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“Created Being”

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pp. 91-113.

We must now turn from the fullness of the divine Being to ourselves, and to the created universe, in itself implenitude and indeed non-being, but called to acquire that fullness. And we have at once to admit that difficult as it was to raise ourselves to the consideration of God and necessary as it proved to follow out the apophatic way in order to apprehend as far as we might the revelation of the Trinity, it is not less difficult to pass from the notion of divine Being to that of created being. A leap of faith is necessary in the second case as in the first in order to recognize outside of and alongside of God, something other than Him, a totally new subject. And we shall need a sort of apophaticism in reverse in order to arrive at the revealed truth of creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.

It is often forgotten that the creation of the world is not a truth of a philosophical order, but rather an article of faith. Ancient philosophy knows nothing of creation in the absolute sense of the word; the demiurge of Plato is not a creator-God, but rather an ordainer of the universe, a craftsman, a fashioner of the *kosmos*, a word itself implying order and comeliness. 'Being' in hellenistic thought signifies existence in some ordered manner, the possession of an essence. The demiurge creates substances giving form to amorphous matter which exists eternally and in-

dependently of himself as a chaotic and unqualifiable mass, capable of receiving every possible form and quality. In itself, matter is thus non-being, a pure potentiality of being, of becoming something; it is the *mê on*, but it is not the *ouk on*, which is absolute nothingness. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* is first found in the Bible (2 Macc. vii, 28) where a mother, urging her son to have courage to undergo martyrdom for the faith, says: 'I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise.' (*hoti ek ouk ontôn epoiêsen auta ho theos*, according to the Septuagint translation.)

'All creatures are balanced upon the creative word of God, as if upon a bridge of diamond; above them is the abyss of the divine infinitude, below them that of their own nothingness,' says Philaret of Moscow.' The nothingness of creatures is as mysterious and unimaginable as the divine Nothingness of apophatic theology. The very idea of absolute nothingness is contradictory and absurd: to say that nothingness exists is a contradiction in terms; to say that it does not exist is to state a pleonasm, at least unless we are trying awkwardly to express, in this way, the idea that nothing exists outside God; that, indeed, there is no such thing as 'outside God'. Yet creation *ex nihilo* does mean just such an act producing something which is 'outside of God'— the production of an entirely new subject, with no origin of any kind either in the divine nature or in any matter or potentially of being external to God. We might say that by creation *ex nihilo* God 'makes room' for something which is wholly outside of Himself; that, indeed, He sets up the 'outside' or nothingness alongside of His plenitude. The result is a subject which is entirely 'other', infinitely removed from Him,

¹ Quoted by Fr. Florovsky in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Paris, 1937, p. 180 (in Russian).

'not by place but by nature' (*ou topôi, alla physei*), as it is expressed by St. John Damascene.'

The creation is not a kind of spreading out or infinite diffusion of the Godhead, a spontaneous communication of the energies producing beings in virtue of some necessity of the divine nature— 'the Good diffusing itself by itself' of neo-platonism is not the God of St. Paul who 'callesh those things which be not as though they were' (Rom. iv, 17). The creation is a work of will and not of nature; and it is in this sense that St. John Damascene opposes the creation of the world to the generation of the Word: 'Since,' he says, 'the generation is a work of nature and proceeds from the very substance of God, it must necessarily be that it is eternal and without beginning, otherwise the begetter would undergo a change, and there would be prior God and posterior God: God would develop. With creation, on the other hand, it is a work of the will, and is thus not coeternal with God. For it is not possible that which is brought from not-being into being should be coeternal with that which exists always and without origin.'² We are, therefore, dealing with a work which has had a beginning; and a beginning presupposes a change, the passage from not-being into being. The creature is thus, by virtue of its very origin, something 'Which changes, is liable to pass from one state into another. It has no ontological foundation either in itself (for it is created from nothing), nor in the divine essence, for in the act of creation God was under no necessity of any kind whatever. There is, in fact, nothing in the divine nature which could be the necessary cause of the production of creatures: creation might just as well not exist. God could equally well not have created; creation is a free act of His will, and this free act is the sole foundation of the existence of all beings. The very intention of the

¹ 'De fide orthodoxa, 1, 13', P.G., XCIV, 833 C.

² Ibid., 1, 8, 813 A.

divine will, in the act of God's willing it, becomes a fact, and is realized in the immediate existence of a being by the power of the Almighty, who, when in His Wisdom and creative power He desires something, does not leave His will unrealized. And created being, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, *is* this realization of His will.¹ But though creation is contingent in its origin and began to exist, it will never cease to be; death and destruction Will not involve a return to non-being, for 'the word of the Lord endureth for ever' (I Pet. i, 25), and the divine Will is unchangeable.

