it. All his activities and motivations must become like those of Christ—he must “put on the mind of Christ.” Sanctity is not an ethical ideal, but a manifestation of the new reality of Christ, a gradual entering into an identity with Christ through the continual working of the Holy Spirit.

HOLY EUCHARIST

The Holy Eucharist forms a whole with Baptism and Chrismation. Grace is a principle of life. Final glorification has flowed from the love of the Father and has been bestowed upon the baptized by the Holy Spirit. The person has been sealed by the indwelling of the Spirit who now gives the baptized a new direction and a new mind, the “mind which is in Christ Jesus.” The Holy Eucharist is precisely this new mind. Jesus said, “I am the living Bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this Bread he shall live forever, and the Bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 7: 48-52).

In the Eucharist is realized the whole essence and meaning of creation, of the redemption and of the return to the Father. Here is realized the whole essence of Christianity: “God is made Man in order that man might become God.” This means that the kernel of our spiritual life shines forth in this most intimate reunion with God.

“Man becomes by grace what God is by nature.” This is what we mean, as I’ve stated several times, by man’s deification or his theosis. It is indeed the divinization of the whole human being and the realization of immortality that God grants us in the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. “This is the Bread that comes down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever” (John 7:50-51).

Because of this union with Christ the Christian becomes fully alive with the Holy Spirit, and with the infinite power of the Love that breathes life wherever it enters. The measure of our communication in this Life is the measure of our possession of It. The Christian now knows with certainty that the anointing of the Good News of Christ cannot be done by words alone. Verbalization about his faith will not convince anyone. His faith is a life. Life must be lived, and its radiation gives life. The sign of credibility, especially in our own days, can only be acts which are not done simply to project some kind of good image, but which proceed from an interior conviction which inspires heroism in the service of others. Holy Communion, which is Christ himself—living, teaching, inspiring—becomes this fire which sustains the Christian in such a life.

It is precisely because of this most intimate association with Christ that the Eucharist becomes a source of repentance and of the remission of sins. It establishes an opportunity by which one can express his sorrow for sin, any sin, more authentically, and allow him to grow into a mature personal relationship with Christ himself. Once the soul has been purified by the crucible of the fire of repentance, it is ready to enter into a deeper personal communion with the risen Christ—to become itself a “resurrection.”

The Holy Eucharist has been implicitly considered for

a long time as a sacrifice for sins. The Eastern Church treated it as the fulfillment of the Jewish Day of Atonement on which the people of God obtained complete remission of all their sins by the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice. The Sacrifice of Christ on the altar is completed only by carrying out Christ's command expressed at the moment of Consecration: "Take and eat all of you. . ." "Drink of this all of you. . ." Communion is part of the sacrificial ritual, and not separate from it.

Life is in the blood, and blood is the symbol of life. In the Old Testament it was not the sacrifice itself that obtained remission of sins, but the sprinkling of the blood on the people. Anyone could sacrifice. But only the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice, thus accomplishing the remission of sins. This is what Christ has done for us: "Christ, the High Priest, has accomplished once and for all an eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:11-12).

Communion, consequently, is the way we enter most intimately into the Sacrifice of Christ. It is the climax of our participation in this sacrifice. It is the moment when Christ acts upon us sacramentally, sprinkles his Blood on us to draw us into his sacrificial offering. It is the moment when he gives full bodily direction to our love and to our whole being. Because of his love he opens all of himself to us and in our reciprocal love we open ourselves to him. Communion unites us, therefore, to make the two into one; more, to make us one with all of our brothers and with the whole world.

The Holy Eucharist is really and truly the living presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, sacrificed for mankind. The cry of confidence and of love that makes a man participate in this sacrificial act finds the perfection of forgiveness. It allows the Kingdom of God to extend itself to the whole personality with all its emotions, psychological drives and physical needs. Our prayers refer

to the Eucharist as a consuming fire:

O you who graciously give your Flesh to me as Food, you who are a fire consuming the unworthy. Consume me not, my Creator, but rather pass through all the parts of my body, into all my joints, my heart, my soul; burn, O good Lord, the thorns of my transgressions, cleanse my soul and purify all my thoughts. Ever shelter, guard, and keep me in your love. Chasten me, purify me, and control all my passions. Adorn me, teach me, and enlighten me always. Show me how to be a tabernacle of your Holy Spirit, and in no wise the dwelling place of sin, that from me, your habitation, every evil deed and passion may flee as from fire.

(Prayer After Receiving Communion)

This image of fire is taken from Holy Scripture. Before Isaiah the Prophet could hear the word of God, his lips were touched by fire and he heard the words of the angel say, "Your sin is taken away, your iniquity is now purged" (6:7). Another source for this image is to be found in the Book of Exodus, where it speaks of the bush set afire by the Divine Presence, burning with light but never consumed (3:2).

This belief and practice of our Church, expressed in the prayers which prepare for or follow the reception of the Holy Eucharist, quite often allude to this burning coal of Isaiah as a purification and a remission of sins, all sins. The teaching of the Church is so emphatic on the subject that the remission and forgiveness includes all sins "voluntary and involuntary, in word and deed, committed knowingly and unknowingly. . . ."

After the priest has received the blood of Christ he holds out the chalice and declares with a sigh of relief and joy:

Behold this has touched my lips. It will cleanse me from my sins and purify me from all my iniquities.

When a bishop presents the chalice to the priest communicant he is the one to declare: "Behold, priest of God, N., this has touched your lips. It will cleanse you from your sins and purify you from all your iniquities."

St. Gregory Palamas expresses this same reality in a practical way:

At once I fear and I rejoice
 I who as but straw
 Receive the fire. . .and,
 Wondrous miracle!
 I am instead sprinkled as like dew
 Like the Bush of old
 Which burned and was not consumed.

