

Archpriest Georges Florovsky (1893-1979)

## The Church: Her Nature and Task<sup>\*</sup>

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### The catholic mind

It is impossible to start with a formal definition of the Church. For, strictly speaking, there is none which could claim any doctrinal authority. None can be found in the Fathers. No definition has been given by the Ecumenical Councils. In the doctrinal summaries, drafted on various occasions in the Eastern Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century and taken often (but wrongly for the “symbolic books,” again no definition of the Church was given, except a reference to the relevant clause of the Creed, followed by some comments. This lack of formal definitions does not mean, however, a confusion of ideas or any obscurity of view. The Fathers did not care so much for the *doctrine* of the Church precisely because the glorious *reality* of the Church was open to their spiritual vision. One does not define what is self-evident. This accounts for the absence of a special chapter on the Church in all early presentations of Christian doctrine: in Origen, in St. Gregory of Nyssa, even in St. John of Damascus. Many modern scholars, both Orthodox and Roman, suggest that the Church itself has not yet defined her essence and nature. “Die Kirche selbst hat sich bis heute noch nicht definiert,” says Robert Grosche.<sup>1</sup> Some theologians go even further and claim that no definition of

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the Church is possible.<sup>2</sup> In any case, the theology of the Church is still *im Werden*, in the process of formation.<sup>3</sup>

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\* “The Church: Her Nature and Task” appeared in volume 1 of *The Universal Church in God’s Design* (S.C.M. Press, 1948).

<sup>1</sup> Robert Grosche, *Pilgernde Kirche* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1938), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 1935, p. 12; Stefan Zankow, *Das Orthodoxe Christentum des Ostens*, Berlin 1928, p. 65; English translation by Dr. Lowrie, 1929, p. 6gf.

<sup>3</sup> See M. D. Koster, *Ecclesiologie im Werden*, Paderborn 1940.

In our time, it seems, one has to get beyond the modern theological disputes, to regain a wider historical perspective, to recover the true “catholic mind,” which would embrace the whole of the historical experience of the Church in its pilgrimage through the ages. One has to return from the school-room to the worshipping Church and perhaps to change the school-dialect of theology for the pictorial and metaphorical language of Scripture. The very nature of the Church can be rather depicted and described than properly defined. And surely this can be done only from within the Church. Probably even this description will be convincing only for those of the Church. The Mystery is apprehended only by faith.

### **The new reality**

The Greek name *ekklesia* adopted by the primitive Christians to denote the New Reality, in which they were aware they shared, presumed and suggested a very definite conception of what the Church really was. Adopted under an obvious influence of the Septuagint use, this word stressed first of all the organic continuity of the two Covenants. The Christian existence was conceived in the sacred perspective of the Messianic preparation and fulfilment (Heb. 1:1-2). A very definite theology of history was thereby implied. The Church was the true Israel, the new Chosen People of God, “A chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9). Or rather, it was the faithful Remnant, selected out of the unresponsive People of old.<sup>4</sup> And all nations of the earth, Greeks and Barbarians, were to be coopted and grafted into this new People of God by the call of God (this was the main theme of St. Paul in Romans and Galatians, cf. Ephesians ch. 2).

Already in the Old Testament the word *ekklesia* (a rendering in Greek of the Hebrew *Qahal*) did imply a special emphasis on the ultimate unity of the Chosen People, conceived as a sacred whole, and this unity was rooted more in the mystery of the divine election than in any “natural” features. This emphasis could only be confirmed by the supplementary influence of the Hellenistic use of the word *ekklesia* meaning usually an assembly of the sovereign people in a city, a general congregation of all regular citizens. Applied to the new Christian existence, the word kept its traditional connotation. The Church was both the People and the City. A special stress has been put on the organic unity of Christians.

