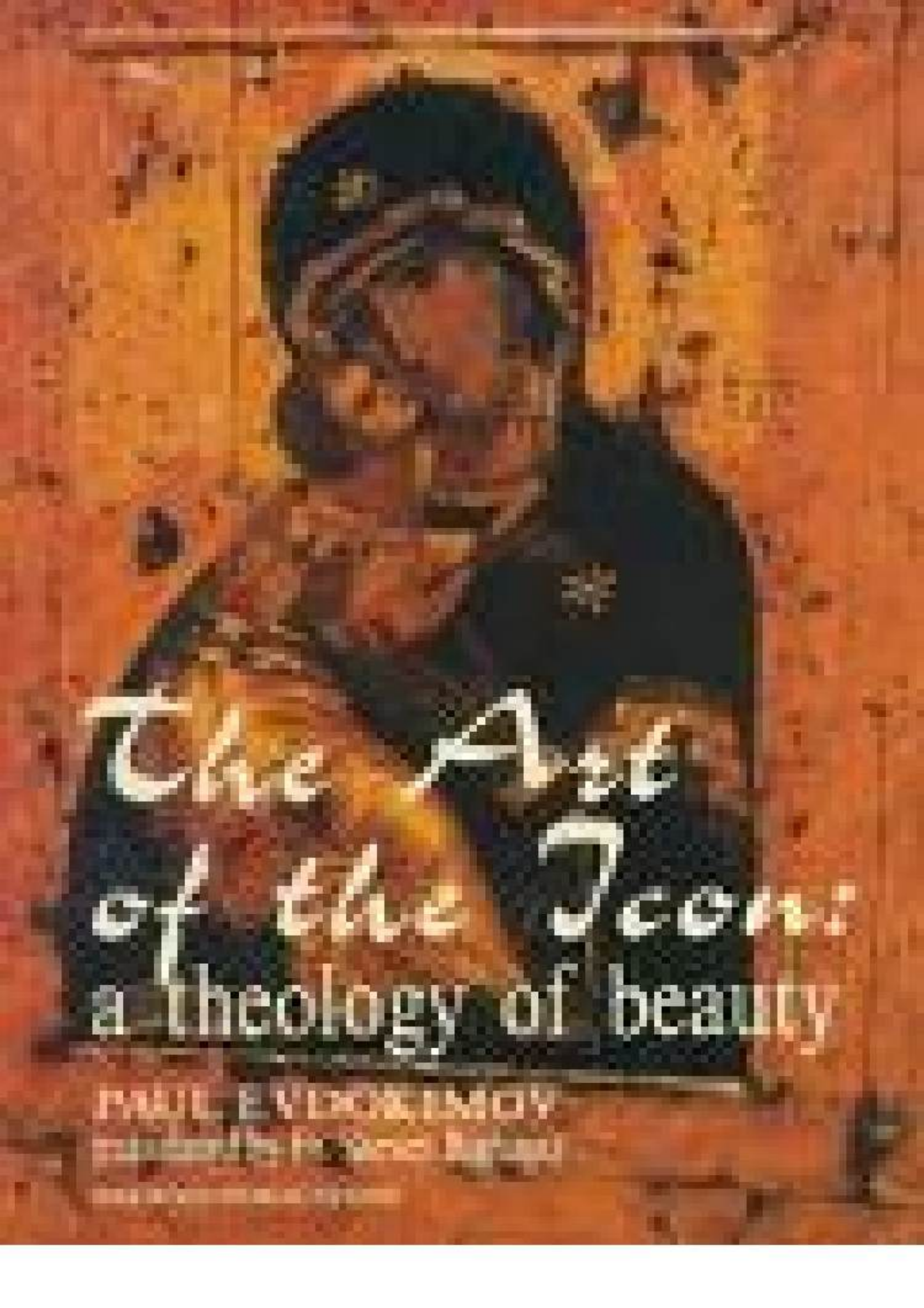
The Art
of the Icon:
a theology of beauty
PAUL EVDOKIMOV

THE ART OF THE ICON

A Theology of Beauty

by

Paul Evdokimov

translated by

Fr. Steven Bigham

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The Mother of God: A Section of the Icon, "In Thee, All Creation Rejoices." Early 16th Century, Master Dionysius, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

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Section I

Beauty

CHAPTER ONE

The Biblical Vision of Beauty

"Beauty is the splendor of truth." So said Plato in an affirmation that the genius of the Greek language completed by coining a single term, *kalokagathia*. This word combines goodness and beauty together as if they were the two slopes of one mountain. At the highest degree of synthesis, that which is found in the Bible, truth and goodness offer themselves for our contemplation. Their living union, symbiosis, denotes the integrity of being from which beauty springs forth.

"The bird on the branch, the lily in the field, the deer in the forest, the fish in the sea, the numberless companies of happy men, all these proclaim with great joy: God is love! But from below, and as if carried by all these voices, like the moaning bass below all the high sopranos, we hear, *de profundis*, the voices of the sacrificed victims: God is love."[1]

The sacrificed victims, the martyrs, the "wounded friends of the Bridegroom," these "offer themselves as a spectacle to angels and men," and they form the fundamental harmonies of the immense hymn of salvation. The harvested ears of grain, these the Lord stores in the granaries of his Kingdom. Holy Tradition sees in this image the imitation of Christ in Beauty. St. Nicholas Cabasilas, the great liturgist of the 14th century, expressed it this way when he spoke of "those who were able to love sovereign Beauty above everything else,"[2] that sovereign Beauty which is the seed of the divine and "*agapé* enrooted in the heart."[3]

The Creator, like a divine poet, in bringing the world into being out of nothingness, composed his *Symphony in Six Days*, the *Hexameron*. After each one of his creative acts, he "saw that it was *beautiful*." The Greek text of the biblical story uses the word *kalon*-beautiful and not *agathon*-good; the Hebrew word carries both meanings at the same time. In addition, the Hebrew verb *to create* is conjugated in the completed mood. That is to say, the world "has been created, is created, and will be created" until its fulfillment. Even at the moment it leaves God's hands, the sprout of creation is already beautiful, but this very seedling points to its evolution, to the very lively but tragic history of God and man working together, their synergy. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, the realization of the primal beauty in the perfect Beauty takes place at the end and is called the Kingdom.[4]

Holy Tradition makes an important clarification in this matter. Evagrius Ponticus, a great spiritual writer of the 4th century, commented on an alternate reading of the Lord's Prayer in which one manuscript of St. Luke has "Your Holy Spirit come." instead of "Your Kingdom come." Evagrius said that "the Kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit; we pray the Father to send him down on us."[5] In agreement with Holy Tradition, Evagrius identified the Kingdom with the Holy Spirit.

If therefore the contemplated Kingdom is Beauty, the Third Person of the Trinity reveals himself as the *Spirit of Beauty*. Dostoyevsky understood the point very well: "The Holy Spirit is the direct seizure, grasping of Beauty." He communicates the splendor of holiness. This is why, according to St. Gregory Palamas, in the heart of the Trinity, the Spirit is "the eternal joy where the Three delight in each other."[6] The famous icon of the Trinity by Rublev offers us the gripping vision of this divine Beauty.

The trinitarian dogma states that if the Son is the Word that the Father pronounces and which becomes flesh, the Spirit manifests the Word, makes him audible, and makes it possible for us to hear him in the gospel. The Spirit himself, however, remains hidden, mysterious, and silent; "he will not be speaking as from himself" (Jn 16:13). The person of the Spirit is hidden in his very manifestation: "Though your Name is heartily desired and constantly proclaimed, no one can say what it is."[7] In relation to the Word, the Gospel of the Holy Spirit is visual and contemplative. In his revelations, the Spirit is the "finger of God" which sketches the Icon of Being with the uncreated Light. At the threshold of the ineffable Wisdom of God, the Spirit makes us contemplate the sophianic Beauty of Meaning and builds up this meaning into a cosmic Temple of Glory.

The fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council had this to say about the icon: "What the word says, the image shows us silently; what we have heard, we have seen." Now if "no one can say, 'Jesus is

Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit,"[8] no one can represent the image of the Lord unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit who is the divine iconographer. The rite for the consecration of a church insists on this attribute of the Spirit. The troparion (4th tone) sings the praises of the perfection of the adequate form at the coming of Him-who-is-Beauty: "As you spread out the splendor of the heavens on high, so also here below you have revealed the *beauty* of the holy dwelling of your glory." Then follows the epiclesis: " through your ineffable love for mankind, creation has received the theophany of Mount Sinai, the miracle of the Burning Bush, and the Temple of the great Solomon as an image of the New Covenant; we pray you and ask you send down your most Holy Spirit on us and on all your inheritance " "O Lord, I love the beauty of your house" (Septuagint Ps 26:8).

Life and light are the well-known characteristics of the Holy Spirit. Light is above all the power of revelation which is why *Deus revelatus* is called God of Light. This divine Light "enlightens all men" (Jn 1:9) and, according to St. Symeon, "transforms those that it enlightens into light." What is more, it is the source of all knowledge: " by your light, we see the light" (Ps 36:10).[9]

There are "points of view," always partial and therefore deforming, and then there is full and total seeing which makes man, according to the expression of St. Macarius,[10] an immense "single eye" penetrated by the divine Light. St. Gregory of Nyssa urges us to "see with the eye of the Dove," and St. Maximus the Confessor, to see "with God's eye.": "Just as at the center of a circle there is one single point where all the straight lines which come out from it are undivided, in the same way, whoever has been judged worthy of "seeing in God" knows, without concepts and with simple knowledge, all the ideas of created things."[11] The expression "without concepts" means to grasp knowledge in an intuitive and contemplative manner. That is why iconographers teach "the fast of the eyes"[12] which teaches us anew how to contemplate.

From the optical point of view alone, we know that the eye does not really perceive objects but only the light reflected from the objects. An object is only visible if light makes it luminous. We see the light which unites itself to the object, marries the object, so to speak, taking its form, giving it shape and revealing it. The mysterious interaction of carbon and light produces the diamond, produces beauty. According to an old folk tale, the pearl is conceived when lightning penetrates the darkness of the oyster's shell.[13] Space has no existence without light which makes it the matrix of all life. It is in this sense that life and light are identical. Light makes every person alive, making him present; he is thus the one who sees and is seen by the other, the one who lives with and "toward" the other, the one existing in the other. On the other hand, hell, the Greek *hades* or the Hebrew *sheol*, designate a darkened place where solitude reduces a person to the extreme emptiness of demonic solipsism where no one's look crosses another's. The Coptic *Apophthegmas* of Macarius the Elder give us a gripping description of this solitude. The captives are tied back to back and only a great act of pity by the living brings them a moment's rest: "We see each others' faces for only a split second "

According to the biblical story of the creation, in the beginning "Evening came and morning came: the first day." The six-day creation story, the *hexameron*, does not know "night". Darkness and night are not created by God. For the moment, night is only a sign of non-existence, the abstract nothingness which is "separated" from being by its very nature. Morning and evening denote the succession of events; they designate the creative progression of things and only form "day" which is a dimension of pure light. The opposite of "day," that is "night," is not yet the effective power of darkness. According to the meaning given to it in John's gospel, night only appears with the fall.

Night is not the simple and passive absence of light. Psychiatrists know that every apparent "passivity" hides a deaf and active resistance. Darkness is a desperate flight toward its own interior because it cannot get away from the Light. In order to hide itself, darkness clothes itself in the obscurity of guilt and manifests a conscious and demonic attitude of negation, denial, and refusal.

At the Last Supper, the upper room was completely flooded with light because Christ was there in the midst of his apostles. It was at that moment that Satan entered into Judas and from then on Judas was no longer able to remain in the circle of light: "He quickly went out" and John who is very sober in describing details notes that "it was night." The darkness of night enveloped Judas and hid the terrible secret of his communion with Satan.

As the fathers note, the first day of Creation is not *prôti* but *mia*, that is, it is not first but rather one, unique, not one of a series. It is the *alpha* which already carries within itself and calls forth its *omega*, the 8th day of the final harmony, the *pleroma*.

This first day is the joyous hymn of the Song of Songs sung by God himself, the flashing eruption of “Let there be Light.” This Light is not an optical phenomenon; such light will appear only on the 4th day with the creation of the astronomical sun. The primal Light of “in the beginning,” according to the absolute meaning *in principio*, is the most shattering revelation of the face of God. For the world just beginning its development, “Let there be Light” means “Let the revelation be” and “Let the One who reveals, *let the Holy Spirit come*!” The Father pronounces his Word, and the Spirit shows him forth; the Spirit is the *Light of the Word*. This Light reveals God as the absolute Thou and immediately calls forth the one who listens to him and contemplates him: a second light having arisen from the Light, like its alter ego and mirror in the light-revelation-communion.

Even after the Fall, “a light shines in the dark.” The light does not shine just to illuminate but to transform the night into the day without end: “ your light will rise in the darkness, and your shadows will become like noon” (Is 58: 10). “The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light” (Mt 6:22). The Hesychastic tradition teaches the method of silent meditation and the science of the light: “The perfect ones study the divine not only by the word (the Word) but also by the light of the word (the Holy Spirit), mysteriously ”

At the ultimate heights of holiness, the human person “becomes in a certain sense light.”[14] Seraphim of Sarov was thus able to clothe himself in the sun and shine. Being himself called “a striking likeness,” St. Seraphim was the living icon of the God of Light. St. Gregory of Nyssa described the elevation of the soul of him who hears in the following way: “You have become beautiful by coming close to my Light.” Man is drawn upward; we might even say “falls up” and attains the level of divine beauty. To be in the Light is to be in an illuminating communion which reveals the icons of persons and things. This communion allows us to grasp their *logoi* as contained in divine thought and thus initiates these persons and things into their perfect wholeness: in other words, persons and things are initiated into the beauty that God willed for them.

The Book of Revelation is the end, but it is also the beginning. The Light of the first day is the object of the vision and it is also the organ of vision. Just like the first moment of creation, “the future age is but one single day, the Great Day,” in the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa. The Book of Revelation says that “it will never be night again, and they will not need lamplight or sunlight because the Lord God will be shining on them” (Rv 22:5).

“I am the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end.” The circle of the Revelation hinges both on the differentiation and on the perfect identity of all its elements. The first word of the Bible “Let there be light” is also the last word: “Let there be beauty.” Man’s only choice is to become a complete and living doxology: “Glory to you who has shown us the Light.” “One thing I ask of the Lord, the one thing I seek is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life and to contemplate the *Beauty of the Lord*. “As the Spirit of Beauty, the Spirit’s proper work is a “poetry without contemplation of the divine Beauty which extends over all eternity ”

CHAPTER TWO

The Theology of Beauty in the Fathers

According to the legendary story of "the choice of the faith," Prince Vladimir of Kiev is said to have sent ambassadors to the Moslems, the Jews, the Latins, and the Greeks in order to choose the best religion. The report that the envoys brought back about their experience in Constantinople made the prince decide without any hesitation for Byzantine Christianity. The ambassadors said, "We did not know if we were in heaven or on earth for on earth such *beauty* is not to be found." We are not dealing here with just an aesthetic experience; the report goes much beyond that: "We thus do not know what to say, but we know one thing for sure. God dwells there among men. " God's presence among men is what is beautiful; it is this beauty that ravishes and transports men's souls.

St. Germanus Patriarch of Constantinople said that with the coming of Christ, the whole of heaven descended to earth and that the Christian soul was forever seized and held by this vision. The greatest eastern Fathers have always been visionary poets and their theology has been contemplative. In the words of Evagrius Ponticus, "a theologian is someone who knows how to pray," and according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, a theologian is someone who puts into theological terms the liturgical experience of God, a living communion. Theology derived from prayer is written like a liturgical composition; even the dogmas are formulated as doxologies. We now understand why Fr. Serge Bulgakov called Orthodoxy "heaven on earth" because in its highest and purest form, it expresses itself in terms of light and beauty.

For Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Beauty is one of the names for God in his relation to human persons; man is conceived according to a model of increasing conformity to a divine model. In the words of Dionysius "man was created according to the eternal model, the Archetype of Beauty."[15] In this plan or blueprint of archetypal structures, the creation of the world already contains the seed of its final vocation, and man's destiny is already determined: "God allows us to participate in his own Beauty."[16] This perspective is assumed by all the Fathers, and on this basis, they laid the foundation for a penetrating *theology of Beauty.*

Through the thought of Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius, and Maximus the Confessor, Holy Tradition assimilated the inspired intuitions of Plato about *Eros*; for Plato, *Eros* was "birth in beauty." And St. Paul's hymn to love (1 Co 13), that Pauline Banquet, is a magnificent reply to Plato's *Banquet.* According to St. Maximus, the Creator is "the divine *Eros*" and Christ is "the crucified *Eros*." In the words of St. Macarius, "The divine *Eros* brought God down to earth."[17] The power of divine love contains the universe and from chaos it made the Cosmos, that is Beauty. Normally every living thing reaches out and rises up toward the Sun of divine Beauty. St. Basil says that "by nature men desire the beautiful"[18] and in his essence, man is created with a hunger for the beautiful; he is that very hunger because as "image of God" and being "of God's race" (Ac 17:29), man is "related" to God. It is in being "in his likeness that man manifests the divine Beauty."[19] The liturgical services speak of a certain category of saints as "those who have a striking resemblance." In the same way, the *Philocalia*, or "love of beauty," a collection of ascetical writings, indicates by its very name that an ascetic, a spiritual person, a person "taught by God," is not only good that goes without saying but that he is also beautiful in that he radiates the divine Beauty. "God has made man the singer of his radiance,"[20] as St. Gregory of Nazianzus has noted.

The christological tradition of Antioch accentuates the revelation of the Word in his humanity. The pneumatological tradition of Alexandria insists on the Beauty of the divine. St. Cyril of Alexandria makes clear that the vocation of the Spirit is to be the Spirit of Beauty, the form of the forms. He goes on to say that in the Spirit we participate in the Beauty of the divine nature.[21] At the creation, the original breathing forth of life "conferred on man perfect beauty."[22] Sealed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, man receives a charismatic gift which orients him toward contemplation. He carries in himself "a hidden *poetic logos*" and as a little god, *microtheos*, in a little world, *microcosm*, "he contemplates, in himself, the Wisdom of God, the beauty of the poetic *logoi* of the universe."[23] St. Basil of Selecia highlights the very artistic charism of penetrating the essence of

things and in order to unravel their secrets: “God gives *being* to every living thing, and man gives them their name.”[24] In speaking about Hölderlin in his *Metaphysics*, Heidegger profoundly notes that the essence of poetry is properly to name things, to create names. The image of the Burning Bush or the “flame of things,” according to the expression of St. Isaac the Syrian, receives its full luster: St. Maximus says that “the unspeakable and prodigious fire hidden in the essence of things, as in the bush, is the fire of divine love and the dazzling brilliance of his beauty inside every thing.”[25]

The art of contemplation is at the heart of the fathers’ cosmology: the vision of the archetypal *logoi,* or the thoughts of God concerning beings and things, builds up a grandiose visual theology, an iconosophy. Each thing possesses its own *logos,* its “interior word,” its “entelechy,” which is closely tied to the concrete thing itself. This link is established by the divine *Fiat*; it is the adequate correspondence, and therefore transparent, between the form and its content, its *logos*. Their intimate interpenetration, the secret coinciding, reveals itself in terms of light and constitutes beauty. According to St. Paul, glory appears where the form and the idea of God, which inhabits it, become one. This is especially true where form becomes a place of theophany, where the body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. The beauty of Christ is in the coexistence of divine transcendence and immanence. The prayer which is addressed to a guardian angel calls him the “guardian of our souls and bodies,” of their reciprocal transparence. He thus becomes the guardian of beauty.

A powerful spirit can take on a weak body; this is the imperfection of our world. This condition refers to the mystery of the *Kenosis* of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53:2: “without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes ” It is this kenotic veil thrown over his splendor that is expressed by Psalm 44:3 (the Septuagint): “You are beautiful, the most beautiful of the children of men.” St. Peter also says (1 Pe 3:3) that “all this [outward beauty] should be inside, in a person’s heart, imperishable ” In this case, the very infirmity becomes ineffably “beautiful” for in going beyond its infirmity in a veritable trans-figuration, the obstacle is made to serve the spirit in a mysterious bending to the secret destiny of a being. In an extreme way, the “fools for Christ” made themselves ugly as part of their vocation and went into the depths of shame in order to sow light. This “show” was often seen only by the angels.

In contrast, fearful ugliness, close to the limits of the demonic, is an eclipse of content, a purely formal appearance, corpse-like, a monstrous form, being mendacious and parasitic, an imposture whose mask hides any content. It is an ontological perversion, separation, being un-alike, dissolution, hell and nothingness at worst. It is an empty form, an absolutely adequate form for an absolutely non-existent content. It is thus the disappearance of both form and content.

The face of Christ is the human face of God. The Holy Spirit rests on him and reveals to us absolute Beauty, a divine-human Beauty, that no art can ever properly and fully make visible. Only the icon can suggest such Beauty by means of the taboric light.

According to Heraclitus, “War is the father of all things,” but “harmony, accord, and beauty are the mother of all things.” He give us the astonishingly expressive image of the bow and the lyre. In Greek the same word *bios* stands for bow and life; the one kills and the other gives life. Father-war is symbolized by the bow, and Mother-beauty by the lyre. Now we might say that the lyre is a sublimated bow, a bow with several strings. In place of death, it sings life. The masculine warrior, a killer, can thus be *harmonized*, sublimated by the feminine and changed into life, culture, worship and a liturgy of glory. At its perfection, this beauty is the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, and thus the Mother of all men, the New Eve, life. She is the privileged place of the Spirit of Beauty and only her icon can bring us close to the mystery. St. Gregory Palamas wrote that “it was necessary that she, who was going to give birth to the most beautiful of the children of men, be herself admirably beautiful.”[26]

Joseph of Volokolamsk (15th century), a great admirer of Andrei Rublov’s art, rose to great poetic heights when he wrote his *Treatise on the Veneration of Icons*. Concerning the icon of the Trinity, Joseph said that “from the visible image, the spirit launches itself toward the divine. It is not the object (the material icon) which is venerated but the Beauty which, by resemblance, the icon transmits mysteriously ” The icons illustrate what Byzantine literature calls “the unspeakable lightning flashes of divine Beauty ”

All positive, or cataphatic knowledge, postulates a negative knowledge, an apophasis, a limit at the threshold of the unspeakable, where positive knowledge stops and completes itself in the system of contemplated symbols. This is the “symbolic realism” of the liturgy which always signifies an

epiphanic symbolism: what is invoked in the epiclesis answers by appearing immediately, and this appearing shines in and through the visible aspects of the sacraments and the liturgy.

St. Maximus sketches out an immense vision of created being in concentric circles, centered on Christ the Cosmocrator (Ruler of the Universe). The world ultimately reveals itself as an "image and appearing of the invisible light, a very pure mirror, clear, showing a true reflection, immaculate, undarkened, welcoming, if it is proper to speak so: all the splendor of the primal beauty."[27] The creature will be united to the Creator up to and including "identity by assimilation," fruit of divinization, "identity in act" which like a bridge joins the two banks above the abyss. All the antinomies of the world end up being dissolved like mist in the azure blue of eternity.

"Irresistible human *eros*" launches itself toward the uniquely Desirable One to meet the divine *Eros* who "comes out of himself and unites himself to our spirit."[28] It is precisely this birth in Beauty, so strongly underscored in the mysticism of the liturgy, which permeates the thought of the Fathers. Created in the image of the Creator, man is also creator, artist, and poet. A "poetic" and doxological divine work (theurgy) shapes and forms a living theology. St. Gregory Palamas affirms with great force that "perfect beauty comes from on high, from a union with the light which is more brilliant than any known light and which is the unique origin of any solidly grounded theology."[29]

What the pre-eternal Council of God has decided about the destiny of man is summed up in Revelations and expressed in the eternal praise of God: "And all the angels the elders and the four animals, prostrated themselves before the throne, and worshiped God seated there on his throne, and they cried, 'Amen, Alleluia.' Then a voice came from the throne; it said, 'Praise our God, you servants of his '" (Rv 7:11; 19:4). A saint is not a superman but someone who lives his truth as a liturgical being. The fathers have found the most exact definition of man in the expression "eucharistic adoration." A human being is a person of the *Sanctus* who joining the angelic choirs "in an eternal unchanging movement around God sings and blesses the triple face of the unique God with triple blessings."[30] The *Sanctus* hymn during the liturgy is a *theologia,* that is a hymn produced by the Holy Spirit.[31]

"I will sing to my God as long as I live" (Septuagint Ps 104:33). It is for this kind of "action" that man has been set apart and made holy. To sing to God, to sing his perfections, in a word to sing his Beauty, this is man's unique preoccupation, his unique and totally free "work." The figure in the praying position, the Orant, found in the catacombs represents the proper attitude of the human soul, its inner structure in the form of prayer. The command "to fill the earth and conquer it " (Gn 1:28) is a command to transform the earth into a cosmic temple in which to worship God and then to offer that earth to the Creator. We have here a much loved iconographic subject. It sums up the gospel message in a single word *XAIRE*: "rejoice and worship let every creature that breathes give thanks to God." In a masterly fashion, St. Paul sets out the ultimate goal of God's charisms: "You have been sealed in the Holy Spirit and God has obtained [these sealed persons] for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14). There is no better way to express the transcendent vocation of man and his doxological and iconographic ministry. The Church expresses this same notion when she sings: "Gathered together in your temple, we see ourselves in the light of your heavenly beauty."

The spirituality which derives from St. Nicholas Cabasilas, 14th century, distills the essence of a long tradition and defines itself as the participation of all the faithful in an eschatological liturgy: "the future life overflows and mixes with the present life, the Sun of Glory has appeared, freely accepting a great abasement the bread of angels has been given to men." God, the "true lover, creates the universe and beauty," becomes flesh and dies full of love. At the end of his work, Cabasilas evokes the glorious Second Coming when Christ will appear above the clouds as a "beautiful choir master (coryphæus) in the midst of a beautiful choir" and will draw all creatures to himself in a great movement of ecstasy. "What a vision we will see at the Second Coming! An assembly of beautiful creatures, gods, surrounding God himself to form a crown around him who is supreme Beauty."[32] The deified humanity of Christ will be like a "glass torch" shining like a cloud with a trisolar fringe of gold. The kontakion of the Sunday of Orthodoxy says the following: "The Word of God having reëstablished the soiled image in its ancient dignity united it to divine Beauty." According to Diodocus of Photiki, "when grace perceives that we greatly desire the heavenly beauty, it grants us the mark of the likeness."[33] Procopius of Gaza, in his work *De ædificiis* I, 1, admires the beauty of holy the temple of Holy Wisdom and notes that "God is especially pleased with it." God takes pleasure in every work of art which is a mirror of his glory. He is pleased with every saint who is the icon of his splendor.[34]

CHAPTER THREE

From Æsthetic to Religious Experience

There is an amazing resemblance between æsthetic and religious experience: standing before the material object at the center of the experience, *l'objet d'art*, both types of experience assume an attitude of contemplation, even prayer and supplication. What differentiates the two is the way each experience grasps its object, or rather is grasped by that object.

Speaking for philosophy in general, Kant stated that Beauty is "whatever pleases universally and without concepts," that is, whatever produces disinterested pleasure, for "Beauty is an end in itself without any other purpose,"[35] either utilitarian or moral. What is even more important is the affirmation that the idea of the beautiful is interchangeable with the idea of being; this means that beauty is the final stage of the progression toward fullness of being; it is identical with the ideal wholeness and integrity of being. In contrast, ugliness is a lack of being, its perversion by being deprived of an essential element.

Concerning the beautiful, the Scholastics said that "id quod visum placet: whatever is pleasing to sight. Nicholas Poussin later spoke of "delectation," delight or enjoyment, and Delacroix of a "feast for the eye." For everyone, "pleasure," or emotion, is characteristic of æsthetic knowledge, of truth perceived by the senses, by using artistic forms. An artist reveals the restored fullness of being and makes it possible for us to contemplate its ideal aspects. In the words of Baudelaire, the artist allows us to see "another nature," a buried and hidden truth. Beauty thus presents one of three faces that make up the ideal trinity of truth, the good, and the beautiful. The artist brings his light into the darkness, but he neither reproduces nor copies. He rather creates forms perceivable by the senses, and these forms become containers of an idealistic content. At its highest level, Art aspires to present a vision of the fullness of being, of the world as it must be in its perfection. Art thus opens the way toward the Mystery of Being. The intuitive perception of Beauty is already a sort of creative victory over chaos and ugliness.

In his *Æsthetics as the Science of Expression*, Benedetto Croce demonstrates that Art is above all linked to expression. This is why æsthetic experience is the most immediate of all experiences; in music this may be even more the case, since music's dynamism is free of the constraints of space and unfolds entirely in time. By using the elements of this world, Art reveals to us a depth which is logically inexpressible. It is in fact impossible to "tell" poetry, to "decompose" a symphony, or to "tear apart" a painting. The beautiful is present in the harmony of all its elements and brings us face to face with a truth that cannot be demonstrated or proved, except by contemplating it. The mystery of the beautiful illuminates external phenomena from within, as the soul radiates mysteriously on a person's face. The beautiful meets us and we know it intimately; it comes close to us and begins to mold itself in the very likeness of our being. We are in no way speaking of an illusion or of a transfer of our subjective emotions. We add nothing to the objective reality of a revelation. We are simply grasped by our experience, without even being able to find adequate poetic words to describe what we feel so movingly. This experience is not related to the mind or reason but to the heart, in the Pascalian sense. For Isabelle Rivière, the task of Alain-Fournier in *Le Grand Meaulnes* is to restore life to what is marvelous in the world at that point "where all things are seen in their secret beauty."

Great painters affirm that they have never seen anything ugly in nature. An artist lends us his eyes so we can see a fragment in which the Whole is nonetheless present, as the sun is reflected in a drop of dew. Like a living person, the world turns toward us, speaks to us, sings to us, shows us its secret colors, and fills us with an overwhelming joy; our solitude is thus broken. We commune with the beauty of a countryside, with a face or with poetry in the same way we commune with a friend. We feel a strange relation with a reality that seems to be our soul's homeland, once lost but now found. Art "dephenomenalizes" present reality, and as a result the whole world opens up to mystery. It is at this point, however, that æsthetic experience reaches its limits and stops.

In his well-known philosophy of stages, Kierkegaard asks the following question: Is there an æsthetic, ethical, or religious way to arrive at the supreme value? The Middle Ages celebrated the Venusberg, that is, the kingdom of intoxication whose first citizen is Don Juan. He incarnates the æsthetic principle of a life totally given over to desire and the enjoyment of life. However, "woman inspires man only as long as he does not possess her;" she can open him up to the infinite but then must disappear. The "first love" is the first and only fresh, romantic escape while at the end, the imaginary worlds plunge us into illusion and mystification. The Seducer fails by abstraction; the musical sound of his art is cracked; his enjoyment of the fleeting moments, as an artist, is achieved at the expense of his victims who suffer and sing off-key. Desire fades away until it becomes pure geometry, a game of musical eroticism, which ends up as a disquieting and equivocal anxiety. Finally he does not even know if desire is good or bad. Each insufficient and immediate instant must be surpassed for each supreme moment walks hand in hand with death. The pleasure seeker dances over the abyss, and his despair awakens in him a deep and limitless sadness.

Now despair, at the lowest point of its abyss, forces us to look at ourselves in the light of our *eternal value*, and at this point we pass over to the ethical stage. The irresponsible pleasures of the æsthete stand over against the duties and responsibilities of the moralist. But the moralist too struggles against the boredom and monotony of life; he seeks victory through repetitions and renewals and by taking himself very seriously. He may be able to attain to the value of a fresh, flowing stream, but the ethical stage is shipwrecked on the reef of sin, guilt and anxiety.

Guided by the hand of God, man in spite of himself breaks through the ceiling of the æsthetic and ethical stages. Abraham is a good example of "the suspension of the ethical." Man finds himself always suspended above an abyss, and yet he is joyful. Here we have the absurd and paradoxical nature of faith. The God-Man is the ultimate paradox in the face of supreme power, and at the religious stage, man enters into an absolute relation with the Absolute through a meditation on anxiety and suffering.

Despite the powerful genius of his religious attitude, Kierkegaard remains *in front of God* and not *in God*. The miracle of the wedding at Cana is beyond Kierkegaard. The joyful breath of grace is never to be found in the dark and ironic pages of both his books and his life. According to docetic christology, which never advances beyond the edge of the Pentecost event, God's absolute otherness is projected onto the otherness of man's whole being; Spirit-bearing love is thus impossible to attain. This negative relation, created by distance, ends up as absence. Now in the sacrament of marriage, loved otherness is the very essence of the relationship: *finis amoris ut duo unam fiant*. The divine Other becomes more deeply rooted in my being than my own soul, and I, the beloved, follow wherever He leads. God meets us, and he makes the ethical experience a vehicle for disciplining creation, and the æsthetical experience becomes a opening through which his Beauty erupts.

We prove God's existence by worshiping him and not by advancing so-called proofs. We have here the liturgical and iconographic argument for the existence of God. We arrive at a solid belief in the existence of God through a leap over what seems true, over the Pascalian certitude. According to an ancient monastic saying, "Give your blood and receive the Spirit."

According to the profound idea of Aristotle, we meet beauty and its purifying power in tragedy. Beauty is not only an æsthetical reality but also metaphysical. A purely æsthetical vision, one that recognizes only æsthetical values, is certainly the furthest removed from beauty. Such a vision, being autonomous and thereby defenseless, opens itself very easily to demonic perversions. Beauty can deceive, and its charms can hide moral depravity and a shocking indifference toward truth. It is obvious, as St. Paul stated, that natural beauty is fragile; it suffers and is waiting for its liberation from the *religious* man (Rm 8:21).

The Absolute is God, but God goes beyond the abstract perfection of a philosophical concept: he is the Living and Existing One; Love, he is Trinity; Love, he is Himself and the One other than himself, the God-Man. The world only exists in that it is *loved*, and its existence witnesses to the Father "who so loved the world" (Jn 3:16). From this point of view, contemplation which is religious and not æsthetic shows itself to be *in love* with every creature; at this level of "ontological tenderness," contemplation rises above death, anxiety, and worries, even above remorse, for "God is greater than our heart." Against the background of the radical opposition between Being and Nothingness, Light and Darkness, the Johannine writings focus on the reciprocal immanence of God and man. It is obvious then that true Beauty is not found in nature itself but rather in the epiphany of

the Transcendent. This epiphany transforms nature into a cosmic place of its radiance, a "burning bush." In his notes, Dostoevsky draws attention to the hesychastic theme of the interior Kingdom when he says that "the light of Tabor distinguishes man from matter which is his food." In addition God gives man the "bread of angels" as well as his own substance.

Splendor is inherent in truth which does not exist in the abstract. In its fullness, truth requires a personalization and seeks to be "enhypostazied," that is, rooted and grounded in a person. In answer to this requirement, Christ states "I am the Truth." Since truth and beauty are intimately united and are but two aspects of one reality, the Lord's saying also signifies "I am Beauty." All beauty is thus one of the images for the Incarnation. Dostoevsky states it this way: "There is not and cannot be anything more beautiful and more perfect than Christ." Nevertheless, contemplation of beauty which is strictly *æsthetical*, even a strictly æesthetical contemplation of Christ, is not at all sufficient and requires a religious act of faith, an active participation and an incorporation into the transforming beauty of the Lord. The Beauty of the Son is the image of the Father-Source of Beauty, revealed by the Spirit of Beauty. We are dealing here with a trinitarian Beauty, and it is this Beauty that we contemplate in the face of the Incarnate Word for "he who *has seen* me *has seen* the Father." Such is the order of the Incarnation: Christ is the "Judgment of judgment," according to St. Maximus; he is the "crucified judgment" of every face of this world, the Archetype of every form. This is why, according to the Fathers, there is no Beauty except in God. The biblical passage "Be perfect as you heavenly Father is perfect" also means "Be beautiful as your heavenly Father is beautiful," for, by its very nature and source, the form of divine perfection is *beautiful*; it is the object of silent contemplation and "the form that gives form to everything that has no form," according to the felicitous expression of Pseudo-Dionysius.

In the writings of the Fathers, divine Beauty is a fundamental category, both biblical and theological, according to which beauty in the world is a divine reality, a transcendental quality of being analogous to truth and the good. The harmony of divine truths is personalized in Christ; he is *believed* but also *seen* and contemplated, for the deified humanity of the Word is the "glass torch" from which the trinitarian Light shines forth. The Epiphany, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and Pentecost are fiery irruptions become visible, but in these revelations, the Object entirely determines the subject. The light is the object of the vision as well as the organ. The Transfiguration of the Lord was in fact the transfiguration of the apostles; for a moment their eyes were opened, and they could see the Glory of the Lord beyond his kenosis, that is, his form of a servant. In the words of St. Gregory Palamas, "By a transmutation of their senses, the three disciples passed over from the flesh to the Spirit."[36]

According to Heb. 5:13-14, "solid food is for mature men with minds trained by practice to distinguish between good and bad." "Mature men" have a spirit of discernment, which is itself a faculty that permits the evaluation of values, that distinguishes infallibly not only between good and evil but also between what is beautiful and ugly. God wants his epiphany to be perceived by the whole man. St. Gregory Palamas underlines forcefully the wholeness of the human being: "The body also has an experience of divine things."[37] Alongside "kosmos noetos" (the intelligible world) Holy Tradition sets "kosmos aisthetos" (the sensible world). This latter encompasses the whole realm of what belongs to the senses in the sacraments, in the liturgy, in icons, and in the lived experience of God. At the end of the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the faithful sing the following hymn which expresses an admirable sense of liturgical realism: "We have *seen* the true Light " St. Maximus said that the powers of the soul expand and develop through the *senses*. The soul hears, sees, smells, tastes and therefore creates organs of perception, the senses. Man is a totality, both spiritual and sensual, in order to better grasp the Incarnation. The sharpened senses perceive sensually the Non-Sensible, or even better the Transsensible. The beautiful then is as a shining forth, an epiphany, of the mysterious depths of being, of that interiority that is a witness to the intimate relation between the body and the spirit. "Ordered" and "deified" nature allows us to see God's Beauty through the human face of Christ. The face of Stephen "appeared to them like the face of an angel" (Ac 6:15).

The Revelations of St. Seraphim of Sarov explain the heart of the Christian religious experience as a shining forth of the Transcendent. St. Seraphim deplored the lose of good simplicity:

> Certain passages of Holy Scripture appear strange to us today; do people still believe that men can see God in such a concrete manner? Under the pretext of "light," we are so committed to the darkness of ignorance that what the Fathers saw very clearly, we find incomprehensible

today, namely that they could talk among themselves about God's manifestations to men as something known to all and completely normal.

The conversation of St. Seraphim with one of his disciples, Motovilov, took place during the winter of 1831 deep in a forest. St. Seraphim had just defined the goal of Christian life as the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and Motovilov asked St. Seraphim to explain to him the meaning of the state of grace. St. Seraphim then told Motovilov to look at him. "I looked at him and was seized with fear" because he appeared to be clothed with the sun. St. Seraphim then asked Motovilov what he felt: "an unspeakable joy, calm and peace," answered the disciple. Motovilov not only felt something in his soul, but his senses also participated in the experience: he saw a blinding light and felt an unusual heat, and smelled perfume. The conversation ended with this exhortation: "It is not only for you to understand these things but through you, to the whole world." We have here then a very important revelation for all people.

The experience as told in this story is not an ecstasy which takes those who have it out of this world but rather an anticipation of the transfiguration of the whole human person. The role played by the senses is the most striking element of the story, but in the context of the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, this phenomenon has its well-defined place. Origen's intellectualism and St. Gregory of Nyssa's platonizing spiritualism deformed their own doctrine of the "spiritual senses." This doctrine was explained in another way by St. Athanasius and his doctrine of *theosis* which is concerned with the whole human person, soul and body. In this authoritative tradition, are counted such witnesses as Macarius of Egypt, John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas and finally Seraphim of Sarov. Grace which is experienced, lived, and felt as sweetness, peace, joy, and light is a foretaste of the future age. St. Macarius spoke of "divinity felt." We are not dealing here with eliminating the senses which, due to the Fall, have lost all sense of direction nor with replacing them with a new organ of perception, but rather with the transfiguration of the senses we already have. We want to restore them to their normal condition, a condition lost in the Fall but now being restored. In the economy of the Incarnation, the spiritual and the corporeal have been integrated together. In the liturgy, we hear sung chants, contemplate visible icons, smell incense, receive through the senses and eat matter in the sacraments: all this allows us to speak of liturgical sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Liturgy elevates matter to its real dignity and destiny, and we understand thereby that matter is not some autonomous substance but rather a function of the Spirit and a vehicle of the spiritual.

St. Maximus the Confessor taught "the transformation of the activity of the senses, a transformation produced by the spirit." Our natural faculties are not sufficient to allow us to perceive the spiritual. This is why Christ united human energy to divine and deifying energy. The senses are spiritualized and become like the object they are sensing: "He who participates in the light becomes himself light." During the vision in the forest, St. Seraphim told Motovilov that "you too have become as luminous as me if not you could not see me " St. John says it this way in his gospel: "What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." St. Augustine said that man can become carnal even in his spirit, and he can become spiritual even in his flesh. "Those who are worthy receive grace and perceive through the senses as well as through the mind what is above all sense and intellect."[38] In the final analysis, we are talking of the ascetical rehabilitation of matter as the substratum of the resurrection and the medium in which all epiphanies take place.

God's beauty, like his light, is neither material nor sensible nor intellectual but is communicated in itself or through the forms of this world, and we can contemplate it with the opened eyes of our transfigured bodies. This doctrine is not the "sensual" mysticism of the Messalians, nor a reduction of the spiritual to what is merely intelligible, nor the gross materialization of the spiritual. It is rather the very concrete communion of man's entire created nature with the uncreated divine energies. It is the mystery of the "Eighth Day," but its reality is already at work in the sacraments and lived in the experience of the saints. In line with St. Gregory Palamas, St. Seraphim underscored that the light of the Creation, of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, of Pentecost, of the sacraments, and of the Second Coming is one and the same divine light. It is important to understand that Christian spirituality is based on the concrete nature of the Incarnation and deals with the whole man and the cosmos as "new creatures." The patristic tradition accentuates the real aspect of the Kingdom of God—we can even say the Kingdom "materialized." It is a sort of "theomaterialism" whose beauty is manifested through the forms of this world, and that beauty is preparing this world to become the "new earth."

When St. Seraphim was a deacon, he had a vision of Christ surrounded by angels as they took part in the liturgy in his chapel. The apparitions of the Virgin, the apostles and the saints along with

a multitude of historical details clearly show that we are not dealing with an adaptation of the spiritual to man's raw senses but rather with the elevation, through deified persons, of the whole reality of matter and history, and this without losing anything. As a consequence, St. Seraphim very simply distributed the bread left over after the visitation of the heavenly guests; he gave his disciples the fruits and flowers which had become the visible fruits of the "new earth," the heavenly fruits brought to maturity under the "new heavens."

We have here the very precise biblical order of earthly Theophanies.

> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation, and tells Zion, 'Your God is king!' Listen! Your watchmen raise their voices, they shout for joy together, for they see the Lord Face to face, as he returns to Zion (Is 52:7-8).

God's luminous face as it is turned toward men is the face of the transfigured Christ. Against the iconoclasts, the Fathers affirmed that we see the Person of Christ in icons and not his divine or human nature. As understood in the perspective of Christian religious experience, icons already have begun to show forth the vision of God in the light of the Eight Day.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Word and the Image

The Gospel according to St. John begins with the mystery of the Son and calls him the Logos, but in translating this name by "the Word," the immense richness of the Greek term is lost. The Latin translation of St. Irenæus of Lyons does not even attempt to render the Greek "logos" into Latin. This is probably the best solution. Origen noted that certain words "cannot have the same richness of meaning when translated into other languages. It is thus better not to translate them at all; translation only diminishes their force."[39] Such words at *Amen, Alleluia,* and *Hosanna* fall into this category. Martin Buber draws our attention to the fact that "biblical language maintains the conversational character of living reality. The choir prays in one of the psalms: 'save us through your love.' The singers then listen in silence to find out if their prayer has been answered."[40]

The liturgy adopts this conversational and evocative language as its own. During the liturgy of catechumens, which is the liturgy of the Word, the Gospel book is in the center of the altar, but during the liturgy of the faithful, it is removed and the chalice takes its place. The Word comes to fullness in the Eucharist, becomes radiant in the Living God, and is offered as food.

The Word enters into history but not simply to speak. He makes history and calls men to openly manifest their spirit. Time and space are inseparable, and every creative word calls to seeing as well as to hearing: "Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life--this is our subject. That life was made visible: we saw it and we are giving our testimony " (1 Jn 1:1-3). This text witnesses in a superb way to the visual nature of the Word. The visual is intimately associated with the intelligible; in the same way, the word and the image are closely linked.

It is generally believed that the Greeks laid greater importance on seeing while the Hebrews accentuated hearing. Israel is the people of the word and of hearing. The Protestant theologian G. Kittel[41] notes that in the messianic passages "Hear, Oh Israel" recedes into the background, and "Lift up your eyes and see" takes its place. In other words, seeing replaces hearing. Moses and Elijah stand on either side of the transfigured Lord on Mt. Tabor because they are the great visionaries of the Old Testament. "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for they shall see God," and St. Stephen saw the heavens open at the moment of his martyrdom. The apocalyptic passages in the gospels and in Revelations try to find words for what is ultimate and final, the *eschaton.* In trying to talk about these things, however, words alone lose their force, and it is not surprising that this type of literature gives way to grandiose and glorious visions of forms and colors which convey meaning in their own special plastic way. God answers Job's suffering with a massive succession of images that reveal, and at the same time protect, God's mystery. Job finally confesses: "I knew you then only by hearsay; but now, having seen you with my own eyes, I retract all I have said " (Job 42:5). In the Bible, the word and the image are in dialogue, they call to one another, and express complementary elements of one and the same Revelation.

Visible signs punctuate biblical history, going back as far as the rainbow which became the heavenly image of the unshakable covenant between God and men. The altars and the sanctuaries of the Old Testament prefigure the Temple as a place of God's self-manifestation, his epiphany. They are powerful witnesses against any form of abstract piety. The prophets were torn with anguish over spiritual purity, and they tried to evaluate the tragic and insufferable distance between Heaven and earth. Isaiah uttered the classic cry of the Jewish soul: "Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down " (Is 64:1). This cry expresses the need for the spatial dimension. It is this spatial element which waits for and calls out for the Incarnation: "I tell you most solemnly, you will see heaven laid open and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending" (Jn 1:51).

The word tends to establish the truth of something, prove it through speech, and the image tends to show that truth, to make it visible. All through the Old Testament, we read about the struggle against those false images called idols. This history and struggle were thus a kind of waiting period looking forward to the appearance of the true Image. At the end of the waiting period, God revealed

his human face, the Word became the object of contemplation: “Blessed are the eyes which see what you see” (Lk 10:23).

Jesus healed the deaf but also opened the eyes of the blind. The Invisible reveals itself in the visible: “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” From the moment of the Incarnation, the image was to become an essential part of Christianity, on the same level as the word. The Word at his highest realization offers himself as food for the gods: “Take, eat, this is my body.” And on Pentecost, everything is set aflame by the tongues of fire.

Does not the Cross express the silence of the Great Sabbath, that is, Holy Saturday while only its icon can make the silence audible? We might even say that the icon makes the silence visible. It is important to note that the “Symbol of the Faith,” the creed, is called “symbol” precisely because it contains no purely doctrinal words. It rather confesses the mysteries of the faith by setting out the events of salvation history one after the other. The Symbol of Faith lends itself admirably to iconographic representation. The icons of the liturgical feasts confess it in *epiphanic* images: through the visible, the Invisible One advances toward us, greets us, and envelops us in his Presence.

The liturgy is biblical theater; the Word gives himself in a liturgical presentation: “ God has put us apostles at the end of his parade, with the men sentenced to death; it is true--we have been put *on show* in front of the whole universe, angels as well as men” (1 Co 4:9). “He has overridden the Law, and cancelled every record of the debt that we had to pay; he has done away with it by nailing it to the cross; and so he got rid of the Sovereignties and the Powers, and *paraded them in public*, behind him in his triumphal procession” (Col 2:14-15).

The liturgy constructs its own framework and structures: the temple-church built in a certain architectural way, forms and colors, poetry and chant. All the harmonious parts together call to the whole man. The liturgy’s grandeur requires sobriety, measure and artistic taste. This is why the heavenly liturgy of Revelations gives form and structure to the earthly liturgy; the heavenly celebration confers on the earthly its character of being an icon of the celestial liturgy. This heavenly liturgy also defines sacred art by an infallible criterion, that is, by its participation in the liturgical mystery.

What Chestov had to say is paradoxical but true. As an authentic philosopher, he noted that every negation of philosophy is already a philosophy. The refusal of the image is then already a sort of image, an impoverished image of the waiting period, a regression to the pre-iconographic period of the Old Testament. The only real question is to know which images are legitimate and in perfect line with the total Revelation.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Ambiguity of Beauty

> Are you aware that mankind can do without the English, that it can also do without Germany, that nothing is easier for mankind than to do without the Russians, that it can live without science or even bread? Only *beauty* is absolutely indispensable for without beauty, there is nothing left in the world worth doing. Here is the entire secret; all of history, right in a nutshell.[42]

Here we have the expression of Dostoevsky's deeply felt conviction about Beauty. Aristotle believed that tragedy purifies the passions, and Plato said that music and poetry make the spirit more virile. The reason behind these opinions is that the perfection of forms is not a stranger to truth and goodness. Taken together, these three opinions form the theoretical basis of an æsthetic utopia, that is, the idolatrous belief in the theurgic power and magic of art. Is it not the power of Beauty alone that gives Art its transfiguring power? Take for example a single ray of the divine light shining on the earth; is not the face of the world changed merely by its shining? This was in any case the faith of the young Gogol when he said that "if Art is not able to miraculously transform the soul of the person who looks at it, then it is only a fleeting passion "

But here is the paradox: even though truth is always beautiful, beauty is not always true. Plotinus warned against beauty's blinding power: "Evil is caught in the entangling ropes that form the web of beauty, like a prisoner covered with golden chains. Evil hides in these ropes so that its reality cannot be seen by the gods, so that it is not constantly visible to men."[43]

God is not the only one who "clothes himself in Beauty." Evil imitates him in this respect and thus makes beauty a profoundly ambiguous quality.

"How did you come to fall from the heavens, Lucifer, you who rose in the morning full of beauty, you that fell down on the earth?" (Septuagint Is 14:12). "Your heart was puffed up with pride because of your beauty you have corrupted your wisdom owing to your splendor" (Ez 28:17). The biblical story of the fruits of the forbidden tree echoes this same notion: "The woman saw that the fruit was *good to eat*, and *pleasing to the eye* and *desirable* " In other words, the fruit was appealing to the senses and æsthetic to the highest degree. Sensual pleasure was thus elevated into an absolute, even above Good and Evil. Beauty exercises its charms, converts the human soul to its idolatrous worship, and usurps the place of the Absolute. Beauty is able to accomplish this transformation with a strange and total indifference toward Goodness and Truth.

Gogol bitterly turns his back on his former illusions:

> Alas, because the Devil seeks to destroy the harmony of the universe, Beauty was thrown into an awful pit while he howls with scornful laughter at the sight. "What a horrible thing is our life with its contrasts between dreams and reality It would have been better for you, Beauty, if you had never existed at all, if you had remained a stranger to this world."

In collusion with perverted Eros, beauty can evoke passions that exterminate life and show us the repulsive face of earthly Aphrodite:

> Never have any confidence in what you see stay far away and continue on your way Everything breathes the lie at every hour of the day and night. This is especially true however when the heavy shades of darkness fall on the pavement and houses, when the city is filled with the light and thunder and when many coaches dash about amidst the cries while the devil himself *lights his lamp* and throws light on men and things who clothe themselves with an illusory and false appearance.

The fundamental amoralism of the human person, his interior chaos, is naturally undergirded by the irresistible forces of the soul's æsthetic impulses. The moral principle alone can never oppose and resist the passions; it gives in every time. The dynamism that the passions awaken carry everything away in the name of complete liberation from all normative principles, and it is precisely the æsthetic element of life that offers the greatest liberty. Its enchanting power frees us from every restraint. The creative Eros is thus set against the destructive Eros.

Dostoevsky started out with the simplistic affirmation that "the Beautiful Beauty is what is normal and healthy." It did not take him long, however, to realize that things are not so simple. He issued his famous statement: "Beauty will save the world" but just as quickly had to ask "Which Beauty?" "Beauty is an enigma," double-edged; it enchants, fascinates and brings to destruction. Dostoevsky also noted that "nihilists love beauty." Atheists, perhaps more than all others, feel the irresistible need to have an idol, and so they make one and begin to worship it. Even before beginning to understand and to live beauty and love, human beings have already profaned them. The problem now must be stated in a different way: Does Beauty have in itself the power to save, or must Beauty too, ambiguous as it has become, be saved and protected?

Dostoevsky continued his philosophical reflection. It is undeniable that the initial unity between Truth, Goodness, and Beauty has fallen apart. The principles which govern knowledge, ethics and æsthetics are no longer integrated in religious principles. Each area of human activity has become autonomous and thus manifests the deepest ambiguity. "In man, the æsthetic idea has been shaken and troubled." "The heart finds beauty even in shame, in the ideal of Sodom shared by the immense majority of people. It is in fact a dual between the devil and God, and man's heart is the battle field."

Confronted by such an ontological schism, Dostoevsky's brilliant psychoanalysis developed into an equally brilliant psychosynthesis. Good prospector that he was, Dostoevsky discovered a vein of gold, and as such his psychosynthesis was a mature analysis of man and his destiny. It leads to a pneumatology in thought and to the acquisition of the Holy Spirit in existence; it leads to a "life filled with the fire of the Spirit." Religious truth conditions and reunites in itself ethical and æsthetic values: "If we could deprive people of the infinitely great, they would not want to live any more and would die of despair. A sense of infinity and measurelessness is as necessary for man as the little planet he lives on." The search for Beauty coincides with the search for the Absolute and the Infinite. The fact that artists today still use terms like *transfiguration, incarnation, image*, and *light* testify to the secret unity between art and religion. Despite the dead ends, the dominant force that inspires peoples all over the world is the "unquenchable desire to attain fullness: it is the Spirit of life, according to the Scriptures; it is the æsthetic or moral principle, as philosophers call it. I simply call it *the search for God*." From the moment that the Holy Spirit speaks in Beauty as "he spoke in the prophets," "salvation through Beauty" can no longer be the autonomous principle of art but becomes a religious formula: "The Holy Spirit is an immediate understanding of Beauty, the prophetic conscienceness of Harmony." It is in holiness, in the Spirit, that man finds again the immediate intuition of true Beauty. Filled with the Spirit, that is, deified, the human nature of Christ, for Dostoevsky, becomes "the positively and absolutely beautiful image." "The Gospel according to St. John identifies the miracle of the Incarnation with the revelation of Beauty."

Natural beauty is real but fragile. This is why the personalized beauty of a saint is at the summit of being. The saint, as "microcosm" and "microtheos," thus becomes nature's center, but grounded in a person. Nature trembles and waits to be saved by man become holy.

Such a task is eschatological in that it links art to the apocalyptic vision of ultimate things, to the fiery vision of the icon. The integration of all principles in *Culture-Cult* goes beyond the capacity of natural forces and appeals for help to the energies of the saints and to the Spirit-bearing power of the Church. This art is *relevant* to our age because it is above all ages and is at the very heart of existence. It seasons the world with the salt mentioned in the gospel, a salt without which life would be tasteless. Such an art brings forth "the Beauty without which there is nothing left in the world worth doing." Such a Beauty introduces God into the soul like the burning bush whose roots go down deep into that same Beauty. Like the violent St. John the Baptist, this Beauty leads to hell where it meets Christ and hears his message of victory over death. In the Cross, this Beauty explains the meaning of Jacob's ladder and the Tree of Life. We already get a glimpse of the icon of the divine philanthropy as it sketches the Father's smile. All God's mystery is found in this smile.[44] The icon lets us see beforehand that for all our eternity we will be able to contemplate that smile, a smile which is ever new, like the first morning of creation

Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite speaks of the Beauty that can save the world when he addresses this prayer to the Mother of God:

> I pray that your icon will be infinitely reflected in the mirror of our souls and that it will preserve them pure until the end of time, that it will raise up those who are bent down toward the earth, and that it will give hope to those who contemplate and try to imitate this eternal model of Beauty

In this prayer, the expression "Beauty will save the world" receives its full justification. It is the healing power which flows from Christ, "the Great Healer": "having reëstablished the soiled image in its ancient dignity, he united it to divine Beauty." This healing power also flows from every icon that is called "miraculous" since its ministry is to protect and to heal.

It seems clear that Dostoevsky clearly grasped the full meaning of such an *iconographic vision* of the world. As a novelist, he experienced an insurmountable difficulty in trying to describe a eminently good person. He wondered what this ideal man could possibly do in life, be a justice of the peace, a social reformer? He had to give up his quest and borrow his good person from the lives of the great spiritual saints. This is why his saints do not participate in the external activity of events. If they do participate in them, however, it is *in a totally different manner*. Dostoevsky drew the face of a saint and put it on the far wall as a sort of icon. In the revealing and therapeutic light of this image, we can penetrate the meaning of the events that take place on the world's stage.

In the light of activist philosophy, it is certainly true that a saint is absolutely "useless," as Beauty and its icons are useless, as God is useless, according to the recent statement of the atheist writer Roger Ikor. All these have no place, are useless, in the fictions and dreams of this world, and yet God saves and a saint enlightens and explains! No sociological structure has a place for a being whose entire existence is exclusively defined as a theophany. And yet, this theophany is the only really "serious" thing in the world for it puts an end to absurdity and stamps the heart of this world with the sign of another dimension and age.

Along side our technological civilization, highly practical and utilitarian, there is another culture growing, the Culture of the Spirit, and there "useless" and seemingly "gratuitous" values are cultivated. In this spiritual culture, values grow until we arrive at the moment when the category of useful-useless is left far behind. We then discover the one thing which, according to the Gospel, is "useless" but absolutely "necessary."