Many prayers written by the great saints of the past are utilized as a preparation for the reception of the Body of the Lord. Some of these allude to the power of the Eucharist to effect the remission of sins. To cite one example, used as a preparation for Communion:

O Lord, in this life I have wholly yielded myself to sin and have become a slave to the pleasures of this life. I come to you burdened with every kind of sin committed knowingly and unknowingly. I have defiled your image in me and have turned my back on you. Yet when I consider your infinite compassion, I dare to come back to you, my God and Creator.

Hesychius, a spiritual writer of the 13th cent., expresses the same traditional notion in this way:

The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ is like a divine fire which consumes our faults and miseries. As soon as he enters into us

in Holy Communion, he drives from our hearts the spirit of malice, he blots out our sins, he preserves our souls. If afterwards we are careful to guard our hearts and keep them shut against all evil, then, when we approach the Holy Mysteries, the divine Body will fill our souls with more and more light, making them shine like the stars.

The liturgical rubrics give this admonition: "You O Man, who are about to receive the Body and Blood of Christ as food, approach with fear lest you be scorched—for it is a consuming fire. Be first at peace with those you have injured before you drink of the Holy Blood. Then, and only then, may you receive with confidence the food of Christ." The recipient of Holy Communion calls on the Divine Goodness and Mercy, mentions the sublime examples of the sinners who came to the Lord. They immediately obtained forgiveness of their sins. Christ is the fountain of life and immortality, and those who approach him will necessarily obtain purification.

The prayers of the Divine Liturgy are constant reminders that the Eucharist is for the remission of sins. There is first the declaration of the Lord that "This is my Body for the remission of sins. . .this is my Blood. . .for the remission of sins." At the epiclesis the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father to transform what still looks like bread into the "precious Body of Christ." What the Father created and ordained to be bread and wine the Son now declares to be his Body and Blood. And the Holy Spirit fills with life these same elements "so that those who partake of them they may be for the remission of sins, for the fellowship of your Holy Spirit, for the fullness of the Kingdom of heaven, for intimate confidence in you, and not for judgement or condemnation."

The prayers of the liturgy accomplish what they mean. Thus, the prayer to the Holy Spirit effects the

“remission of sins” and the fulfillment of everything that Christ stands for. This same affirmation of the remission of all sins is repeated again, with no reservation whatsoever at least three more times before approaching these marvelous mysteries of Christ. In the immediate preparation, this same effect is stressed: “Have mercy on me and pardon my offences. . .and count me worthy to share without condemnation your spotless mysteries for the remission of sins and for eternal life.”

When we come to the prayers of thanks, the realization of the forgiveness of sins through the Eucharist becomes a series of glorious hymns of praise and glorification for the goodness and generosity of God.

With the living presence of Christ in his own Body and Blood, man’s whole being is enveloped by the grace of God. He is sustained by his love. Man’s destiny becomes the possession of God. Grace is not, therefore, a *thing* but an *encounter* with a living Person, present and working within us. This encounter makes us “relatives of God” and enables us to know him, to find ourselves in him, and to attain to mystical union with him. This union is our exalted calling and the *raison d’être* of being a Christian.

The reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is the surrender of the human person as a whole to the Divine Person of Christ in the most intimate embrace of love. Man possesses Christ and he is possessed by Christ. The Father sees in the communicant the image and reflection of his Son. The grace of union is God himself entering into his creature, into the whole being of man—not to make him God by nature but to make him participate in the nature of God.

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

Within the life of the community there is a sacrament

of reconciliation. A man whose heart has been softened and set aflame by the divine fire seeks, as it were by instinct, a complete reconciliation with the Body of Christ. The Eucharist, as we have said, effects this union with Christ and thus remits sins. But tradition has seen fit to develop and extend the use of the sacrament of Confession so that there may be effected a deeper personal communion with the risen Christ and with the community which makes up his Body.

Sin is a breaking away from God's embrace and a willful wandering from the family of God. By the grace of the Holy Spirit the sinner's heart is changed and lies open to God's forgiveness. Through sacramental confessions, should he sin, he can be fully restored to membership in the Church. Such readmission takes place when the penitent sinner seeks it from those who fully represent the visible Church.

The Apostles were made instruments of reconciliation of the sinner with the Church because they were both witnesses and sharers of the healing power of Christ. "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven. For those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (John 20:22). In the primitive Church only the Bishops performed this reconciliation because they were considered the successors of the Apostles. St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, and many other Fathers considered that the only *Economos* or dispenser of this sacrament was the Bishop.

When the number of believers increased and this sacrament was more frequently used, the Bishop delegated some of his priests to help him in this service. It is interesting to note that monks, who were not ordained priests, also heard the confession of sins and gave absolution.

The Eastern Church, while stressing the special power

of ordination, does not confine such power only to those who enjoy a special function or position in the Church. "Where the Spirit is, forgiveness of sins and reconciliation are also there."

In Eastern spirituality there is no such thing as a "director of conscience." Rather, there is what we call a "spiritual father," a man who has lived the mind of Christ and experienced his love and intimate presence. Consequently, he can witness to this Presence and somehow communicate it to others. Christ is light. So too the "spiritual father" a "light of the world." Christ is tenderness and understanding, commanding us to love one another as he has loved us. The "spiritual father" is such a lover. He is a saint, and a saint is one who has left a trail of light and tenderness in his wake.

A "spiritual father" is first and foremost a man born of the Holy Spirit, an image of the healing Christ. He is strong enough to share the burden of his brother's sins, and wise enough to practice the art of reading hearts. He is able to discern whether or not a man has accepted the gift of a change of heart. In such a view it is easy to understand how function and charism overlap. According to St. Clement of Alexandria, a confessor is "the physician of souls," the messenger and "angel of God." The joy, peace, and security which accompany forgiveness of sins are the fruit of the Holy Spirit living in the spiritual father, and operating through Him.

In this sacrament, confessor and penitent come together in a liturgy of praise. Together they give glory to the mercy and goodness of God, and celebrate the victory of God in man. In such a context the most ancient resonances of the word "confession" are revitalized. "Come and listen all you who fear God, while I tell you what he has done for me" (Ps. 66:16). "It is good to give thanks (literally, to 'confess') to Yahweh, to praise in honor

of your name, Most High, to proclaim your love at daybreak and your faithfulness all through the night" (Ps. 92:1-2). Here again we see how ancient and biblical is the Eastern notion that the praise of God effects forgiveness of sins.