Christianity from the very beginning existed as a corporate reality, as a community. To be Christian meant just to belong to the community. Nobody could be Christian by himself, as an isolated individual, but only together with “the brethren,” in a “togetherness” with them. *Unus Christianus— nullus Christianus* [“One Christian— no Christian”]. Personal conviction or even a rule of life still do not make one a Christian. Christian existence presumes and implies an incorporation, a membership in the community. This must be qualified at once: in the *Apostolic*

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 12:32 “*little flock*” seems to mean precisely the “remnant,” reconstituted and redeemed, and reconsecrated.

community, i.e. in communion with the Twelve and their message. The Christian “community” was gathered and constituted by Jesus Himself “in the days of His flesh,” and it was given by Him at least a provisional constitution by the election and the appointment of the Twelve, to whom He gave the name (or rather the title) of His “messengers” or “ambassadors”.<sup>5</sup> For a “sending forth” of the Twelve was not only a mission, but precisely a commission, for which they were invested with a “power” (Mark 3:15 ; Matt. 10:1; Luke 9:1). In any case as the appointed “witnesses” of the Lord (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8) the Twelve alone were entitled to secure the continuity both of the Christian message and of the community life. Therefore communion with the Apostles was a basic note of the primitive “Church of God” in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42: *koinonía*).

Christianity means a “common life,” a life in common. Christians have to regard themselves as “brethren” (in fact this was one of their first names) , as members of one corporation, closely linked together. And therefore charity had to be the first mark and the first proof as well as the token

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of this fellowship. We are entitled to say: Christianity is a community, a corporation, a fellowship, a brotherhood, a “society,” *coetus fidelium*. And surely, as a first approximation, such a description could be of help. But obviously it requires a further qualification, and something crucial is missing here. One has to ask: in what exactly this unity and togetherness of the many is based and rooted? what is the power that brings many together and joins them one with another? Is this merely a social instinct, some power of social cohesion, an impetus of mutual affection, or any other natural attraction? Is this unity based simply on unanimity, on identity of views or convictions? Briefly, is the Christian Community, the Church, merely a human society, a society of men? Surely, the clear evidence of the New Testament takes us far beyond this purely human level. Christians are united not only among themselves, but first of all they *are one— in Christ*, and only this communion *with* Christ makes the communion of men first possible— *in Him*. The centre of unity *is the Lord* and the power that effects and enacts the unity *is the Spirit*. Christians are constituted into this unity by divine design; by the Will and Power of God. Their unity comes from above. They are one only in Christ, as those who had been born anew in Him, “Rooted and built up in Him” (Col. 2:7), who by One Spirit have been “Baptized into One Body” (1 Cor. 12:13) . The Church of God has been established and constituted by God through Jesus Christ, Our Lord: “she is His own creation by water and the word.” Thus there is no human society, but rather a “Divine Society,” not a secular community, which would have been still “of this world,” still commensurable with other human groups, but a

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<sup>5</sup> See Luke 6:13: “whom also *He named apostles*.”

sacred community, which is intrinsically “not of this world,” not even of “this aeon,” but of the “aeon to come.”

Moreover, Christ Himself belongs to this community, as its Head, not only as its Lord or Master. Christ is not above or outside of the Church. The Church *is in Him*. The Church is not merely a community of those who believe in Christ and walk in His steps or in His commandments. She is a community of those who abide and dwell in Him, and in whom He Himself is abiding and dwelling by the Spirit. Christians

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are set apart, “born anew” and re-created, they are given not only a new pattern of life, but rather a new principle: the new Life in the Lord by the Spirit. They are a “peculiar People,” “the People of God’s own possession.” The point is that the Christian Community, the *ekklesia*, is a *sacramental community: communio in sacris*, a “fellowship in holy things,” i.e. in the Holy Spirit, or even *communio sanctorum* [“communion of the holy things”] (*sanctorum* being taken as neuter rather than masculine— perhaps that was the original meaning of the phrase). The unity of the Church is effected through the sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist are the two “social sacraments” of the Church, and in them the true meaning of Christian “togetherness” is continually revealed and sealed. Or even more emphatically, the sacraments constitute the Church. Only in the sacraments does the Christian Community pass beyond the purely human measure and become the Church. Therefore “the right administration of the sacraments” belongs to the essence of the Church (to her *esse* [“act of being”]). Sacraments must be “worthily” received indeed, therefore they cannot be separated or divorced from the inner effort and spiritual attitude of believers. Baptism is to be preceded by repentance and faith. A personal relation between an aspirant and his Lord must be first established by the hearing and the receiving of the Word, of the message of salvation. And again an oath of allegiance to God and His Christ is a pre-requisite and indispensable condition of the administration of the sacrament (the first meaning of the word *sacramentum* was precisely “the (military) oath.”) A catechumen is already “enrolled” among the brethren on the basis of his faith. Again, the baptismal gift is appropriated, received and kept, by faith and faithfulness, by the steadfast standing in the faith and the promises. And yet sacraments are not merely signs of a professed faith, but rather effective signs of the saving Grace— not only symbols of human aspiration and loyalty, but the outward symbols of the divine action. In them our human existence is linked to, or rather raised up to, the Divine Life, by the Spirit, the giver of life.