CHAPTER SIX

Culture, Art and their Charisms

I. God and Man

The biblical idea of "the image and likeness of God" is fundamental to the Christian doctrine of man. Paradoxical as it may seem, however, this doctrine is even more important for an atheistic anthropology. In fact, the likeness between God and man has never been denied by atheists. For Nicholas Hartmann, Feuerback or Marx, the human person is defined by attributes that are specifically divine: intelligence, liberty, creation, and prophetic clairvoyance. For Sartre, man is essentially a project to be accomplished, therefore liberty. The consequence of this doctrine is that existence precedes and takes precedence over essence. This is precisely what St. Gregory Palamas affirmed about God: "'I am He who exists' means that the divine Existing One does not issue from essence, but that essence issues from Him who is, for He who is embraces in Himself the totality of Being."[45]

In his book *The Faith of an Unbeliever*, F. Jeanson affirms that "the universe is a machine that produces gods the human race is capable of incarnating God and of bringing him into being." For the more pessimist Heidegger, man is a "powerless god," but a god nonetheless. From whatever point of view, man thinks of himself in relation to the Absolute, and to understand man is to explain this relation. For believers as well as for atheists, the problem of man is theandric, that is, divino-human. God is the archetype, the theoretical limit of the human person. According to the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, when man offers his Sunday prayers, he addresses them to his own divine essence which is precisely his own God the Father. It is certainly true that the human person carries within himself something of the Absolute, of its *aseitas*; in his own way, man exists *en soi* and *pour soi*. We have here the linchpin of Sartre's philosophical system. The common position of all is that man is in the likeness of God. Neither the Greek poets, nor the skeptic Xenophanes, nor Feuerback, nor Freud have ever denied this affirmation. But the more important question is to know who is the creator of whom.

The atheistic vision of man is especially important for its methodology. In effect, atheists say that God and man are the same thing, never stopping to really appreciate the enormity of such a statement. It must be said, however, that atheists are infinitely more consistent than Christians in the face of biblical statements about man as well as those from the Fathers of the Church. The biblical and patristic doctrine of man is no less striking than what atheists have to say.

The doctrine of the Fathers has its roots in the relation between God and his creation, and the biblical notion of "likeness" conditions the Revelation about this relation. God the Word is the Word that the Father speaks to man, his child. This communication is possible precisely because there exists a certain "con-form-ity," a correspondence between the divine *Logos* and the human *logos*. We have here the ontological foundation of all human knowledge. The divine Architect lays down the laws of nature: God is Creator and Poet of the universe, and man resembles Him because he is also creator and poet. Man reflects God in his own fashion. St. Gregory Palamas stated that "God is high above all things, incomprehensible, unspeakable, but he accepts to participate in our intelligence." Going even farther, Clement of Alexandria said that "man is like God because God is like man."[46] God sculpted the human person while looking at his Wisdom, the celestial humanity of Christ.[47] Christ, the Wisdom of God, has as his vocation the "reuniting of all things, whether in the heavens or on the earth," in his deified humanity, and this is a "mystery hidden in God from before the beginning of the ages."[48] The Incarnation was the purpose of man's creation in the image of God, and this image implied the ultimate degree of communion between God and man. The icon of the Theotokos (*Eleousa*-tenderness) holding the Child Jesus expresses this doctrine in an admirable way. The birth of God in human form (the Nativity, Christmas) implies the birth of man in divine form (the Ascension).

Let us look closely at the patristic vision: the deification of man is a function of and results from the humanization of God. St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "man is the human face of God"[49] and this why "man who is destined to enjoy divine things had to receive in his very being an affinity with what he was destined to participate in."[50] St. Macarius echoed the same notion: "Between God and man, there is the closest affinity."[51] The human spirit can only develop, grow, and expand in a "divine milieu." It is no exaggeration then to say that "the very life of the soul is to contemplate God."[52]

The patristic doctrine of man thus begins at the divine level. This doctrine has always been noted for its cutting, paradoxical, and very daring theological expressions. We need only consider a few well-known but striking statements to appreciate the boldness of the doctrine:

> God became man so that man might become God by grace and participate in God's divine life.
>
> Man is a being that has been ordered to become God.
>
> Man must unite created nature and the uncreated divine energies.
>
> I am man by nature and God by grace.
>
> Whoever participates in the divine energies becomes himself light, in a certain sense.
>
> Man is both microcosm and microtheos.

"Man carries a theological enigma in his very makeup"; he is a mysterious being, *homo cordis absconditus*[53] It is no wonder that the Fathers showed such an interest in this distinctly apophatic definition. It motivates all their thought about the content of the *imago Dei*. For St. Gregory of Nyssa, the richness of the image reflects the divine perfections and the convergence of every good thing. It underlines the properly divine power to freely determine one's own being.

When man says "I exist," he expresses in human terms something of God's absolute nature expressed in the divine saying "I am He who exists."

For the Fathers, these theological formulations were "essential words," words of life, received and lived. Sadly enough, though, in actual human history, these expressions of the dizzying heights of spiritual awareness have fallen to the level of banal platitudes in scholastic theology. Images of fire have become lifeless clichés, mere commonplace statements quoted to reinforce one or another theological, cerebral, abstract or polemical position. These statements are cited without drawing any earth shattering and revolutionary conclusions for the life of the world. Certain theologians "demythologize" the ultimate realism of the Fathers and thereby water down the explosive message of the Gospels themselves. In today's popular piety, asceticism is poorly understood and often becomes something close to obscurantism. Humility has become a formality, a simple passport of accepted orthodoxy. This false humility leads to extremes where man is reduced to practically nothing and ends up having to really become nothing or to revolt. Monophysitism has never been able to get beyond certain forms of piety and has often taken the form of individualistic salvation expressed in terms of a "transcendent self-centeredness". Such piety is finally nothing more than the Monophysite scorn for the body and matter, a flight toward the heavenly realm of pure spirits, the misunderstanding of culture and man's vocation in the world, a hostility and even hatred for women and beauty. According to St. Nicholas Cabasilas, God has "a crazy love" (*manikon eros*) for man. Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow said that "the Father is Love which crucifies; the Son is Loved crucified; and the Holy Spirit is the invincible power of the Cross."[54] Such a religion of Love crucified has been strangely transformed into a religion that is either paternalistic (clericalism) or which projects the image of a "sadistic Father," a religion of law and punishment, one obsessed with hell, a "terrorist" religion according to which the Gospel is reduced to a purely moralistic system. According to 19th century theological thinking, the "rich" represented divine Providence, and the "poor" were to bless God for having brought such rich people into the world! As long as we consider wealth and poverty as *divine institutions*, we can only choose between a fearful tyrannical Father and a goody-goody and reassuring Father patriarch.[55]

Now the real Tradition of the Church teaches the authentic dialectic tension which St. Gregory Palamas so strongly underscored: not one or the other element but both at the same time. The balanced doctrine is a tension between the *subjective* humility and the *objective* fact of being a co-

celebrant, co-creator, co-poet with God. We must learn once again the antinomies, the supposed contradictions, once so familiar to the Fathers of the Church. Man says "I am imperfect," and God answers "Be perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect." Man says "I am dust and nothing," and Christ answers "You are all gods and you are my friends." St. Paul affirms that "you are of God's race"; and St. John states that "you have received the anointing of the Holy One, and you know all." In a forceful synthesis, a troparion of the Orthodox funeral service says that "I carry the marks of my iniquities but I am made in the image of your unspeakable glory."

Man has been created and yet not created but "born of water and the Holy Spirit"; he is earthly and he is heavenly; he is creature and yet god in the process of becoming. "A created god" is one of the most paradoxical of notions, just as is "a created person" or "created liberty." The boldness of the Fathers brings out the depths of these maxims and sayings so as "not to grieve" and "not to extinguish the Holy Spirit."

The doctrine of *theosis* as set forth by the eastern Fathers is not a logical doctrine, not a concept but rather a vision of life and grace, an antinomy as is every charism, and it has its roots in the antinomy of God himself. The Fathers saw this antinomy when they said that God's Name is related to the world. How can God be both absolute and relative, the God *of* history as well as the God *in* history. We have here the mystery of his Love which transcends his own absolute nature and reveals itself as Fatherhood. How can we reconcile the following two positions? St. Ephrem the Syrian said that "every Church is a Church of penitents, a Church of those who are perishing," and St. Symeon the New Theologian said that "in truth, it is a great mystery, that is, God among men and God among gods by deification." We are, nonetheless, standing in front of one and the same mystery.

II. The Church and the World

Vatican II dealt with this mystery when, in Constitution 13, it addressed the immense question of *The Church in the World*, but it was only a beginning. The Lord placed the Church in the world and charged it with the apostolic mission of witnessing and evangelizing. But this is only the beginning of the Church's mission whose magnitude obliges us to reverse the words *church* and *world* and to look ahead to the end of the process and sketch the vision of *the world in the Church*. By doing this, we are required to correctly evaluate the scope of human creation and culture. Theologians must undertake this reflection in order to develop a balanced theology of the world. It is the role of eschatology to deepen this vision, to make it possible to grasp the absolutely new reality of the image of God, redeemed in Christ, to reveal as well the exact nature and role of angels and demons in man's life, to make holiness credible as *martyria* and prophetic charism in the present historical context. We have here the creative collision of the world and its destiny seen in the light of God's grand design for the world.

In history, "Christian" empires and states, as well as real theocracies, collapse under the weight of a world which simply refuses to submit itself to ecclesiastic authorities. Every good which violates or forces the human conscience automatically is converted into an evil, and it becomes, according to Berdiaeff, "the nightmare of the imposed good." In such a system, human liberty remains unknown or misunderstood, a liberty which God desired to preserve at the cost of his death. St. Augustine's *compelle intrare* has been used to justify the inquisition, but St. John Chrysostom had another opinion: "Whoever kills a heretic commits an unpardonable sin." What a magnificent contrast. Long before Hegel and Nietzsche, St. Cyril of Alexandria set the dialectic of "the Father and the Son"[56] against that of "the Master and the slave." In the same way, the central call of the Gospel (the "taking of the Kingdom of God by force" and "seizing the heavens" through Christian violence) sets itself against the *domination* of the world by the Church, against the world's submission to ecclesiastical power.

History and eschatology interpenetrate each other; they live inside one another. The meaning of Pentecost and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the universal meaning of the invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiclesis), especially as it touches the doctrine of eschatology and the Second Coming, this meaning gives a clear indication of the basic vocation of Christians in the world. St. Maximus said it this way: "unite created nature [the world] with the uncreated deifying energies" of which the Church is the living source. The Church in the world defines time and existence from the point of view of the *eschaton*. This point of view sees all existence as already closed, folded back on its own imminence and thus affirms the priestly vocation of the world itself. The world does not become the

Church but in "symphonic" agreement with the Church, "without confusion or separation," the world accomplishes its proper task through its own charisms.

In our present time, what is called the "responsible society" has become conscious of being the active subject of both its own destiny and of the universality of the communion of men. This is why when the Church speaks to society, it does not speak to a foreign and separate body. The texts of Vatican II speak to all, without distinction, to believers and non-believers. The Church's message contains the salt and the leaven which alone will ultimately determine its place in today's civilizations. This message not only touches individuals but nations and peoples and encourages them to make responsible choices and to pay attention, for example, to the problems of the third world, automation, and the distribution of the earth's wealth.

There is no ontological dualism between the Church and the world, between the sacred and the profane. There is an ethical dualism, however, between "the old man" and the "new man," between the redeemed sacred and the demonized profane. According to the Fathers, man is a *microcosm*, but the Church is a *macro-anthropos*. The Church puts its cosmic and pan-human dimension to work through its *diaconia* and the Good Samaritan is the image of this service orientation. This dimension provides a bridge over the abysses and suppresses all separation such as emancipation and secularization, Nestorianism and Monophysitism. Such a pan-human dimension does not, however, suppress the distinctions of individual vocations. The world in its own way enters into the *macro-anthropos* of the Church which is the arena of ultimate accomplishments, of the *apocatastasis* (the reëstablishing of all things); it is the sphere of the Parousia and of the "new earth" established in power.

In the place of false "sacralizations," there is the true "consecrations:" in the East, every baptized person at the moment of sacramental chrismation is tonsured and thus *consecrated* wholly to the service of the Lord. This rite, which is analogous to the monastic rite, invites everyone to rediscover the meaning of *interiorized* monasticism which the sacrament teaches to all. On the other hand, the time has come to "desacralize" everything that has become petrified, immobilized in the closed network of the ecclesiastical ghetto. In addition, there is a great need to desacralize Marxist materialism. It is not sufficiently rationalist nor logically materialist. If atheism contributes to the purification of Christian thinking about God, the Christian faith also helps purify atheism of every trace of false metaphysics. Marxism must also be demythologized so a real dialogue between partners can begin, a dialogue whose principles have been clearly defined.

"Fill the earth and conquer it" means to turn it into God's Temple. Consecrate the world means to force it to go from its demonic state to being God's creature. No form of life or culture can escape from God, from the universalism of the Incarnation. Christ who is the image of all perfections is the supreme and unique Bishop as well as the supreme and unique Layman. He assumed the priesthood and also the lay state; he therefore has taken upon himself all vocations, occupations and professions in the world. "God loved the world" in its state of sin. Christ's victory, including his descent into hell, takes on a cosmic dimension which destroys all barriers. *Theosis* is an essentially *dynamic* notion, and its action has an effect on every part of the cosmos in the same way that doxology spreads God's glory over everything that is human.

According to patristic cosmology which has nothing in common with natural ethics, the universe is moving toward its completion and fulfillment, as these are seen and defined in the fullness of creation, a fullness defined by the Incarnation. Christ *takes up again* and completes, completes and fulfills, that process that the Fall halted. He manifests the Love that saves without omitting anything of the grand design for man as concelebrant and co-worker with God.

God is present in the world in a different way than in his Body. The Church must make the implicit Presence explicit; it must do what St. Paul did in Athens when he explained that the "unknown god" was Jesus Christ. The work of evangelization must penetrate the work of civilization and orient it toward Christ the Orient from on high.

Baptism recalls the great Benediction of the waters and of all cosmic matter during the feast of Epiphany. The liturgical celebration of the feasts of the Cross bend the whole universe down under the victorious sign of the resurrected Christ. These feasts put the world back in the context of God's first Benediction, a Benediction which is reaffirmed at the time of the Ascension by the liturgical gesture of Christ the Priest: "and raising his hand, he blessed them." The consecration relates everything that is human to Christ: "Everything is yours and you are Christ's."

The Fathers fought against the gnostics who scorned earthly life. God is not the "wholly other" separated from the world but rather *Emmanuel*, "God with us." This is why "the whole creation is

waiting impatiently for the revelation of the sons of God." A baptized person is not different from the world; he is simply the world's truth and is thereby responsible for its destiny. The world becomes a royal *gift* to man as soon as its horizontal dimension finds its vertical coordinates.

III. Man's Dignity and his Charism of Creation

St. Gregory Palamas, who energetically opposed all deviations from Holy Tradition, audaciously established the primacy of man over the angels. It is precisely man's double nature, spirit-body, that makes him a complete being and sets him at the head of all creatures. To his advantage, man is distinguished from the angels because he is in the image of the incarnate Word. Man's spirit is present in and penetrates all of nature by his creative and "life-giving" energies which are carried by the Holy Spirit. An angel is a "second light," a pure reflection; he is a messenger and a servant. Only God, absolute spirit, can create *ex nihilo* while an angel can create nothing. Man's condition is very different. From the biblical perspective, God is more than the Absolute. He is the Absolute and his own Other, the God-Man. God thus gives to man, his image, the capacity to call forth the imperishable values of the matter of this world and to manifest holiness through his own body. In effect, man does not reflect light like the angels but becomes light. The saints become luminous in their bodies, and this is a normative sign of their holiness: "You are the light of the world." The halos which are painted on the saints in their icons are an expression of this normative sign. The ministry of angels is thus put at the service of man's royal dignity. According to the synaxarion of the Monday of the Holy Spirit, each of the nine angelic orders comes and worships Christ's deified humanity during the nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost.

In one of his homilies, St. Gregory Palamas indicates one of the purposes of the Incarnation: "to venerate the flesh so that the prideful spirits dare not imagine that they are more venerable than man."[57] This uncommonly vigorous text is an amazing hymn sung in praise of man's creative spirit. It is the full and unreserved blessing of human creation, of the building of *Culture-Cult*, and as such carries the complete approbation and authority of the patristic tradition.

The Kingdom of God will cause the paradisiac seed, whose growth was halted by the disease of sin and which Christ came to heal, to germinate and flower. Christ's coming heals the sickness introduced into man and the creation. God pulls man back from the abyss of the Fall and saves him. According to the Gospel, salvation means *healing*: "Your faith has healed you." Christ comes as the "great Healer" and offers the Eucharist as the "remedy of immortality." Healing as seen in the Gospels implies an ascetic *catharsis*, a purification of the human person of every demonic seed, but this ascetic *catharsis* is completed by an ontological *catharsis*, that is, the restoration of the initial form of the image of God as well as its real transfiguration in nature.

The biblical meaning of creation is found in the story of the seed that reproduces one hundred fold and keeps on multiplying: "My Father goes on working and so do I" (Jn 5:17). The world was created *with* time, and this means that at the beginning, it had not reached its full development; it was only an embryo. The purpose of this type of creation is to allow the prophets and "good workers" to arise throughout history and lead creation toward a synergy, that is, coöperative labor, of human and divine activity. This common work is to continue until the Day when the embryo will attain its full maturity. This is why the initial commandment to "cultivate" Eden opens up onto the enormous perspectives of Culture. Culture with its constituent elements has thus left the realm of cultic activities and monasteries to reconstitute the "cosmic liturgy." It accomplishes this re-creation while preserving the analogical differentiation of its parts. Recreated culture is thus a prelude here and now of the celestial doxology.

In his very nature, man is destined to this liturgical ministry. He is "a musical composition, a wonderfully written hymn to powerful creative activity."[58] "Your glory, O Christ, is man whom you created to be the singer of your shining radiance."[59] "Man, who has already been illuminated here on earth, has become a miracle. He coöperates with the heavenly forces in a unending song. Standing on earth, like an angel, he leads all creatures to God "[60]

Christ gives man the power to act, and this is the essential gift of the sacrament of chrismation. St. Gregory of Nyssa insisted on affirming man's power to reign.[61] Man is king, priest, and prophet, and his charisms make him a demiurge, in a human way.

The preëxistence in God's thought of the cosmic *logoï*, of the archetypes of all that exists, gives a very special value to the action of God's "co-workers." " you should be living holy and saintly lives

while you wait and long for the Day of God to come " (2 Pe 3:9-11). "Seek the Kingdom of God" means that we are "to prepare" the secret germination of the Kingdom. We are talking here about our own "births" through faith, births which reveal and order the deep meaning of history and point the world, thus prepared and brought to maturity, toward the Coming of the Lord.

Man's destiny is thus to attain an intense charity purified by a real ascetic discipline. The "ontological tenderness" of the great spiritual saints (St. Isaac the Syrian and St. Macarius of Egypt) toward all creatures, including reptiles and even demons, goes hand in hand with an iconographic way of contemplating the world. The great saints discover divine thoughts in the world, present but transparent, and look into the very center of the cosmic shell where they find the world's true meaning. It is from this theological source that Orthodoxy gets its joyful vision of the cosmos, its unshakable optimism, and its eminently elevated evaluation of the human person: "After God, consider every man to be God."[62]

St. Maximus the Confessor said that "the divine Teacher nourishes men in a eucharistic way with knowledge about the ultimate destiny of the world."[63] Like an immense parable, the world gives us a reading of the divine "Poetry" written in its flesh. The material images of the Gospel parables and the cosmic matter of the sacraments are not accidental. The simplest things conform to a very precise destiny. Everything is an image, a likeness, a participation in the economy of salvation; everything is a hymn, a doxology. Paul Claudel said that "things are finally more than just the furniture of our prison; they are rather the furnishings of our temple."

Man's vocation is determined by his spiritual gifts and charisms: "cultivate" the immense field of the world, get involved in all the arts and sciences in order to build human existence as God intended it. But this human existence can only be based on *diaconia*, whose biblical meaning is far more than just social work. Diaconia means precisely the act which heals and restores the balance. Human existence is also the *koinonia* of all men, human community and communion, grafted onto what Revelations tells us is the absolutely new and absolutely desirable reality of the Kingdom.

The vision of the Fathers sketches a grandiose philosophy of the creation which is much more that a simple justification of culture. When culture becomes a ministry in the service of the Kingdom of God, it justifies history, man, and his priesthood in the world.

IV. Culture: Its Ambiguity and Destiny

The Lord said to "go and teach all nations." The Church takes care of individual souls, it is true, but it is also concerned with national groupings. In the formation of cultures and civilizations, the Church has to make its prophetic word of testimony heard. The Church manifests the transcendent dimension through its own eucharistic nature, and its pascal message makes the Church more than contemporary and "up-to-date" because its message is above all ages. The Church's message announces that Christ has come to transform the dead into those fallen asleep and to wake up the living.

Every people eventually defines its own historical mission, develops around this mission, and sooner or later runs up against God's great Plan. The parable of the talents speaks of this normative plan which God has set before man's liberty. The ethical vision of the Gospel is defined by liberty and creation. This vision requires the full maturity of an adult and carries with it far more ascetic discipline, freely accepted restraint, and risk than any ethical vision based on the Law.

History is in no way autonomous; all its events have a reference to him who possesses "all power in heaven and earth." Even the statement "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's" has no meaning except in the light of faith: Caesar is only Caesar in relation to God. "If God does not exist, am I still captain?" An officer in Dostoevsky's *Possessed* asked this question during a conversation he had with his friends who tried to convince him that God does not exist. It is not possible for history to escape from its preëstablished and normative destiny. It is this destiny that will finally judge the world. This is the meaning of the "crises" inherent in every civilization. They are the eschatological and intra-historical judgments, the *kairoi*, the irruptions of the Transcendent which catch the attention of "those who have ears to hear."

The eminently clear formula of the Council of Chalcedon condemns every kind of Manichean dualism or Nestorian separation, every sort of Monophysitism of the divine or the human alone: the divine and human are united "without confusion, without separation." This Chalcedonian dogma also defines the same unity "without confusion, without separation" between the divine element of the Church and the world, history and culture. Social and cultural life ought normatively to be built on dogma and to apply the principles of theological sociology for "Christianity is the imitation of God's nature."[64]

Now, if laicized and secularized eschatology is conceived without the biblical *eschaton* and dreams of the communion of the holy ones without the Holy One, of the Kingdom of God without God, it is thus a Christian heresy brought into being by the deficiencies of Christians themselves. This eschatology either abandons the Kingdom for a closed city entirely enclosed in history or flees the world and loses itself in the contemplation of heaven. Contemporary Marxism sets before the Christian conscience the problem of history's meaning and forces that conscience to affirm a mysterious continuity between history and the Kingdom.

The greatest Revolution, and the only really effective one, can only come from the Church fully charged with the energies of the Holy Spirit. By its very nature, the Church cannot canonize any particular political, economic, or social order, and this is why it has such great flexibility in adapting to local conditions. Nonetheless, if the Word consoles and comforts, it also judges, and we understand why the clairvoyant Witness keeps a certain distance. The Word also has the task of condemning every kind of compromise and conformism. The penetrating realism of the Word, nonetheless, uncovers the demonic elements of compromise and conformism and leads the charge against them. The universal task, and the most relevant to our own times, is to make the fruits of the earth available to all men but without depriving them of religious and political liberty.

The major problem of our time is that the rich and the false poor both covet wealth. In a technical and commercially oriented civilization, poets, thinkers, and prophets are useless beings. Non-aligned artists and intellectuals make up a new form of the proletariat. Before anything else, a world-wide obligatory tax should certainly be imposed in order to eradicate physical hunger. And then we must think of the hungry who know that man does not live by bread alone. We desperately need to affirm the primacy of Culture and "the refined spirit"; modern society must protect poets and prophets. The unquestionable presence of demons in our world requires that a privileged place be given to angels and saints who are as real as demons and other men. To call into doubt the fact that man can master not only the cosmos but also himself would be to reject man's dignity as the child of God.

The firm assurance of faith is called to search out and find this closed world and to manifest to it and in it the invisible presence of the Transcendent, to resurrect the dead and to move mountains, to infuse the fire of hope for the salvation of all, and to graft the emptiness of this world onto the "Church full of the Trinity "[65]

No Monophysite and disincarnated theology can do anything to change the magnificent patristic rule of faith, nor minimize or water down the most explosive texts of Scripture. It is obvious that history finds its most solid foundation and justification in the eschatological maximalism of monks. Whoever does not participate in this monastic exit from history, in a brusque passage into the future age due to a lack of procreation, must assume the entire responsibility for constructing history in a positive way. They must open it up to human plenitude: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." This way and these paths show forth man's maturity.

The theology of final things presupposes a crucifixion of thought, and this theology is in discontinuity with speculative philosophy: "We teach what scripture calls: the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Co 2:9). Eschatology, or the doctrine of final things, sets before us the magnificent definition of what a Christian is: " all those who have longed for his Appearing" (2 Tm 4:8). In the light of this doctrine, saints, heroes, and geniuses, when they orient themselves toward and lock onto what is true and ultimate, find their way to the same and unique reality of the Kingdom. They do this of course each in his own way.

In God's sight, man is never a means to or for something else. The existence of man presupposes the existence of God, and vice versa. The human person is an *absolute value for God*, God's "other" and his "friend" from whom He wants to elicit a free response of love and creation. The visionary doctrine is *theandric*, that is, the coming together, the circuminsession, of two plenitudes in Christ. This is why the eschatological man does not passively wait for the Second Coming but prepares for

its arrival in the most active way. Christ comes to “his own” (Jn 1:11), that is, “God [is] among gods by deification.” And the result?: it is the fiery explosion of the divine plenitude in the deified human plenitude.

“Whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me ” (Jn 13:20). The destiny of the world hangs on the inventive and creative attitude of the Church, on its ability to present the Gospel message so that all men will welcome it. Culture, at all levels, is the immediate arena of this meeting, but the ambiguity of culture complicates the Church’s task in a special way.

Historically, culture has been used as a means of preaching the Gospel without, however, always being accepted as an organic element of Christian spirituality. On the other hand, there is an inherent difficulty in the very nature of culture. The principle of the Græco-Roman culture is the perfect cultural form within the limits of temporal finiteness, but it is this very perfection in finite time that opposes it to the infinite, the unlimited and the apocalypse. Refusing to accept death which calls culture itself into question, this culture also refuses death’s antidote which comes from beyond and outside culture. Instead, culture opposes, sets itself up against, the *eschaton* and closes itself up in historical time and space alone. Now, “the face of this world is passing away,” and we must be warned not to create idols and not to be fooled by the illusion of earthly paradises nor even to think that the Church is a utopia and identical with the Kingdom of God. Loisy said that “we were expecting the Kingdom, and we got the Church.” The face of the Church militant is passing away just like the face of this world.

The meaning of history is revealed and explained by its end and goal, by the light of its final judgment. If we anchor ourselves only in history, in a historicism cut off from history’s final destiny, history itself becomes disincarnated and loses its own value. The same thing happens if we simplistically negate history by jumping over it and only concerning ourselves with the end, the apocalypse.

The Christian attitude toward the world can never be either an ascetic or eschatological negation. It is always an *eschatological affirmation*, that is, the constant going beyond the here and now toward the end point. This transcending of history, instead of enclosing history in itself, opens everything up to the Beyond.

In fact, culture can never have an infinite development. It is not an end in itself. When it becomes self-conscientious and objectified, culture turns into a system of constraints. In any case, when it is enclosed in its own limits, the problem of culture has no solution. Sooner or later, thought, art, social life reach their own limits, and at that moment, a choice must be made: either dig into the vicious infinity of its own immanence and get drunk on the its own emptiness; or go beyond the choking limits of culture and, in a transparence like clear water, reflect the Transcendent. This is the way God wanted it, for his Kingdom is only accessible through the chaos of this world. The Kingdom of God is not a transplant foreign to this world but the revelation of the hidden, numenal depth of this very world.

A scientist studying the disintegration of atoms can also reflect on the integration of the world, through the Eucharist, in the Body of the resurrected Christ. The Jesus prayer will come naturally to purify him as he studies and to initiate him to the wonderment of the angels, and to unfold before his eyes, full of amazement, the “flame of things” hidden in the very matter of this world.

Art must choose between living in order to die or to die in order to live. Abstract art at its advanced stage finds virginal freedom from every preëxistent and academic form. The *exterior* figurative form is undone and destroyed, but access to the *interior* form, the carrier of a secret message, is blocked by an angel holding a flaming sword. The path will only de opened up again by baptism *ex Spiritu Sancto,* and this is nothing less than the death of art and its resurrection, its birth in the epiphanic art whose highest expression is the icon. The artist will only find his real vocation in a priestly art, which becomes a theophanic sacrament: draw, sculpt, sing the Name of God in one of the places where God descends and makes his abode. It is not a question of points of view or of schools: “The glory of our eyes is to become the eyes of the dove.”[66], and this glory looks “ahead” for Christ is “not above” but “ahead” waiting for us to meet him. What is absolutely new comes from the eschatological return to the sources: St. Gregory of Nyssa called it “remembering the future” when speaking of the eucharistic memorial.

In philosophy, phenomenological reduction separates the essential from the accidental and artificial. Essences point to the transcendental Subject, and the world appears as a phenomenon in His pure glance, in His absolutely certain intuition. The Transcendental, however, denotes a multiplicity, and the separation of subject-object remains. Even if the Transcendental constitutes and

produces essences, it itself is not one of them. The *cogito* is thus not the final reality; it is not absolute. Is a final, ultimate reduction possible? Yes, if *to reduce* means to understand that all things are relative. Now everything that is relative can only be thought of in relation to the Absolute. Beyond the ultimate reduction, there are two certain realities: myself, who am not the Absolute and the Absolute which is utterly other than me. As St. Augustine said: "I know God and the soul, and nothing more."

St. Bonaventure gave us his formula: "*Deus non est, Deus est*. Every negation of God, every false absolute, every idol exists only in relation to the real and unique Absolute. For the West, the world is real and God is doubtful and illusory. It is therefore necessary to invent arguments for his existence. For the East, the world is doubtful and hypothetical, and the only argument for its reality is God's self-evident existence. The philosophy of obvious things, what is evident without needing proof, coincides with the philosophy of the Revelation. The belief that certain things are obvious and self-evident, which incorporates the type of certitude set forth in Pascal's *Memorial*, is the very prototype of the true knowledge which has passed through the apophatic fire.

If man is able to think about God, it means that he is already inside divine thought and that God is already thinking in him. We can only move toward God if we have already started our journey by going out from Him. The content of all thought about God is epiphanic. It is accompanied by the presence of Him who is the subject of the thought.

Nonetheless, the mystery of the perverted will, "the mystery of iniquity" is not diminished. Even if the "ethical likeness" can become a radical "unlikeness," the ontological likeness "in the image" remains intact. Liberty, which in the ultimate revolt can become totally arbitrary, remains real, and transgressions can lead to insane iniquity. The fact that some truth is self-evident does not force the human will. In the same way, grace only touches the will if it is freely accepted. A slave answers the orders of a tyrant with silent resistance. The Master invites all to come to the banquet, and those who freely and willingly accept the invitation show themselves to be the elect of God.

If we reflect on the action of the Holy Spirit in the "end time," we may be able to understand His function as the "finger of the Father," as the Witness: the Spirit has the function of suggesting, of authoritatively inviting all forms of culture to realize their original *raison d'être*, to fulfill their destiny by orienting themselves toward the Kingdom.

St. Paul sets out before us the criterion of the one and only foundation, Jesus Christ. "On this foundation you can build in gold, silver and jewels, or in wood, grass and straw, but whatever the material, the work of each builder is going to be clearly revealed when the day comes. That day will begin with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work" (1 Co 3:13). The same is true for man himself: "He will be saved, but as through fire." There are then "works that resist fire." This does not imply, however, the destruction, pure and simple, of this world, only its testing. Whatever stands the test of fire will have the charismatic qualities needed to become a constitutive element of the "New Earth." In former times, Noah's Ark was saved "through water." The symbolic image of the arc stands for what is destined to survive, and in this prophetic vision, the arc prefigures the great passage to the Kingdom "through fire."

At its highest point, culture is the penetration of things and beings into God's thoughts about them, a revelation of the *logos* of beings and of their transfigured form. The icon does this but it is beyond culture as "a guiding image," for the icon is already the direct vision, the open window on the "Eighth Day."

Berdiaeff centered his reflective thoughts on the apparent conflict between the Creation and Holiness. He was struck by the fact that a great saint like Seraphim of Sarov and a great poet like Puskin, were contemporaries in the 19th centuries and that they knew nothing of each other. He found the solution to his problem in *the passage from symbols to realities*. Men who are ministers, generals, professors, bishops etc. are symbols, functions, but a saint is a reality. A historical theocracy, a Christian state, a republic, these are symbols, but "the communion of the saints" is a reality. Culture then is a symbol when it merely collects works and becomes a museum of petrified objects, of lifeless values. Geniuses know the deep bitterness of the distance between the fire of their spirit and their concrete works. Is such a thing as a Christian culture even possible? In fact, the grand successes of their creators turn out to be the grand failures of the creation *because they do not change the world*.

The paradox of the Christian faith is that it stimulates creativity in the world but, at its final stage when its eschatological dimension comes into play, the Christian faith shatters the world and makes history overflow its boundaries. At this point, it is not the way that is impossible but the impossible

that is the way, and only the charisms can make it possible: “Divine power can invent a way that is impossible.”[67] That impossible way is the fiery irruption of the “totally other” coming from the depths of the world itself. All forms of culture must stretch out toward this limit which is at the border between two ages. Each age reveals the other, and we see the passage from the “having” of this world to the “being” of the Kingdom. The world in the Church is the “burning bush” in the very heart of existence.

The scientist, the thinker, the artist, the social reformer etc. can find the charisms of the Royal Priesthood, and each one in his own area can become a “priest,” can make his research a priestly work, a *sacrament* transforming every form of culture into a *theophanic* meeting place. This work thus become a way to sing God’s Name through science, thought, social action (the sacrament of the brother) and art. In its own way, culture joins the liturgy; it becomes a *doxology*, and we hear the “cosmic liturgy.”

In the past, holy princes were canonized not for their personal holiness but for their faithfulness to the charisms of royal power exercised in the service of the Christian people. We are entering into the time of the final manifestations of the Holy Spirit: God said that “in the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh ” and we can even now sense the coming of the time when scientists, thinkers or artists will be canonized, all those who have given their lives and been faithful to their charisms of the Royal Priesthood and who have created works in the service of the Kingdom of God. The prophetic charism of creation thus eliminates the false dilemma of Culture *or* Holiness and sets up rather the synergy of Culture-Creation *and* Holiness. Even more, this charism sets up the particular form of a Holiness of Culture itself. It is nothing less than “the world in the Church,” the ultimate vocation of its metamorphosis into the “New Earth” of the Kingdom.

There is yet an even more false dilemma which we hear about today, that is, Christ in the Church or Christ in the World. It is not at a question of adapting the Church to the world’s mentality, but of adapting the Church and the world of today to divine Truth, to divine Thought about the contemporary world. God is not farther away from our time than from any other, but his presence is more especially felt in every true interpersonal encounter. For these encounters are building in their own way the *macro-anthropos* and thus link up with the Church. Christ sends his Church into history so it can become the place where, at different moments of history, Christ’s presence is met. And the purpose of this sending and meeting is to allow *all* to live the “today” of God in the “today” of men.

Christ is universally present, but the Church is his Body which he calls to go beyond symbolic forms to the explosive reality of the Gospel, to become above all the fiery doxology that we read about in Revelations, a doxology that is carried by the liberating dynamism of the Holy Spirit and that, no one can ignore.

V. Culture and the Kingdom of God

St. Paul tells us that “we are co-workers with God” and Revelations says that “the nations bring their glory and honor.” The nations thus do not enter the Kingdom with empty hands. It is not difficult then to believe that everything that brings the human spirit closer to truth will enter into the Kingdom. Everything that the human spirit expresses in art, discovers in science, and lives in the light of eternity, that is, all the heights of its genius and holiness will be integrated into the Kingdom and will coincide with their truth in the same way that an inspired image is identical with its original.

Even the majestic beauty of snow-caped mountain tops, the caresses of the sea and the golden fields of grain will become the perfect language that the Bible speaks of so often. Van Gogh’s suns or the nostalgia of Botticelli’s Venuses as well as the sadness of his Madonnas will find their serene fullness when those who hunger for the two worlds will be filled. Even music, the purest and the most mysterious element of culture, at its highest perfection faints and fades away leaving us face to face with the Absolute. In Mozart’s Mass or Requiem, we hear Christ’s voice, and our elevation acquires the liturgical value of his presence.

When it is really true, culture finds its liturgical origins, even outside of the liturgy. In its essence, culture is the search for the “one thing that is necessary,” and this “one necessary thing” pushes it beyond its own immanent limits. Through the instrument of this world, culture erects the Sign of the Kingdom, that fiery arrow pointed toward what is to come. with the Bride and the Spirit, culture

cries, “Come, Lord!” Like St. John the Baptist, culture’s star is engulfed into the blinding light of the parousiac Midday.

If every person is created in the image of God and is a living icon, *earthly culture is the icon of the Kingdom of Heaven*. At the moment of the great passage, the Holy Spirit, the “finger of God,” will touch this icon and something of it will remain forever.

In the eternal liturgy of the future age, man will sing the glory of his Lord through all the cultural elements that have passed through the fire of the final purifications. But already here and now, men in community, scientists, artists, etc., who are all priests of the universal Priesthood, celebrate their own liturgy where Christ’s presence is manifested in accordance with the purity of the human celebrant. Like talented iconographers, they sketch a completely new reality by using the material of this world and the Thaboric light, and in this new reality the mysterious face of the Kingdom slowly begins to shine through.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Modern Art in the Light of the Icon

From its very beginnings, western Christian theology has manifested a certain dogmatic indifference toward the spiritual significance of sacred art, toward the iconography that the Christian East so deeply venerates. This western indifference is apparent despite the many martyrs and confessors who have suffered for the preservation of icons. Western religious art, however, has always lagged behind western theological thought. We can even go so far as to say that this was a blessing. Up to the 12th century, western art remained faithful to the common Tradition of both East and West. This unified Tradition is fully alive and visible in the magnificent the works of Romanesque art, in the miracle of Chartres Cathedral and in the Italian paintings whose creators continued to cultivate the *maniera bizantina.*

But starting in the 13th century, Giotto, Duccio, and Cimabue introduced into their works optical illusion, perspective, depth, chiaroscuro [play of light and shadows], and trompe l'oeil [still-life deception]. Such art, though more refined and more reflective of the natural world, lost the ability to directly grasp and portray the Transcendent.[68] In recent studies, researchers have been able to demonstrate the strong hold of Dominican intellectualism in the vision of Fra Angelico. Having broken with the artistic canons of tradition, western Christian art could no longer be integrated into the liturgical mystery, and having left its heavenly "biosphere," it became more and more autonomous and subjective. The "spiritual bodies" of the saints could no longer be seen underneath the folds of their clothing. Even the angels seemed to be beings make of flesh and blood. The holy persons painted in these pictures acted just like everyone else. They were dressed in the clothing of the artist's time and were set in scenes that were mere copies of the artist's own world. It did not take much for the biblical story too, in itself a miraculous event, to become nothing more than an occasion for the artist to exercise his talents on a portrait, anatomy, or landscape. The dialogue of spirit to spirit ended, the vision of "the flame of things" was replaced by emotion, flights of the soul, and sentimentality. For Maurice Denis, Leonardo da Vinci was the forerunner of the images of Christ painted by Muncanscy and Tissot. This sentimental orientation, pushed to its limits has produced contemporary images of the Sacred Heart. In the same way, a crucifix painted with detailed realism jolts our nerves, and the unspeakable mystery of the Cross loses its secret power and fades away. When art forgets the sacred language of symbols and the holy presence, and merely deals with "religious subjects" in a plastic manner, the breath of the Transcendent is no longer felt.

Once past the middle of the 16th century, the great painters like Bernini, Le Brun, Mignard, and Tieoplo painted images with Christian themes but with a total lack of religious meaning. The so-called religious art that we find in churches today is completely bereft of the sacred. A western theologian had this to say:

> The whole controversy about "sacred art" that is raging in the West nowadays shows the complete dissimilarity between oriental and western [Christian] sacred art. The battle is being fought on a ground that makes this schism very clear. The alternatives proposed show it as well. More precisely, we see that western religious art, regardless of what we may think about it, shows nothing of the sacred when compared to the sacredness of icons. Western religious art is basically subjective and seeks to express religious sentiments. Everything admirably points to the fact that religious art in the West is not incorporated into the liturgy, and people do not even think it could or should be. There is no longer, for the moment, an altar in St. Vitale's in Ravenna, not even any liturgical objects. We are obviously, however, in a church where everything seems to be waiting for the Holy Mysteries to begin. In our most mediocre churches, and even in our best, from as far back as the Gothic period, we can celebrate mass every day, and we can find many things to excite or repress our personal devotion, but there is nothing that differentiates the church from a workshop or a museum. Nothing in the church unites the paintings and sculptures on the walls with the Holy Mysteries.[69]

At the end of the 18th century, art had visibly lost the organic link between form and content and had sunk into the night of ruptures. Happily, art certainly remains complex, and it preserves all kinds of tendencies, but the predominance of certain of these tendencies has changed its face. We will follow, however, the evolution of only one of them, the one that led to pure abstraction in art.

When "to know deeply and personally" (*connaître*) no longer assumes an attitude of worship and prayerful communion, at that moment intimate and personal knowledge is separated from contemplation. At that moment, we give up the deepening of interiority, which can lead to a meeting with the Transcendent and with reality pulsating with life. We exchange this deepening of interiority for "knowledge which leads to power" (*science*) and the pursuit of an increase of this power over the things of this world. But in so doing, we lose the heavenly root of being. Being itself is emptied of its essential meaning; it loses its heavenly root. It is denatured and desacralized. Consciousness discovers the *Dasein* (Being-there) only to reveal it as "being for death," enclosed in nothingness. We destroy what is real by separating its elements, by producing unbridgeable discontinuities. Nothing is left for man except a deeply acosmic spirituality of the soul or a moralism of the will. Both of these block the path to the transfiguring of matter. Neither a philosophy of essences, with its closed substances governed by the principle of causality, nor existentialist thought, with its transcendences without ontological depth, can open up to the dynamic divine energies which operate to make us and the cosmos like God and to allow the whole creation to participate in him. There are no more singers for the cosmic liturgy because, the Taboric light has no longer been seeded in the opacity of our bodies, and the glory of God has lost its place in a nature put to another and illegitimate use.

Art has been captured by the "dominating forces" of this world and its wisdom. The artist, destined more than ever to solitude, searches for a sort of "sur-object" or "sur-reality," since for him simple reality is no longer directly expressible. In a very heroic but desperate way, the artist tries to find the secret side of the things of this world, that side of things which has been "evicted" from its own dwelling. We try to know secularized objects deeply, and in so doing we lose their mystery. We even lose the things when we search for the mystery alone, in a spirit of reaction or despair. The vain quest for the detached mystery leads to a docetist abstraction and to a phantasmagoric game of bodiless shadows.

The exposition at Nadar's in 1874 is more or less the event and date which mark the rupture between two periods: the one, Renaissance art and the other, modern art. The independent and deeply subjective painting of modern art manifests a need for constant renewal and seeks to portray perpetually unsatisfied spiritual and psychological states. We see this tendency in painters that run the gamut from Cezanne and his profound disquietude and all the way to Van Gogh and his tragic anguish. Impressionism and expressionism transmit the subjective reactions of the artist's retina or of his nervous system. In both, we have paintings of what is circumstantial and occasional, as interpreted emotionally by the painter. The emulsionized object disappears in a luminous and chromatic plasma. The technique of separated but juxtaposed touches of paint pursues the colored vibrations of light and searches for a synthesis by trying to seize impressions in a single instant. For its part, cubism decomposes the living unity of things into geometric elements and cerebrally reconstructs a painting like a mathematical problem. Cubism also abandons the play of light and color and analyses an object as it represents itself to the imagination. An object is placed in a space reduced to two dimensions or at the other extreme, a space expanded into many dimensions like the physicist's atom. Surrealism unravels the reality of this world and superimposes on it another and invented reality, going even so far as to draw in a "sur-existential aura." Art has freed itself from every "canon," from every rule, and when it is "theurgic," it throws itself at magical powers of incantation and falls into false transcendencies, veritable "metaphysical miscarriages." African masks are ala mode nowadays, along with the transporting power of drugs as well as counterfeit occult symbolism. Contemporaries run to see compositions which get their inspiration from reinforced concrete, the atom and space rockets, the plastic images of pure speed, and iron wire sculptures. The enormous weight of the "sticky and strangling" universe gives birth to modern dance, an impetuous promenade leading nowhere. Every artist has the terrible liberty of representing the world in the image of his own devastated soul, and this tendency by no means excludes even the vision of a gigantic latrine in which dismembered monsters squirm around. Everywhere we find the discontinuity of disjointed, syncopated rhythms, the dissolution of forms and the disappearance of

precise content, of a subject, a face. Similarly, in poetry, words lose their meaning, and we listen to music that has no melody.

For the modern compartmentalized mentality, an object does not exist under one unique form but dresses and shows itself in many aspects, like the facets of a diamond. Before it disappears, an object rears up in its final death throws, all twisted and convulsive. The content of things and the outer skin of faces decompose; everything is broken up in pieces, atomized, disintegrated. The reality that the painter perceives thus reflects a consciousness that is itself torn and shattered. Finally, reality itself slides into this chaos. Man is no longer the master of nature's anarchistic tendencies. He no longer puts them in order by his own spirit but simply registers them and in fact contributes to their chaos by refusing to intervene. In the past, things questioned the artist. They were waiting for him to answer and bring them to life under his creative glance, to return to them their virginal innocence, and to bring them back to their right mind, to their candor and ingenuity. The modern artist, however, questions his own soul, then looks at the world and applies his disintegrating vision to things. He thus becomes an accomplice to the ancient rebellion which tries to get free from every meaning, from every preëxisting and normative principle. Such a return toward the primordial chaos only accelerates the wearing out of time and reduces being to the poverty of nothingness. Matter is thus dissolved and loses its shape. It is looked at from the point of view of a temporal atom. The duration of matter in time has been eliminated and with it the pulsation of a living face and the confidence in a person's look. Each fragment of matter begins to live its own particular existence. Goya's famous *Saturn* eats up man's substance. At the end of the Middle Ages when medieval culture was in convulsions, sulfuric winds were blowing through the open breaches and let loose hordes of liberated, writhing desires, of eternally unsatisfied hungers. Demonic and irrational powers sprang forth and spread all over the world. Goya's man is haunted by monsters who bubble up from his subconscious. For Bosch, the same paradisiac road takes the form of a long, endless and dark tunnel which becomes the inspiration of Kafka and Freud. The way is dark, suffocating, and its outcome is very uncertain. But from Picasso's point of view, that of his "line of cruelty," man does not find much comfort. It is probably from this occult point of view that demons must see the world, a point of view emptied of the inaccessible image of God.

The Unique, the Idea, and the Sacred are all crumbling due to the universal leveling that we see today. They are being replaced by the magic of a whirlpool movement which is centered, rather decentered, on itself. It is no longer eternity that sin has fragmented in time but rather time has been fragmented into nothingness. Is not hell to be defined precisely as a fragment of subjective time extended and eternally frozen, a dream without a dreamer, the ultimate refuge of the nonexistent? Ultra-modern existence knows nothing of the emergence or the growth of being, nor of the progressive succession of events. It only contains broken elements, ruptures tied together, explosions which over lap one another without any connection or order. Time oriented toward a destiny is replaced by the notion of simultaneous and instantaneous moments or by futurism; it thus shrinks into a pseudo-eschatology of a return to what is elementary. In the final analysis, a corpse does not move; it only spreads out. Dostoevsky prophesied that man would lose even his outer form if he lost his faith in the possibility of being integrated into the Divine. In the past, the great Masters had the feeling that when they touched any piece of being, they held the whole world in their hands, a world wriggling with life. Today, however, the world is shrinking into the poverty of a few fragments, and we see this world portrayed across immense canvases and billboards.

Take for example Jacques Lipchitz's famous bronze *Barbara*. She has no outer skin; we see what corresponds to a face, but it does not resemble one at all. The sculptor put himself inside Barbara and transmitted internal sensations. He transformed the impression of organic sensations into a visual image. Through entangled wires and knots, peaks and empty spaces, we are supposed to see Barbara's sensations, to actually meet her. Her interiority is translated without any reference to nature as we usually know it. This sculpture is cerebral art. It does not search for a meaning or the mystery of destiny but only function, relation and dependence. The sculptor Henry Moore busied himself with the projection of one substance into another and wondered what would become of the human body if it were constructed in stone. The same thing is also true for intra-atomic painting or the corpuscular mystique of Salvador Dali or Francis Picabia.

Non-figurative, informal, abstract art suppresses all ontological undergirding and denies reality to any concrete object. An red apple is not a red apple but only redness in itself, a colored spot into which the artist projects a meaning that only he understands.

Schopenhauer said that all the arts have a secret tendency toward "musicality." Now of all the arts, music is the only one which in no way tries to imitate a form of this world. Despite, or perhaps

thanks to, this lack of correspondence between music and natural forms, Kandinsky, Malévitch, Kupka, and Mondrian follow Mallarmé's wish to "borrow music's laws and powers." The talented cellist Kandinsky called his drawings "improvisations" and his completed works "compositions." Kupka drew a "Fugue in Two Colors" and "Hot Chromatism." In his paintings, the musician and composer Paul Klee pursued metamorphoses in perpetual lyric or explosive germinations. On the other hand, the musician Scriabine spoke of a "symphony of light" and sounds that evoke color associations. He was passionately interested in the idea of "flowing light" associated with sounds and unfolding in time. Survage, Beothy, Cahn, and Valensi make this dream real in film and experiment with "colored rhythms." Richter even goes so far as to make abstract films.

"Concrete music" eliminates melody, harmony, and counterpoint. According to Mozart, the wholeness of the melody precedes its differentiation into parts. Fragmentation moves on to mere isolated sounds placed side by side, to the discontinuity of Stravinsky's music and finally to the pure vibration and chaos of liberated noises. It is very symptomatic of this movement that Boris Bilinsky, in his quest for the "continuity of forms and colors without subjects," mentioned Debussy and Ravel whose music, he felt, was the beginning of a musical mosaic, a continuity of pieces without any necessary organic links.

The painter Tchourlanis, before finishing his life in a sanatorium, tried to translate his "musical sensitivity of the world" into "sonata-paintings" without any subjects. Malévitch felt in himself a mystique of the night in which the world was recreated as it might have been, the Mallarmean "midnight" and his "drop of nothing." Malévitch created "supremacism" and sought the supreme intensity of "absence." Space liberated from any structure becomes "a container with no dimensions, having no spatial components, a pure aprioric form without subject or object." For Malévitch, the diagonal line translates the idea of movement in emptiness. It is an abstraction purified in the extreme and is symbolized in a black square on a white background. He wrote *Die Gegenstandlose Welt* about a world of pure ideal thought in which all representable reality has been removed. François Kupka studied theology, learned Hebrew in order to read the Bible and acted as a medium in spiritualistic seances. As an Orphist, he painted "Fugue in Red and Blue" and transposed his metaphysical experiences by means of geometric signs and an abstract emotionalism. The ideal and cerebral world is violently opposed to the real and perceived world. Vertical planes push back the weight of space

For all these artists, non-figurative painting knows only proportions and constructive relations, a pure rhythm of colored planes, discursive lines, and plastic values. Kandinsky set out this anemic mysticism in his philosophically very weak book entitled *Du spirituel dans l'art* (The Spiritual in Art). Mondrian, a member of the Dutch Calvinist "Theological Society," searched for the transcendent in the strict relation of lines which meet at right angles. In Paul Klee more than in the others, we feel the deep hunger to penetrate the "world" before the world, the *tohû wâ bohû*, the formless and contentless abyss of the creation story in the Bible, pure and ideal potentiality. He believed that chosen artists descend into this secret place where pre-creational forces feed every possible evolution. For Klee, the present day form of the world is not the only possible one. We can feel here the temptation of the demiurge to predict and imagine a cosmos different from the one God created. In the same way, the surrealism of André Breton, Max Ernst, and Picabia forces open the doors of the irrational by "systematic exile" (*dépaysement*) and the awakened appetite searches out the secret core of things *Ding an sich* by abstracting the things themselves. Now St. Gregory of Nazianzus gave us this warning: "Cursed is the intelligence that looks into the mysteries of God with a deceitful and impure heart "[70]

For Iavlensky, friend of Kandinsky, art expresses "the nostalgia of God." Malévitch's diagonal, or the movement of lines that break at right angles, comes to a halt in front of the square which, according to Mondrian, is the ideal geometric sign of the Absolute. For the great founders of abstract art, the desire to penetrate behind the veil of the real world is obviously "theosophical" and occult in nature. Paul Klee wrote that "at the higher levels, there is the mysterious." Is this the new era of the knowledge of God? Perhaps but if it is, it is a knowledge which knows nothing of the incarnate God. It is a knowledge of the ideal and abstract deity which sets aside the divine Subject himself.

The forms of "artistic existentialism" are even more disquieting. The unconscious mind dreams of curved space and the fourth dimension, but nature is quite capable of avenging itself by ensnaring men's curiosity. Imagination, drunk on its unlimited possibilities, introduces hallucinations and delirium. It ends up as Dubuffet's raw art, as the primitive art of the mentally ill, as Hernandez's "mystical nightmares," as Kopac's bestiary, an animal fable book, as Giraud's "chimerical builders,"

and finally as absolute primitivism. André Gide said that "art is born out of constraints and dies from liberty." Sexual violence haunts painters like Goetz and Ossorio or sculptors like Pevsner, Arp, Stahly, and Etienne Martin. Alongside "collages" and automatic writing, the non-logical character of Max Ernst or Dali joined together the photographic exactness of objects with a change in their function, for example, the "Melting Clocks." For Pollok and the entire American school of *Action Painting,* the goal of automatic speed painting is to exclude all consciousness. Colors are simply thrown onto the canvas; the painter does not even touch it in order to avoid any intention, even unconscious.

While in a trance, Georges Mathieu made drawings on a stage to the accompaniment of concrete music. He covered an immense canvas, 10 square meters, in less than an hour. He squirted colors out of ruptured tubes; the paint flew through the air by itself, so to speak, in a way that fit right in with the magical atmosphere of the trance. At the end, the artist was in a state of complete prostration. The impulsive spontaneity gut reaction is set side by side with the preconscious chaos. The great panels of Bernard Buffet are very symptomatic of a seemingly intentional profanation. Their only subject shows monstrous birds, with a look of corpse-like immobility, who walk over the body of a naked woman. All the veils, even the anatomical ones, are pulled off and very studied postures are poised for the ultimate and obscene profanation of the mystery of the human person. Standing in front of these panels with their definite smell of rotting matter, we cannot help recalling a passage from the *Ladder* of St. John Climacus: a saint "saw the beauty of a woman and cried with joy and praised the Creator Such a man has already been raised from the dead before the General Resurrection."

If we try to imagine the wall decoration of hell, certain works of contemporary art just fit the bill. The "artful Deceiver" of the Bible, whom Luther called "the One who wrinkles his nose," has made of his very existence the bitter profession of ridiculing human existence. People can ridicule human existence even with a good conscience and with taste, in an artistic manner; they and others may not even be aware they are doing it. What we are in fact dealing with is a refusal of the "image and the likeness of God," even more, a refusal of the God "who loves mankind," who makes the human face radiant with his light. By its very nature, abstract art has nothing in it that allows us to know "the Word that became flesh." What can this type of art say about the eucharist, the transfiguration of the body, the resurrection of the flesh? It is the Taboric light without Christ, the luminescence of the saints without the saints. It is nothing but a ray captured in a magic mirror, the hellish sign of impotence and lack of fullness.

Among the various possible philosophical approaches, the sophialogical conception is the most capable of defining the nature of abstract art. According to the most classical expression of this doctrine, the "ideal" foundation of being, in the Platonic sense of the word, is far deeper than its changing, moving, and phenomenalogical appearance. This foundation is based on ideal and normative principles that are also called the *logoï* of things and beings. This ideal world, which exists above and beyond the temporal and spatial forms of being, penetrates them and gives them structure. It is called created *sophia* (wisdom). Being created and earthly, this *sophia* is in the image of the heavenly and uncreated *Sophia* which according to the teaching of the Fathers unites the ideas of God, his creative wills, of the world. The two *Sophias* are nonetheless radically separated from one another without any possible confusion. The ideal, created, and ontologically inseparable reality of things conditions and structures the concrete unity of the world and turns its multiplicity into ordered cosmos.

All knowledge consists of rising above and going beyond empirical things to their intelligible structure and of grasping their unity. The presence of an ideal content in a sensible form, and their harmony, condition the æsthetic aspect of being which the artist reads and comments on. Now thanks to the freedom of his spirit, man can transgress these norms. He can even pervert their relations. Beauty can therefore touch the human heart without any necessary link with Goodness or Truth precisely because man's liberty is the greatest in the æsthetic realm. In its quest for the infinite, the human *eros* can stop and be satisfied with created *sophia*, identify it with God, and deify nature. What is even more, in making this luciferian identification between created *sophia* and God, man can think he is the source of the cosmic fountain, can mistake himself for the Infinite One, and so do without God.

The ideal and intelligible side of things exists only to ground and unify the visible world. Outside of its "incarnational biosphere," the ideal has no meaning, no goal, no reason to exist. Art is precisely a system of expressions, a particular language whose elements are related to created *sophia* and express it. Words do the same thing for thought. At the opposite end from conventional signs, artistic expressions carry their content, like a secret and unique message. These artistic expressions when pushed to their limits, where they come close to the icon, nearly become religious symbols in which the symbolized content is always present. In Greek, the words for devil (*diabolos*) and symbol (*symbolos*) have the same root (*bolos,* throwing), but the devil "throws apart," what the symbol "throws together." A symbol is a bridge which links two shores: the visible and the invisible, the earthly and the heavenly, the empiric and the ideal. The symbol makes it possible for the two to interpenetrate each other.

The iconoclasts believed very correctly in symbols, but because of their "portraital" conception of art (imitation, copy), they refused to recognize in the icon its symbolic character and consequently did not believe that the person depicted could be mysteriously present in the image. They were never able to understand that beside the visible representation of a visible reality (artistic copy or portrait), there exists a whole other kind of art in which the image presents the "visible of the invisible" and thus shows itself to be an authentic symbol. The iconoclasts would probably have had no problems with abstract art and its geometric figurations, for example, a cross without a corpus. Now the iconic likeness is radically opposed to natural likeness, to natural portraiture, and only relates to the hypostasis, that is, the person, and to his heavenly body. This is why an icon of a living person is impossible and all attempts to introduce carnal, earthly likeness are to be excluded. In iconography, the person does not "enhypostasizes" or appropriate to himself a cosmic substance like wood or colors but rather appropriates his own resemblance. The heavenly face of the person assumes the transfigured body which is represented in the icon.