Creation, which is thus a free act of the will, and not (like the shining forth of the divine energies) a natural outpouring, is an act proper to a God who is personal, to the Trinity whose common will belongs to the divine nature and operates according to the determination of thought. St. John Damascene calls this 'the eternal and unchanging Counsel of God'.² In the book of Genesis God is represented to us as saying: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (i, 26), as if the Trinity consulted within Itself before creating. 'Counsel' signifies a free and considered act: 'God creates by His thought which immediately becomes a work', according to the same St. John Damascene.³ 'God, he says, 'contemplated all things before their existence, formulating them in — His mind; and each being received its existence at a particular moment, according to His eternal thought and will (*kata tēn thelêtikēn autou achronon ennoian*), which is a predestination (*proorismos*), an image (*eikôn*) and a model (*paradeigma*).⁴ The term *thelêtikê ennoia* ('thought-will', or, more accurately, 'volitional thought') is very important. It is a perfect expression of the Eastern doctrine of the divine ideas, of the place which the

¹ In Hexaemeron, P.G., XLIV, 69 A.

² De imaginibus, I, 20', P.G., XCIV, 1240-1241.

³ 'De fide orth., 11, 2', P.G., XCIV, 865 A.

⁴ Ibid., 837 A.

theology of the Eastern Church gives to the ideas of created things in God. The ideas are not, according to this conception, the eternal reasons of creatures contained within the very being of God, determinations of the essence to which created things refer as to their exemplary cause, as in the thought of St. Augustine which later became the common teaching of the whole Western tradition and was more precisely formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas. In the thought of the Greek Fathers the divine ideas are more dynamic, intentional in character. Their place is not in the essence, but in 'that which is after the essence', the divine energies: for the ideas are to be identified with the will or wills (*thelêmata*) which determine the different modes according to which created beings participate in the creative energies. It is thus that Dionysius characterizes the 'ideas or models' which are 'the reasons of things which give them substance for it is by them that all things have been determined and are created by the supersubstantial God'.¹ And if the divine ideas are not the essence of God itself, if they are thus as it were separated from the essence by the will, then it follows that not only the act of creation but also the very thoughts of God Himself can no longer be considered as a necessary determination of His nature and part of the intelligible content of the divine Being. The created universe is thus not seen, as in platonic or platonizing thought, under the pale and attenuated aspect of a poor replica of the Godhead; rather it appears as an entirely new being, as creation fresh from the hands of the God of Genesis 'who saw that it was good', a created universe willed by God and the joy of His Wisdom, 'a harmonious ordinance', 'a marvellously composed hymn to the power of the Almighty', as St. Gregory of Nyssa says.²

¹ 'De divin. nomin., V, 8', P.G., 111, 824 C.

² 'In Psalmorum inscriptiones', P.G., XLIV, 441 B. Cf. 'Oratio catechetica magna, c. 6', P.G., XLV, 25 C.

The attempt to bring the ideas into the inner being of God necessarily gives an ideal content to the divine essence and places the platonic *kosmos noētos* in it; the consequence of this is to face us with the following alternative, which will be decided according to the view one holds of this ideal world in God: either the created world will be disparaged, and deprived of its original character as the unconditioned work of the creative Wisdom, or else creation will be introduced into the inner life of the Godhead with its ontological roots established within the Trinity itself, as in the so-called sophiological doctrines. In the first case (that of St. Augustine), the divine ideas remain static-unmoving perfections of God; in the second (that of Eastern sophiology) the essence (*ousia*) of God itself becomes dynamic. It is interesting to note that John Scotus Eriugena (whose theological system is a curious amalgam of Eastern and Western elements, a transposition of the doctrines of the Greek fathers upon a basis of Augustinian thought),¹ represents the divine ideas as creatures, the first created principles by means of which God creates the universe (*natura creata creans*). Together with the Easterns, he puts the ideas outside the divine essence, but at the same time he wants to maintain with St. Augustine their substantial character; and so they become the first created essences. Eriugena did not grasp the distinction between the essence and the energies; on this point he remained faithful to Augustinianism, and was therefore unable to identify the ideas with God's creative acts of will.