The Church as a whole is a *sacred* (or consecrated) community, distinguished thereby from “the (profane) world.”

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She is the *Holy Church*. St. Paul obviously uses the terms “Church” and “saints” as co-extensive and synonymous. It is remarkable that in the New Testament the name “saint” is almost exclusively used in the plural, saintliness being social in its intrinsic meaning. For the name refers not to any human achievement, but to a gift, to sanctification or consecration. Holiness comes from the Holy One, i.e. only from God. To be holy for a man means to share the Divine Life. Holiness is available to individuals only in the community, or rather in the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” The “communion of saints” is a pleonasm. One can be a “saint” only in the communion.

Strictly speaking, the Messianic Community, gathered by Jesus the Christ, was not yet the Church, before His Passion and Resurrection, before “the promise of the Father” was sent upon it and it was “endued with the power from on high,” “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (cf. Luke 14:49 and Acts 1:4-5) , in the mystery of Pentecost. Before the victory of the Cross disclosed in the glorious Resurrection, it was still *sub umbraculo legis* [“under the shadow of the Law”]. It was still the eve of the fulfilment. And Pentecost was there to witness to and to seal the victory of Christ. “The power from on high” has entered into history. The “new aeon” has been truly disclosed and started. And the sacramental life of the Church is the continuation of Pentecost.

The descent of the Spirit was a supreme revelation. Once and for ever, in the “dreadful and inscrutable mystery” of Pentecost, the Spirit-Comforter enters the world in which He was not yet present in such manner as now He begins to dwell and to abide. An abundant spring of living water is disclosed on that day, here on earth, in the world which had been already redeemed and reconciled with God by the Crucified and Risen Lord. The Kingdom comes, for the Holy Spirit is the Kingdom.<sup>6</sup> But the “coming” of the Spirit depends upon the “going” of the Son (John 16:7). “Another Comforter” comes down to testify of the Son, to reveal His glory and to seal His victory (15:26; 16:7 and 14). Indeed in the Holy Spirit the Glorified Lord

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Himself comes back or returns to His flock to abide with them always (14:18 and 28)... Pentecost was the mystical consecration, the baptism of the whole Church (Acts 1:5). This fiery baptism was administered by the Lord: for He baptizes “With the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt. 3:3 and Luke 3:16) . He has sent the Spirit from the Father, as a pledge in our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of adoption, in Christ Jesus, “The power of Christ” (2 Cor. 12:9). By the spirit we recognize and we acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord (1 Cor. 12:3) . The work of the Spirit in believers is precisely their incorporation into Christ, their baptism into one body (12:13), even

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De oratione Dominica* 3, MG, 44, c. 115f.-1160.

the body of Christ. As St. Athanasius puts it: “being given drink of the Spirit, we drink Christ.” For the Rock was Christ.<sup>7</sup>

By the Spirit Christians are united with Christ, are united in Him, are constituted into His Body. *One body*, that of Christ: this excellent analogy used by St. Paul in various contexts, when depicting the mystery of Christian existence, is at the same time the best witness to the intimate experience of the Apostolic Church. By no means was it an accidental image: it was rather a summary of faith and experience. With St. Paul the main emphasis was always on the intimate union of the faithful with the Lord, on their sharing in His fulness. As St. John Chrysostom has pointed out, commenting on (Col. 3:4), in all his writings St. Paul was endeavouring to prove that the believers “Are in communion with Him in all things” and “Precisely to show this union does he speak of the Head and the body”.<sup>8</sup> It is highly probable that the term was suggested by the Eucharistic experience (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17), and was deliberately used to suggest its sacramental connotation. The Church of Christ is one in the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is Christ Himself, and He *sacramentally* abides in the Church, which is His Body. The Church is a body indeed, *an organism*, much more than a society or a corporation. And perhaps an “organism” is the best modern rendering of the term *soma*, as used by St. Paul.