The principle concern of the Sacrament of Penance is the formation of a truly Christian conscience—a complete turning to the living and true God, away from all sin and self-centeredness (1 Thess. 1:9). The attention of the penitent is directed toward the person of the Lord himself, toward his words, his actions, his self-giving love. The goal of this sacrament is a reconciliation with Christ in his community, conferring the true freedom of being a child of God and the ability to grow into a fully mature Christian personality.

An inner turning to God and renunciation of selfishness are the very core of Christian maturity. Its final fruit is a perfect love of one's enemies and a gentleness and humility by which the unruly and even unconscious drives are transformed into the humility of Christ. It is this humility, together with gentleness, simplicity and kindness, that shape the personality of the Christian and make him free.

It is precisely this freedom that makes the penitent bold before God. As he prays he becomes more alive in God with a deep feeling of peace. In confession there cannot be any morbid sorrow for sin, but rather a vibrant effort to be faithful to the grace given by the sacrament: "We carry with us, in our body, the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body. Indeed, while we are still alive, we are consigned to our death every day, for the sake of Jesus, so that in our mortal flesh the life of Jesus too may be openly seen" (2 Cor. 4:10-11). The Christian who accepts the gift of reconciliation manifests it in his own life by his gentleness

and the love of his enemies. A pure love for all men, reconciliation with all men, is the fruit of the sacrament of reconciliation with God.

The confessor is not a judge in the legal sense of the word. Rather, he is a witness, a healer, a counselor. He judges by teaching and proclaiming the wonderful works of God, and by making present to the sinner the power and consolation of the risen Christ in whom forgiveness is found. The role of the priest is to enlighten and awaken the conscience so that the inner mystery of the Church's life and teaching becomes the well-spring of the penitent's life.

In the rite of sacramental confession the penitent stands by the Gospel Book, or near the icon of Christ, and the confessor stands slightly to one side: Christ is thus the center or focal point of attention. With Christ thus present there is also the assurance of the activity of the Holy Spirit who confers joy and confidence. St. John Climacus, commenting on the sincerity, humility, and gentleness which must accompany the avowal of sins says: "Uncover and show your wounds to this physician, and putting shame underfoot say, 'Here are my wounds, here is my sore, here is the fruit of my weakness. None but I am responsible; it is indeed I who am to blame.' "

The penitent kneels down and, holding out his hands to the Lord present in the icon or Gospel Book, says: "O Lord of heaven and earth, I confess to you all the hidden and open sins of my heart and mind which I have committed. I beg of you, O Lord, Merciful Judge, forgiveness, and the strength to sin no more."

The Byzantine Church does not categorize sin as venial and mortal. All weaknesses and sins are opened to the Lord in one act of a truly contrite heart, without analysis of classification. Any sin offends the majesty and goodness of God, and helps to sever the bond of love

between us and God. The sinner comes begging reconciliation and presenting the fruit of his change of heart.

After hearing the confession of the penitent, the priest, by his words and attitude, assures the penitent of Christ's love for him, instructs and encourages. He then places his stole on the head of the penitent and covers the stole with both his hands and says the formula of absolution:

God, who through Nathan the prophet forgave David confessing his sins; and Peter shedding bitter tears for his betrayal, and the adulterous woman weeping at his feet, the Prodigal Son, and the Publican, is now forgiving you, N., all the sins of your life in this world and in the world to come. And may he make you stand uncondemned before his awesome tribunal, for he is blessed forever and ever. Amen.

Once the sinner has been thus healed and restored to a full share in the life of the community, the confessor prescribes a remedy, or penance, which is not a punishment, but, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, "a medicine that is applied for purification, consolation and joy."

CHAPTER 11

RESPONSE TO GOD—LOVE: PRAYER

The Sacrament of Initiation, Baptism, puts man on his way to God, makes him a child of the Father. Confirmation animates him and “seals” him with the Gift of the Holy Spirit. In Holy Communion the person becomes wholly possessed by Christ. By this three-fold movement he is taken into the life of the Three Divine Persons. The love surging from the Father to the Son in the Holy Spirit overflows and is poured out upon him. “God’s love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us” (Rom. 5:5). We are deified. Radically there is nothing anymore in the thoughts, words, deeds, or desires of the baptized which does not come from God and belong ultimately to God.

Closely united with his Lord, nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:39). His personal commitment to “put on Christ” has opened him to become progressively aware that God has given him a unique existence, a personality eternally and intimately related to God. The mystery of “who he is” must become ever-more manifest: “Now your life lies hidden with Christ in God. When Christ our Life appears, then you shall shine forth with him in glory” (Col. 3:3).

The manifestation “in glory” of the presence of Christ within the Christian is anticipated now by his silent openness to the activity of the Spirit in *prayer*. The faith

that springs up out of the divine nature is not simply an idea or a piece of new information. It is essentially a stronger hunger for God and a magnetic desire for Christ. Indeed, faith goes hand in hand with love. It is in prayer that faith and love will lift our mind and heart out of their own narrowness to receive the fullness of God's love and life and open our being to the wonders of creation.

PENETRATION INTO THE INVISIBLE

No theory or explanation can be given to prayer itself. The Fathers can tell us how to fast and abstain, or how to recite and sing psalms. They can give some guidelines to the soul reaching out to touch the Lord. But they know that prayer is essentially an experience of a person-to-person relationship, a realization where mere information becomes life, where the soul reaches out to touch a deeper Life. They know that it is ultimately God, and God alone, who teaches one how to pray. The cry of the apostles—"Lord, teach us how to pray"—is not the expression of a desire for a new method. Rather, it is man's basic longing for a personal relationship and encounter with God.