The Fullness toward which everything is moving will bring about the eschatological synthesis of "the earthly and the heavenly" (1 Co 15:42-49). Art prophetically anticipates this synthesis. Through the imperfections of our world, art sketches out the perfection of being and tells us about its mysterious element. But if art leaves its "incarnational biosphere," it changes its own nature and when it openly refuses all likeness, it sinks into the abstract.

We know that mathematical philosophy, such as that of Brunschvicg, is searching for pure thought from which all anthropomorphic form has been eliminated. Science is trying more and more to deal with notions which go beyond man's capacity to grasp. In the same way, abstract art violently opposes figurative art. Kupka said: "I swear to Nature that I will never again represent it." A thing without sophianic content is certainly flat and absurd, like the canvases of Fougeron or those of "socialist realism." But on the other hand, the ideal without the thing is blind and insignificant. It is as if art tried to represent the pure potentialities of Aristotle, his entelechies, which had lost the place of their actualization.

From the sophialogical point of view, it is obvious that abstract art (*ab-trahere*, pull out from, extract from the real) is based on an emptied *sophia*, diverted from its destination, perverted in its very essence and in its relation to the real. This perverted *sophia* is prevented from reaching its goal and becomes incomprehensible because it has lost its body. As a result, we have nothing but a false magic of the moment. Ghosts can still offer us a certain æsthetic pleasure. They haunt the left-over crumbs of the fragmented world but are of very little interest. Kandinsky or Paul Klee can attain a high degree of musicality because they are geniuses, but the person who looks at their works is never welcome in their world where personal presence and faces are absent. It is possible for the eye to listen to the voices of silence, but colored emptiness only distracts and ultimately collapses from fatigue. Can we enter into communion with or begin to make a gesture of tenderness toward one of Picasso's painted women? Fr. Serge Bulgakov called them "corpses of beauty." Can we feel the desire to pray in front of Malévitch's square?

Abstract art works on the rainbow which has been removed from its cosmic context. We can admire its solar spectrum, analyze it, and play with its colors forever, but it no longer unites heaven and earth and says nothing essential about man. Now the rainbow is not just a play of colors; it is not even an æsthetic object. But according to the Bible, it is the grand symbol of God's covenant with man. In iconography, Christ the Pantocrator sits on a rainbow in the image of his glorious Second Coming. Abstraction cuts off the luminous vibrations from their source, from the liturgical Orient. What can abstraction reveal to the praying man who bows down before the fiery lightning of the divine face and says: "In your light, we know all light." The beautiful is not only whatever

pleases, but even more than being a feast for the eyes, the beautiful must nourish and enlighten man's spirit.

Art exhibits show us that modern forms do not survive long. The more artistic forms are without intelligible content, the more they come together in unlimited combinations. The *unlimited range* of expressions in abstract art shows us the fearful shrinking, the *limitedness* of the soul, for unlimitedness, within the limits of a closed world does not really transcend anything. It is the art of Sartre's play *No Exit*. In contrast, the divine unlimitedness takes the one and only expression of the Incarnation: "By your nature, O Lord, you are certainly unlimited, but you willed to become limited under the veil of the flesh." In the unique face of Christ, God is present and with him, the whole of mankind. The saints' hieratic look, their iconographic and nearly rigid immobility is the *exterior limitedness* of their form, but that look reveals the *unlimitedness of their spirit.* In the frontal position, they look at us honestly and sincerely and fill us with holy fire without burning us.

As a symbol, the icon goes way beyond art, but it also explains art. We can unreservedly admire the works of the great Masters of all ages and even consider them to be the summit of art itself. The icon, however, stand somewhat apart, as the Bible is above universal literature and poetry. Apart from certain exceptions, art as such will always be more perfect than iconography because the iconographer does not attempt to attain artistic and æsthetic perfection. In fact, an excess of æsthetic beauty would detract from the icon and would be a dangerous element because such beauty could detract the person's interior look from the revelation of the Mystery. In the same way, an excessively refined poetic style could detract from the power of the biblical word. The icon's beauty is found in an extremely rigorous hierarchical balance. Below a certain limit, an icon is only a simple drawing; beyond a certain limit and commensurate with the contemplative genius of the iconographer, the icon reflects a beauty which strictly conforms to its subject, that is, to him who is "the God of those who paint the heavens and of what is above the heavens," according to St. Basil.

Due to its expressive nature, art can be the carrier of many different contents. Because it is free, art can become nearly iconic, like a Rembrandt canvas. At the same time, art can empty itself of all religious content. It can even have the function of a pure sign or become exclusively an æsthetic object, "art for art's sake," or mere decoration. It can completely change its nature and cease to be art.

The great figurative art of the past shows us the transfiguring vision of the Masters. Such art seizes the earthly *sophia* in the harmony of its two aspects, the real and the ideal; it sings the praises of that harmony and builds the sophianic temple. But in order for it to become the container of divine Beauty, the temple must consciously be opened up to the divine light and to the uncreated Wisdom by man's faith and holiness. Created *sophia* is only the ambiguous mirror of God's Glory, a mirror darkened by the Fall. This is why art itself remains profoundly ambiguous. In order to meet Beauty face to face, to attain its grace-filled rays, we must enter the temple through its secret doors, that is, the icon. This entry is made possible by a "trans-ascendence," by going beyond the senses and the intelligence. It is no longer the invocation but the parousia. Beauty comes to meet us, not to kidnap us but to open us up to the burning closeness of the personal God. The descent of the heavenly Wisdom makes the earthly *sophia* into its shining container, the Burning Bush. The art of the icon is not autonomous because it is included in the liturgical mystery and flows out of the sacraments. It nonetheless accepts a certain "abstraction," even a certain trans-figuration. In its freedom of composition, the icon freely arranges the elements of this world in their total submission to the spiritual. It is possible, therefore, to represent the Virgin with three arms, portray a martyr holding his own head, give a fool-for-Christ the face of a dog, put Adam's skull at the foot of the Cross, personify the cosmos as an old king and the Jordan as a fisherman, inverse natural perspective, and make all time and space come together in a single point. Light here serves as a coloring matter for the icon and makes it luminescent in itself. As in the heavenly City of Revelations, there is no need for a natural light source.

Photography has liberated art from certain functions of reproducing likenesses and therefore clearly showed that art has always aimed at the plastic transfiguration of the real world and not simply at the reproduction of nature, that is, at making faithful copies. Manessier affirmed that "the figurative is the Promised Land" and that art only has value if it results from a fertilization by nature. This fertilization, however, from the artist's point of view, is beyond immediate figurations and finds its place in the harmonious relations between its interior qualities, in the rhythms of being. Mallarmé said "to paint not the thing but the effect that it produces." This is the quest for the purely spiritual but carried inside of the real. Bazaine, Le Moal, and Bissière are good examples of this

type of painting, but in Monet's *Nymphéas*, we see a radical "detachment" from the real which moves on to a pure musicality of colors. Artistic sensibility strives to transcend material data. Manessier said that the artist's job is "to use authentic plastic means to reveal the spiritual relations between the exterior world and a more interior world and to make these correspondences more intelligible through transposition."

Hokusaï in his old age felt that "an artist would have to live 130 years in order to draw a branch." If this is true, would it not take the whole of human history to be able to draw a person's face? There is, nonetheless, an indefinite preliminary time necessary because the artist lives in the center of the modern world's turmoil where everything is uncertain and questioned. The non-figurative tendency goes hand in hand with the secularization of society, with an opposition even in theological circles to the historical element of the Bible. A de-figuration in sacred art has its equivalent in the demythologizing of the Bible in theology.

Science has profoundly changed our cosmic landscape. It is also obvious that we can no longer use spatial images in a naive manner: heaven up there, hell below and the angels playing musical instruments. In abstract art, however, not only matter but also forms have lost their transcendent content. Through its fear of matter, artistic dematerialization has dissolved the world. Art reaches out to the absolute, but it starts off from a void. Its launching force carries with it nothing of this world, no piece of its own flesh. Such art is impenetrable and made up of pure rhythms. Its subject is the artist's own esoteric and cerebral subjectivity, mere games of his unconscious. He creates a world all to himself into which no one else can enter because there is no door. His world is reduced to an ephemeral explosion of fire works.

On the other hand, attempts to create sacred art with elliptic figures or graphic designs or exaggerated and simplistic forms can only aggravate the situation, for none of these forms is true. Art surrounds itself with empty faces; it is better than to mutilate them, but the artist is uncomfortable because he see "nothing." His art is therefore deceiving and deceptive. He copies or invents and produces things that are sur-real, unacceptable or desperately naive. If profane art expresses a troubled interior and disquietude, the solution offered by so-called religious art is inadequate; it cheats and says nothing.

The organization of spots of color produces a certain luminous quality which can translate the infinite, especially in stained glass windows. In the same way, arabesque with its floral elements, interlacing figures, and palm-leaf ornamentation introduces a bit of fantasy into the severity of Romanesque architecture. Abstract art, when it does not pretend to be a substitute for sacred art, possesses a decorative and architectural sense which has always existed in the ornamentalists of the past. As such, abstract art is a minor art which has a certain pedagogical importance for the catechumens who are still in the antechamber of the Mystery. Abstract art can help us all to understand that we are in the presence of Beauty, not when there is nothing more to add but when there is nothing left to take away, for Beauty is without limit, but it cannot accept to be in the presence of non-Beauty.

Without being able to prove it, it is obvious that abstract art has its origins in Orthodox iconography, in Moslem arabesques, and in the transcendental. To understand this relation of origin is to reawaken unpleasant memories for everyone. Beauty has certainly been universally prostituted and contemplation desacralized. Academicism in art, theology, preaching, and Christian living has provoked justifiable revolts as well as a passionate but very tragic quest for the truth. Now, every revolt carries in its heart its own transcendence. Hell only exists because of the light that shines in the darkness. The hope of attaining the opposite, that is in this case, the hope of hell's ultimate repentance, arises at the extreme end of its secret suffering. The immense demolition job, which is inherent in abstract art, is a form of asceticism, of purification, of aeration, and we should recognize that fact with respect. Abstract art is an answer to the sought-after purity of the soul, the nostalgia of lost innocence, the desire to find at least a ray or a burst of color which has not been soiled by an earthly face, on which shines both complicity and an equivocal smile. Is not abstract art's refusal of the forms of this world, by its deep hunger, the uncompromising demand for the "wholly other"? It cries out "impossible" to artistic activity in a closed and atheistic world, in a world of "still life" and dead matter which is no longer the substance of resurrection. This is why modern art has meaning: it has brought about the liberation from every prejudice. It has suppressed the ornaments and accessories of life; it has demolished the academic horrors of recent centuries; it has killed the bad taste of the 19th century. For all this, it is a very refreshing breeze. The exterior form has been defeated, but at this level, no evolution is any longer possible. The key to the secret relations has been lost and the rupture between the divine and transcendent sacredness, on the one hand, and the

human and immanent religious aspect, on the other, is so radical that it is no longer possible to pass simply from one plane to another. The entrance to the “sophianic,” heavenly, and interior form, the contemplation by transparence of the invisible in the visible, is blocked by an angel with a flaming sword. Only the baptism of fire can resurrect art in the light of final accomplishments.[71]

The fading light and force of iconography since the 17th century carries a very heavy responsibility for the destiny of modern art. Having reached its own dead end, modern art expresses the desperate expectation of a miracle whose form, however, cannot be foretold, as is the case with all miracles. Perhaps the miracle is in the virginal look of a saint: in a handful of humus, he sees the fiery trace of the Spirit who, at the beginning, sculpted from this humid earth the face of the first man, of him who was destined to welcome the light of the divine look.

More than ever, modern iconosophy is called to rediscover the creative power of the ancient iconographers and to find an exit from the static immobility of the “copyist’s” art. If the world has lost all style as an expression of the human universal and of the spiritual communion of souls, the image of God today is imposing its own style in order to interpret our time in its light. Even though the icon has remained faithful to its origins in the past and is still a part of the pentecostal age, will it be able to unswervingly remain oriented toward the Gospel of the Parousia and the human face of the trinitarian God?

The liturgy teaches us today more that ever before that art decomposes not because it is the child of its time but because it refuses its priestly functions: to create a theophanic art and to set the icon in the middle of buried and disappointed hopes, the icon which is the Angel of the Presence, dressed in a “coat of many colors,” the sophianic Beauty of the Church. Its face is human: on the one hand, it is the Holy Face of the God-Man and on the other, it is the Woman robed with the sun, “the Joy of all joys,” “she who fights against all sadness” and from whom flows an inexhaustible spring of tenderness.

Section II

The Sacred

CHAPTER ONE

The Biblical and Patristic Cosmology

I. A Preliminary Notion

The Bible tells the story of the creation's progressive advance toward its culmination, that is, the creation of man. Having reached its final stage, God's initial creative activity came to an end. Man is the center of the creation and in him converge all the levels of being. The central position of man explains why God submitted nature to him as to its cosmic *logos*, as to its multiple hypostasis. Man "cultivates" nature, names beings and things, "humanizes" them. Man's direct relation with the Creator is therefore constitutive of man's very being.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul, speaking of the Fall, referred to the ancient curse ("the earth is cursed because of you" [Gn 3:17]) and stated that "the creation was made subject to vanity and servitude but not as if it was supposed to be that way." The captive state of nature does not result from a "natural evolution;" nature is rather a victim. Because man lost his cosmic place, nature also lost its initial normative and preëstablished orientation. It is this state of affairs which became its so-called "natural state."

The derailment of nature dehumanized it and explains its exteriorization in relation to Good and Evil, for only man possesses moral consciousness. In this way, nature which ought to be morally neutral finds itself subject to necessity and has to fight for its existence. The Fall had cosmic repercussions in that it perverted not only the initial relationship between God and man but also the relationship between man and the cosmos. Nature is not at all demonic, but the disturbed relationship of man with the world deprives the world of its center, man, and thereby alters its nature. It is left estranged.

Regardless of the interpretation we give to the Fall, it is obvious that we are referring to an event, to a tragedy at the threshold of historical existence and which determines it. We only have knowledge of this event through God's Revelation; the Fall is otherwise beyond all empirical investigation. Man did not succeed in raising nature up on high, in giving it its existential center grounded in his spirit. As a result, the passage of the cosmos into another age will not take place at the end of human progress but rather by an intervention of divine power. We have to wait for the return of Christ who "will open the heavens" and gives us access to the celestial mansions. Nature is also waiting for the universalization of this access to the heavens *in and with* "christified" man.

Science stops at this threshold, its advance being blocked by a radical rupture in the fabric of existence, stalled by a lose of power. The Fall also affects science's capacity to perceive and study nature in its secret undergirding or foundation. Brought face to face with this secret and irreducible substructure of nature, science is forced to multiply "antinomical points of view." This is why the methods and means of understanding nature depend on an unavoidable abstraction because science studies a nature whose mystic heart has been cut out of it. In defining the laws of nature, science does not have a direct perception of living being. It does not hear nature's cries, as St. Paul spoke of them. Science cannot hear nature's silent suffering and cannot sense its anxious waiting for its liberation. The metaphysical root of corruption and death are completely beyond science's capacity to grasp. Theology, on the other hand, does not claim to fully plum the mystery, but at least it has the light of Revelation. St. Peter spoke about the secret and hidden man, *homo absconditus* ; we can also speak of a secret and hidden world, *mundus* or *cosmos absconditus.* For St. Basil, the analysis of the properties or qualities of nature gives us useful empirical information, but it never reaches the essence of the matter, that is, the ultimate foundation of creation.

II. Creation Ex Nihilo

Greek philosophy never became aware of God as creator. Eternal preëxistent matter is the stuff which the demiurge used to form and produce beings and things.

The heritage of the ancient metaphysicians has gone over to materialism. Henri Poincaré noted ironically that even today we do not know what it means to be a materialist because we do not know what matter is. Nonetheless, even though materialism believes that life had a beginning, it refuses to believe in the creation of matter and affirms the existence of an eternal substance that takes on diverse and ever changing forms.

The Bible, however, takes the opposite view (2 Mac 7:28) and speaks, not of *mè on*, that is, the pure possibility of being but not yet made into a concrete existing thing, but rather of *ouk on*, that is, absolute nothingness. The biblical doctrine is the creation of everything from absolute nothingness, *ex nihilo.* Nothing existed outside of God, not even an empty space outside of God. The creation, therefore, opened up a whole new category, that which is outside of God. God created the empty space outside of himself, that "nothingness outside of himself" which could potentially contain something. The result was that he gave existence to something, namely, the empty space containing nothing. That new something was infinitely far from him. St. John of Damascus said that the empty nothingness was far from God "not in the sense of a place but according to its nature."

Following Justin, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Irenæus of Lyons, Athanasius of Alexandria summed up the situation: "Others, among whom we count Plato, thought that God made all things from a preëxistent and unbegotten matter on this subject, they are spouting pure mythology."

The different levels of being were called into existence by the creative Word of God. The upper spheres did not evolved from lower spheres; there is no principle of evolution here. Rather the principle of discontinuity is visibly at work, and nature in fact jumps from one degree of creation to another. God's activity, nonetheless, assures the unity of the different kingdoms: mineral, plant, animal, human, and angelic. These levels or kingdoms do not simply pile up on top of one another but represent the degrees of a single Whole, living and set in a definite order. The physical and chemical level rises to the biosphere of living beings; above that is the psychosphere and finally the "noosphere," that is, the intelligible and the spiritual level.

In the patristic interpretation, the creation of the heavens stands for the creation of the angelic world. This doctrine proclaims that the spiritual world preceded the material world, and that the spiritual does not come from the material. The spirit is not therefore the epiphenomenon of matter. Man was placed at the summit of the living whole as the synthesis of the spiritual and the material.

According to St. Basil and St. Augustine, creation *ex nihilo* means, that the world was created *along with* time. In this way, the flow of being and the positioning of each of its parts in relation to the others are measured by time and space. Thanks to the mathematical structure of being, number assures its order and harmony. By means of natural causality, the laws of nature give order to the creation. Only the human spirit rises above nature by an individual and creative causality.

The whole creation is very "good and beautiful." God put a creative power into nature. *Natura naturata* has become *natura naturans.* The Greek word *phusis* comes from *phuô* and means to cause to be born or to grow. God ordered "that the earth bear fruit," and according to St. Basil, that "Word echoes down to this very day." St. Basil also said that God united all the parts of the cosmos in a covenant of love. St. Gregory of Nazianzus had something similar to say: As long as the world is at peace and no being rises up against another, the covenant of love is operative and harmonizes everything. This vision presupposes therefore the freedom to contradict and to build a world based on the refusal of God's covenant. Man, endowed as he is with the freedom of choosing among options, abdicated his royal dignity and thus upset the preëstablished order of things when he ceased to consciously assure the "relation of love." The sun gives light, the earth turns, and nature knows the increase and decrease of natural light. But it has also comes to know its other fearful pole: darkness and night consciousness. This polarization takes place as a result of the fall of man which comes *after* the creation. It appears as a cosmic catastrophe in a world henceforth deprived of its master. Man's place[72] as king and lord is usurped by the one to whom St. Paul gave a very strong name, "the god of this world" (2 Co 4:4).

III. The Biblical Conception

The particularities of the Hebrew language have structured the biblical vision of creation; this is not an accident but God's hand at work. In Hebrew *bara* means to create, and in the Bible, this verb is reserved for God alone. It refers to a way of acting that is properly divine. God's creation is opposed to everything that is *made* or *constructed*. God creates and then sustains; he carries his creation and constantly intervenes in history on its behalf. Each piece of this world is God's work, and Psalm 104 is a cosmic hymn of praise to the Creator who recognizes his world and declares it to be entirely *good.*

Hebrew is essentially a concrete language of shepherds and peasants. It gives names to what exists and does not worry about abstract matters. It is radically opposed to all philosophical abstraction and abhors abstract words. Being a poetic language, it lends itself admirably to the telling of epic stories. It has a feeling and a love for nature, for the carnal, and excludes all ontological dualism.

The sensible world[73] was created by the Word of God and therefore has its foundation and principle in him (Jn 1:1 and Heb 1:9). This sensible world is in no way opposed to the intelligible world. What is more, the sensible world is intelligible by its very constitution. The sensible world has a "language" (Gn 2:19), and it can be read clearly by the spirit. The biblical notion of the sensible and material world therefore totally excludes the idea of an anti-spiritual matter. The Bible liberates us from every guilt complex toward matter and the senses. The Fall has its origins in the angelic world of pure spirits; evil, therefore, does not come from matter. It is the spirit which has profaned matter by turning it into an idol. Carnal sin is essentially the sin of the spirit against the flesh.

Matter is never inert. The Cabbala only deepens this very biblical understanding, namely that matter is animated by a concentrated but dormant energy. This *dynamic* vision of matter rejects every sort of static notion, and as such it passed directly into the thinking of the Church Fathers. Nothing stops; creation continues: "God never gets tired or weary" (Is 40:28). The Lord said, "My Father is working still, and I also continue to work" (Jn 5:17). The notion of time thus means that the world is continually regenerating itself, in movement toward its fullness: "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I will drink it *anew* with you in the Kingdom" (Mt 26:29).

In the wedding covenant between the Lord God and Israel, the elements of the world are the carnal letters of an "imaged" dialogue: light, fire, water, oil, salt, wine, wheat bread, stones, boulders. Even dust and ashes symbolize death and nothingness. These elements become the cosmic matter of the Christian liturgy. Christ said "*I am the bread of life*." "God is a consuming fire," and God is "light."

In the biblical universe, the sensible side of the creation is not reduced to being an instrument. It is not simply a material stage for a play whose actors are the heavenly powers. The material world of the senses obviously offers man its colors, images and language but without ever diminishing its own full "fleshly" value; it is a means of divine contemplation, a temple and cosmic liturgy. The Lord said, "Look at the lilies, how God clothes them in glory." St. Maximus the Confessor said that "many diverse natures come together in man to form in him but one unique perfection as such they form a polyphonic harmony of different sounds," a splendid doxology.

According to Plato, the world of the senses participates in the idea by a diminution, lose of its own reality. It is but a shadow and pale reflection. In fact, the more sensible realities fade away, the better they play their role, to the point even that the "myth of the cave" urges us to turn away from the sensible world and to flee from it. Platonism's allegories are cold because they "thingify" the world and thereby, paradoxically, robe it of its life, dematerialize it, and finally undercut its reality as part of the cosmos. In the Bible, on the other hand, the more nature is firm, living, and full of vigor within the realm of its own value, the greater is its symbolic meaning. The more man is man, the more he is an image, an icon of God. The more man's person expands and develops, as in the case of St. Paul, the more Christ lives in him.

The parable, *maschâl*, naturally takes its place in God's world. The Kingdom of Heaven is symbolized by the most day to day earthly realities, even the most fleshly ones: a sower who smells of the good open earth, a woman who puts yeast in the dough, a grain of wheat, the vine, the fig tree. The world of the senses carries in itself all that is necessary for teaching the most profound mysteries of the divine creation.

Every symbol, in the liturgical sense, contains in itself a certain presence of the thing symbolized, and its "reality-limit" (*réalité-limite*) is God's Name. God is present in his Name, and this Name becomes a theophanic meeting place par excellence. By extension therefore, every name, according to the Jewish mentality, contains the meaning and the destiny of the person or thing named. This is why parable images are never chosen by accident. Between the image and the reality it designates, there is a kind of "con-formity," family resemblance and likeness. The earth and the heavens do not just prefigure the new heavens and the new earth of the Kingdom, but they are the substructure of the forthcoming change. By anticipation, they are already this future change, though only partially and invisibly. In the same way, at the Last Supper, before his resurrection and by anticipation, Christ offered his body and his blood to his apostles.

The fourth gospel is perhaps more *historic*, that is, more carnal in the semitic biblical sense than the synoptics because all the manifestations of the Word made flesh open up more fully to our understanding.

Biblical symbolism is therefore rigorously concrete. The psalms describe a sort of sacred dance in which "the mountains jump around like rams and the hills like lambs" (Ps 114:4). This is not a simple allegory but the secret aspiration of every living thing, its hymn of glory to the Creator which is so well expressed by the "Hymn of the Three Young Men" in Daniel (3:51-90).

The isolated and autonomous body does not exist; it is an abstraction completely foreign to the biblical vision. Nothing is more unbiblical than the extended and spread-out substance of Cartesian dualism. Man is an indivisible totality, a living soul. If life leaves man, the corpse is not a body but dust, a horrible and frightful thing at the threshold of nothingness. After Christ's resurrection, death took an even more tragic meaning, so forcefully underlined in the burial service for priests. Human remains are venerated, however, as they, along with all of nature, wait for the general resurrection. The words of institution in the eucharistic liturgy: "This is my body" stand for the living body, the whole Christ who gives to each communicant a living body and blood relationship.[74] Similarly, "The Word was made flesh" means that God assumed human nature in its totality and with it the whole cosmos. And when the Nicene creed speaks of the "resurrection of the body," it confesses the reconstitution of the whole man, soul and body. As such "all flesh will see the salvation of God." "All flesh" means the fullness of nature.

"The old things have passed away, look, all things have been made new" (2 Co 5:17). If "the old man is going to his ruin," the new man is that "new creature" who "is renewing himself from day to day." The Bible shows being "in becoming," bubbling over with unforeseen new things. On the other hand, every static conception of being is its profanation, a regression back toward the state of inanimate dust, toward the brink of nothingness. The line between the two different visions is very clearly drawn: on the one hand, we have an artificial, fixed, and "thingified" vision of being, reduced to an acosmism of a static and devalorized cosmos. On the other hand, we have a dynamic vision of being, energized by its insertion in the biblical cosmism of the living creation, full of vigor and in perpetual creative activity. The Kingdom is not a simple return to Paradise but rather an advance toward its creative "being-made-full" which brings to perfection the whole of the created order.

IV. Patristic Thought

The Fathers thought in Greek and the Greek genius helped structure their ideas: patristic thought incorporates the biblical vision, while adding certain clarifications. First of all, the creation is not a necessary work of God. He created by an act of his divine will and not because his divine nature required a creation. St. John of Damascus taught that:

> God created through his thought, thoughts which became actually existing things. God contemplated all things before their existence imagining them in his thought, but each being received its existence at a particular moment according to an eternal thought-will which is a predetermination (*proorismos*), an image (*eikdôn*), and a model (*paradeigma*).

These ideas have no place in the essence of God but rather in his energies.

The *energetic* vision of creation corresponds to the cosmic *dynamism* of the Bible. It rejects the static vision in which the world is a simple copy of the intelligible content of the divine essence. God's ideas-wills remain radically separated from creatures as the will of an artist remains separated from his work. The ideas-wills normatively preëstablish different ways in which creatures participate in the divine energies, which are always operating and acting. The actual reality of creatures is oriented toward a measured standard which calls them to conform themselves more and more to the divine standard, or idea-will. This is called the *synergy* of "second liberties," that is, the aligning of created wills with the divines ideas-wills.

The alignment of wills presupposes freedom and therefore an initially unstable perfection. The patristic admonition to "become what you are" means to freely conform ourselves to God's idea of us, to become the temple of divine likeness and indwelling presence. A usurped autonomy, on the other hand, gives birth to a progressive dissimilarity, an unlikeness and eventually leads to a hellish isolation. It is quite clear that the divine ideas, the *logoï*, do not coincide at all with the Stoics' "seminal reasons." These ideas are not the essences of things; they are not substantial but only ideal and normative. They sum up, reflect, and recapitulate the temporal order in their ideal and metatemporal existence above the creation. The ideas-wills are contained in the Logos-Christ and shine forth from him. They govern God's great project of making each creature progressively conform to and participate in its heavenly model.

God did not create a qualityless substratum, a merely potential protomatter. According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, "the qualities are pure intelligibles, and their working together (*sundromè*) produces nature." Equally for St. Maximus the Confessor, sensible nature is not materialist in its depth. It is charged with energies and even represents a certain condensation of the spiritual and intelligible world. In this sense, we can say that matter is the epiphenomenon of the spirit. We see again that the patristic vision is essentially dynamic. It accepts different degrees of materiality and opacity in nature by accepting the possibility of nature's degeneration and its regeneration. The iconographic vision is very rich in teachings. It explains the ultimate consequences of the Incarnation: the sanctification of matter and the transfiguration of the flesh. With a loving passion, this vision allows us to see "the spiritual bodies" and "Christified" nature. The perfect balance of the Chalcedonian unity, between the divine and the human, conditions this cosmic assumption and directs our vision toward the blinding whiteness of earthly nature seen in the light of the Taboric noonday sun.

Having salvation as its main concern, the Bible is geocentric and anthropocentric, but patristic thought widens the horizons. The patristic vision sees in the parable of the lost sheep an allusion to the smallness of our earthly sphere which is seen as but one of the sheep. The other 99 sheep represent the universe in its totality along with the angelic eons.

St. Basil's *Hexameron*, a commentary on the six days of creation, is completed by St. Gregory of Nyssa. Man is not the result of an order given to the earth. Man is placed at the border between two worlds, and his task is to open the way for the whole creation to participate in his deified state. St. Maximus the Confessor expressed it in the form of several syntheses: man must establish harmony between the masculine and the feminine, cultivate the earth in paradise, reunite the earth and heaven, reunite in himself the intelligible and the sensible, and finally return to God the universe which has been set in order according to the divine plan. St. Gregory Palamas underlined several times that "man elevates himself without ever being separated from the matter which has accompanied him from the beginning." Christ fully accomplished this task, and we must all follow him. We see here that Christian metaphysics is basically concrete. History gives a concrete character to an otherwise purely intellectual activity. "Salvation comes from the Jews" (Jn 4:22), a historical people chosen for this task; and when their Messiah, the Word of life, appeared, "our hands touched him, our eyes saw him." Christ became the Door and no one could come to the invisible truth without passing by the visible door of his Body. Salvation is both human and cosmic *metanoïa*, raising up the whole of nature to the fullness of the Kingdom. Biblical time is positive; it measures nature's fertility, a fertility which reflects the Creator's goodness. A *Nabi* (prophet) has a historical consciousness. He has an intuition about what is and is not a creative gesture of God. He knows how to identify the "favorable times." These times open the world to eternity, to the today of God which is already penetrating into the today of men and which is leading the world toward "God who will be all in all."

V. Captive Nature

Nothing in nature is impure in itself, but the corrupted spirit of the devil or man can pollute it. When man abdicates his vocation of humanizing the world, he becomes its slave and submerges himself in the sensible. Man then creates idols out of the world of the senses. Idolatry is a deviation from the norm, the perversion of the relation between values and their proper order. Idolatry introduces the non-existent into nature, that which has no real being, a lying spirit, trickery.

Even though nature has been knocked off its center, namely man, and reoriented away from its proper doxological destiny, nature is not evil in itself. It has, however, been robed of its proper function; it has become exterior to man, and in this neutral position, nature is vulnerable to evil powers which use it to tempt and capture man. Nature itself is thus imprisoned and is waiting for its own liberation. "All creation groans in labor pains," and "the cursed earth" has miscarriages or produces monsters in the image of demonic man.

St. Symeon the New Theologian described the revolt of nature against fallen man at the time of the Fall:

> The heavens were ready to fall on him and the earth no longer wanted to carry him, but God did not allow the elements to rage so soon against man. He commanded that creation remain subject to man so that nature, which had become perishable, should continue to serve perishable man since nature had been created for man. However, when man becomes regenerate the creation will also become regenerate and will also become incorruptible and so to speak spiritual.

In the end, man will join himself to God, the cosmos will join itself to man having a place in his very inner self, and the sun and stars will shine inside the human soul.

For the anthropology and cosmology of the Christian Orient, nature has kept something of its initial and predetermined status. The Fall did not touch the image of God in man. It was only reduced to ontological silence by destroying the likeness, that is, the actualization of the image. St. Anthony, as related by St. Athanasius in his biography of the saint, declared that "our nature is essentially good," and according to St. John of Damascus, asceticism reëstablishes the balance, that is, the "turning of what is against nature back toward what is proper to it."

St. Paul's theology accented the universality of Christ's work of salvation. The whole universe is filled with the presence of God and the Incarnation introduces all of nature into the work of salvation: "For it pleased God that all fullness should dwell in Christ. For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible all was created by him and for him that all things should subsist in him (Col 1:16, 19). The wholeness of creatures is ontologically hung on Christ: "Everything is for him." The destiny of the creation is to glorify him and finds its final goal, purpose, and fulfillment in him. "All things subsists in him": The Word is the source and principle of the creation's cohesion; he turns the world into cosmos, oriented and moving toward its final goal and destiny.

In St. Paul, creation and redemption are intimately tied together, and Christ's work has an immediate echo in the whole universe. Christ "has the headship of all things" (Col 1:18), the material creation as well as the spiritual order. Being "the only-begotten Son of his [Father's] delight (Col 1:13), Christ is also the only-begotten Son of his will and his intention: God wanted Christ to be the final goal and the absolute center of all things. All creatures participate in him, "on earth or in the heavens." If "Christ also descended into the lower regions of the earth he did it to fill all things" (Eph 4:9-10). In the words of St. Irenæus: "By the Word of God, all things have been put under the sign of the economy of redemption, and the Son of God has been crucified for everyone and for everything, having drawn this sign of the cross *on all things*." The whole of nature is thus associated with man's destiny. Romans 8 describes the anxious waiting of nervous nature looking up from below or "like the eyes of the handmaiden look to the hand of her mistress" (Ps 123:2). The suffering of nature is not the pain of dying but rather the pain of childbirth.

VI. The Ecclesiological Aspect of Cosmology

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow said that "the truth of the Holy Scriptures goes far beyond the limits of our understanding," adding that man was created last in order to enter into the cosmos "like a king and high priest." According to the teaching of the Fathers, man's royal and priestly role gives an ecclesiological accent to biblical cosmology. For St. Maximus the Confessor, the world is a "cosmic temple" in which man exercises his priesthood. He is priest of nature, and "he offers nature to God in his soul as on an altar."

According to the Eastern Christian Tradition, the Church is rooted in Paradise. God comes "in the cool of the evening." to converse with man, and it is this communion which starts the process of deification, the Church's main characteristic. Communion with God is theandric, divino-human right from the beginning because "the Lamb is sacrificed from the foundation of the world" (Rv 13:8 and 1 Pe 1:19). The act of creating the world has its origin in the mystery of the Lamb, and therefore christology and with it ecclesiology also have their origins "in the beginning." The Church is precisely the arena where union and communion with God take place. Clement of Alexandria said that "Adam signifies Christ and Eve signifies the Church." This is why marriage and especially the first couple prefigure the union between Christ and the Church.

In Clement of Rome, as well as in Hermas, the world was created with a view toward the Church which is the entelechy, the pure potentiality, of history, its reason, its content and its final goal and destiny. The act of creation carries within itself the *communio sanctorum* of the Church, as the alpha and the omega of the whole creative economy of God. By becoming flesh, the Word actualized God's preëternal project, that is, to unite, as in marriage, in his person both the human and the divine. Christ the God-Man becomes Christ God-Humanity, that is the Church. The Church is set at the preëstablished center of the universe in order to "reunite in love created nature and uncreated nature by uniting them through the acquisition of grace," in the words of St. Maximus. What the Church of Paradise prophesied, the Church of Pentecost took up and actualized by transcending the limits set by the Fall.

The divine energies outside the Church act as the determining forces that keep being from falling apart, but inside the Church, the deifying energies lead to union with God. It is thus inside the preëstablished mystery of the Church, in the light of its sanctifying action, that we can penetrate to the greatest degree into nature's mystery.

The universe is called to enter into the Church; profaned things are to become sacred things, elements of Sacred History. The admirable syntheses of St. Maximus open up to our understanding the new vocation of man by looking at the work accomplished by Christ.

The Christian East very strongly expresses the universal and cosmic meaning of man's destiny. St. Isaac the Syrian asked the following question:

> What is the heart filled with love? It is a heart burning with love for the whole creation, for men, for the demons, for all creatures an immense compassion seizes the heart. Such a love cannot accept to inflict even the tiniest pain on any creature. Such a love prays even for the reptiles, moved by an infinite pity which comes to life in the heart of all those who become like God.

Man assembles the disjointed cosmos in his love, introduces it into the Church, and opens it up to the therapeutic action of grace. Harnack ironically commented on the Eastern Christian conception of Redemption calling it "physiological and pharmaceutical." Vladimir Soloview called it the Eastern Christian "theomaterialism." This conception nonetheless faithfully follows biblical realism and the tradition of primitive Christianity.

In the biblical view, salvation has nothing to do with legalism. It is not a sentence of the tribunal. The Hebrew verb *yacha* means to have lots of space, to be at ease; in the most general sense, it means to deliver, save from danger, from an illness, and finally from death. It makes clear the very particular meaning of reëstablishing the vital balance, namely, *healing.* The Hebrew noun *yecha*, salvation, means the final and total deliverance in peace, *shalom*. In the New Testament, the Greek word *soteria* comes from the verb *soizo*, and the adjective *sos* corresponds to the Latin *sanus* and means to give health to someone who has lost it, to save someone from death, that is, the natural end of all sickness. This is why the expression "your faith has saved you" is but an alternative form of "your faith has healed you." The two forms are but synonyms for the same act of divine forgiveness, an act that touches the soul and the body in their very unity. Along this same line, the sacrament of

confession is conceived as “a medical clinic,” and St. Ignatius of Antioch called the eucharist the *pharmakon athanasias*, that is the remedy of immortality.

Jesus the Savior thus presents himself as the divine Healer, “the generator of health,” to use the expression of St. Nicholas Cabasilas: “Healthy people do not need a doctor but rather sick people ” Sinners are sick people threatened with death in their bodies and in their spirits, and the therapeutic meaning of salvation stands for healing of the whole being, the universal elimination of death, that seed of corruption. Redemption presents itself as a corollary of the resurrection of the body. “Trampling down death by death.” This physical side of salvation also includes the physical victory over all the consequences of the Fall.

VII. A Sacramental Cosmology

From the one single divine source, “Be holy as I am holy,” flows a whole panoply of consecrations by participation. They operate by “deprofaning” and “devulgarizing” the very being of the world. This action of “punching holes” in the closed world by powerful explosions from the Beyond belongs properly to the sacramental mysteries and sacramentals which teach us that everything is destined for a liturgical fulfillment. The blessing of the fruits of the earth at Transfiguration or at Easter extends over every kind of “food” that sanctifying action contained in the words of the priest when he gives communion: “for the healing of his soul and body.” The final destiny of water is to participate in the mystery of the Epiphany; of wood, to become a cross; of the earth, to receive the body of the Lord during his rest on the Great Sabbath; of rock, to become the “sealed Tomb” and the stone rolled away from in front of the myrrh-bearing women.[75] Olive oil and water attain their fullness as conductor elements for grace on regenerated man. Wheat and wine achieve their ultimate *raison d’être* in the eucharistic chalice. Everything is referred to the Incarnation and everything finds its final goal and destiny in the Lord. The liturgy integrates the most elementary actions of life: drinking, eating, washing, speaking, acting, communing It restores to them their meaning and true destiny, that is to be blocks in the cosmic temple of God’s glory.

A piece of being becomes a hierophany, an epiphany of the sacred; for the physical eyes, nothing is changed in its appearance but at a deeper level, between the sanctifying principle and its object, its natural undercarriage, a copenetration, an exchange, a communion of natures takes place. The body ceases to be an obstacle as soon as it passes over to the “spiritual body” that St. Paul spoke about. St. Irenæus strongly underscored the notion that the whole man was created in the image of God. St. Gregory Palamas followed him in affirming that “the body also has the experience of divine things.”

The Pentecost icon is very rich in the teachings of Tradition. Below the apostles gathered together in a semicircle, we see *cosmos* allegorized in the form of an old man wearing a crown; he also extends his arms toward the Spirit in the form of tongues of fire.[76]

Christ walked on this earth and he admired its flowers; in his parables, he spoke of the things of this world as though they were images of heaven. He was baptized in the waters of the Jordan and passed the three-day rest in the heart of the earth. Nothing in this world remains foreign to his humanity, everything has received the seal of the Holy Spirit. This is why the Church in turn blesses and sanctifies all of creation: green branches and flowers fill the churches on the day of Pentecost; the feast of Epiphany has its “Great Blessing of the Waters and all Cosmic Matter;” at the litya during vespers, the church blesses wheat, oil, bread and wine, that is, four elements that represent nature and its fertility; at the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the Church blesses the four corners of the earth. The Church thus bows down before and puts the natural order under the saving sign of the invincible Cross.

The brilliance of divine actions is hidden under the veil of the things of this world. This is why, during the liturgy, the priest invokes “the seen and unseen benefits,” those that are hidden and therefore invisible for the moment. St. Ambrose warned his catechumens of the danger of scorning the sacraments because the Church uses common matter: bread, wine, water, and oil. Divine actions are not visible, but they are *visibly signified.* For the Fathers, the Church is the new Paradise in which the Spirit raises up “trees of life,” that is, the sacraments and where the kingship of the saints over the cosmos is mystically restored.

The eucharistic *metabole*, change, shows us the limit of nature’s possibility to change. Baptism brings about “a new birth of water and of the Spirit” (Jn 3:5-7). According to the doctrine of the Fathers, the Spirit confers his energies on the baptismal water which thereby becomes living, life-

giving, and regenerating water. By the invocation of the Spirit, the epiclesis, the water is purified of every evil trace and acquires the power to transmit sanctification. Water is not simply elevated by the Spirit to the level of becoming the agent of his operations, but the Spirit is infused into the water. In the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, water is now united to the Holy Spirit whose action operates in and by it. In the same way, oil, *myron* or *chrisma*, by the invocation of the Spirit, becomes "the charisma of Christ which conveys the Holy Spirit by the presence of his divinity." This is the common doctrine of all the Fathers. The Holy Spirit is in the chrism as he is in the baptismal water; he acts in it and by it. Cosmic matter thus becomes a conductor of grace, a vehicle of the divine energies.

The rhythms of nature, the flesh of this world, having been enrolled in the sacramental and liturgical action, integrate themselves into Sacred History. The sacred space of the Church penetrates cosmic space and spreads out to the "holy cities": to Jerusalem, to Rome, and to every city marked by theophanies, thus creating sanctuaries and pilgrimage centers where heaven and earth have visibly met each other. Ancient Rome, New Rome, today "Rome the relay between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem," they are all but pale gropings after an ideal. They must all be purified in the light of the saying "neither in Jerusalem nor on this mountain but in spirit and in truth" so as to be detached from fixed geographical and "thingified" points. This verse means that there are multiple "cosmic centers," that Rome or Jerusalem are found in every eucharistic gathering place where the Church manifests itself. In the same way, Peter's chair is contained in the chair of every bishop. It is in this sense that we must understand the resistance of St. Gregory of Nyssa to pilgrimages to the Holy Land; he did not deny the principle of the sacred. He only refused its static aspect.

If the Old Testament had already begun to sanctify springs, mountains, and stones, the Christian liturgy, however, undertakes the consecration of the whole world. With Constantine, the cultic building began to be part of the social structure of the city, the Day of the Lord coincided with man's day of rest, and the temple offered the image of the organized cosmos. The Church's liturgy is not simply a copy of the heavenly liturgy but is rather the irruption of the heavenly into history: God descends and sanctifies not only souls but the whole of nature and cosmic spaces.[77] In the same way, the Church's calendar and the cycle of offerings sanctify and fill with meaning the elements of time and the march of History. It is man's task to grasp and extend these transcendent measures over human time and space.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sacred

Today we often hear such expressions as “the holy will,” “our sacred duty,” “the holy law,” “a holy man,” etc. The semantic evolution of the words *sacred, holy* through history shows us that they have been detached from their roots and have taken on a moral meaning that leaves out a great deal of their initial ontological significance.

Above all, the sacred stands over against this world and stands for an irruption of the wholly Other, of what is absolutely different from this world. Rudolf Otto called it *das ganz Andere.* The Bible make this basic clarification: God alone is *ontôs*, or being; and he is exclusively the Holy One. Creatures are holy only in a derivative sense. What is holy or sacred in this world is never such by its own nature, by its own essence but always by *participation.* The words *qadosh, agios, sacer, sanctus* imply a relation of belonging totally to God and suppose a setting apart. The act of consecration withdraws a thing or a being from its empirical conditions and places it in communion with the numinous.[78] This sanctifying act changes the nature of the person or object, and the *mysterium tremendum*, the holy trembling in the presence of the numinous, is immediately felt in the surrounding environment. This trembling is not the fear of the unknown but rather a mystical dread which accompanies every manifestation of the Transcendent, every energy-filled shining in and through the realities of this world. God said, “I will send *my terror* before you; I will throw into confusion all the peoples you will encounter” (Ex 23: 27). Or again he said, “Take off your shoes for the place on which you stand is holy ground” (Ex 3: 5).

We have here the disturbing appearance of an “innocent” and therefore sanctified reality among and through the denatured elements of this world. We speak of *innocent* and *sanctified* because the consecrated thing or person is purified and returned to its original state, reoriented toward its authentic destiny and that is none other than to be the pure container of a presence, to permit the Holy God to dwell in it and to shine forth. In effect, “this place is holy” because God’s presence makes it holy. In the same way, the section of the Temple which housed the Ark of the Covenant was holy because of God’s presence. The Scriptures are holy because they contain Christ’s presence in his word. Every church is holy because God dwells there and makes it his house; he speaks there and gives himself as food within its walls. The “kiss of peace” during the liturgy was called holy because it sealed the communion of the faithful in the presence of Christ. The angels, “second lights,” are holy because they live in God’s light and reflect it. The prophets, the apostles, “the holy ones of Jerusalem” are holy by the charisms of their ministry. Israel was a *ethnos agion*, a “holy nation” because it was “set apart.” In the dispensation of the New Israel, every baptized and confirmed person is “anointed,” sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts integrate him into Christ so that he can “participate in God’s nature” (2 Pe 1:4). This participation sanctifies him, makes him “holy.” Bishops call each other “holy brother,” and a patriarch is called “your Holiness,” not by virtue of his human reality but because of his special sharing in the priesthood of Christ, the only Pontiff and Holy One.

The liturgy gives us a very clear teaching on this matter. Before giving communion, the priest announces: “The holy things are for the holy.” The faithful, struck by this fearful requirement, answer by confessing their unworthiness: “One is holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.” Christ is the one and only Holy One *by his nature*. His members are only holy *by their participation* in his unique holiness. In one of her hymns, the Church sings “Your light shines on the faces of your saints.” “Christ loved the Church in order to make her holy” (Eph 5:25-27). St. Nicholas Cabasilas[79] explained that “the faithful are called saints because of the holy thing they participate in.” Isaiah 6: 5-6 gives us a very precise image of this holiness:

> What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding in his hand a live coal which he had taken from the altar with a pair of *tongs* With this he touched my mouth and said “See now, this has touched your lips, your sin is taken away, your iniquity is purged.”

Man has become holy by purification because the powers of the Beyond have touched him. After communion, the priest recites the angel's words in the vision of Isaiah. He kisses the rim of the chalice, symbol of Christ's pierced side, and says, "This has touched my lips and shall take away my transgressions and cleanse my sins." The spoon that the priest uses to give the holy gifts at communion is called *labis* in Greek, *tongs* in English, the very instrument used by the angel to purify Isaiah's lips. The spiritual masters speak of the eucharist in terms of "eating fire."

All the liturgical sanctifications flow from the one divine source, by participation. They integrate all human activity into a whole which is oriented toward its true destiny.

Man gets used to living in the world of God. In the depths of this world, he glimpses a destiny rooted in the Garden of Eden. The universe is built up into a cosmic liturgy and a temple of God's glory. We see then that everything is potentially sacred and that nothing is in fact profane; nothing is neutral for everything can orient itself toward God. The liturgical "memorial" is precisely an orientation of oneself and the cosmos to the Father, to recall everything to memory, that is, to God's memory. Nonetheless, along side the sacred, we see its cartoonish imitation being drawn. Instead of participating in God, we see the fearful participation in "the Prince of the left," in the demonic. This is why St. Gregory of Nyssa categorically denied the existence of a separate, isolated, autonomous humanity. For him, the purely profane does not exist. Either man is "an angel of light," an icon of God and his likeness or "he wears the mask of the beast" and acts like a monkey.[80]

The liturgy initiates us into the language of the sacred. It introduces us into the world of symbols. A symbol (a cross, an icon, a church) represents a participation in the heavenly in conformity with the symbol's very material configuration.[81] Nonetheless, any fragment of time or space can become a hierophany, an epiphany of the sacred, without changing anything for our physical eyes. Its outward appearance continues to participate in its empirical environment. But between the sacred and its material support, there exists an ontological communion: between the material of the sacrament or the human being, on the one hand, and the energies of grace, on the other. And finally, this communion passes over into consubstantiality, the total change (metabolism) of the eucharistic bread and wine. These elements do not just symbolize or stand for the body and blood of Christ; they are the body and blood of Christ. St. Maximus the Confessor spoke of the miracle of "identity by grace;"[82] St. Arsenius appeared to his disciples[83] in the form of fire, a man of light. Light not only shined on him from the exterior, but a light also shined forth from inside him. He glowed. But for these examples of advanced holiness, the gospel reminds us, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

CHAPTER THREE

Sacred Time

Despite what most people think today, time and space are not pure forms. Space is not simply a sack into which atoms are thrown and held. Neither are time and space the necessary a priori elements of transcendentalism, that is, the *subjective* net that our mind throws over the external world in order to have some knowledge of it. Space and time exist *objectively*, and they are the measure of existence, one of its dimensions. Their function is to order, and also to *qualify*, things that only exist in these forms which are inherent to all creatures. Time and space reveal the state of health of things, their ontological temperature.[84] When the angel of Revelations announces the end of diseased time, he will announce the end of mathematical time, decomposed as it is into separate instants. He will announce the end of uncompleted and unfulfilled temporal duration and the passage toward completed and fulfilled duration, toward the qualitative fullness of time in which time finds is completeness and fulfillment.[85] St. Augustine admirably understood the biblical vision when he stated that the world and time were created *together*: "The world was not created *in* time but *with* time."[86] This means that time in and of itself is good, that life in Paradise and the Kingdom of God exists *in its own time*, that is, within the order and realm that are proper to the succession of events. St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "the first man was created in such a way that time would have flowed even if man had remained stable." The eternity of created beings is not the absence of time, and it is certainly not our own time, cut off as it is from its final goal. Creaturely eternity is rather time's positive form; it is the time in which the past is fully preserved and the present is opened up to the infinity of the ages. It is the "memorial of the Kingdom," that is, the referring of everything toward the face of the Eternal One, being totally present to him. We must therefore distinguish between profaned and infected time, the negative time of the Fall, on the one hand, and sacred and redeemed time, that time which is oriented toward salvation, on the other.

In examining the time we actually live in, we have the impression that its sections (moments, seconds, days, etc.) are regular and identical. We think this way only because we abstract these measures from our clocks. We are not simply clock faces on which the hands turn and mark off the mathematical fractions of time. We are not subjected to time, but we do live it. This means that we assume it and take it up into ourselves. Lived time represents a very intimate interaction between the mathematical form and its existential content.[87] Time qualifies us, but we also qualify time. The result of this reciprocal influence produces a reality that is very diverse in its moments. It thus has the possibility of opening up to another dimension.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine masterfully showed that none of the three parts of time really exists: the future does not yet exist except as it passes through the present, and the present is an imperceptible instant, so rapid is its fleeting. The future thus instantaneously becomes the past and evaporates into nothingness, into what no longer exists.

The first form of this time is ordered by the cosmic seasons, that is, the *cyclical time* of the stars and planets. Our clocks register this kind of time. The graphic image of this time is the closed circle, the snake biting its tail. It is the vicious circle of eternal and exitless returns. The pessimistic Ecclesiastes proclaimed that "there is nothing new under the sun." Closed time, such as represented by the god Chronos, feeds itself on its own children, that is, temporal moments. He coldly and mathematically registers the "repetitions" and thus stimulates what Pascal felt when he contemplated spatial infinity, that is, the anxiety of the absurd.[88] The hands of the clock are always moving, but they go nowhere.

> The earth has reproduced itself perhaps a million times. It is frozen, split, disintegrated, and then decomposed into its elements and once again the waters cover it. And then, there was a comet, a new one, and then a sun out of which came a globe. This cycle repeats itself perhaps for an infinite number of times, in the same way, even to the smallest detail. How deadly boring it all is. [89]

But then, there is the second form of time, historical time, whose image is a line that goes on and on indefinitely. Historical time has a different standard of measurement. Historical ages unfold at their own rhythm, speeded up or slowed down. Observations of patients with scars left from wounds show a biological time which is very personal and determined by the age of the wounded person. In the same way, suffering or joy can modify the feeling of time: imperceptible or infinitely long.[90]

The third form of time is existential. Each instant can open up from inside to another dimension. We can thus live eternity in an instant, in the "eternal present." This is sacred or liturgical time. Its participation in the absolutely different changes its nature. Eternity is neither before or after time; it is that dimension to which time can open itself up.

In order to define time, St. Gregory of Nyssa used the Greek word *akolouthia*, meaning an ordered succession which regulates evolution according to the "before" and "after." It orients seeds toward their ultimate purpose and goal.[91] But the ultimate and final goal, in terms of fullness, is not simply *telos,* the final point, but rather *teleios*, the fullness of perfection. This real function of time only appears on the *theological* level. It is the theology of time.

In Christ, time finds its axis. Before Christ, history was moving toward him and was "messianically" oriented and stretched out toward him. This was the time of gestation, prefigurations, and waiting. After the Incarnation, everything became interiorized; everything is now governed by the categories of empty-full,[92] absent-present, and unfinished-finished. The only real content of time has become the presence of Christ as he extends himself through time. Like a hinge, everything turns visibly or invisibly toward the ultimate fulfillment of time itself which, at the same time, is already realized and is yet to be fully realized at the End. In this expression "at the same time," we see the magnitude of the real problem of time; it is the mystery of the coexistence in us of two men who live *in different times*: " though this outer man of ours may be falling into decay, the inner man is renewed day by day" (2 Co 4:16). Christ has broken the historical continuum, but he has not abolished time itself. He has only opened it. "The Word was made flesh," and as flesh, he was subject to the continuum. "Meanwhile the child grew to maturity " according to St. Luke the historian (Lk 2:40), but as the Word, he is only accessible by faith. In the eyes of faith, historic time opens up to sacred time, to a wholly other succession of events: the miraculous Nativity, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost and the Parousia. St. Irenæus of Lyons said that "God became temporal so that we, temporal men, could become eternal."[93] We thus see that the temporal reaches its fullness in the eternal "right here and now."

Christ does not destroy time but fulfills it, renews its value, and redeems it. Real events no longer fade away but are kept deposited in God's Memory. The prayer for the repose of the dead asks God to "keep them in his memory." Positive time takes over and neutralizes negative time, that is, the destruction of time. It shows that for man eternity is not the absence of time but rather its fulfillment. The messianic banquet will bring together Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the men and women of every age. But historic time in its very inner reality is not completely negative either. In the very nature of historical time, its positive side is just waiting to be brought out and made operative. Properly directed, it is analogous to the principle of homeopathy (a system whereby certain diseases can be cured by small quantities of drugs which in large quantities produce, in a healthy person, the same pathological effects that are symptomatic of the disease): *similia similibus curantur*. Positive time is the possibility of interrupting evolution, of turning back the clock, of killing in the past what deserves to die, and of starting life all over. "Let the dead bury their dead" (Mt 8:22). It means to go through the "new birth" of baptism (Jn 3:3) and let the corrupted past die. St. Gregory[94] of Nyssa explained his double interpretation of history by saying that history is at the same time a process of growth and a process of disintegration. Salvation is found in the rupture of levels. Baptism thus interrupts the corrupted progression of events and inaugurates a new succession: in the face of death, God has set the new order of eternal life. We have here the application of St. Paul's theology of the two Adams: the first Adam inaugurated the time of perdition, and the second Adam, the time of universal restoration and salvation.

The corrupted past has been abolished in baptism and repentance, and the future age has already become present in the eucharist, that is, "oriented" time. In eucharistic time, we are already living our Orient, our Eternity.

Following Kierkegaard, many people have talked about the "reversibility of time" through the power of the liturgy. Now time is not really reversible. It is more exact to talk of the power of *opening time up* to what does not fade away. Memory gives us the homogeneous presence of the past in the form of memories, *souvenirs*. We have in memories the frozen image of the past, but the liturgical memorial goes even farther and contains not only images of the past but the events themselves become present. We become their contemporaries. St. Gregory of Nyssa indicated this by speaking of "the progressive order," of the regular flow of liturgical feasts. Every liturgical reading of the Gospel places us in the event that is being related. "At that time" is the sacred formula that begins every liturgical reading of the Gospel, and it indicates the "sacred time" *in illo tempore* the now, the contemporary. At Christmas, we are present at the birth of Christ, and at Easter, the resurrected Christ appears to us during the pascal night and makes us eye witnesses of the events of the Great Time. There is no longer any trace of the repetitions of dead time, but everything remains once and for all. St. John Chrysostom said that "it is the same sacrifice that we offer, not one today and another tomorrow."[95] Theodore of Mopsuestia also noted and underlined the rupture of levels: "It is not something new; it is the liturgy which takes place in heaven, and we are then and there in heaven." All the holy eucharists of the Church are nothing else than the one, eternal, and unique Supper which Christ shared with his disciples in the upper room. A divine act happened at a precise moment of history in the past; at the same time, that act is always offered in the sacrament. This divine act has the power to open up time and to place itself inside a subsequent event and thus become its true content.

In the liturgical dimension, moments open up to each other. The kontakion of the Ascension says, "When you fulfilled the dispensation for our sake, and united earth to heaven: you ascended in glory, O Christ our God, not being parted from those who love you, but remaining with them and crying: 'I am with you and no one will be against you.'" In the same vain, the following prayer: "You were in the tomb with the body and in hell with the soul, in paradise with the thief and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit, O boundless Christ, filling all things." Also in the prayer before communion: "You are seated on high with the Father and are here invisibly present with us "

Repetition only exists on the side of man which periodically enters into communion with what does not fade away. For example, we see it in the liturgical commemoration of the New Year with all its cosmogonic import. St. Ephrem the Syrian[96] said that "God recreated the heavens because sinners worshiped the heavenly bodies. He recreated the world which had withered up because of Adam. He constructed a new creation with his own saliva." This last sentence is a reference to the Lord's healing of the man born blind and is also a great symbol of the healing of *blind time.* We are not dealing with a new creation in the strict sense of the word but rather with the regeneration of time in its totality. Going back through time to the cosmogonic moment of the first sun on the first morning puts the cosmos back in communion with its real destiny and thus renews it, straightens it back up, renews it from within: "renewing your youth like an eagle" (Ps 103:5). We have here an explanation of the fact that everything that is renewal and true birth, cosmogony, is intimately related to water,[97] as well as to the idea of birth and resurrection. According to the Talmud, "God has three keys: the key for rain, the key for birth, and the key for the resurrection of the dead."