The ideas or acts of will, which Dionysius calls 'models' (*paradeigmata*), 'predestinations' (*proorismoi*) or 'provi-

¹ A. Brilliantov expounds the thought of Scotus Eriugena in this sense in his fundamental work, *The influence of Eastern theology upon Western thought in the works of John Scotus Eriugena*, St. Petersburg, 1898 (in Russian).

dences' (*pronoiai*),¹ are not identical with created things. While they are the foundation of everything which is established by the divine will in the simple outpourings or energies, relationships between God and the beings which He creates, the ideas remain nevertheless separate from creatures, as the will of the craftsman remains separate from the work in which it is manifested. The ideas foreordain the different modes of participation in the energies, the unequal statures of the various categories of beings, which are moved by the divine love and respond to it each according to the proportion of its nature. The creation then appears as a hierarchy of real analogies in which, as Dionysius says, 'each order of the hierarchical disposition achieves co-operation with God according to its proper analogy, accomplishing by the grace and power which is given by God that which God possesses by nature and without measure'.² Thus all creatures are called to perfect union with God which is accomplished in the 'synergy', the co-operation of the created wills with the idea-willings of God. The notion of creation in Dionysius is so close to that of deification that it is hard to distinguish between the first state of creatures and their final end, union with God. In fact, because this union, according to Dionysius, presupposes 'co-operation', the agreement of wills and therefore liberty, it is possible to see in the initial state of the created cosmos an unstable perfection in which the fullness of union is not yet achieved and in which created beings have still to grow in love in order to accomplish fully the thought-will of God.

This consideration is developed by St. Maximus, for whom creatures are defined in the first place as beings who are limited,, which is as much as to say (according to

¹ 'De divin. nomin., V, 2, 8', P.G., 111, 817 and 824.

² 'De coel. Hier., 111, 3', P.G., 111, 168.

St. Maximus) that their end is outside of themselves, that there is something towards which they tend, that they are in a perpetual state of becoming. Wherever there is diversity and multiplicity there is becoming; everything in the created world is in a state of becoming, the intelligible as well as the sensible, and this limitation and this movement of becoming are the domain of the forms of space and time. God alone remains in absolute repose; and His perfect unmovability places him outside space and time. If one attributes movement to Him in His relationship to created being, it is meant that He produces in creatures the love which makes them tend towards Himself, that He draws them to Him, 'desiring to be desired and loving to be loved'.¹ His will for us is a mystery, for the will is a relationship with another, and there is nothing which is 'other' to God: creation *ex nihilo* is incomprehensible to us. We only know the will of God in so far as it is His relationship to the world which is already created; it is the point of contact between the infinite and the finite, and in this sense the divine 'willings' are the creative ideas of things, the *logoi*, the 'words'. In spite of the terminological identity, these 'words' have little in common with the *logoi spermatikoi* or 'seminal reasons' of the stoics. Rather they are the 'words' of creation and of providence which are found in Genesis and the Psalms (Ps. cxlvii). Every created thing has its point of contact with the Godhead; and this point of contact is its idea, reason or *logos* which is at the same time the end towards which it tends. The ideas of individual things are contained within the higher and more general ideas, as are the species within a genus. The whole is contained in the Logos, the second person of the Trinity who is the first principle and the last end of all created things. Here the Logos, God the Word, has the 'economical' emphasis proper to antenicene theology: He is the manifestation of

¹ 'De ambiguis', P.G., XCI, 1260 C.

the divine will, for it is by Him that the Father has created all things in the Holy Spirit. When we are examining the nature of created things, seeking to penetrate into the reason of their being, we are led finally to the knowledge of the Word, causal principle and at the same time end of all beings. All things were created by the Logos who is as it were a divine nexus, the threshold from which flow the creative outpourings, the particular *logoi* of creatures, and the centre towards which in their turn all created beings tend, as to their final end. For creatures, from the moment of their first condition, are separate from God; and their end and final fulfilment lies in union with Him or deification. Thus the primitive beatitude was not a state of deification, but a condition of order, a perfection of the creature which was ordained and tending towards its end.¹

Revealing himself through His creative 'thought-wills', God can be known in creatures and by means of creatures, but He can also be known immediately in mystical contemplation, in His uncreated energies which are the splendour of His face. It is thus, in His Godhead, that Christ appeared to the apostles on Mount Tabor, and it is thus that He makes Himself known to the saints who detach themselves from all created things, renouncing all finite knowledge in order to attain to union with God. And we see here why, when they have abandoned all, the saints receive in the end perfect knowledge of the created world, for in being lifted up to the contemplation of God, they possess in the same instant the knowledge of the whole world of being in its first reasons which are the 'thought-wills' of God, contained in His simple energies. We are reminded here of the ecstasy of St. Benedict of

¹ See the principal texts of St. Maximus on the ontology of created being in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie*, Freiburg im. Breisgau, 1941; especially in the chapter, 'Die Kosmologischen Synthesen', pp. 108-60.