Still more, the Church is the body of Christ and His “fulness” Body and fulness (to *sóma* and to *pléroma*)—

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these two terms are correlative and closely linked together in St. Paul’s mind, one explaining the other: “which is His body, the fulness of Him Who all in all is being fulfilled” (Eph. 1:23). The Church is the Body of Christ because it is His *complement*. St. John Chrysostom commends the Pauline idea just in this sense. “The Church is the complement of Christ in the same manner in which the head completes the body and the body is completed by the head.” Christ is not alone. “He has prepared the whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His train.” Chrysostom insists, “Observe how he (i.e. St. Paul) introduces Him as having need of all the members. This means that only then will the Head be filled up, when the Body is rendered perfect, when we are all together, co-united and knit together”.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the Church is the extension and the “fulness” of the Holy Incarnation, or rather of the Incarnate life of the Son, “with all that for our sakes was brought to pass, the Cross and tomb, the Resurrection the third day, the Ascension into Heaven, the sitting on the right hand” (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Prayer of Consecration).

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<sup>7</sup> S. Athan. Alex. *Epist. I ad Seraponiem*, MG 26. 576.

<sup>8</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *in Coloss. Hom. 7*, MG, 62, 375.

<sup>9</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *in Ephes. Hom. 3*, MG, 52, 29.

The Incarnation is being completed in the Church. And, in a certain sense, the Church is Christ Himself, in His all-embracing plenitude (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). This identification has been suggested and vindicated by St. Augustine: "*Non solum nos Christianos factos esse, sed Christum*" ["Not only to make us Christians, but Christ"]. For if He is the Head, we are the members: the whole man is He and we— *totus homo, ille et nos— Christus et Ecclesia* ["the whole man, he and us— Christ and the Church].” And again: “For Christ is not simply in the head and not in the body (only), but Christ is entire in the head and body”— "*non enim Christus in capite et non in corpore, sed Christus totus in capite et in corpore*".<sup>10</sup> This term *totus Christus*<sup>11</sup> occurs in St. Augustine again and again, this is his basic and favourite idea, suggested obviously by St. Paul. “When I speak of Christians in the plural, I understand one in the One Christ. Ye are therefore many, and ye are yet one: we are many and we are one”— "*cum plures Christianos appello, in uno Christo unum intelligo*".<sup>12</sup> “For our

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Lord Jesus is not only in Himself, but in us also”— "*Dominus enim Jesus non solum in se, sed et in nobis*".<sup>13</sup> “One Man up to the end of the ages”— "*Unus homo usque ad finem saeculi extenditur*".<sup>14</sup>

The main contention of all these utterances is obvious. Christians are incorporated into Christ and Christ abides in them— this intimate union constitutes the mystery of the Church. The Church is, as it were, the place and the mode of the redeeming presence of the Risen Lord in the redeemed world. “The Body of Christ is Christ Himself. The Church is Christ, as after His Resurrection He is present with us and encounters us here on earth”.<sup>15</sup> And in this sense one can say: Christ is the Church. "*Ipse enim est Ecclesia, per sacramentum corporis sui in se ... eam continens*" [For He himself is the Church, containing it in himself through the sacrament of his body.]<sup>16</sup> Or in the words of Karl Adam: “Christ, the Lord, is the proper Ego of the Church”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine, in *Evangelium Joannis tract.*, 21, 8, MG. 35, 1568; cf. St. John Chrysostom in *I Cor. Hom.* 30, MG, 61, 279-283.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine in *Evangelium Joannis tract.*, 21, 8, ML, 35, 1568.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine in *Ps. 127*, 3, ML, 37, 1679.

<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine in *Ps. 90 enarr.* 1, 9, ML, 37, 1157.

<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine in *Ps. 85*, 5, ML, 37, 1083.

<sup>15</sup> A. Nygren, *Corpus Christi*, in *En Bok om Kyrkan*, av Svenska teologer, Lund, 1943, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> St. Hilary in *Ps. 125*, 6, ML, 9, 688.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Adam, *Das Wesen Katholizismus*, 4 Ausgabe, 1927, p. 24.