The religious importance attributed in the liturgy to the dates of the astronomical calendar shows us that they function as signs and prefigurations. The twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany (Dec 25–Jan 6) prefigure the twelve months of the year. Peasants of Central Europe used to determine the quantity of rain and the size of the harvest for the twelve coming months by measuring the rainfall during these twelve days. The Jews also used to determine the quantity of rain for each month during the Feast of Tabernacles. For the Fathers of the Church, the Sabbath, Saturday is the seventh day of the Jewish week. Sunday does not replace it but is considered to be the eighth day[98] or the first day in an absolute and unique sense. The days of the week are the image of the cosmic week, closed in on itself, or the totality of history. However, Sunday, the day of the resurrection, is the eighth day, the weekly pascha. It is thus the image of eternity, and St. Basil the Great underlined the prohibition of kneeling on Sunday because kneeling is a attitude and position of repentance. On Sunday, the faithful should be standing[99] because standing is an eschatological position. Standing upright is an expression of *epectasis*, or being stretched out toward the Parousia.

The forty years in the desert, Christ's forty days of fasting, the forty days of Great Lent are the time of waiting before entering the Promised Land.[100] The time of Lent thus represents the totality of history in microcosm; it is the time of waiting. On the other hand, the fifty days between

Easter and Pentecost are considered to be fifty Sundays, thus the prohibition against kneeling, a time of joy, an image of the age to come yet already inaugurated.

In the same way, Christmas is not only a feast but also "a feast time" when light increases, *crescit lux*. Christmas and Epiphany are the solar manifestations of Christ: "the Light of the nations" and "the rising Sun." In the future age, according to Origen, "everyone will be completed and fulfilled in a perfect Man and will become a single sun." The astronomical calendar "orients" man in the time of seeding and harvests. The ecclesiastic calendar, on the other hand, is not oriented, but it is *Orient*, that is, ordered time. Each New Year is a universal abridged history, regenerated by the liturgical order and what is more, each day is a *feria*, that is, opened up to the age to come.

In baptismal immersion, a person passes through the flood, through the death of corrupted time and is reborn in salvation time. In a prayer of the sacrament of chrismation, we hear, "May he take pleasure in serving you in every word and deed." This prayer shows us that man is potentially removed from corrupted time and sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit; he is consecrated, marked, destined in the totality of his life for *salvation time.* This is why, according to St. John, whoever follows Christ does not come to judgment for the historical past is already abolished. In the same way, whoever eats the body of Christ *already* has eternal life and lives in sacred time. In contrast, hell cannot be situated in salvation time, in eternity. Hell is essentially negative and subjective time; it has no ontological place in the positive and universal time of the Kingdom of God.

Joshua stopped the sun during Israel's passage through the waters; he effected a rupture of levels, a passage into salvation time. The gospel text "Narrow is the door and hard is the road that leads to Life" (Mt 7:14) also designates the same passage into salvation time.

The hesychastic method of prayer cultivates this narrow door, and it introduces the person into a time of a different quality. By leaving a longer time than normal between breaths, the person who practices this method lives a different rhythm, a different time.[101] Time is essentially "deterioration," "being used up and worn out." Meister Eckhart noted that there is no greater obstacle to union with God than time.

In the vision of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the Church is eternally young because its verdant being escapes from the weathering of time. The calendar of feasts and saints gives new value to each fraction of time and makes it part of sacred time. It feeds our hunger, here and now, for eternity. The liturgy thus takes the form of a sacrament of eternity and integrates time into the Word of God, the *Chronocrator*, the Lord of time.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sacred Space

What time is for duration, space is for extension. Space, however, is not homogeneous; there are various kinds: amorphous, chaotic, ordered, and sacred space. Profane space is subject to the law of extraposition (being set outside itself) and exteriority which coordinates all existing things. Sacred space abolishes juxtaposition and does more than just bring about the simple coexistence of two things set side by side. Sacred space makes us "one" in Christ; it brings about a consubstantiality with him.

When Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman and said that "the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:21), he spoke of himself as the ever-present sacred place which abolishes the exclusivity of every empirical place. From that moment on, every visit to a church is already a pilgrimage to a sacred place. This explains the plurality of places each one identifying itself as the center; they are all centers not in the sense of a geographical center but in the sense of a cosmic center. A cosmic center is located not on the horizontal, geographical, plane but on the vertical. The vertical plane thus unites every geographical point with the Beyond. Thus it is in starting from the omnipresence of the church building that the blessing of oil, bread, wine, and wheat during certain vespers services sanctifies these elements everywhere on the earth. In the same sense, the blessing of the "four corners of the earth" at the Elevation of the Cross, September 14, sanctifies the whole earth.

All levels of creation communicate in these axial places: the underground, the earth, the sky, and their image is the holy mountain, the cosmic tree, the central column, the ladder.[102] Thus Mount Tabor probably gets its name from *tabbûr* which means *navel*;[103] Mount Gerizim is called "the Navel of the Land" (*tabbûr eretz,* Jdg 9:37). This is why, according to the Rabbinical tradition, the land of Israel was not flooded by the deluge.[104] In a Christian tradition, Golgotha is the center of the world. There Adam was created and buried, and there the Cross was raised up.[105] We often see Adam's tomb and skull represented at the foot of the Cross. In the same line of thinking, the roots of the cosmic tree goes down to hell and its top touches the sky. The various heights of its branches represent the different celestial levels, St. Paul being raised to the third heaven. In *The Book of the Mysteries*, St. Maximus the Confessor underlined the coexistence by transcendence of cosmic levels: "'Today you will be with me in paradise' as though what is for us the earth, for him is no different from paradise. He later on appeared again on earth and talked with his disciples."[106]

In the writings of the Rabbis, Adam is a giant. In the Christian Apocrypha[107] and in *The Shepherd of Hermas*,[108] Christ is a giant, with his head reaching above the heavens.[109] We understand these images because Christ is their divine archetype. He is the tree of life and the cosmic center. Origen said that "the Scriptures describe Christ in terms of a tree."[110] On the other hand, many images, for example the baptistery mosaic by Henchir Messouada, identifies Christ and the Cross. The same symbolism is found in so-called "living" crosses. The ends of the Cross are covered with palm branches, and the very ends are human arms: one opens the gate of heaven, and the other breaks down the gates of hell. At the Exaltation of the Cross, we hear, "The tree of life planted on Golgotha (identification of the tree of the Garden of Eden and the Cross)[111] is raised at the center of the earth and sanctifies the ends of the earth," "the length and breadth of the Cross stretches out as far as the heavens."[112]

St. Augustine asked, "And what is this mountain that we climb if it is not the Lord Jesus Christ."[113] *The Acts of Philip* call Christ, "the Pillar of Fire," *siylos puros*, and in the ascetical writings, a great spiritual father reproduces the same image: "Pillar of fire uniting heaven and earth."[114]

The biblical image which best expresses the meaning of these images, however, is Jacob's ladder. The angels ascended and descended on it. The heavens are opened and the ladder rests on the center of the earth. Since Christ is the ladder, it springs forth from every sacred place, from the infinite number of centers. James of Saroug said that "Christ on the cross stood on the earth like on a ladder

with many rungs."[115] Catherine of Sienna saw Christ as a bridge between heaven and earth, like a rainbow, the sign of the living Covenant.[116] In one of his hymns on Epiphany, St. Ephrem the Syrian wrote the following:[117] "Brothers, contemplate the column hidden in the air whose base rests on the waters but whose capital reaches up to the gates of heaven, like the ladder that Jacob saw."[118]

And finally, the circle (the wall of church buildings and cities) is endowed with the power of protection because it symbolizes eternity. When the walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of the trumpets, the city was without heavenly defense. In reverse, when a city is under siege, the clergy in procession carry relics or a miraculous icon, a sacred object, all around the top of the walls. Such a prayer inscribed in space invokes and reinforces the power of protection. The same meaning is recognized in every liturgical procession around the church; it traces the figure and sign of eternity and gives to extended space its value as sacred space. If sacred time answers to the deep nostalgia for eternity, sacred space quenches the thirst for the lost Paradise. The sacred makes it possible for man to go beyond empirical time and space, partially to recover his original destiny, and to push on toward his fulfillment.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Church Building

I. The Divine Plan and the Heavenly Origin of the Church Building

"The church is the earthly heaven; in these heavenly spaces, God lives and walks about." In these words of Patriarch Germanus,[119] we get a glimpse of the dizzying heights of the church building's significance. The Byzantines treated space as God's dwelling place. Their architectural problem was to create harmony between the natural scale of the human and the transcendent scale of the infinite.

Recent attempts to find forms adapted to the modern mentality have often resulted in drowning architecture in the surrounding landscape and in local preoccupations. It has become an *anthropocentric* religious art. It expresses man and his emotions and the æsthetic search for expressions and forms. Such art has completely forgotten the initial plan of the great workers and builders, the very mystery of the church, and sacred art which is always *theocentric* in its attempts to express God's descent into his creation. It is perfectly legitimate to search for new forms, but these forms must express a symbolic content that remains the same throughout the centuries because it has a heavenly origin. Modern builders must listen to and appreciate the suggestions of the chief architect, the *Angel of the temple* (Rv 21:15).

From the beginning, all Christian buildings have had the same goal which goes back to the vision of the Temple of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is why Christian architecture speaks the same language. We have here the profound teaching which comes from the icon of Christ "not-made-with-human-hands, that is, the Holy Face: every icon refers back to this Archetype drawn by the Holy Spirit.[120] This is also the meaning of the tradition which claims that certain icons were painted by angels. On the one hand, divine origin presupposes an active receptivity, and on the other, it is the foundation of canonical norms. The Council of Nicæa II (787) decreed that "painting icons is not to be exclusively left to the initiative of artists." Iconography depends on requirements based on the liturgical mystery, on God's coming into the creation, and this mystery sets down certain architectural and iconographic rules that are in keeping with his Presence.

The sanctuaries of the Old Testament were in fact built according to God's indications: the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 35:34), Moses' sanctuary (Ex 25:8-9), and Solomon's temple built on a "model inspired by the Spirit" (1 Chr 28:12, 19) "that you had prepared from the beginning" (Wsd 9:8; Ez 4:10-11). St. Clement of Rome called attention to the tradition behind the ritual for the consecration of a church: "God himself designated the place where the services must be celebrated."[121] The same tradition is mentioned by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*. It shows the blending of the Jewish idea of the Temple as the dwelling place of the Most High with the Christian notion of the New Jerusalem and the Kingdom of God. According to the *Revelation of Baruch,*[122] the Heavenly Jerusalem was created by God at the same time as Paradise, therefore *in aeternum*.

II. The Church Building: Image of the Universe and Cosmic Center. Number and Measure

In his *Poem on the Holy Wisdom of Edessa*, St. Maximus the Confessor described the church in these words: "It is a most admirable thing that a small church can be like the vast universe. Its raised dome is like the heaven of heavens and rests solidly on its lower part. Its arches represent the four corners of the earth." Flavius Josephus had already described the Temple of Jerusalem as the *imago mundi*. It was situated at the "Center of the World," Jerusalem, and it sanctified the cosmos and time. The courtyard represented the sea; the sanctuary, the earth; and the Holy of Holies, heaven. The twelve loaves of breads on the table stood for the twelve months of the year, and the seventy branch candelabra represented the decans of the zodiac.[123] Each church therefore

is an *omphalos*, a cosmic center. Its space is constructed and ordered; thus centered and oriented, each church gives witness to a rigorous and sacred significance.

The church reproduces the internal structure of the universe. Plato said that "there is no beauty without measure," and Aristotle added that "beauty resides in measure and order." God is the great Architect and the inspired geometrician of the world (*The Timaeus*). These ideas go back to Pythagoras for whom "all things are arranged according to number." The mathematical structure of the universe, the laws of relations and proportions (the golden number or the golden section) evoke a feeling of perfection and Olympian serenity. St. Isaac the Syrian felt that "measure made everything beautiful." In the *Philebus*, Plato said that the beauty of form is "something rectilinear and circular, using a compass, a string, and a square. These forms are therefore beautiful in themselves."

The Heavenly Jerusalem shows precisely the interaction of the circle and the square (Rv 21:16). The nave (from *navis* meaning "ship") is an eschatological ship on which is set the spherical form of the dome. We therefore have the union of the circle and the square, the measure and number of heaven and of the Kingdom. St. Maximus the Confessor[124] said that "the sanctuary enlightens and directs the nave; the nave thus becomes the sanctuary's visible expression. Such a relation restores order reëstablishes what was in Paradise and what will be in the Kingdom." The square or cube represents unshakable immutability and the stability of the accomplished plan, and inside, the circular dynamism of the services and rites take place. The development of liturgical space proceeds along a vertical plane. This is the direction of prayer symbolized by the rising of incense, the perfume of the sun and light, the sweet smell of the *Pneuma*. The raised hands of the priest, the movement of the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and the elevation of the holy gifts are also an indication of this vertical plane. Along with these upward and linear movements, we have the procession (originally a sacred dance) around the church or the altar which designates a movement around the cosmic center. This circular movement unites heaven and earth and imitates the stars moving in their orbits.

III. The Form and the Transcendent Content

The church building reproduces the world, God's work, and is therefore a vehicle for carrying the presence of the Transcendent One. It is "God's House" and "the Gate of Heaven" (Gn 28:17).

God created everything "with number, weight, and measure," and from chaos, he made cosmos, Beauty. The Beauty of Greek æsthetics is however a static harmony, being only on the surface. The Christian vision, on the other hand, is turned toward an interior dynamism, toward the sense of the divine in the infinite, for God's beauty is not measurable and transcends all attempts to subordinate it to rules. God's beauty goes beyond all forms since content always takes precedent over everything. It can touch what has no form and create its own form. This is why a human form that is "too perfect" can be an obstacle, a screen, that obscures the content of the message. It throws an opaque shadow over the invisible.

The cathedrals of former times were charged with a supernatural force and intensity. Their dynamism can even today make one breathless and lead to ecstasy. In the Gothic cathedrals, the vertical line and the mass of stone are violently launched toward the infinite and pull man's spirit along with them. In contrast, in Hagia Sophia, everything is ordered around a central axis and crowned by the dome's majesty; beauty is expressed in a more esoteric manner. This beauty comes from a mysterious depth and an unlimited height and descends on man and fills him with a transcendent peace.

The cross on top of the dome, and the dome itself, give order to space. By its lines, the dome gives visible form to the descending movement of divine love, and its spherical shape unites all men in an assembly, in a body. Under the dome, we feel protected and saved from the Pascalian anxiety of infinite spaces. And the cross, if we infinitely extend the arms of its beautiful geometric form, will embrace the totality of organized space; it witnesses to infinity present in the here and now.

IV. The Church Building: Image of the Kingdom and God's Call

A church is not at all a building of strange architecture set down among houses. To the degree that profane space is indifferent or opposed to the Transcendent, it is in fact profaned or demonic

space. The organized space of the church is set up right in the middle of this profane, or profaned, space. The church building is the strongest rejection of the principles of this world and ultimately of the "god of this world," the apocalyptic beast. It offers the plastic image of a mystical "heaven," the heaven of the Kingdom, and it ardently calls all men to become "living stones" of the cosmic church in which "everything that has breath" sings God's praises.

In the sanctuary, behind the altar, the central mystery is represented, that of the eucharistic communion of the apostles. The Mother of God in the orant position is depicted above the apostles. In this prayer position, representing her ministry of intercession, Mary personifies the Church, the Body of Christ. Still higher, we see Christ the sacrifice and the priest. The image of Pentecost seems to float in the hemisphere of the vault. How appropriate that this symbol should find its place there, being as it is a visual epiclesis, the descent of the Holy Spirit which inaugurates the Parousia and anticipates the Kingdom. The nave is the place where God's people assemble as the royal priesthood of the faithful. On the western wall, at the opposite end from the sanctuary, we find a fresco of the Last Judgment, that balance-sheet of history. And finally the door opens onto the earth of the Fall, that space which has not yet been evangelized.

The great spiritual Fathers were visionaries who expressed themselves in images and symbols. St. Sergius of Radonezh, the "theologian of the Holy Trinity," did not write a theological treatise but rather, at a time of fratricidal wars and conflicts, built a church and dedicated it to the Holy Trinity. According to his biographer, "he built the church of the Trinity as a mirror, a vision of 'the Wholly Other' in order to combat the divisions of the world." We have here the image of Christ's priestly prayer. Andrei Rublov, the disciple of St. Sergius, represented the same image in his icon. The purpose of the church and the icon was to transfigure the world in the overwhelming image of the Trinity.

Faced with "worldly cares," with life reduced to the struggle for existence, with the extermination of life by hatred, with the kingdom of evil, faced with all this, the church building in its totality is already a fragment of eternity which preaches simply by existing. It calls us to a radical turn around, *metanoia*, in human relations, to the "sacrament of the brother" and to a heart filled with compassion and "ontological tenderness" toward all creatures.

The Pentecost icon is a model. It shows all the distance between the world and the church, between history and the Kingdom. It traces the clear limit between the two levels of human history: the apostles receive the tongues of fire and at the bottom, the old king who represents the captive cosmos, comes out of a dark cave. He extends his hands toward his salvation, toward the dwelling place of divine peace, the apostolic temple, the Church of Christ.

Churches built on a central plan, sometimes even veritable towers, with their cupolas like golden flames, call to mind the Easter candles; they sing the Resurrection. The onion-shaped bulbs on Russian churches suggest the image of prayer, and this image, similar to Jacob's ladder, allows this world to participate in the Beyond. The cupola is a tongue of fire, crowned by the sparkling cross, and a church with several cupolas is like a chandelier ablaze with flames. Just as if heaven had descended on earth, its brilliance penetrates into the interior of the cupola and lights up the vaults with the majestic face of Christ Pantocrator who reigns in the central dome, just as if heaven had descended on the earth. His open hand contains everyone's destiny.

The elongated and slender figures on the icons and frescoes center the upward flight of the grandiose assembly toward the Exalted One. Everything that is individual finds its legitimate development and fulfillment here. At the same time everything is ordered by the communion of all and its catholicity. The angels with their eschatological trumpets call all of us to unite in one single doxology, a cosmic harmony which rings out above the chaos and the darkness. The powerful movement of their wings carries all gazes toward the maternal heart and protecting veil of the Theotokos, "the Joy of all Creation." The church building preaches this joy and peace through its lines, forms and light. St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "silent art knows how to speak."[125]

V. The Construction of Sacred Space

An observer can look at a church building, examine its different parts one after the other, determine its architecture, evaluate its artistic success, but it will always be for him a closed book. In order for each stone, each form, to begin to speak, in order for the whole building to become a hymn, a liturgy, the observer must perceive its mysterious life. He must understand its purpose, the

very principle of its organized space, a space which cuts in on the surrounding environment. The consecration ceremony for a church very powerfully expresses the meaning of the organization of sacred space. It cuts out a certain space, separates it from profane space, purifies it, and invokes on it the descent of the Holy Spirit. This epiclesis transforms an ordinary geographical point into a very specific place where God manifests himself; it becomes a holy mountain, a cosmic center, Jacob's ladder: "Standing in this temple, a figure of heaven and sanctuary of your glory, we pray and supplicate you to send your Holy Spirit down on us and on your inheritance "

The bishop lights a tall candle, "the first light," and with the relics of a martyr, the faithful march in procession around the church, thus tracing the circle of eternity. Standing in front of the door, the bishop recites Psalm 24: "Gates, raise your arches, rise, you ancient doors, let the king of glory in!" Inside the building, the choir represents the space that is not yet organized but is waiting to be organized. It answers, "Who is this king of glory?"

The bishop traces a cross with the relics and proclaims, "He is the Lord Sabaoth; he is the King of Glory." As he enters, the bishop images God as he takes possession of the space and transforms it into the House of God. It is in this place that the liturgy receives its name *divine*. From this sacred center, "a house which the Lord watches day and night" (1 Ki 8:29), the Son will unceasingly send up to the Father the oblation and the incense of liturgical prayer. The bishop then *constructs* the altar table, sets it up, invokes the Holy Spirit, and anoints the table with chrism and washes it with baptismal water. These actions are accompanied by the singing of the angelic alleluia. The church building thus becomes, in all of its parts taken together, the plastic image of heaven on earth.

The word *altar*, coming from *alta ara*, means "high place." We have here the holy mountain of Zion, with its cosmic center: "I will go up to the altar of God" and "He has brought about his salvation at the center of the earth" (Ps 73). The holy table, by a mystical transfer, is an image of the Lord himself. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite spoke of this ceremony when he said that "it is on Jesus himself, as on the altar, that the consecration is accomplished."[126] At the ordination of a priest when the bishop puts his hands on the kneeling candidate, the ordinand leans his head on the corner of the altar which represents Christ. We have here the image of St. John, "lying on the Jesus' breast" (Jn 13:23).

The tabernacle containing the body and blood of Christ is then placed on the altar, and this action transforms it into the tomb of Christ, a tomb broken by the power of the resurrection. No one except a priest is supposed to touch it, and upon entering the sanctuary, he prostrates himself before this figuration of Christ. The very substance of the altar on which the tabernacle rests is transfigured by the presence of holy relics or martyrs' bones placed inside. This is a reference to Rev. 6:9; under the altar, "the Lamb showed" the souls of those who were immolated for the Word of God and for the witness that they had given. St. Nicholas Cabasilas went very far in his affirmation that the real altar is the bones themselves. He explained that by anticipation, the relics, and therefore the table, are the "spiritualized flesh" of the future Pascha.[127] We clearly see that the liturgical center is built with the matter of the Kingdom of God, and the sacred space is organized around a piece of the Beyond.

VI. Setting the Direction

The central rectangle of the church building is called the *nave*, Noah's Ark being the prophetic figure of the Church. A church building is a ship launched into open space and heading for the Orient. The *Didascalia of the Apostles* cites Psalm 68, "God rises up on the eastern sky," and Acts 1:11 says that "Christ will come back in the same way you saw his go." These two passages show the origin of praying toward the East. It is the waiting for the return of the Lord: "Like lightning coming from the East, so will the Son of Man appear" (Mt 24:27). Every prayer therefore when it is properly oriented, is a waiting; in its deepest intention, such prayer is always eschatological. "As lightning comes from the Orient," Christ is the "Sun of Righteousness" and "Orient" (Zac 3:4). This is why the altar is turned toward the rising of the sun. In contrast, the outside door is at the west end of the church, facing the setting sun, the amorphous space of darkness, the land not yet evangelized, even hell. Thus the profession of faith is made facing East, and the renunciation of Satan is made facing West. Praying toward the East for Christians distinguishes them from the Jews who pray toward Jerusalem and the Moslems who pray toward Mecca. By entering into a church, we move

toward the meeting of the light. We are on the road of salvation which leads toward the city of the saints and the land of the living where the never-setting Sun shines. The vertical polar axis and the horizontal axis of the four corners of the world synthesize space into the figure of the cross in six directions. These six directions centered on the Divine Center thus constitute the sacred number of seven, according to Clement of Alexandria.

Granz von Doelger pointed out the figure of the cross in basilicas with three apses and claimed to see in them the symbol of Light and Life. These words in Greek, *Zoé* and *Phos* cross each other on their central letter, the omega which is the eschatological letter of the Greek alphabet. All this underlines even more strongly the image of a ship floating in the eschatological dimension and sailing toward the mystic Orient.

VII. The Iconostase and the Doors

Thus oriented and ordered, the church building is divided into three sections on the model of Moses' sanctuary and Solomon's temple: the sanctuary at the eastern end, the narthex at the west, and the nave in the middle. The sanctuary corresponds to the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling place. The Holy One of God resides there and shines out from there. The sanctuary is a figure of the Kingdom and is separated from the nave, where the faithful stand, by a screen called the iconostase. This is the ancient chancel to which many icons were attached at the time of the victory over iconoclasm. This screen has three doors in it. The central one has two swinging gates which give it its plural name "royal" or "holy doors." This central door is flanked by two smaller doors called "north" and "south doors. They are used by the deacons and acolytes to go in and out of the sanctuary.

In its present form, the iconostase represents a rather recent evolution from about the 15th century. To the right of the royal doors, we have the icon of Christ, and on the left, the icon of the Mother of God. Immediately above the doors, we see the icon of the eucharist, the Mystical Supper. The second row is centered on the *Deisis* while the third assembles the icons of the major feasts. The fourth row shows the prophets and finally the top row shows the patriarchs.

Up until the 14th century, the dimension of the iconostase did not prevent the faithful from following the liturgical mystery taking place inside the sanctuary. The screen was developed because of a concern to visually teach by showing the faithful the economy of salvation and its progressive advance. This concern, however, carried with it the danger of reducing the active participation of the faithful in the liturgical action. The Josephite tradition in the Russian Church, dedicated to liturgical pomp and lavish decoration, won out over the more sober spirituality of St. Nil Sorsky. The Josephite tradition transposed between clerics and laymen the tension that exists between the Church and the world along with the accompanying danger of emphasizing too much the distinction between the sanctuary and the nave. At the present time, there is a tendency to recover the simplicity of former times. This reduction of forms also allows the people to hear the eucharistic prayers and to be more intimately associated with the very mystery of the liturgy.

The iconostase is covered with brilliant icons, and at the center, we find the *Deisis* which means "supplication" or "intercession." This icons shows Christ vested as a bishop blessing mankind; he is also shown as Judge and Doctor. He holds the Gospel book symbolizing that he is the sole interpreter of his own word. This icon is thus a figure of Tradition. Through all the elements provided by Holy Tradition, Christ explains his earthly words. He is surrounded by the Virgin and St. John the Baptist. Following them and seemingly coming out from them as from their archetypes (the Mother of God being the archetype of the feminine and St. John the archetype of the masculine), the apostles and saints take their places. They seem to be introduced by the angels. The Deisis is in fact the Church in prayer; it is the "madness of love" which intercedes for those who are being judged. The Word judges, but the supreme Wisdom of Christ the bishop sets justice and mercy side by side and anticipates the second meaning of this same icon, that is, the marriage of the Lamb. The Mother of God, the bride, is a figure of the Church, and St. John, the friend of the bridegroom, invites us all into the perfect joy of the Kingdom.

The Deisis gives meaning to the whole iconostase which sparkles with witnesses. The saints represented on it offer their praying hands, the Church prays for the Church, and the Mother of God carries the world in her prayer covering it with her maternal protection. What seemed to be a wall of

separation reveals itself, on a deeper level, to be a uniting link: the whole Christ made up of his saints.

This transparent wall of intercession receives and amplifies the prayer of the heart: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” It also undergoes the violence of the saints who take hold of the Kingdom and under their pressure, following Christ, the royal doors open wide and allow us to see the vision of heaven.

The commentaries on the liturgy naturally explain the immediate symbolism of the door as the image of Christ “through whom you will see the heavens opened up” (Jn 1:51). This symbolism evokes such a veneration by the Church that only the clergy, and then only vested in their priestly robes, are allowed to go through the royal doors.

The symbolism of the sanctuary carries us even farther. Christ the Door opens up the way into himself; the royal doors open up onto the altar, the high place of the *Opus Dei* and the center around which the sacred action of the liturgy takes place. St. Germanus said that the altar was “heaven descended on earth, the heaven where the triune God moves.”[128] Following the liturgical tradition, St. Nicholas Cabasilas substituted for the Pauline image of “head” the “triumphant and overflowing heart,” a heart which is the inexhaustible source of the treasures of Agapè. The tabernacle of the messianic banquet enshrines the biblical theme of the mystical wedding. The “Man of Sorrows” appears as the “Man of desire,” the eternal lover, the divine Philanthropist. The altar, anointed with the “oil of gladness,” “radiates with the perfect joy of love,” unlike anything else here below. Only Christ is the Lover who magnetizes love and introduces himself into us so that we can begin to live again in him. St. Nicholas Cabasilas stated what is simply and clearly evident: “The human soul is hungry for the Infinite. The eye was created for light and the ear for sounds. All things have their reason for being, and the soul’s desire is to launch itself toward Christ.”

In his third homely on Jeremiah, Origen[129] attributed the following saying to Jesus: “Whoever is near me is near fire.” Is not this saying a beautiful illustration of the mystical interiorization of the “Door” which opens onto God’s heart?

Fr. Sergius Bulgakov made reference to the ineffable quality of passing through Christ the Fire on the occasion of his ordination: “The whole consecration was fiery. The most overwhelming thing about it was the first time I went through the royal doors toward the altar. I literally went through a wall of fire, burning, illuminating, and renewing; I entered into another age, I entered into the Kingdom ”

VIII. The Gradual Ascent

The ultimate meaning of the church building does not allow us to enter it directly due to the risk of introducing some incompatible element from the profane world. As we hear in the Cherubic hymn, “let us put aside all earthly cares ” at the threshold of the church. Entering into the church is a gradual and guided initiation which the topographical arrangement of the parts themselves helps us to see. In former times, the church building was surrounded by a circular wall in which we find the symbol of eternity and protection, the symbolic setting off of spheres and spaces.

In monasteries, a cemetery and a hostel are both set close to the church thus showing the unity of the living and the dead assembled together in the same sacred space. When we enter the front gate, we find ourselves first and foremost in the realm of the “Wholly Other.” We immediately feel we are home. We pass through the atrium, or courtyard, and pass by the bell tower. In its form, often pyramidal, and crowned with a cupola, the bell tower reproduces the design of the church building. The ceremony of blessing bells incorporates them into the sacred action. In the nearly living sound of the bells, matter itself sings the liturgy. The ringing of bells is also an exorcism; it purifies the air of demonic elements by resoundingly announcing the hours of prayer. The wooden bell that wakes up the monks of Mount Athos for the midnight office is called *Adam*. This name recalls the first man that God searched for; God is still searching for that man in each of us.

In front of the main door is the baptistery, the capped well becomes the fountain of living water.

We slowly go up the front steps, already an upward movement which introduces us into the outside narthex and then the interior narthex. In former times, it was the place for the penitents, funeral services, and also the refectory for the monks. Only after being prepared by this measured and admirably tactful initiation, are we able to enter the church itself. At this moment, we see before

us the fulfillment of the upward movement. It is the way that leads to the summit of the Holy Mountain.

At the east end, we see a raised platform, the *solea*, whose central part is called the *ambon* from the Greek *anabainô*, meaning to "mount up, go up." It is the upper room, the place of eucharistic communion. The Church sings, "Let us lift up our hearts and we will find ourselves in the Upper Room." The *Sursum corda* invites us to lift up our whole being toward heaven. The Syriac hymn says, "Holy Trinity, receive from my hands this sacrifice that I offer on the heavenly altar of the Word."

The royal doors open up directly onto the Cosmic Center, the "High Place," the Holy Mountain. The simple cross with no corpus behind the altar represents Jacob's ladder which God used to come down to earth and which takes the form of the Cross inscribed in the Trinity and mysteriously suggested on Rublov's icon. The cross is the figure of God's face turned toward the world, a figure of his unspeakable love. Between this cross and the altar is the candelabra with seven branches. [130] It symbolizes both the power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which seal man and the grace of Pentecost which "consecrates" the universe, a universe illuminated by the seven-fold light of the rising sun, namely Christ.

The cupola crowned with the cross floats like a tongue of pentecostal fire. It becomes a point of prayerful participation in celestial realities. The heavens come close, fill the vaults, light them up and reveal the *Pantocrator* surrounded by the angels of the Presence. The four supporting columns carry the four evangelists,[131] that is, the Word. The icon called "the Just in the Hand of God," shows the saints stretched out toward the open hand of the King forming the "sacred assembly" where "every creature and everything that has breath praises the Lord." Plants climb up on the columns and bloom with the flowers of paradise; pacified animals move around on the lower parts. In a powerful movement, the hand of the Pantocrator orders the whole assembly and sends it toward the heart of the liturgical action: the icon of the Lord's Supper which glistens above the royal doors.

The cross placed on top of the icon screen indicates the Orient from which the Christ of Glory will come to occupy the *hetimasia*, that is, the King's Throne represented above the altar.[132]

High up in the apse, we see the Mother of God in the orant position; she is the "indestructible Wall." She is *hodiguitria*, the one who shows us the way. She guides and reunites all the faithful in the eucharistic assemble and covers the world with her "protective veil." "Mother of Life, you brought into the world the joy and gladness which dry the tears of sin." "You give joy to every creature." The icons show this heavenly joy and peace. The icons on the royal doors set before us a veritable feast for the eyes: the four evangelists and the Annunciation. We see the solar mystery in gold and in the brilliant colors of the rainbow. It strikes and becomes almost audible, and finally it floods everything with warmth and light.

Thus in the entire church building, even when there are no services going on, we very strongly feel the pulsating and ceaseless life, for everything is waiting for the holy mysteries. Stretched out toward the Kingdom, this waiting sparkles with the presence of the saints, and here we have the liturgical ministry of the icon.

Section III

The Theology of the Icon

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Preliminaries

I. Introduction

In 843, the Council of Constantinople once and for all reëstablished icon veneration, and at the same time, inaugurated the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. The Church celebrates this feast on the first Sunday of Great Lent. But what it celebrates is not so much the orthodoxy of the icon, that goes without saying, but rather the image itself as the icon of Orthodoxy.[133] This feast raised the icon to the level of a luminous light source in which all the dogmas are focused and find their harmonious expression. Iconoclasm was not seen as just one among many heresies that attacked this or that doctrine of the faith. It was rather, according to the 7th Ecumenical Council, all the previous heresies rolled into one, a "heretical compendium," undercutting the whole economy of salvation. Without knowing it, the iconoclasts in effect were docetists[134] and attacked the reality of the Incarnation itself. They attacked the Church's fundamental belief in the theandric, divino-human, character of the Incarnation. In addition, the iconoclasts were nominalists, that is, they questioned the belief that human beings can share in the fruit of the Incarnation. Being blind to gospel realism and to the sacredness of history, they also denied the realism of holiness and its capacity to transfigure nature. It seems, then, quite in keeping with the general thrust of iconoclasm that at its high point it attacked not only icons but monasticism, the veneration of the saints and the divine motherhood of the Theotokos. St. John of Damascus[135] wrote to the emperor Leo III saying that "you are not struggling against icons but against the saints." The Orthodox defenders of icons, in their intransigence going even as far as martyrdom, went way beyond the simple didactic or artistic aspect of icons. In the icon, the Church defended the very foundation of the Christian faith. However, even though the icon itself came out victorious in the dogmatic struggle, the full truth of the icon, *iconology*,[136] did not become crystallized and dominant until the 10th-15th centuries. This iconological triumph came about by the force and weight of the icon's own light. The dogmatic definitions of the 8th and 9th centuries still belong to the germination stage. It is obvious, however, that from the beginning theology and iconology were the two major expressions of one single faith culminating in the contemplation of the mysteries.

II. Icons and Symbols

The icon's homeland is the Christian East. Very early on, iconography became an organic part of Holy Tradition and came to be nothing less than "visual theology." The evolution of iconography took place in three periods: 1) the Justinian era, 6th century, and the miracle of Hagia Sophia. This great church seeks to capture monumental and grandiose fullness and perfection. It suggests the sublime by its immense and seemingly unmeasurable dimensions as they come together in majestic serenity. 2) The first Byzantine renaissance under the Macedonian and Comnenian dynasties, 10th-12th centuries. The intensity of this period is measured rather on a more human and measurable scale; vigor is a characteristic of its artistic expression. 3) The second Byzantine renaissance under the Palæologan dynasty, 14th century. This was the icon's golden age.

The 11th century saw the beginning of iconography in Russia. The art of Hagia Sophia in Kiev and Novgorod was at this time still closely tied to Byzantine painting. At the end of the Byzantine period, Palæologan art projected on Russia a final and sublime light and reinforced the already very personal face of Russian icons. This is also the era of the great development of Serbian sacred art. With its unspeakable softness, it elevated the human into God. In Bulgaria, we feel the more tragic influence of Syria along with the Semitic dimension of Orthodoxy. Finally, we have the great Rumanian art, the Cretan school, and the treasures of Mount Athos, and Greek art, so full of pathos

during the Turkish period showing Christ *Elcomenos* carrying the cross by himself as he climbs to Golgotha.

Iconography easily flowered and developed in the Platonistic mind-set of the eastern Christian Fathers, in their philosophy of transcendence. There was a theory of symbols implicit in that philosophy: from sense phenomena, one can rise to their heavenly roots. Remembrance, *anamnesis*, is here more that just memory or even a memory. It is an *epiphanic calling forth.* As with God's Name in the Bible, what is called forth or named, shows itself and becomes present. To the old question about the relationship between the Absolute and the world, the Old Testament had already answered with the doctrine of angels. Being mediators and messengers, the angels fulfill and express the symbolic function par excellence. They are the vehicles of the transcendent, for God's Name is deposited in them and God is present in his Name.

Above the senses and sense perception, and therefore above *direct thought*, there is the sphere of *indirect thought* based and built up on revelations and the grasping of the invisible, that is, mystery whose meaning is never given directly. It is rather represented by intermediaries, mediators: angels, a symbol, an icon. These are all messengers carrying a secret message.

In order to avoid frequent confusion, we need to be precise about certain terms.*[137] The *sign* informs and teaches. Its content is the most elementary and the most empty of any presence. Road and store signs, algebraic signs and chemical formulas are good examples. In these cases, there is no relation of communion or presence between the *significant*, the physical symbol, and the *signifié*, the thing and content symbolized. In the same way, an *allegory* is a way to explain something by using analogical emblems; an allegory hardly goes beyond a didactic illustration. Neither a sign nor an allegory is in any way "epiphanic."

In contrast, a *symbol*,[138] in the spirit of the Fathers of the Church and according to the liturgical tradition, contains in itself the presence of what is symbolized. It fulfills the function of revealing a meaning, and at the same time, it becomes an expressive and effective container of the "presence." Symbolic knowledge is always indirect. It appeals to the contemplative faculty of the mind, to the real imagination, both evocative and invocative. In this way, symbolic knowledge decodes the meaning and message of the symbol and grasps its epiphanic character, a character which shows forth a figured, symbolized but very real presence of the transcendent.

III. Eastern and Western Christian Art

In the West, the *Libri Carolini* were based on a most unfortunate and inexact Latin translation of the Greek texts of the 7th Ecumenical Council. These books, named after and attributed to Charlemagne, accuse the Council of being an *ineptissimae sinodi* and to have legitimated the "worship" of images. The Council of Frankfurt, 794, and the Synod of Paris, 824, declared that images only serve an ornamental purpose and that it is completely unimportant whether Christians have them or not: "Christ did not save us by paintings, " nor by a book, we might add. Thus at the very moment when the East was defending the value of artistic expression and theologically defining the icon in terms of the Incarnation, in the West, sacred art was being poisoned at its very source. Something of this attitude was to remain permanently in the West; this may help to explain the dead ends of contemporary art. Even the great and grandiose explosions of past artistic vigor in the West have not succeeded in getting the upper hand because the theological definition of images, perhaps overly prudent, is limited to what is useful, utilitarian, that is, what teaches and consoles. For Gregory the Great, the image is a Bible for the illiterate, and for Bonaventure, it is destined for the uncultured masses.

It is true that western Christian art up to the 11th-12th centuries everywhere attests to the same climate; it shows the world as in an "illuminated manuscript," and reveals the *invisibilia*. This was fortunately the case because art lagged behind theological thinking. This time lag permitted the miracles of Chartres, of Romanesque art, and of Italian iconography; later on this art would be expressed in the visionary genius of Fra Angelico, Simone Martini and still many others. In the modern era, rare are the Westerners, among them Goethe, who were sensitive to the language of icons. Goethe's attention was drawn to icons by Seroux d'Argincourt whom he met in Rome in the circle of Angelika Kauffmann. In his youth, Matisse was also struck by the coloring of icons and even went to Moscow to study them firsthand, but their meaning completely escaped him.

We can even say that mystically the Middles Ages died precisely when angels disappeared, when the icon gave way to the allegorical and didactic image, when indirect thought gave way to direct thought. It was the end of Romanesque art, an essentially iconographic art. It was at that moment that the West parted company with the East.

The 13th century made Aristotelianism the philosophy par excellence, to the detriment of symbolic imagination and indirect methods of thinking. Aristotelian physics explains an abandoned world, a world cut off from the transcendent. According to this philosophy, the intellect extracts the idea of a thing from the object itself but fails to grasp the object's transcendental dimension. In Scholastic thinking, angels are robbed of their mediating function. They are reduced to the role of ruling "virtues" of a "natural" order. They appear as the sensible expression of logical notions and no longer as messengers, as living persons. The slide toward perceptive realism and sensualism accentuated the *significant*, the symbol itself, to the detriment of the *signifié*, the person or thing symbolized, to the point that the content of the symbol completely evaporated. Nothing was left but the naturalistic image. Aristotelian poetics expressed the æsthetic dimension of the arts but *Aristotle's poetic theory was based on imitation*; his art is *mimesis*, that is, the imitation of nature. The icon of Christ always gets its essential inspiration from the icon of the Holy Face, made we might say by God's own hand. Western art, however, was to become more and more the representation of a human model, made solely by the hand of man. A "religious" painting represents man but intends that the faithful see and understand the God-Man. The icon represents the Hypostasis of the Word and shows God in Man.

Even geniuses like Giotto, Masaccio, Ducio, and Cimabue, who were greatly influenced by intellectualism,[139] renounced the mysterious and irrational reality of the world. They introduce optical illusions, depth perspective, and chiaroscuro (the play of lights and shadows). This is not exactly the art of the transcendent. Art that breaks with the "canons of iconography" finds its independence. Its vision becomes more and more subjective and is no longer integrated in the liturgical mystery. It continues to give "religious subjects" a plastic form but has lost the ancient sacred language of symbols and presence. As soon as the artist seeks to let himself go in psychical transports, spiritual communion fades away and gives place to emotivity. Sacred art degenerates into nothing more than religious art and moves on toward portraiture, landscape, and ornamentation.

The Council of Trent,[140] in very moderate terms, affirmed the honor due to images, explained their usefulness, and regulated their use. It is symptomatic of the differences between the East and the West that the Council of Trent and the Stoglav Council (the Council of One Hundred Chapters), having taken place at approximately the same time, the mid-16th century, arrived at opposite definition about the nature of "divine art." It is apparent that the West and the East had previously gone off in opposite directions. In the West, the three-dimensional statue, individual and autonomous, won out over the two-dimensional and more mystical iconography.

In its opposition to Catholic worship and symbolism, the Reformation did not even ask questions about sacred art. Luther tolerated the image as an illustration. For the more intransigent Calvin, the only ornament tolerated was the reproduction of the Word of God. Images are "the book of idiots" which cause people to fall back into idolatry: "If a goldsmith makes a cross or a chalice, he will be punished as is prescribed."[141] The Reformation whitewashed church paintings. After Islam and before abstract art, the Reformation practiced "white on white "[142]

At an even earlier period, St. Bernard and the advocates of the Cistercian ascetic vision, in their struggle with Cluny, fought against the art that "cluttered up" the cloisters, as they felt, and distracted the monks from interior contemplation. Port Royal pursued the same policy of artistic austerity and allowed only that art which strictly followed the scriptural texts and illustrated them. Gothic statuary expressed Christ's human sufferings.

The Christian West mystically revolves around the Cross. Taken to its limits, this tendency leads to the long contemplation of the Grünewald retable, already nearly a sermon by Luther; it jolts us but in the end leaves us with the tragic feeling of absence. The Christian East, along with the Romanesque style, revolves around the Glory of God, triumphant over suffering and death. The Byzantine Pantocrator and the Vezelay Christ, even though they seem to be different from the humble Christ of the Gospels, reveal his divinity and strike us by a presence that fills everything.

Descartes substituted the "rational" for the "reasonable" and thus insured the triumph of pure semiology, that is, the victory of the sign over the symbol, of the "geometric spirit" over the "spirit of finesse." He inaugurated the reign of the mathematical algorithm. With the triumph of 19th century scientific positivism, the semiological conception of the world ruled supreme in the

universities. The knowing imagination was violently shut out and the artistic image minimized to the extreme under the pragmatic power of the sign. Art became pure entertainment, ornament, decor.

At the present time, abstract art sets itself against the art of Soviet realism, the dead end of "academic" art, the social art of imitation, and against affected and junk art. A rhythm of colored planes searches for musicality, but the music has no reference to the forms of this world. Having left space, non-figurative art is essentially cerebral and regresses to a pre-formal stage, to the pre-container stage. It indefinitely unrolls and spreads out a colored plane without being able to stop because it has no meaning. It is the art of the great navigators who start their voyage on an infinite sea, of time rather than space, but without a metaphysical compass. They have no sense of their metaphysical orientation because they have no sense of their physical orientation.

The universal inflation of images is replacing the book with photo magazines and television and results in the giant idols of film stars and heads of state. This insatiable appetite for images is a counter-offensive of the imaginative faculty, but it does not lead to a rediscovery of the symbolic.

Happily in our time, depth psychology is powerfully rehabilitating true imagination as the revealer of meaning. Philosophers like Bachelard, Lavelle, Ricoeur, G. Durand, and Corbin are placing the symbol at the center of their reflection.

CHAPTER TWO

The Passage from Signs to Symbols

In the catacombs, we see an art that is purely "signitive" that is, composed of signs. The purpose of this art is didactic. It proclaims salvation and traces salvation's instruments by means of coded signs that can be classified in three groups: 1) water signs, such as Noah's Ark, Jonah, Moses, the fish, and anchors; 2) bread and wine signs, such as the multiplication of bread, grains of wheat, vines; 3) salvation signs and signs that refer to saved persons, such as the young men in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions' den, the phoenix, Lazarus raised from the dead, and the Good Shepherd. The representations simply indicate God's saving action: for example, someone is raised from the dead or is saved from perishing. We see in this art a great disregard for artistic form and an absence of theological development. The Good Shepherd does not represent the historic Christ in any way but means "the Savior really saves." Daniel in the lions' den represents the soul saved from death. These images are drawn statements; they are brief and striking and speak of salvation through baptism and the eucharist. Here is a Greek funerary inscription which in a verbal form is similar to "signitive" designs and shows their meaning:

> I am Abercius the disciple of the holy Shepherd who grazes his flocks on the hills and in the valleys The faith has been my guide everywhere, and everywhere the faith has fed me with the Fish of the Spring, that great and pure Fish that the Virgin caught and offers as food to the friends. She also has a delicious Wine mixed with Water that she gives along with the Bread May all of you who think like me and understand these words pray for Abercius.[143]

Everything converges toward the one thought that there is no eternal life outside of Christ and his sacraments. Everything is reduced to the single sign and expresses joy, for the resurrection of the dead is inscribed on the sarcophagi (the "flesh eaters"). The absence of any kind of art marks the decisive moment of this art's very destiny: its summit, still very close, that is, the high creation of antiquity, is useless for the moment. The art of antiquity is renounced, and it passes through its own death. It is immersed in the waters of baptism, and that is what the catacomb graffiti signify and record. The art of antiquity comes out of the baptismal waters at the beginning of the 4th century in a form that had never been seen before, that is, the icon. This art is raised from the dead in Christ. It is therefore no longer a sign or a painting but an icon; it is the symbol of a presence and its shining meeting place. The baptized art of antiquity is the liturgical vision of the mystery become image.

The spoken and heard Word is contained in the Bible; in an architectural and structured form, the Word opens the door of the church building; sung and played out on the stage of hierophanic worship, the Word becomes the liturgy; drawn in lines of mystery, the Word offers himself for contemplation in the "visual theology" of the icon.

CHAPTER THREE

The Icon and the Liturgy

The architectural forms of the church building, the frescoes, the icons, the objects used in the services are not indiscriminately brought together like articles in a museum. They are rather members of a body. They live in and through a single mystical life: *they are integrated into the liturgical mystery.* This is in fact their essential characteristic, and we can never understand the icon outside of this integration. In the homes of the faithful, an icon is placed in the most conspicuous place in a room, high up where it can guide our visual attention toward the Most High, toward that "one thing necessary." Prayerful contemplation passes through the icon, so to speak, and does not stop until it reaches the living content, that is, the person represented. The icon makes this living personal content present. In its liturgical function, that of uniting meaning and presence, the icon sanctifies times and spaces. Through it, a neutral dwelling place becomes a "domestic church," and the life of a Christian becomes one of prayer and a continuous interiorized liturgy. On entering the house, a visitor first bows in front of the icon thus placing himself in God's visual presence, and then greets the master of the house. We begin by honoring God, and then afterwards we honor men. The icon is a target, the point which centers the whole household on the brilliant shining forth of the beyond. It is never simply a decoration.

In the same way, everyone who enters an Orthodox church is struck by a strong sensation of intense and ceaseless life. Even when there are no services going on, everything seems to be waiting for the holy mysteries; everything is animated and stretched out toward him who is coming to give himself as food.

During a service, the liturgical texts center on the event being celebrated and are in fact a commentary on that event. The liturgical mystery makes the event "present" and transmits its living content to the icon of the feast. First of all, the icon shows its iconographic function in the liturgy itself. We see a visualization, an imaged representation of the whole economy of salvation. During the singing of the Cherubic hymn, "Let us who mystically *represent* the cherubim and who sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity," we go beyond the earthly realm and participate "mystically" in the eternal liturgy celebrated by Christ himself in heaven. The icon of the "synaxis" shows the assembly of angels, with innumerable eyes and myriads of whirring wings. On the icon of the "eternal liturgy," the angels encircle Christ the High Priest as he officiates so that "the Gospel of Christ's glory, the icon of God, can shine in the eyes of the believers."[144] The faithful "mystically represent" the angels and are the living icons, "angelophanies," that is, the human containers in which the angels exercise their ministry of worship and prayer. *Hic et nunc*, everything is participation, offering, presence and eucharist: "We offer you what is already yours" and "we give you thanks." In this grandiose symphony, each faithful Christian as he looks at the icons sees his older companions: the patriarchs, the apostles, the martyrs, and saints as being present, and it is with them that everyone participates in the Mystery. Each faithful person is a concelebrant with the angels singing "In your holy icons, we contemplate the heavenly tabernacles, and we rejoice with an all-pure joy "

CHAPTER FOUR

The Theology of Presence

A manuscript found on Mount Athos insists that the iconographer should "pray with tears so that God can penetrate into his soul." It also advises him to have "the fear of God for painting icons is "a divine art, transmitted to us by God himself." The text continues and puts this prayer into the mouth of the iconographer: "In the past, you so admirably *inspired* the evangelist Luke; enlighten now the soul of your servant and guide his hand so that he can perfectly execute your mystical features "[145]

According to an ancient tradition, St. Luke was both an evangelist and the first iconographer. His two inspirations, his two gifts *inspired* by God, were used to serve the one gospel truth. At the matins of the feast of Our Lady of Vladimir, the first hymn of the canon proclaims that "St. Luke, the divine writer of Christ's gospel, was *inspired* by God's voice to make your venerable icon and to represent the Creator of all things in your arms." Similarly, *The Life of St. John the Evangelist* exhorts us to "pray to St. John if you want to learn iconography and understand icons " We see then that the inspirations of the evangelists and iconographers, without being identical, are put on the same level when it comes to the revelations of the Mystery. Speaking to the Theotokos, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite says "Let your image be unceasingly reflected in the mirror of our souls so that they may be preserved pure. May your image raise up those who are bent down to the ground and give hope to those who contemplate and imitate this eternal model of beauty."

In a nutshell, *the icon is a sacramental* for the Christian East; more precisely, it is the vehicle of a personal presence. The stichera for the vespers of the feast of Our Lad y of Vladimir underlines this point of view: "When you saw this icon, you said with power, '*My* grace and *my* force are *with* this image.'" This is why the intercession of a priest and the blessing ritual are necessary to inaugurate an icon into its liturgical function and thereby into its theophanic ministry. An image which has been verified for dogmatic correctness by a priest, which conforms to the Holy Tradition, and which attains a sufficient level of artistic expression becomes a "miraculous icon" by the divine response to the epiclesis in the rite. "Miraculous" here means exactly that the icon is *charged with a presence*. The icon is a sure witness of this presence and the "channel of grace and sanctifying virtue."[146] The 7th Ecumenical Council stated it very explicitly: "Whether it be by the contemplation of the Scriptures or by the representation of the icon we remember all the prototypes and *we are introduced into their presence*."[147] The Council of 860 affirmed the same thing: "What the gospel says to us in words, the icon announces to us in colors and *makes it present to us*."[148]

St. John of Damascus said that "when my thoughts torture me and keep me from profiting from my reading, I go to the church My eyes are captivated and push my soul to praise God. I consider the martyr's courage his stamina inflames me I fall to the ground to worship God and pray to him through the martyr's intercession." The icon is a witness to the saint's presence and expresses his ministry of intercession and communion.

It is certainly true that the icon has no reality of its own. In itself, it is only a wooden board. The icon gets all its theophanic value from its *participation* in the Wholly Other; the icon is the mirror of the Wholly Other. It can therefore contain nothing in itself but becomes rather a grid, a structure through which the Other shines forth. The absence of three-dimensional volume in two-dimensional icons excludes all materialization. The icon thus expresses an energetic presence which is not localized nor enclosed but which shines out from a point of condensation.

In this liturgical theology of presence, affirmed in the rite of consecration, we have the element that clearly distinguishes, and draws the line of demarcation between, an icon and a painting with a religious subject. Every purely æsthetic work of art is a triptych whose panels open up to show the artist, the work itself, and the person who looks at the work. The artist executes his work; he plays on the keyboard of his genius thus bringing out an *emotion* of admiration in the soul of the spectator. The whole is enclosed in a triangle of æsthetic immanentism. And even if the emotion passes over into religious sentiment, this feeling is based only on the subjective capacity of the spectator to have such sentiments. A work of art is to be seen; it is supposed to ravish the soul. Even though such a

work of art may be deeply moving and quite admirable at the summit of its power, it has no liturgical function. Now the sacred art of the icon transcends the emotional plane which only acts through the senses. In an icon, there is a certain cultivated hieratic dryness along with an ascetic detachment in the technique. These characteristics set themselves over against everything that is sweet and soft; they oppose any sort of artistic decoration or æsthetic enjoyment for their own sake.

In its liturgical function, the icon breaks the æsthetic triangle and its immanentism. It evokes not an emotion but rather a mystical sense, the *mysterium tremendum*. In the presence of an icon, we sense a fourth principle, fourth in relation to the previously mentioned triangle; we sense the appearance of the Transcendent whose *presence* is attested to by the icon. The artist fades away behind Holy Tradition which speaks to us through the image; icons are nearly never signed. The art object gives way to a theophany. Every spectator looking for a artistic show is out of place before an icon. It is more appropriate for a person in front of an icon, being grasped by a fiery revelation, to fall down in an act of worship and prayer.

The attitude of the Christian West toward images, on the other hand, as shown in the Council of Trent, puts the accent on anamnesis, memory, but not on the epiphanic presence. Trent thus placed itself outside the sacramental perspective of presence. It affirmed all the catholic dogmas, but faced with the militantly iconoclastic Reformation, it rejected the iconographic dogma which the West had already abandoned after the 7th Ecumenical Council in 787. It seems therefore quite in keeping with the epiphanic character of the icon, its iconographic approach to mystery, that Bernadette Soubirous did not hesitate to choose a Byzantine icon of the Virgin, painted in the 11th century, when she was asked to choose an image that best corresponded to what she had seen in her visions.

The primacy given to showing forth the Transcendent separates iconography from a strict conformity with the subject's immediate historical context. Only the strict historical minimum is kept so as to recognize the event or the saint's face through traits that have been purified by the heavenly fire. For a saint, the face is natural without being naturalistic. This is why an icon of a living person is impossible; as well, any attempt at mere physical resemblance is excluded. The iconographers' vision must pass through an asceticism, "the fast of the eyes" (St. Dorotheus), so that it can coincide with the vision of the Church. As a powerful form of preaching and an expression of the dogmas, the icon must be submitted to the transcendent rules of the Church's vision.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Theology of Glory-Light

God “adorns himself in magnificence and clothes himself with beauty.” Man stands amazed and contemplates the glory whose light causes a hymn of praise to burst forth from the heart of every creature. The *Testamentum Domini* gives us the following prayer: “Let them be filled with the Holy Spirit so they can sing a doxology and give you praise and glory forever.” An icon is the same kind of doxology but in a different form. It radiates joy and sings the glory of God in its own way. True beauty does not need proof. The icon does not prove anything; it simply lets true beauty shine forth. In itself, the icon is shining proof of God’s existence, according to a “kalokagathic”[149] argument.

St. Paul gave us the expression which is the icon’s Christological foundation: “Christ is the image, *eikôn*, of the invisible God.”[150] He meant that the visible humanity of Christ is the icon of his invisible divinity, that it is “the visible of the invisible.”[151] The icon of Jesus is thus the image of God and of man at the same time. It is the icon of the total Christ, of the God-Man. Christ’s humanity is a vehicle of revelation, and it becomes the truth of every human person. Man is not true nor real except as he reflects the heavenly. What a marvelous grace! Every creature can be the mirror of the Uncreated, “the image of God.” The kondakion of Orthodoxy Sunday says: “Having reëstablished the soiled image to its ancient dignity, the Word of God unites it to *divine Beauty*. In confessing our salvation, we express it in action and in word.” We see that the mystery of salvation goes far beyond a simple reëstablishment of what Adam was before the Fall, the Adamic image. Christ made that image a reality, brought it to fullness, for having purified it, he opened it up to participation in divine Beauty.