In prayer man does not lose himself in God or in creation; he finds himself and creation *in God*. Nilos the Sinaite describes prayer as "the conversation of the soul with God, the sweet branch of liberation from evil." It is the exteriorization of joy and gratitude when confronted with a personal relationship. This elevation of the soul to touch the living God is the realization of God. Not a learning *about* God, but a discovery and an encounter with God himself. Prayer is not a knowledge about God, but the experiencing of God's love in one's own being. Nilos says again: "Prayer is an intimate and familiar intercourse with

God where God gives himself and where man finds himself in the ocean of God's loving goodness.

Masters of spirituality such as Maximos the Confessor and John Climacus insist that the activity of the soul in prayer is essentially a concentration on a divine person and a self-surrender to him in order to be united and identified with him. Hence the general saying, "If you are a theologian you really pray, and if you really pray, you are a theologian." Prayer is the most complete form of theology. It is theology carried to its ultimate realization.

Saying words and thinking thoughts do not constitute prayer. Words and thinking are merely springboards. Life is best experienced and communicated in the silence of dialogue, or rather, in the dialogue of silence, in a sort of "inarticulate groan by which the Spirit pleads within us (Rom. 8:26). In real prayer all thinking processes should be brought to a standstill, to an increasing silence of the heart, free from thoughts, in order that the "peace from on high," the peace of a living Person, may have unimpeded entry into our soul.

Prayer then is a person to person contact with God and a vision of him, a vision without image, a way that leads us to experience God's presence. To pray, therefore, is to experience the special freedom where man is not bound within the narrow world of time and space. It is to affirm that man belongs to a reality much more vast than anything he can imagine. Agitations, disorders, and disturbances of egotism create separation and close one's self to the Other. The soul must be open, calm, and serene in order to meet the Other. In short, it must be free.

This tranquility in freedom is what the Fathers call *apatheia*. John Climacus defines *apatheia* as the state of the soul which has been purified from the flesh, from all stain, and has raised the heart far beyond all creatures and subjected every sense to reason. It remains in the presence

of God.” (Treatise *On the Prayer of the Heart*) He who reaches this state is free. He possesses God who dwells within him and who rules his thoughts, words, and actions. God gives him inward light, makes known to him his will, and acts in him. In a word, *apatheia* describes the state of one who lives no longer with his own life but “it is Christ who lives in him” (Gal. 2:20). *Apatheia* is the fruit of love and the fullness of peace that brings love to perfection.

Apatheia is not then what some interpreters call apathy, “impassibility,” “absence of vigor and energy.” Much less is it a stoic state of “insensibility.” It is rather a state in which the love of God is so active and burning as to leave no room for self-centeredness and egoism. It is the full flower of charity where man ceases to be the plaything of his instincts and becomes capable of ordering his whole life in accordance with the new life force planted in him, the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), to which he pledged himself at Baptism. As the prayers of this Sacrament express it, “he ceases to be a child of this world” (Lk. 16:8) and becomes a “child of the kingdom” (Matt. 8:12). Diodorus the Photike called *apatheia* “the fire.” John Climacus refers to it as the “flame of love.” To be fire and flame it must have a great amount of spiritual energy and constant awakeness. And the favorite saying of the hesychasts who practiced *apatheia* and sought the ways of perfect prayer was, “Flee! Be silent! Be at rest!”

THE LADDER OF PRAYER

A constant, loving concentration upon God is attained only by degrees. It requires long exercise and an ever-greater attentiveness to the breath of the Holy Spirit. We use the word “degree.” In reality they are not degrees or steps but moments, moments to which we give ourselves

successively and which we experience alternately. They approximate more closely the symphonic rhythms in a musical piece which gather momentum as the symphony progresses.

In prayer we sometimes use words. Soon we discover that our minds are wandering. We come back again and again to what we are saying and to our relationship with God. Patience is necessary. Tenseness and even a certain amount of effort are unavoidable. One must be courageous and keep on trying. Once the passions are channeled and sanctified, calm and quietness come to reside in the soul, and man thus becomes sensitive to the Divine Presence. It is in this stillness and repose of the soul that he finds the inner contemplation and awareness of his love-relationship with God. Life is indeed best realized and communicated in the silence of dialogue. This attitude of calm will bring all thinking processes to a stand-still in order that the peace of God may enter into our soul.

A helpful factor in achieving an attitude of simple regard in the presence of God is a good breathing habit. Our Fathers attached a great importance to breathing habits. In fact, "breathing is a condition of life and of consciousness." A perfect breathing habit calms, soothes, and strengthens our ability to concentrate. Then, when words are read or chanted slowly and meaningfully, their content is better revealed. Their true meaning will strike the inner ear, echo within the soul, reach the subconscious mind and introduce us into the divine presence.

The "sound" par excellence that can introduce us into the presence of God is the Word of God in the Scriptures. By the recitation of texts, or the chanting of psalms, the soul is best caught up and penetrated by the revelation of the peace and joy which are in God. In order to awaken our sense to the meaning of Scripture, a whole rhythmic, poetic, and musical literature was devised and

perfected by the masters of the spiritual life. By this balanced and humanly-enchancing voicing of the Word, the soul becomes alive and inundated with a light from beyond. At the sound of this Word the soul achieves a simple perception of God, and is at rest.

There is also the asceticism of fasting, abstinence, corporal works of mercy and study. These are all means to greater freedom, since freedom is what we seek in our relationship with God. From time immemorial, and long before Christianity, fasting and abstinence were considered the best means to master one's passions. Greek philosophers as well as our own modern scientists have established that discipline in regards to food and drink is extremely advantageous to attaining a deeper intellectual, artistic, or spiritual life. "The prayer of one who fasts," says St. Nilos, "is like a young eagle that flies on high; that of the glutton is heavy and cannot fly above the clouds."

At Baptism, as we have already said, the Christian commits himself to seeking freedom by following Christ. Indeed, Christ touched the very point of freedom when he declared, "If you want to be my disciple, go, sell whatever you have, and come, follow me." The Christian then has to break through every barrier. He has to transcend himself and establish control over nature in order to free his personality. Once he is thus free he can attain to the awareness of the One who calls him. He gives away all he has, dies to a former way of life, and adopts a new one.