The Church is the unity of charismatic life. The source of this unity is hidden in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and in the mystery of Pentecost. And Pentecost is continued and made permanent in the Church by means of the Apostolic Succession. It is not merely, as it were, the canonic skeleton of the Church. Ministry (or "hierarchy") itself is primarily a *charismatic* principle, a "ministry of the sacraments," or "a divine oeconomia." Ministry is not only a *canonical* commission, it belongs not only to the *institutional* fabric of the Church— it is rather an indispensable constitutional or *structural* feature, just in so far as the Church is a body, an organism. Ministers are not, as it were, "commissioned officers" of the community, not only leaders or delegates of the "multitudes," of the "people" or "congregation"— they are acting not only *in persona ecclesiae*. They are acting primarily *in persona Christi*. They are "representatives" of Christ Himself, not of believers, and in them and through them, the Head of the Body, the only High Priest of the New Covenant, is performing, continuing and accomplishing His eternal pastoral and priestly office. He is Himself the only true Minister of the Church.

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All others are but stewards of His mysteries. They are standing *for* Him, *before* the community— and just because the Body is one only in its Head, is brought together and into unity by Him and in Him, the Ministry in the Church is primarily the Ministry of unity. In the Ministry the organic unity of the Body is not only represented or exhibited, but rather rooted, without any prejudice to the "equality" of the believers, just as the "equality" of the cells of an organism is not destroyed by their structural differentiation: all cells are equal as such, and yet differentiated by their functions, and again this differentiation serves the unity, enables this organic unity to become more comprehensive and more intimate. The unity of every local congregation springs from the unity in the Eucharistic meal. And it is as the celebrant of the Eucharist that the priest is the minister and the builder of Church unity. But there is another and higher office: to secure the universal and catholic unity of the whole Church in space and time. This is the episcopal office and function. On the one hand, the Bishop has an authority to ordain, and again this is not only a jurisdictional privilege, but precisely a power of sacramental action beyond that possessed by the priest. Thus the Bishop as "ordainer" is the builder of Church unity on a wider scale. The Last Supper and Pentecost are inseparably linked to one another. The Spirit Comforter descends when the Son has been glorified in His death and resurrection. But still they are two sacraments (or mysteries) which cannot be merged into one another. In the same way the priesthood and the episcopate differ from one another. In the episcopacy Pentecost becomes universal and continuous, in the undivided episcopate of the Church (*episcopatus unus* of St. Cyprian) the unity in space is secured. On the other hand, through its bishop, or rather in its bishop, every particular or local Church is included in the catholic fulness of the Church, is linked with the past and with all ages. In its bishop every single Church outgrows and



transcends its own limits and is organically united with the others. The Apostolic Succession is not so much the canonical as the mystical foundation of Church unity. It is something

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other than a safeguard of historical continuity or of administrative cohesion. It is an ultimate means to keep the mystical identity of the Body through the ages. But, of course, Ministry is never detached from the Body. It is in the Body, belongs to its structure. And ministerial gifts are given inside the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 12).

The Pauline conception of the Body of Christ was taken up and variously commented on by the Fathers, both in the East and in the West, and then was rather forgotten.<sup>18</sup> It is high time now to return to this experience of the early Church which may provide us with a solid ground for a modern theological synthesis. Some other similes and metaphors were used by St. Paul and elsewhere in the New Testament, but much to the same purpose and effect: *to stress the intimate and organic unity between Christ and those who are His*. But, among all these various images, that of the Body is the most inclusive and impressive, is the most emphatic expression of the basic vision.<sup>19</sup> Of course, no analogy is to be pressed too far or over-emphasized. The idea of an organism, when used of the Church, has its own limitations. On the one hand, the Church is composed of human personalities, which never can be regarded merely as elements or cells of the whole, because each is in direct and immediate union with Christ and His Father—the personal is not to be sacrificed or dissolved in the corporate, Christian “togetherness” must not degenerate into impersonalism. The idea of the organism must be supplemented by the idea of a symphony of personalities, in which the mystery of the Holy Trinity is reflected (cf. John 17:21 and 23), and this is the core of the conception of “catholicity” (*sobornost*).<sup>20</sup> This is the chief reason why we should prefer a christological orientation in the theology of the Church rather than a pneumatological.<sup>21</sup> For, on the other hand, the Church, as a whole, has her *personal centre* only in Christ, she is not an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, nor is she merely a Spirit-being community, but precisely the Body of Christ, the Incarnate Lord. This saves us from

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<sup>18</sup> See E. Mersch, S.J., *Les Corps Mystique du Christ, Etudes de Theologie Historique*, 2 vols., 2nd edition, Louvain, 1936.