The image of God in man, redeemed in Christ and consciously sought after in contemplative asceticism, explains why a holy monk is always called “very similar.” This title refers to the ultimate subjective and personal resemblance of the person to the objective image of God. We find its precise expression in another passage from St. Paul: “And we, with our unveiled faces (made explicit in his mystery) reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord (“which is on the face of Christ”), all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image (icon) that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.”[152] This is why the icon of Christ in the central lunette of Hagia Sophia shows the Lord holding the gospel open onto the passage: “I am the Light of the world;” this is also why the Church sings: “Your Light shines on the faces of your saints.” Man confesses his salvation *in word* but also witnesses to it *in action* by becoming “very similar.” And of course, the most moving icon of God is man “turned into the image we reflect,” according to the text of St. Paul. During the services, the priest censes the icons of the saints thus addressing this liturgical salutation to their prototypes, the mirrors of God. He also censes the faithful and acknowledges the presence of God in his image, that is, man. He salutes the human persons, the living icons of God, present at the liturgy. Didymus of Alexandria quoted a supposed non-biblical saying of the Lord: “After God, see God in every brother. ” This iconographic conception of the human person, his “very great similarity” moved St. Basil to define human destiny in terms of deification: “Man has received the order to become god by grace,”[153] for “having come close to light, the soul is transformed into light.”[154] According to the Fathers, baptized persons clothe themselves in white tunics and cover themselves with the luminous clothing of Christ *imatia phôteina* as seen in the Transfiguration.

We can now see that at a much deeper level the iconoclastic rejection of icons called into question the fundamental tradition of Orthodoxy: hesychasm[155] and its contemplation of the Taboric Light as the first step toward deification. The theology of the icon is based on the distinction in God of his essence and his energies, and the icons speak to us about the divine energy of his light. “God is called Light, not according to his essence but according to his energies.”[156]

For the Christian East, being deified is to contemplate the uncreated Light and to allow it to penetrate us. It is to reproduce in our very being the Christological mystery: “through love, to reunite created nature to uncreated nature and through the acquisition of grace, to show them united.”[157] God, being always hidden in his essence, “multiplies himself in his (energetic and luminous) manifestations” so as to fill man with his “burning closeness.” This is why the Lord’s Transfiguration, the most brilliant manifestation of his light, plays such an important role in the mystical life of Orthodoxy.

His light is already the light of the Second Coming. “Like calls unto like and similar sees what is similar to it.” More precisely, the eye not only perceives, picks up, things but also emits things. To see is at the same time to extend vision, that is, light. The icon reveals to all the eschatological light of the saints It is thus a ray of the Eighth Day, a witness of inaugurated eschatology. Iconoclasm thus diminishes the meaning of the Transfiguration and obscures its light by destroying the icon. How much more significant is it that an iconographer’s first subject is of the Transfiguration? The

rules prescribe this first icon so that Christ "can shine his light into the iconographer's heart." The manuscript of Mount Athos that we referred to previously also calls for an epiclesis, an invocation of the Holy Spirit on "the divine art," saying that the iconographer "should go to the priest and let him pray over him and recite the hymn of the Transfiguration."[158]

There is never a source of natural light shown on icons for light is their very subject, and we can never enlighten the sun. We can even say that the contemplation of the Transfiguration teaches every iconographer that he paints far more with light than with colors. Even in technical terms, the icon's golden background is called "light" and the artistic method is called "progressive enlightenment."[159]

At the beginning of his work, the iconographer covers the face with a dark color. Then he puts on a brighter color obtained by adding some yellow ocre to the previous mixture. In effect, he adds light. This procedure of adding brighter and brighter colors on top of each other is repeated many times. Thus the progressive appearance of a human face on the icon follows a parallel progression which produces in living persons an increase of light, a greater degree of transfiguration.

"We reflect the glory of the Lord as in a mirror." An icon is this mirror which allows the major attribute of the Lord's glory to flow forth, that is, his light. The astonishing art of Rublov's Trinity icon expresses the trisolar brilliance that enlightens the world. According to St. Gregory Palamas, the light of Tabor, the light contemplated by the saints, and the light of the future age are one and the same. For Clement of Alexandria,[160] the light of the first day existed before the creation. This light was "the true light of the Logos illuminating the things still hidden. By this light all creatures came into being." Among the names for the Word, Justin the Philosopher mentioned Day and Light. Eusebius[161] saw in the first day the divine light that enlightens the progressive creation of the world. In his mind, this first Sunday links up with the last Sunday of Revelations when God-Light will be all in all. We can thus say that the light of the first day of creation was the coming forth of the Taboric light. It was in this luminous element of God's glory throughout six days that he created the cosmic being of man by a "progressive clarification or enlightenment." "God is Light" and in line with this revelation, after the epiclesis, that is, the apostolic waiting for the Holy Spirit, the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost changed man into fire and light.[162] For the saints, the saying "you are the light of the world" is *ontologically normative.* The halos which encircle the heads of the saints on their icons are not simply distinctive signs of their holiness but the shining forth of their bodies' luminosity.

The regulations of the Council of One Hundred Chapters (Stoglav), 1551, ordered that iconographers were "to work with the fear of God for theirs is a divine art." The council required the charismatic ministry of the "holy" iconographers who have learned to practice the "fast of the eyes" and who prepare themselves by a long and prayerful ascetic practice, which marks the passage from art to sacred art. A bad icon is "an offense to God," and the bad artist must be chased away. The canons are very sever and forbid all traffic in icons.

The combination of the artistic element and mystical contemplation produces a visionary theology. The vision here expresses the faith, in St. Paul's sense of "the vision of the invisible."[163] The icon addresses itself to the eyes of the spirit so they can contemplate the "spiritual bodies."[164] The ecclesial style filters out all subjective vision, for it is the Church that sees the object of its faith, that is, the mysteries. If the sacred architecture of the church building orders space while the liturgical memorial orders time, the icon gives us an experience of the invisible, of the "interior form" of being, and this interiority once again depends on illumination, on the Taboric light. St. Seraphim[165] taught that the state of grace enlightens us so we can see the light. The icon reveals that light to us all. The icon is prayer; it purifies and transfigures in its image those who contemplate it. It is mystery and teaches us to see in it the inhabited silence, heavenly joy on earth, and the brilliant shining of the beyond.

CHAPTER SIX

The Biblical Foundation of the Icon

The Old Testament law prohibited images because they would have endangered the purity of worship of the *invisible* God. Only ornamental art in the form of geometric forms could express the feeling of the Infinite.[166] For Muslims, non-figurative art, arabesques, and polygonal decor reinforced the same idea of God's radical transcendence.

The distance between God and man expanded to the danger point because man had turned away from his initial likeness with God to sink into unlikeness. In contrast, the angels kept untouched their nature as "second lights;" they remained pure containers of the divine light. As a result, God could even order that sculptured representations of angels be made.[167] In order to fulfill its ministry of serving man, the heavenly world of spirits, found its artistic expression and human form on the Ark of the Covenant. The Old Testament has thus given us the sculpted icon of the cherubim. These angelic images were placed in the Tabernacle. Their presence in this place expresses their liturgical ministry, but they are in no way works of art. We have here the whole philosophy of sacred art.

Thus *before* the Incarnation, all artistic expression of the heavenly is limited to angelic world due to the fear of idolatry. We must understand, however, that this limitation was only the purification of a waiting period; it was a prophecy of the coming of the icon in Christ.

Exodus 25:17 says that " you are to make a throne of mercy, of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. For the two ends of this throne of mercy you are to make two golden cherubs." "Throne of mercy" or *kapporêt* comes from the verbs "to cover" and "to make expiation." According to the text, this golden slab was set on top of the Ark and was to be the place where Yahweh would appear. He was to speak from between the two cherubim.

The icons of Christ's Resurrection sets out this prophetic symbolism. It shows a slab representing the empty tomb and reproducing the slab of the Ark. On this slab, we see the abandoned winding sheet, and on the ends of the slab two cherubim stand facing the myrrh-bearing women. This exact reproduction of the "throne of mercy" now reveals in Christ its real meaning. At the same time, it shows that the same quality of Presence is inherent in every icon: Yahweh appears on the throne of mercy and speaks from it.

On Orthodoxy Sunday, the feast of the icon, the Church reads two gospel passages (Mt 18:10 and Jn 1:43-51) which teach us that the many-eyed angels have the gift of contemplating the divine light and that after the Incarnation all the faithful receive this angelic gift that the icon expresses so obviously.

Christ delivered men from mythology and idols, not *negatively* by suppressing the image, but *positively* by revealing the real human face of God. If we say that only God's divinity is beyond all representation and that humanity isolated and separated from God is reduced to nothingness, these things are true because "Christ's humanity is the icon of his divinity." This is the declaration of the 7th Ecumenical Council. Being *lumen de lumine*, the Son of God, that is, the whole Christ, is the "splendor," the "effigy," the "imprint,"[168] and the unique icon of God. What is human is affirmed in its iconographic function: the visible image of the invisible. Its biblical foundation goes back to the creation of man, to the "image of God." Interrupted by the Fall, his fullness is brought about in and through Christ. This fullness is passed onto the "Christified ones," to those in whom "Christ is being formed,"[169] to those who carry Christ the "christophers" to those who are "very similar." God in himself transcends all images, but his face as it is turned toward the world takes on visible form and finds an image adequate to express the mystery of his love of man, his philanthropy. That image is a human face. In the thinking of the Fathers, above the potential abyss of the Fall, God sculpted the human face while looking at the humanity of Christ in the depths of his Wisdom.[170] Methodius of Olympus[171] said that "the Word descended in Adam before the ages, and St. Athanasius[172] said that "God created the world so that he could become man and that man could

become god by grace." The Incarnation comes from God, from his desire to become Man and to make his Humanity a Theophany, a place and a living icon of his Presence.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Iconoclasm

First and foremost, iconoclasm expressed a violent surge of Semitic transcendentalism, both Jewish and Muslim but also Christian, which overemphasize the meaning of God's ineffable and unknowable qualities. This transcendentalism was pushed to the point of undermining the Incarnation and God's *philanthropia*, "Love of man." Iconoclasm was also a reaction against the excesses of what was at times an idolatrous cult of images, against their contamination by a magical conception that confused the icon and the eucharist, exalting the *consubstantiality* of the image with its model. One consequence was that some over zealous priests mixed flakes of paint from an icon with the holy eucharistic gifts.

The conflict between iconoclasts and iconodules, the defenders of icons, broke out at a time when the two rival camps could no longer understand what the other was saying. They were talking about totally different realities. For the iconoclasts, every image could only be a portrait, and of course a portrait of God was inconceivable. Their exclusively realistic conception of art drove them to deny any symbolic character in the icon. From the sacramental perspective, they believed quite correctly in symbols, that is, in the real presence of the symbolized thing or person in its symbol, but they denied any presence of the person represented, the prototype, in his iconographic image. Once this conception was accepted, the icon fell into the category of profane art, since it was obviously not a sacrament. From their point of view, the claim that icons were a sacred art simply clothed them in superstition and even heresy. It was therefore necessary to choose between a photographic likeness, as we would say today, and a symbolic likeness. The two were mutually exclusive. The iconoclasts could only conceive of an art that was realistic and reproduced the visible of the visible, thus simply making a copy of the visible. They could not see that the icon portrayed the "visible of the invisible," and the invisible *in* the visible. The relation of the visible and the invisible is such that the invisible is mysteriously present in the visible and reveals the icon to be an authentic *symbol* and vehicle of a personal presence.

The iconoclast tolerated only non-figurative religious art, for example a cross as a geometric form without a corpus. They thought it proper to venerate the image of the instrument that brought about our salvation. Without Christ on the cross, however, there was no question of a personal presence. What is more, they limited their conception of the image to a question of identity: the image was identical with what it represented. The only adequate image of Christ was, therefore, the eucharist because it was consubstantial (*homoousios*) and identical (*tauto*) with him in nature (*kat'ousian*). Now the eucharist is a miracle in which the cosmic matter of bread and wine are changed into the heavenly matter of the transfigured body of Christ. But, the miracle of the *metabole*, or transformation, takes place without producing any likeness or resemblance. Every vision of "flesh" in the chalice is severely forbidden by the canons, and every "apparition" of this kind is considered to be a temptation against nature. The Word of God does indeed "enhypostasize," appropriate, or take up into himself the eucharistic gifts, and he integrates them into his spiritual body: "This bread *is* the Body of Christ." This substantial identity hides the eucharistic presence of Christ, however, not because it is hidden under the inherent veil of every mystery, but because this presence is not visual and is therefore *without image*. The visible bread is simply stated to be identical with the invisible heavenly body, but the operation gives no place to any visual manifestation. The eucharist cannot in any way be an icon for it is uniquely the Lord's Supper which must be *consumed* and not *contemplated.*

The icon finds its place on a totally different level and thus escapes any charge of idolatry. The very word *icon*[173] suppresses any identification and underlines the *difference of nature* between the image and its prototype, "between the representation and what is represented."[174] We can never say that "the icon of Christ is Christ" as we say that "this bread is the body of Christ." This would obviously be idolatry. The icon is an image which witnesses to a presence in a very specific way: it allows a prayerful communion with the glorified nature of Christ; it is however not a eucharistic communion, that is, substantial. It is rather a spiritual communion, a mystical communion with the Person of Christ. The icon brings about a meeting *in prayer*, without localizing

this communion in the icon as a material object. The meeting nonetheless takes place through and with the icon as a vehicle of the presence. In an icon, the Hypostasis, Christ's Person, "enhypostasizes" not a substance (the wood and colors) but the *likeness*. It is the likeness alone and not the board that is the meeting place where we encounter the presence. This likeness is fundamental to an understanding of the real nature of the icon. It is tied solely to the contemplation of the Church. This is how, in truth, the Church sees Christ *liturgically.* The iconographer follows this vision and expresses it. The mystery of the icon resides in this dynamic and mysterious likeness with the Prototype, with the whole Christ, a likeness attested to by the Church. It is a likeness therefore that is felt and lived in a catholic and communion-filled manner.

Nicæe II stated that "the icon carries the name of the prototype. It neither carries nor contains the prototype's nature." This means that the religious content, that is, the mystical essence of the icon, is only related to the *hypostatic* or *personal* presence. There is therefore no question of some ontological presence being absorbed into the matter of the icon. It "does not contain any nature;" it neither captures nor retains anything. But the Name-Hypostasis radiates out from the icon without being in any way imprisoned in the volume of the board. The icon does not have any existence in itself. It is participation and a "guiding image." It leads to the Prototype, to the person represented, announces his presence, and witnesses to his coming. The presence in no way incarnates itself in the icon, but the icon is nonetheless a center from which the divine energies radiate out. *The iconic presence is a circle whose center is found, or rather is reflected, in every icon but whose circumference is infinite*. Being a material point in this world, the icon opens a breach through which the Transcendent shines, and the successive waves of this presence transcend all limits and fill the whole universe.

The iconoclasts never understood this point and got stuck in the mire of a false theological question: Is it possible to make an image, that is, a portrait, of the God-Man? The answer, as is obvious from the start, can only be negative. If the divine nature is in fact not at all "describable," in the sense of being limited and representable by artistic techniques, then an image only of the humanity of Christ would become a Nestorian separation of the two natures. On the other hand, if we take just one nature for the two, we end up with the Monophysite confusion. But we are not trying to represent the natures, either divine or human. St. Theodore Studite[175] suggested the correct solution and thus laid the foundation for a true theology: the icon represents neither the nature nor the natures but through the visible humanity of Christ, as a *symbol*, the icon reveals the Person of the God-Man, the whole Christ, and contemplates the very mystery of the Incarnation. The contemplation of the icon is "aristocratic" and adult; it is formed pedagogically by the liturgy and is placed at the level of the liturgy. To contemplate the icon, we must have an ascetical conditioning, the liturgical fine tuning of purified senses, and the creative elevation of the spirit.

The 7th Ecumenical Council proclaimed the veneration of icons as legitimate but did not set out an elaborate doctrine. Nonetheless, the Council and the Fathers of that period answered the iconoclasts in broad strokes and formulated certain defensive arguments. To the question about how God could be circumscribed in the form of an image, the council asked in its turn in canon 3: "How will you recognize Christ at his Second Coming if you deny that he is circumscribable?" The iconoclasts asked another question: The Word of God, as the second Adam, adopted humanity in general and not the nature of a particular man; how, therefore, can you represent this "humanity in general"? Theodore Studite answered that the human nature of Christ is the species (*eidos*) made up of the genus (*genos*); this human nature was given reality in a concrete being distinct from all others. Along the same lines, John of Damascus said that the Word of God united himself to the nature of an individual which was the same as that of the species. But does not the making of an image of Christ introduce a second person into Christ? The Fathers answered that the human nature of Christ was enhypostasized, that is, given a personal center, by the Word of God so that the two natures refer back to and are united to one unique Subject. We cannot say, therefore, that the divine nature was crucified but that the Person of the Word of God participated in the crucifixion in the flesh. The icon does not represent a simple earthly apparition. The iconographers make the Person of the Word visible with the traits that determine his human nature. These traits are nonetheless transformed by being close to the Word.

The notion of *enhypostatos* is at the base of the Fathers' doctrine. It explains how, through the image, we can invoke the presence of its prototype. The saints in their icons, beyond their earthly appearance, show themselves in their deified humanity as persons illuminated by the light of the Eight Day. An iconographer thus contemplates something very different from what the painter of a religious scene contemplates.

We have to understand very clearly from what point of view the iconographer looks at things. His subject is never solely Christ's humanity. According to the chronicle of Andrew Rublev, the great master "constantly elevated his spirit and plunged it into the immaterial and divine light." Rublev teaches us that we must have recourse to the Taboric Light and that it is in this Light that we see Christ's Humanity, inseparable from the whole Mystery, and as such the "generator of unity." According to St. Gregory Palamas, the deified flesh of Christ is represented in the icons to the extent that that flesh manifests the Divinity of Christ.[176] The icon, of course, can say nothing to the conscious denial of "the mysterious." It judges such a denial by refusing to manifest its light, but to a sensitive and attentive faith, the icon reveals its light. The believer is like the apostles who witnessed the Transfiguration. They saw the Transfigured Christ because their sight had been transfigured. This is the profound meaning of the image of Christ called *acheiropoietos* or the icon of the Holy Face "not-made-by-human-hands." This image teaches us that there is nothing that is made uniquely by man's hands, that everything visible is always a miracle and that we must *believe* and therefore *see*[177] with and through the eyes of the Dove if we hope to penetrate into the mysterious heart of that miracle. The 7th Council clearly stated and explained how we should contemplate an icon: "In the icon, we recognize nothing other than an image representing a *likeness* of the Prototype. This is why the icon receives the Prototype's name. This is the *only* reason why it participates in the likeness, and that is the reason we venerate it and call it holy."[178] The definition is very basic: the miracle of the icon, its participation in Christ is situated uniquely in the *hypostatic* or *personal likeness* not in any natural likeness. If the icon shows the humanity of Christ, it is a representative of the human nature that it sums up and recapitulates. This is why the multitude of different icons does not claim to reproduce an earthly and naturalistic portrait. As a sacramental symbol, the icon carries the presence of the whole divino-humanity. The Council said that "we contemplate what is unspeakable and what is represented at the same time:"[179] not one or the other but one *and* the other, the one *in* the other. This miracle orients the anagogic, that is, the upward movement of prayer: "the honor given to the icon rises to its prototype."[180]

"The icon is sanctified by God's Name and by the name of his friends [the saints], and that is why it receives the grace of the divine Spirit."[181] According to the Bible, God makes himself present in his Name.[182] An icon is God's Name in a *drawn* form. In the pronounced Name, through and with the icon, which "pronounces" it in a silent and visible way, our love carries us to venerate and embrace the grace of the real presence in the very likeness of the icon. Nonetheless, the likeness is so intimately tied to the icon itself that this likeness constitutes its secret essence. It is impossible to distinguish the likeness and the icon, and even less to separate them. Veneration unites them in an iconic whole, but this "whole" elevates the spirit to its beyond, to the invisibly present Archetype.

The icons of the saints do not pose the Christological problem of the two natures but rather the problem of two bodies, the earthly and the heavenly. The already deified earthly body is the anticipation of the heavenly body, and the icon suggests the real face of eternity as God contemplates it. The personal presence of a saint is situated in this likeness to the heavenly sphere.

The iconoclasts' central argument that the icon is an idol is crude. The Fathers answered it very clearly: an idol is the expression of what is non-existent, fiction, simulacre, nothingness.[183] Consequently, to worship an icon, to adore it as though it were of the same nature as the person it represents would be to destroy it, for that would be to enclose a presence in the wooden board. It would be to make an idol and make the person represented absent. The *Horos* of the 7th Council makes it very clear: "The more the faithful look at the icons the more they remember those who are represented Woe to those who worship images!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Dogmatic Foundation of the Icon

The 7th Ecumenical Council formulated the canon that regulates the veneration of icons. The dogmatic content of the icon, however, is found scattered throughout the teachings of the Fathers and especially in the icons themselves. In their luminous testimony, in their prodigious life, we can follow, step by step, the dynamism of Holy Tradition. In this Tradition and through the various elements of the Church's life (liturgy, sacraments, the Fathers, icons), Christ gives us a commentary of his own words.

Martirum signum est mixime caritatis. The icon itself is martyrdom and carries the marks of a fire and blood baptism. The blood of the martyrs was mixed with the ashes and charred remains of the icons, splashes of light, during the fierce persecution carried on by the iconoclasts. After being deposed, Patriarch Germanus took off his omophorion and declared that "without the authority of a council, Emperor, you can change nothing about the faith." Pope Gregory II wrote to Emperor Leo the Isaurian saying that "the dogmas of the Church are not your business abandon your insanity." In the case of the icon, we are not dealing with simple illustrations. At the time of Byzantine iconoclasm, the Christian West and East were united in Holy Tradition and rose up together against the heresy, for by attacking the icons, the iconoclasts entered into the dogmatic arena and began to eat away at the whole economy of salvation. The veneration of the Gospel Book, the Cross and the icon are united together with the liturgical mystery of the presence that the Church proclaims from her eucharistic heart: "Our doctrine is in agreement with the eucharist and the eucharist confirms our doctrine," according to St. Iranæus.

If it is true that every art worthy of the name never seeks simply to copy what is real but aspires to reveal its meaning, to unravel its secret message, to seize its *logos*, to suggest the highest vocation of the liberties that inspire it, if all this is true then iconography in its finest works is clearly an expression of pneumatology, that is, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is why St. John of Damascus attributed the presence of the Holy Spirit to the icon.[184]

The prologue of St. John's gospel (1:4) says that "life was in him." The Spirit, that is, Life, was interior to the Word of God from all eternity. At Epiphany, the Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove, stopped, and rested on Jesus. In his apparitions, the Spirit is a movement "toward Jesus," toward the Lamb so as to make his divinity apparent to all. The Spirit "takes a back seat" to Christ in order to announce him "up front." His breath carries the word of Christ, makes it audible, amplifies it, and gives it the breath of life and its eschatological dimension: St. Athanasius admirably said that we have "drunk deeply of the Spirit, and we drink Christ."[185] The Spirit introduces us into Christ, and in Christ we fully meet the Spirit and are *inspired* by him so we can grasp the full meaning of his revelation.

The Spirit's sanctifying action conditions every act in which the spiritual realm takes body, is incarnated, and becomes *christophany*, that is, a manifestation of Christ. The Spirit thus "hovers" over the abyss so that the world, the place of Incarnation, can burst forth. By the mouth of the prophets, the whole Old Testament is the preliminary Pentecost looking forward to the coming of the Virgin and her *fiat.* The Spirit descended on Mary and made her the *Theotokos*, on Jesus who became Christ, the Anointed One, and he reveals Christ to be "the Lamb slain before the foundations of the world." From the Spirit's fiery tongues, the Church, the Body of Christ, is born. He makes a baptized person a member of Christ, and bread and wine the Body and Blood of the Lord. As the divine Iconographer, he makes the icon "not-made-by-human-hands" into the Holy Face, and from this Archetype comes every icon made in the forms of this world and the Taboric light.

The theology of the Fathers shows the great importance of the *epiclesis*, the invocation of the Holy Spirit. This invocation goes beyond just the liturgical dimension of the eucharist; it acquires significance for the whole universe, and shows, in the Spirit, the divine power of revelation and of

the manifestation of the invisible. It is the Spirit in us who says "*Abba,* Father," in order that we can add, "*Abba* Father, send your Holy Spirit so we can say 'Lord Jesus,' so that we can also contemplate his face and through his deified humanity, that "glass torch," see *the Hypostasis of the God-Man*.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit became the active agent *inside* both nature in general and the human person in particular. He became the co-subject of our life in Christ, more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. "By the Holy Spirit, all creation is renewed and reinstated in its first state,"[186] in its initial and final truth. In the Church, we see the icon of the Trinity's diverse unity and in each human person a living icon and image of God.

"The Holy Spirit is the great Doctor of the Church," according to St. Cyril of Jerusalem,[187] himself a doctor of the Church, for the Spirit guarantees and assures the Church's *charisma veritatis certum*. A council is ecumenical because the Spirit of Truth, by the mouth of the people of the Church, has identified it with Christ the Truth. In response to the epiclesis used in the ceremony for blessing an icon, the Spirit of Beauty identifies the likeness with Christ and makes the image an icon, that is, the contemplated Beauty of the Word of God. "The Spirit and the Bride cry 'Come, Lord.'" We are introduced into the mystical wedding feast of Christ and the Church by the epiclesis of the Kingdom, but also into the mystical wedding feast of Christ with every soul, personally and by name. The Deisis icon opens up on this vision in front of which every word falls silent and gives place to the silence of the Word of God, to the brilliant shining of his never-setting Light.

The blessing prayer for an icon says,

> O Lord God, you created man in your image, but the Fall darkened its brilliance. By the Incarnation of your Christ become Man, you restored the image and thus reëstablished your saints in their first dignity. In venerating your saints we venerate your image and likeness. Through them, we glorify you as their Archetype.

The dogmatic conscience of the Church has affirmed the truth of the icon in relation to the Incarnation, but the Incarnation itself is conditioned by man's creation "in the image of God" and by the iconic structure of the human person. Christ did not become incarnate in a foreign and utterly alien element, but he found in man his own heavenly and archetypical image, for God created man while looking at the heavenly humanity of the Word of God (1 Co 15:47-49), preëxistent in the Wisdom of God.

In his divinity, the Son is the consubstantial Image of the Father; in his humanity, Christ is the icon of God, but "He who has seen me has seen the Father." The two natures of Christ, divine and human, are attached to and refer back to his unique Person and therefore unique Image; but the Person of the Word expresses himself in two different ways. The image is one, as the Person is one, but this unity safeguards the distinction between the uncreated and the created.

In opposition to an excessive spiritualism, we affirm that God's fullness would be diminished if he did not have his image. God is the Form of all forms, the Icon of all icons; he is the all-containing Archetype. The apophatic approach is not a pure denial or negation. It rather affirms that God is a Meta-Icon, in the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, a Hyper-Icon. The iconoclasts showed a strange insensitivity to the sacred realism of being, a docetic rupture between the spiritual and the incarnate. Faced with iconic symbolism, the iconoclasts accentuated the vertical, apophatic axis and upset the balance by losing its horizontal, cataphatic coordinates. And what is more, their intransigent rationalism shut them off from any understanding of true symbolism.

The negative way alone is not sufficient. In fact, according to St. Gregory Palamas, "the apophatic way is only a way of understanding what appears to be different from God. It does not carry the image of the inexpressible."[188] Now, God is above all affirmation but is also above all negation. This means finally an apophatic *yes*. St. Gregory synthesizes the personalism characteristic of the patristic doctrine of the knowledge of God. God is unknowable, radically transcendent in his essence, but he is expressible as the Existing One and present in his energies. The Incarnation makes those energies immanent to the entire being of man.

According to St. Anastasius the Sinaite, the face-to-face vision of the future age will be the vision of the incarnate Person of the Word of God. This is why the basic affirmation of the Fathers makes clear that what we see on the icons is neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ but

rather his *Person.* The veneration of icon is thus the beginning of the vision of the Eight Day. St. Theodore Studite said that the image differs radically from the prototype in its *essence* but resembles it in *name* and in *person.*

"Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation" (Col 1:15). Now even the first defenders of the icon separated, rather simplistically, the two natures and put the visible with Christ's humanity and the invisible with his divinity. But the image cannot be divided along the lines of the natures, for it refers back to the Person of Christ in his unity. A Person in two natures means an Image in two modes, visible and invisible. The divine is invisible, but it is reflected in the visible human aspect. The icon of Christ is possible, true, and real because his image in the human mode is identical to the invisible image according to the divine mode; the two images constitute the two aspects of the one Person-Image of the Word of God. According to St. John of Damascus, the energies of the two natures, the created and the uncreated, penetrate each other. In the hypostatic union, Christ's deified humanity participates in the divine glory and shows us God. The Christological *perichoresis*, that is, the exchange of idioms, calls to mind the same and reciprocal co-penetration of the two natures and makes more explicit the mystery of the *one image* according to two modes of expression. This allows us to say that *the humanity of Christ is the image of his divinity*. And again, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," does not say "has seen God" but rather "the Father," for the Son is the image of the Father and thereby the expression of the Trinity. The unique Person thus possesses the unique Image-Icon in two modes of expression: seen by God and seen by man.

At the feast of the Transfiguration, the Church sings "the disciples saw your glory as far as they were able," thus underlining the fact that this vision presupposes a *gift* that transfigures our sight. "The image of the invisible God," the unique theandric reality in the Person of the Word of God incarnate, manifested himself to the disciples. It is this Taboric vision that conditions and is the dogmatic foundation of the icon of Christ and of all icons in general.

The icon is also an expression of the Biblical theology of the Name. God's Name is his oral icon. We do not "take the Lord's Name in vain," for God is present in his Name. The Jesus Prayer is enrooted in this Biblical notion. In the blessing service, we name the icon: "This image is the icon of Christ" and "this image is sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit." These expressions mean that the "likeness" which is sacramentally affirmed confers on the icon the charism of the inherent presence of the Name. The icons of the same Prototype, and especially of Christ, are innumerable, but the unique Name identifies them; each one is an aspect of the one Christ. The eucharist transforms the material of this world into a heavenly and transcendent reality. The blessing prayers do not bring about any change in the icon but identify the icon with its own likeness, that is, with the drawn Name, and so it becomes a center from which the divine energies radiate out.

The "matter" of the ritual is not the "board" but rather the "likeness" which is linked to the icon "not-made-by-human-hands." After the Ascension, Christ said: "I am with you until the end of the world." In his word, he is present for the hearing, in the eucharist for eating, and in the icon for a prayerful encounter. It is certainly true that prayer without an icon loses none of its value; after all the great spiritual fathers and mothers of the desert spoke directly with God. At its deepest level, prayer falls silent, and "we pray beyond prayer." St. Seraphim of Sarov advised that "when the Holy Spirit descends, we must stop praying." But in order to arrive at such heights of spiritual life, God offers us the means of his grace, and the icon is one of those means.

The iconoclasts quoted the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus to the effect that "faith is not in colors but in the heart." St. Gregory meant this to be a warning against superstition and idolatry. We worship God "in spirit and in truth," but man is the image of God in the very structure of his spirit. This is why man thinks, contemplates, "imagines," and creates beauty along with its symbols and its icons. "In truth" can thus stand for sacred art oriented, like a magnet, toward transcendent Beauty. God robes himself in Beauty and makes it the meeting place of our encounter with him. He is the Archetype of all the beauties of the earthly and heavenly worlds.

It is obvious that an icon is the opposite of a naturalistic image and physical likeness. The body is the form of the spirit, and every true art penetrates "behind the veil" of the phenomena of this world so as to express the spiritual content, the *logos*. The great painters say that "reality should be painted just as it is but also just a little as it is not." When he was painting a portrait, Serov would say from time to time: "now it is time to make an error or two "[189]

When he draws God's human face, the iconographer transposes the vision of the Church, for the Church contemplates the Mystery of God in his human face. This art is synergetic in that the divine

Spirit-Iconographer *inspires* man. In fact, all the icons of Christ give the impression of being basically the same. We recognize Christ immediately, but this resemblance is not like that of a portrait. It is not the human individuality but rather the Person of Christ who shows himself to each iconographer in a unique, ecclesial and personal manner, all at the same time. We have a parallel between Christ's appearance in icons and his appearances after the Resurrection. In both cases, he showed different aspects of himself. The Church keeps the unique Holy Face "not-made-by-human-hands" in her memory, and there are as many different Holy Face icons as there are iconographers. Pseudo-Dionysius underlined the mysterious character of the Face when he said that it is "the Face of faces and the face of the Inaccessible One "

The canonization of iconographers raises sacred art to the level of holiness. What is more, their vision, essentially charismatic and ecclesial at the same time, makes the icon a "theological meeting place" and therefore one of the sources of theology. In the West, the dogmatician informs and guides the artist; in the East the vision of a real iconographer informs and guides the dogmatician.

CHAPTER NINE

The Canons and Creative Liberty

Through the councils and the bishops, the Church watches over the authenticity of her "divine art," an art that "was not invented by painters but is a confirmed rule and a tradition of the Church."[190] In 692, the Quinisext Council, or the Council *in Trullo*, formulated three canons[191] and thus set out solid criteria for judging the iconographic value of an image. The Council of One Hundred Chapters, in 1551, instructed the bishops:

> to watch over with untiring attention and care, each in his own diocese, and to make sure that the iconographers do not give themselves over to their own fantasies but that they follow tradition. Whoever God has not endowed with talent, let that person be forbidden to paint icons. The icon of God must not be given over into the hands of those who disfigure and dishonor it.[192]

Art and talent, though they are necessary, are not at all sufficient in themselves. There is a third requirement, *holiness of life*, that is, a purified soul, purified by ascetical effort and prayer accompanied by a capacity for contemplation.

An icon can never go below a certain artistic level. The ability to draw and paint is a strict minimum. This basic talent is the vehicle which carries everything else. An icon is a place where theology is practiced and thus becomes praise, singing, poetry in colors. The iconographer must possess a sense of color; he must have ears that hear the music of lines and forms, and a perfect ability to describe the heavens. Above this level, the unlimited perspective of inspired vision opens up. It is never the icon itself, however, that is beautiful. What is beautiful is the Truth that descends into it and clothes itself with its forms. From the mathematical point of view, the relations of two infinities is done with, but every icon relates two infinities, that is, the divine light and the human spirit.

The Council of One Hundred Chapters[193] elevated Rublev's Trinity icon to the rank of official model for all trinitarian icons. This icon, on the other hand, is not more of an icon than any other composition which has the same function of intercession and presence. Nonetheless, a contemplative, expressive, and original penetration of the mystery is the lot of the iconographer's personal genius. In the presence of Rublev's works, everyone said that "we see the heavens opened and God's splendor." The chronicle of the period tell how Andrei Rublev, called "greatly similar," along with his companion and friend Daniel spent all their rare free moments in front of ancient icons; they were "filled with divine joy" and lost in endless contemplation.[194] After his death, Rublev appeared to Daniel *shining in all the brilliant colors of his icons* and inviting Daniel to joyfully follow him "into the infinite happiness." We already have a foretaste of that happiness in Rublev's Trinity icon.

In the Tradition, the Church cultivates style and taste with an infallible refinement. The iconographic canon makes clear the great principles concerning the icon's form and content. We also find some brief remarks in the *podlinniki* (authentic texts), that is, manuals that served as guides for the iconographers. Certain of these texts were illustrated and gave schematic models of traditional compositions while other were more explanatory and contained technical information. They taught the artists how to prepare gesso and other covering liquids, the binding agents for the colors, and especially the gold. They also included representations of certain symbolic details, the classic features of certain saints, and the order of the paintings in a church.

Icons are painted on a wooden board, often cypress-wood. A flat surface is dug into the surface leaving a slightly raised border on the edges, forming a natural frame. On the flat inner surface, the iconographer puts down a layer of glue on which he places a piece of fabric that he later covers with

a layer of gesso made from alabaster dust. The alabaster gesso forms a resistant support for the painting. On this surface, the artist paints with colors which, as much as possible, come from natural powders mixed with egg yoke. When the painting is finished, the artist puts on a protective layer using the best linseed oil that has been mixed with different kinds of resins, such as yellow amber. This varnish soaks into the colors and produces a hard, resistant, and homogeneous mass, but through time it also collects and holds dust. As a result, the surface turns a dark brown color, but the colors reappear in their original brilliance when this layer of dirt is cleaned off. The mass production of icons is considered to be insufficiently pure for this divine art. For example, the making and selling of commercially printed paper icons is against the canons and was forbidden by the Council of Moscow in 1667 as well as by Patriarch Joachim.

The manuals are only useful documentation. Moreover, they came into extensive use only in the 16th-18th centuries when the knowledge of the tradition had begun to wane. The essential elements of iconography are found in the direct teaching and oral transmission from a master to his disciples. The pronounced conservatism of the tradition is explained by the *ecclesial vision*, that is the Church's looking at one single and unchanging subject. The great stability of the forms is also explained by this vision. Symbols are in any case generally characterized by conservatism and stability. Iconography is not the free use of the imagination but rather the reading of archetypes and the contemplation of prototypes. It would be quite false, however, to mistake the canons for unchangeable laws that would freeze and kill the art. Spontaneity has never been restricted, nor has the creative sap ever stopped flowing. The apparent rigidity is the inevitable and conventional expression of the transcendent. It preserves icons from the expressionist subjectivism of the Romantics. The constraints on rhythm contribute to the clarity of expression and to the full power of icons. The lyricism of feeling, filtered through progressive purifications, rises to a sublime elimination of all non-essential and distracting elements. When we compare icons of the same composition or theme, we are struck by the fact that none is a servile copy of any other, and this despite the fact that they all resemble each other. Even during the periods when this art was at its height, we never find two icons that are absolutely identical. Each school and each icon carry their own identifiable characteristics.

The masters followed the tradition quite naturally without even being conscious of doing so, and they certainly never felt that their creative energies were being stifled. Can we say that a painter is the slave of his model? The masters treated all the iconographic types that they had received from the tradition in a very free manner. Without ever going outside the canonical framework, the great iconographers changed the rhythm of the composition, the contours, the long and short lines, the colors and their arrangement. Each artist expressed the uniqueness of his person. They were thus able to give a new look to each of their works. Onto traditional forms, they imprinted a very personal character while still remaining faithful to the very spirit of the tradition, a spirit which is always bubbling life, creative progression and the vision of what is never seen twice. To see this, we need only compare the evolution of the Trinity icon with its nearly perfect expression by Rublev's very bold genius.

CHAPTER TEN

The Divine Art

All art is a system of expression, a particular language whose elements relate to meaning as the words of a sentence relate to thought. Ultimately, of course, the content or secret message expresses the beyond. This is precisely the case with the icon. Its light enlightens the destiny of the world and points to the eschatological union of the earthly and the heavenly. Through both human and material vases, with all their imperfections, the icon suggests perfection in delicate lacy contours. It reminds man that his original and permanent vocation is to be the image of God, an earthly angel, a heavenly being.

The present-day crisis in sacred art is not æsthetic but religious. On one hand, there still exists today a theological fundamentalism that turns the Bible into a Koran and, on the other, an exaggerated scientism that demythologizes in the extreme. These two tendencies confront each other because there is a growth crisis in the contemporary world. Human sensitivities have not yet found a balanced way to express themselves. In both cases, generalized iconoclasm, that is, the refusal of the icon, has its source in the progressive lose of liturgical symbolism and the abandonment of the patristic vision.

The realism of being and of its transfiguration gives place to æsthetic "beauty" in which the secret message fades away before the purely narrative element. Art has lost the organic link between content and form and, like knowledge, has separated itself from mystical contemplation, thereby sinking into the night of ruptures. Due to the lack of a sacred art from the past, we have nothing left but works of art on religious subjects.

Profane art obeys the optical laws that throw a net over empirical things arranging them so as to constitute a homogeneous vision of the here and now. The principles of this art are functions of this fallen world, of its state of exteriorization, separation, distance, and isolation. In order to express itself, profane art invents two unities: unity of action, which is the net of time and unity of perspective, which is the net of space. It sets up an *a priori* grid between the eye and empirical things. Profane art is "a point of view" full of optical illusions. It is useful for everyday life but is not the total vision, that is, the vision of "the Dove's eye." The artificial depth of a painting is achieved by the optical game of lines that converge as they move off in the distance. What a very odd trickery.

Iconographers are not unaware of the various artistic techniques, even the most modern ones. Techniques are not, however, the essence of their work. Icons do not reflect the material reality as we see it through normal vision. The art of the icon imposes its own principles on the spectator who thereby learns what true vision is. A spiritual science, an immense culture opens up to us and lets us feel, nearly touch, the "flame of things."

The relations between the real dimensions of beings and things is not at all important in an icon, for it does not attempt to copy nature. In an icon, cities are looked down on from a bird's eye point of view. Instead of landscape, the icon suggest the schematic presence of the universe most often by means of geometric forms, of superimposed tiers of scarped rocks stretching off toward the top of the icon. A surrealistic game calls into question the false security of the architectural principles of this world. Skillful abstraction gives everything a weightless appearance leading to a paradoxical figuration of the transfigured world. These forms of a fantasized architecture or of a schematized universe, that is, plants and animals stylized according to their paradisiac essence, do not have a value in themselves. They unite themselves to the attitudes adopted by the persons shown, reinforce their meaning, and show the submission of the interiorized material world to the human spirit. Matter is very much alive, but it is so-to-speak, immobilized, in contemplative quietness, so as to listen closely to the revelations.

The icon "de-thingifies," dematerializes, and lightens reality but does not disintegrate it. The weight and opacity of matter seem to disappear, and fine, closely drawn, golden lines spiritualize the human body. These lines represent the penetrating rays of the deifying energies. *Homo terrenus*

becomes *homo cælestis*, light, joyful, and winged. Nudity is covered, and the classical cult of the beautiful body is done away with. The body is draped, hidden, and the mystery of its transfiguration is hinted at through the sober folds of the clothing. The consciously deformed natural anatomy, as well as its apparent rigidity, only underlines the interior power that enlivens the saints. The face expresses the spirit; the "interior" man blossoms out and is represented. Conscious, but admirably measured, deviations show to what extent the icon's spiritual vision is detached from earthly forms. We see thin and elongated figures of extreme grace and elegance. The feet are too small, the legs thin and nearly feeble. On the rigid bodies we see minuscule and graceful heads. The bodies drawn to underline their svelteness seem to float in the air or melt into the ethereal gold of the divine light; they lose all carnal character. The icon represents a world apart, renewed, in which persons with eternity written on their faces live freely together with the divine energies. These saints are energized by *epectasis*, the stretching out of a universe that dilates without limits in the heavenly spaces of the Kingdom.

Symmetry is frequently used to designate the ideal center to which everything is subordinated. The bodies of the saints follow the architectural lines of the church's vaults, and they may undergo skillful modifications. As is needed, they may be elongated and stretched out toward the central point. Christ the Pantocrator in the dome of a church and the Virgin in the apse do not unbalance the whole in any way, for their grandeur is on God's transcendent scale. Unity in multiplicity and the catholicity of the Kingdom harmoniously adjust everything in the liturgical assembly.

The art of the icon handles space and time with total freedom. It places the elements of this world where it wants and leaves the audacity of modern painting far behind. The iconographer can reverse linear perspective and bring all times and places together in one single point. Everything spreads out beyond the space-prison in which the empirical world finds itself. The position of subjects and their grandeur depend on their proper value and the meaning. Each object is presented as a subject known in itself. As is needed, the persons in the background can be larger than those in the foreground. The flat, two-dimensional nature of the icon gives the iconographer the freedom to place each part according to its own function in the whole while safeguarding the natural rhythm of the composition.

Sculpture molds nudity and beautiful forms in three dimensions. In contrast to two-dimensional painting, it cannot as easily express the *other* dimension, that is, the dimension of transcendence, mystery, and infinity.

The miracle of Romanesque and Gothic sculpture is that it admirably expressed what could not be subordinated to the laws of weight; it transformed the tactile into visual and spiritualized stone. It is nonetheless undeniable that painting can better express the transcendence of heavenly space. In the Christian East, sculpture rapidly declined, and the icon eliminated the statue. In mosaics, the sparkling light reflected off the pieces of glass makes the whole work vibrate with life. We feel the pulsation of life in an atmosphere that has the depth of the heavens, when the mosaic background is blue, or the brilliance of the sun, when it is gold. Mosaics, frescoes, and icons allow us to see the beyond in a space penetrated by a silent mystery, a mystery which is nonetheless full of life and movement. Who has not felt the nearly intoxicating effects standing before the marvels of Ravenna?

The iconographer thus works on heavenly space and takes no account of the third dimension. He never uses chiaroscuro, the play of light and shadow, artificial depth, nor the tangible volume of sculpture. The golden background or the movement of the bodies as in Egyptian painting replaces these. A crowd is composed of heads having the same size but with several rows superimposed one on top of the other. This artistic device, isocephaly, is enough to give a proper sense of mass.

The artist organizes his composition in height not in depth and subordinates the whole work to the flat surface of the board or wall. This technique suppresses empty space *horror vacui*. Using all his talents, the iconographer installs the saints in the two dimensions of the board. The figures move with a surprising ease and slide, so to speak, along the surface on a vertical axis. Or perhaps they float on the surface and seem to flow out toward those who are looking at them. The artist finds the perfect relationship between the human forms and the free space which seems to be so light and airy. The bodies conserve only the minimum of their earthly form. They are thus tied to their point of departure, the earth, but also launch out toward the heavens.

On a flat surface, setting darker and lighter colors side by side gives the impression of distance. Red, for example, makes things seem closer together than does blue. Chronological time and order are not absolutes in themselves. Scenes may be placed side by side according to the interior order of "redeemed time." Episodes can be associated according to their meaning and spiritual requirements.

This helps us understand why scenes are never enclosed in walls. The action takes place outside the limits of time and space, that is, everywhere and in front of everyone. If it is necessary to indicate that the event took place somewhere inside, this is indicated in the background by a red veil hanging between the buildings. The icon is thus never a "window on nature" nor even on a specific place but rather an opening onto the beyond, a beyond that is bathed in the light of the Eight Day.

This way of representing events in an "open" form shows that everything is subordinated to everything and that everything is immanent to everything. To fully understand one feast icon, we must know how to read all the feast icons because one feast icon contains all the feasts. The Christmas icon, for example, speaks about all the events of the Lord's life, and we have to be able to grasp its particular message which also contains and refers to the total message.

The "academic" perspective is a product of the Renaissance. The optical cone set up between the object and the eye determines a vanishing point. The lines of the painting come together at this point which, for those looking at the work, is situated on the horizon line. The objects farther away seem to be smaller; everything is proportional in terms of distance, and this gives the illusion of depth. Ambrose Lorenzetti, Brunelleschi, Giotto, Duccio, Masaccio, and Uccello who was said to be "crazy for perspective," worked out this system and introduced it into their works. The notion of volume is everywhere present in their manner of treating heads, the folds of clothing, and other cloths. Theirs is a scientific and mathematical system for representing an object in space. It is a way of calculating the distance and the relative, but exact, height of objects in space.

Perspective is often reversed in icons. The lines move in a reversed direction, that is, the point of perspective is not behind the panel but in front of it. It is the iconographic commentary on the gospel *metanoia*. The effect is startling because the perspective originates in the person who is looking at the icon. The lines thus come together in the spectator and give the impression that the people in the icon are coming out to meet those who are looking on. The world of the icon is turned *toward man.* Iconic vision is opposed to the dual vision of our carnal eyes. In iconic vision, the eye of the heart perceives the redeemed space that dilates into infinity and where everything rediscovers its proper place. While in the dual vision of carnal sight, our eyes see space according to the vanishing point of fallen space where everything is lost in the distance. The vanishing point encloses and closes everything up while the "approaching" point of icons dilates and opens everything up. People in icons move from left to right, toward the East, in a natural direction, in the same way as writing.

Forms are adroitly made unusual and evoke a transfiguration in action, a world becoming "cosmos," the joyous beauty of the "new creature." Iconic forms bring the spiritual dimension and spiritual depth strikingly close. Plato's "prison of the soul," that is, the body, becomes a temple in an icon. The body is drawn lightly and instead of seeing it, we gets hints of its existence through the sober folds of the clothes. The near total dryness of the lines does not attract our attention to the human anatomy but allows us to sense the deified and heavenly body underneath. Even nudity in icons is shown like a glorious robe which does not uncover the flesh but rather reveals spiritual corporality. A saint is clothed with luminous space and with a pre-Fall nudity.

Ever since the Incarnation of the Word of God, everything has been dominated by the face, God's human face. An iconographer always begins with the head because it gives dimension and position to the body and orders the rest of the composition. Even cosmic elements often have a human face because man is the word of the world. The enlarged eyes and the fixed stare see the beyond. The face is centered on the gaze, that heavenly fire that illuminates from the inside; it is the spirit that looks at us. The thin lips are without any sensuality, either passions or gluttony. Their purpose is to sing praises, consume the eucharist, and give the kiss of peace. The elongated ears are for listening to silence. The nose is only a very thin arch. The forehead is wide and high; its slight deformation accentuates the predominance of contemplative thinking. The dark color of the faces does away with any carnal or naturalistic appearance.

The frontal position of the face does not distract the look by the psychological and dramatic style of its gesture and positioning. Profile interrupts communion, inaugurates a fading away, a flight, and quickly becomes absence. Face to face eye contact plunges the saint's gaze into the spectator's, welcomes it, and immediately establishes a bond of communion. "Let all mortal flesh keep silent;" the immobility of the saints' bodies, without ever being static, concentrates all the dynamism in the spirit-revealing face. This exterior immobility is very particular because it creates the striking impression that everything is concentrated on and looks inwardly. "We charge off again as we arrive," "the well of running water," "the immobile movement": the icon admirably illustrates these paradoxes of mystical language at the point where every word, every description comes to a halt and

is powerless. The material world seems to be quiet and concentrated in anxious waiting, waiting to hear the message. The look by itself expresses all the spiritual tension and then resolves it in transparency. Any uneasiness, worry, or feverish gesticulation disappears in the presence of this interior peace. Icons lets us see *homo cordis absconditus*, "the man hidden in the depths of the heart," about whom St. Peter speaks (1 Pe 3:4). In contrast, demons and sinners are painted in profile, so typical of fading away. They manifest the greatest agitation and are incapable of contemplation. Along the same lines, the narrative and anecdotal side is reduced to the strict minimum necessary to identify the event. Martyrs do not carry the instruments of their deaths; they are already above earthly history. They are present in that history but in a way different from their presence before martyrdom. All the historical realism is kept, however, when it becomes a symbol of its own numenal depth. A saint is already in the beyond, but all his earthly life vibrates in him with a dynamism that is stripped of everything unessential and is centered on that one thing necessary.

Iconographers are the great masters of drawing. The mystical sense in no way replaces the fully developed science of colors and forms. The contours are clear, pure, and extremely clean. Iconographers infinitely vary the line, but it remains maximally precise. Continuous line sketching associates itself with the rhythm. An intense black outline sets off and underlines the importance of the face. These artists were masters of composition as well as poets and singers of color. The radiant and exuberant colors are never dark nor dull; each one is carried to its extreme saturation and offers a full chromatic range of tints. Certain colors excepted (gold, purple and azure blue), most colors can change according to the theme, school, or the meaning of the composition. The colors are striking; they become sonorous and surprise us by their joyous density. They seem to ring like crystal glasses lightly struck by an invisible finger. Objects colored deep blue and burning red especially the red of a fire at its hottest mix with a radiation that opens up to the invisible. All the colors of the rainbow culminate in the pure gold of the brilliant noon-day sun and in the blinding white of Tabor.[195] Together they constitute a veritable mystical solar light. The physical heavens express the transcendent heavens of the divine energies. Pale blue, vermilion red, light green, pistachio, ultramarine, purple, or scarlet express various nuances that form a unity together. In their infinite play of colors, these tones reflect the divine light. The Transfiguration, the Resurrection, the Ascension shine with a gold called "assist," the color of the glorified Christ. This gold is painted with thin lines that weave a transparency. But where the humanity of Christ is brought to the foreground, where the kenosis which veils the divinity in the features of the servant is accentuated, there other colors are used to bring out the meaning. Each color contains a precise meaning; even if it is not immediately evident to everyone, this meaning reveals itself through prolonged contemplation.

The icons of the Divine Wisdom, like the morning sun, enlighten everything with a dazzling purple. The face and wings of St. John the Baptist of Novgorod reflect this color of fire, thus pointing to the Forerunner as the dawn that announces the Day of the Lord. Everything that represents the Kingdom and God's glory is covered with fine light lines of golden rain, living, hot, spiritualized gold, as though it were mobile. Blinding white angels "second lights" refract the Taboric light. At its zenith, the sun floods and penetrates everything with its fiery arrows. The brilliance of the beyond settles on all things and gives them an eternal meaning by the refraction of many colors and the golden sparkling of its light.

Through all these colors, the cosmic maternity, as a pure container, receives the Spirit's fiery flames. The light of the first day is transformed in the final harmony of the luminous city of the Last Day. The Holy Spirit, who is *the* Iconographer and Spirit of Beauty, turns all the great achievements of human culture, all of its icons, into the Icon of the Kingdom.

> To those who know and receive the visions in the forms and the figures that God himself has given and that the prophets have seen, to those who safeguard the tradition, both written and oral, delivered by the Apostles and the Fathers and who, for this reason, represent holy things in images and venerate them: to them all, memory eternal.[196]

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Apophaticism:[197]
The Ascending Way of the Icon

St. Gregory of Nyssa[198] spoke of the "innate movement of the soul that carries it toward the heights of spiritual beauty." St. Basil[199] also spoke of the "burning and innate desire for beauty." This feeling for beauty explains the very refined culture of the icon. It is right here, however, that the ascetic element of Orthodox spirituality seems to contradict this culture and to bring it into question.

In fact, Orthodoxy is mystically sober and quite allergic to all unnecessary imagery. It is also very resistant to any imagination, to all visual and auditory representations, to any "illusion" that seems to be a temptation to circumscribe God in figures and forms. The ascetic quest for the "passionless passion" purifies the mystical way and mercilessly eliminates every *phantasia*, apparition, visual or sense phenomena. St. Symeon said that ecstasy "is not for the perfect ones but for the novices."[200] John of Lycopolis[201] supported this point of view saying that "*la fama miraculorum* is not a spiritual phenomenon but rather a psychic one." "If you see a young novice rise up to heaven by his own will, catch him by the foot and throw him to the ground because such things are of no value to him."[202] St. Nilus the Sinaite counseled: "During prayer, do not try to discern any image or figure."[203] He thus stated in a nut shell the classical teaching of eastern Christian asceticism. Now, as contradictory as it may seem, it is Orthodoxy that created icon veneration, surrounded itself with images and symbols, and in a rich and complex fashion built up the visible aspect of the Church. We have here a real question to which Palamite hesychasm provides an answer. This is entirely appropriate since the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas constitutes the very heart of Orthodoxy; it accentuates the antinomical character inherent in eastern Christian thought. It is, therefore, quite possible that the lack of knowledge and misinformation about the icon in the Christian West is a result of a similar lack of knowledge and misinformation about Palamism.[204]

The icon is a powerful and methodical spiritual exercise program, a "guiding image." It is related to the experience of the great spiritual masters, the "theodacts," that is, "those taught by God."[205] At its heights, this experience transcends earthly bounds and moves out toward the indescribable and the unspeakable. It postulates a radical change in the human person called deification. Concerning the eye-witnesses to the Transfiguration, St. Gregory Palamas said that "the light had no beginning and no end; it remained uncircumscribed and imperceptible to the senses although it was contemplated by the apostles' eyes. By a transformation of their senses, the Lord's disciples *passed from the flesh to the Spirit*."[206] The Taboric light is not only the object of the vision, but it is also its condition:

> Whoever participates in the divine energies in a sense becomes light himself. He is united to the light, and with the light, he sees what remains hidden to those who do not have this grace. He thus goes beyond the physical senses and everything that is known [by the human mind] [207]

We are dealing here with the transmutation of man into light.[208] His physical vision as well is changed, seeing things with God's eye; man's whole being is associated with this vision. It is in fact God who looks at himself in us. In contrast to any sort of disincarnated mysticism, St. Gregory's doctrine underlines the fact that man as a living and indivisible whole, both spirit and spiritualized body, participates in the experience of divine things. The experience itself nonetheless remains inexpressible: "The realities of the future age do not have their own names nor can we directly name them. We can only have a certain *simple* knowledge of them, beyond every word, element, image, color, figure, or composed name."[209]

Man participates in the nature of God (2 Pe 1:4) in his own inconceivable way. The fact that God is inaccessible not only points up our inherent natural weakness as creatures but also the unfathomable depths of the Transcendent. God is living and free; that is why he is essentially mysterious by his very nature. Those who contemplate the divine light see God as Mystery. St. Gregory distilled the whole of Orthodox mystical theology into the distinction between God's essence, unknowable and radically transcendent, and his immanent energies through which we can really participate in him. The saints perceive God's existence without however knowing his essence. Speaking in iconographic terms, the energies can be understood as the ultimate icon of the inaccessible divine essence. They are the visible light of what is absolutely invisible. In contemplating God, we enter into the vision beyond every sensible form. *This is not the absence of form*, but rather the passage to what Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite called a *Hyper-icon*. Being immaterial and uncreated yet having been seen on Mount Tabor, this light surpasses the senses and the mind; it is the "mystery of the Eight Day." Using allusions, since all words are powerless in this case, St. Symeon the New Theologian suggests, rather than explains, the following:

When we reach perfection, *God comes to us in a certain image, but in an image of God*: God does not appear very much in figures or signs, but he manifests himself in his simplicity, formed out of the formless, incomprehensible, and ineffable light. I can say nothing more. Nonetheless, *he manifests himself very clearly.* He is perfectly recognizable. He speaks and listens in a manner that cannot be expressed. But what can I say about what cannot be spoken about. What the eye has not seen, what the ear has not heard, what the heart of man has never imagined: how can any of this be expressed by words? Although we have acquired and received all this inside ourselves, by a gift from God, we cannot in any way measure it by the mind or even express it in words.[210]

St. Maximus the Confessor said that we enter into the "place where we know without images or things, a place where intelligence becomes immaterial."[211]

It is very important to understand that apophatic theology, unlike agnosticism, is a particular way of "knowing through nonknowing." It is the divine darkness conceived as a positive experience of God as the Existing One. Radical *metanoia*, the turning of the intellect up-side-down, the apophatic way limits nothing, for it goes beyond every limit toward the fullness of mystical union. Contemplation is therefore placed beyond discourse. The suspension of all cognitive, cataphatic activity culminates in *hesychia*, that is, the silent inner concentration, the gathering together of one's inner forces where "peace goes beyond all peace."