In Byzantine spiritual life we read much about exceedingly painful penances, long periods of fasting, privation of sleep, and long hours consecrated to community worship. Our Fathers never gave a definition of eternity; they embodied it in these lives of self-denial. By the very exaggerations of their lives they stamped infinity on our minds and imagination. Hour after hour they taught us how to make men eternal.

In some of these saints their physical exploits became extravagances of legend and poetry. True, they were often no more than contests of endurance and bravery. St. Simon Stylite and his followers often give this impression. They came out of their penances more languished and numbed than alert to prayer and to the joy of the presence of God. These are not examples to follow and imitate; they are meant rather to fire the imagination!

In order to provide an environment in which one might train himself for perfect prayer, the Church devised the novitiate, whose counterpart in the art world is the *studio*. The novitiate or studio, however, are not so much places as attitudes: The willingness to accept discipline and dedication for the sake of achieving complete freedom of one's personality in relationship to God as a Person or in respect to achieving a certain perfection. Only discipline can give a priest, nun, or any other Christian the freedom to rise above the ordinary. Perfection requires discipline, not imposed from without, but freely accepted and imposed from within, as it were. The goal is freedom, and freedom can only be achieved through discipline. We can note here that the word discipline comes from disciple, and the Lord said "If you want to be my disciple, take up your cross daily and follow me." Part of that cross is the discipline required to achieve freedom.

Whatever we say about freedom in order to attain to the perfection of love we can apply to the art world—to dancers, musicians, writers, circus people and to all people who strive to do things exceedingly well. The basic rules for superb performances are the same: sweat, struggle, constant watchfulness, and discipline. These are the requirements which carry one to perfection. Only through hardship can man attain freedom. People who attain to perfection in areas of art themselves become "perfect prayers"; they too are "saints" (if not according to

ordinary Catholic terminology, certainly according to the eyes of the gospel).

Christian wisdom is a liturgy directing "*everything* in the heavens and *everything* on earth" (Eph. 1:10) to prayer and dialogue with God. But our vision of the world seems to be distorted, not so much by intellectual considerations as by our sin and self-centeredness. The more we can raise ourselves in the scale of being and be free of our sin and selfishness, the clearer we can see the face of God in the world. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). The Fathers insist that this purity of heart is the first and fundamental condition to attain to God or to any other perfection. He who has not seen God cannot possibly speak of him. There is no other way to see God but by living in him. A Saint is simply one who sees God in prayer in a person to person relationship; other "saints" like performers, scientists, and artists manifest the wisdom and glory of God by freeing themselves from the limitations of ordinary life.

PRAYER OF CONTEMPLATION

The prayer of contemplation or of attention follows the prayer of simple regard where the passions have been channeled and sanctified. The soul has become sensitive to the Divine Presence. Whenever now it looks for God it is immediately awakened and becomes aware of its relationship to him. It is in this stillness and repose that man finds his inner contemplation of God and perceives the deeper initiation into the divine mysteries. What began as a yearning for home (nostalgia) has now become a real vision of the homeland. "After the trouble of words," says Theodore the Recluse (1894) "there comes contrition; after petition, the sentiment of need and hope. Whoever

reaches this summit prays without words, for God is the God of the heart."

Thus, once the soul is completely free from its own thoughts, words, memories, and fantasies, it is filled with God. God reveals himself and pours himself into the soul and illumines it. Man, thus caught up in God, sees his divine beauty and feels the intense joy and spiritual security of belonging to him. The soul has lost the burden of self-centeredness. The world in which he lives is the world of God, ecstatically alive with joy. "It is the same God that said, 'Let there be light shining out of the darkness,' who has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). In the light that burns within him he sees the infinite riches of God as his own possessions. He is a genius; he becomes himself a prayer.

Man in the art world also becomes a prayer when he attains clarity, simplicity, and spontaneity in his art form. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." He has reached God. He is no longer one of twenty, or even one of a pair. He now performs alone. He is not cluttered with any inadequacies. He is all dedication because he has turned his whole life into one long prayer. To pray is to be united with the True, the Indescribable, the Ultimate. A man of prayer has reverence for Life, and he communicates it through his own uniqueness. He is an artist, a saint.

PRAYER OF TENDERNESS

The highest degree of prayer is the prayer of "tenderness." The heart has now been armed and the soul rejoices in its Lord and loving Savior. It is the Holy Spirit who now prays and becomes the soul's life and atmosphere in which man can meet God. "The Spirit comes to the aid

of our weakness. For when we do not even know how we ought to pray, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God" (Rom. 8:26-27).

The awareness of God's presence is so intense that the soul cannot endure it any longer; it utters cries and sheds tears. Spiritual writers call this mystic prayer the prayer of tenderness. Tenderness is the affective state of being that makes us vibrate at the touch of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who touches the fibers of our being. It is he who fills us with the abundance of love and makes it overflow in tears.

This prayer has one distinctive characteristic: suddenness. During the chanting of a psalm, or while reflecting upon one's shortcomings, or in the course of contemplating the beauty, harmony, or splendor of creation, God sometimes suddenly invades and inundates the soul with divine energy and heavenly life. The soul then feels the intensity of God and bursts into flames of compunction and love—and tears well up profusely. Man passes out of himself and is completely taken into the "Other" in an unutterable oneness of life. It is the marriage of the soul, an identification with the beauty of Life and Love which is God.

After all these descriptions of prayer one might say: "That is not for me! It is only for monks or nuns!" There is no distinction between lay spirituality and the spirituality of the monk or nun. All of the baptized are called to the same love, to the highest and most intense level of love. According to St. John Chrysostom, "everyone is called to be a monk, because a monk is supposed to be perfect Christian." In the same way, everyone is called to be an artist. The ways to attain this perfection could be

different, but the final end is the same.

Solitude (where monks are supposed to dwell) is not a place but rather a state of being, of living constantly within the new reality of the Resurrection. In this state the soul is expanded by the breath of the Holy Spirit and it becomes a powerful testimony of the reality of God, of the angels and of the Resurrection. That is why the monk is called *pneumatophore*, a carrier and announcer of the Holy Spirit.