<sup>19</sup> The image of the Bride and her mystical marriage with Christ, Eph. 5. 23f, express the intimate union. Even the image of the House built of many stones, the corner stone being Christ, Eph. 2. 20f; cf. 1 Pet. 2:6, tends to the same purpose: many are becoming one, and the tower appears as it were built of one stone; cf. Hermans, *Shepherd*, Vis. 3, 2, 6, 8. And again “the People of God” is to be regarded as an organic whole. There is no reason whatever to be troubled by the variety of vocabularies used. The main idea and contention is obviously the same in all cases.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. George Florovsky, “The Catholicity of the Church,” in this volume I of his *Collected Works*.

<sup>21</sup> Such as in Khomiakov’s or in Moehler’s *Die Einheit in der Kirche*.

impersonalism without committing us to any humanistic personification. Christ the Lord is the only Head and the

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only Master of the Church. "In Him the whole structure is closely fitted together and grows into a temple holy in the Lord; in Him you too are being built together into a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22, Bp. Challoner's version).

The Christology of the Church does not lead us into the misty clouds of vain speculations or dreamy mysticism. On the contrary, it secures the only solid and positive ground for proper theological research. The doctrine of the Church finds thereby its proper and organic place in the general scheme of the Divine Oeconomía of salvation. For we have indeed still to search for a comprehensive vision of the mystery of our salvation, of the salvation of the world.

One last distinction is to be made. The Church is still *in statu viae* and yet it is already *in statu patriae*. It has, as it were, a double life, *both in heaven and on earth*.<sup>22</sup> The Church is a visible historical society, and the same is the Body of Christ. It is both the Church of the redeemed, and the Church of the miserable sinners— both at once. On the historical level no final goal has yet been attained. But the ultimate reality has been disclosed and revealed. This ultimate reality is still at hand, is truly available, in spite of the historical imperfection, though but in provisional forms. For the Church is a sacramental society. *Sacramental* means no less than "eschatological." *To eschaton* does not mean primarily *final*, in the temporal series of events; it means rather *ultimate* (decisive); and the ultimate is being realized within the stress of historical happenings and events. What is "not of this world" is here "in this world," not abolishing this world, but giving to it a new meaning and a new value, "transvaluating" the world, as it were. Surely this is still only an anticipation, a "token" of the final consummation. Yet the Spirit abides in the Church. This constitutes the mystery of the Church: a visible "society" of frail men *is* an organism of the Divine Grace.<sup>23</sup>

## The new creation

The primary task of the historical Church is the proc-

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lamation of another word "to come." The Church bears witness to the New Life, disclosed and revealed in Christ Jesus, the Lord and Saviour. This it does both by word and deed. The true

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. St. Augustine *in Evang. Joannis tract.*, CXXIV, 5, ML, XXXV, 19f, 7.

<sup>23</sup> See Khomiakov's essay *On the Church*; English translation by W. J. Birkbeck, *Russia and the English Church*, first published 1895, ch. XXIII, PP. 193-222.

proclamation of the Gospel would be precisely the practice of this New Life: to show faith by deeds (cf. Matt. 5:16).

The Church is more than a company of preachers, or a teaching society, or a missionary board. It has not only to invite people, but also to introduce them into this New Life, to which it bears witness. It is a missionary body indeed, and its mission field is the whole world. But the aim of its missionary activity is not merely to convey to people certain convictions or ideas, not even to impose on them a definite discipline or a rule of life, but first of all to introduce them into the New Reality, to *convert* them, to bring them through their faith and repentance to Christ Himself, that they should be born anew in Him and into Him by water and the Spirit. Thus the ministry of the Word is completed in the ministry of the Sacraments.

“Conversion” is a fresh start, but it is only a start, to be followed by a long process of growth. The Church has to organize the new life of the converted. The Church has, as it were, to exhibit the new pattern of existence, the new mode of life, that of the “world to come.” The Church is here, in this world, for its salvation. But just for this reason it has to oppose and to renounce “*this*” wor[l]d. God claims the whole man, and the Church bears witness to this “totalitarian” claim of God revealed in Christ. The Christian has to be a “new creation.” Therefore he cannot find a settled place for himself within the limits of the “old world.” In this sense the Christian attitude is, as it were, always revolutionary with regard to the “old order” of “this world.” Being “not of this world” the Church of Christ “in this world” can only be in permanent opposition, even if it claims only a reformation of the existing order. In any case, the change is to be radical and total.