The icon rightly "sanctifies the eyes of those who see and raises the intelligence to mystical theognosia."[212] *Divino-modo* illumination, being invisible, inaudible, and unspeakable, finds its place above all discourse. At its final stage, contemplation is unitive, ineffable, and beyond human language; it is a "generator of unity."[213] Iconology explains this very well. The icon is a symbolico-personal representation which invites us to transcend the symbol and to enter into communion with the person represented and to participate in the indescribable. The icon is a road we must travel on in order to transcend it. We are not speaking of suppressing it, but of discovering its transcendent dimension. In the icon, we meet the Person and are introduced into the experience of the Presence stripped of all empirical forms.

The pure negative way is a way of thinking about everything that is different from God. It is not sufficient in itself, for God is also above all negation; he is unknowable by nature and mysterious in his essence. This is why his presence, "generator of unity," cannot be expressed in positive nor in negative terms. It is simply beyond. "God is formed by the light without form. He comes to us clothed in a certain image but an image of God. He shows himself in his simplicity."

The icon therefore does not lead us to the absence of images pure and simple. It leads rather above and beyond the image toward the indescribable *Hyper-icon*; this is its apophatic character, that is, *iconographic apophaticism.* The icon is the last arrow of human *eros* shot at the heart of the Mystery. St. Gregory Palamas said that "whoever contemplates the divine light, contemplates the mystery in God." After having reached this threshold, "personified Beauty," the divine Mystagog, the Holy Spirit contemplates God's light with us and in us. Human words here can only speak in silence. In order to contemplate the "light without evening," the evening must disappear. To the iconic arrow, the divine *Eros* answers with its burning but unspeakable closeness. Tabor shines but only silence discovers it.

The cataphatic way by itself contains a possible sarcolatry, that is, a false worship of the flesh. The apophatic way by itself could make the icon mute and empty. Apophatic theology is not simply a *no*. Its negation does away with "idols." It has its own *yes* even though it is transcendent and

unformulatable, going beyond absolutely every positive affirmation. In the light of this theological approach, the icon appears like the last flash of lightening on God's mystery. When in the liturgy we say "Our Father who art *in heaven*," we are invoking the One who is *above the heavens*, the *epouranion* God. In the same way, the icon introduces us to what is *above* the icon.

The world as it is cut off from its heavenly and iconic root has no firm and solidly grounded being. There is only one thing that is not the icon of something, and that is nothingness, that absolute metaphysical emptiness. In contrast, the whole visible creation is an "image-made-by-God's-hand," an image that tells of all his marvelous works. As psychology is nonexistent without the soul and is the greatest proof of the soul's existence and as every liturgy, every invocation (epiclesis) is already God's answer and the manifestation of his Presence, so also the icon is the shining proof of the Kingdom. *The Taboric light raises the icon to the level of an iconographic argument for the existence of God.* In the rarefied air of the theological heights, this argument is more than convincing; it is irresistible, but only for those who respond to the Gospel's exhortation: "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear "

From the circle of silence above the abyss that encircles the Father, a voice says: I am he who exists. This name hides more than it reveals, and its grace is to be the icon in which God is present: "You are the One who is inaccessible and yet unspeakably close."

The world is doubtful because it is *relative*; God is absolutely certain because he is *absolute.* To be relative is to exist in relation to what is not relative. It is uniquely in this iconographic relation to the Absolute that the world finds its own reality as icon, similitude, and likeness. Man could never have invented God; it is impossible to go toward God without having already gone out from him. Man can think about God because he is already inside God's thought; God is already thinking of himself inside man. Man could never have invented the icon either. Man aspires to Beauty because he is already bathed in its light; in his very essence, man is thirsty for Beauty and it image.

At the threshold of his existence, man is struck, like a coin, in the divine effigy. Man the image is on a quest for his divine Original; he hungers after his Archetype. The image orients man and breaks his solitude: "Wherever man is alone, I am with him."[214] The content of our thought about God (his drawn Name, the icon) is not simply a thought out nor imaged content. It is rather an encounter, an immediate presence that generates unity. If man cannot yet say anything *about* God, he can nonetheless say "*God,* you are Father "

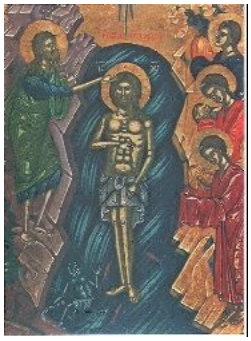
Proof and certitude, in the meaning of the pascal Memorial, come from revelation. For every attentive mind, God's presence precedes every question and by that very fact suppresses the question. This is why the Gospel never stops saying: "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear." This saying most certainly assumes another saying: "Those who have eyes to see, let them see." The proof is the blinding light that comes from him who is present, and that proof is the icon. The icon only reflects; it is the sketched Name; it pronounces that name; it evokes and invokes; and it offers itself as the meeting place where divine Beauty comes down to meet us.

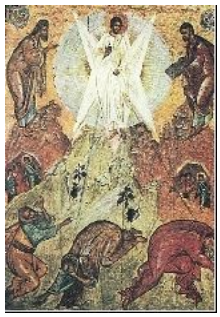
"In your holy icons, we contemplate the heavenly tabernacles, and we rejoice with a sacred joy." Joy because the Bible opens with the saying "Let there be light," and it says to us "Let the Holy Spirit come." The Bible closes with the vision of the heavenly city and says to us "Let Beauty be." The human heart rejoices because Beauty, that is "grace upon grace," transcends the justice of the Judge toward the merciful Beauty of the divine Lover of Man. The icon of the Deisis the mystical wedding of the Lamb is like a fiery triptych that opens its panels onto the Father's House and onto his Banquet of Joy, the Joy of Beauty because it is the Joy of eternal Truth.

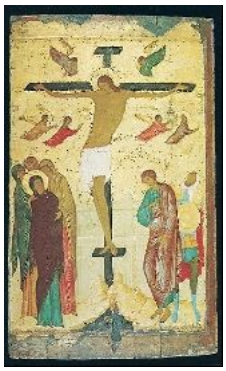
Section IV

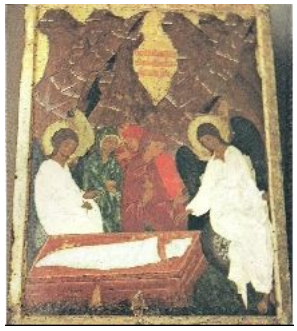
A Theology of Vision

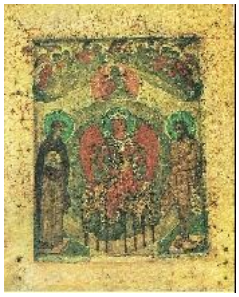
LIST OF COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS











CHAPTER ONE

Andrei Rublev's
Icon of the Holy Trinity

Introduction:

Between being and nothingness, there is no other principle of existence than the trinitarian principle. It is the unshakable foundation that unites the individual person and the community, giving a final meaning to everything. Human thought receives the Revelation and crucifies itself in order to be reborn in the trisolar light of absolute truth. The image of God, both one and three, is the unique standard of all existence. This is why the Christian people are called to reproduce in their lives the divine reality. St. Basil said that "man has received the order to become God by grace"; St. Gregory of Nyssa said that Christianity is an "imitation of the divine nature." The absolute Church of three divine persons is the guiding image of the earthly Church of men, a community of mutual love, a unity in multiplicity, a unity of all human persons in a single nature recapitulated in Christ.

The dogma of the Trinity says that there are three persons (hypostases) and one single nature or essence (ousia). The three consubstantial persons are the basis of absolute unity and absolute diversity. They are united not to melt together but to mutually contain each other. Each person is a unique way of containing the identical essence, of receiving that essence from the others, of giving it to the others, and thus of being the foundation of the others.

According to the patristic saying, "There is only one God because there is only one Father." In an eternal movement of love, the Father-Source is the foundation principle of the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit; he gives them what they are. St. Gregory Nazianzus said that "the monad begins to move because of its richness; the dyad is reached and gone beyond and the triad becomes stable in its own fullness." God is identically monad and triad but is beyond number; the divine Triad is "non-quantifiable." The relations of origin are also relations of diversity which both hide and point to the unspeakable mystery of the persons.

One is the number of solitude; two is the number that separates, and three is the number that goes beyond separation. The one and the multiple are brought together and circumscribed in the Trinity. This is the ineffable order in the Divinity where each person is in the others. "In three suns each one contained in the other, there is only one light by intimate co-penetration." St. Gregory Palamas said that "the Holy Spirit is the eternal joy of the Father and of the Son where the three rejoice together." St. Gregory Nazianzus wanted to be "wherever is found the Trinity and the concentrated brilliance of its splendor the Trinity even its indistinct shadows fill me with emotion "

St. Sergius of Radonezh

St. Sergius of Radonezh, 1313-1392, left no theological treatise, but his whole life was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. This divine mystery was the object of his endless contemplation; it flowed into him and turned him into incarnated peace, a peace which very visibly radiated from him for everyone. He dedicated his church to the Holy Trinity, and in his immediate circle of monks, as well as in the political arena, he tried to reproduce a unity that was the image of the Trinity. We can even say that he assembled the whole of contemporary Russia around his church and God's Name so that men "through the contemplation of the Holy Trinity would be able to conquer the divisive hatred of the world." In the memory of the Russian people, St. Sergius remains their heavenly protector. He gives them strength and is the very expression of the trinitarian mystery, of its Light and its Unity.

Seventeen years after his death, St. Sergius' disciple, St. Nicon, ordered an icon of the Holy Trinity from the famous iconographer Andrei Rublev; this icon was to be in memory of St. Sergius.

He had Rublev and his faithful companion Daniel paint the iconostase of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity. On feast days when they did not work, Andrei and Daniel "used to sit in front of the divine and venerable icons and look at them without distraction. They constantly elevated their spirits and their thoughts to the immaterial and divine light " It is this light that Andrei Rublev was able to transmit in his famous icon. He recreated the very rhythm of trinitarian life. He also was able to show its united diversity and the movement of love that identifies the persons without confusing them. Rublev seemed to breathe the air of eternity and to live in the "space of the divine heart." He was thus able to become the amazing singer of Love. And so we have the whole message of St. Sergius. In colors and in light, we have his living prayer as it stands before us. This prayer goes back to Christ's priestly prayer to which the three angels of the icon invisibly give flight: "that all may be one so that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them "

An Interpretation of Rublev's Icon

In 1515, the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow had just been decorated with splendid icons done by the students of the great master Rublev. When the metropolitan, the bishops, and the faithful entered, they all cried out together "In truth, the heavens have opened up, and we see God's splendor." This reaction is quite understandable as we stand before the icon of icons, the Holy Trinity icon painted in 1425 by the monk Andrei Rublev. Some 150 years later, the Council of 100 Chapters elevated it to the rank of a model for iconography in general and for all representations of the Trinity in particular.

In 1904, the restoration commission took off the metallic ornaments. After cleaning off the many later layers, the members of the commission were literally bowled over by the brilliance of Rublev's original work. We can say without any fear of being contradicted that nowhere in the world is there anything like it from the point of view of theological synthesis, symbolic richness, and artistic beauty.

We can distinguish three levels set on top of each other. The first one is the Biblical story of the visit of the three pilgrims to Abraham (Gn 18:1-15). The liturgical commentary explains it this way: "Blessed Abraham, you saw them, and you received the Divinity, one and three." The absence of Abraham and Sarah invites us to penetrate deeper into the icon and to pass over to the second level, that of the divine economy. The three heavenly pilgrims form the "Eternal Council." The landscape also changes its meaning. Abraham's tent becomes the temple-palace. The oak of Mamre becomes the tree of life. The cosmos is represented by a schematized cup in nature, a delicate sign of its presence. The calf offered as food takes up the space in the eucharistic cup.

The three angels, light and svelte, are painted with very elongated bodies, fourteen times the size of the head against seven times for normal dimensions. The angels' wings, as well as the schematic way of treating the countryside, give the immediate impression of being immaterial and weightless. Inversed perspective abolishes distance and depth in which everything disappears at the horizon. The opposite effect is of course to bring the figures close up and to show that God is here and everywhere. The lively lightness of the whole shows the secret of Rublev's genius and constitutes a winged vision.

The three persons are in conversation, possibly about a text of St. John: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Now the Word of God is always an act, and here it takes on the sacrificial form of the cup.

The third level, the intradivine, is only hinted at since it is transcendent and inaccessible. It is nonetheless present in that the economy of salvation derives from God's interior life.

God is love in himself, in his triune essence, and his love for the world is only the reflection of his trinitarian love. God's gift of himself is never a lack or loss of anything; it is rather the expression of the superabundance of his love. This gift of himself is represented by the cup. The angels are grouped around the divine food. Now the latest cleaning of the icon brought to light the contents of the cup. A later over-painting represented a bunch of grapes in the cup and thus hid the initial drawing, that of the Lamb who links this heavenly meal to the passage in Revelations: the Lamb has been slain from before the foundations of the world. Love, sacrifice, and immolation preceded the act by which the world was created and are the source of that creation.

The three angels are at rest. It is the supreme peace of being in oneself. This rest is however "intoxicating," for it is an authentic ecstasy, that is, the "going outside of oneself." And the paradox is already contained in this ecstasy-enstasy which remains in its own depth. St. Gregory of Nyssa pointed out this mystery when he said that "the greatest paradox is that stability and movement are the same thing."

The movement starts with the left foot of the angel at the right and continues through his inclined head. It passes through the middle angel and irresistibly pulls the cosmos along with it: the rock and the tree. The movement terminates in the vertical position of the angel on the left where it enters into a resting position as in a container. Along side this circular movement, whose completion orders the whole work, like eternity gives order to time, we have the vertical movement of the temple and of the scepters. These designate the major vertical lines as well as the aspiration of the earthly for the heavenly, where all upward movement finds its completion.

This vision of God radiates the transcendent truth of the trinitarian dogma. Rublev's way of painting the angels shows us their unity and equality; one angel could be substituted for another. The difference comes from the personal attitude of each one towards the others, and yet there is no repetition or confusion. The glowing gold on icons always designates the divine nature, its superabundance. The angels' extended wings envelop and cover everything. The interior outlines of the wings, being a tender blue, put the accent on the unity and the heavenly character of the one divine nature. One single God and three perfectly equal persons, this is what the identical scepters express; they are signs of royal power with which each angel is endowed.

The angels' perfect equality is so strongly expressed that there is no rule for defining which divine person is represented by which angel. There is no question about the angel on the right; it represents the Holy Spirit. The question concerns the central angel. Does he represent the Father or the Son? Answering this question, of course, fixes the identity of the angel on the left.

We have however an important testimony from St. Stephen of Perm, an elder contemporary of Rublev and a friend of St. Sergius. In his mission to the Zyrianes who inhabited the vast regions of Great Permia, going up to the Urals, St. Stephen carried with him an icon of the Trinity very similar to the one Rublev painted. Around each angel, we can read an inscription in the Zyrian language: "The angel on the left carries the name *Py*, Son, and the angel on the right *Puiltos*, Holy Spirit, and the middle angel, *Ai*, Father."

We follow this tradition in our commentary. In an excellent study on Rublev's art, N. Demine (Moscow, 1963, in Russian) noted that "for the needs of his mission, Stephen of Perm tried to make the meaning of the icons as clear as possible. The position of the angels on his icon are identical to Rublev's icon and, most surely, their meaning is also identical" (p. 52).

Each person has his sign indicated by the scepters which direct our attention toward these emblems. Behind the Father, we see the three of life, the source. According to St. Isaac, "the tree of life is the trinitarian love from which Adam fell." The scepter of Christ shows the house, the Church or the Body of Christ. The Spirit stands in front of the background of the "scarped rocks," that is, the mountain, the upper room, Tabor, elevation, ecstasy, the breath of spaces and prophetic heights.

Geometric Forms

The following geometric forms make up the composition: the rectangle, the cross, the triangle, and the circle. They structure the image from within, and we must discover them if we want to fully understand the icon. According to the ideas of the time, the earth was octagonal, and the rectangle we see on the lower part of the table.[215] is the hieroglyph of the earth. The upper part of the table is also rectangular, and we see in it the four corners of the earth, the four points of the compass. According to the Fathers of the Church, the number 4 was symbolic of the fullness of the four gospels. Nothing could be added to or subtracted from that fullness. The number 4 was also the sign of the Word's universality. This upper part of the altar-table represents the Bible offering the cup, the fruit of the Word. If we extend the line of the tree of life, found behind the central angel, it descends through the table and sinks its roots into the rectangle of the earth. The tree of life is announced by the Word and is fed by the contents of the cup. We see here the explanation of its mystery, that is, why the tree bore the fruit of eternal life and why it was the tree of life. On Christmas Eve, the Church sings "the angel with the flaming sword withdraws from the tree of life" because its fruit is now given in the eucharist.

The angels' hands converge toward the sign of the earth which is the place where God's love is put to work. The world is inside God as a being of a different nature but is included in the sacred circle of "the Father's communion." The world follows the circular movement upward into heaven in the form of the rock. For the world, this circular movement comes to rest in the palace-temple. This temple is like the extension of the Christ-Angel, of his Incarnation. It is his cosmic body, the Church, the bride of the Lamb united to him "without separation or confusion." The temple remains in the immobility of the Great Sabbath rest, the end point of the trinitarian movement. The cycle of the cosmic liturgy is closed. We have here the eschatological vision of the New Jerusalem. The golden part of the temple, which protrudes upward like a protective shield symbolizes the maternal protection of the Mother of God and of the priesthood of the saints. It is an image of the Virgin's veil, the *Pokrov*.

According to tradition, the wood of the Cross was taken from the tree of life. The tree behind the central angel is the invisible, but the most obvious, axis of the composition. The halo, that luminous circle around the Father's head, the cup, and the sign of the earth are all found on the same vertical line which divides the icon in two. This vertical line crosses the horizontal line that unites the luminous circles, the halos, of the side angels. A cross is thus formed and inscribed in the sacred circle of the divine life; it is the living axis of the trinitarian love. "The Father is love which crucifies; the Son is love crucified; and the Holy Spirit is the cross of love, its invincible power." The movement goes through the branches of the cross which like Christ's extended arms embrace the whole universe: "When I will be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to me" (Jn 12:32). The Son and the Spirit are the two hands of the Father. If we connect the ends of the table to the point just above the head of the central angel, we see that the angels are set neatly in an equilateral triangle. This signifies the unity and the equality of the Trinity whose summit is the *pegaia theotes*, that is, the Father. And finally, the line following the exterior contours of the three angels forms a perfect circle, the sign of God's eternity. The center of this circle is in the hand of the Father, the Pantocrator.

Rublev differs from the Italian painters who inscribed the image in the circle. For Rublev, the angels themselves constitute the circle. On the other hand, the outlines of the various objects (thrones, footrests, mountain) form an octagon which is the symbol of the Eighth Day. The interior contours of the side angels form a chalice, the key to the mystery of the icon. The distribution of the masses, the proportions, and the measurements are subordinated in a nearly perfect fashion to a system of balanced relations. But inside this framework, Rublev manifested great freedom and diversity of methods in order to accentuate as needed the ideological meaning. For example, the chalice and the Father's hand are slightly off center toward the lower right corner while the head is slightly to the left of the vertical axis. The effect is inspiringly calculated. These deviations are nearly imperceptible due to the folds of the clothing which fall in cascade fashion from the left shoulder. They carry our attention toward the hand that is blessing the cup, toward the ideological center of the composition. This center is reinforced and brought out by all the straight lines and the altar.

The angels' feet only barely touch the footrests whose perspective is inversed. This gives the impression of lightness and weightlessness. The whole airy ensemble rises up to heaven. We feel as though we are in what St. Macarius called "the pastures of the heart," in the limitless spaces of God's heart.

The angels are presented in three-quarter profile. The width of the shoulders is thus diminished, and the supple and plastic line follows the elongated silhouettes sliding in a heavenly elegance. In the same way, the faces are slightly turned and take on the same elongated form. The straight lines express the element of force. They harmonize with the rounded lines and captivate us with their purely musical rhythm. They have a youthful freshness which sings the grace of the force contained in them. The contours express the movement much more than do the volumes. The fullness of the clothing allows us to sense the light bodies while the abundant hair underlines, with an antique purity, the faces' fragility and delicateness.

The Angels' Attitudes

The attitude of the Father has something of the monumental about it. It radiates a hieratic peace, an immobility, pure act, the accomplished, the static principle of eternity. But at the same time and in striking contrast, the growing wave of the right arm's movement and its powerful curve which harmonizes with the same power in the tilt of the neck and the head express great dynamism. The

ineffable mystery of God is in this synthesis of immobility and movement: the Absolute of the philosophers, the pure Act of the theologians, and the living God of the Bible, "Our Father who art in heaven."

God's power, as we confess in the creed "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty," is the power of the Father's love which is expressed in the look of the middle angel. He is Love, and he can therefore only reveal himself in communion and can only be known as communion. "No one comes to the Father except by me" (Jn 14:6); and again, "No one can come to me except the Father draws him (Jn 6:44). This is in no way a narrowness or exclusivity of the gospel but rather the most overwhelming revelation of the very nature of love itself. We can have no knowledge of God outside of the communion between man and God. This communion is always trinitarian and initiates us into the communion between the Father and the Son. It makes us understand why the Father never reveals himself directly. He is the Source, and precisely because of this, he is Silence. He reveals himself eternally, but it is always the dyad of the Son and the Holy Spirit that reveal him. The icon shows this communion; its living center is the cup.

The lines on the right side of the central angel widen as they come nearer to the angel on the left. In the symbolic language of lines, convex curves always designate expression, the word, spatial unfolding, and revelation. On the other hand, concaved curves signify obedience, attention, abnegation and receptivity. The Father is turned toward the Son. He speaks. The movement which extends through out his being is ecstasy. He expresses himself fully in the Son: "The Father is in me. Everything that the Father possesses is mine."

The Son listens, the parables of his clothing express the supreme attention, self renunciation. He also renounces himself in order to be nothing but the Word of his Father: "The words that I say to you I do not say of my own accord. The Father who dwells in me is the one who accomplishes his own works." His right hand reproduces the Father's gesture: blessing. The two fingers which stand out on the white background of the table-Bible announce the way of salvation-union in the two-natured Christ, that is, the introduction of the human into the communion of the Father.

The falling hand of the angel on the right indicates the direction of the blessing, that is, toward the world. It appears to cover, to protect, and to "hover," using the word in the biblical story of creation. Above the rectangle of the world, this hand resembles the extended wings of the pure dove.

The gentle lines of the angel on the right have something of the material about them.[216] This angel is the Comforter, but he is also the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Life. He is the one who gives life and in whom all things have their origin. He is the third element of the divine Love, the Spirit of Love. His position is slightly different from that of the two other angels. By his tilt and the movement of his whole being, he is in the middle of the Father and the Son: he is the Spirit of communion and of circumincession. This is clearly shown by the very remarkable fact that the movement starts from him. It is in his breath that the Father descends toward the Son, that the Son receives his Father, and that the Word rings out. As St. John of Damascus said, "By the Holy Spirit, we recognize Christ, the Son of God, and by the Son we contemplate the Father." At Epiphany, the Father moves toward the Son in the movement of the Dove.

With an unspeakable sadness, which is the divine dimension of *agape*, the Father leans his head toward the Son. It seems that he is speaking of the sacrificed Lamb whose sacrifice culminates in the chalice that he is blessing. The vertical position of the Son expresses his attention, and his face seems to have the shadow of the cross on it. He is pensive and expresses his agreement by the same gesture of blessing. In its bottomless depth, the Father's look contemplates the unique way of salvation, and the hardly noticeable elevation of the Son's look expresses his consent. The Holy Spirit leans toward the Father. He is plunged into the contemplation of the mystery. His arm extended toward the world designates the descending movement, Pentecost, and the "revealing force." He seems already to be resting on the Son in his earthly mission. His attitude of submission is already the accomplishment of the gospel.

The Colors

Iconographic colors possess their own language. In Rublev's works, they attain an unequaled richness. They are in full musical harmony with the whole range of subtle nuances which are reflected in every detail of the composition. However, there are no polychrome effects, for nothing

troubles the depth of the divine silence and concentration. There are no shadows. No element reflects natural light but rather emits its own light, a light that wells up from secret roots. The density of the colors on the central angel is increased by the contrast with the white table. This density is reflected also in the silky luster of the two other angels' clothing.

Deep purple (divine love), dense blue (heavenly truth), and the glowing gold of the angels' wings (divine abundance) harmonize perfectly. This harmony is found and perpetuated in a softened tonality, like a nuanced revelation, an initiation by degrees: light rose and lilac on the left and soft blue and silver green on the right. The gold on the thrones, the divine assist, speaks of the superabundance of the trinitarian life. The blue, called "Rublev's blue," expresses the heavenly color of the Trinity and of Paradise. Becoming brighter and clearer, this blue is like the heavenly light of the icon itself.

The Father is thus inaccessible in the density of his colors, in the darkness of his light but reveals himself softened, accessible in the luminous cloud of the Son and the Holy Spirit. From a distance, this composition gives the impression of a red and blue flame. Everything takes flame in the brilliant air of the noonday sun: "Whoever is near me is near fire."

The Father's hand holds the beginning and the end; it is extended over the cup. The Lamb sacrificed from before the foundations of the world and the Lamb-Temple of the New Jerusalem, the Mystical Supper of Christ and his promise to drink of the fruit of the vine in the Father's Kingdom, all this incorporates time into eternity. The cup shines in the blinding whiteness of the Word which reflects all the colors of Truth. This is the Radiance of the divine heart, the reciprocal gift of the three divine Persons.

We hear a powerful appeal from this icon: "Be one as I and my Father are one." Man is in the image of the trinitarian God. Man's ultimate truth is inscribed in his nature of Church-Communion. All men are called to unite around one and the same cup, to rise up to the level of the divine heart, and to take part in the messianic meal, to become one single Temple-Lamb. "It is by eternal life, the spirit, that they know you, the only true God and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ."

The vision ends on this eschatological note: it is an anticipation of the Kingdom of Heaven bathed in the light which is not of this world, bathed in pure disinterested joy, a divine joy. This is all true by the simple fact that the Trinity exists, that we are loved, and that everything is grace. Astonishment wells up in the soul but falls silent. Mysteries never speak about the summit; silence alone can discover it.

CHAPTER TWO

The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir

I. Mariological Preface

According to St. John of Damascus, "the only name of the Theotokos is *the Mother of God*; this name contains the entire mystery of the economy of salvation."[217] The analogy between Eve, Mary, and the Church goes back to St. Irenæus,[218] and ever since, the Fathers have seen Mary as the Woman at enmity with the Serpent, the Woman robed in the Sun, the image of the Wisdom of God in its foundation principle, that is, the integrity and chastity of being. If the Holy Spirit personalizes divine holiness,[219] then the Virgin personalizes human holiness. The virginal structure of Mary's being and her very presence as "the Most-Pure," are things the demonic forces can simply not endure. Ontologically linked to the Holy Spirit, Mary appears as Living Consolation. She is the New Eve-Life who safeguards and protects every creature and thus becomes a figure of the Church in her maternal protection.

The consecration of the Virgin to the life of the Temple, according to the ancient tradition, and especially her unique love for God reached such a depth and intensity in her that the conception of the Word came in her as a divine response to the depth of her prayer life, to her transparency to the energies of the Spirit.

"Crown of the dogmas," Mary projects the light of the trinitarian mystery as it is reflected in human beings: "You gave birth to the Son without a human father, the Son who was born of the Father without a mother."[220] To the Father's fatherhood without a mother on the divine level corresponds the Theotokos' motherhood without a father on the human level, and this motherhood is a figure of the maternal virginity of the Church. St. Cyprian says that "no one can have God as his Father if he does not have the Church as his mother."[221] Mary expresses God's love for man, his philanthropy.

The Virgin was preserved from all impurity. Evil was rendered inoperative in her by the successive purifications of the forefathers, by the special action of the Holy Spirit, and by her freely accepted vocation. The synthesis of patristic thought underlines this freedom of her human response since man could not be saved without the free agreement of his own will. On this point Nicholas Cabasilas said:

> The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father, of his Virtue, and of his Spirit, but also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the Most-Pure One, without the agreement of her faith, this great project would have been as impossible as without the intervention of the three divine persons themselves. God took Mary for his Mother only after having instructed her and convinced her; he was thus able to take flesh from her because she freely chose to give it to him. In the same way that God wanted to become incarnate, he wanted his Mother to bear him freely, of her own free will.[222]

In its confession of the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, Orthodoxy does not accept the notion of exemption from original sin that is the foundation of the [Roman Catholic] dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This dogma sets the Virgin apart, removes her from the common destiny of mankind, and shows that a liberation from original sin was possible before the Cross and thus only by grace. Now God does not act *on man* but *in man*. He does not act on the Virgin by a *superadditum* gift, but he operates *from inside* the synergy between the Spirit and the holiness of the "righteous ancestors of God." Grace does not force or coerce nature's order. Jesus was able to take flesh because the humanity in Mary gave him that possibility. She did not participate in Redemption but in the Incarnation. In her, all have said "Yes, Lord, come!" At the time of the apparitions at Lourdes, the Virgin is supposed to have said that "I am the Immaculate Conception." But since the

event took place on the Annunciation, March 25, 1858, the Orthodox Church understands this saying as applying to the immaculate conception *of the Word* by his Mother. If the term *immaculate conception* is applied to the Virgin's birth, the Mother of God is herself diminished because she is transformed into a "predestined instrument of grace." The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception diminishes her humanity and removes from her the grandeur of being the one who, in the achievement of her humility and purity, freely pronounced the *fiat* for herself and for all humanity.

To the *fiat* of the Creator answers the *fiat* of the creature: "Here I am; I am the servant of the Lord." The Angel Gabriel is like a question that God addresses to man's liberty: "Do you really want to be saved and receive the Savior?" The evil One is disarmed by the action of the Spirit through the line of the "forefathers" and by the purity of her who is *gratia plena*. Sin remains present and capable of acting but has become inoperative.

At the Christmas Eve liturgy, the Church sings, "What shall we offer, O Christ the heavens offer you the angels; the earth brings you its gifts, but we men offer you a Virgin Mother." It is quite obvious that Mary is not simply "one woman among other women," but she is Woman restored in her maternal virginity. In the Virgin, all of humanity gives birth to God. This is why Mary is the New Eve-Life. Her maternal protection, which covered the Child Jesus, now covers the universe and every human being. Jesus' words from the Cross to his mother, "Woman, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother," are the foundation of her dignity as maternal intercessor.

In the gospel story (Lk 8:19-21), the accent is put not on the Virgin but rather on every man: "Whoever does the will of God is my mother." This saying means that every man is given the grace of giving birth to Christ in his soul, of identifying himself with the Theotokos, according to a spiritual analogy.

The Virgin leads humanity, and everyone follows her. She is the first to lead humanity through the death that her Son has rendered powerless. This is why at the moment of death, the Church makes reference to her protection in this prayer: "In falling asleep, you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos." The Dormition closes the doors of death; the seal of the Virgin is placed on nothingness which is sealed above by the God-Man and below by Mary, the first resurrected and deified "new creature." The mystery of the Church is expressed in the divine perfection of Christ and in the human perfection of his Mother. The liturgical texts exalt her fullness which has become the "borderline between the created and the uncreated": "O Faithful, let us hymn her who is the Glory of the universe, the Gate of Heaven, the Virgin Mary. She is the flower of the human race and the One who gave birth to God "; "Mother of Life, you gave birth to joy and happiness which dry the tears of sin"; "You fill every creature with joy."

According to the Fathers, the phrase in the creed, "born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary," also applies to the mystery of the second birth of every believer who is born *ex fide et Spiritu Sancto*, for the faith of every Christian is enrooted in the universal value of the *fiat* of the Virgin. The Annunciation, also called the "Feast of the Root," inaugurates the economy of salvation and itself goes back to its "mariological root." Mariology thus is an organic part of Christology. This is why the Mother of God is nearly always shown in icons with her Son, the Child Jesus.

II. Interpretation

According to the historical chronicle, the Vladimir icon was brought from Constantinople to Russia in about 1131. It was painted by a Greek artist no doubt shortly before it was brought to Kiev. It obviously belongs to the Byzantine art of the Macedonian period. The execution manifests a surprising mastery of the art and witnesses to the refined taste of the inspired but unknown iconographer. In 1155, the icon was transferred from Kiev to Vladimir and got its name from this city. It is famous for its miraculous interventions and has escaped from several fires and Tartar attacks. After 1395, the icon was taken to Moscow and was present at every major political event of the country as a veritable national and sacred treasure.

This icon is a *Hodighitria* type, "She who shows the way," and represents the christological dogma by showing Mary presenting her Son, He who is the way. She carries the Child on her left arm; he is blessing. With her right hand, Mary points to the Savior. In another type of icon with Mary and the Child, the *Eleousa*, the Mother of Tenderness holds the child close and accentuates the maternal relation with her son. The Vladimir icon combines the two.

> Wanting to create an image of absolute beauty and clearly show the power of his art to angels and men, God made Mary very beautiful. He united in her the partial beauties which he distributed to other creatures and made her the common ornament of all creatures, visible and invisible. Or rather, he made of her a mixture of all the perfections, divine, angelic, and human. Hers was a sublime beauty making both worlds beautiful. She rose up from the earth to the heavens going beyond even the heavenly heights [223]

Only the Vladimir icon expresses so well these inspired words of St. Gregory Palamas. It attains one of the heights of iconographic art by its sublime perfection and purity of style. It is difficult to imagine anything that could surpass it.

The Vladimir icon is the direct opposite of the type of Madonna painted by Raphael. Its beauty is beyond every earthly canon. Mary's face is full of heavenly majesty, woven in the transcendent features of the new and totally deified creature, but at the same time it carries all that is human. And here is the miracle. Whoever has seen this icon, especially the original, can never forget her look. As "his mother kept all her Son's sayings in her heart" (Lk 2:51), whoever sees this icon keeps the vision hidden in his heart forever, like the "pearl" the gospel speaks about.

As for Christ in the icon, he is far from the touching naïveté of the *bambino Gésu.* He is also the Word and is always dressed in adult clothing, a tunic and coat, that is *hymation*; only his size indicates that he is a child. His serious and majestic face reflects the Wisdom of God. His clothing is completely woven with the ethereal golden thread (assist), that brilliance of the never setting sun which is the color of his divine dignity.

The center of the composition is found at the level of the Virgin's heart and also in Christ's powerful neck, called "breath," which symbolizes the breath of the Holy Spirit resting on the Word.

Mary wears the *maphorion* over her dress; this *maphorion* encircles her head and is often called *Pokrov*, veil. It has a precious golden border and is ornamented with three stars, one above the forehead[224] and two others on the shoulders. These are the signs of her perpetual virginity.

The composition has the form of a triangle inscribed in an elongated rectangle representing the mystery of the Trinity inscribed in the being of the world. The top of the triangle is slightly moved toward the right. This introduces a certain freedom and living suppleness. Mary's right shoulder meshes with the line of Christ's back in studied contrast with Mary's raised left shoulder which breaks all monotony of the outline.

Mary's face is elongated, her nose long and pointed, her mouth thin and narrow, her eyes big and dark under arched eyelashes. The eyebrows are slightly raised with folds between them. The fixed stare of the eyes looks off into eternity and gives the face the expression of a dense and gripping affliction. The corners of the mouth reinforce this sadness. The shadows of the eyelashes make the pupils appear darker, and the eyes seem to be plunged into an unfathomable depth, inaccessible to the look of the spectator. Christ's eyes seem to be almost at the level of the facial skin, and this makes them wide open; his mouth is full and large.

The Virgin carries the child on her right arm, and her left hand touches him very lightly; it rather points him out to the onlooking faithful. Christ presses his face affectionately against his mother's and is completely absorbed in the movement of tenderness and consolation. His attention, attuned to Mary's state of mind, is very visible in the focused movement of his eyes and makes us think of another icon, the Burial of Christ: "Do not cry for me, O Mother "

Christ has a reassuring caress for his mother. His right hand holds her *maphorion*, while the left hand is tenderly placed on her neck. Mary is gripped by the shadow of Christ's coming sufferings. Her head is slightly inclined toward Christ and softens her majestic dignity as the Mother of God. She is the image of the Church who carries salvation in herself while still waiting for it. She confesses that salvation and contemplates the Resurrection through the Cross.

Rublev knew this icon of the Virgin. Who can describe the unfathomable depth of the look of the Father on the Trinity icon, a depth which strangely reproduces the density and the mystery of Mary's look on the Vladimir icon? The pouring out of love is underlined on the two icons by the same inclination of the heads. The Father's love is crucified while "a sword pierces the soul" of the Mother of God. In the Trinity icon, we feel the mystery of the divine *agape* which transcends its own transcendence. The icon of the Virgin called *Eleousa* shows us the reciprocal tenderness of Mother and Child, the nearness of the presence, and Christ's divine immanence.

The Fathers place the beginning of the Church in Paradise. God "walked in the cool of the evening" (Gn 3:8) in order to talk to man. The essence of the Church is expressed in the communion between God and man and culminates in the mystery of the Incarnation, the total communion between the divine and human united in the person of the Word. Except for rare exceptions (the Virgin Orante and Pokrov), the icons of the Virgin always show her with Christ. This type of icon is in fact the icon of the Incarnation or of the Church, that is, the ultimate communion of the divine (the Child-Word) and the human (Mary). With an incomparable art and the greatest sobriety, the icon describes overwhelming and reciprocal love, divine *philanthropia*, God's "crazy love"[225] for man. In response, as if coming out to meet the advancing love, all the passion of man for his God is manifested: "You are the one who loves my soul,"[226] and "the agape enrooted in the heart."[227] What we have is nothing less that the preëternal desire of God to become man so that man might become god. This icon thus offers us the contemplation of a mystery of God himself.

Mary' face speaks to us of her maternal love; her wide open eyes are fixed on infinity and at the same time turned inward We feel as though we are in the Virgin's inner "spaces of the heart." It is an immense compassion, as big as the heavens (her *Pokrov*), towards suffering, that unavoidable fact of human existence which brings about the Cross, which is the only answer of God who "suffers ineffably"

We ought to be able to hear the voices of the numberless souls who have cried out before this icon through out the ages. Mary's eyes follow the destiny of every man and nothing can interrupt her look, nothing can stop the power of her maternal heart.

CHAPTER THREE

The Icon of

I. The Dogmatic Background

Before the 4th century, the feast of Christmas coincided with the feast of Epiphany. It was thus part of the great number of holy theophanies. This fact helps us to understand why the "trisolar Light" is represented on the Nativity icon. The veiled manifestation of the Holy Trinity discretely bathes everything in its light, thus assuring the greatest dogmatic balance and justifying the name of the feast: the Feast of Lights. The liturgical books also give it the title of "Pascha" or Easter. The liturgical year thus unfolds between two poles of equal significance: the Pascha of the Nativity and the Pascha of the Resurrection. The one looks forward to the other.

Without wanting to be judgmental, we can nonetheless discern different accents in certain traditions. In the West under Franciscan influence, Christmas took on a more picturesque character in the popular form of the manger scene. Popular piety became more sensitive and tender as it focused on the human side of the mystery: the baby Jesus, his mother Mary, and Joseph the carpenter. We have here the very intimate celebration of the "Holy Family" whose image became very widespread in the West but which was totally unknown in the East. Christmas became the celebration of the Man-God more than of the God-Man.

By its fierce attachment to the dogmatic tradition, the Orthodox East drastically filtered out any sentimentality, and this can be seen in the liturgical order of the celebrations. The day after Christmas is dedicated to the Synaxis of the Theotokos. The following Sunday is the feast of St. Joseph, David the ancestor King, and the apostle James. These men are not celebrated as members of the "family" but rather as archetypes of the mystery itself. And finally, on January 1, the Church celebrates the special memory of St. Basil the Great, one of the great defenders of the Nicæan dogma.

By its content alone, the liturgy teaches a fundamental pedagogical principle. The liturgy is not a means but rather a way of life that rests on its own foundation and thus imposes its essentially theocentric character. By being a participant in the liturgical action, man learns to direct his attention toward God and his magnificence and not to himself. Only secondarily and without any predetermined motive does the liturgical light shine on the nature of man and thereby change it. Let man add nothing to the presence of God. There must be moments when man stops pursuing at all costs utilitarian ends when he expands and develops in the pure adoration of God, like David when he danced before the Ark of the Covenant. The angels teach us the same principle. During the liturgy, they "marvel and cover their faces with their wings." At Christmas, this liturgical theocentrism sharply focuses not on the miracle of the "limited that rises to Unlimitedness," but rather on the incomprehensible limitation of the One who is without limit, on his "love for man." It is this *philanthropia* which humbles the Unlimited One to the point of appearing as the Son of Man. The troparion of the feast shows us this strange wonder by its skillfully balanced contrasts: "Today is born of the Virgin the One who holds every creature in his hands; the One who is by nature invisible is wrapped in swaddling clothes; he is laid in a manger, the One who by nature is God and who made the heavens firm."[228]

The liturgy speaks to us less of the little child of Bethlehem than of the God who became flesh: "He is born to us as a little child, the eternal God." The child only serves to bring out more powerfully the divine shining into the human arena, that is, the birth of God.

The dogmatic content of the feast is set out in a very precise hierarchy of values. Above all, we have 1) God's movement downward, 2) then the miracle of the maternal virginity, the divine answer to the "fiat" of the Virgin who was the human condition of the Incarnation and its ineffable correlative: the creature gives birth to its own Creator, and finally 3) the goal of the divine *philanthropia*, the deification of man: "You likened yourself to a vile being formed out of mud, O Christ; he is the work of your hands, and you gave him divinity."[229] The pedagogical orientation of the liturgy is always to elevate our thought from the senses to the mystery: "The One who created the world by his powerful hand now appears as the heart of his creation."[230]

The Lord said, "Blessed are your eyes for they see" (Mt 13:16), and the Church sings, "We worship your nativity, O Christ; let us see your holy Theophany." Christ's light focuses on our icon

so as to direct the whole composition toward his coming.

The icon we see here is from the 16th century Novgorod school. It ancient form and content probably go back to the image painted in the church built by Constantine on the very site of the Nativity. Coming back from their visits to the Holy Land, ancient pilgrims carried with them little bottles containing holy oil. These ampulla had the Nativity image imprinted on them. Thus the essential traits of the icon were already fixed in the 4th and 5th centuries.

With great clarity and simplicity, the icon very precisely relates the gospel story. It does this in such an artful way, however, that the dogmatic suggestions, in their almost musical delicacy, penetrate the souls of the faithful where their melody takes root.

Green, red, brown and purple form a harmony that accords with the sober elegance of the lines. The image is not overly busy. The main lines are perfectly separated and the spaces judiciously measured. The very studied proportions are subordinated to the balance of the whole and to the well structured rhythm of each scene. The ordering of the lines joins together with the whole range of colors, and this without jolting our sensibilities. The hot shade of purple, the red streaked with gold, the bright spots and the sonorous green all denote a great degree of artistic maturity. In music, certain harmonies evoke a feeling of beatitude; pictorial harmony at its highest degree also attains pure beauty. It directly expresses the divine, without any didactic teaching about the content of the icon. Studied assonances and dissonances introduce each figure, each scene into the symphony of the whole. While color and form do not try to imitate anything in this world, the iconographer uses coloring to bring out more vividly the theme expressed in lines. He speaks to the eye and the ear at the same time. The sobriety of his means is at the base of the work's sonority.

After the first moments of contemplation, an interior movement takes hold of the spirit and opens our hearing to a peaceful joy. It is like a still inaudible but increasingly persuasive hymn: "The Mother of Life has brought joy into the world, and the tears of sin are dried up."

The Christmas and Epiphany icons show the same three-rayed light; on the epiphany icon, this indicates the ethereal presence of the Dove, a presence that is guessed at rather than seen. In the Christmas icon, the star of Bethlehem shines out of the sacred triangle inscribed in the divine sphere. The Holy Spirit is, however, manifestly present in answer to Isaiah's ancient prayer, a veritable epiclesis on humanity: "If you would only tear open the heavens and come down " (Is 64:1). God responds with "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Power of the Most High will take you under his shadow" (Lk 1:35). The Fathers of the Church say that the Spirit is the eternal Joy between the Father and the Son; he is the joy of giving birth. This is why, according to St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the Nativity is "the feast of re-creation" and the liturgy overflows with jubilation: "O World, form yourself into a choir at the sound of this news; with the angels and the shepherds, glorify the eternal God."[231] "O Faithful Ones, let us rise up in ecstasy and prepare with great joy our entrance into the feast of the Nativity and let us cry: Glory to God in the Trinity."[232]

A single ray comes out of the upper triangle and signifies the one essence of God, but as it comes out of the star, the ray divides into three so as to indicate the participation of the three Persons in the economy of salvation.

The joy of the feast becomes clearer and clearer: "The heavens and the earth are filled prophetically with joy on this day. Angels and men, let us rejoice." And we see the astonishing purpose and reason behind it:

> for the heavens and the earth are united today. Today, God has come upon the earth, and man has been raised up to the heavens.
>
> Every creature rejoices on this day.
>
> Let the whole creation dance and leap for joy.
>
> Shout for joy before God's presence, all the Earth.

> Come find the hidden joy that deep well from which in olden times David wanted to drink; there the Virgin quenches Adam's thirst.
>
> Heavens, rejoice; Mountains, jump up and down; Righteous Ones, sing with happiness in your voices.

Man fell so heavily that putting the image of God in danger, he also risked his human image. God had to become man so as to restore to him the ancient image and dizzying dignity of being a child of God. "Now is everything made new." It is the re-creation; it is the reëstablishment of what had been sketched out in Paradise when, in the cool of the evening, God came looking for man and talked with him.

III. Isaiah the Prophet

In his kontakion of the feast, Romanos the Melodist poetically transposed the gospel story and inspired the liturgical theme of the icon:

> Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One. Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him. The wise men journey with the star. Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child.

The movement in the icon starts from the figure at the extreme lower right. His vertical position, that is, the eschatological position, man-tree, the immobile column uniting earth and heaven, is accentuated by the shepherd set just above him. The movement describes a circle and stops at the center of the composition. It comes to rest in the peace-*shalom* of the Kingdom: "Bethlehem has opened Eden." In the manger, the "Grapes of Life" have been laid.

In his ever-present pessimism, Ecclesiastes looked at the heavens and evaluated their distance: "God is in the heavens and we men are on the earth" (Ecl 5:1). The prophet Isaiah gave voice to the great impatience of the Jewish soul: "If you would only tear open the heavens and come down " (Is 64:1). The figure on the lower right represents Isaiah[233] and with him all the prophets of the Old Testament. The dynamism of the Spirit, who spoke by the prophets, sets off the movement of the icon and gives the decisive tone to the whole.

Isaiah's right hand points to the child seated on the knees of Salome the midwife.[234] The washing scene shows that the child is really the Son of Man while being the Messiah long awaited and finally come: "A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse, a scion thrusts from his roots: on him the spirit of the Lord rests " (Is 11:1-2). The prophet's hand also points to a wide stump from which has grown up a green shoot: side by side, we contemplate the prefiguration, that is, the shadow of the thing and the thing itself, the symbolic tree and the person symbolized, namely the child. We also see the unity of the two Testaments: the one is brought to perfection, fulfillment in the other. Isaiah's left hand rests on a tablet made according to God's order: "Take a large seal and scratch on it in ordinary writing MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ" (Is 8:1). This is the name of the son of the prophetess who was to mark the end of a terrible period and the beginning of a time of refreshment, the messianic age: "for a child is born to us the Prince of Peace" (Is 9:5). Being the greatest of the prophets, Isaiah was also the prophet of faith, of the *credo*, of the marvelous power that opened the gates of the Mystery. Isaiah's clothing make him look like St. John the Baptist and Elijah; they are the clothes of a martyr. In fact, according to the Jewish tradition, Isaiah received the crown of martyrdom under King Manassah. Having become one of the "wounded friends of the Bridegroom," he is the most worthy witness of the Nativity.

IV. The Child

The liturgy mentions another prophecy which turns our attention to the child: "You filled the Magi with joy, those interpreters of the words of the ancient diviner Balaam, and you rose up like the star of Jacob."[235] We see here the central symbol of light. The star announces the dawn and

gives way to the blinding midday "Sun of Righteousness who illumines those who were sitting in the darkness of death"[236] (Lk 1:78-79). "The wise Creator gave back their ancient form to those who were subject to death and had fallen from the heights of divine life."[237] "O Depth of Wisdom! How impenetrable are his ways" (Rm 11:33). And yet, these ways lead to the heart of the divine love for man: "By participating in a guilty flesh, you gave to it something of your divine nature." "You made man to participate in the divine nature" (2 Pe 1:4). "United to a mortal form, God liberated Eve's womb from the ancient curse" and "opened a way toward heaven."[238] All the grandeur of the event, that is, when "Jesus bent down the heavens and came down," is not simply to be found in the fact that Christ went looking for man who had fallen so low. There is also the distressing mystery of the adversary, and the liturgical texts make this clear in a *crescendo* movement: "You beat down the impudent looks of the enemy so as to lead the fallen creature back to you."[239] The theme of the "three young men in the fiery furnace" is introduced to show just how far the Lord is willing to "bend down the heavens": "the flames roared and whistled but spared the young men for the Lord gave them an abundant dew,"[240] and "the hellish fire retreated."[241] Among the three young men "who walked in the fire without being hurt" appeared the *mysterious fourth person* "who looked like a son of the gods." We have here in a nutshell the whole mystery of the Nativity of Christ and the Incarnation.

> Listen, Sky, and give ear, Earth. Let your foundations shake and let fear take hold of Hades, for the Creator has revealed himself to be the heart of his own creation."[242]
>
> You came down like a cloud on the fleece, O Christ, and like drops of dew that water the dried earth."[243]
>
> The Almighty wiped out the ferocious sin of a mad world fallen into the depth of darkness and covered the enemy with shame.[244]

The scope of the divine act for man ("We who were in the darkness and the shadow of death, we have found the Orient of orients."[245]) goes far beyond just his salvation: "The heavens extend even to the interior of the cavern" and there transform it: "Come, let us enjoy paradise in this cave "[246]

We clearly feel that in these texts there is something other than just the search for poetic lyricism. The mystery is so great, even so fearful, that the texts function by allusions, and "the rest will be venerated in silence," according to the wise advice of St. Gregory of Nazianzus. The Cross is "the judgment of judgment," says St. Maximus the Confessor; he intends to say that our thought is crucified, made powerless before the magnitude of the Incarnation. How could it be otherwise since the Incarnation "contains the meaning of all the enigmas of Scripture," and St. Maximus adds, "whoever penetrates deeper than the Cross and the Tomb and finds himself initiated into the mystery of the Resurrection learns the purpose for which God created all things." Everything is held together by one single act and is reflected therein. "The feast of the Nativity already contains Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost," says St. John Chrysostom. According to Gregory of Nyssa,"the introduction of the sinful will into the creation set up a triple barrier: death, sin, and wounded nature." What Adam was not able to attain by rising up, God brought about in his place by coming down. To Lucifer's covetous desire to be like God, God responds generously by the gift of deification. But in order to bring it about, "you came down on the earth to save Adam and not finding him there, O Master, you went to look for him even in Hades."[247] "God's flesh was a light-bearing torch and dissipated the darkness of Hades."[248]

The gospels do not mention the cave. This element comes from Tradition and speaks to us of the mysterious depths of the earth. The icon follows the liturgical texts very closely and gives us the most astonishing interpretation: the dark triangle of the cave is the shadowy opening of the bowls of Hades. In order to reach the abyss and become the "heart of creation," Christ *mystically* sets his birth in the depths of the pit where evil crouches in its ultimate density. Christ is born in the shadow of death, and the Nativity bends down the heavens even to Hades. As Christ lies in the manger, we contemplate the "Lamb of Bethlehem who vanquished the serpent and gave peace to the world."[249]

We are far from the idyllic image of a little child; this child is already the man of sorrows of Isaiah (Is 53:3). Baptism as a symbol carries the figure of the Cross, and the washing of the child anticipates the baptismal bath of Epiphany. It refers us to the very weighty meaning of Romans 6, to baptism as a figure of death. In fact the swaddling clothes of the child have exactly the same form as the grave clothes that we see on the icon of the Resurrection. The strange immobility of the Lamb of

Bethlehem recalls the text of the matins of Holy Saturday: “This is the blessed Sabbath; this is the Day of great rest. For today, the only-begotten Son of God rests from all his works.” “Life has fallen asleep, and Hades shakes with fear.” A text of the feast indicates the finality of this “rest in the unending watch”: “Himself being tightly wrapped, he undoes the chains so strongly welded together by our sins.” The swaddling/grave clothes prophesy “death trampled down by death.” As the texts begin to hint, the Magi from now on are the image of the myrrh-bearing women: “God leads the Magi to worship him by predicting his Resurrection after three days through the gold, the myrrh and the incense.”[250] “Pure gold, as for the King of the ages; incense, as for the God of the universe; myrrh for the Immortal One as for one dead three days.”[251]

The child is situated at the exact height of the “golden number” or the “golden section,” and this is the classical dimension of the Cross. The Cross is thus presented through this geometrical proportion, and the child is at the intersection of the arms of the cross.

The child lying in the cave is already the descent of the Word into Hades; it is perhaps the most gripping expression of the prologue of the fourth gospel: “The light shined in the darkness.” The absolute polarity that this passage contains requires us to understand “darkness” in its ultimate, hellish sense as a designation for all that tragically went wrong with God’s plan throughout human history. Seen from the point of view of time, the child in the cave is the most distressing coexistence of Light and darkness, of God and Satan. Seen from the point of view of eternity, it is “the Sun which set with him dissipated the darkness of death forever ”

V. The Shepherd(s) and the Lamb

The presence of the bull and donkey beside the manger refer us back once more to Isaiah: “The bull recognizes his master and the donkey the manger of his Lord; Israel knows nothing, and my people understand nothing” (Is 1:3). The double symbolism of the sacrificial calf and of the donkey of the King entering Jerusalem is reinforced by the symbolism of the shepherds with their sheep and the plants which, however, have nothing to do with nature, the outdoors, and country living. All this symbolism designates the messianic dignity of the Child: Emmanuel “will be fed on milk and honey until he knows how to reject evil and choose good” (Is 7:15). The Promised Land is the image of the messianic Kingdom where milk and honey flow (Ex 3:8). Matt. 4:15-16 quotes Is. 8:23-29 and links it to the announcement of Christ’s birth: Then the messianic “mountain will be the domain of cattle and the grazing land for sheep” (Is 7:24). This is precisely what we have in the landscape of the icon.

The shepherds, however, remind us immediately of the figure of the Shepherd-Messiah. The meaning of the cave projects a very strange light on the parable of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:1, 21) and gives it the scope of a Johannine version of the “Descent into Hades.” The sheepfold where the sheep wait for the true Shepherd, that is, the Messiah, is Hades, “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps 23:4). “Whoever does not enter by the door is a thief.” “Thief” is Satan’s name, and he cannot enter by the Door which is Christ. He comes in among the sheep by his twisted lying ways. The Shepherd-Messiah “calls the sheep one by one and brings them out.” He comes to “bring them out,” that is, out of the sheepfold which is hell-death, in order “to give them life,” “to lead every creature from the doors without sun light toward the life-giving splendor.”[252] The theme of the Shepherd deepens: he is not only the one who guards and guides the sheep but also the one who pulls them from death to life.

The icon now appears in all its messianic and eschatological significance: 1) the Nativity in which everything is already brought to completion and fulfilled and 2) the terrible secret of God who becomes Man. These are now proclaimed with all their consequences. “Eternity and time embrace.” In fact, the office of the proscomidia at the beginning of the Orthodox liturgy represents “the Lamb sacrificed from before the foundations of the world.” It is the sacrifice of divine love in eternity. The eucharistic Lamb is placed on the discos, or paten. After this ritual of the preëternal sacrifice, the priest places the star, the star of Bethlehem, over the lamb saying “The star came and stood over the place where the young child lay” (Mt 2:9). This is the beginning of the liturgy in which the sacrifice in time is actualized.

The Lamb of Bethlehem is already the eucharistic Lamb. In the past, in the desert, the manna, “the heavenly bread,” fed the Hebrew people. Today, in the deepest desert of Hades, the “Bread of Life” offers himself. “Come, let us rejoice at the explanation of this mystery. The wall of separation (the triple barrier) is overthrown; the angel with the flaming sword withdraws and goes away from the tree of life.”[253] According to Tradition, the Cross was made from the wood of Eden’s “tree of

life." The Cross planted in the center of the cosmos flowers into the Tree of Life, once again green and offering its fruit of immortality: the holy eucharist.

VI. Mary

"Hail, O Star announcing to us the Sun," "the Dawn of the mystical Day." Outside the cave, dressed in royal purple is the *Basilissa*, the Queen Theotokos, lying down. She is exhausted and is resting her head on her hand. Her eyes are lost in the contemplation of the gospel of salvation: "She kept all these sayings pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). Even though she is mother, she turns away from her child to welcome us all. She recognizes in us the birth of her child, and at the same time she is presented in her own value as the "flower of the human plant." She is the one in whom all humanity pronounced the *fiat* that Nicholas Cabasilas so admirably explained:

> The Incarnation was not only the work of God but also the work of the will and the faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the Most Pure One, without the agreement of her faith, the great plan was as unworkable as without the intervention of the three divine persons themselves. God took her for Mother and borrowed from her the flesh that she willingly gave him. As he freely willed to become flesh, he also wanted his Mother to give birth to him of her own free will.[254]

Mary is the New Eve, the Mother of the living, and she pronounced her fiat for everyone. This is why she is the image of the Church. *Virgo fidelis*, Mary answered God's faithfulness to his promise with her own human faithfulness. In her, the hope of the Jewish people reached its culmination; she summed up the long preparation period, filled as it was with prefigurations and signs which divine science can now explain.

"Today, the One born of a Father *without a mother* takes flesh in you *without a father*."[255] God's mysterious paternity is reflected in the human domain in the miraculous maternity of the Virgin. The birth of Christ from Mary is more in line with the divine birth of the Word from his Father than with natural human birth. This miracle shows us how absurd it is to consider the Theotokos as "one woman among other women." "Giving birth against the laws of nature and yet remaining sealed," Mary wears three stars on her head and shoulders. These are a sign of her virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ. Lying down and yet standing out clearly from the background, Mary is representative of humanity, and she is the tower in Hermas' vision, that is, the Church. Her liturgical names underline this identification and find their image on the icon: Holy Mountain, Height of holiness, Original Rock. In the feast of re-creation, Mary is the most sublime gift that man has ever been able to offer to God:

> What can we offer you, O Christ, for having been born for us on earth as a Man? Each creature, the work of your hands, offers you a sign of gratitude: the angels, their hymn; the heavens, the star; the Magi, their gifts; the shepherds, their admiration; the earth, the cave; the desert, the manger; and all mankind, we offer you a virgin mother.[256]

Across the many centuries and generations, humanity cultivated this gift, and on its purity the Holy Spirit rested. Mysterious presence of the Church before Jesus, convergence of the waiting of Israel and of the Gentiles had not the race of Ismael already confessed her Virginity?