The monk, the man of solitude, has also been called 'equal to the apostles.' Just as the apostles were witnesses to "what they had seen with their eyes and touched with their hands of the Word of Life," so every monk, every baptized person is to be a living witness to the God he has encountered and experienced in the solitude of his heart in prayer.

THE METANOIA

An interesting insight into Eastern anthropology is the prayerful *metanoia*. This word, as is well known, means "change of heart," and often occurs with this meaning in the New Testament (Lk. 3:8). In our liturgical books it is used to signify a bodily gesture expressive of repentance and humility. There are many references to bodily attitudes of worship in the scriptures. We read, for instance, that David went in before Yahweh, "got down" and began to pray (2 Sam. 7:18). Moses and Aaron, challenged by the people, went to the door of the meeting tent and "threw themselves face downward on the ground" (Num. 20:6); and Paul himself "Kne't down with them all and prayed" (Acts 20:36).

The *metanoia* is an act of prayer practiced both in private and at the liturgy. It is usually accompanied by the

prayer of the Publican which, according to the words of the Lord, "justified him" (Lk. 18:14): "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."

This gesture of the *metanoia* is made in two ways. There is a small *metanoia* and a deep *metanoia*. The small *metanoia* is a bow in which the penitent touches the floor with his right hand, then makes the sign of the cross as he returns to an upright position. The deep *metanoia* consists in touching the floor with both knees, both hands, and the forehead, then rising to a standing position to make the sign of the cross.

TRISAGION, DOXOLOGY

Once the Christian realizes the magnificence of God's love, wonder and joy seize his heart and he gives voice to a hymn of praise. His song flows from the serene possession of life that he knows is worthwhile. It is the life of God that deifies and gives real life "where there is no pain, no sorrow." The Christian praises the Father, Son and Holy Spirit because he knows that his whole being is centered on them, and that he belongs to each Person of the Trinity in a special way.

Yet he knows that God has no need to hear his wonders recounted and interpreted. It is rather the individual human being and the community in which he lives who need to proclaim their awe and admiration so that they may continue to grow in faith and love. Wonder and praise of a person tend toward authentic union which does not destroy the differences between them, but rather exalts the originality of each of the persons, and in this movement draws them closer together.

As every prayer and office is introduced by a Trisagion, so every prayer and petition is concluded with a

doxology to the Triadic God. A doxology or a Trisagion is a hymn or declaration in praise of the love and goodness of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . .”; “for you are a merciful God and we send up glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . .”; “for you are the source of tenderness, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . .”; and the most frequent one is, “You who are the lover of man, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . .”

This trinitarian devotion is so ingrained in the Byzantine Christian heart precisely because of these endless and constant proclamations of devotion. Prayers which are addressed to one specific Person of the Holy Trinity end with a glorification and doxology to all three Divine Persons. In the Divine and Holy Liturgy, the prayer of ambo is directed to the Father through the Son represented on the icon, but the final doxology is addressed to all Three Persons.

Besides these short doxologies there is a longer one called the “Great Doxology,” a splendid hymn of descriptive praise to the Three Divine Persons often repeated at the divine Office:

Glory to you, O Giver of Light!
 We praise You, we bless You, we worship You
 We glorify You, we give You thanks
 For the splendor of your glory.

O Lord, O King, O Heavenly God, O Father Almighty!
 O Lord, O Son, O Only-begotten One, O Jesus Christ!
 Who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us,
 O You who take away the sin of the world!

O Lord, to You I come for shelter;
 Teach me to follow Your will.
 For You are my God.

For with You is the fountain of life,
And in your light we shall see light.
Extend your mercy to those who recognize You.

Declarative doxologies are also interposed between psalms of the same theme and inspiration. The psalms of praise themselves are often repeated in the Office: "Praise the Lord in his sanctuary" (150); "Praise the Lord from heaven" (148); "Sing to the Lord a new song" (149). Because they express joy and exaltation at our relationship with God, these psalms have been used especially in the morning and evening offices.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

As we come to the end of these reflections it is fitting to mention a very popular doxology which in a way is the most constant daily reminder and expression of our Christian faith: the Sign of the Cross. Besides being an act of faith, the Sign of the Cross is an act of consecration by which we dedicate ourselves to each Person of the Holy Trinity.

The Sign of the Cross is an act of faith; the symbolism contained in the gesture is very rich. The thumb, index finger, and middle finger of the right hand are joined together, while the fourth and little finger are joined and bent into the palm of the hand. The three fingers are joined together so as to form one entity, and this expresses our faith in the Trinity, Three in One. The fourth and little finger joined together in the palm also form a unity which signifies our faith in the Incarnation: the union of God and man in one Person. Then, by the gesture of the Cross, we proclaim our faith in the Redemption: Christ died on the Cross for our salvation.

The way this gesture is made is also highly symbolic.

After joining our fingers, we lift our hand to our forehead, calling on God the Father to be in our mind, or as offering him the homage of our intelligence. Then we bring our hand to our heart, offering our love to the Son and accepting his love and life. Then crossing over to the right shoulder we call on the Holy Spirit to inspire our actions and to be the source of all our life and works, and to the left shoulder to ask forgiveness for our sins.

We sign the right shoulder first because in our human language and especially in the Holy Scriptures, right symbolizes good, while left symbolizes evil and death. In practical life, many of our Byzantine people express verbally what the gesture symbolizes. Instead of the words "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," they say, "Lord, I give You my mind (or, be in my mind); Lord, I give You my love (or, be in my heart); Lord, I consecrate to You all that is good in my life (or, be in the works of my life); I ask forgiveness of my sins. Amen." This sign is made whenever we hear the name of Christ or a word which symbolizes his presence, for example, "Your face, O Lord," or, "Sign us with the sign of your countenance." Sign of self-dedication, consecration and surrender in love, the Sign of the Cross is no less a sign of appeal to the goodness and mercy of God.