Nursia, who saw the whole universe as if it had been gathered together into a beam of the divine light.¹

All things were created by the Logos. St. John tells us this— *all things were made by Him* (i, 3)— and we repeat it in the creed: *by whom all things were made*. But the same symbol of Nicaea teaches us that it is the Father who created the heavens and the earth and all things visible and invisible; and, later on, the Holy Spirit is called 'lifegiving', *zôopoion*. 'The Father created all things by the Son in the Holy Spirit— says St. Athanasius— for where the Word is, there also is the Spirit, and whatever is created by the Father receives its existence by the Word in the Holy Spirit; as the Psalm (xxxii) says: *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth*.'² Here we have the 'economical' manifestation of the Trinity: the Father operating by the Son in the Holy Spirit. This is why St. Irenaeus calls the Son and the Spirit 'the two hands of God'.³ The work of creation is common to the whole Trinity, but each of the three persons is the cause of created being in a way which is different though in each case united to the others. St. Basil, when he is speaking of the creation of the angels, traces the manifestation of the three persons in the work of creation in the following way: 'In the creation, he says, consider first the primordial cause (*tên prokatartikên aitian*) of all that has been made— this is the Father; then the operating cause (*tên dêmiourgikên*)— which is the Son; and the perfecting cause (*tên prokatartikên*)— the Holy Spirit: so that it is by the will of the Father that the heavenly spirits are, by the operation of the Son that they come into existence, and by the presence of the Spirit

¹ St. Gregory the Great, 'Dialogorum liber II, cap. 35', P.G., LXVI, 198-200.

² 'Epistola III ad Serapionem, 5', P.G., XXVI, 632 BC.

³ 'Contra Haereses, IV, praefatio', P.G., VII, 975 B.

that they are made perfect.¹ It is this common action of the Trinity, manifested thus in the double economy of the effecting Word and of the perfecting Spirit, that confers upon all creatures not simply being, but also 'good being'— *to eu einai*— the faculty of being according to the good, to perfection.

The Eastern tradition knows nothing of 'pure nature' to which grace is added as a supernatural gift. For it, there is no natural or 'normal' state, since grace is implied in the act of creation itself. The eternal determinations of the 'divine Counsel', the divine ideas cannot really be made to correspond with the 'essences' of things which are postulated in the so-called natural philosophy of Aristotle and of every other philosopher whose experience reaches only to nature in its fallen state. 'Pure nature', for Eastern theology, would thus be., a philosophical fiction corresponding neither to the original state of creation, nor to its present condition which is 'against nature', nor to the state of deification which belongs to the age to come. The world, created in order that it might be deified, is dynamic, tending always towards its final end, predestined in the 'thought-wills'. These latter have their centre in the Word, the hypostatic Wisdom of the Father who gives expression to Himself in all things and who brings all things, in the Holy Spirit, towards union with God. For there is no 'natural beatitude' for the creation, which can have no other end than deification. All the distinctions which we may try to make between the state which was proper to the first creatures according to their nature and that which was conferred upon them by their ever-increasing participation in the divine energies can never be more than fictions; fictions, moreover, which tend to separate into distinct moments an indivisible reality whose appearance is simultaneous: created

¹ 'Liber de Spiritu Sancto, XVI, 38', P.G., XXXII, 136 AB.

beings have the faculty of being assimilated to God because such was the very object of their creation.

In Genesis we read that the heavens and the earth, the universe in its entirety in fact, was created 'in the beginning'. St. Basil saw this as the beginning of time; but 'as the beginning of a road is not yet the road, and the beginning of a house is not yet a house, so the beginning of time is not yet time, not even the smallest part of it.'¹ If the divine will created 'in the beginning', it means that 'its action was instantaneous and outside of time'; but with the universe time also begins. According to St. Maximus it is motion, the change which is proper to created things whose very origin was in change, which is also the origin of time, the form of sensible being (*ta aisthêta*). It is time whose nature is to begin, to endure, and to have an end; however, there is also another form of created existence outside of time, and which is proper to intelligible being (*ta noêta*): the aeon— *aiôni*. 'The aeon— says St. Maximus— is motionless time, while time is the aeon measured according to motion.'² The intelligible is not eternal: it has its beginning in the age'— *en aiôni*, in passing from not-being to being, but it remains none the less without any change, being part of a non-temporal mode of existence. The aeon is outside of time, but having, like time, a beginning, it is commensurable to it. The divine eternity alone is incommensurable: in relation both to time and to the aeon. It is in this extra-temporal condition that God created the angelic world, according to St. Basil.³ This is why the angels are no longer capable of falling into sin: their un-

¹ In Hexaemeron, homilia 1, 6', P.G., XXIX, 16 C.