VII. Joseph

On the lower left side, we see St. Joseph deep in meditation. He is obviously set apart from the center, showing thereby that he is not the father of the Child. The liturgical texts tell of his profound anguish being attacked by his doubts: "Joseph spoke to the Virgin Mary and said: 'What is this event that I see in you? I am dumbfounded and my mind is bowled over."[257] "How can you give birth, being a heifer who has never known the yoke?" (see Deut 21:3). In front of Joseph is the devil in the disguise of the shepherd Thyrsos; sometimes the devil is shown as an old man with horns and

a tail. The apocryphal gospels let us hear his words of temptation: “An old man like you cannot beget children or a virgin give birth anymore than this staff [sometimes curved or broken to represent the broken scepter of his former power] can burst into flower.” But at that very moment the staff did indeed burst into flower. “Being greatly troubled in his heart by a storm of contradictory thoughts, the chaste Joseph was enlightened by the Holy Spirit and joyfully sang Alleluia.”[258]

In the person of St. Joseph, the icon tells the story of a universal drama which happens over and over again through the centuries. Its content is always the same. The shepherd-tempter affirms that there is no other world than the visible one we live in, and there is therefore no other way of being born than the natural one. We have here the negation of the principle of transcendence wherein is found all the tragedy of the sincere atheist whose “heart is slow to believe.” St. Joseph’s face often expresses the anguish and near despair (“the inner storm” according to the name of one icon). On certain icons, the Virgin looks at him with a profound and boundless compassion.

The gospel message speaks to faith and immediately encounters obstacles and doubts. The suffering of the Mother reflects the suffering of God himself, his waiting for the free gift which is so well expressed in this liturgical text: “We offer you more than a silvery gift; we offer to you the richness of the true faith, for you are the God and Savior of our souls.”

VIII. The Magi

On the upper left part of the icon, we see the Magi whose horses are remarkable for their lightness and liveliness. “Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world the light of wisdom! For by it, those who worshiped the stars, were taught by a star to adore you, the Sun of Righteousness.”[259] “Human powers have come to an end idolatrous polytheism has been struck dead.”[260] “The wise star watchers were lead to you as the first fruits of the nations.”[261] We have here a great mystery of the wisdom of God. Daniel the Phoenician, Job the Idumean, the Queen of Sheba, a Princess of Arabia, or Melchisedec the King without father or mother (Hb 7:3): all these were “saints” and “righteous ones.” They were, however, from outside Israel but nonetheless “pleasing to God” because they “feared him and did justice.” The Fathers loved to speak of “the visits of the Word” before his Incarnation. Along with the Covenant with Israel, there is the Testament of the Gentiles. Their knowledge of God was already a form of faith in Providence and in his interventions in history. According to St. Irenæus of Lyons, “the Word of God has never ceased to be present in the race of men.” This is the cosmic Advent that united the messianic waiting of the Jews and the prophetic inspiration of the wise pagans: Clement of Alexandria said that “to the ones God gave the Law, to the others prophecy.” God’s love for man receives the wise men of all times. If we can say that the best men and women of all times are the “prophets raised by the Word,” then it is also true that the star of Bethlehem shines over human science and every creation of the mind. The star designates the Logos, leads all to the Knowledge of God, and causes all to fall down in worship. The priests of the royal priesthood, philosophers and scientists, all the servants of Culture when it is really the liturgy of the Spirit all these learn from the Holy Spirit to sing praises. Their creation, in its advanced and purified points, is justified when it pierces this world and sketches the image of the Kingdom by prophetic anticipation. On other icons, the shepherds play joyfully on their flutes: “Sorrow had silenced music and singing, but Christ rising from Bethlehem, put an end to the follies of Babylon and gave currency to musical harmonies.” “Sing, for the Lord is born.”[262]

VIII. The Angels

The angels are represented in their double ministry and dressed in red and shining with golden lines, that is, the reflection of the divine Majesty: on the left, they are turned toward the upper part of the icon, toward the Source of the Light. They represent the unending praise of God and the heavenly liturgy. On the right side, the angel leans toward the shepherd and represents the servant of mankind, the angel of the Incarnation. In his bent over position, leaning toward mankind, we feel all the angelic tenderness and protection, the unending watch of the guardian angel. At moments of silence, we can sense his presence and hear his voice. It is a voice that will appear to us in the Kingdom as the most familiar, the most known, nearly our own.

The last look meets up with the first vision and is completed in a very pure joy. The Holy Spirit suggests it: “Christ is born; glorify him. Christ descends from the heavens; go out to meet him. Christ is on the earth; praise him. Sing to the Lord all the earth, and in your joy, O Peoples, celebrate him.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Icon of the Lord's Baptism (Epiphany)

I. The Theological Background

Up until the 4th century, the Lord's Nativity and Baptism were celebrated on the same day.[263] Their unity is still visible in the similar way the services of these two feasts are structured. This unity shows a certain fulfillment of the Nativity in the Baptism. St. Jerome said that "in his nativity, the Son of God came to the world in a hidden way; in his baptism, however, he appeared in an open and public manner." St. John Chrysostom also said that "the Epiphany is not the feast of the Nativity but rather of the Baptism. Before, Christ was not known to the people, but he was revealed to all through his baptism."[264]

The Holy Spirit rests eternally on the Son. As the "revealing force," the Spirit reveals the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son; he thus actualizes the *divine* filiation. He is "the eternal joy in which the three persons delight together."[265] The Incarnation takes root in the same act of filiation which progressively covers Christ's *humanity*.

In the Nativity, the Holy Spirit descended on the Virgin and made her the Theotokos, the Mother of God: "And so the Child will be holy and will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:35). "Meanwhile the Child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was with him" (Lk 2:40). "And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2:52). Being a "real man," Christ in his human nature grew in the natural way progressing through various stages. The grace of the Spirit accompanied him, but the Person of the Spirit did not yet rest on him, on his humanity, in the way that the Spirit rests eternally on his divinity. Now in speaking about Christ's baptism, St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John of Damascus[266] quoted Acts 10:38: "God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit " In this event, they stressed the point that Christ's baptism was the culminating point of his maturity. It was the manifestation of the Lord's fully deified humanity. He is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Spirit reveals his humanity to the Father, and the Father receives it as his Son: "And a voice spoke from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on him'" (Mt 3:17). The Spirit descended on the incarnate Son like the breath of adoption at the very moment when the Father said "Today, I have begotten you."[267]

"My affection" or "my favor" is the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son which from that moment on rested on Christ in the personal (hypostatic) descent of the Spirit. The God-Man revealed himself to be really the Son in his two natures, and this fullness of "true God and true Man" was to be reaffirmed at the Transfiguration, a fullness that had already been manifested in Christ's baptism: "This is my beloved Son." Christ's Baptism is called *Theophany* or *Epiphany*, that is, the manifestation of the three persons in their single witness. The Transfiguration troparion says, "You were transfigured on the Mount, O Christ God, revealing your glory to your disciples " The Epiphany troparion, however, announces, "O Lord, when you were baptized in the Jordan the voice of the Father bore witness to you and called you his beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his word "

Jesus thus grew into maturity "When he started to teach, Jesus was thirty years old" (Lk 3:23) and in the Nazareth synagogue, he solemnly announced himself: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me" (Lk 4:18). The is the core of the mystery of the Incarnation. Christ in his humanity advanced through the exercise of his free determination. Jesus consciously consecrated himself to his earthly mission and entirely submitted himself to the Father's will. The Father answered back by sending the Holy Spirit on him.

In the icon of the feast, we see all the dense and concentrated symbolism of Christ's baptism, and we understand the frightful importance of this act: it is already the death on the Cross. Christ said to St. John, "It is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands" (Mt 3:15). He thereby anticipated the final saying that reverberated in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, may

your will be done." The liturgical parallels between Epiphany and Holy Week are striking: the hymns of January 3 are quite similar to those of Holy Wednesday; the services of January 4 resemble those of Holy Thursday; and the office of January 5 reflects that of Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

St. John the Baptist is dressed so as to show his witnessing ministry. He is the witness of Christ's submission, of his ultimate humbling (*kenosis*). St. John the Baptist is seen as the archetype of all mankind,[268] and therefore all humanity is the witness of God's love. "God's love for mankind" culminated in the act of baptism, in the doing of "all that righteousness demands," with death and resurrection at the end. Christ's baptism was the fulfillment of the preëternal decision that we have contemplated in the Trinity icon.

"Now when all the people had been baptized and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer " (Lk 3:21). The Word came to earth, toward us men, and we are therefore in the presence of the most overwhelming meeting between God and Man (" all the people "). In John the Baptist, all men mystically recognize each other as "sons in the Son," "beloved sons" in the "Beloved Son," and therefore as "friends of the Bridegroom," as witnesses. The *fiat* of the Virgin was the *yes* of all mankind to the Incarnation, to the coming of God "to his own." In St. John, that significant other along with the Mother of God, all men say *fiat* to the meeting, to the divine friendship, to the *philanthropia* of the Father who is man's Friend. As Simeon, "prompted by the Spirit," met and received the child Jesus, so also John met and received Jesus the Messiah: "A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him" (Jn 1:6-7). St. John witnessed for *everyone*, in place of *everyone*. This witness was an event inside of humanity as a whole and therefore concerns every man.

The fourth gospel speaks of John in the prologue, just after "In the beginning was the Word. " And when we read "A man came, sent from God," we feel that his coming, in a certain sense, also came from "the beginning," from eternity. The heavens opened before him, and he witnessed: "I saw the Spirit coming down on him He is the Chosen One of God" (Jn 1:29-34). In this brief passage, we have the whole Gospel, in reduced form. John is the one who knows; he points out the Lamb, for he has been initiated into the mystery of the "Lamb sacrificed from before the foundations of the world."

John "predicted" nothing, and yet he is the greatest of the prophets because like the finger of God, he pointed out Christ. He is the greatest because he is the smallest and therefore freed from his own sufficiency in order to be nothing else than the "one who stands there," who rejoices in hearing the voice of the Bridegroom, who is the friend of the Bridegroom. His joy is great and without measure. John is the most intimate closeness in which the Word makes himself heard. He is like the Son who is nothing other than the Word of the Father. He is also like the Spirit, for "he says nothing of himself but speaks in the name of the One who is to come." John is the "violent one who takes heaven by force," and his martyrdom admirably illustrates an ancient monastic saying: "Give you blood and receive the Spirit." Along with the Mother of God, he stands beside Christ the Judge and intercedes for all men. He can intercede for us all because his "friendship" was as deep as that of another great spiritual master. We hear his story in the *Sayings of the Fathers*:

> Paissius the Great was praying for his disciple who had renounced Christ. While he was praying, the Lord appeared to him and said: "Paissius, for whom are you praying? Do you not know that he renounced me?" The saint nonetheless continued to have pity on his disciple and to pray for him. The Lord then said to Paissius: "You have become like me through your love "

The liturgical texts call John "a preacher, an angel, and an *apostle*." He bore witness and his voice, the voice of the Bridegroom's friend, called forth the first apostolic vocation: "Andrew and John follow Jesus" (Jn 1:37). Later on John left this world and went down into the place of the dead, as a forerunner of the Good News.

John's baptism before the Epiphany was only a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:3). It was the conversion of the final waiting. By going to the Jordan, Jesus was not going there to be penitent, since he was without sin. To say that he was setting an example of humility does not really do justice to the importance of the event. Jesus' baptism was his personal Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit and the trinitarian Epiphany: "O Lord, when you were

baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest " (the Epiphany troparion). The sacrament of baptism in Jesus' name comes from this fullness. This name becomes immediately more precise in the complete baptismal formula: In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The liturgical texts call Epiphany the feast of "the great New Year," for the "universe has been renewed in the light of the Trinity." It is precisely at this moment that the bishops announce to their churches the time of Great Lent and the date of Pascha.

II. The Icon

The Epiphany icon reproduces the gospel account but adds certain details taken from the liturgy of the feast showing what John might have said. At the top of the icon, we see part of a circle representing the heavens opened up, and sometimes the Father's blessing hand descends from a fold that seems to be the fringe of a cloud. Rays of light, attributes of the Holy Spirit, come out of this circle and enlighten the Dove. Being a reminder of the beginning text of the Bible, "Let there be light," the "revealing energy" of the Spirit reveals the trinitarian God: "The Trinity our God shows himself to us without division." Christ came to be the light of the world: "on those who dwell in the land and shadow of death, a light has dawned" (Mt 4:16). This is why Epiphany is called the "Feast of lights."[269] "While Jesus went down into the water, the Jordan caught fire."[270] It is the Lord's Pentecost, and the Word, prefigured by the "column of light," shows that baptism is *illumination*, that is, a person's birth into the divine light.

In ancient times, catechumens were baptized on the eve of the feast, and the church was flooded in light as a sign of the person's initiation into the knowledge of God. The witness of this light, St. John, fits in very well with the event because he himself was "a lamp alight and shining," and the people came "to enjoy the light he gave" (Jn 5:35).

The descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove expresses the movement of the Father toward his Son. According to the Fathers,[271] the Dove is also explained in reference to the Flood and to the dove with an olive branch in its beak, that is, a sign of peace. The Holy Spirit hovered over the primordial waters and brought forth life; hovering over the waters of the Jordan, he brings forth the second birth of the new creature.

Christ is represented standing against the background of water, "covered by the waters of the Jordan." From the beginning of his mission, Jesus confronted the cosmic elements which contain the powers of darkness: water, air and the desert. The crossing of the Red Sea is a figure of baptism: God's victory over the sea dragon, the monster Rahab. In an idiomelion of the feast, we hear the Lord say to John the Baptist: "Prophet, come baptize me I am in a hurry to destroy the enemy hidden in the waters, the prince of darkness, and to deliver the world from his nets and bestow eternal life on it." The Lord thus purified the waters by being baptized in the Jordan: "Today the waters of the Jordan are transformed into healing by the coming of the Lord. Today the whole creation is watered by mystical streams" (the prayer of Sophronius). The whole world receives his sanctification: "Christ is baptized: He comes up out of the waters, and with Him He carries up the world" (stichiera of Cosmas). "He crushed the heads of dragons and re-created Adam": In baptism, we have the re-creation of the human person, his regeneration in the purifying *lavacrum* of the sacrament. Didymus the Blind[272] made this point clear: "God gave me the baptismal fountain (Church) for a Mother, for a father the Most High, and for a brother the Lord who was baptized for us."

On the icon, Christ blesses the waters with his right hand and prepares it for becoming the waters of baptism which he sanctified by his own immersion. Water changes its meaning. Formerly it was an image of death, the Flood, but now it has become "the well of the water of life" (Rv 21:6 and Jn 4:14). The water of baptism is sacramentally the equivalent of the blood of Christ.

We see on the icon two small human figures at the Lord's feet, in the waters of the Jordan; they are illustrations of Old Testament texts which are part of the services: "The sea saw and fled, and the Jordan turned back" (Ps 114:3). The troparion, tone 4, gives the explanation: "The Jordan was turned back by Elisha's coat, and the waters were divided leaving a dry path. This is a true image of baptism by which we pass through life." We have here a symbolic image which speaks of the still invisible *metanoia* of the cosmic nature, of the turning around of its ontology. The blessing of "aquatic nature" sanctifies the very principle of earthly life. This is why after the divine liturgy on

Epiphany the “great blessing of waters” takes place at a river or a well; often just a container of water is blessed in the church.

The liturgy calls non-sanctified water “a liquid tomb,” *hydatostrotos taphos*, as the image of death-flood. In fact, the icon shows Jesus going down into the waters as into a watery tomb. The Jordan is in the form of a dark cave, the iconographic image for Hades; it contains the Lord’s entire body, as an image of burial. This image is reproduced in the sacrament of baptism by total immersion, thus being a figure of the three-day burial before Easter. All this symbolism shows that Christ’s coming was “to pull the head of our race [Adam] from his sojourn in darkness.” The Epiphany icon continues the symbolism of the Nativity, which predicts Christ’s sojourn in the land of the dead, and shows the pre-descent of Christ into Hades: “Having descended into the waters, Christ bound the Strong One.”[273] St. John Chrysostom said that “the going down into and the coming up out of the water in baptism are the image of the descent of Christ into Hades and of his resurrection.”[274]

Christ is shown naked because he clothed himself in Adam’s nudity. He thus gave back to man the glorious clothing he had in the Garden of Eden. To indicate that Christ himself chose to be baptized, he is represented walking toward St. John or taking a step toward him. Christ freely came and bent his head. John was afraid and said, “I need to be baptized by you! Why do you come to me?” Jesus ordered him to “let things be as I tell you.” On the icon, John extends his right hand in a ritual gesture, and in his left hand he holds a scroll containing the text of his preaching.

The angels of the Incarnation are in a worshipful attitude, their hands are covered as a sign of veneration. They symbolize and illustrate St. Paul’s saying: “All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ ” (Gal 3:27).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Icon of the Lord's Transfiguration

In the central lunette of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Christ is shown holding the gospel book open to the verse "I am the light of the world." The Fathers' doctrine of the knowledge of God is heavily colored by eschatology. It is therefore quite naturally centered on the Lord's Transfiguration, Resurrection and Second Coming. In their theological vision, the theme of light has a most prominent place. Like a bolt of lightning, the light theme flashes across the sky of Orthodox iconography. It penetrates this art as though in its own natural element and transforms it into a grandiose "solar mysticism." In former times, every iconographer-monk began his "divine art" by painting the icon of the Transfiguration. This living and direct initiation taught him, above all, that the icon is painted not so much with colors as with the Taboric light. According to Tradition, the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested precisely in the luminosity of the icon itself. This brilliant shining eliminates the need for any source of natural light in an icon.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom the faithful sing: "We have received the heavenly Spirit; we have seen the true light." We have seen it because we have received the Holy Spirit. This is not simply poetic language but the very full and strong affirmation of what the Church has authentically lived: we have really seen the light. In one of his sermons, St. Symeon the New Theologian declared that "God is light and those whom he makes worthy of seeing him see him as light. Those who have not seen this light have not seen God for God is light "

The Lord prepared his disciples very specially for the coming vision. He did it in rather enigmatic terms which only underscored the ultimate importance of the event: "And he said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power'" (Mk 9:1). Even more clearly, he said " before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom" (Mt 16:28). In effect, the apostles Peter, James, and John were chosen, while still living, to be "eye witnesses of his *majesty* We were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Pe 1:16-18).

" In their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light." Moses and Elijah were standing on either side of him. " a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favor " (Mt 17:1-8).

St. Gregory of Nazianzus[275] and St. John of Damascus[276] expressed the unanimous Tradition: the light revealed to the apostles was the manifestation of the "divine splendor," "the timeless and uncreated glory." We are obviously dealing here with the vision of God. This is why the Transfiguration of the Lord is at the center of patristic contemplative theology. In seeking doctrinal precision, St. Gregory Palamas gave us an incisive and fundamental formula for all of Orthodoxy: "God is called light not according to his essence but according to his energy."[277]

Having its source in John of the Ladder, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory of Sinai, the hesychastic tradition spoke through its official spokesman, St. Gregory Palamas, and fully set out the *nature of the communion between God and man*. The councils of 1341, 1347, and 1351-53 held in Constantinople accepted St. Gregory's doctrine as the most correct expression of the Church's dogmatic teaching, especially in the synodal decree of 1351.

The divine "super-essence" is radically transcendent to man and requires an antinomical but never contradictory affirmation about the absolute inaccessibility of God in himself, on the one hand, and his manifestations in which we can participate, his immanent operations in the world, on the other. God "exteriorizes" himself in his energies and is totally present in them. We have here two modes of God's existence and presence: 1) his transcendent essence and 2) his immanent energies. The energies are not a part of God. They are God in his revelation, but he loses nothing of his radically other and non-exteriorized essence. The energies are common to the persons of the Trinity. They are uncreated but accessible to creatures. The distinction-identity of the essence and energies

in no way lessens the divine unity, indivisibility, and simplicity. God is no more divided by the distinction essence-energies than he is made into a composite being by the distinction between the persons. Even St. Augustine had to call God *simpliciter multiplex*.[278] God is more than being, especially in a logical form, for he is the creator of every form; he thereby is above and beyond every concept. God's simplicity is "totally other" than our anthropomorphic idea of simplicity. Every dogma is already antinomical and metalogical, but never contradictory.

Here is the fundamental affirmation: We believe in the transcendence of the inaccessible essence and the immanence of the operations (grace and the energies) in which we can participate. This is in no way an abstraction. Because this affirmation colors, forms, and orients all of Orthodox theology, it is a question of life and death and is at the heart of the divine economy of salvation, at the very center of the communion between God and man. Man cannot in fact participate in the essence of God; if he did, he would be God. In addition, any communion with a created element, such as created grace, is not at all communion with God. Man enters into a very real communion with God in his divine energies, and as in the eucharistic mystery, with a small piece of the holy gifts, man receives God in his fullness. Man's communion with God is not on the level of God's essence; that would be pantheism. It is not on the level of the divine persons either; Christ is the only one who has that kind of *personal* communion with God. Man's communion with God is rather on the level of the divine energies in which God makes himself totally present.

This communion goes far beyond what is intelligible or sensible; it permits the totality of each human being to participate in God's life. St. Gregory Palamas said that the body also has an experience of divine things. This is why we can see God with our eyes, but eyes that, of necessity, have been "changed by the power of the Spirit." According to St. Paul, "in his body lives the fullness of divinity" (Col 2:9), that is, in Christ's humanity which is the "glass torch" through which the light of the Trinity shines brilliantly. In the gospel story, this light radiated from the transfigured Christ. But Christ's transfiguration was in fact the apostles' transfiguration. For a moment, they "passed from the flesh to the Spirit," and received grace to see Christ's humanity transformed into a body of lightning, of contemplating the glory of the Lord hidden under his *kenosis*, his humility, but suddenly revealed to their opened eyes. This light is the energy in which God gives himself completely, and the vision of this light constitutes the "face to face," the mystery of the Eight Day and the state of deification. This light "possesses the value of the Second Coming of Christ, and in the gospels, the Lord called it *the Kingdom of God*."[279]

The icon shows Christ as he appeared to the apostle in the "form of God," as one of the persons of the Trinity. This appearance was thus a trinitarian theophany, with the voice of the Father and the Holy Spirit in the luminous cloud.

> Today on Tabor in the manifestation of your Light, O Word, you are the unaltered Light from the Light of the unbegotten Father, and we have seen the Father as Light and the Spirit as Light, guiding with light the whole creation (the exapostilarion of matins).

Similar events reflect their light on each other by anticipation, and this is the meaning of the Lord's saying before his Passion: "Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified" (Jn 13:31) and "A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it [God's Name], and I will glorify it again'" (Jn 12:28).

The kontakion of the feast says that the disciples "beheld your glory as far as they could see it," that is, according to the measure of their receptivity. Christ spoke with Moses and Elijah about his coming passion, but so as not to lead the apostles into temptation by the hard testing of the cross, the Lord appeared in the brilliance of his divine glory. The Father bore witness to the divine Father-Son relation so that the apostles "would understand that your suffering was voluntary " and realize that the Lord is "in very truth the splendor of the Father."

The icon shows the disciples falling from a scarped peak; they are overwhelmed and terrified by the fiery vision. Most often, Peter is on the right kneeling with his hand raised to protect himself from the light. John is in the middle and falls with his back turned to the light. James is on the left, falling backwards.

The studied contrast between the upper and lower parts of the icon is very striking. Christ is above motionless in the transcendent peace which emanates from him. Moses and Elijah are bathed in this peace and form the perfect circle of the Beyond. The calm of the upper part of the icon

contrasts markedly with the excited dynamism of the still quite human apostles as they are exposed to the revelation which bowls them over and throws them to the ground. The opposition of these two states, by the use of artistic means, admirably underlines the uncreated character of the light of the Transfiguration.

Stunned by the vision, St. Peter wanted "to put up tents," to install himself in the Second Coming, in the Kingdom before the end of history. This is an obvious temptation, and several times St. Gregory Palamas deals with the meaning of history as an immense stage on which the great salvation play is staged. The whole world is destined for the Kingdom, and it must be transfigured into "the new earth." St. Gregory taught that man in a certain sense is superior to the angels because he is an *incarnate spirit*, because he lives in very close continuity with the cosmos. He contains all of creation in himself and therefore has a great influence on its state and condition. Nature groans (Rm 8) waiting to be freed and saved in the christified man who will finally be the master and lord of the universe. St. Gregory said that "when the light becomes his pathway, the real man rises to eternal heights; he contemplates metacosmic realities *without being separated from matter* which has been part of his being from the beginning. Through himself, man leads *the whole creation* to God." We understand why Peter's request received no answer. The Resurrection and the Kingdom must come through the Cross, and "the whole creation" must be led to it. After the brief irruption of the Eight Day, the apostles must take up the apostolic mission in its light, return to the world, and descend into its hell.

St. Gregory wrote:

> Is it not clear that the divine light is always one and the same, whether it be that which the Apostles saw on Tabor, or that which purified spirits now see, or that of the very reality of eternal blessedness to come? That is why the great Basil called the light which blazed on Tabor at the Transfiguration of our Lord, a prelude to the glory of Christ in his second coming.[280]

The icon of the Transfiguration is thus the prelude of the icon of the Second Coming. We can contemplate it with the attitude of the frightened apostles and receive it "according to our capacity." The more God reveals himself as mystery, the more he envelops man in his "burning closeness." The spiritual masters say that God gives himself to men according to their thirst for him. To those who cannot drink much, he gives only a drop, but he would like to give waves upon waves to drink so that in their turn, Christians could quench the world's thirst.

Christ stands in the center of a circle or oval called a mandorla. It is formed of concentric circles representing all the spheres of the created universe. According to the *Ars Magna*, the three spheres contain all the mysteries of the divine creation. A star is often inscribed in the mandorla and represents the "luminous cloud," sign of the Holy Spirit and transcendent source of the divine energies. Moses and Elijah symbolize the law and the prophets as well as the dead (Moses) and the living (Elijah who was taken away into heaven in a fiery chariot). More in line with the icon is the explanation of a stichiera, tone 1, from vespers which presents Moses and Elijah as the two great visionaries of the Old Testament because they had visions of God on Mount Sinai and Mount Carmel.

As they were climbing Mount Sion, the Israelites used to sing Psalm 43 (42) *Judica me*: "Send me your light and your truth: they will guide me and lead me to your holy mountain " The holy mountain is an essential element in the biblical landscape. Icons often show Christ standing or sitting on the heights of a mountain from which flow the rivers of paradise and where the fountain of life has its source and divides into four branches. The New Adam, Christ, restores nature so that it conforms to God's vision: "He who once spoke through symbols to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, 'I am He who is,' is transfigured today upon Mount Tabor before the disciples; and in his own person he shows the nature of man, arrayed in the original beauty of the image." "The mountain was covered with light the heavens shook and the earth trembled at the sight of the Lord of glory. All rejoice today, for in the divine light all of nature shines. This is why nature cries out with joy: Christ is transfigured, he who is the Savior of the world" (an idiomelion by Cosmos and Anatolius taken from vespers).

St. Peter exclaimed, "It is good to be here." He expressed his ecstatic joy at finding himself in the initial state of the world when God contemplated it and "saw that it was good-beautiful." This was

how God created the world even though his truth still remains hidden. Nonetheless, the veil was lifted on the heights of Mount Tabor, and the disciples felt the perfect joy before being terrified.

The icon is more than an art. The distance between these two visions is so great that we must simply follow the liturgical call: “Let all mortal flesh keep silent.” Then in silent meditation and quiet inner calming, our eyes will open, and the icon will come to life making us sensitive to its secret message. The light of the Transfiguration will appear to us as it appeared to the three apostles chosen by the Lord. Like a bolt of lightning, the image of the world to come reaches us like a veritable Feast of Beauty. Now Christ converses with Moses and Elijah and speaks to them about his Passion, of *Beauty crucified*, but precisely because it is crucified, this Beauty shines all the more. Love, even in God, can only be sacrificial, hence the Cross and the way of the Cross that the present world is following, in the footsteps of Christ. Nonetheless, the Cross, and here is the secret message of the icon, is already basking in the light of Easter morning.

CHAPTER SIX

The Crucifixion Icon

I. Theological Background

"The Lamb crucified from before the creation of the world" entered into history to be crucified under Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. The Unique One, without stain or shadow, came into the world poisoned by sin. The hostility, the *ontological hatred*, of the Perverted One toward the Holy One, the Pure One, the Innocent One, reached such a density that the Cross became obvious and inexorable: "Now the hour has come when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mt 26:45), into the hands also of "the god of this world "

In his Incarnation, the Word of God assumed the totality of human nature; one and all have their place in that Incarnation. The First and Second Adam are two poles, two centers that coexist in humanity as a whole and in each man. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6:21). Each person can freely choose his existential axis. The fundamental and universal objective of salvation applies to all human beings, but salvation is made effective and concrete, is assumed personally, in each person's free act of choosing. And here is God's own predicament: "God can do anything except make man love him," according to the famous saying of the Church Fathers.

The Son of God presented himself before his Father as the Son of Man. The Second Adam identified himself with the First Adam and at Gethsemane sank into the deadly night of anguish: "Now my soul is troubled but it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour" (Jn 12:27). Christ became *the subject of sin*, freely accepted. *Ecce Homo*, and elsewhere: "It is no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me." The human egos of the two Adams coincide and are the same. This is the God-Man's "crazy love" (*manikon eros,* according to Nicholas Cabasilas), his love-limit for his fallen brother.

The Father extended the chalice of human iniquities to his Son and obliged him to go beyond the trembling, the fear of his humanity, not in the face of physical suffering but in the face of the crushing load of universal Sin, in the face of the mysterious and fearful passage through the gates of death. The Father did not grant Christ's prayer when he cried "Let this cup pass from me." Christ's human liberty had to accept the Cross.

Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, in a magnificent statement said that "the Father is Love that crucifies; the Son is Love crucified; and the Holy Spirit is the invincible power of the Cross." In a certain sense, the Crucifixion is common to each person of the Trinity. Each person has his proper way of participating in that Mystery. Rublev's Trinity icon shows us this silently, mysteriously, in fear and trembling. Are we getting close to an anthropomorphism that would introduce theopaschism into God's immutable eternity? Certainly not! The Fathers very clearly saw God's own antinomy. God is more than an Absolute, for he is absolutely himself and himself the Other: the God-Man, and the Name of God is relative to the world. How can God be both absolute and relative, God *of* History and God *in* History? We have here the mystery of God's love that transcends his own transcendence and must simply be venerated in silence, in fear and trembling. The suffering of Christ's human nature was felt in his person and therefore possessed its equivalent in the trinitarian unity of God. The whole eucharistic canon along with the epiclesis is addressed to the Trinity and is the work of the Trinity.

"The Holy Spirit is the joy in which the Three delight together." But the cry that rings out from the Cross "Father, why have you abandoned me" means that the Spirit no longer unites the Son to the Father. The "Giver of Life" abandoned the Son like the Father abandoned him. The Holy Spirit became the ineffable Suffering in which the Three unite together. The Father cut himself off from the Son, and the Son, as in an instant of eternity, went through the divine infinity of solitude. The Holy Spirit, being the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son, offered himself in sacrifice and, in his own way, took the Cross to himself so as to become "the invincible power of the Cross "

Rublev's admirable icon shows the High Priest who offered the sacrifice, symbolized by the chalice on the altar of the Trinity, for "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son "

How can man understand love that is as broad and deep as God himself? Christ accepted the Cross and in so doing he introduced the sin of the world inside himself, *by compassion*, as though it were part of his own being. The Cross united the abyss of innocence and the abyss of darkness in the same cry: Abba Father.

In the Word's *kenosis*, that is, in his humbling of himself by becoming a servant, his divinity fell silent and his humanity cried out. God took on himself the answer to his own Justice, and he assumed the ultimate consequence of his act of creation. Love took on itself the sin of the world in order to pardon each sinner.

"The prince of this world is on his way," but "he has no power over me" (Jn 14:30). "The Father loves me because I lay down my life No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will And this is the command I have been given by my Father" (Jn 10:18). On some icons, we see the "man of sorrows" transfiguring in himself all of human suffering. He is *elkomenos*, himself climbing the ladder leaning against the Cross. "But this is your hour; this is the reign of darkness" (Lk 22:53). It was violence, outrage, and murder, all freely accepted.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son *without any guarantees*. Abraham's faith would not have reached its ultimate truth, its "agonal" degree without total acceptance beyond any guarantees. The very striking text of Hebrews 11:31-39 describes the eminently tragic destiny of the prophets. We have in this text a theology of defeat and disappointment, but in the light of this theological vision, these defeats show themselves to be the greatest achievements: "since God had made provision for us to have something better, " better than an apparent success. Prophets were a prefiguration, and they identified themselves with the tragedy of God's destiny in the world. "The Lamb sacrificed from before the foundation of the world" was suspended over the abyss "without form or content." This can also mean that he was without any guarantees. Optimistic theodicies always construct rectilinear and rationalist systems, like Job's friends. In order for human liberty, "the second liberty" as the Fathers said, to be true, that is, in the divine image, it must be unforeseeable even for God. Human liberty is unforeseeable because of God's free decision to throw the veil of his *kenosis* over his omniscience. God left the summit of his silence, and his love took an insane gamble. On the Cross, God against God took man's part. He sacrificed his Son without having an angel to halt the death and guarantee that all would turn out right: "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on the earth?" (Lk 18:8).

Atheism is conducting a trial on the subject of the kingdom of evil, and the life-giving Cross is the only answer. We can apply to God the highly paradoxical notion of *weakness*; it simply means salvation by free love: "God presents himself and declares his love. He asks that we respond in kind but being pushed back, he waits at the door. For all the good that he does for us, he only asks in return that we love him; in exchange for our love, he cancels all our debt."[281]

Confronted with suffering and every sort of evil, we give the only adequate answer: "God is weak," and he can only suffer with us. Weak, certainly, not in his almighty Power but rather in his crucified love.

On the Cross, Christ assumed mortality itself. The power of death is in its autonomy, but Christ gave his death to the Father, and so, in Christ, death dies: "trampling down death by death." From that moment on, no one dies alone;[282] Christ dies with him in order to raise him up with him.

II. The Icon

In 11th century Byzantium,[283] an iconographic shift took place. The tradition transmitted from Palestine, Syria, and Cappadocia of depicting a living Christ dressed in a tunic with short sleeves, eyes opened, standing straight on the cross was displaced by a new rendering of a dead and nearly naked Christ, his head bent, and a slightly curved body. His body is naked except for a white cloth that covers his hips. By the elegance of its folds, this cloth adds to the icon's linear beauty. Christ's closed eyes indicate his real death, and at the same time, his face, bent toward the Mother of God, expresses rather a deep sleep, in line with the dogmatic truth: the incorruptibility of his body in death. "Life fell asleep, and Hades shook with fear" (a stichiera from Holy Saturday, tone 2).[284]

In the East, the icon of the crucified Christ never shows the realism of exhausted and dead flesh; painful expressions of agony have no place. Dead and at peace, Christ loses nothing of his royal nobility and always keeps his majesty. According to St. John Chrysostom,[285] "I see him crucified, and I call him King."

The cross on the icon has three arms. The lower arm, under the Savior's feet, is slightly bent. This *scabellum pedum* (Ac 2:35 and Ps 109) tilted downward on one side indicates the fate of the thief on the left. The end bent upward shows the fate of the thief on the right. The troparion of None compares the Cross to a scale of destiny. The Cross is a "scale of justice" and a breach in eternity. It stands in the middle like a mysterious hyphen between the Kingdom and hell.

In the Crucifixion icon, the vertical trunk of the cross is the *descensus* and the *ascensus* of the Word of God. According to James of Saroug,[286] "Christ on the Cross stood on the earth as on a ladder with many rungs." The Cross is "the tree of life planted on Calvary,"[287] the place of the great "cosmic battle." In the *Acts of Andrew*, it is clearly stated that "one end [of the Cross] is planted in the earth so as to reunite the things that are on the earth and in Hades with heavenly things." This is why on the icons, the foot of the cross goes down into a black cavern in which we see Adam's head,[288] Golgotha being the place of the skull" (Jn 19:17). This symbolic detail shows the head of the first Adam, and in him all human beings are washed by Christ's blood.

The architectural background of the icons shows the walls of Jerusalem. Christ suffered outside the walls of the city, and the faithful must follow him: "For there is no lasting city for us in this life " (Heb 13:11-14). The sky is bright; according to St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom, this fact underlines the cosmic meaning of the Cross because it purifies the air of demonic powers.[289]

The pale color of Christ's body pushes it into the background and in contrast puts the dark cross of the passion in relief. The cross is solidly planted in the ground while Christ's suspended body forms a noble curve eliminating any sense of weight, making it light and airy. Christ's body bends out toward the Virgin who is always at the right; she seems to stretch out toward her Son. Mary's right hand points to the cross; her left hand, by its immobility, underlines the movement of the right hand. The fingers of her left hand are near her throat as though she is trying to loosen the tightness caused by an unspeakable pain. Thus the tragic voice of silence passes from one hand to the other. Mary cannot move; she is frozen in suffering, and her soul is pierced by a sword. In her dark clothing, she stands out from the pale and almost unreal body of her Son.

Dressed more brightly, John is at the left and a bit farther away from the cross. His hand touches his slightly bent head and seems to direct his thought toward the Lord. He stares out in front of him; his look is lost or turned inward. Contemplative, he meditates on the mystery of the Passion.

The Savior on the cross is not simply a dead Christ. He is the *Kyrios*, the Master of his own death and Lord of his own life. He underwent no alteration because of his suffering. He remains the Word of God, the eternal Life that gave himself to death and then went beyond it. "When you were crucified, O Christ, the whole creation shuddered in horror at the spectacle, and the foundations of the earth trembled before your power."

The God-Man appears in his two inseparable dimensions: with God above and with humanity below. The angels flying around the top of the cross represent heaven, and the holy women and Longinus the Centurion at the foot of the Cross represent humanity.

As we look at the icon, we think of the beautiful reflection of Nicholas Cabasilas:

> From the beginning human desire was made to be gauged and measured by their desire for Him, and is a treasury so great, so ample, that it is able to encompass even God . The eye was created capable of perceiving light, the ear for sound, and each member for its appropriate end; the desire of the soul has for its object Christ alone.[290]

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Icons of Christ's Resurrection

I. Introduction

"He took to himself descent from Abraham. It was essential that he should in this way become *completely like* his brothers " (Heb 2:16-17). The Lord's voluntary death was the last, and so tragically ringing, step in establishing his conjugal unity with humanity. It was not, however, the end of his earthly ministry. "Moses mystically prefigured that day when he said: 'and the Lord blessed the seventh day.' For it is the blessed Sabbath, the day of rest in which the Son rested from all his works" (the matins of Holy Saturday). The silence of Holy Saturday falls on the final Mystery.

Being "similar" to men, similar to Adam's state before the Fall, Christ's humanity, without being mortal, did not yet have the effective power of immortality. But by *freely* accepting his own death, Christ assumed *mortality* itself. He died with all men, but all humanity was also found in Christ's death. In his Passion, he endured the suffering of all: " he had to experience death for all mankind" (Heb 2:9).

At death, the human person disintegrates. The spirit with the soul are separated from the body which, having become earth, "returns to the earth." Christ likewise "gave up his spirit," but his soul "was not abandoned to Hades" (Ac 2:31). In this mysterious state beyond the tomb, the union of the two natures in the one single person of the Word remained unchanged: "In the tomb with the body, in hell with the soul, in paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit " (a pascal antiphon). The Son of God is always the Son of Man: the God-Man. Death was not able to separate the divine and human natures. Even the link between his person and his body was not broken in death. This is why his flesh was not touched by corruption. Nonetheless, Christ experienced *real death*, as violent and unnatural as it was for him, and his soul descended to Hades, the "place" of the dead.

The direct and inevitable consequence of sin, the very principle of mortality, is expressed in each person's death, in his return to the earth, and in the corruption of his body. Since Christ's humanity was not mortal, his death was *voluntary*, and by that very fact, it was the beginning of victory: "trampling down death by death."

In his priestly prayer, Christ solemnly said: "Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was" (Jn 17:4-5). This was the fulfillment of his *kenosis* and his entry into ever-lasting glory. Sin was nailed to the Cross, and Christ broke down the barrier of separation (Eph 2:14). And then the Father answered the Son's prayer, his final epiclesis, and " raised him from the dead and gave him glory " (1 Pe 1:20-21). Stephen the first martyr saw the Son of Man glorified standing at the right hand of God (Ac 7:55-56). The Father glorified the Son through the Holy Spirit.

In the Resurrection, God gave to Christ's soul the power to awaken his body from sleep and to reunite it to himself: "for it was impossible for him to be held in its [Hades'] power" (Ac 2:24). In fact, by his total obedience to the Father, an obedience to the Love that crucifies, Christ the crucified Love acquired the perfect deification of his humanity which was placed henceforth in active, as opposed to potential, immortality. The Word participated in the trinitarian act, but his humanity also participated in the victory over death in a synergetic and active manner. If God cannot save man without man's participation, neither can God resurrect man without his active participation, without the bloody sweat and the *fiat* of Gethsemane.

Christ's Resurrection was the victory that *did away with* death. It constituted therefore an ontological change and henceforth the spiritual body of glory could reappear in this world without being restrained by its laws. Christ could go through closed doors and appear and disappear in front of his disciples. These archetypical properties of the Lord's resurrected body suggest that all resurrected bodies lose the negative force of repulsion (hostility and solipsism) which characterizes the dark, dense, and opaque aspect of matter, that is, the closed volume of objects in space. The

resurrected body keeps, on the other hand, the positive force of attraction (charity) and thus resistance and impenetrability are suppressed. This force allows the deified bodies to go "through," to be transparent, able to go anywhere, and totally receptive to communion.

II. Hades and the Resurrection

The gospel narrative says nothing about the very moment of the Resurrection. Iconography follows this silence very faithfully out of great respect for the mystery. As a result and in conformity with the Scriptures, there are only two icons of the Resurrection: 1) the Descent into Hades and 2) the Myrrh-bearing Woman at the Tomb. These are the only icons of Easter.

"You came down to earth to save Adam but not finding him here, O Master, you went looking for him even in Hades" (matins of Holy Saturday). In order to touch the farthest depths of the Fall and to put himself at the "heart of the creation," Christ was *mystically* born in Hades, in that "place" where evil crouches in its ultimate despair. The Nativity icon shows the dense darkness of the cave, a somber triangle where the Christ Child lies as though he is in the dark bowls of Hades. The Nativity bends down the heavens to the very depths of the abyss: "As a light-bearing torch, God's flesh *under* the earth dissipates the darkness of Hades." What the Nativity prophetizes, the Epiphany, the Cross, and the Descent into Hell bring to fulfillment, and from then on, "the Light shines in the darkness." St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "the Sun set with him, but he dissipated forever the darkness of death." The Bible opens with this Sun by announcing the word: "Let there be Light." Throughout the liturgy, we follow its itinerary in the history of this world: the Light was also crucified[291] because it is the trinitarian Light.

The Epiphany icon shows Christ entering into the Jordan, referred to as "a liquid tomb," that abyss of watery matter which conceals the powers of evil. Christ penetrates into this element "to pull out men from their darkened dwelling place." We can easily see that the Lord's baptism is already a reflection of his descent into Hades: "O eternal Word, you give a new youthfulness to man who had been corrupted by his exile; *he is buried with you in the waters*."

Early catechetical instruction drew attention to an aspect of baptism that has been forgotten throughout history: baptism by immersion reproduces the whole cycle of salvation, and the baptized person follows the Lord through each stage. Baptism is therefore a very real descent with Christ into death; it is also a *descent into Hades*. St. John Chrysostom clearly said that "the action of going down into water and of coming up again symbolizes the descent into Hades and the rising from that abode."[292] To receive baptism is not just to die and rise again with Christ but also to go down into Hades and to come up again with Christ. Hades is in fact more fearful than death. A spiritual master said that "the nothingness that they are searching for will not even be given to them." And here the decisive victory has been won.

Christ descended to Hades carrying sin with him, and he carried as well the marks of the Cross, of Love crucified. But every baptized person who is raised up with Christ also carries the marks of the priestly concerns of Christ the priest, of his apostolic anguish for the destiny of those who are in Hades. Every baptized person, while still living, this very day even, can go down into the hell of the modern world, in its ultimate state of refusal and bring to it the witness of the light of Christ. *The Shepherd of Hermas*[293] and Clement of Alexandria[294] showed this concern in an figurative image. The apostles and the doctors of the Church went down into hell after their death in order to announce salvation and give baptism to those who asked for it.

The Johannine East is just as sensitive to the theme of hell as it is to the Resurrection; these two sensitivities are among its special gifts. This stands out very clearly in the liturgical and iconographic tradition. In Eph. 4:9-10, St. Paul dealt with this theme in a very compact and gripping form: "When it says, 'he ascended,' what can it mean if not that he descended right down to the lower regions of the earth? The one who rose higher than all the heavens to fill all things is none other than the one who descended." We see the surprising extent of the itinerary: *kata, ana,* down, up; the two extremities of the course of the winged Lamb; the descent to the lowest point (Hades) and the ascent to the highest point (heaven). The East stops in amazement before the "height and the depth" of the mystery of salvation. In these two points, it sees the dimensions of Christ's charity and his triumphal message: "When he ascended to the height, he captured prisoners " (Eph 4:8).

Let us listen to what Epiphanius had to say in his magnificent homily for Holy Saturday:[295]

> What is this? A great silence reigns today on the earth, a great silence and a great solitude. A great silence because the King is sleeping. The earth trembled and was calmed because God fell asleep in the flesh and went to wake up those who had been sleeping for centuries. God died in the flesh, and Hades shook. God fell asleep for a little while, and he aroused from sleep those who were dwelling in Hades

He went to search for Adam, our first father, the lost sheep. He wanted to go visit all those seated in the darkness and in the shadow of death. Let us go down with him in order to see the covenant between God and men. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah, and Jonah are all there. And among the prophets, one cries out: "From the bowls of hell, hear my supplication, listen to my cry!" Another says: "From the depths, I cry to you Lord, Lord, hear my voice." And yet another: "Make your face to shine on us, and we will be saved!"

Adam was held captive deeper down than all the rest, and said: "I hear the footsteps of someone who is coming toward us!" And while he was speaking, the Lord entered, carrying the victorious weapon of the Cross. Full of amazement, Adam cried to the others: "My Lord be with you all!" And Christ answered Adam:

> And with your spirit Get up out of that mass of dead people. I am your God and because of you, I have become your son Get up, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you. *We form together one unique and indivisible person* Get up, let us leave here and go from pain to joy My heavenly Father is waiting for the lost sheep the wedding hall is prepared the eternal tents have been put up this heavenly Kingdom which existed before the ages is now waiting for you

In the silence of Good Friday, the eucharist is not celebrated, for Christ is in Hades. For the earth, it is the day of pain, the burial service, and the tears of the Mother of God, but in Hades, on Good Friday, it is already Easter. Christ's power dissipated the darkness in the heart of death's kingdom.

III. The Icons

The Church of the Holy Savior of Chora (Kahriye Camii) in Constantinople dates back to the 5th century and was rebuild in the 12th. Its name, Chora, means "in the fields," outside the walls. Beside the main church is a chapel or *parecleseion*. The apse is dedicated to the Resurrection and shows the descent of Christ into Hades. The immense job of cleaning off the chalk that the Moslems had used to cover the frescoes and mosaics was carried out by the Byzantine Institute of America. This work restored to the images their original richness and showed the exceptional artistic quality of the Byzantine renaissance of the 14th century.

The artist who painted the Descent into Hell was a master of an exceptional science. He remains anonymous, but his work dates from the first years of the 14th century.

According to St. Peter, Christ was the liberator who announced the Gospel to the captives (1 Pe 4:6). His word on salvation was already the saving act: "You have broken the eternal chains holding the captives." Christ walks over the broken doors of Hades. In a black abyss, Satan is chained, and the beaten forces of Hades, the debris of its evil weightiness, are symbolically represented by a multitude of broken chains, keys, and nails.

At the center of the icon, we see Christ the lightning-bolt as he breaks into Hades; he is a brilliantly shining light, the master of life, charged with the dynamism of the Holy Spirit, and shining with the divine energies. But his face, as though immobilized by his infinite tenderness, royally masters and dominates this liberating whirlwind. This image is the plastic transposition of the Easter liturgy sung in Hades. The power of his gesture, this violence that grabs hold of the heavens and flashes across the firmament, is reinforced by Christ's flowing and floating tunic. He is surrounded by a mandorla made up of heavenly spheres, dotted with brilliant stars and flashing rays. He is dressed in Light which is the attribute of his glorified body and the symbol of divine Glory. This is why his clothing is of a supernatural whiteness; we naturally think of the colors of Mount Tabor. On other icons, his clothes are golden yellow and covered with "assist," that is, golden lines.

Christ is dressed as a king. He is the Lord, but his only power is Love crucified and the invincible power of the Cross.

In a powerful hand movement, Christ yanks bewildered Adam and Eve from Hades. We have here the *powerful meeting of the two Adams* and a foretelling of the fullness of the Kingdom. The two Adams are together and identify with one another, no longer in the *kenosis* of the Incarnation but in the Glory of the Parousia. "He who said to Adam 'Where are you?' has mounted the Cross to search for him who was lost. He went down into Hades saying: Come to me my image and my likeness" (a hymn by St. Ephrem). This is why the groups on the left and the right are in the background; they are the constitutive elements of Adam, that is, all humanity, individual men and women. They are the righteous and the prophets. On the left are the kings David and Solomon; they are preceded by the Forerunner whose gesture calls attention to and points out the Savior. On the right is Moses who often carries the tablets of the Law. They all recognize the Savior and express their recognition by their gestures and attitudes. "And the Lord extended his hand and made the sign of the cross on Adam and all the saints. And taking Adam by the hand, he rose up out of Hades, and all the saints followed him."[296] Christ does not come out of the tomb but out from "among the dead," *ek nekron*, "coming up out of devastated Hades as from a nuptial palace "

Between the descent into hell and the appearing of the resurrected Christ, there is a mystery surrounded by silence, absolutely inaccessible to the human eye. We therefore pass on immediately to the second image of the diptych of the Resurrection, which shows the myrrh-bearing women coming to the Tomb holding vases of spices and perfume. On Rublev's icon, or perhaps of his school, the women have the striking form of a plant with three flowers; we see an astonishing elegance. The women are represented as a mysterious reflection of the trinitarian unity.

We most often see two angels dressed in white, the "one at the head and the other at the foot" of the tomb. They say to the women that "he is not here; he is risen." They show the women the empty tomb with the burial clothes in the form of long strips. These strips are just like the ones in which the Christ Child is wrapped on the Nativity icon. And finally, this is all that remains of Hades: just debris, dust, emptiness, nothingness. Life is elsewhere. "And then the other disciple [John] entered, he saw, and he believed" (Jn 20:8). The icons shows us what he saw.

In studying the icon, we are initiated into a symbolism of rare depth. At the time of Moses, the Ark of the Covenant was covered by a slab of solid gold and was called the *kapporet*, meaning *propitiation* or "that which brings about expiation" (Ex 25:21; 37:6). According to the ritual, the *kapporet* was the place where God entered into communion with his people in order to pardon them. "I will meet you there." and "I will speak to you there." have contributed to the name "the Tent of Meeting." Following God's orders, Moses placed "a cherubim at one end and another at the other. The cherubim had their wings spread out upward to protect the place." The iconographer exactly reproduced the *kapporet* and has thus given us the key to understanding the parallel. The *kapporet* and the Tent of Meeting were symbolic figures. They were prefigurations that foretold the meeting of the two Adams and the place where the mystery of salvation was accomplished. His power made this place such a convincing witness that John "saw and believed."

The myrrh-bearing women went away from the tomb with great joy. Jesus met them and his first word to them was *chairete*, "rejoice "

The Holy Spirit makes the darkness of death fade away, along with the fear of judgment and the abyss of hell. His Light transforms the pascal night into "the Feast of Joy," *the Feast of Meeting*. A homily of St. John Chrysostom read at the matins of Pascha says it quite admirably:

> for the Lord, who is jealous of his honor, will accept the last even as the first; he gives rest to him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as to him who has worked from the first hour. Wherefore, let everyone enter into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast Let no one bewail his poverty Let no one weep for his iniquities Let no one fear death The table is full-laden; let everyone feast sumptuously.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Ascension Icon

I. The Theological Background

The icon of a feast is always inspired by the liturgical texts of the services. The liturgy of the Ascension centers around St. Luke 24:50-52 and Acts 1:9-11. St. Paul also spoke of the event: "When it says, 'he ascended,' what can it mean if not that he descended right down to the lower regions of the earth?" Psalm 24:9 underlines the magnitude of the event: "Gates, raise your arches; rise, you ancient doors. Let the king of glory in!" The two words *gates* and *doors* stand for the two metaphysical poles of the earth and the two ends of the playing field on which the salvation race was run. God descended to the gates of Hades, broke them down, and then rose up to the doors of heaven: "By his descent, the Lord destroyed the adversary, and by his ascension he exalted man."

In his pessimism, Job said: " he who goes down to Sheol never ascends again" (Job 7:9). The Song of Hannah foretold: the Lord "gives death and life, brings down to Sheol and draws up" (1 Sm 2:6). The feast announces the victory over death and hell, and the tradition goes even further in stating the extent of the final achievement. In an admirable synthesis, St. John Chrysostom showed us the ultimate goal of salvation: in Christ's humanity, the humanity of all was definitively introduced into heavenly existence. It was our "eternalization," and our immortality was given a solid reality without any possibility of sliding back. From that moment on, "for us, our homeland is in heaven" (Phil 3:20). What is more, the Father " raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). By anticipation, in Christ, St. Paul already contemplated the fullness of the Kingdom.

According to the New Testament text, the apostles "worshiped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy" (Lk 24:53); the liturgy of the feast is also overflowing with joy. Christ's work has been objectively realized and salvation is now available to all, but each person must appropriate that salvation in a subjective manner. St. Luke said: "Lifting up his hands, he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven" (Lk 24:50-51). The Lord ascended while he was blessing the apostles, and this event is the central axis of the icon. This blessing is already the beginning of Pentecost, the sending of the Holy Spirit, so magnificently shown at Vezelay (in France where there is a remarkable Romanesque basilica). We can even say that the Ascension icon represents the pentecostal epiclesis, that is, the moment when "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever (Jn 14:16). The piclesis is the invocation addressed to the Father asking him to send the Spirit, and this is precisely what the hymns of the feast constantly refer to: "You ascended in glory, O Christ our God, granting joy to your disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the blessing, they were assured that you are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world" (the troparion of the feast). "The Lord ascended to raise up Adam, the fallen image, and to send us the Spirit Paraclet in order to sanctify our souls " We can clearly see the deep source of the apostolic joy which bursts forth despite the Lord's departure, for the promise remains: " I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28:20). The kontakion underlines quite well what for human reason is an antinomy, that is, seemingly irreconcilable opposites, but for the spirit is simply obvious: "When you had fulfilled the dispensation for our sake, and united earth to heaven: you ascended in glory, O Christ our God, not being parted from those who love you, but remaining with them and crying: I am with you, and no one will be against you." After the Ascension, Christ is present still but in a different way; his presence has been interiorized. He is no longer physically in front of his disciples but rather inside them: he is present in every manifestation of the Holy Spirit as he is present in the eucharist.

II. The Icon

All the different aspects of the one single mystery of salvation shine forth from the very dense content of the icon. The oldest image of the Ascension, already known on the little oil bottles (ampulla) of Monza (5th and 6th centuries), is faithfully reproduced on the icon. The icon's content has not essentially changed from this early time. Our icon is from the Moscow school in the style of Andrei Rublev and dates from the 15th century. In order for the icon to begin to speak to us, we must be in a silent, meditative, and recollected mood. We must abandon ourselves to its grace which progressively leads us to the heart of its message. By its sober and vigorous lyricism, the composition is a wonder of harmony in which each detail sings. We hear a deep musical harmony resounding from the whole: *Sursum corda.*

As in the gospel narrative, the theme of the composition is the Lord's order to gather together and receive his final message. It is the Church under the never ending rain of grace. It is interesting to notice that Christ is represented in the same manner on the images of the Last Judgment, but the direction of the movement is reversed. Here the alpha and the omega meet. The Church gathers together in meditation and waits: " this same Jesus will come back in the same way as you have seen him go" into heaven (Ac 1:11). Christ is the head of the Church, the Mother of God is its image, and the apostles are its foundation. Under this sign of permanent blessing, the apostles assume their function of being the foundation of the Church.

The angels' raised hands and the Virgin's feet form the three points of a very regular triangle. This figure wedges in so forcefully between the apostles that it visibly expresses the image of the Trinity which has the Church as its imprint. In the Virgin, we see the immobility of the Father, the Source of all; the divine agents of salvation, the Word and the Spirit, are symbolized by the angels. In addition to the triangle, we see another sacred geometrical form undergirding the composition: the circle of the Church. It goes through the apostles on the edge of the group and reflects the circle surrounding Christ. The vertical line that unites the Savior's and the Virgin's heads is also the vertical axis that divides the icon in two equal parts. It intersects the horizon line to form a perfect cross.

Christ is set in the circle of cosmic spheres from which his glory radiates. He is upheld by two angels. The colors of their clothing reproduce those of the apostles. They are the angels of the Incarnation and underline the fact that Christ is leaving the earth in his earthly body but is not separating himself from the earth and the faithful who are united to him by his blood. Christ extends his right hand in a blessing gesture; in his left hand he holds a scroll of the Scriptures. He is the source of the grace that blesses and also of the word that teaches. The Ascension does not terminate this aspect of Christ's work.

The two white angels in the middle of the apostles announce that the ascending Christ will come back in his glory. We have here an allusion to St. Paul's statement: "The evidence of three, or at least two, witnesses is necessary to sustain the charge" (2 Co 13:1). Their witness is certain.