The use of this Sign of the Cross by a priest upon persons or objects is also a sign of the person's or object's consecration to the Trinity. It is well to note that in the Roman practice the blessing is still given from the right to the left of the person being blessed. When imparting this blessing the Byzantine priest composes the fingers on his right hand in such a manner as to form the name of Jesus Christ, since all blessing and all grace flow from Christ. Thus, the index finger is stretched out straight, and the middle finger is slightly bent. This represents the Greek

letters I and C (Jesus). The fourth finger is bent and the thumb placed across it, with the little finger slightly inclined so as to form the letters X and C (Christ). In the Roman Church the Pope alone still blesses in this manner.

Since the Sign of the Cross is thus a highly symbolic gesture, and an act of faith and consecration, it should always be made with care. Because it is made so frequently, there is danger of abusing it. St. John Chrysostom remarked that a Sign of the Cross made hurriedly and without personal devotion is an empty and ineffective "magical waving of the hand in which the demons rejoice." St. Cyril of Jerusalem gives this exhortation: "Let us not be ashamed to confess the crucified. Let us devoutly make the sign of the cross on the forehead, and on everything—on the bread we eat, on the wine we drink. Let us make it when we go out and when we come in, when we lie down to sleep and when we rise up, when we journey and when we rest."

In a very real sense, this Sign of the Cross is the perfect expression of the theology and approach to God of the Byzantine soul. A Christian is a spiritual man, but nevertheless a man who is dependent upon his senses to make contact with realities beyond himself. A spiritual man lives and moves by faith in a world richer and wider than all the material realities he can see with his bodily senses, but these latter are necessary to lift him up to that invisible world. By the use of signs and symbols he draws nearer to the realities they represent, and thus his realization of them becomes life and sources of joy, confidence and spiritual security.

Strictly speaking, one cannot teach religion, since religion is a personal relationship with God. One can provide a context for an experience of God, as a friend can arrange a meeting for two people to get to know each other better. Byzantine spirituality is designed precisely to

help create this atmosphere, this meeting place, where man's consciousness can reach out to touch God and actually experience the mystery of life in the Other. The relaying of mere facts and information about Jesus Christ does not necessarily lead to union. One can memorize all the Gospels, and quote them perfectly, and still be as remote from Christ as any unbeliever.

This is why in the Eastern Church the liturgy itself is the proper place for "religious education" to take place. We are not after information as much as *realization*, the conscious awareness of union with God. Realization is consciousness reaching out to touch a soul, a person, to touch and experience the mystery of life in another. By reaching out to life we absorb life. Our consciousness absorbs life and then becomes richer and more alive itself. Realization is this integration in one's own life of a living spark which flows from another life, and which makes us stand in awe and wonder.

Awe and wonder of the Trinity is the purpose and essence of the Christian's spiritual life. How sound and how true is that saying of the Fathers that we quoted at the beginning of this book, that one becomes what one contemplates. Byzantine spirituality seeks to create the atmosphere for that awe and wonder, not just on special occasions but all the time. It seeks to create an awareness and a consciousness of God's constant presence. Thus, the Christian's love is not an occasional attraction that responds to God's revelation on special days and at special times. The love of the Christian is rather a restless awe, excited at the possibility of meeting the Trinity on an infinite number of occasions, and in that meeting celebrating God's outgoing and everlasting love.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction: Chapter 1

1. In recent centuries this word and the Christian reality for which it stands have been amply vindicated by such scholars as Alfred Rambaud, Charles Bayet, G. Schlemberger, and their successors, L. Brehier, G. Millet, and especially Charles Diehl.
2. The Slavs, in fact, were civilized and christianized not by Greek but by Byzantine culture.
3. F. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity* (New York: University Books, 1964), p. 7.
4. The people of Egypt and Syria retained their own consciousness of being separate races and never really accepted the Roman Empire, that original Latin reality which at that time was fast becoming Greek and developing into a mixture of all nations. Although the Egyptians and Syrians had no chance of obtaining political independence, their hatred of powerful Rome found a vent in christological controversies. The cry of the Faith by Cyril: "One nature in Christ," while really no betrayal of Ephesus, was more a rallying cry meaning, "No submission to the foreign tyrant on the Bosphorus." So the great majority of the populations in these lands became Monophysites, continually rebelling against the creed of the Empire and committing savage atrocities against the "Melkites" (the King's Men): the government officials, tax collectors and army officers. In return, the rebels were fiercely persecuted. A. Fortesque, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1911), X, pp. 157-161.
5. J. M. Hussey, *The Byzantine World* (New York: Harper Torch Book, 1961).
6. F. X. Krauss, *Roman and Byzantine Silk and Textiles* (Strasbourg, 1891).
7. In modern translations, and especially for the Melkites, "I am your city" is rendered by "I am your own." The words of the whole hymn are put in the mouth of the faithful. The Acatlist is an Eastern liturgical service in honor of Mary.

Chapter 2

1. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), p. 65.
2. The word in Greek means "to choose," "to take for oneself."
3. P.G. 55, 706.
4. St. Hilarion of Poitiers, P.G. 36, 141 B.
5. Analogy is a reasoning process or description based on the assumption that things have some similar attributes without being identical.

Chapter 3

1. "Vespers of Pentecost," in Joseph M. Raya and Baron Jose de Vinck, *Byzantine Daily Worship* (Allendale, N.J.: Alleluia Press, 1969), p. 900.

Chapter 4

1. Philaret of Moscow, quoted by Floresky, *Ways of Russian Theology* (Paris, 1937).
2. Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 46, 524.
3. First Canon of the Funeral Service in *Byzantine Daily Worship*, p. 996.
4. Lossky, p. 136.
5. There are other forms of the divine *kenosis* of the Son. In his Baptism, Christ showed repentance, as it were, for the sins of the whole world by allowing himself to be baptized by John. In the temptations in the desert Christ accepted the humiliations of our broken nature. In the passion he endured mockery, suffered, died and was buried as all men are. In the Eucharist he is "broken and distributed."