² 'De ambiguis', P.G., XCI, 1164 BC.

³ In Hexaemeron, homil. 1, 5', P.G., XXIX, 13; 'Adversus Eunomium, IV, 2', *ibid.*, 680 B.

wavering attachment to God or their eternal enmity against Him having been realized instantaneously and for all the ages at the moment of their creation. For St. Gregory of Nyssa, as for St. Maximus, however, the angelic nature is none the less able to grow without ceasing in the acquisition of eternal good things in an unending development such as is proper to everything which is created, but excluding all temporal succession.

The nature of matter in the teaching of St. Gregory of Nyssa, later adopted by St. Maximus, is the result of the uniting of simple qualities, which are intelligible in themselves but of which the sum, the joining together or concretion produces the substratum or corporeity of sensible things. 'No one thing in the body— neither its shape nor its size nor its bulk nor its weight nor its colour, nor any of its other qualities taken in themselves are the body: they are in themselves simply intelligibles. Their concourse (*syndromê*), nevertheless, does make the body.'¹ This dynamic theory of matter makes it possible to conceive of different degrees of materiality, bodies which are material to a greater or lesser extent; it also makes it easier to comprehend the change which took place in the original nature after the coming of sin, as also the resurrection of the body. The material elements pass from one body to another, so that the universe is in fact but a single body. All things exist in each other— says St. Gregory of Nyssa— and all things mutually support each other, for there is a kind of transmuting power which, by a movement of rotation causes the terrestrial elements to pass from one to the other and gathers them in again to the point from which they started. 'And thus in this process nothing becomes greater or less, but everything remains within its primordial limits.'² Moreover, each element of the body is

¹ 'De anima et resurrectione', P.G., XLVI, 124 G.

² 'In Hexaemeron', P.G., XLIV, 104 BQ 'De anima et resurrectione', P.G., XLVI, 28 A.

'as if guarded by a sentinel'¹ by the intellectual faculty of the soul whose character it is imprinted, for the soul knows its own body even when its elements are dispersed throughout the world. Thus in the condition of mortality which is the consequence of the coming of sin, the spiritual nature of the soul maintains a certain link with the disunited elements of the body, a link which it will find again at the moment of the resurrection in order that the parts may be transformed into a 'spiritual body', which is indeed our true body, different from the grossness of those we now have, the 'garments of skin' which God made for Adam and Eve after their sin.

The cosmology of the Greek Fathers is necessarily expressed in terms of the conception of the universe which prevailed in their own age; a fact which takes nothing whatever away from the properly theological basis of their commentaries upon the Biblical narrative of the creation. The theology of the Orthodox Church, constantly soteriological in its emphasis, has never entered into alliance with philosophy in any attempt at a doctrinal synthesis: despite all its richness, the religious thought of the East has never had a scholasticism. If it does contain certain elements of Christian gnosis, as in the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Maximus, or in the *Physical and theological chapters* of St. Gregory Palamas, the speculation is always dominated by the central idea of union with God and never acquires the character of a system. Having no philosophical preferences, the Church always freely makes use of philosophy and the sciences for apologetic purposes, but she never has any cause to defend these relative and changing truths as she defends the unchangeable truth of her doctrines. This is why ancient or more modern cosmological theories cannot affect in any way the more fundamental truth which is revealed to the Church: 'the truth of Holy Scripture is far deeper than

¹ 'De anima et resurrectione', *ibid.*, 76-7.

the limits of our understanding', as Philaret of Moscow says.¹ In the face of the vision of the universe which the human race has gained since the period of the renaissance, in which the earth is represented as an atom lost in infinite space amid innumerable other worlds, there is no need for theology to change anything whatever in the narrative of Genesis; any more than it is its business to be concerned over the question of the salvation of the inhabitants of Mars. Revelation remains for theology essentially geocentric, for it is addressed to men and confers upon them the truth as it is relative to their salvation under the conditions which belong to the reality of life on earth. The Fathers saw in the parable of the Good Shepherd, coming down to seek one erring sheep from the mountains where he has left the remaining ninety-nine of his flock, an allusion to the smallness of the fallen world compared with the cosmos as a whole, and with the angelic aeons in particular.²