The Mother of God occupies the central place and is the axis of the group in the foreground. She stands out on the background of the white angels. "More holy than the cherubim and greater than the seraphim." She is the preëstablished center in whom converge the angelic and human worlds, the earth and heaven. Christ is nonetheless seated "at his [the Father's] right hand in heaven, far above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power, or Domination the head of the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation" (Eph 1:20-23). As the image of the Church, the Virgin is always shown under Christ. She has a double attitude: 1) she is the Orante, interceding before the face of God, and 2) the Most Pure, representing the holiness of the Church before the world. Her immobility represents the immutable truth of the Church. The nearly transparent grace and lightness of her outline contrast strikingly with the manly and agitated figures of the surrounding apostles. Her ecclesial significance is underlined by her elongated body stretching upward as well as by her hands in a position of offering and supplication for the world. The three stars on her head and shoulders represent her virginity before, during, and after giving birth.

The apostles encircle Mary but are divided into two equal groups. They form a perfect circle which is accentuated by the rounded arms of the angels. They also show us the Church inscribed in this sacred sign of eternity and the loving indwelling of the Father in the Son. Their agitated movements indicate the preaching, the many languages and expressions of the one single Truth. The colors of their clothing make up the divine Bridegroom's "coat of many colors," that is, the Church as unity in multiplicity: they are the image of the One that expands into Three and the Three who gather together into One. The group on the left, with the angels, express the movement of the soul toward heaven; the right hand group contemplates the Mother of God, the hidden mystery of the Church, the well of living water, holiness. Thanks to the iconographer's amazing artistic talent, by

strongly contrasting immobility and movement, we feel the Lord's Ascension as though it were happening right before our eyes.

The *sursum corda* resounds and invites one and all to hear the message: "Clap your hands, all you nations; rejoice with great shouts of joy before God for having united earth and heaven. Christ says to those who love him: I am with you and no one will be against you."

The landscape establishes a faint border between the Beyond and the here-and-now, but the tops of the four trees on the Mount of Olives (symbol of peace) clearly go beyond this border and show that nature has its place in the cosmic liturgy: God comes down toward the world, and the world rises up to meet its King. The ivory green colors speak of salvation through grace. A feeling of peace, prayer, and praise envelops everything, for wherever the head is found, there also we find the joyous hope of the body. The liturgy teaches us that "we remember what is to come" and "hope for what already exists."

CHAPTER NINE

The Pentecostal Icon

I. The Theological Background

Exactly halfway through the fifty-day period between Easter and Pentecost, that is, on the Wednesday of the 4th week, the Church celebrates the feast of Mid-Pentecost. In this period, the Church is advancing toward some very solemn events, and the hymns of Mid-Pentecost reveal their meaning. These hymns also show us why, for the Orthodox Church, Pentecost Sunday is a feast of the Holy Trinity and why only on the following Monday, called the Day of the Holy Spirit, is the descent of the Holy Spirit celebrated.

The gospel reading for Mid-Pentecost (Jn 7:14-36) contains the answer: "When the festival was half over, Jesus went up to the Temple and began to teach. 'My teaching is not from myself: it comes from the one who sent me I shall remain with you for only a short time now; then I shall go back to the one who sent me '" The hymns explain the meaning by saying: "You manifested your glory by proclaiming your relationship with the Father" (5th ode of the canon). It is thus from the *Revelation of the Trinity* that the rivers of life will flow: "Jesus stood there and cried out: 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me!' He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (Jn 7:39). Only a Jewish person could come up with so surprisingly accurate a statement about the thirst for the Holy Spirit. Simone Weil[297] said "to call him, simply and purely When someone is at the limit of thirst, when he is sick from thirst, he no longer imagines the act of drinking He only imagines water, pure water, but this image of water is like a cry of his whole being "

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit has its origin in the plenitude of the trinitarian revelation. That revelation is also made full and complete in that outpouring: "Today the Paraclet opens up a new and mystical knowledge: the worship of the Holy Trinity."

This is the order of the manifestations. The Word and the Spirit are inseparable in their action of showing the Father (his "two hands"). They are ineffably distinct, however, like two persons proceeding from the same Father. The Spirit is thus not subordinated to the Son. He is not a function of the Word. He is the second Paraclet, and according to St. Gregory of Nazianzus, "he is another Comforter as if he were another God." We see a reciprocity and a mutual service in the two economies, of the Son and the Spirit. Pentecost is not however simply a consequence or continuation of the Incarnation. It has its own complete value in itself; it is the second act of the Father: the Father sends the Son, and now he sends the Holy Spirit. Having completed his mission, Christ returns to the Father so that the Holy Spirit might come down in Person.

Pentecost thus appears as the final end of the trinitarian economy of salvation. According to the Fathers, Christ is the great Forerunner of the Holy Spirit. St. Athanasius said that "the Word took on flesh so that we might receive the Holy Spirit."[298] For St. Symeon, "the goal and purpose of all of Christ's work of salvation for us was that believers should receive the Holy Spirit."[299] St. Nicholas Cabasilas asked: "What is the effect and the result of Christ's acts? It was nothing other than the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church."[300] The Event at the heart of the Institution only happens in the Holy Spirit, in the work that the Word expressly relates to the Spirit: "It is for your own good that I am going I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate " (Jn 14:16 and 16:7). Christ's Ascension is the epiclesis par excellence, and as a response to this invocation, the Father sends the Spirit and sets Pentecost in motion. This whole vision does not diminish at all the centrality of Christ's redemption, the sacrifice of the Lamb. It rather makes clear the progressive order of the events and shows each one of them in its own grandeur and dimension, each one serving the other in a reciprocity and mutual service. Everything converges toward the Kingdom of the Father.

At the Lord's baptism, the movement of the Dove showed us the Father coming *toward Christ's humanity* and adopting it: "Today have I begotten you." On Pentecost, the tongues of fire showed us

how the Father moves *toward all men* and adopts them. In one of the hymns, we sing: "The Holy Spirit now grants the first fruits of divinity to human nature."[301] Having been given to man by the divine inbreathing at the creation, the Holy Spirit was given back to man on Pentecost and thus became more interior, more intimate to man than man himself.

"I have come to bring fire to the earth" (Lk 12:49). This fire is the Holy Spirit. In the form of tongues of fire, the divine energy deifies, penetrates, and inflames human nature with its truth: "The Holy Spirit makes the one single nature of the Trinity shine mysteriously in the souls [of men]."[302] "On that day, you will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you" (Jn 14:20). The fourth gospel is centered on the indwelling of the Trinity in man: "If anyone loves me, we shall come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23). This is the feast of the Kingdom. According to the Fathers, the Monad-Triade makes himself known by the Paraclet.

The New Testament narrative (Ac 2:3) contains a very important clarification, one that the icon itself underlines very forcefully: " tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of *each one of them*." Each apostle received a tongue personally. Christ recapitulated and integrated human nature into the unity of his body. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, relates to the personal principal of that nature, to human persons. Having received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, each human person expands and develops to his fullness in a unique and personal way. St. Cyril of Alexandria explained that "we are sort of melted into a single Body while being divided in persons."[303] In the heart of the unity found in Christ, the Spirit diversifies and makes each person *charismatic.*

The Church celebrates the trinitarian Mystery on Pentecost Sunday. The importance of this mystery becomes apparent in the face of the crucial problem of human existence: man is either dissolved in the collective mass (1+1 ad infinitum) or is isolated in a lawless individualism (solitary monad, 1 minus the whole). Now between society and the individual, the community and the person, there is no other principle of existence than the trinitarian one: in every love relationship, God is the third pole, the principle of integration. Out of the *you* and the *me*, God makes the *us*. Such a unity in multiplicity offers communion as the vital sphere in which the human person can expand and develop. The Trinity offers its truth as a universal law of all existence: "the One expands in Three, and the Three gather together in One."

Peter's first sermon in Acts 2 expressed this law, and the grandeur of this revelation drew down the miracle of the tongues: "The tongues that were formerly confused at the Tower of Babel are now unified in the mysterious knowledge of the Trinity." Whatever explanation we give to this miracle, the communion between those involved was so intense that it was not simply a matter of linguistic knowledge; they spoke to each other spirit to spirit. "Like a melodious harp, the apostles exposed the melody of your words, O Savior, with a mystical pick."

"Through the Spirit's action, the prophets well up like a spring; the Spirit installs priests; he makes theologians out of sinners; *he gives being to the Church*."[304] The pouring out of the Spirit is preceded and announced by the feast of the Trinity. The three divine Persons of the Trinity are revealed as the heavenly Church, and at Pentecost, the Spirit proceeds to the creation of its earthly icon: the Church of men. On that Sunday, the faithful contemplate the icon of the Trinity in which they see, as in a divine mirror, the mysterious truth of their own existence.

II. The Icon

We are now in a better position to understand the Pentecost icon. It is not simply an illustration of Acts 2. The icon is inspired by all the scriptural texts, follows the liturgy, and sketches an immense perspective that goes far beyond a historical event. It expresses the "inner word," or meaning, of that event. In the icon, we see the college of the twelve apostles (Lk 6:13 and Rv 20:14) which is the mysterious fullness that replaced the twelve tribes of Israel. The assembled apostles represent the *oneness,* the *unity* of the Church, the Church which is waiting to be "clothed with the power from on high" (Lk 24:49) in order to show forth "the fullness of him who fills the whole creation" (Eph 1:23).

In the room, we see Paul, Mark, and Luke. Their presence is an eloquent symbol; it enlarges the apostolic college to include the twelve, the seventy, and the whole body of the Church. This is why the Virgin is absent. She is present on the Ascension icon, for as an image of the Church, she received Christ's heavenly blessing as well as his promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost, however, the Church received the gifts in the form of tongues; each apostle received them

personally. There is no reason, therefore, to have the Virgin repeat the image of the Church which is already represented by the body of the apostles. The icon presents a vision of the Church from the inside. Going beyond the immediate text of Acts, the hymns say: "When the Spirit distributed the tongues of fire, he called all men to unity. We therefore celebrate the Holy Spirit in harmony and concord." It is the harmony of *sobernost*, conciliarity. This is why, on old icons of the Ecumenical Councils, the bishops are arranged in the same pattern as the apostles on the Pentecost icon.

The apostles are seated on a semi-circular bench thus forming two groups of apostles facing each other. They are all in the foreground, all of the same height; this shows that they all have equal honor and dignity. At the top, we see Peter and Paul with an empty space between them. This pattern reminds us of the icon of the young Christ teaching in the Temple, the feast of Mid-Pentecost. In the Pentecost icon, Christ is invisible but nonetheless the ever-present Head. The gospel read on the Monday after Pentecost, the Day of the Spirit, says that "where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (Mt 18:20). He is invisibly present governing and directing the Church.

The icon shows an *open* pattern and situates the event on a vast, raised stage, "the upper room" whose unlimited ecclesial space dominates the world. The upper part is open, sort of stretched out toward the sky, toward the paternal Source. From this Source descend the tongues of fire, the trinitarian energies concentrated in the Holy Spirit. The icon is also open toward the bottom, open onto a black arched space in which languishes a prisoner dressed like a king. The space is often closed off by prison bars thus underlining the "king's" captivity. The inscription around the prisoner's head explains who he is: he is Cosmos, the universe personified by an old man weighed down by many days since the Fall. He represents the world held in captivity by the prince of this world. The blackness that surrounds him is "the darkness and the shadow of death" (Lk 1:79). We have here hell universalized; from which the non-baptized world detaches itself and, in its most enlightened part, also aspires toward the apostolic light of the Gospel. Cosmos extends his hands to receive grace, and on a cloth, he respectfully holds twelve scrolls representing the preaching of the twelve apostles, the apostolic mission of the Church, and the promise of universal salvation. The contrast between these two coexisting worlds is striking: on the upper part, we already see the "new earth," vision of the ideal Cosmos set on fire by the divine fire and toward which the old king aspires to rise. The energies of the Holy Spirit operate to liberate and transform the captive Cosmos shown on the bottom of the icon.

At this point the message of the feast resounds in its fullness. Speaking for all men, Christ cried out, "Why have you abandoned me?" This cry shook the foundations of Hades; its reverberations even evoked a reaction in the Father's heart. But the Father who sent his Son knew that even Hades was his domain and that "death's door" had been changed into the "gate of life." By his extended hands, the old king shows that hellish despair has been wounded by a hope that it contained in itself from the beginning but which had been darkened. Man must never fall into despair; he can only fall into God, and God never despairs of man. The hand extended toward Christ never remains empty.

In John 13, we hear the story of the Last Supper. Judas opened his hand; Christ placed the eucharistic bread in it and made a final appeal. Judas' fingers closed on the sacrificed Lamb. He left, and "it was night." The night received him for Satan was in him. But Judas carried in his hand, Satan's hand, a fearful gift. Hell kept this piece of bread in its bosom. Like a ray of light, is this not a faithful and exact expression of the verse: " a light that shines in the dark"?

Jesus' gesture indicated the final mystery of the Church which ultimately is nothing other than Jesus' hand offering the eucharistic bread, this food of the gods, the bread of his love. The appeal is addressed to everyone, for all are in the power of the prince of this world, like the old captive king on the icon. Everyone is ultimately stretched out toward the divine love. Now those without hope explore Satan's depths. The Gospel, on the other hand, calls believers to "move mountains." Perhaps this means for us to move the hellish mountain of the modern world, to pull the world from its nothingness toward the fiery being of Pentecost, toward its all new dimensions of life.

There is an evolution even in atheism. Nietzsche's death of God, that Good Friday with no aftermath, seems to be giving way today to the great silence of Holy Saturday to the silence of the old king. It is a silence of waiting, of anticipation, rather than of negation.

The very rich iconographic content calls our attention to the content of the feast's services. The great vespers service that follows the Sunday liturgy contain three long prayers of St. Basil the Great. The priest reads them in front of the people, kneeling as a sign of special attention. The first prayer presents the Church before the face of the Father; the second asks the Son to protect all the

living; the third prays for *all* the dead, from the very beginning of the creation. It thus makes reference to the descent of Christ into Hades:

> You mercifully accept to listen to our prayers of expiation for those who are prisoners in Hades. You also give us the great hope of seeing you deliver them from the torments that weigh them down Give them rest in a place of refreshment ; make them worthy of deliverance, for those in Hades do not dare confess you, but we the living, we bless you and beg you and offer you our prayers and sacrifices for their souls.

The overflowing grace of the feast removes all limits. Once a year on Pentecost, the Church prays even for those who have committed suicide. We see the grandeur of the feast so forcefully underlined by the two openings of the icon: from heaven to Hades and from Hades to heaven.

During matins on Easter night, during Holy Saturday's final moments of silence, the priest and people leave the church. The procession stops outside the closed doors of the church. For a brief moment, these closed doors symbolize the Lord's tomb, death, Hades. The priest makes the sign of the cross on them, and under its irresistible force, the doors open wide, and everybody enters the church flooded with light. As they enter, the people sing "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life." *The gates of Hades have become the doors of the church.* We cannot go any farther than this with the symbolic meaning of the feast.

The Church of sinners, "of those who are perishing," according to St. Ephrem's expression, discovers the "golden chain" of holiness through the communion with "holy things." Pentecost brings a new ecclesial qualification to what is human: in a sinner, it allows us to see a saint. At Lystra, the mob mistook Paul and Barnabas for "gods." "We are only human beings like you," answered the apostles (Ac 14:15). St. John Chrysostom insisted that "this is very true. The apostles were at the same time themselves and other than themselves: *to human nature had been added a tongue of fire*."[305] On the Sunday that follows and closes the week long feast of Pentecost, it is quite fitting that the Church should celebrate All Saints, the feast of all known and unknown saints. The feast of the pentecostal tongues of fire is the feast of the Church's very essence, of holiness itself. According to Origen, "the Church full of the Trinity" finds its fullness and completeness in the Church full of saints.

The hymns of All Saints transmit the message of all icons: "I praise all the friends of my Lord, the Lord who wants to be united to them." And from the iconostase, "the cloud of witnesses comes out to meet us "

CHAPTER TEN

The Icon of Divine Wisdom

I. Introduction

We feel a profound mystery as we contemplate the icons of the Wisdom of God. There are no absolutely convincing explanations about the meaning of this enigmatic figure. The following commentary is only a theological hypothesis, and we in no way claim to give a definitive solution to the problem. What follows is but one suggestion among others.

From the many different compositions of the Divine Wisdom, we have chosen the famous Sophia icon from Novgorod painted around 1500. Wisdom has the form of an angel seated on a throne crowned and dressed in imperial garments. The figure holds a scepter as a sign of royal dignity and a scroll representing the content of Wisdom. The face, hands and wings are fire-red, and the tunic is of shining gold. The feet are set on a stone, representing an unshakable foundation, "on this rock, I will build my Church," the rock of faith whose round form stands for fullness. The seven vertical columns placed under the throne reproduce the "palace with seven columns" and symbolize the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit according to Isaiah. Wisdom is at the center of the spheres of glory making up the mandorla. On the upper part of the icon, we see Christ lowering his hands toward the angel. At the very top, we have the throne of the Parousia surrounded by angels. The Wisdom-angel is surrounded by the Mother of God holding Christ-Emmanuel and St. John the Baptist. This formation makes us think immediately of the Deisis icon.

The iconographic theme of Wisdom comes from Proverbs 9:1-5:

> Wisdom has built herself a house; she has erected her seven pillars; she has slaughtered her beasts, prepared her wine; she has laid her table. She has dispatched her maidservants and proclaimed from the city's height: "Who is ignorant? Let him step this way." To the fool she says, "Come and eat my bread, drink the wine I have prepared."

The patristic commentaries relate this text to the economy of salvation with the eucharist at the center. This same text was chosen as the liturgical reading for the dedication service of a church and also for feasts of the Mother of God. In both cases, we see that the Church and the Mother of God are the containers of Wisdom.

The book of Isaiah speaks of the "angel of great council," a title that has always been applied to the incarnate Word. This name stands for his mission in the world as "the One sent" by the Trinity. However, these necessarily symbolic iconographic compositions have stirred up a lot of controversy. The Council in Trullo, canon 82, has forbidden "symbols" and "shadows" (angel, lamb, fish) of the Word of God *after* his Incarnation.

Since this interdiction is part of the iconographic tradition, how can we explain Andrei Rublev's famous Trinity icon? According to St. Justin the Philosopher,[306] only two angels were really angels in the biblical story of the *philoxenia* or the hospitality of Abraham. The other was the Lord by himself. Origen[307] had the same approach: Abraham "met three, but he only worshiped one."

The commentaries of Rublev's icon which identify Christ with the middle angel align themselves with this tradition. If the central angel is identified with Christ, it is not fitting that the Father be set to the side and that such a prominent central position be given to another. After all, the Father is the source and monarchical principle of unity. This tradition (Justin and Origen) suppresses the trinitarian sense of the icon. On the other hand, if the Father is in the middle, then the trinitarian meaning is immediately and explicitly affirmed. It is therefore perfectly legitimate to represent the Father and the Holy Spirit in the form of angels. Likewise, in this trinitarian perspective, and only in this perspective, can Christ be represented in the form of an angel without contradicting the decree

of the Council in Trullo. The icon in no way describes the persons but opens onto the mystery of the Unity of the Three.

In a 12th century manuscript of St. John of the Ladder, preserved in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai, we see an image of three figures: an angel in the middle seated on a throne placed in the center of an oval mandorla. This angel is obviously set apart, for he is surrounded by two other winged figures standing at some distance from the throne. The royal dignity of the middle angel, surrounded as he is in glory, stands out very clearly. The inscriptions make clear the meaning of the figures: in the middle is divine agape who is royally seated and surrounded by the human virtues of faith and hope. Above this, we see Christ lowering his hands toward the middle angel. This composition reminds us of our Wisdom icon and can be taken to be its prefiguration. It is obvious that Christ in the upper part of the image, by lowering his hands, is in no way pointing out his own image in the middle angel. Such an interpretation of the angel would contradict the Council in Trullo. What would be the sense of an apparently useless symbolic double of Christ beside an image of the incarnate Christ?

Let us recall here the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas: the Holy Spirit takes the eternal movement of trinitarian love into himself; he *enhypostasizes* it, that is, he gives it personal grounding in his own person. Love is inherent to each person of the Trinity, but in the circulation of the intradivine life, the Holy Spirit is the trinitarian agape par excellence. It is therefore perfectly plausible to interpret the middle angel as a symbolic figuration of the Holy Spirit: he is seen as the divine agape surrounded by the human virtues of faith and hope since these virtues lead to the heart of the divine and human life. They lead toward love just as in the Deisis, where the Virgin and St. John surround the Word.

II. The Various Images of Wisdom

Several images of God's Wisdom stand out in Holy Tradition: Wisdom is: 1) the image of the incarnate Word based on I Cor. 1:24; 2) not an image of the second but of the third person, that is, of the Holy Spirit, according to St. Theophilus of Antioch[308] and St. Irenaeus;[309] 3) an image of the trinitarian energy in Palamite theology. Finally Wisdom has its image 4) in the Virgin and 5) the Church.

This symbolic richness warns us that it would be false to isolate one single meaning. Wisdom is the attribute of the trinitarian God and possesses a plurality of figures. Above all, Wisdom is the place where each person shows himself. More precisely and according to the classical outline of the Fathers: Wisdom is the revelation of the Father-*the Wise One* in the Son-*Wisdom* through the Holy Spirit-*the Spirit of Wisdom.* In the economy of salvation, Wisdom is more precisely the place of the dyad Son-Spirit which reveals the Father. This is why Wisdom can be identified with the Son as well as with the Spirit. The relation with the Son is more often brought out because the Son is the Word incarnate and possesses a human form.

III. An Interpretation of the Wisdom Icon

In the 14th century with the doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas, Holy Tradition achieved a doctrinal synthesis about the Holy Spirit. The uncreated energy is "inseparable from the most Holy Spirit." Palamite doctrine works with the distinction between the Spirit (with the article) as person and Spirit (without the article) as energy. It is the very important distinction between the levels of *essence* and *energetic manifestations.* In patristic doctrine, the mysterious reality of Sophia-Wisdom has sometimes been identified with Holy Spirit, sometimes and more often identified with the Word. Palamite doctrine has seen in Wisdom the *divine energy* manifested in the Son but common to the three persons of the Trinity and *communicated in the Holy Spirit*: "God created the universe by and in Wisdom."[310] Patriarch Philotheus said that "Wisdom is the energy common to the Trinity energy given in the Holy Spirit to those who are worthy."

Iconography follows tradition and shows Wisdom in the form of a winged feminine figure, on the background of a building with seven columns. Being the "breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty " (Wsd 7:25), Wisdom is "at play everywhere in his world,

delighting to be with the sons of men" (Pr 8:31). In its dominant note, the divine is visibly felt here to be *tenderness* and *beauty.*

According to our hypothesis, the Sophia icon unites all its various images of Wisdom. On the upper part of the icon, the Gospel book is set on the "throne of preparation" and constitutes the content of Wisdom preached. Christ dressed as a king is Wisdom identified with the incarnate Word. The Mother of God holding the medallion of Christ-Emmanuel is Wisdom in the theandric mystery of the Incarnation and the privileged place of its presence, maternal virginity. The Virgin with St. John the Baptist (the "child of Wisdom," Lke 7:35), the handmaiden of the Lord and the friend of the Bridegroom on the Deisis, represent Wisdom as the Church in its ministry of intercession. And finally, the angel in the middle is Wisdom as the personified source of the energies and of sanctification, Spirit without the article.

Its mystery, however, forces us to go even farther. St. John of Damascus[311] said that "the son is the image of the Father, and *the Holy Spirit is the image of the Son.*" The third person is the only one not to have his image in another person. The Spirit hides himself even when revealing himself. He appears *as* or *in the form of*, that is, the Dove or the tongues of fire. On the upper parts of some icons, we see the Cross placed beside the Gospel book. In I Cor. 2, St. Paul spoke of the "folly of the Cross;" he said it referred to God's wisdom, that mystery that only the Holy Spirit reveals. This is why the mystery is called the "invincible power of the Cross." On the throne of the *hetimasia*, Wisdom is thus represented by the Gospel book and the Cross, figures of the Word and the Spirit.

We have already mentioned St. Theophilus and St. Irenaeus who identified Wisdom with the Holy Spirit. We must certainly add that Wisdom is identified in the same way with the Word and with the Spirit, with "the two hands of the Father," according to St. Irenaeus' expression. But the Spirit, like the Father, has no incarnate image. The Son is the only one to show us a human face. Nonetheless, his mystery is not therefore limited for "whoever has seen me has seen the Father." We can also say that "whoever has seen the Holy Spirit has seen me" for the Holy Spirit is the image of the Son. In reading the fourth gospel, we are taken by the fact that the same names, *Comforter* and *Advocate* are intimately linked to Christ, the first Comforter-Advocate, and to the Spirit, the second Comforter-Advocate. We therefore understand why their dyadic unity culminates in their reciprocal identification with Wisdom.

"Like the sun when it meets a pure eye, the Holy Spirit will show you *in himself* the Image of the Invisible. In the blessed contemplation of this Image, you will see the ineffable beauty of the Archetype."[312] Every vision of God is trinitarian.

We can consider the angel of the Sophia icon to be the icon of the Holy Spirit, not in his person which is radically hidden but as the "image of the Son," according to the expression of St. John of Damascus.

The angel of the Wisdom icon is obviously derived from Rublev's icon in which the Spirit is represented not in his person but as the third principal of trinitarian unity. Only the Son is "true man," only the Son has a human face. But in a certain sense, this face is also the human face of the trinitarian God. This is why the Father and the Spirit can appear *as* angels with a human face.

The angel of our icon wears a crown and holds a scepter, signs of kingship. The assist covers him with the gold of the God of glory. The purple[313] of his face is very enigmatic. According to the ancient Byzantine tradition, Wisdom with a purple face appeared to the master worker's son during the construction of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

In its ultimate fullness, the icon represents the economy of salvation, God's Wisdom *in its totality.* The purple places us at the "beginning," at the source of creation. It is thus the first statement of the Bible: "Let there be light." It is the *preeternal dawning*, and this explains the color purple which rises up above the abyss still without life or light. From this abyss, God draws out being. The spheres around the angel represent the universe. They are dusted with stars, with innumerable worlds. We see here God's great plan for his creation, but the two figures that surround the angel are already its fulfillment.

"In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1). The Gospel book on the throne of glory is already overshadowed by the Cross. "The Word was God," and this is the bust of Christ: "The Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:1, 14). "A light shines in the dark" (Jn 1:5), and this is the brilliance of the angel on the starry background of spheres and worlds. The Mother of God shows Christ-Emmanuel, image of the eternal Word before the creation, and St. John, the friend of the Bridegroom, are the witnesses of the fulfillment of the divine plan.

The preeternal purple dawn announces the brilliant noonday, the light of Tabor and of the Second Coming, the Sun of the incarnate Word. Christ lowers his hands toward the angel in a gesture that shows that he has accomplished his mission and points to the "work of the Spirit that is beginning." Christ comes "to send fire on the earth," and the fire according to the Fathers is the Holy Spirit.

In an ascending order, the Trinity is revealed on the vertical line of the icon. On the other hand, in the circular composition, the angel is the architectural center with the heavenly powers, the angels, on top and mankind on the bottom. The whole universe is united around God's glory; heaven and earth, angels and men form a splendid doxology.

The Sophia icon reproduces the Deisis which, in an eschatological perspective, transforms the Last Judgment into the wedding feast of the Lamb. At its most advanced point, our icon represents the icon of the Kingdom which according to the Fathers is the Holy Spirit. In this final perspective, it is no longer the *Dawn of History* but the *Dawn of Eternity*. The alpha and the omega meet, and the "let there be light" reaches its fulfillment in the "let there be beauty." On the Sophia icon, we can contemplate the *divine Beauty* that saves.

The unspeakable Kingdom and its vision overflow in the soul and allow us to have a glimpse of the light of the Eighth Day, in which the Holy Spirit will make Christ's humanity radiate like a "glass torch" shining with all the colors of the Beyond. It will be the fiery icon of the trinitarian Glory.

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[1] Kierkegaard, *La note de 1852*, (*The Note of 1852*) Bohlin, 1941, p. 251.

[2] Lot Borodine, *Nicolas Cabasilas*, 1958, p. 156.

[3] St. John Chrysostom, *Ibid*, p. 155.

[4] *Mystagogy*, 23, PG 91, 701 C.

[5] *Le Traité de l'Oraison (The Essay on Prayer)*, I. Hausherr, Paris, 1960, p. 83.

[6] *Cap. phys.,* 37.

[7] St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymne à l'amour divin (The Hymn to Divine Love), La vie spirituelle*, 27, 1931, p. 201.

[8] 1 Co 12:3.

[9] The editing of the gospels and the creation of the icon took place after the illumination of Pentecost.

[10] *Homilies*, I, 2.

[11] Jean Hani, *Le Symbolisme du Temple chrétien (The Symbolism of the Christian Temple)*, Paris, 1962, p. 126.

[12] Saint Dorotheus, *Enseignements utiles à l'âme (Useful Teachings for the Soul).*

[13] For St. Ephrem the Syrian, the pearl evoked the images of baptismal water and fire because it is the result of the union of water and fire-light. St. Macarius spoke of the "heavenly pearl", an image of the divine Light. In the gospel parable, the pearl stands for the Kingdom.

[14] Gregory Palamas, *Homélies sur la présentation de la Sainte Vierge au temple (Homilies on the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the Temple).*

[15] *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, III, 7.

[16] *Ibid.* III, 11.

[17] *Homily* 26, 1.

[18] *Regulæ fusius tractate,* PG 31, 912 A.

[19] St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De opif. hom.,* 18, 192 CD.

[20] PG, 38, 1327.

[21] *On St. John*, 16, 25; PG 73, 464 B.

[22] *On Matthew*, 24, 51.

[23] St. Basil, *Homily* 21, PG 31, 549 A; 216 A.

[24] *Homily on the Scriptures*, PG 85, 41 A.

[25] *Amb.,* PG 91, 1148C.

[26] *Homily* 53. See our later chapter (IV, 2) on Our Lady of Vladimir.

[27] *Myst.* 23, PG 91, 701C.

[28] *Gregory Palamas,* John Meyendorff, pp. 178 & 212.

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 140.

[30] St. Maximus, *Myst. cap.* 1-21.

[31] E. Peterson, *Le Livre des Anges* (The Book of Angels), Desclée De Brouwer, 1954.

[32] *Vie en Jésus-Christ,* tr. S. Broussaleux, pp. 136 & 149; *The Life in Christ,* Carmino de Catanzaro, tr., St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974.

[33] *Sources Chrétiennes*, 1955, p. 149.

[34] In homes of the Slavic faithful, there is a corner called the "angle of beauty." This corner is decorated with icons, and its very name shows great spiritual depth.

[35] *Critique of Judgment*, I, 9, 17.

[36] *Homily 35*; PG 151, 433 B

[37] *Tome Hagiorite*; PG 150,1233 D.

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] *De doctr. chr.*, II, 11.

[40] *Opera omnia,* II, 1090.

[41] *Die Religiongeschichte und das Urchristentum* (*The History of Religions and Early Christianity*).

[42] *The Possessed*, tome III.

[43] *Enneade*, I, 8, Editions Budé, p. 130.

[44] See Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*.

[45] *Treatises*, III, 2,12.

[46] PG 9, 293.

[47] See Col 1:15, 1 Co 15:47, and Jn 3:11.

[48] Eph 1:10 and 1 Co 2:7.

[49] PG 44, 446 BC.

[50] *Or. Cat. c/5*; PG 45, 21 CD.

[51] Hom. 45.

[52] St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De infant.,* PG 46, 176 A.

[53] *I. P.* 3,4.

[54] *Oraisons, homélies et discours* (French translation from Russian: Prayers, Homelies, and Speeches by A. De Strourdza), Paris 1849, p. 154.

[55] We can therefore understand the violent reaction of Jacques Prévert: "Our Father, who art in Heaven: Stay right where you are, and we will stay here on earth which is oftentimes so pretty with its mysteries of New York alongside those of Paris, mysteries which are quite the equal of the Trinity "

[56] *Treasury*, 5; PG 75, 65-68.

[57] *Homily* 16: PG 154, 201 D-204 A.

[58] St. Gregory of Nyssa, PG 44, 441 B.

[59] St. Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 37, 1327.

[60] St. Gregory Palamas, PG 150, 1031 A B.

[61] *Ibid*., PG 44, 132 D.

[62] *Agraphon*, reported by Clement of Alexandria.

[63] *Question* 89.

[64] St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De prof. Christ*., PG 46, 244 C.

[65] Origen, PG 12, 1264.

[66] St. Gregory of Nyssa, PG 44, 835.

[67] *Ibid*., PG 44, 128 B.

[68] The Byzantine Christ, *elkomenos*, humiliated and suffering, alone, climbs the final ascent as the Lord of all things. St. John Chrysostom said that "I look at Christ crucified and I see the King." But in western art after the 13th century, Jesus, the man of sorrows, seems to be the very image of suffering, to be abandoned by the Holy Spirit like the Christ of Andernach, Cologne, and the Dévot Christ of Perpignan. The search for realism in the 15th century became even more absorbed by the image of suffering and death. It centered on the cult of the five wounds, the Holy Blood, the instruments of the passion. It is an art of Christ abandoned, waiting for his torture, and of the Virgin of the *Pietà*, alone in her suffering and abandoned by the Dove.

[69] Bouyer, Louis, *Dieu Vivant*, "Les Catholiques occidentaux et la liturgie byzantine," (Western Catholics and the Byzantine Liturgy), #21.

[70] *Or.* XXXI, 8. PG 36, 141 B.

[71] See the admirable analyses of W. Weidlé in his book *Les Abeilles d'Aristée* (The Bees of Aristæus).

[72] According to St. John of Damascus, the devil belonged to the choir of angels that governed the earthly order. This presupposes that the cosmic order has already been troubled by the fall of the angels and that in this case, man failed to undo the damage and to reëstablish the previous situation.

[73] "The sensible world": that part of the creation that touches the physical senses and is perceivable by them, to be distinguished from *sensible* meaning *reasonable* and *logical*. Translator's note.

[74] St. Symeon Metaphrastes' prayer after Holy Communion underlines this point: "You willingly give your flesh to me as food enter into all my members, into all my joints, reins, heart strengthen my knees and my bones nail the whole of me together with the fear of you and establish my whole being in your love."

[75] "What shall we offer to you, O Christ each creature offers its thanksgiving: the earth, the cave; the desert, the manger " (the troparion from the vespers of Christmas).

[76] "Today the waters of the Jordan have become a healing liquid by the presence of the Lord and the whole creation is sprinkled with mystical waves." (Sophrony's prayer at the "Blessing of the waters") "Let every tree of the forest rejoice because nature is sanctified for Christ has been nailed to the Cross" (troparion, 9th ode, matins, the Feast of the Cross).

[77] According to St. Athanasius, the cosmic import of Christ's death "which purified the air" liberated the universe from demonic domination.

[78] The word is from Rudolf Otto's *Le Sacré* [The Idea of the Holy], Paris, 1929, p.22: "If *luminous* can be derived from *lumen*, then *numinous* can be formed from *numen*." In German *ominos* is derived from *omen.*

[79] *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy,* chapter 36.

[80] PG 44, 192. These are two ways the world can exist, two ways to envision the world. The "profane" world is in reality the world "profaned," that is, deprived of its transcendental

dimensions. It must be said that the experience of non-religious man is a rather recent discovery of modern societies.

[81] Such liturgical words as *alleluia, kyrie eleison, amen,* etc. go back to very ancient expressions that were used only for special occasions. The same thing can be said for *verba certa*, that is, certain set formulas such as the trisagion, the sanctus, the Lord's Prayer, the prayer of the heart, the creed, and sacramental formulas. Liturgical repetition underlines their power, and the rising and falling of the voice along with measured and orchestrated rhythm give form to the litanies, chanted prayers, and liturgical readings. Every benediction invokes the grace of the Name, and therefore every wish possesses a very real power. This is why we will have to give an account of *every* word we have every spoken. (See, for example, the gospel texts that speak about the wish of peace.) When a

Christian signs himself with the cross, he performs a gesture that invokes the Holy Spirit; the gesture is epicletic. More precisely, the Christian invokes the "invincible force of the Cross" and by the Cross's penetrating power, he configures his own being so as to conform to the cross of Christ. By this sign of crucified love, the Christian thinks of the cross as an image of the Trinity. He becomes an icon, a living transcription of this sacred hieroglyph.

[82] *Ad Thal.,* q. 25; PG 90, 333A.

[83] *Alphab*, Arsenius 27; PG 65, 96c.

[84] For Bréal and Bailly, *Dictionnaire étymologique latin*, sub. V, the primitive meaning of *tempus* was *temperature.*

[85] For Bergson, duration is the very characteristic of lived and felt succession, as opposed to Kant's mathematical idea of "spatialized" time (*Données immédiates de la conscience*, [The Immediate Data of Experience] p. 74 ff.) Pascal forcefully underlined the mystery of time. He wondered who could define it. "Definitions are made only to designate the things that we give names to and not to show their nature." (*De l'esprit géométrique* [Concerning the Geometrical Mind], Editions Brunschwicg, p. 170).

[86] The world cannot exist outside of time, *procul dubio mundus non factus est in tempore sed cum tempore* (PL 41, 322).

[87] "The theory of relativity eliminates the notion of *absolute mathematical time*, a time that has no experimental meaning. Each system of reference has its own proper time." (See P. Langevin, *Le Temps, l'Espace et la Causalité* [Time, Space and Causality] and H. Poincaré, *La valeur de la science* [The Value of Science].

[88] In *La Douce* [A Gentle Creature], Dostoevsky's genius confronts us with the unbearable contrast between the infinity of suffering and the indifference of time: "Men, love one another." Who had the nerve to say that? The pendulum tics, unfeeling, with a repugnant monotony" (Dostoevsky, *Journal d'un écrivain* [Journal of a Writer], t. II, p. 386). Time reminds us that everything passes away. In *Crime and Punishment*, the ghost of the woman assassinated by Svidrigaylov appeared to him and reminded him that "he forgot to wind the clock." We can stop the clock, but we cannot stop time, and time is implacably moving on toward the Judgment. Stopped time is the most fearful image. Kierkegaard described a sinner when he awoke in hell: "What time is it," he cried. And with an icy indifference, Satan replied, "It's eternity."

[89] Dostoevsky, *Les Frères Karamazoff* [The Brothers Karamazov], Paris, 1948, p. 562.

[90] Lecomte de Noüy introduced the notion of "biological time" which follows a logarithmic and not a arithmetic law. (*Le Temps et la vie* [Time and Life], Paris, 1936; *L'Homme et sa destinée* [Man and His Destiny], Paris, 1946).

[91] PG 46, 547 D; 45, 364 C.

[92] For St. Ignatius, as early as the year 100, Christians were different from others in that they carried God and were *filled* with God (Magn. 14,1).

[93] St. Hillary, PG 82, 205 A; St. Gregory of Nyssa PG 45, 1152 C.

[94] PG 44, 1312 B.

[95] II Timothy, *Homily II* 45; PG 62, 612.

[96] *Hymn* 8, 16; Wensinck, 169.

[97] The abyss of the world or the fetus surrounded by water.

[98] St. Basil, PG 29, 59 B; St. Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 36, 429 C. See also Jean Daniélou, *Bible et Liturgie* [Bible and Liturgy], ch 16.

[99] St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, ch. 27; Canon 19 of the Council of Nicaea; nonetheless, Origen noted that "for the perfected ones, every day is a Sunday" (PG 11, 1549 D).

[100] There is also the traditional belief that the souls of the dead remain on earth for 40 days before going on to the celestial spheres.

[101] The yogis underscore the influence of breathing on existence and by it explain the amazing youth of the ascetics. During the night, they reduce the number of breaths to one tenth of the normal number. Counting in hours, the breaths of one 24 hour day, which represent a wearing out or aging, is equivalent for a yogi to only 12 hours of breathing. If he eats once a day, he eats every 12 hours and not every 24 hours (M. Eliade, *Images et Symboles* [Images and Symbols], Paris, 1952, pp. 112-113).

[102] De Lubac, Henri, *Aspects du Bouddhisme* (Aspects of Buddhism), Paris, 1951; Mircea Eliade, *Images et Symboles* (Images and Symbols), Paris, 1952; Van der Leeuw, *La Religion* (Religion), Paris, 1948.

[103] Eric Burrows, *The Labyrinth,* London, 1935, p. 51.

[104] A. Wensinck, *Navel of the Earth*, Amsterdam, 1916, p. 15.

[105] Adam's body was supposed to have been buried where Christ was to be crucified (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, PG 13, 1777).

[106] PG 91, 1309 B.

[107] *The Gospel according to Peter*, verses 29-40; *The Acts of John,* N. 90-93.

[108] *Similitudes* 9, ch. 6, N 1.

[109] St. Ambrose, *On the Incarnation,* PL 16, 827 C.

[110] Psalm 1; Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, t. II, p. 445.

[111] Von W. Mayer, *Die Geschichte des Kreuzholzes von Christus* (The Wooden Cross of Christ), Munich, 1881.

[112] *La Prière des Eglises de rite byzantin* [The Prayer of the Churches of the Byzantine Rite), Mercenier, t. V, part 1, pp. 39, 52.

[113] *In Psalmum 119,* #1; PL 37, 1597.

[114] Amélineau, *Etudes sur le christianisme en Egypte au VIIIe siècle* (Studies of Egyptian Christianity in the 8th Century), 1887.

[115] *Homélie sur la vision de Jacob* (Homily on Jacob's Vision), #95, Zingerle-Nozinger, *Monumenta Syriaca,* t. I, p. 26.

[116] R. P. Louis Beirnaert, "Le Symbolisme ascensionnel," (Symbolism of Elevation), Eranos-Jahrbuch, 18, 1950.

[117] Hymn XI, 11.

[118] St. Ephrem the Syrian, Aphraate, *Homélie sur la prière* (Homily on Prayer), Patr. Syr. t. I, p. 146.

[119] PG 98, 384.

[120] St. John of Damascus: "Every icon receives the grace of the Holy Spirit." *On the Divine Images*, PG 94,1300.

[121] *To the Corinthians*, I, 40.

[122] *Ecclesiastical History*, II, IV, 3-7.

[123] *Jewish Antiquities*, III, VII, 7.

[124] PG 91, 872.

[125] PG 46, 737 D.

[126] *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*, IV, 12.

[127] *The Life in Christ*.

[128] PG 98, 384.

[129] Didymus makes the same attribution in his commentary on Psalm 88.

[130] The seven-branched candelabra goes back to the heavenly model that Moses saw (Num. 8:4; Rev. 2:1). See also the Lamb with seven eyes, the "seven Spirits of God," the "seven angels of the Face. (Rev. 5:6 and 4:5) The relighting of the fire at the paschal liturgy refers to the "column of fire" and announces the Resurrection of Christ. This light symbolism is difficult to harmonize with modern electric lighting in churches.

[131] These are the four "cosmic pillars," the earthly supports of Revelation. Their symbolism refers to the Tetramorph, to the four mysterious beings who encircle Christ in glory on certain icons and who are the symbols of the four evangelists: the eagle, the bull, the lion, and a man. They are the plastic representation of Ezekiel's vision (1:5-14) and of Revelation (4:6-8). It is also the ideal representation of all living creation. The Jewish tradition relates each one of these beings to one of the four letters of God's Name. A targum of Pseudo-Jonathan links the twelve signs of the zodiac with the twelve tribes of Israel and groups them by threes under the same emblem of the Tetramorph.

[132] At Torcello, the fresco of the Last Judgment shows Christ surrounded by angels and saints descending from heaven toward the royal throne. This fresco expresses the eschatological waiting of the Church.

[133] "The sacred art of the icon was not invented by artists. It is an institution coming from the Fathers and the Tradition of the Church." Council of Nicæa II, *Mansi* XIII, 252 C.

[134] *Docetism* comes from the Greek verb meaning "to seem," "to appear," "to have the appearance of." St. Germanus said that "the representation of the Lord's human aspect on the icons serves to confound the heretics who claim that he only became man in appearance and not in reality." PG 98, 173 B.

[135] 3. PG 94, 1249. This is why Pope Gregory III convoked a council in Rome against the iconoclasts and instituted the feast of All Saints. Gregory IV set the date of this feast for November 1 (Hefele, *History of the Councils*, vol. III). The emperor Constantine Copronymus suppressed the name of the Theotokos, Mother of God, and prohibited the use of "saint" as a title. Celibacy was prohibited, and monks were designated as "idolaters and worshipers of darkness." According to the heretical assembly of Hieria, 754, icons were idols. *Mansi* XIII; Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, N. J. 1969.

[136] Evdokimov uses the term *iconosophy* which in English seems to have an esoteric ring to it, i.e. *theosophy.* What he means of course is the theological vision which surrounds the actual physical object, the icon. I would therefore propose *iconology* as a more appropriate English verbal container for the meaning Evdokimov gives to *iconosophy. Iconology* has come into accepted use among specialists (for example, The St. John of Damascus Iconographers and Iconologists Association). It also avoids any esoteric connotation. [The Translator]

[137] See Gilbert Gurand, *L'Imagination symbolique* (Symbolic Imagination), Paris 1964.

[138] *Sumbolon* in Greek implies the coming together of two halves: the symbol and the thing symbolized. See R. Alleau, *De la Nature du Symbole* (On the Nature of the Symbol]) Paris, 1958. The same thing can be said for the Hebrew *mashal*, but it always has the sense of historical and existential perspective, of a personal meeting.

[139] Guilio-Carlo Argan, *Fra Angelico*, Geneva, Skira, 1955, portrays the angelic painter, alas, as a doctrinaire scholastic.

[140] Session 25; Denzinger, #98 b.

[141] Leon Wencelius, *L'esthétique de Calvin* (Calvin's Æsthetics), Paris, 1937.

[142] G. Mercier, *L'Art abstrait dans l'Art sacré* ([Abstract Art in Sacred Art), Paris, 1964.

[143] G. Wilpert, *Fractio panis*, pp. 114-17.

[144] Dom J. Dirks, *Les saintes icônes* [The Holy Icons], p. 44.

[145] Dom J. Dirks, *Les saintes icônes* [The Holy Icons], p. 44.

[146] St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, I, 16.

[147] *Mansi* XIII, 482.

[148] *Mansi* XVI, 400.

[149] The Greek genius unites the Beautiful and the Good in one single word which designates the place where we encounter the Truth.

[150] Colossians 1:15.

[151] The expression comes from Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite; it is taken up again by St. John of Damascus, *On the Holy Icons*, I, XI.

[152] II Corinthians 3:18 and 4:6.

[153] A statement quoted by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in *Laudem Basilii Magni*; PG 36, 560 A.

[154] St. Gregory of Nyssa, PG 44, 869 A.

[155] From *hesychia*: silence, peaceful contemplation. It is an ascetico-mystical method of interiorization and of the prayer of the heart.

[156] St. Gregory Palamas, PG 150, 823.

[157] St. Maximus, *De ambiguis*; PG 91, 1308 B.

[158] Dom Ildefonse Dirks, *op. cit.*, Prieuré d'Amay, 1939, p. 44.

[159] Varnish protects the icon from various factors that could cause the colors to change but also gives them the greatest transparency and depth. According to one complex and intricate method of preparation, the varnish is bleached *under the influence of day light* for two years.

[160] *Stomata* VI, 16.

[161] PG 23, 1176.

[162] According to tradition, St. Luke began his iconographic work after Pentecost.

[163] Hebrews 11:1.

[164] I Corinthians 15:44.

[165] *Conversation with Motovilov.*

[166] At the beginning of the Christian era, Judaism showed a less rigorous attitude. For example, the catacomb of the Vigna Randamini, the mosaics of the synagogue of Hamma-Lif, the funeral chamber at Palmyra, Dura Europos, etc.

[167] Exodus 25:1, 17-22; Numbers 7:88-89; Ezekiel 1.

[168] Hebrews 1:3.

[169] Galatians 4:19.

[170] Colossians 1:15; I Corinthians 15:47; John 3:11.

[171] *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, III, 4.

[172] *On the Incarnation,* PG 54, 192.

[173] *Eikôn* comes from *eikô* and means *likeness, similitude.*

[174] St. John of Damascus, PG 94, 1337; St. Nicephorus, PG 100, 225, 277.

[175] PG 99. 405 B; 505 A; 340.

[176] *The Decalogue*, Col. 1092. Quoted by Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'Etude de Grégoire Palamas* [*A Study of Gregory Palamas*, Faith Press, 1964], p. 255.

[177] "Blessed are those who believe and yet have not seen." Faith precedes vision and authenticates it.

[178] *Mansi* XIII*,* 344.

[179] *Mansi* XIII, 244 B.

[180] The 7th Council, see St. John of Damascus, PG 94, 1256.

[181] St. John of Damascus, PG 94, 1300.

[182] On the Biblical conception of the Name as a carrier of a presence, and as a result the Hesychastic tradition of the Name of Jesus, see *La prière de Jésus* [The Jesus Prayer], by a monk of the Eastern Church, Chevetogne, 1951.

[183] Theodore Studite, PG 99, 180; Theodoret, PG 80, 264.

[184] *On the Divine Images*, I, 19, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N. Y., 1980.

[185] *Letter to Serapion*, PG 26, 576 A.

[186] The Sunday service.

[187] *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments,* XVI, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N. Y., 1977.

[188] *The Triades*, I, 3, 19.

[189] Karsavine, *Réflexions sur l'Art* (Reflections on Art), "Le Messager," #68-69, 1963.

[190] *Mansi* XIII, 252 C.

[191] Canons 73, 82, 100. The council prohibited the use of "the figures and shadows," of the Old Testament, that is, the lamb, fish, etc., as symbols of Christ. These prefigurations must be replaced by the human face of Christ.

[192] Chapter 43, see Duchesne, *Le Stoglav* (The Stoglav Council), Paris 1920.

[193] Chapter 41.

[194] See *Réponses du vénérable Joseph de Volokolamsk*, [Answers of the Venerable Joseph of Volokolamsk], St. Petersburg, 1847.

[195] Icons, especially those of Andrei Rublev, are most successful in the use of the color white. This color was already remarkable in the frescoes at Pompeii, but it is not used very much, or very well, in modern painting. Renoir used to say that his dream was to be able to paint a white napkin.

[196] The service for Orthodoxy Sunday, the first Sunday of Lent, from the Greek *Synodikon.*

[197] *Apophaticism* or apophatic theology: the negative or ascending way of theological contemplation. It goes beyond all images and concepts toward the fullness of the Trinity, a fullness that cannot be grasped either as object or knowledge. *Cataphaticism* or cataphatic theology: the positive or descending way of theological thought. It formulates in human language the manifestations of God in his Names and energies. *Energies* indicates the acts by which God manifests himself and his whole presence in these *energetic* manifestations. These epiphanies are never *essential*, that is, having to do with God's essence which always remains radically transcendent. Without ever separating anything in God's absolute simplicity, Orthodox theology distinguishes the following aspects in God: three Persons, the nature or essence, and the energies. According to two different modes of existence, God is wholly present in his essence and in his energies.

[198] PG 44, 161 C

[199] PG 31, 909 B C.

[200] PG 143, 401 B.

[201] *Orientalia Christiana*, 120, 1939, p. 35.

[202] *Vitae Patrum* X, 10, 111.

[203] PG 79, 1193.

[204] The doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas who in the 14th century synthesized the patristic theology about the relations between God and man.

[205] We think that the first icons of saints represented the stylites. The people took these images home with them to have a constant visual reminder of the gospel requirements.

[206] PG 151, 433 B

[207] St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily on the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the Temple*, quoted by the monk Basil, *Sem. Kond.* VII, p. 138.

[208] St. Gregory Palamas, *Hom. 53*; St. Maximus the Confessor, PG 91, 1125.

[209] St. Isaac the Syrian, *Hom. 11.*

[210] *Homily XC*

[211] PG 90, 1004 C.

[212] The Synodikon of the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

[213] Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, 701 B.

[214] An *agraphon* is a saying of the Lord not contained in the New Testament but preserved by Holy Tradition.

[215] In his *Christian Topography of the Universe*, Cosmas Indicopleustes, a great traveler of the 6th century, affirmed that the world was a long square.

[216] *Ruach*: in Semitic languages, the Spirit is feminine. Syriac texts often call the Comforter the "Comfortrix."

[217] *The Orthodox Faith*, III, 12.

[218] *Against Heresies*, I, III, c 22, n. 4.

[219] St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Trinity.*

[220] The dogmatikon of the 3rd tone.

[221] *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, c. 6.

[222] *Homily on the Annunciation.*

[223] St. Gregory Palamas, *On the Dormition of the Virgin*, PG 151, 468 A B.

[224] The halos are always centered on the middle of the forehead. The symbolic star reminds us of the *urna* on the forehead of Buddha, like the ritual tattoos in Africa. The stars on her shoulders are also a sign of power. In the East, a servant kisses his master on the shoulder.

[225] The expression is from Nicholas Cabasilas.

[226] The expression is from St. Gregory of Nyssa.

[227] St. John Chrysostom.

[228] The troparion of the Royal Hours, None.

[229] The third ode of the first canon.

[230] The idiomelian of Sexte from the paramony.

[231] The kondakion, tone 5

[232] Idiomelic stichiera, tone 1.

[233] See the study by K. Onasch, *König des Alls* (King of All), Berlin, 1954.

[234] See the apocryphal gospels of Matthew and James.

[235] The troparion of the 4th ode.

[236] Vespers, the troparion tone 1.

[237] Matins, the troparion, first ode.

[238] The hirmos of the 2nd canon, tone 1.

[239] Matins, the troparion of the 3rd ode.

[240] Matins, the troparion of the 7th ode.

[241] The hirmos of the 7th ode.

[242] A stichiera of the Royal Hours, tone 4.

[243] The troparion of the 4th ode.

[244] The 8th troparion of the 7th ode.

[245] Matins, the exapostilarion.

[246] The hirmos of the 9th ode.

[247] The Matins of Holy Saturday.

[248] *Ibid.*

[249] A prayer after liturgy.

[250] Matins of the Synaxis of the Theotokos.

[251] The Vigil of the Nativity.

[252] Matins, the 4th ode.

[253] Vespers of the Nativity, a stichiera, tone 2.

[254] *Homily on the Annunciation.*

[255] Matins, the kondakion, tone 2.

[256] A stichiera of the feast.

[257] A stichiera of Sophronius.

[258] The Acathist of the Theotokos.

[259] The apolytikion, tone 4.

[260] A stichiera of Cassia.

[261] Matins, the 4th ode.

[262] Matins, the 7th ode.

[263] At Antioch in 326, the feasts were separated. *Apostolic Constitutions*, V, 12 and VIII, 33.

[264] *Homily # 37*, on baptism.

[265] St. Gregory Palamas, *Cap. phys*. 37; PG 150, 1144.

[266] *On the Orthodox Faith* V, 9.

[267] A variation of St. Luke's text quoting Psalm 2:7.

[268] See the commentary of the Deisis icon in *La femme et le salut du monde* [Woman and the Salvation of the World].

[269] St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. XI*, 46, and *Or. XL*, 24.

[270] Tatian's *Diatessaron*, 88, 3; see also the *Gospel of the Nazareens*.

[271] St. John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, III, 16.

[272] PG 39, 692 B.

[273] St. Cyril of Jerusalem, PG 33, 441 B.

[274] *Homily I Cor. 40*; PG 61, 34 B.

[275] *Sermon # 40*, on baptism; PG 36, 365.

[276] *Homily on the Transfiguration*, PG 96, 552.

[277] *Against Akindynos*, PG 150, 893.

[278] *The City of God*, 12, 18.

[279] Quoted by John Meyendorff, St. Gregory Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes* [The Defense of the Holy Hesychasts], Louvain, p. 166.

[280] *Triades*, I, 3, §43. Quoted by John Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* [*A Study of Gregory Palamas*, p. 194], p. 268.

[281] Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, VI, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1974.

[282] Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, in his *Sophiologie de la mort* [*Sophiology of Death*], describes his shattering experience, during a serious illness, of this co-death, this death with Christ.

[283] See the painted manuscript of the Studios monastery, from 1066, in the British Museum, addit. 19352.

[284] We sometimes see blood squirting out, a sign of lingering life: “Warm blood and water flowed from the body of the Lord, even after his death,” according to the 32nd canon of the Quinisext Council. This doctrine has given rise to the rite of the zeon in the Byzantine liturgy. Hot water is added to Christ’s blood, already living, warm, and spirit-filled.

[285] PG 49, 413.

[286] *Homily 95*, on Jacob’s vision.

[287] The services of the Exaltation of the Cross.

[288] Origen, *Math.*; PG 91, 1309 B.

[289] *On the Incarnation*; PG 25, 140 A C; *On the Cross*, PG 9, 49, 408-9.

[290] *La vie en Jésus-Christ* [*The Life in Christ* II, 19, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974, p. 96], Broussaleux, tr., p. 79.

[291] John 1:5. The Greek verb *katelaben* from *katalambano* means *to receive* but also *to conquer*. The Vulgate follows the first meaning: “the darkness did not receive it.” The Light met a terrible obstacle, and this interpretation colors the situation with a certain pessimism. The East however followed Origen and chose the second meaning: “The darkness did not conquer it.” This is the idea of the invincibility of the Light. The Johannine message units the two meanings, both pessimistic and optimistic, and brings out the tragedy of the Light. It is the tragedy of God himself and of his mysterious Love: for still another moment, Light and darkness *coexist* in the life of the world.

[292] *Homily #40* on Corinthians 15:29; see also Cyril of Jerusalem; PG 33, 1079; Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 46, 585.

[293] IX, 16, 5-17.

[294] *Stromata* II, 9, 43.

[295] PG 43, 440-64.

[296] *The Gospel of Nicodemus.*

[297] Simone Weil, *L’Attente de Dieu*, Paris, 1950, p. 214.

[298] *On the Incarnation*, 8.

[299] *Discourse #38.*

[300] *Explanation of the Divine Liturgy*, chapter 37.

[301] The troparion of the 9th ode, the Friday of Pentecost.

[302] The antiphon of the 9th tone, Sunday service.

[303] PG 74, 560.

[304] A stichiera of tone 1, Great Vespers.

[305] *Homilies I & IV* on the Acts of the Apostles.

[306] *Dialogue with Trypho*, 57, 2.

[307] *Homily on Genesis.*

[308] *Discourse with Autolycus*, 2, 10.

[309] *Against Heresies*, 4, 20, 1: “The Son and the Spirit, the Word and Wisdom are always inherent in the Father.” St. John of Damascus said that “the Holy Spirit is the source of Wisdom,” *The Orthodox Faith*, 1, 8.

[310] St. Gregory Palamas, *Dialogue with Gregoras.*

[311] *The Orthodox Faith* 1, 13.

[312] St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 9, 23; PG 32, 109.

[313] See E. Troubetzkoy, *Icons: Theology in Color*, “Two Worlds in Old-Russian Icon Painting,” St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973.