6. Quoted by Lossky, p. 143.
7. Maximos: *De Ambiquis*, P.G. XCI, 1260 C.
8. Kontakion of the Ascension.
9. Isasac the Syrian, "Mystic Treatises."
10. Lossky, p. 112.

Chapter 5

1. Byzantine asceticism presents man's salvation as intimately connected with the degree one shares in this divine self-emptying, this divine "descent" and self-giving and lowliness. This "kenotic" life involves peaceful resistance, or even the absence of any resistance to suffering, war and violence.

Chapter 6

1. How regrettable is the present intransigent discipline of the Latin Church on the subject of celibacy for priests. It would have been and still would be a blessing for the West if they heeded the advice given by our Holy Patriarch Maximos IV Sayeg to Pope Paul VI of Rome: "In regard to the Latin clergy," said the Patriarch, "all that I propose to lay before your Holiness is the wish that your Holiness would set up a commission in order to study this problem in open discussion. The problem exists and is becoming more difficult from day to day. It demands a solution. It is useless to close our eyes to this problem or consider it taboo. Your Holiness knows very well that truths on which silence is maintained turn to poison. Celibacy will always remain the ideal of an elite which God chooses for himself and which never dies out. But that is no reason why celibacy should be imposed as an indispensable condition for the priesthood." (Letter to Pope Paul VI, October 13, 1965. *L'Eglise Grecque Melkite au Concile*, p. 255.)
2. Dom Theodore Strotmann, *The Bishop In the Eastern Tradition* (Cheverogne, 1962), p. 208 ff.

3. Under the influence of the consideration that the bishop is the image of Christ, the throne of Christ, the *Etoimasia*, became the throne of the bishop himself; the *Etoimasia* is now almost completely forgotten.
4. Here we should comment on the reluctance of Easterners to accept a "Canon Law." For them, a fixed and rigid Canon Law such as is in the West is a death-blow to life in Christ. It is despotic clericalism where some bureaucrats separate the dynamism of life into small compartments in order that they can fit them into static categories, the easier for "authority" to manipulate. This lack of confidence in such "Canon Law" has produced a certain rejection and even hatred on the part of Easterners. As soon as some "Canon Law" is written for them, it stirs up controversies and battles with the Orthodox Church. Then, the Romans who wrote it realize their mistake and change it. Since the first beautifully organized "Canon Law" for the Eastern Church in 1917, we have had five radical changes in the so-called "Oriental Canon Law" which have created heated controversies and divisions within the Church.
5. This passage has been quoted at length because of its importance and because, when given at the Council, it received loud applause. Cf. *L'Eglise Grecque Melkite au Concile*, p. 120.
6. An interesting article on "The Patriarchate in the Law of the Eastern Catholic Churches" by Msgr. Victor J. Pospishil was published in *John XXIII Lectures*, Vol. I (New York: Fordham University Press, 1965), p. 22 ff.
7. On the subject read the study of Peter K. Medawar, *On the Protection of the Rights of the Oriental Church* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959).
8. Archimandrite Sofrony, *The Undistorted Image* (London 1958), pp. 123,163.
9. Those interested in a theological study of the procession of the Holy Spirit can read the detailed and enlightening debate between Greeks and Latins at the Council of Florence in Joseph Gill, *Council of Florence* (Cambridge University Press, 1959), esp. p. 227 ff.

10. Joseph Bingham, *Antiquities of the Church*, Vol. I (London, 1843), p. 9.
11. According to Orthodox theology, "Peter is not here like the other apostles. It is he who expresses the apostolic unity and he is the spokesman for the entire group. The Orthodox Church repeats without hesitation that Peter, and not only his faith, is the rock of the Church." Archbishop Khodr Al Nour, reported by *Proch Orient Chrétien*, tome XXV, 1975, fasc. 1, p. 48.
12. Ep. 66,8 as quoted by Strotmann, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
13. *L'Eglise Greque Melkite au Concile*, p. 102.

Chapter 7

1. I say "at least" because, for instance, in Russia there are many more celebrations in her honor. There is a special one for each of the famous Icons of Mary, with a Proper, an Apolytikion, and a Kontakion: Nov. 5, Our Lady of Smolensk; March 31, Our Lady of the Iberians; May 21, June 23, etc. August 26, Our Lady of Vladimir, etc.
2. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 63.

Chapter 8

1. According to Professor Talbot Rice (*Russian Icons*) this icon dates from the mid-eleventh century. He attributes it to a Constantinopolitan and a Russian workshop. It must have been taken from Constantinople to Kiev in the twelfth century. In 1155 it was carried from Kiev to Vladimir. At the end of the fourteenth century it was transferred to the Kremlin.
2. This realization is so ingrained in our minds that people passing by or near a Church stop and kiss its walls from the outside, and bow to it. I remember from my childhood that one of the loudest complaints against the French Christian Brothers who opened a college in my hometown was that they did not kiss the

walls of the Churches when passing by, and did not bow to them. People were scandalized and were calling the faith of these holy religious into question.

3. "The Way of the Pilgrim," in *Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, ed. G.P. Fedotov (London: Sheed & Ward, 1952), p. 303.

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"I deeply believe that the Byzantine way is still the most suitable way for modern man to come to a realization of the sheer poetry and grace that are in the Gospels. I believe that Western man, and especially Americans, can easily live it, and that it can add to his enrichment without intellectual capitulation. . . . Christianity is not an abstract doctrine divorced from reality and from history. Nor is it some momentary, flickering light which shines for a brief while and then is gone. Christianity is a continual celebration of life and love between God and man lived out in concrete history. . . . It is a mystery of life in an embrace of Love."

—excerpt from the Preface

GOD WITH US PUBLICATIONS is pleased to make available this reprint of *The Face of God* by Archbishop Joseph Raya. It is our hope and prayer that this insightful work, which reflects the dynamic spirit of Eastern Christianity, will help lead its readers into a deeper relationship with the holy, consubstantial, and life creating Trinity, the God Who is Love.