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### **Historical antinomies**

Historical failures of the Church do not obscure the absolute and ultimate character of its challenge, to which it is committed by its very eschatological nature, and it constantly challenges itself.

Historical life and the task of the Church are an antinomy, and this antinomy can never be solved or overcome on a historical level. It is rather a permanent hint to what is “to come” hereafter. The antinomy is rooted in the practical alternative which the Church had to face from the very beginning of its historical pilgrimage. *Either* the Church was to be constituted as an exclusive and “totalitarian” society, endeavouring to satisfy all requirements of the believers, both “temporal” and “spiritual,” paying no attention to the existing order and leaving nothing to the external world—it would have been an entire separation from the world, an ultimate flight out of it, and a radical denial of any external authority. *Or* the Church could attempt an inclusive Christianization of the world, subduing the whole of life to Christian rule and authority, to reform and to reorganize secular life on Christian principles, to build the Christian City. In the history of

the Church we can trace both solutions: a flight to the desert and a construction of the Christian Empire. The first was practiced not only in monasticism of various trends, but in many other Christian groups and denominations. The second was the main line taken by Christians, both in the West and in the East, up to the rise of militant secularism, but even in our days this solution has not lost its hold on many people. But on the whole, both proved unsuccessful. One has, however, to acknowledge the reality of their common problem and the truth of their common purpose. Christianity is not an individualistic religion and it is not only concerned for the "salvation of the soul." Christianity is the Church, i.e. a Community, the New People of God, leading its corporate life according to its peculiar principles. And this life cannot be split into departments, some of which might have been ruled by any other and heterogeneous principles.

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leadership of the Church can hardly be reduced to an occasional guidance given to individuals or to groups living under conditions utterly uncongenial to the Church. The legitimacy of these conditions must be questioned first of all. The task of a complete re-creation or re-shaping of the whole fabric of human life cannot or must not be avoided or declined. One cannot serve two Masters and a double allegiance is a poor solution. Here the above-mentioned alternative inevitably comes in—everything else would merely be an open compromise or a reduction of the ultimate and therefore *total* claims. *Either* Christians ought to go out of the world, in which there is another Master besides Christ (whatever name this other Master may bear: Caesar or Mammon or any other and in which the rule and the goal of life are other than those set out in the Gospel—to go out and to start a separate society. *Or* again Christians have to transform the outer world, to make it the Kingdom of God as well, and introduce the principles of the Gospel into secular legislation.

There is an inner consistency in both programmes. And therefore the separation of the two ways is inevitable. Christians seem compelled to take different ways. The unity of the Christian task is broken. An inner schism arises within the Church: an abnormal separation between the monks (or the *elite* of the initiated) and the lay-people (including clergy, which is far more dangerous than the alleged "clericalization" of the Church. In the last resort, however, it is only a symptom of the ultimate antinomy. The problem simply has no historical solution. A true solution would transcend history, it belongs to the "age to come." In this age, on the historic plane, no constitutional principle can be given, but only a regulative one: a principle of discrimination, not a principle of construction.

For again each of the two programmes is self-contradictory. There is an inherent *sectarian* temptation in the first: the "catholic" and universal character of the Christian message and purpose is here at least obscured and often deliberately denied, the world is simply left out of sight. And all attempts at the direct Christianization of the world,

in the guise of a Christian State or Empire, have only led to the more or less acute *secularization* of Christianity itself.<sup>24</sup>

In our time nobody would consider it possible for everyone to be converted to a universal monasticism or a realization of a truly Christian, and universal, State. The Church remain “in the world,” as a heterogeneous body, and the tension is stronger than it has ever been; the ambiguity of the situation is painfully left by everyone in the Church. A practical program for the present age can be deduced only from a restored understanding of the nature and essence of the Church. And the failure of all Utopian expectations cannot obscure the Christian hope: the King has come, the Lord Jesus, and His Kingdom is to come.

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<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed treatment, see George Florovsky, “The Antinomies of Christian History”, Chapter III of *The Collected Works of George Florovsky* (Nordland Press, Belmont, Massachusetts: 1976), pp. 67-100.