It is the mystery of our salvation that is revealed to us by the Church, and not the secrets of the universe in general which, quite possibly, does not stand in need of salvation; this is the reason why the cosmology of revelation is necessarily geocentric. It also enables us to see why copernican cosmology, from a psychological or rather spiritual point of view, corresponds to a state of religious dispersion or off-centredness, a relaxation of the soteriological attitude, such as is found in the gnostics or the occult religions. The spirit of the insatiable thirst for knowledge, the restless spirit of Faust, turning to the cosmos breaks through the constricting limits of the heavenly spheres to launch out into infinite space; where it becomes lost in the search for some synthetic

¹ See Fr. G. Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

² St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 'Catech., XV, 24', P.G., XXXIII, 904; St. Cyril of Alexandria, 'Oratio pasch., XII, 2', P.G., LXXVII, 673; St. John Chrysostom, 'Contra anom., 11, 3', P.G., XLVIII, 714.

understanding of the universe, for its own understanding, external and limited to the domain of becoming, can only grasp the whole under the aspect of disintegration which corresponds to the condition of our nature since the fall. The Christian mystic, on the other hand, entering into himself, and enclosing himself in the 'inner chamber' of his heart, finds there, deeper even than sin, the beginning of an ascent in the course of which the universe appears more and more unified, more and more coherent, penetrated with spiritual forces and forming one whole within the hand of God. One may quote, by way of interest, the suggestion of a modern Russian theologian, who was also a great mathematician, Fr. Paul Florensky, that it would be possible to return to a geocentric cosmology on the basis of the scientific theories of our own time. It is hardly necessary to add that such a bold and, possibly, scientifically defensible synthesis has no real value for Christian theology, which is able to accommodate itself very easily to any scientific theory of the universe, provided that this does not attempt to go beyond its own boundaries and begin impertinently to deny things which are outside its own field of vision.

The cosmology, or rather cosmologies, of the Fathers, have only been mentioned here in order to single out from them certain theological ideas which have their place in the doctrine of union with God. The six days labour signifies— according to St. Basil in the *Hexameron* as also to St. Gregory of Nyssa who completed this work— a successive distinction of elements which were created simultaneously on the first day. St. Basil envisages this first day, 'the beginning', the first moment of created being, as if it was 'outside the seven days', as is also the 'eighth day' which we celebrate on Sundays and which was also to be the beginning of eternity, the day of the resurrection.² In

¹ The expression is that of St. Isaac the Syrian: see Wensinck, p. 8.

² St. Basil, 'In *Hexameron*, homil. 11, 8', P.G., XXIX, 49-52

the five days which follow the creation of the intelligible and sensible elements, of the heavens and the earth, the visible universe becomes progressively organized; but this successive ordinance, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, only exists from the point of view of creation, which is governed by a 'luminous force' which God has introduced into matter and which is His word (the '*logoi* or willings' of St. Maximus), His ordination of created things which is spoken of in Genesis.¹ For the word of God, as Philaret of Moscow says, 'is not like the words of men, which cease and disappear into air as soon as they are spoken. In God there is nothing which ceases, nothing which has an end. His word proceeds forth but does not pass away. He has not X created for a certain time, but for ever; He has brought the creation into existence by means of His creative word. *For He hath stablished the world, so that it cannot be moved.*' (PS. xciii, 1.)²

St. Isaac the Syrian remarks that there is a certain mysterious scale of difference in creation, different modes of the divine activity: . . . If, after the creation of the heavens and the earth, it was by His successive ordinances that God created the multiplicity of beings out of matter, He created the world of the angelic spirits 'in silence'.³ In the same way, the creation of man was not, as with the rest of living creatures, the result of an ordinance given to the earth: in this case God did not ordain, but said in His eternal Counsel 'let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. It is by His ordinances that God arranges the universe and organizes its parts; but men and angels, as personal beings, are not strictly speaking parts: for a per-

¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, 'In Hexaemeron', P.G., XLIV, 72-3.

² Sermons and Discourses, by Mgr Philaret, Moscow, 1877 (in Russian).

³ A. J. Wensinck, Mystic treatises by Isaac of Nineveh, translated from Bedian's syriac text. Verhandelingen der koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afdeeling letterkunde, Nieuwe reeks, XXIII, 1, Amsterdam, 1923, p. 127.

son cannot be a part of a whole, since it contains the whole within itself. In this respect, the human being is the richer, more complete and possesses more potentialities than the angelic spirits. Situated as he is at the meeting place of the intelligible and the sensible, He unites these

two worlds within himself, and participates at large in the spheres of the created universe. 'For all things which have been created by God, in their diverse natures, are brought together in man as in a melting-pot, and form in him one unique perfection— a harmony composed of many different notes.'¹

According to St. Maximus,² the work of creation contains five divisions, from which are derived concentric spheres of being, at whose centre is man, virtually containing them all in himself. In the first place, it is necessary to distinguish uncreated nature and created nature, God and the totality of creatures. We can then divide created nature into the intelligible universe and the sensible universe (*noêta kai aisthêta*). In the sensible universe the heavens are divided from the earth (*ouranos kai gê*); and from the whole surface of the earth we find paradise (*oikoumenê kai paradeisos*), the place of man's habitation divided off. Finally, man is divided into two sexes, male and female, a division which becomes definitive after sin, in the state of fallen human nature. This latter division was made by God in prevision of sin, according to St. Maximus, who is here reproducing the thought of St. Gregory of Nyssa. 'Being, which has had its origin in change— says the latter— retains an affinity with change. This is why He who, as Scripture says, sees

¹ St. Maximus, text quoted by L. Karsavine, *The holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church* (in Russian), Paris, 1926, P. 238. We have not been able to find this passage in the works of St. Maximus; however, the same idea is found in many places, e.g. in 'De Ambiguis', P.G., XCI 1305 AB.

² 'De Ambiguis', P.G., XCI, 1305.

all things before their coming to be, having regarded or rather having foreseen in advance by the power of His anticipatory knowledge in which direction the movement of man's free and independent choice would incline, having thus seen how it would come to pass, added to the image the division into male and female: a division which has no relation to the divine Archetype, but which, as we have said, is in agreement with irrational nature.¹ There is here an inevitable confusion in theological reasoning, so that clear expression becomes impossible: the plane of creation and that of the fall are superimposed upon one another, and we are only able to conceive of the first in images which belong to the second, in terms of sexuality as it exists in our fallen nature. The true meaning of this last mysterious division can only be glimpsed in those places where sex is surpassed in a new plenitude— in mariology and ecclesiology as well as in the sacrament of marriage and the 'angelic way' of monasticism. And it must be remembered that the other divisions of the cosmos as well as this latter one have acquired as a result of sin a limited, a separated and fragmentary character.

It was the divinely appointed function of the first man, according to St. Maximus, to unite in himself the whole of created being; and at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole creation. It was first necessary that he should suppress in his own nature the division into two sexes, in his following of the impassible life according to the divine archetype. He would then be in a Position to reunite paradise with the rest of the earth, for, constantly bearing paradise within himself, being in ceaseless communion with God, he would be able to transform the whole earth into paradise. After this, he

¹ 'De hominis opificio, XVI', P.G., XLIV, 181-5. Cf. Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Catholicisme*, Paris, 1938, app. I, p. 296.

must overcome spatial conditions not only in his spirit but also in the body, by reuniting the heavens and the earth, the totality of the sensible universe. Having surpassed the limits of the sensible, it would then be for him to penetrate into the intelligible universe by knowledge equal to that of the angelic spirits, in order to unite in himself the intelligible and the sensible worlds. Finally, there remaining nothing outside himself but God alone, man had only to give himself to Him in a complete abandonment of love, and thus return to Him the whole created universe gathered together in his own being. God Himself would then in His turn have given Himself to man, who would then, in virtue of this gift, that is to say by grace, possess all that God possesses by nature.¹ The deification of man and of the whole created universe would thus be accomplished. Since this task which was given to man was not fulfilled by Adam, it is in the work of Christ, the second Adam, that we can see what it was meant to be.

Such is the teaching of St. Maximus on the divisions of created being, which was borrowed, in part, by John Scotus Eriugena in his *De divisione naturae*. These divisions of St. Maximus express the limited character of the creation which is indeed the very condition of its existence; at the same time they are problems to be resolved, obstacles to be surmounted on the way towards union with God. Man is not a being isolated from the rest of creation; by his very nature he is bound up with the whole of the universe, and St. Paul bears witness that the whole creation awaits the future glory which will be revealed in the sons of God (Rom. viii, 18-22). This cosmic awareness has never been absent from Eastern spirituality, and is given expression in theology as well as in liturgical poetry, in iconography and, perhaps above all, in the ascetical writings of the masters of the spiritual life of the Eastern

¹ St. Maximus, 'De ambiguis', P.G., XCI, 1308.

Church. 'What is a charitable heart?'— asks St. Isaac the Syrian— 'It is a heart which is burning With charity for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons-for all creatures. He who has such a heart cannot see or call to mind a creature without his eyes becoming filled with tears by reason of the immense compassion which seizes his heart; a heart which is softened and can no longer bear to see or learn from others of any suffering, even the smallest pain, being inflicted upon a creature. This is why such a man never ceases to pray also for the animals, for the enemies of Truth, and for those who do him evil, that they may be preserved and purified. He will pray even for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united to God.'¹ In his way to union with God, man in no way leaves creatures aside, but gathers together in his love the whole cosmos disordered by sin, that it may at last be transfigured by grace.

Man was created last, according to the Greek Fathers, in order that he might be introduced into the universe like a king into his palace. 'As a prophet and a high priest', added Philaret of Moscow,² giving an ecclesiological accent to the cosmology of the Bible. For this great theologian of the last century, the creation is already a preparation for the Church, which was to begin to exist in the earthly paradise, with the first men. The books of God's Revelation are for him a sacred history of the world, beginning with the creation of the heavens and the earth, and ending with the new heaven and the new earth of the Apocalypse. The history of the world is a history of the Church which is the mystical foundation of the world. The Orthodox theology of the last things is essentially ecclesiological; and it is the doctrine of the Church which today is the hidden determining force of the thought and

¹ *Mystic treatises*, ed. A. J. Wensinck, p. 341.

² G. Florovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

religious life of Orthodoxy. Without being modified or modernized, the whole of the Christian tradition comes before us today under this new aspect of ecclesiology, showing once more that tradition is no stagnant and inert deposit, but the very life of the Spirit of Truth who informs the Church. It is therefore not surprising that cosmology also should receive in our day an ecclesiological turn; a development in no way opposed, but on the contrary giving a new value to, the christological cosmology of St. Maximus and other ancient writers.

Even when it has strayed furthest from the line of tradition, even, indeed, in its very errors, the thought of Eastern Christians in recent centuries— and Russian religious thought in particular—reflects a tendency to envisage the Cosmos in ecclesiological terms. The motifs are prominent in the religious philosophy of Soloviev, for example, in which the mystical cosmology of Jacob Boehme, of Paracelsus and of the Kabbala are mixed up with the sociological ideas of Fourier and of Auguste Comte; they are present also in the eschatological utopianism of Fedorov, and in the millenarian aspirations of Russian Christian socialism; and they are to be found most recently in the sophiology of Fr. Bulgakov, which is an ecclesiology gone astray. In these thinkers the idea of the Church is confounded with that of the Cosmos, and the idea of the Cosmos is dechristianised. But error itself sometimes bears witness to the truth, if in an indirect and negative fashion. Nevertheless, if the idea of the Church as the place where union with God is accomplished— is already implied in that of the Cosmos, this is not the same thing as to say that the Cosmos is the Church. It is not legitimate to accord to origins that which belongs to vocation, to accomplishment and the final end.

The world was created from nothing by the sole will of God— this is its origin. It was created in order to participate in the fullness of the divine life— this its vocation. It

is called to make this union a reality in liberty, in the free harmony of the created will with the will of God— this is the mystery of the Church inherent in creation. Throughout all the vicissitudes which followed upon the fall of humanity and the destruction of the first Church— the Church of paradise— the creation preserved the idea of its vocation and with it the idea of the Church, which was at length to be fully realized after Golgotha and after Pentecost, as the Church properly so-called, the indestructible Church of Christ. From that time on, the created and contingent universe has borne within itself a new body, possessing an uncreated and limitless plenitude which the world cannot contain. This new body is the Church; the plenitude which it contains is grace, the profusion of the divine energies by which and for which the world was created. Outside of the Church they act as determining exterior causes, as the constant willing of God by which all being is created and preserved. It is only in the Church, within the unity of the body of Christ, that they are conferred, given to men by the Holy Spirit; it is in the Church that the energies appear as the grace in which created beings are called to union with God. The entire universe is called to enter within the Church, to become the Church of Christ, that it may be transformed after the consummation of the ages, into the eternal Kingdom of God. Created from nothing, the world finds its fulfilment in the Church, where the creation acquires an unshakable foundation in the accomplishment of its vocation.